

## 11.329 Social Theory and the City

### Session 7: "Theorizing a Center for Universal Design."

This class session embarked on the project of working from a design brief to a theoretical proposition underpinning the project. Nadya Nilina presented the brief from which she is building her M.Arch thesis project: a request for design proposals for an art center on Roosevelt Island in the East River between Manhattan and Queens that would be universally accessible to patients at the Coler-Goldwater Hospital, the Roosevelt Island Visual Arts Society, and other residents wishing to use the facilities. The site is at the southern tip of the Island in the ruins of the Smallpox Hospital, which was closed in 1955. Class discussion examined the issue of universal access; individual versus collective spaces, and how to create limits for the design project.

Theoretical issues underpinning the content:

- Universal vs. Democratic
  - o Inclusion vs. Participation
- Exposure (of disability) vs. Integration (of disabled) vs. Distraction (from disability)
- Reversal: creating a universally unpleasant space
- Independence and isolation
  - o How to design for community?
- Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*
  - o Haussman's Parisian streets
  - o Serendipity can follow sweeping gestures