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Public?

How can architecture make "*public space*"? A question ever more frequently asked, but never more challenging and divisive. Yet, and probably precisely because of that, "*public space*" is called for in design briefs for almost all projects where tax or philanthropic monies are being spent. It would be overly cynical to discount these questions as merely disingenuous chatter. But if one considers it a valid yearning for a common purpose, a coherent belief, and attempts to answer to it one should really start with the fundamental question, "what is *public* now"? Only once we have surveyed the extent of this question, we can follow with "what is *public space*"?

In the introduction for the show "Making Things Public-Atmospheres of Democracy" (MIT Press, 2005), Bruno Latour points out that in today's diverse and divided global world, objectivity is difficult, otherwise a lengthy and costly process, to obtain. Whenever evidence or facts are pronounced, they are merely assertions or rhetoric at best. Think of Secretary Powell's evidence for the presence of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. Political space therefore is not a place of consensus or universal ideas, but a makeshift constellation of agreements and disagreements that revolve around specific and separate subjects and/or objects. "Things" as Latour calls them. "The assembling is done under the provisional and fragile Phantom Public, which no longer claims to be equivalent to a Body, a Leviathan or a State." (Latour, p31) One does not have to look very far to find support for these observations. Lobbyists in Washington dictate how a bill emerges and is pushed through Congress. Curiously, this is a model currently being adopted in countries in Europe in place of traditional political processes.

Pier Vittorio Aureli's reading of the city as "polis", which is founded on the notion the civic city is made up of differentiate parts, irrevocably autonomous and resolutely itself, mirrors this notion. For Aureli, politics is agonism through separation and confrontation. Political space is the site of arguments and negotiations. (Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *The possibility of an absolute architecture*. MIT Press, 2011) It is therefore important to define the boundaries, to articulate the differences, to make visible the parts. Without this effort, there will not be diplomacy or opinions. There will only be uneven neo-liberal development left without any critical resistance. The image of the public in this context is not one of *center*, but on the *edge*, each "truth" captivates an ever-expanding globe within.

While the above two authors share a divided and fragmented view of the world, they do not exclude the possibility for a collective unconsciousness, "utopia", to be constructed on the basis of empirical "texts", phenomenon, values, behaviors and dreams. (Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future*. Verso, 2007) With the rapid spread of internet, younger generations grow up in a world that's inherently ambivalent and full of contradictions. Information is no longer fed and channeled through a pre-existing hierarchical structure or in sequential order. This allows us to move through a vaster landscape of projective narratives. We may now have the recourse to art and culture's incorrigible ambiguity – its desire to be political, critical or even subversive to the social system of which it is part of. We have seen petitions; political movements and even revolution spin out of an online discussion and spread via social networks like wildfire. These utopian visions might be fleeting; ambiguous or even opportunistic at

times they offer a radically different imagination from what currently is. They are politically meaningful, and point precisely towards the direction of our collective unconscious.

In the name of democracy, public asks for transparency, for immediate access to the objective "*truth*", which is proven to not exist in any empirical form. Therefore, "*public*" ceases to have a singular image. But then how can "*public space*" be organized? In this studio, students will intuitively assemble into three groups. The first will imagine this space as an assembly of various concrete topics and things of specificity, where people can congregate and discussion can be encouraged. (The passive one) The second will imagine it as a puzzle of highly defined pieces. Each piece is given its own freedom and internal structure. Together, they form a juxtaposed and jarring collage. (The agonistic one) The third will imagine the space to have multiple projective narratives, each coherent to its own logic and each open-ended. It functions as an island, separated from the here and now, where all are welcomed. (The opportunistic one)

During the mid-term, the 3 groups will debate with each other, arguing their own approach through the design process up till then. Then, students are given one chance to reassemble into new groups and to develop the projects towards the final. The program consists of a hybrid of museum and library as semi-public and public program sited on Staten Island off the ferry dock. A preliminary schedule is as following:

Week 1: Site visit on Friday, 7th. Complete mandatory readings over the weekend.

Week 2: Divide into 3 groups on Monday, 10th. Studio session to discuss program and site strategy.

Find 3 precedents that express these 3 possible directions. Pin-up to compare the difference in these approaches.

Deliverables – Site plan, program diagrams, precedents.

Week 3: Studio site model. Complete by end of week.

Week 4: Studio session on Monday, 24th to discuss massing models.

Studio visit of sustainability, virtual and museum specialists.

Week 5: Studio session on Monday, 1st and Wednesday 3rd to discuss plans, sections and thesis of each group. EOW – preparation for Midterm.

Week 6: Midterm and studio reassembly. Studio session on Wednesday, 10th to discuss further design development.

Week 7: Pin-up on Monday, 15th of presentation story board for final. Suggested modes of representation: movie, graphic representation of abstract information, iterative modeling.

Studio session on Wednesday, 17th to discuss presentation materials with individual group.

Week 8: Desk crits on Monday, 22nd and Wednesday 24th.

Studio visit of structural specialist.

Week 9: Preparation for final presentation.

Week 10: Final.

Program and site are given. Deliverables for each week are set. Deliverables for final presentation, are expected to be different for each group, but once set, are non-negotiable. Suggested readings for each argument are non-negotiable and essential in forming respective arguments. Failure in meeting any of the above criteria will result in significantly lower evaluation or failure of your projects.

Program

Public Library	Qty	Seats/Persons	Sq Meters
Reader Services			
Multimedia and Internet Resources		275	1800
Entry/Security			
Children's Reading Area		260	1600
Senior's Reading Area		100	550
Periodicals Reading Area		80	400
Young Adult's Reading Area		100	800
Main Reading Areas		1000	6500
Special Collections		100	1200
Individual Study Areas		500	1200
Admin			
Technical Services (Editing, Media, IT, Circulation Offices)		35	1200
Admin & Support (Director's Office, Publicity, Press, Meeting Rooms, Volunteer Organization, Storage)	14	50	1800 total
Meeting/Events			
Conference Hall		300	600
e-Learning Classroom		100	360

Public Services			
Exhibition			500
Bookstore			500
Cafe			400
TOTAL			20500

Art Museum	Qty	Seats/Persons	Sq Meters
Exhibition			
Permanent Exhibition			4000
Special/Temporary Exhibition			2500
Small Theater		25	200
Lounge			150
Exhibition Prep Room			150
Storage			800
Equipment Room			150
Collection			
Archive (controlled temperature & humidity)			3000
Operation Room			200
Photography Studio			100
Digital Operation Room			100
Loading/Packing			300
Equipment Room			180
Support/Education			
Education Classrooms (Art Classrooms, Workshop Space, Studios)	5		100-200

Research Rooms (Study Areas, Library, Meeting Room	5	50-200
Administration (Staff Offices, Reception, Security)	9	50-350
Public		
Lobby		600
Service Counter / Ticket Counter		80
Corporate Art Exchange		600
Gift Shop		200
Bookstores		250
TOTAL		15500