

**Studio Fall 1999**  
**Mitchell/Moses**  
**23 August 1999**  
**Studio Description**

### **Verdant Versions: Landscape, Building, Value**

Land in North America, according to Locke, is destined to remain worthless until it acquires the status of a commodity in the market or capitalist economy. With the image of America as boundless, scaleless space in mind, he was able to contemplate the possibility, unimaginable in Europe, that fertile, habitable land could be so abundant as to lack value. The importance of the commodity-exchange facet of the American ideology of space cannot be exaggerated.

Leo Marx

The studio will explore the opportunities inherent at the intersection of *landscape* and *type*. One could argue that in the canon of Modernism, there are pitifully few examples of ‘the garden’, that the primary focus within this tradition has been on the object. One version of this is the Corbusian city, a collection of tall buildings set in bucolic parks catering to a bourgeois culture. Since designers have for the last half-century obsessed about the object and largely ignored the garden, we believe it may be time to transfer our collective compulsion, and propose that participants take a head-on look at the potential of the urban garden. To that end, the first part of the semester will be dedicated literally and figuratively to preparing a bit of ground.

A great criticism of the Modernist city has been that the open, unprogrammed plaza has led to urban spaces devoid of life: latter-day critics have tried to fill them in with the tarted up shed-palace. While surely the modern plaza has by and large been a failure, the original motivation was generally sincere: the provision of more open space, a pre-WWII response to the overpopulated, poorly ventilated, disease-ridden conditions of many European cities. Recent American projects have dismissed this ambition and replaced it with a nostalgic view of the “dense” urban core, a thinly veiled attempt to maximize land use for profit. Is there another version of urbanity that captures Modernist idealism but is also local, particular, and democratic?

Object obsession and the commodification of land has resulted in the architecture of building type, with all the attendant connotations about cultural specialization. We are troubled by the possibility that typology may have buttonholed occupation. Is there really an ideal way to live in the city? Is there an opportunity to transform accepted types and provide for unanticipated lifestyles? To test this concern, the second, longer part of the semester will overlay an investigation of a particular occupation on the earlier landscape revelations.

In method, the studio places high priority on participants taking responsibility for locating their own interests and developing appropriate means of investigation. We therefore expect that projects will vary widely in scale and complexity, relative to experience and ambition, with the common theme and point of departure being the tie that binds. This being said, students will not be without guidance in identifying the trajectory of their projects.

Required text: *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams