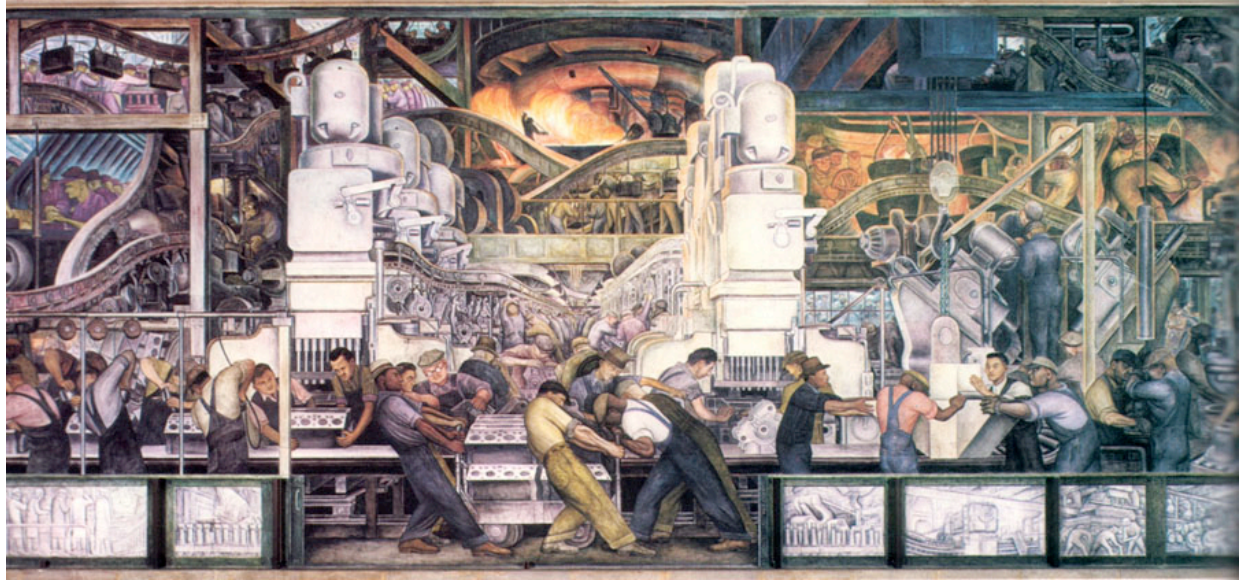


LURB 2103A -- Undergraduate Seminar

The Everyday City: Architecture, Technology, and Landscape



FALL 2007
Friday, 10.00-13:20
66 West 12th St., Rm. 602

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Purpose

Who builds the city that we experience every day? How is it put together, and for what purposes? What are the connections between the small spaces of daily life and the broader urban system? This seminar explores the development of urban landscapes in twentieth century America. The major emphasis is on the dynamic relationship between architecture, technology, and built environments. We examine ordinary artifacts of human planning and production, from factories and industrial processes, to homes, parks, ports, utilities, transportation systems, and information networks.

At root, we are concerned with the cultural, political, and social meanings embedded in built environment artifacts, and with how people contest landscapes over time. Recognizing that every landscape is part materiality and part representation, we must also examine the organization of images, depictions, and modes of envisioning the built environment. Thus, while we will study the production of landscapes such as the subways, Lincoln Center, and Levittown, we will also study the varied ways in which these landscapes are mapped, packaged, advertised, and consumed. In the end, we will come to see the urban landscapes that surround us as part of a continual dialogue between producers and consumers, mediated through an ever-shifting envelope of culture.

Objectives

The main goal of the course is to introduce rigor to the examination of the city around you--in effect, to prepare you to be urban thinkers. You will familiarize yourselves with the general outline of the history of urbanism from the turn of the last century up to the present, and will be able to place landscape developments in their proper contexts. You will learn to interpret disparate urban forms such as homes, gardens, streets, parks, factories, highways, railroads, downtowns and suburbs, and to "read" these forms for their "arguments," for what they reveal about the needs, aspirations, fears and anxieties of Americans at any given moment. Finally, each of you will develop your own voice as a critic, and will equip yourself with the tools to make informed judgements about urban landscapes in the past and today.

Policies

Attendance: Legitimate excuses for classroom absence are as follows: an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician (with documentation); a family emergency, e.g. serious illness (with written explanation); observance of a religious holiday. Students will receive a demotion of one-half of a letter grade for each unexcused absence. More than four absences will result in a failing grade for the course, unless there are extenuating circumstances. Students failing a course due to attendance should consult with an academic advisor to discuss options.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism can be found in the fourth edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, pages 26-29. Procedures concerning allegations of plagiarism and penalties are set forth in the Lang catalog.

Disabilities: In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Student Disability Services is located at 79 Fifth Avenue - 5th Floor. The phone number is 212.229.5626. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/studentaffairs/disability/> and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.

Evaluation: I assume that all students at Lang College are very smart and capable of excellent work; however, I will grade each of you on performance rather than potential. Grades will be assigned along a standard academic scale. The relatively rare grades of A and A- will be reserved for work of very high caliber, depth, focus, and originality. Grades in the B range signify that the student has performed well in the course, submitting above average work and contributing to the course on a weekly basis. The award of a C indicates that the student has met all of the obligations of the course to an acceptable level, whereas grades from C- to D indicate coursework that falls below an acceptable level. An F, well, you know.

Late Work: Late work is penalized by the reduction of an assignment grade by one half letter grade per day. Exceptions can be made only in dire emergencies (see attendance policy above).

Assignments

Readings: Besides reserve readings, required texts include:

- Hilary Ballon and Kenneth Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City*
- Daniel Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago*
- Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*
- Camillo Jose Vergara, *American Ruins*
- William Mitchell, *City of Bits*

Participation: I take your participation in the life of the course very seriously. The success of the course depends on everyone's active engagement. Participation includes coming to class prepared and contributing in a spirit of civility and common purpose. (100 POINTS, 20% of total grade)

Critical Response: On most weeks you will hand in a one-page critical response document. For this assignment you should identify and reflect on the key themes that arise from the weekly readings. What arguments do the authors advance? What kinds of evidence do they marshal to make their cases? What are the implications of their ideas for city life past and present? For your response, compose a list of five key points that arise in the weekly readings and that you feel merit discussion. Second, compose a list of five questions that arise, whether about the arguments, the evidence, the theories, or the implications for city life today. (100 POINTS, 20% of total grade)

Artifact Study: The first paper challenges you to analyze a late nineteenth or early twentieth century urban material artifact in the context of its current uses. The artifact must be extant, proximate, and observable. Possible artifact genres include, but are by no means limited to, street furniture, infrastructure elements, public amenities, a building or building group. The goal of the paper is twofold. First, you will describe the elements, organization, design, location, and disposition of the artifact as accurately as possible. Second, you will interpret the cultural meanings of the artifact by referencing its historical composition and use. Note any significant alterations to the landscape, and interpret these changes as well. (100 POINTS, 20% of total grade)

Image Study: For the second paper you will examine an image or set of images of the city. The images should be mass mediated, e.g. films, magazine advertisements, television shows, commercials, exhibitions, tourist brochures. The paper should discuss the historical and cultural contexts that shape these images, their production, their circulation, and their use. The paper should then interpret the ideas encoded in the images, examining them for their didactic and rhetorical meanings. Finally, the paper should draw conclusions about the implications of the images for the trajectory of city life at the time and beyond. (100 POINTS, 20% of total grade)

Place Study: In the final project you will use the critical and analytic tools that you have developed during the semester to devise a public interpretation of an everyday urban landscape or space. We will examine models of this kind of interpretation over the course of the semester. The major goal of the project is for you to provide people with new ways of understanding and connecting with the city around them. You will describe the space in terms of its format, structure, history, alterations over time, and current uses. You will then develop a rationale for a campaign, program, exhibit, or physical intervention into this space. Such interventions could be in the form of a public art installation, urban design scheme, conservation effort, place marker, community project, or any other reorganization large or small. (100 POINTS, 20% of total grade)

Class schedule

Week One, 9.7 Orientation to LURB 2103A

Studying cultural landscapes: the layered city
Studying urbanism: people and environment

Week Two, 9.14 Reading the City: Space, Place, and Society
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Reading: Elizabeth Wilson, "Reading the City" (reserve); Joel Tarr, "Patterns in the Development of Urban Infrastructure" (reserve); David Nye, "Technology and the Construction of American Space" (reserve).

Document: City maps: early hand drafted, plat, aerial oblique, fire insurance

Site: Walk through the West Village and the High Line

Week Three, 9.21 The Field and the Factory
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Reading: Gwendolyn Wright, "Row Upon Row in the Commercial City" in *Building*; William Cronon, "Lumber" in *Nature's Metropolis* (reserve); David Harvey, "Labour, Capital, and Class Struggle Around the Built Environment in Advanced Capitalist Societies" (reserve).

Document: Film--"Modern Times"

Site: Grain Elevators and Silos, Hoboken

Week Four, 9.28 The New Urban Landscape

Reading: Daniel Bluestone, "Park Designs" in *Constructing*; Gwendolyn Wright, "Victorian Suburbs" in *Building*; David Nye, "The Electric Cityscape" in *The Technological Sublime*.

Document: Burnham and Olmstead's Chicago Park Designs

Site: Central Park

FRIDAY: First paper due

Week Five, 10.5 The Tenement and the Slum
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Reading: Gwendolyn Wright, "Americanization and Ethnicity in Urban Tenements" in *Building*; Susan Wirka, "The City Social Movement" in *Planning* (reserve).

Document: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*

Site: Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Week Six, 10.12 Searching for a Civic Order
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Reading: Daniel Bluestone, "Churches", "Skyscrapers", "Civic and Cultural Chicago" in *Constructing*; Christine Boyer, "In Search of a Spatial Order" (reserve).

Document: Postcards and ephemera from various World's Fairs

Site: New York Public Library

Week Seven, 10.19 The Garden City

Reading: Gwendolyn Wright, "The Progressive Housewife and the Bungalow" in *Building*; Barbara Stabin-Nesmith, "Radburn: The Continuing Value of a Planned Community" in *Journal of Urban Design* (reserve).

Document: Designs for Early Housing Projects (Historic American Building Survey)

Site: Jackson Heights, Queens

Week Eight, 10.26 Public Works, Public Landscapes
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Reading: Gwendolyn Wright, "Public Housing for the Worthy Poor" in *Building*; Marta Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm" in *Moses*.

Document: WPA posters and photographs, Library of Congress

Site: Jackie Robinson Park Pool, Washington Heights

FRIDAY: Second paper due

Week Nine, 11.2 Technology, Modernity, and Suburban Life
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Reading: Gwendolyn Wright, "The New Suburban Expansion" in *Building*; Owen Gutfreund, "Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age" in *Moses*.

Document: Prelinger Archive Films on Suburban Developments

Site: Levittown, Long Island

Week Ten, 11.9 Renewing the Core

Reading: Hilary Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal" in *Moses*;

Document: Workable Plan documents for Title I projects on Philadelphia's West Side

Site: Lincoln Center

Week Eleven, 11.16 The New Metropolis

Reading: Robert Fishman, "Revolt of the Urbs" in *Moses*; Reinhold Martin, "Computer Architectures" in *The Organizational Complex*.

Document: Urban Development Corporation projects

Site: Marcus Garvey Village, Brooklyn

Week Twelve, 11.23 Landscapes of Consumption
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Reading: Jeffrey Hardwick, "A Shopper's Paradise For Suburbia," in *Mall Maker* (reserve); Elizabeth Smith, "The Case Study House Program" in *Blueprints for Modern Living* (reserve).

Document: Floor plan of the Federal Plaza Mall (National Historic Register)

Site: South Street Seaport

THURSDAY: Thanksgiving

Week Thirteen, 11.30 Durable Ghetto: Ruins and Representations

Reading: Camillo Jose Vergara, *American Ruins*.

Document: Films--"Wildstyle" and "Candyman"

Site: New York Housing Authority, Harborview Arts Center

Week Fourteen, 12.7 Art, Commerce, and Development

Reading: Sharon Zukin, "Gentrification, Cuisine, and the Critical Infrastructure" in *Landscapes of Power* (reserve); Richard Lloyd, "The Neighborhood in Cultural Production" in *Neo-Bohemia* (reserve).

Document: Graphic novel, *War in the Neighborhood*

Site: SoHo, Manhattan; Ft. Greene, Brooklyn

Week Fifteen, 12.14 The Edge, the Virtual, and the World

Reading: William Mitchell, *City of Bits*

Document: Building, zoning, and design codes for Celebration and Seaside, Florida

Week Sixteen, 12.21 The Work of Urbanists
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Students present final projects