

GRADUATE SEMINAR: SPACE, PLACE, AND ARCHITECTURE

American Studies 502T
Spring, 2008
Wednesdays 7-9:45 PM
University Hall 333

Professor Michael Steiner
Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-3;
Wednesdays 10-11 AM: & by
appointment in UH-410.

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SPACE

In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes America what it is.

Gertrude Stein

I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large and without mercy. It is geography at bottom, a hell of a wide land from the beginning....Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive.

Charles Olson

PLACE

In everything respect the genius of the place.

Alexander Pope

You cannot know who you are without knowing where you are.

Paul Shepard

The American land is an artifact....We should learn the landscape's language.

Henry Glassie

ARCHITECTURE

The land is the simplest form of architecture.

Frank Lloyd Wright

Architecture is the most immediate, expressive, and lasting art ever to record the human condition. Cities are containers and generators of our history and culture. We are what we build; stone and steel do not lie.

Ada Louise Huxtable

It means something to live where one sees nothing but rubble or nothing but high buildings....We take our shape within and against the cage of reality bequeathed to us at our birth.

James Baldwin

This graduate seminar is concerned with understanding how a variety of Americans shape space and how space shapes them: how we make ourselves at home in nature and how our dwelling, work, and recreational places in turn influence us. It is structured around understanding three basic social forces—space, place, and

architecture—and how these concepts have been manifest in American culture over time. These are vast, fascinating, vexingly elusive subjects. In moving from space to place to architecture the seminar shifts from theory to practice, from sweeping conceptual discussions of the relationship between culture and nature to grounded vision of the built environments of our lives. The seminar is concerned with learning to look at the things we build—at our stone and steel, concrete and glass, plastic and stucco, bulldozed and landscaped surroundings—and understand what they tell us about others and ourselves.

What at first seems to be definite and concrete--the land we live upon and the buildings we live within--becomes, after careful consideration, a most compelling and all-inclusive issue. Very little of the world around us is untouched by human endeavor. The land itself is largely an artifact, a built environment. Built environments effect every moment of our lives, yet we rarely think about their influence. The power of places we have created is ubiquitous yet taken-for-granted like the circumambient air we breathe. Edward Hall, for example, has pointed out that "Man has developed his territoriality to an almost unbelievable extent.... Yet we treat space somewhat as we treat sex. It is there but we don't talk about it."

With this in mind, the primary purpose of this seminar is to learn to talk about space, place, and architecture and to clarify our understanding of the relationship between Americans and their built environments. I hope that this course will awaken students to the fundamental fact that everything takes place and alert us to the taken-for-granted power of constructed places as the ubiquitous background, context, and condition of our lives. Emphasis is upon the diversity of architectural expression in a pluralistic society, and students will be equipped to "read" a range of built environments as cultural/historical documents. Beyond exploring a variety of environmental and architectural theory, we will become familiar with a kaleidoscope of artifacts from the New England Village to the Southern California suburb, from sod huts to skyscrapers, from log cabins, shot gun houses, and mobile homes to theme parks, shopping malls, city walks, freeways, tract houses, and new urban villages.

The seminar is divided into four sections. The first four weeks are devoted to theoretical considerations--to defining space, place, and architecture and their bearing upon our personal and collective lives. This theoretical framework is then used to interpret specific transformations of Americans space, place, and architecture from the 17th to the early 21st century. The third section focuses upon the politics of place both nationally (through a wide-ranging anthology on landscape and race) and locally (through a recent book on collective memory and architecture in Southern California). The final three or four weeks will be devoted to seminar discussion of first drafts students' research projects.

Readings:

Required books: (All available, except Mumford's, book at Little Professor Book Center, 725 N. Placentia Ave., Fullerton)

Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place

Lewis Mumford, Sticks and Stones (out of print; available through used book sources)

Tom Wolfe, From Bauhaus to Our House

Ada Louise Huxtable, The Unreal America

Richard H. Schein, ed., Landscape and Race in the United States

Phoebe S. Kropp, California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place

Recommended book: John Milnes Baker, American House Styles: A Concise Guide (for students interested in stylistic detail—not essential for seminar discussion)

Collected Readings: 30 essays and articles of various lengths (available at CopyCo, 2436 Chapman Ave, Fullerton).

General Format and Requirements:

1) **Readings and discussion:** In many ways the most valuable part of the course involves the give and take of ideas in discussion. I look forward to the free, sometimes heated, intellectual exchange of ideas generated by

our community of interest in understanding space, place, and architecture. To lay the groundwork for each meeting, I provide every week a series of topics and questions related to the readings. It is essential that you attend all of the meetings ready to engage in critical discussion and informed debate.

- 2) **Oral report:** I will ask each student to present one 10-15 minute report on an essay or chapter not assigned to the seminar as a whole. These reports can be seen as ways to enrich our collective background on the vast field of space, place, and architecture. In addition to being drawn from outside sources, your presentation can also be based upon a lead or source from one of our common texts—a footnote or allusion to primary or secondary source that the author did not have the opportunity to develop as fully as possible and that you would like to expand upon in your own creative and scholarly fashion. We will begin these reports by the third week. You can do a second oral report if you’re unhappy with the first.
- 3) **Response paper:** Each student will also write one 5-6 page response paper during the first ten or eleven weeks of the semester. This relatively brief paper should help you capture and develop some of the fugitive thoughts sparked by our readings and discussions; it should serve as a warming up exercise for your longer and more important research paper due at the end of the semester. I will I will provide paper topics--questions directly related to the course materials--two weeks before the papers are due, and I will give you two opportunities to write this response paper. You may, of course, write both and only the best paper will be counted toward your final grade.
- 4) **Research Project and Paper:** Students will spend most of the semester pursuing primary and secondary source research and writing an 18-22 page paper analyzing a particular topic, issue, or place related to American landscape and architecture. The research project includes a **conference** with the instructor by the fourth week of the semester, a **prospectus and bibliography** due by the tenth week of the semester, a **first full draft** that will be read and discussed by all seminar members during the final three weeks of the semester, and a final draft handed in during final week. I hope that a significant amount of our seminar readings can be woven into your research papers. Ideally, your research will connect to other work in your graduate program--either as conceptual background for part of your MA exam or as the germ of a chapter in your thesis.

Grading, Participation, Attendance:

Your final grade will be based upon your written work, your oral report, the quality of your seminar discussion, and consistency of your attendance.

Response paper:	20%	20 points
Presentation:	15%	15 points
Seminar participation & attendance:	15%	15 points
Final draft of 18-22 page research paper:	50%	<u>50 points</u> (including research conference & prospectus)

100 possible points graded on a 10% scale—as are each of the requirements as they’re evaluated throughout the semester. You will receive a letter grade as well as its numerical equivalent for each piece of work done during the semester.

The plus/minus grading system will be used. Papers must come in on time unless extremely difficult and uncontrollable circumstances arise. Be sure to discuss this with me before hand, whenever possible. I will accept late papers, but they will be evaluated much more rigorously than papers that arrive on time. As detailed above, your final grade will be based upon your written work, your oral report, the quality of your seminar discussion, and consistency of your attendance.

A word of caution to all students: In writing your papers—both response and research essays--be sure to avoid the temptations and perils of plagiarism. Most students know and respect these boundaries, but because of a few who cross these borders or don’t understand the rules, it has become increasingly important for me to

discuss this in class. In the meanwhile, I will refer you to the university's standards on plagiarism at: fullerton.edu/integrity. A useful source on CSUF's website is: "Student Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism" by Dean Sandra Rhoten. Here is a succinct and useful definition of plagiarism from that essay:

"Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another writer. Because plagiarism corrupts values in which the university community is fundamentally committed – the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual honesty – plagiarism is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe. Plagiarism can be characterized as "academic theft." Plagiarism is: 1) The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form; 2) The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style and; 3) Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays, papers, or presentations."

Seminar Outline:

I. DEFINING THE FIELD AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS (Four weeks)

"History and geography are bound together by the very nature of things: history takes place, and places are created by history."

Donald Meinig

"The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history....The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space."

Michel Foucault

January 23: Introduction to the seminar and to the study of the space, place, and architecture

January 30: Definitions and Distinctions: What is nature? What is culture? How do human responses to nature compare with the responses of other species? What is the relationship between land and life, between the environment (both man-made and natural) and culture? What is space? What is place? What is a cultural landscape? What is architecture? What is an artifact?

Read: Yi-Fu Tuan, "Man and Nature," Ellen Churchill Semple and George Perkins Marsh (brief excerpts, in Collected Readings); begin Tuan, chapters 1 and 8 of Space and Place, pp. 3-7 & 101-117; also: Yi-Fu Tuan, "The Significance of the Artifact." (Collected Readings)

February 6: From the Ground Up: Intimate Experiences of Place

a)--Personal Space/Proxemics: Read: Edward T. Hall, "Space Speaks" (Collected Readings). (continued, next page)

b)--Sense of Place, Stages of Life, and Remembered Places: Read: Loren Eiseley, "The Brown Wasps," Walt Whitman, "There Was A Child Went Forth," Milburn Rice, "The Last Stop," and Harvey Cox, "Restoration of a Sense of Place" (Collected Readings).

c)--The Meaning of Home: Arthur Danto, "Our Houseness," Clare Cooper, "The House as Symbol of the Self," and Alistair Cooke, "The New Californian," (Collected Readings).

**Recommended reading/possible reports: Yi-Fu Tuan, "Rootedness vs. Sense of Place," and selected chapters from several of Tuan's books. Including

Affection and Dominance: The Meaning of Pets, Escapism, & Cosmos and Hearth.

Begin conferences with instructor about your research paper—schedule at least one meeting before February 20th seminar meeting.

February 13:

Varieties of Space, Place, and Architecture, building upon our discussion of the meaning of the home, we will discuss significant portions of Yi-Fu Tuan's Space and Place, chapters 3, 4, 5, 10 and 11, pp. 19-66 and 136-160, and on children, body orientation, spaciousness, crowding, intimate experiences of place, homeland, and nationalism.

****Possible reports:** Chapters from Gary Paul Nabun and Stephen Trimble, The Geography of Childhood, Richard Louv, The Last Child in the Woods, and other sources on children, nature, and built environments. Tuan, "Place and Culture" in Franklin and Steiner, Mapping American Culture, as well as many other possibilities from anthologies such as Textures of Place and American Space/American Place.

II. AMERICAN SPACE, PLACE, AND ARCHITECTURE (Five weeks)

"Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round."

Black Elk, Oglala Sioux

"The American landscape is lovely save where American man has touched it."

Dwight MacDonald

"The shell that we create marks our spiritual development as plainly as that of a snail denotes its species. If sometimes architecture becomes frozen music, we have ourselves to thank when it is a pompous blare of meaningless sounds."

Lewis Mumford, Sticks and Stones

A. FROM NATIVE AND MEDIEVAL TRADITIONS TO THE CHICAGO SCHOOL:

February 20:

1) The spirit of place and what is American about American architecture? Native Americans, transplanted Europeans, and their built environments. Read: excerpt from Vincent Scully's American Architecture and Urbanism, David Lowenthal, "The American Scene," Paul Shepard's "Place in American Culture," and Yi-Fu Tuan, "Rootedness vs. Sense of Place" (Collected Readings) (continued next page)

2) Begin Lewis Mumford, Sticks and Stones (1924). (This classic book is out of print; I will ask you to send off for used copies via ABE Books, Powells, or other sources)

****Recommended Readings/ possible reports:** Steven Nissenbaum's essay "New England as Region and Nation," (available in my office), folk housing chapter from David Fischer, 's Albion's Seeds, and/or John Brinckerhoff Jackson, "A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time," in his book of the same title --available from my office.

February 27:

Finish Mumford's Sticks and Stones, see his film "The City" (1939), part of Ken Burns's film, "Brooklyn Bridge," and begin a myriad of slides related to the

Chicago School of modern architecture (Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and many others).

**Recommended readings/possible reports: Peirce Lewis, “Common Houses, Cultural Spoor,” James Deetz and John Vlach on the shotgun house, Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Art and Craft of the Machine” and many other possibilities—available from my office.

B. THE LEGACY OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

March 5:

1) Glass and Steel Prisons, the Colonial Complex, and Architecture in the American Grain: Read Tom Wolfe, From Bauhaus to Our House, see portions of Ken Burns’s documentary on Frank Lloyd Wright, Spiro Kostof on Louis Sullivan, and a plethora of slides on Chicago and selected modern American architects, including H. H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan, Irving Gill, Charles and Henry Greene, and others.

2) Some Postmodern Responses: Video and slide glimpses and glimpses of some postmodern architectural responses—Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, the ubiquitous Frank Gehry, Robert A.M. Stern, Michael Graves, Thom Mayne, and many others. Snippets of the film, “My Architect,” about Louis Kahn.

3) Folk, vernacular, and commercial responses: Read: Dolores Hayden’s “The American Sense of Place and the Politics of Space” (Collected Readings)

**Possible report: portion of John Silber’s Architecture and the Absurd (2007)

C. PANOPLY OF CONTEMPORARY PLACES

March 12:

1)--Symbolic landscapes: Read: D.W. Meinig, "Symbolic Landscapes," John Fraser Hart, "The Bypass Strip as Ideal Landscape," Margaret King, "McDonalds and the New American Landscape" (Collected Readings) and next page. (continued next page)

2)--The malling and theming and controlling of America, an overview: Read: Witold Rybczynski, “The New Downtowns,” Michael Steiner’s “Frontierland as Tomorrowland,” and Mike Davis’s “Fortress Los Angeles” (Collected Readings)

3)--Mall Talk: Read: Four brief essays by Tim Cavanaugh, Virginia Postrell, Rick Caruso, and Michelle Langsberg (Collected Readings—at the end)

4)--Automobility and Architecture; Kunstler vs. Jackson: Read: James Kunstler, “The Evil Empire” and John Brinckerhoff. Jackson, “The Mobile Home and the Range” (Collected Readings) Film snippet, J.B. Jackson on the vernacular landscape.

**Possible reports: Richard Keller Simon, on shopping malls in Mapping American Culture; Margaret Crawford and Michael Sorkin on malls and Disneyland in Variations on a Theme Park; Jennifer Price and Susan Davis on the Nature

Company and Sea World in Uncommon Ground; Donald Waldie on suburbia, especially Lakewood—available from my office.

D. THE LURE OF THE FAKE

March 19:

Varieties of Unreality from Williamsburg to Las Vegas and Beyond.

Read: Ada Louise Huxtable, The Unreal America, pp. 1-124, as well as Roger Vick, “Artificial Nature,” Leon Whiteson, “Dream Street,” “Casinos Royale,” and James Kunstler, “Las Vegas: Utopia of Clowns (Collected Readings)

**Possible reports: essays on the lure of illusion, verisimilitude, facsimile, and simulacra at Disneyland, Beach Boulevard, and the Bonaventure Hotel by Miles Orville, Umberto Eco, Jean Baudrillard, and Frederic Jameson—available in my office. Excerpt from the film, “The Truman Show.”

III. THE POLITICS OF SPACE, PLACE, AND ARCHITECTURE (Three weeks)

“Every force evolves a form.”

Shaker proverb

“Architecture takes a place from nature and appropriates it for politics.”

Henri Lefebvre

March 26:

Race, Class, and Place: Architecture as Cultural Expression and Hegemonic Control: Read selected essays from Richard Schein’s Landscape and Race in the United States.

Essays on geographies of race in New Orleans, the Deep South, Chinese exclusion at San Francisco’s Angel Island, Latino street scenes in East Los Angeles, politics of streets named after Martin Luther King, Mexican-American housescaping, white gentrification in Chicago’s North Side, among others will be discussed. Excerpts from “Rancho California,” a documentary concerning architectural and aesthetic expressions of undocumented Mexican field workers in Southern California will be viewed.

Research Prospective Due: research topic statement, questions being asked, and research strategy; lists and brief discussion of primary and secondary sources.

SPRING BREAK

April 9:

Red Tile Roofs, Missions, Markets, and Other Places: Public Memory, Architecture, and Race Relations in Southern California:

A Road and a Fair: Begin Phoebe Kropp’s California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place. Read: her Introduction and chapter two, “The Road: El Camino Real and Mission Nostalgia,” and chapter three, “The Fair: The Panama California Exposition.”

April 16:

A Suburb and a Street: Rancho Santa Fe, Olvera Street, and Images of Race in Southern California

Read and discuss California Vieja, chapter four “The Home: Rancho Santa Fe and the Suburban Style” and chapter five “The Market: Olvera Street and Urban Space.”

IV. RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AND SEMINAR CRITIQUES: (Four weeks):

April 23: Sign up for one of these three dates; submit a best-effort first draft (full documentation required) by the Friday evening before your presentation). First drafts will be submitted via email in PDF format to the seminar. All students will be asked to read each paper and provide constructive comments as these papers come up for discussion. The primary goal during these final three weeks is to see the culmination of our community of interest in American space, place, and architecture and to help everyone in the seminar write the best possible research paper exploring this vast and vital field.

Friday-Sat. April 25-26: California American Studies conference, “Assembling California’s Cultures,” at Soka University in Aliso Viejo. (I encourage you to attend; several of your colleagues are giving papers.)

April 30: Continue Research Paper Discussions

May 7: Conclude Research Paper Discussions.

May 14: Final draft of research essay is due, seminar celebration—hoop la!--and a well-earned Summer Break. Wishing you all the best.

Some important dates:

Begin oral reports and begin research conferences: February 6.

Response papers due: possible dates (write one of two or both): February 27 and March 19—very flexible.

Research prospectus and preliminary bibliography due: March 26.

Research paper drafts due for seminar discussion: April 23, April 30, and May 7.

Final draft due: May 14.