

Demolition Studio : Building and Value
Core 2 Fall 1998

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By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has esthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being. And, if one is to go beyond personal enjoyment,...one has to be willing...to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens, with civic sense identified with a civic religion, of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration.... The one who sets out to theorize about the esthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our own towns and on our own streets.

John Dewey

Since the 1950's, many American cities have seen the abandonment of their centers for the inexpensive, abundant, and safe land of the suburbs. A shift in cultural and economic life from the immigrant point of arrival to the pastoral ideal has rendered downtowns little more than theme park versions of the city. Boston may be one exception to this pattern. One could argue that cities do not stay locked in one period but evolve over time; that while Boston's evidently rich past sets a tone of scale, the Prudential Center is as much a city treasure as Trinity Church or Fanueil Hall.

A fundamental question of the studio is 'What in the city has value?' Is it Boston Garden? The new Federal Courthouse? Will the next Dunkin' Donuts occupy a renovated firehouse or the ground floor of the steel and glass office building? One's own developed sense of value is essential if one intends to put forth architectural propositions in a city that is built to capacity.

The studio breaks the semester into two discrete but related segments:

Five weeks: We will observe an aspect of the city at several scales (from the regional to the hand-held), paying attention to manners of occupation specific to the neighborhoods of Boston. A series of exercises will attempt to draw out students' individual interests with respect to life in the home of the bean and the cod.

Eleven weeks: Having developed an understanding of locale, participants will speculate upon construction in a context with 360 years of accumulated stuff. Students will propose programs and projects that transform their sites, manifesting earlier observations in a more explicitly tectonic expression. Issues related to construction will be the generators of opportunity.