PUBLIC BODY BUILDING: THE CONEY ISLAND YMCA

The Second Core studio poses three challenges for the semester: Who do we envision as our architecture’s subject and by what means do we conjure up this subject for the purposes of design? In what ways might architecture reinforce and transform an old but historically progressive institution? And finally, how do we understand and manage disciplinary lineages in an anachronistic time like ours? Each of these issues is meant to prompt different modes of contextualizing and to enable definitions of criteria for a design of a synthetic architectural proposition.

STUDIO ISSUES

The subject of the era of globalized capitalism - the multitude - constitutes itself as a public only occasionally through shared concerns, or a collection of personal turn-ons. It makes itself visible more often on twitter than in architecturally defined “public space.” This is not to say that architecture does not have a role to play in the constitution of the multitude, but rather that the relationship between public space and the type of public that assembles from the networked multitudes has yet to be properly conceptualized. We will take on this issue of defining the contemporary subject of architecture in the studio as we re-imagine an architecture dedicated to collective play, sports, and health in Coney Island. Our partner in this endeavor is the New York City YMCA.

The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in 1844 in London as a world organization for social reform through recreation. A decade later the first US based YMCA opened in the Old Church in Boston. Others followed, with this institution and its sister institution YWCA (incorporated separately) shaping American urban life and politics from the East to the West Coast. YMCA was the first institution to offer English as a second language to immigrants in 1856. From 1869 on its buildings included gymnasiums and shortly thereafter at a Boston YMCA, Robert Roberts coined the term “body building” and developed exercise machines to support this newly codified activity. Launching at the height of the Public Bath movement in the US (with 99 indoor and outdoor public bath facilities in the US opening between 1895 and 1904), and providing additional social and sports facilities with its baths and pools, the YMCA has also been credited with codifying and popularizing two sports that are now fully part of the American and global urban imaginary, as well as the Olympics: basketball in 1891, and volleyball in 1890. Conceptualized from the outset as a progressive, reformist and missionary institution, the YMCA transformed with the times, opening at first dedicated Y’s for African Americans, for railway workers, Native Americans; operating residences for young men arriving to the city and also offering classes and lodging to the new female working force. Its identity politics and social policies evolved at the liberal forefront of the times. Though its name still carries a series of labels (young, men, women, Christian)—indeed demographic lenses through which one might be tempted to understand its public—all of these have been surpassed by the type of wide-ranging community center that the Y has become. No longer housing an exclusive religious, gendered, ageist institution, the modernized YMCA buildings across the U.S. function like ultimate urban social condensers. In the greater New York City network they offer programs ranging from diabetes prevention to vocational training; turn more than 60,000 young New Yorkers (and sometimes their families) into swimmers every year; support military families and rehabilitate injured veterans; provide work for neighborhood youth, and camps for kids.
In cases such as the Bed-Stuy Y, which multiplied its membership by over a tenfold after its renovation in 2007, they successfully transform the physical and social health of the city.

Whether they are housed in beaux arts buildings (from the end of the 19th and turn of the 20th century) like the famous 23rd Street Westside Y, or in later era neo-Georgian buildings such as the Harlem Y, their architecture still signals the institution’s old missionary, reformist role through reserved and inward oriented (and sometimes quite beautiful) citadels. The outdated signifying role of Y’s architecture coupled with the fact that its “public” is still located behind a paying barrier and oriented toward a single neighborhood location, prompt the studio to seek an important architectural adjustment and offerings that the new Y could make to its city. With its swimming pools, dance classes, daycares, saunas and exercise machines, the Y is obviously a site where an intimate exchange of bodily energies occurs among its users, but also between them and the building. Sweat is here constantly countered by the mechanics of AC, the piezoelectric potential of the many steps taken here simply gets absorbed by the internal gears of the elliptical machines, electricity gets piped in to do it, while all the pool water gets flushed every 80,000 gallons or so. The challenge of Core 2 will be to find compelling ways that architecture might contribute to the reimagining of this institution’s literal, cultural and urban operation in our site in Coney Island.

**STUDIO STRUCTURE**

The semester is structured in two parts. The first, is organized as a series of short exercises that dove tail together. The second part, will be dedicated to projecting a new Y in the Coney Island site. Even though students are not required to literally carry all the lessons and findings from one exercise to the other, the sequence is designed to progressively engage with topics, references, and the local conditions necessary to understand the scope and complexities of the larger project.

The site remains the same for all design problems, ensuring that the students’ understanding of the urban context (cultural and formal) builds up over the course of the semester.

The first three problems will conclude with students designing a complex of two open-air public pools and a playground with specific use and sports requirements. This first projects will be developed in groups across the three Core 2 studios and will take the form of an architectural competition. The second and more complex design challenge will involve rethinking the architecture and the institution of the new Coney Island YMCA located at the corner of Surf Avenue and West 29th Street.

Together the two parts of the semester introduce disciplinary issues that range from siting and urban disposition, through inhabitation, sectional and spatial proposition of the building, to architecture’s capacity to signify attitude and mission through its organizational and external characteristics. And insofar as they are understood as disciplinary, these issues will also orient us towards the vast archives of architectural knowledge. Throughout the semester the emphasis is placed on the clarity of intentions (on each of the above listed registers), and by extension, on the choice of the appropriate architectural and representational solutions. However, the emphasis on clarity does not also require pre-meditation of every design move, this semester is highly iterative, and the clarity of design intentions is expected to result from an intelligent and diligent pursuit of ideas through constant testing and reworking.

**STUDIO LOGISTICS**

Completion Requirements:
At the end of the course students should be able to translate spatial, material and programmatic ideas into a comprehensive architectural proposal and understand the intentions and consequences behind basic design decisions. Students should also be able to engage with an increasing level of design-research through iterative studies and move fluidly between different modes and scales of design. The student projects will demonstrate spatial clarity and basic tectonic thinking.
Evaluation Criteria and Grading
The following criteria will be used for the evaluation of your work, both in terms of helping your progress and in final grading:

1/ Thesis: How clearly are you articulating your conceptual intentions?
2/ Translation of Thesis: How well are you using your thesis to develop an architectural response to given problems?
3/ Representation Appropriateness: How well matched is your choice of representational means to your intentions?
4/ Representation Quality: To what degree do your representations convey what they ought to?
5/ Oral Presentation Skills: How clearly are you presenting your ideas orally, whether at your desk, or to a more formal jury?
6/ Participation in Discussions: How actively and how constructively are you involved in class discussions?
7/ Response to Criticism: How effectively do you take advantage of criticism from instructors, your classmates and outside jurors?
8/ Auto-Critical Skills: To what extent are you able to critique your own work regularly and effectively?

A: Excellent
Project surpasses expectations in terms of inventiveness, appropriateness, verbal and visual ability, conceptual rigor, craft, and personal development. Student pursues concepts and techniques above and beyond what is discussed in class.

B: Above Average
Project is thorough, well researched, diligently pursued, and successfully completed. Student pursues ideas and suggestions presented in class and puts in effort to resolve required projects. Project is complete on all levels and demonstrates potential for excellence.

C: Average
Project meets the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class are not pursued with dedication or rigor. Project is incomplete in one or more areas.

D: Poor
Project is incomplete. Basic skills including graphic skills, model-making skills, verbal clarity or logic of presentation are not level-appropriate. Student does not demonstrate the required design skill and knowledge base.

F: Failure
Project is unresolved. Minimum objectives are not met. Performance is not acceptable. This grade will be assigned when you have more than two unexcused absences.

Studio Culture and Absence Policy

Work in the studio will build sequentially. Therefore, your commitment to incremental development on a daily basis is of paramount importance. The demanding nature and pace of this studio course necessitates your regular attendance and requires that deadlines are consistently met. Attendance in studio and for the duration of all formal reviews is mandatory. Greater than two absences from studio without medical excuse supported by a doctor’s note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade for the studio.
SUGGESTED STUDIO READINGS/MATERIAL

On Users and Publics:

Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias,” (1967)

On Program and Organization:

Mark Jarzombek, “Corridor Spaces,” *Critical Theory*, v. 36
Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” *Translations from Drawing to Building*.

On Form and Envelopes:


On Process and “Influence”

Editorial Introduction, *San Rocco #7*: Indifference,
JG Ballard, “I Believe,” *JG Ballard RE:Search*

On YMCA, WPA Pools, and Reform

Bodies, Race, and Gender


Black Lives Matter, *Aggregate* project edited by Meredith TenHoor and Jonathan Massey (http://we-aggregate.org/project/black-lives-matter)


On Performance:


On Materials and Matter:


Reference Readings on Structures:


Web resources:

www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sun
www.earth.columbia.edu
www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sun
www.ldeo.columbia.edu/res/pi/climatecenter/documents
http://www.wecansolveit.org/
http://www.climatecrisis.net/
http://uic.edu/depts/geos/terra-society
http://www.agiweb.org
http://aapg.org
http://www.uic.edu/dept/geos
1 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

You will work in teams of THREE (one member from each studio) to research, take a position and report on one of the following topics, some overlap is ok:

1. History of the YMC
2. Public Bathhouses in New York
3. YWCA’s Politics
4. History of ADA rules and regulations
5. History of Urban Transformations in Coney Island
6. Swimming Pool Standards,
7. The Down Town Athletic Club
8. NYC Day Care Regulations
9. OneNY Plan
10. WPA Pools in NYC
11. The NYCHA program
12. Public and Private Transportation in Coney Island

Your report will take a form of a documentary pecha kucha. The quality and eloquence of images you choose and make matters as much as the factual information, or the historical narrative you are relaying. If it seems like you need to produce a set of diagrams or redraw spatial rules and conditions for your topic please do so. The intelligence we collect on these topics will be open source for all three studios.

SCHEDULE

T 2/5 #1 Issued
TH 2/7 Presentations of #1 and launch of #2 (On the Shoulders of…) (Long Lounge)
F 2/9 Working Sessions

T2/12 Presentations of #2 (On the Shoulders of…) and launch of #3 (The People’s Pool: A Competition)
TH 2/14 Desk Crits
F 2/15 Desk Crits

T2/19 No Studio
TH 2/21 Desk Crits
F 2/22 Desk Crits

T2/26 Silent Review with critics
TH 2/28 New York
F 3/2 New York
You will continue to work in your teams of THREE (one member from each studio) to analyze one of the projects listed on our syllabus.

1. Collect, analyze and present the architect’s own representations of the project as well as representations by others that communicate the program organization and design concept.

2. Draft critical plans and sections of the project.

3. Create your own analytical representations that dissect the project/program and re-represent the organizational logic of the project based on your own analysis and criteria.

4. Finally, produce a conceptual physical model/patent of your precedent. For reference, take a look at Rem Koolhaas’s tongue-in-cheek patent drawings produced for the Content exhibit and book.

The point of this exercise is for you to begin to think critically about the spatial organization and key programmatic components of the YMCA, and most importantly, to begin to take a position on historically important projects in the disciplinary archive. You can and should be smart, inventive and constructive (in that order) when you “crit” your particular architect. You will give your presentation in power point format (maximum 20 slides). You must post your power point presentation on Stellar by Monday (March 12th), by 11 pm. There will be a homework folder called “Precedents” waiting there for you. You must also pin up and display your analytical representation and conceptual physical model, and print out the architectural drawings you made of the precedent at 1/32”=1’ (to eventually post in the studio). Include “slides” of your analytical studies in your power point.

Choose from:

235 CE  Baths of Caracalla, Rome
1936  John M. Hatton, Astoria Pool, Queens NY
1957  Louis Kahn, The Bath House, Trenton NJ
1961  Cedric Price, Fun Palace (conceptual project)
1966  Alvaro Siza, Leca Swimming Pool, Leca de Palmeira, Portugal
1972  Lawrence Halprin, Fountain Stage in Manhattan Square Park, NYC
1975  Isamu Noguchi, Piedmont Park, Atlanta GA
1979  Paulo Mendes Da Rocha, Paulistano Athletic Gymnasium, Brazil
1986  Lina Bo Bardi, SESC Pompeia Factory, Sao Paulo, Brazil
1991  Zumthor, Baths in Vals, Switzerland
1991  Enric Miralles and Carmen Pinos, Archery in Barcelona, Spain
1994  OMA, Saitama Arena (competition)
2012  BIG, SuperKilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark
2012  Zaha Hadid, London Aquatic Centre, UK
2014  Herzog and de Meuron, Arena de Morro, Brazil
3

THE PEOPLE’S POOL: An Anachronistic Competition for a Public Pool and Playground in Coney Island

Futurologist Bruce Sterling recently offered “atemporality” to contemporary designers. Philosopher of Science, Bruno Latour offered prospects in place of the old, stable idea of future in his manifesto for Constructivism. In a way, each proposed that an older version of temporality, predicated on an unproblematic idea of progress, was waning. The issue is not that time has stopped ticking, or even moving forward, but that our modernist ideas of progress and even our postmodernist ways of critiquing those, seem reptilian and moralizing in light of our contemporary understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. These two thinkers are not alone in characterizing the world that we collectively or individually sense as ours - the world of anachronistic relationships - as one in which no idealized destination is reachable. Or at least, the cost of progress is understood to be such that it (progress, above all else) does not seem as desirable as it might have seemed in the 1920s.

You have your raw material already—the precedent you analyzed. You need to adapt the projects you studied to accommodate the program below as well as enter into a dialogue with contemporary cultural and disciplinary issues, which should affect the ideologies, tectonic solutions, and representational choices you make in this competition. Anachronism is only part of it. The other important component of this competition relies on your ability to discern the nexus between historically specific pressures on your precedent project and its architectural resolution. Take your precedent, and after you have distilled its core organizational and tectonic ideas, radicalize it and adapt, edit, reduce, enlarge, cut-up (as the American writer William Burroughs might say), and transform it to include the program listed below and place it intelligently on our site in Coney Island. Don’t forget the lessons of our collective research on the institution and content we are working with. This is a re-enactment of sorts, enjoy the freedom that wearing someone else’s hat gives you.

The anachronistic competition for Coney Island comes with a set of format requirements: 5 boards (24x36) and a model at 1/32”=1’. Somewhere on those boards you have to include a site drawing and relevant plans and sections. Everything else is open to you, but you should use the boards to “speak” to the historical moment you chose to address with your reworked playground. The time you have for this competition is commensurate with the usual competition conditions. You will continue to work as teams. The review will be silent and will result in prizes.

Take big risks. Dare to crash and burn!

THE PEOPLE’S POOL Program (Roof is required over 20 percent of the facility)

- 2 Pools
  - Lap Pool at 8000 - 10000 SF
  - Shallow (Kid) Pool 4000 SF (Seasonal Skating Option)

- Bicycle storage
- Bicycle path
- Running Track
  - standard 400 meter track rules apply
- 3 basketball courts
  - restandard size
- A rock climbing wall
  - 600 SF
- Dedicated Playground
  - 2000 SF
- Audience accommodation
  - for 200 viewers
- Surface parking for 30 cars
- Locker rooms/showers
  - 2200 SF
- Bathrooms
  - 300 SF
- An Outdoor Cafe
  - 1000 SF
- Meeting Hall
  - 1000 SF
- Program X
  - 1000 SF

(Program X needs to make sense with your precedent or chosen history)