



One Rock

Five Obstructions

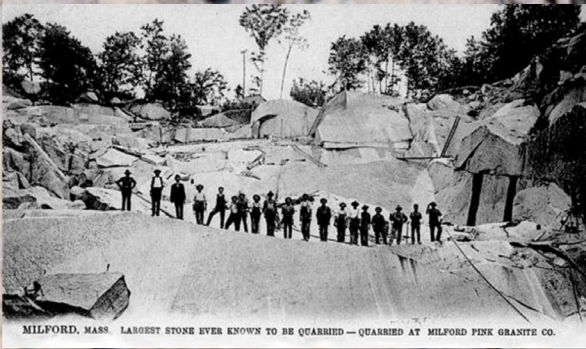
Columbia GSAPP, Fall 2021 / Advanced V, New Affiliates
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Walk across New York City and you'll see it again and again: in pavers from Stone Street to George Washington Bridge, ornate surfaces enveloping the American Museum of Natural History and Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum, ground cover at the Seagram Building and base of the Statue of Liberty, monuments like the Memorial Arch at Grand Army Plaza, tombstones and dedication plaques and a 3,500 year old obelisk housed in Central Park. And as soon as you are home, chances are you'll see it again, punctuating your kitchen and bathroom, in various products, at arm's reach.

Granite is as ubiquitous as it is diverse, in its many uses; as rigid as it is signficatory. We're compelled to look at its many instances at the infrastructural, the iconic, and the inglorious all together. We might see in this collection a material story that is driven by local supply, shifting demand and evolving labor practices. In it, we might begin to understand materiality as a property that is relational—tied as much to context and culture as to image, pattern, weight and durability.

This studio investigates the material implications of granite as a social, cultural and historical system at large, and as a building block of New York City. We'll look closely at Penn Station—a site perpetually adapting (or failing to adapt) to the city's civic, cultural, and transportation needs, from the original (all-granite!) station, to the nearly invisible underbelly of Madison Square Garden, to the recently completed Moynihan Train Hall expansion into the (also granite!) James A. Farley Building across the street.

In the context of Penn Station, we will consider granite through use, assembly, and reuse. We will consider how it might respond to a civic space like Penn Station with specificity and across scales. The studio will include site visits, workshops, and talks to develop the brief through ecological, material, and historical frameworks. Guests will include architect and scholar Rania Ghosn of Design Earth, the artist Michael Wang, and SOM Associate Rami Abou-Khalil, among others.



Milford Pink Granite: Historic photograph of the workers and quarry; Roosevelt Memorial and Nobel Obelisk, Museum of Natural History; James A. Farley Building

Overview

Granite comes from the Latin *granum* for grain. Its coarse and visible grain shows us the process of its making: magma that squeezed into existing rocks, picking up crystals and minerals along the way until slowly solidifying under their surface. Geologists call this kind of rock *intrusive*, as opposed to *extrusive*, and it exists in massive, consistently-patterned formations along the crust of the earth. In other words, it's an ample resource and oftentimes easy to extract (though a challenge to transport). It is both durable and porous—a combination that makes it appealing in many kinds of construction. And while it appears as a building material as far back as the Pyramids, for this studio we'll look more closely at its history here in the United States. We will consider its use, relative to context — how did it go from hyper-local to internationally imported? And factor in building technology—how did chiseling and hand-cutting give way to CNC-milling and water-jet cutting? And its image or cultural value—how did the material of every other building on the National Mall come to represent the housing boom's promise of individual luxury? Maybe it's simple: we'd like to have a piece of the mountain that made the Library of Congress at home, too.

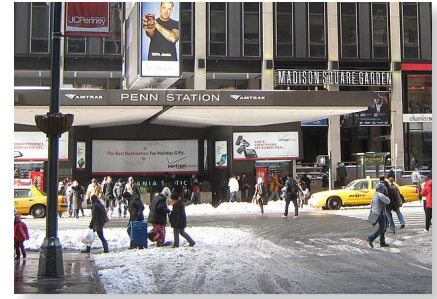
We want to look more closely at how we use granite to speculate on the ethos that drove its specification across program, location, and time. It might tell a story about our evolving perception of precision or labor or craft. Or permanence and iconicity. Or civic infrastructure. Or domesticity. We want to use granite to interpret assemblies of the past as cultural artifacts, and experiment with detailing to speculate on the future. At its core the studio is about design as an act of analyzing and assigning value to individual materials, of understanding their respective assemblies, and ultimately of designing entire buildings.



The Tenderloin



Pennsylvania Station, McKim, Mead and White



Penn Station, recent

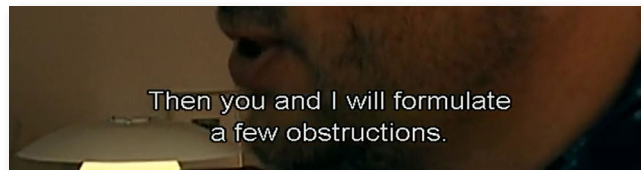
Going back to Penn Station

Let's look to granite as the building block for a new kind of civic transportation hub for New York. One that fosters comfort, embraces impermanence, and opens up to the city and its communities. We will work in Penn Station and consider the site's many lives across time and through its iterations. Situated in midtown Manhattan between 31st and 34th Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues, the construction of the original station began with the displacement of roughly 2,000 residents in 400 buildings across 4 acres in the predominantly black neighborhood previously known as The Tenderloin.

The celebrated yet short-lived station by McKim, Mead, and White collaged in its facade the Acropolis, St. Peter's square, and the Bank of England cast in approximately half a million cubic feet of Millford Pink granite. Five decades later, with post-war commuter traffic slowing down and real estate skyrocketing, the above-ground portion of the station was demolished to make room for the development of Madison Square Garden as a multi-use arena. And while service continued uninterrupted underneath, millions of tons of material found its way to the Meadowlands' landfills to make room for an architecture dedicated to public entertainment and spectacle.

To this day over a century later, the original tracks have continued to run uninterrupted attracting more and more commuters. And, like a Sisyphean tale, the station perpetually stretches and expands, and yet perpetually fails to accommodate the growing mass of commuters flooding its halls... Up until 2019, and ahead of the pandemic, 458,000 commuters entered and exited New York through Penn Station's main rail lines, and thousands of others crossed through its halls for the subway, the stores, the bathrooms, the climate-controlled environment, as a public space, etc.

Architectural historian Vincent Scully once famously wrote, after McKim Mead & White's original Penn Station was demolished for Madison Square Garden: "One entered the city like a god; one scuttles in now like a rat". Looking at the transition between the original Penn Station and Madison Square Garden raises important considerations around architecture's role in defining civic life. From neo-classical monument to multi-programmed spectacle, we have seen in it a range of interpretations of public space. We are conflicted. Does architecture want to be light, fast, and fungible, or stoic, permanent, and grandiose? Granite is often tied to the latter, but we're curious if it may find new resonance in the former, particularly if we understand it as a cultural object that can be managed, processed, and fabricated using new technologies.



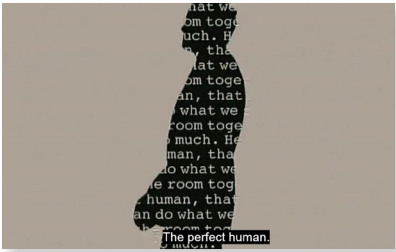
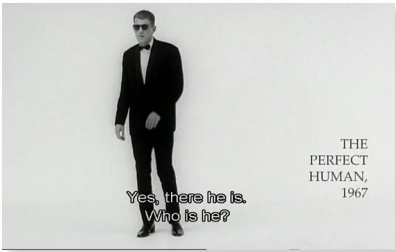
- It's below the belt.
- It is.

Obstructions

We'll start with Lars von Trier's challenge to Jorgen Leth in The Five Obstructions. Therein, von Trier challenges his mentor to remake his 1967 film The Perfect Human five times, each time with a different set of rules. These range from editing cues to location, from casting to medium (in one iteration), Leth must animate his film. The obstructions test the robustness of film itself, digging at the original's essence by forcing it through various filters and examining what's left.

We look to The Five Obstructions as a framework but will quickly shed some of its limitations and unlearn some of its problems. Let's bring in acts not just of form and method, but of otherness, of empathy, and of criticality to question not only the medium, but the message as well. Our constraints will test critical aspects of an architectural project—while challenging us to overcome materiality—through disciplinary tools but always with an eye to see the broader effects of those tools. We'll look at the subjects they presume, the possibilities of use, their exclusionary potentials as we test them through our new station and civic space. We'll consider the following in the context of our site, envisioning many lives for one station—accounting for cycles of assembly and disassembly, of regeneration and mutability.

- Obstruction 1 Multiple Lives
- Obstruction 2 Weighted Addition
- Obstruction 3 Phenomenal Impermanence
- Obstruction 4 New Comfort
- Obstruction 5 Stereotomic Acts



Schedule

Week 1	Thursday 9/9	Lottery, intro O1
Week 2	Monday 9/13	O1: Desk-crits
	Thursday 9/16	O1: Desk-crits
Week 3	Monday 9/20	O1: Review; Intro O2
	Thursday 9/23	O2: Penn Station visit (TBC)
Week 4	Monday 9/27	O2: Pin-up
	Thursday 9/30	O2: Desk-crits
Week 5	Monday 10/4	O2: Review; Intro O3
	Thursday 10/7	O3: Desk-crits
Week 6	Monday 10/11	O3: Pin-up
	Thursday 10/14	O3: Desk-crits
Week 7	Monday 10/18	O3: Desk-crits
	Wednesday 10/20	Midterm, O3: Review
Week 8	Monday 10/25	Intro O4, Guest Lecture (TBC)
	Thursday 10/28	O4: Desk-crits
Week 9	Monday 11/1	Election day, no studio
	Thursday 11/4	O4: Desk-crits
Week 10	Monday 11/8	O4: Pin-up
	Thursday 11/11	O4: Desk-crits
Week 11	Monday 11/15	O4: Review; Intro O5
	Thursday 11/18	O5: Desk-crits
Week 12	Monday 11/22	O5: Group crits
	Thursday 11/25	Thanksgiving holiday, no studio
Week 13	Monday 11/29	O5: Pin-up
	Thursday 12/2	O5: Desk-crits
Week 14	Monday 12/6	O5: Desk-crits
	Wednesday 12/9	O5: Desk-crits
Final Week	Monday 12/13	O5: Desk-crits, optional
	Wednesday 12/15	Final Review

Readings for Discussion

Obstruction 1: Multiple Lives

Hutton, Jane. *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2020, 66–102.
 Thomson, Robert Garland. “Preservation in Search of the Historic: New Methods, Expanding Boundaries.”
Future Anterior, 2004, ix–xiii.

Obstruction 2: Weighted Addition

Jencks, Charles and Nathan Silver. *Adhocism*. New York: Doubleday, 1972. (Manifesto & Chapter 1.)

Obstruction 3: New Comfort

Heschong, Lisa. *Thermal Delight in Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979.
 Easterling, Keller. “The Wrong Story” in *Perspecta 41: Grand Tour*, 2008, 74–82.

Obstruction 4: Phenomenal Impermanence

Abrons, Ellie. “For Real” in *Log 41*, 2018, 67–73.
 Schnapp, Jeffrey T., “Three Pieces of Asphalt” in *Grey Room 11*, 2003, 5–21.

Obstruction 5: Stereotomic Acts

Koolhaas, Rem. Junkspace, in *October #100*, 2002, 175–190.
 Kalyan, Rohan. “Fragmentation by Design: Architecture, Finance, and Identity” in *Grey Room 44*, 2011, 26–53.