

# SYLLABUS

## THE STRAND PLAYHOUSE

ACCESS AS AN ACT OF PERCEPTION

### TEACHING TEAM

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Core 2 is about how to use the conceptual framework of the theater to force architecture to think. Can we infect architecture with the alienating effect? Can we produce estrangement in the preestablished time frames of architectural perception?



At the midpoint of the MArch Core Program at MIT, Core 2 is concerned with questions of organization and access as they relate to architectural agency. As a pedagogical strategy, it distinguishes three main systems of organization—program, circulation and structure—always in relation to issues of subject, choreography, tectonics, material, form, space, event and experience. The studio provides students with conceptual tools to broaden the ways in which we consider access in architecture and practical skills to make architecture more accessible.

# ACCESS

## ACCESS AS AN ACT OF PERCEPTION

In Core 2 we consider access as an act of perception. Access is a way of bringing life to consciousness; a way of relating to people and places; the way we have to sense, to feel, and to move in the world. We will consider access, therefore a prime source for creativity and design. How can the conceptual framework of the theater produce estrangement in the preestablished conceptions of access in architecture?

## ACCESS AND THE SUBJECT

In what ways can architecture expand its ways of conceiving access as the means to develop a more sensitive relationship the subject and to open up to new subjectivities?

Access and disability are always mediated by multiple aspects of our social environments, including race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. “From more politically aware positions, being a woman under patriarchy is to face disablement; being racialized in settler societies is to face disablement; most forms of exclusion, marginalization, or devaluation entail disablement.” “What if, like access, we treat disability as a way of perceiving and orienting to the world rather than conceiving of it as an individual functional limitation?”

## ACCESS AND PROGRAM

Students will be asked to consider program as a means to expand the accessibility of the theater. The project will entail the reactivation of the Strand proposing an expanded notion of “lobby” that incorporates a secondary program.

## ACCESS AND CIRCULATION (MOVEMENT)

The design of circulation in a building requires careful consideration to the different subjects that will move through the space, their different abilities and requirements. The studio will make special

emphasis on how to make horizontal and vertical circulation accessible and safe. While considering ADA Accessibility requirements as a starting reference point, the studio aims to take access beyond compliance, accessibility beyond the building code. Students will be encouraged to think circulation not only as the connector between two spaces but as an event in and on itself, considering the time that it takes to move from one place to another, the different activities that may take place during that time and the different relations of different bodies with the built world.

## ACCESS AND STRUCTURE

Material. We will think about access to goods and materials within, and beyond the scale of the physical building, considering movement of materials at urban, territorial, and sometimes planetary scales: processes of extraction, transportation, construction, demolition, and redistribution of matter back into the Earth. Students will consider the environmental consequences of these processes through their material choices. Understanding the planet as one of the subjects of architecture, the aim is to tap into circular ecologies using local, reclaimed materials or designing for disassembly as a way to facilitate future reuse of the materials.

Structure. The structural system is the skeleton that holds the building in place, the strategy to distribute the physical loads of the building to the ground. Students will be encouraged to think the structure of the building as a system that introduces an internal order into the building that can transcend the load bearing function becoming a broader logic of organization. At the same time, the structural system is tied to the specific materials used and to specific orders of assembly. The long or short span systems and other structural choices, must be considered in relation to the program requirements.

# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## THE STRAND PLAYHOUSE

The hypothetical site of Core 2 this semester will be the Strand Theater located in the Upham's Corner of Dorchester in Boston. The studio will speculate with the City of Boston's vision for the Upham's Corner Arts and Innovation District, which builds directly on the Strand Theatre as a public asset.

The Strand Theater first opened its doors on November 11, 1918 as a movie and vaudeville palace. Programming at the Strand has been influential for Upham's Corner as well as for Boston's arts sector. As a public asset for decades the Theatre has primarily operated as a venue for both film and the performing arts. However, the city has identified needs for new operations models that build upon those uses to include other activation strategies and community strengthening endeavors that will make it an anchor to the Upham's Corner Arts and Innovation District. While there are shows that fill the 1,400 seat Theatre, there is a clear and critical need for smaller capacity spaces, rehearsal space, and spaces that accommodate a variety of types of performing arts in the district.

The ability to offer smaller spaces, especially at reduced prices, would fill both a community and arts sector need. On the other hand, simultaneous uses would also address the feeling that the theater is often unused or underused. While most of the days of the year are booked, this includes dates when the Theatre appears dark because it is closed for rehearsals. Expanding the theater with new uses should allow the building to be activated by other programming while the auditorium is booked helping the Theatre serve as an active anchor in Upham's Corner. The Strand Playhouse will combine the Strand Theater and a secondary program aiming to be a resource to the neighborhood at large and an important institutional landmark. The center will be a forum for the exchange of knowledge and culture providing ample space to accommodate cultural, community and arts programming, as well as performance uses desired by the community.

# STUDIO STRUCTURE

The project will be divided in three Acts that entail different levels of complexity and different temporalities.

## **Act 1: Perceiving the theater / Introduction**

Act1 is concerned with analysis as an act of projection. Students develop their own "ways of seeing" the Strand Theater through happenings, mind maps and physical models.

Feb. 02: "one day event"

Feb. 14: In-Class Charette

**Feb. 23: Act 1 Review**

## **Act 2: Accessing the theater / Knot**

In Act2 students are asked to develop a specific transformation in the Strand (adding a smaller theaters and one dedicated space for rehearsal) In addition students need to consider a secondary program that supports the theater and augments its time frame of operations, its audience and provides other means to expands the theater accessibility.

Mar. 03: "soft" pin-up

**Mar. 10: Act 2 Review**

## **Act 3: The Strand Play House / Outcome**

Act 3 is the development of the project. If Act 1 and Act 2 could be considered as the Schematic Design, in Act 3 Students will be guided through the rest of the sequence of design as if it were a real project of architecture that needs to be taken through the different phases addressing different audiences.

Mar. 24: pin-up w/guests

Mar. 28-31: Spring Break

Apr. 06: "soft" pin-up

**Apr. 18: mid-term review**

May 04: pin-up

**May 16: Final Review**

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Ability to clearly communicate architectural concepts, propositions, intentions, and design decisions in writing and in visual presentation.

Understanding the role of the design process in shaping the built environment and engage with different methods by which design processes integrate multiple factors, at the scale of the building.

**PC.3 Understanding of the dynamic between built and natural environments through the responsible use of materials leveraging ecological, adaptation and resilience principles in their projects.**

**SC.1 Understanding of the impact of the built environment on human health, safety, and welfare at the scale of the building. Specifically, through the design of inclusive accessible circulation.**

**SC.4 Preliminary understanding of the established and emerging systems, technologies, and assemblies of building construction, and the methods and criteria architects use to assess those technologies against the design and performance objectives of projects.**

**SC.5 Ability to make design decisions within architectural projects while demonstrating synthesis of user requirements, regulatory requirements, site conditions, and accessible design, and consideration of the measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions.**

## CORE 2 CULTURE AND VALUES

PC.7 Core 2 aims to foster and ensure a positive and respectful environment that encourages optimism, respect, sharing, engagement, and innovation among its students, faculty, teaching assistants and guests.

### Exceptional Times

We are undertaking this class in a period of great uncertainty. If you find yourself in a difficult situation because of illness, changed family circumstances, or other factors, please do not hesitate to reach out to your professor and TAs so that we can do what we can to help. We are here for you.

# COURSE EXPECTATIONS

## Class Meetings

Core 2 Studio class will meet Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM, EST.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

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?

## GRADING

### 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.