

Columbia University GSAPP

Fall 2016

Bernard Tschumi

Advanced Studio V

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CONCEPT + SITE (Revisiting “The Gym”)

Item 1 (Precedent)

In 1968, strikes, the occupation of university buildings, and hundreds of arrests at Columbia University all began with an architectural incident. The university had started to build a gym on Morningside Park, on the slope leading to Harlem (but accessible only from the summit above) for the exclusive use of Columbia College students. Considered insensitive and racially charged, the gym was eventually abandoned. But it was an architectural incident that set fire to the already confrontational climate of a time that included the Vietnam War, the assassination of MLK, and May '68 in Paris.

Item 2 (Reversing Mediocrity)

More than 50 years later, it is the contention of our Columbia studio that while there was possibly nothing sinister about building a gym at that location, everything else was wrong:

- The elitist program was accessible only to Columbia students, with no regard for the Harlem community below it.
- The gym proposal interacted with Olmsted's park design with complete disregard for its topography, planning, and social use.
- The architecture was essentially mediocre.

The result was an insult to program intelligence, to site intelligence, to social and political intelligence, and to architectural intelligence, with the predictable result of the protests that followed. Our studio will investigate how the gym (and other programs) could have been designed otherwise on the same complex and challenging site.

Item 3 (Reversing the Clichés of “Green”)

The last few years have seen an inordinate amount of pseudo-“greening” of cities, whereby streets are covered with trees, building balconies are covered with trees, and roofs are covered with trees. If such a reversal of history is here to stay (cities are historically about culture, not nature), it is the contention of this studio that existing trees and parks ought to accommodate buildings, too. We feel that a carefully planted building inside Morningside Park is a reasonable reciprocal proposition.

Item 4 (Concept + Site + Program)

The studios run by Bernard Tschumi over the past few years have taken their starting point from the idea of "Concept." Namely, that there is no architecture without an organizing concept. In this semester, we will look at "Concept and Site" at how a concept affects a site, or a site affects a concept; how topography and social context can become an opportunity rather than a constraint. The gym will be one of six programs developed respectively by six pairs of students. The other five are a museum with A.I.R, a clinic, a school, a performance center, and a library. Various modes of notation and representation will also be investigated. The footprint dimensions of the project are 200' x 200.'

Item 5 (Consultants and Users)

Although architects and critics will be invited to our reviews, the studio given this Fall 2016 does not intend to invite Low Library representatives, Harlem political leaders, or Frederick Law Olmsted lovers. Should our experimental studio fulfill its premise and promise, it will be given again in 2017, this time with the participation of the full socioeconomic and political spectrum the project deserves.

Item 6 (Mini-Seminars)

Four mini-seminars will be run by our four TAs (Esteban de Backer, Jerome Haferd, Pedro Camara, Cecil Barnes) on four specific subjects closely related to this particular studio, discussing precedents (e.g. SESC, Lina Bo Bardi, vertiginous buildings, elevator buildings, and so forth.)