

BAC Fall 03
Core 2
Mitchell/Moses Studio
2 June 2003

The Institution and the City: Memory and Prospect

The placement of art in the midst of life is not always an unqualified good, and it is still insufficiently appreciated that the right of people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives extends to art when it impinges on their lives as lived. The right of free expression is constitutionally guaranteed. What remains to be explored is what recourse we have over art that is imposed on us without our consent.

-Arthur C. Danto, "The Removal of Tilted Arc", Art Forum, April 2003, XLI, No. 8



Do we live in an uncivil society? What unites us? The myth of the American Golden Age is just that: the melting pot, that trusted saw, used to blend distinctions of race, class and ethnicity, may be ready for the sociologist's tag sale. In its place we are left with a polyglot people that has been disparaged as the "culture of identity". However one describes America, at the end of the day we must all live next to each other, neighbors in every sense. How does our landscape mediate our differences and bring commonality and mutual respect into the public realm? We would argue that an important aspect in forming this cultural cohesion is the institution.

Since its "founding" Boston has been defined and distinguished by the number and longevity of its institutions. According to the 'creation myth', immediately upon settling the end of the Neck, the Puritan fathers founded Harvard College to provide a supply of clergymen in perpetuity. If one social function of the institution is to serve as repository of collective memory, Boston, it would be fair to say, is built of these. On the one hand, this suggests a continuity, even constancy, to the social and physical landscape. On the other hand, we know that institutions that are incapable of evolving to meet the demands of a particular era's ethos die, or become irrelevant. In an increasingly open, globally oriented (dare we say "multicultural"?) world, the successful institutions have broadened their constituencies.

It seems ironic, if not tragic, that during a period of increasing democratization, many institutions, particularly colleges and universities, are choosing to collect buildings for whom the dominant force is the authors' intent. (They often come with a collection of images and text offering a facsimile of the design process.) One cannot deny that much of this work is thrilling to behold. We live at a time when, because of the power of computing, it is possible to produce buildings of any shape and configuration. We have come to expect spectacle.

This studio seeks proposals for a grounded, even quiet, architecture. One that anticipates and invites use, even uses not expected: a latent architecture. We are interested in the opportunities that might become apparent where the territories of institutions (utopia) and the outside world (reality) meet. It is our belief that the neighboring precincts of these institutions, which are continually changing, with comings and goings, keep the places fresh and enlivened: the changing tide cleanses the harbor.

The semester will be structured in the following way:

Six weeks: Case study and design exercise on the theme of *compactness* (cf. R. Moneo).

Ten weeks: Project sited where utopia abuts reality

Our pedagogical priorities this term make a three-legged stool: craft, three-dimensional investigation, and material consequence.

Grades will be a measure of engagement, improvement, and accomplishment.

Recommended reading: *How Buildings Learn*, Stewart Brand

For additional course information visit www.geocities.com/mitchellmosesstudio