Graduate Research Studio: Interior Civic Space
Course # 7130  Masters Research Studio
Professor Tim Love

Northeastern University School of Architecture
Fall 2011

Course Overview

This studio, like other studio courses in our curriculum, will explore design through a typological and cultural lens, but in this case the focus will be on interior spaces that provide places for both organized and informal civic and intellectual discourse – but outside of more fixed and official governmental and religious institutional frameworks. As a result, the historical types that we will study - including the Roman basilica, guild halls, the multi-purpose English town hall, the New England meeting house, the coffee houses of Continental Europe, and the clubs that emerged in New York City in the late eighteenth century – have a more slippery relationship between function and spatial enclosure than both Western church architecture and the new functional types that emerged in the nineteenth century such as public libraries, museums, and train stations. In fact, the spaces that we will study represent both a precursor and less former corollary to these more institutionalized expressions of an emergent democratized public life.

At the same time, the studio will deconstruct the program and cultural impetus of contemporary multi-purpose function room; which has become, in our culture, a bland beige space with no windows, easy to mobilize round tables, and awkwardly padded chairs. By cross-comparing the historic and contemporary examples, a more nuanced theoretical framework will emerge.

We will analyze this range of historical and contemporary spaces in order to frame strategies for conceiving of new models of interior civic space. Our collaborative research and theoretical speculation will fuel each of your own design projects during the last few weeks of the Fall semester and your work in the Spring.

Studio methodology

The studio is organized into three phases:

1. Research of historical precedents and cultural history (Assignments A-C)
   Students will be organized into teams of two to do targeted research on the assigned topic. Categories of research might include precedent and case studies (images and factual information), relevant codes and guidelines, field trips/documentation, interviews, and historical research.
2. Creation of a guidebook (Assignment D)
The class will work together to produce a single comprehensive guide book that organizes and clarifies the history, rules, and opportunities discovered during the research phase.

3. Prototyping and development of a design agenda (Assignment E)
Using the guide book as a reference, students will propose speculative proposals, interventions, or prototypes that leverage the knowledge gained during the class. These proposals will frame the design agenda for the spring semester.

Assignments

Assignment A: Interior Civic Spaces
Due: September 19th
Beginning with a list of potential precedents and areas of research generated by the professor, students will work in team of two on targeted research about a specific cultural-spatial type. Requirements for the assignment include a) 500 word written overview of the cultural and architectural history of the type, b) graphic diagrams that identify the basic characteristics of the type, c) not less than five print quality images of precedents and corresponding labels that can be repurposed for Part 2 of the Class (creation of the guidebook). The information will be submitted to the class dropbox (file protocol and formats TBD) and in a slide presentation given to the class.

Assignment B: The Architectonic Characteristics of Great Rooms
Due: September 26
With a better understanding of the cultural and architectural underpinnings of interior civic spaces, the class will focus on the architectonic characteristics of canonical interior spaces including – spatial logic, threshold (windows and entrances), functional performance, natural and artificial lighting, furniture, and “décor.” The assignment will start with a reading of selected chapters of Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture – in order to establish terms for discussion and potential precedents for additional analysis. Like Assignment A above, students will work in teams of two to analyze a single precedent from a longer list provided from the instructor. This list of potential precedents will include a much wider range of building types including libraries, churches, and other examples that demonstrate a high level of architectonic ambition.

Assignment C: Great Rooms Field Research
Due: Monday, October 17
The assignment will begin with a list of potential interior civic spaces to analyze in Boston. A graphic matrix will be created that identifies the spaces according to use, general size, year built, and the other characteristics (TBD). Once the matrix is completely, the class will select six spaces/buildings to visit and analyze in detail. In addition to historic examples such as Faneuil Hall and the Boston Antheneum, we will also choose one or more recently designed spaces to study. Students will work in teams of two on
this analysis, which will include both textual research and graphic analysis. The graphic analysis will focus on the same range of issues as Assignment B above.

Assignment D: the Interior Civic Space Guidebook
Due: Monday, November 21
The information from Assignments A-C above, plus the synthesis of the information into speculative categories and conclusions, will be packaged into a single bound illustrated guidebook. The class will work collaboratively on this endeavor, with teams of two students responsible for specific chapters (TBD) and/or the management of specific aspects of layout and production. Roles and responsibilities will be determined as the conclusion of Assignment C.

Assignment E: The Thesis Proposal
Due: Monday, December 12
After the analysis phase, students will propose their own great room programs and prototypes based on a specific list of functional requirements and physical constraints that will be developed during the studio. These programs and prototypes will support your arguments and agenda for the spring design studio.
Assignment A: Interior Civic Spaces
Due: September 19th

Beginning with a list of potential precedents and areas of research generated by the professor (see below), students will work in teams of two on targeted research about a specific cultural-spatial type. Requirements for the assignment include a) 500 word written overview of the cultural and architectural history of the type, b) graphic diagrams that identify the basic characteristics of the type, c) not less than five print quality images of precedents and corresponding labels that can be repurposed for Part 2 of the Class (creation of the guidebook). The information will be submitted to the class dropbox (file protocol and formats TBD) and in a slide presentation given to the class.

Potential Research Topics

1. The Roman Basilica type
Informal social gatherings as depicted in Italian Renaissance art (see School of Athens)
Palladio’s Basilica and the Basilica in Padua (see: Aldo Rossi’s Autobiography of an Architect)
English Town Halls (including Boston’s original “Town House”)
Faneuil Hall

2. Dutch Guild Halls
17th/18th café life as depicted in Dutch and Italian painting
Early stock exchanges (early history)
Berlage’s Amsterdam Stock Exchange
Louis Sullivan’s Chicago Stock Exchange

3. Late 18th century/early 20th century Viennese Coffee Houses (see Adolf Loos’ Museum Café)
Late 19th century/early 20th century NYC clubs (see McKim, Mead & White’s Metropolitan, University, and Harvard Clubs)

4. Early Convention Centers (Messehalle)
Mies van der Rohe’s proposal for convention centers
Frankfurt Messehalle by OM Ungers
The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in Boston by Rafael Vinoly
Kunsthalle (see OMA’s Kunsthalle in Rotterdam)
Other important new convention centers (TBD)