

ZCC

HOME ADMISSIONS NEWS & EVENTS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PEOPLE RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS INSIDE THE DESIGN SCHOOL

Profile  
Curriculum Vitae  
Courses  
Core Studios  
Studios  
Projects  
Publications



## Faculty

**Scott Cohen**  
Professor and Program Director  
Department of Architecture

### Studios

[Faculty List](#)

Search

**ZCC**  
GSD 1314, Spring 2004

The focus of this studio is twofold. On the one hand, to study museum typologies in combination or singly parallel to an investigation of geometric configurations that are inherently related. Among the types to be studied are the palatial residence, the linear picture gallery, rooms enfilade linearly arranged and around atria and the spiraling ramp. Among the geometries: projective geometry, spirals, helicoids, and minimal surfaces. On the other hand, there are tasks and problems at the institutional and architectural levels that are specific to the modification of the existing building, the former Gallery of Modern Art in New York designed by Edward Durell Stone, which is presently vacant and slated for a controversial face lift.

Because the actuality of the original institution has long since disappeared, we can infuse the building with our own interests and imagine other scenarios. Admittedly, this can be done with any cultural artifact. But, the Stone edifice is an extreme case due to a peculiar combination of factors: the size and shape of its constrained site, the non-communicative opacity of its facades, the retardataire character of its language and the fact of its persistence in an undeniably prominent urban position. The latter confers an incongruous monumentality on a building whose language is conspicuously dated.

The gallery of Modern Art was a fusion of two institutional categories: the private collection and the public museum. Its founder, Huntington Hartford, was a wealthy executive with a pronounced hostility to all forms of the avant garde. What is anomalous about his museum is that its program consists of a reactionary critique of another obviously more prominent museum, the Museum of Modern Art and its self consciously progressive program. The Hartford museum occupied a culturally rear-guard position based on a dogmatic adherence to figurative canons that were in his view sufficiently up to date. Paradoxically, this is exactly what makes his museum worthy of note today; it is singular not in spite of but rather because of its regression and the obsolescence of its critique. It is significant moreover that this critique was accompanied by the figurative, historicist idiom of a particular phase of Edward Durell Stone's architecture after his design for the MoMA building.

Viewed in terms both of its superannuated character and the fact that no

durable function has been assigned to it over the years, it is surprising that it has not been demolished and that lately it has managed to attract expressions of sympathy and affection. Yet, it is also possible that stylistic marginality is not its most negative attribute: marginal works quite often reveal the assumptions of an epoch more effectively than canonized works. Poised between modernism, kitsch and naïve historicism the building is irreducible to any one of these tendencies. The most disparate idioms -- Venetian Gothic, decorative abstraction, and mid century corporate modernism -- secure a specificity for this building that cannot be easily subsumed under the category of the Post Modernism.

One of the central aims of the studio is to develop alternatives to the usual renovation strategies by excluding the customary tactics of reactive renovation or out and out demolition. To this end, the studio begins by bracketing out the whole Hartford/Stone affair in order to focus on the most active part of the problem, the development of an internal organization. The problem is to establish a sufficiently continuous sequence by means of deftly arranged circulatory apparatuses and or circulatory exhibition spaces within the constraints of the site, a whole block so small as to illicit a rare single building solution.

Among the most anomalous in Manhattan, this block is the result of the confluence of three basic configurations: the grid, the beaux arts circle at the corner of Olmstead and Vaux's plan for Central Park and the refracted diagonal vector of Broadway. There is one sense in which it is the inverse of the Flatiron building block at 23rd Street; although its sides converge toward a curved edge, it is concave rather than convex.

The program for the studio project, a new branch for the Guggenheim, is particularly fitting for a site that suggests another answer to the spiraling promenade. Our assumption is that Guggenheim is interested in extending its facilities to a number of sites around the city, rather than concentrating on a single mega-plex by Gehry on the East river.

---

### **Holdout Architecture (Case Study : Upper Manhattan)**

GSD 1316, Spring 2002

This studio investigates the architectural consequences of obstacles to the complete redevelopment of urban sites. Holdouts are buildings or parcels of land owned or leased by parties unwilling to relinquish them to a developer who has amassed a significantly greater sum total of adjacent or surrounding parcels. Clearly, there is a bias suggested by the term. The holdout is first and foremost subordinate to a dominant entity. A holdout is typically disproportionately diminutive relative to an otherwise uncontested assemblage of properties that would be available for a totalizing, consistent, or coherent redevelopment if it were not for the holdout.

The aim of the studio is to find an alternative way to enter the "magic circle" of architectural form: the dialectic of norm and exception, convention and invention that traditionally has been initiated as a game willfully concocted by the architect. The presumption is that the architect as catalyst is supplanted by the holdout. Yet, the holdout as a general category is insufficient for our purposes. It does not always serve to stimulate a dialectic of architecture which, as intended in this case, originates in discord and leads to innovation. In other words, it may or may not result in peculiar or

distorted building configurations. In the undistorted cases, both the building occupying the larger area and the holdout remain consistent with whatever building types or conventions that are assumed to be unfettered in situations that are similar but without holdouts.

The operative assumption of the studio is that the architectural dialectic is manifest by witnessing and giving form to an architecture that is distinctively interpretable as evidence of tension or conflict. Thus, we have to disregard the cases in which the holdout has required no convolutedness or has no apparent or discernable impact on building forms. Any builder who manages to avoid adapting a building to a holdout is too good or too evasive for us. If it does not lead to any evidence of adaptation, the holdout is not particularly architectural.

Holdouts are not synonymous with holdout architecture. There are two types of holdout architecture. The first involves a building modified in order to conform to the presence of a holdout. These buildings represent deviations from normative type, pattern, or geometry—unusual structural, functional, circulatory or tectonic architectural elements. The exceptional configuration is allegedly caused by the intrusive presence of the holdout. The second type is a decidedly anomalous building that occupies the peculiar site left after a holdout has disappeared. Here, anomalous holdout architecture replaces the holdout.

The semester is divided roughly into four parts. First, we investigate a language analogous to holdout architecture: spatial, formal, structural, and functional bases for mutual exclusions, circumvention, cantilever, displacement, and interpenetration. In the second part, we take a trip to New York. Students work individually within specifically assigned study areas. Upon return, each student nominates and makes a case for three sites with hypothetical holdouts. After the final selection of sites, teams establish constraints and scenarios for multi-use redevelopment to include a boutique hotel or bed and breakfast, condominiums, health club, retail, parking and, optionally, a theatre. During the third and fourth parts of the semester, each student undertakes two projects: the two types of holdout architecture in succession.