MIT Architecture
Core II
4.152
Spring 2025

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Interfaith Chapel: *On Architecture and Otherness*
Light, Form & Material

Introduction

This studio is grounded in the belief that architecture has the power to express shared values.

Spaces for spiritual practice have been part of human existence since the dawn of time. Religious structures, buildings for spiritual practice, rites, ceremonies and communal activities, played a key role in the history of architecture, as social 'carrier', an art form and a means for technological innovation. In fact some argue that the origins of architecture stems from the creation of structures that symbolize shared beliefs in a higher order.

In this studio we ask: what is the role of such spaces today, in a society that aims to live by democratic values of equality, freedom, acceptance and respect for one another ?
In an age of Selfism, partisanship, rising bigotry, where virtual groups overpower physical ones, a time of decreasing opportunities for personal-human interaction, how can architecture promote a setting for physical human connection, interaction and communion ?
What additional collective and communal programs can be combined in such a space?

The studio responds to and continues MIT's commitment to spiritual- religious well-being, as evident in the creation of the MIT Chapel (designed by Eero Saarinen[1] between 1952 and 1955) as part of the Institute's program to address "spiritual matters", which, science and technology, on their own, had been judged incapable of addressing." (Martin, p.82) The Chapel was seen as a "constant warning that, just as technology cannot exhaust truth, it [was] not qualified, and therefore should not attempt, to monopolize belief." (Martin, p.86)

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[1] Reinhold Martin, "The MIT Chapel: An Interdiscursive History," in Arindam Dutta, ed., *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the 'Techno-Social' Modernism.* The MIT Press, 2013.

Close to a century later we ask to inquire about the role of such spaces in our time: of exponential growth of artificial intelligence and automation on the one hand and the increase of political and social divisions on the other. We also ask to better understand how the collective response and collaboration needed to address climate changes and environmental risks can benefit from shared spaces for assembly that capture and promote these shared beliefs.

In summary we are looking to invest in architectural design, to shape spaces that promote acceptance, inspire conversation, and emphasize our commonalities without negating our differences.

Episode I: Sections of Light

" . . light, the giver of all presence, is the maker of a material, and the material was made to cast a shadow, and the shadow belongs to the light."
- Louis Kahn 1969 (Silence and Light - lecture at ETH)

Examining the interplay between the spatial and material qualities of a space, students (in pairs) will use precedents of exceptional religious and communal structures to study and understand the power and role of light in space, in its ability to shape space, impact scale, form and material.
This will be done through the assembly of large scale sectional models

Episode II: Collective Programs

How might a shared sacred and communal space accommodate the diverse spatial needs of religious and secular rituals, sometimes harmonizing and sometimes conflicting? And how can we develop a program that combines these activities with other (secular and everyday) communal activities. Each group of three will document different rites through images: photographs and diagrams, and collectively produce visual analyses that reveal the overlaps and tensions among these rituals. This assignment will explore how ritual, community, and their respective spatial features can converge to create new kinds of combinations, uses and activities within a single architectural project.

Episode III: Urban Analysis

Originally founded in Boston, MIT relocated to Cambridge in 1916, and over time, it has grown into the urban landscape of Cambridge, tracing one mile (1.6km) along the Charles River. Our three chosen sites form a triangle around MIT's campus—creating <u>urban thresholds</u> , sites that act as an 'interface' between the campus and the city, both boundary and 'gate' condition. The class will divide into three groups, with

each studying the layers of context and urban history that formulate each location's attitude towards campus, river and city; towards past, present and future.

Episode IV: Project

Informed by the previous three episodes, the main part of the semester will be dedicated to an individual project of designing an Interfaith Chapel / Communal House on one of the three sites analyzed.

Schedule

Episode I: Sections of Light

Week 01

Tuesday 2/4	Meet at 4pm; Introduction to Core II Studio
Thursday 2/6	**Precedent Presentations**
Friday 2/7	Working Session

Week 02

Tuesday 2/11	Desk Crits on Model (*Courageous Conversations ends at 2pm*)
	Tour of MIT Chapel with ORSEL at 4pm
Thursday 2/12	Desk Crits on Individual Part
Friday 2/13	Working Session

Week 03

Tuesday 2/18	*No Class; Monday Schedule*
Thursday 2/20	**Review Part I, Introduction to Part II**
Friday 2/21	**Elaborate Part II**; Guest Speakers

Episode II: Collective Programs

Week 04

Tuesday 2/25	Lecture/Workshop
Thursday 2/27	Desk Crit
Friday 2/28	Working Session

Episode III: Urban Analysis

Week 05

Tuesday 3/4	**Review Part II + Introduction to Part III**
Thursday 3/6	Lecture/Workshop; Campus tour (maybe with John O?)
Friday 3/7	Desk Crit

Week 06

    Tuesday 3/11   Desk Crit

    Thursday 3/13   **Review Part III + Introduction to Episode IV ("Conceptual Stage")**

    Friday 3/14   Working Session

<u>Episode IV: Project</u>

Week 07

    Tuesday 3/18   Lecture/Workshop

    Thursday 3/20   Desk Crit

    Friday 3/21   **Pin Up / "Review" - "Conceptual Stage"**

Week 08   *Spring Break; No Classes*

Week 09

    Tuesday 4/1   **Introduction to Final Project + Working Session**

    Thursday 4/3   Desk Crit

    Friday 4/4   Working Session

Week 10

    Tuesday 4/8   Desk Crit

    Thursday 4/10   Lecture

    Friday 4/11   Working Session

Week 11

    Tuesday 4/15   **Mid Term Review**

    Thursday 4/17   Lecture

    Friday 4/18   Working Session

Week 12

    Tuesday 4/22   Desk Crit

    Thursday 4/24   Lecture

    Friday 4/25   Working Session

Week 13

    Tuesday 4/29   Desk Crit

    Thursday 5/1   **Pin Up (Pre-Final Review)**

    Friday 5/2   Working Session

Week 14   *Venice Biennale Opens*
          Tuesday 5/6   Working Session
          Thursday 5/8   Working Session
          Friday 5/9   Working Session

Week 15
          Tuesday 5/13   **Final Review**