



Gruene Hall, Gruene, Texas

Mitchell Moses Studio

BAC

Fall 2004

Masters Core 1

Reclaiming Common Ground: Building in the Margins

... perhaps what liberalism brings to the cultural table is not level and featureless, like a playing field, but adaptable and absent-minded like a park... (Adam Gopnik, 1997)

In this culminating period since 1992, closed by three national elections, our politics has become cultural, with each side offering distinct and counterpoised views about government, values, the family, and the best way of life. The politics of culture has pushed other voting issues off the public agenda, though not out of the consciousness of ordinary voters. (Stanley Greenberg, The Two Americas, 1.9.04)

We Americans are continually relocating, downsizing, upsizing, supersizing, migrating, dieting, and exercising; we remain the most mobile people on the planet. Yet in our mobility, might we be losing something? We leave behind the detritus of our consumer culture. We push outwards without ever getting to know our old neighbors. A shared conception of what it means to be American has deteriorated. Increasingly we lack common ground. Do architects have a role in re-forming potentials for shared experiences?

One consequence of post-WW2 suburbanization is a patchwork of unresolved fragments of land, pieces leftover from the construction of major roadways and subdividing of farm- and woodland. They tend to be neither urban, suburban, nor rural in character, but largely untended and sometimes forgotten. These parcels seem to invite new and common occupation.

We observe in current architectural practice two distinct phenomena: a) an increasing obsession with consumer object architecture and b) the privileging of the immediate uses of buildings over the inevitability of change. There is a sense that these facts contribute to a built environment that is limited in the choices it offers the citizenry, distrustful of diversity. We are interested in the possibility of an architecture that expands social opportunity and fosters shared experience more in keeping with our democratic values. These observations will serve as the critical underpinning of the studio.

As a catalyst for discussion of the issues raised above and a touchstone for the second half of the term, two preliminary studies will be undertaken: 1) a case study of 'buildings in the landscape' and 2) a design study taking as its primary focus the weather, its impacts and the ways in which they might begin to have a consequence on architectural decisions such as siting, materiality, composition, and detail; students will be encouraged to look beyond the literal to the figurative.

These studies will lay the groundwork for a long project that will be sited in a landscape not dissimilar to one of those untended, forgotten parcels. As is typical for our studios, the function, scope, and scale of the project will be determined, with our guidance, by each student individually, based on experience and preoccupation.

Required reading: "The Architectural Paradox: The Pyramid and the Labyrinth", Bernard Tschumi

For more information please visit www.geocities.com/mitchellmosesstudio.