

Yale University
Architecture 941b, Spring 2009
Tuesday, 1:30 – 3:20
Room 212

Urban Research & Representation presents . . . WAYFINDING

Instructor: Elihu Rubin
TA: Susan Surface

Every day, architects and urban designers make proposals that shape the public and private realms of the city. This seminar sets out to contextualize the social and political ramifications of these interventions; to intensify the designer's tool kit of deep, socio-historical research of site and place; and to cultivate a reflexive practice that considers the social responsibilities of the architect and the urban researcher.

Wayfinding is the process of perceiving, engaging, and navigating physical and social space. **Wayfinding Design** describes architectural and graphic interventions that orient people and enhance the user-experience of space. I also evoke the notion of **wayfinding** to describe our route through a suite of themes in urban research and representation that cast *the urban* as a complex set physical, social, and cultural phenomena. My agenda is to combine urban social criticism and an introduction to a variety of research methods with opportunities for designers to propose small-scale interventions for the ordinary urban spaces that compose our "near environment."

Imagine the city as a great lobby or vestibule that engages and circulates people through physical and social space. People come and people go, the revolving door always in motion, the city stable – governed by sophisticated social norms – and transitory at the same time, constantly reassembling and reproducing itself. We start with the material city as both urban sedimentation and representation before navigating its dialectic relationship to the social lives of the city. All aboard!

Requirements and Expectations:

Seminar meetings are structured as group conversations. You are expected to attend class, read the readings, and contribute to the conversation.

Each week, you will write a short READING RESPONSE and be prepared to explain it.

You will execute a series of small research ASSIGNMENTS, sometimes in lieu of a reading response, with a lot of flexibility in terms of representational technique:

- 1) Ride the Bus / Visit the Lobby / Find the Bathroom
- 2) Research: the history of a building our interactive field trip.
- 3) Analyze: a wayfinding design
- 4) Document: a research site
- 5) Drift: urban *dérive*
- 6) Pin-Up: design for the near environment

FINAL PROJECT: 12-page research paper, relating to your pin-up project or an independent inquiry. Multi-media projects based on a research proposal with a strong written component will be considered.

Many of our readings will be made available as PDFs through class web site. There is one required book available at Labyrinth Books on York Street: Mitchell Duneier. 1999. *Sidewalk*.

Week 1, January 13

Wayfinding: Itineraries Through the Urban . . .

Introduction to the course, its central themes, the syllabus, and assignments.

Week 2, January 20

The Stranger's Path: Storytelling and Space

Reading

J.B. Jackson. 1957. "The Stranger's Path," *Landscape in Sight*

Dolores Hayden. 1997. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.
(Part I)

George Packer. 2006. "The Megacity: Lagos becomes an urban test case," *The New Yorker*.

Rebecca Solnit. 2007. "Detroit and the Post-American Landscape," *Harper's Magazine*

Suggested Reading

Paul Groth. 1997. "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Studies," *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*.

Assignment

How Public Is It? Ride the Bus / Visit the Lobby / Find a Bathroom

Week 3, January 27

The Urban Text: Reading the Built Environment

Reading

Gabrielle Brainard (YSOA '07). 2001. "Party Walls: Understanding Urban Change Through a Block of New Haven Row Houses, 1870-1979," *Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society*.

Deryck W. Holdsworth. 1997. "Landscape and Archives as Texts," *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, pp. 44-55.

Video

American Beat. 1999. "On Broadway: A New Haven Streetscape."

Week 4, February 3 (Travel Week)

Legibility: Orientation, Navigation, and Graphic Design

Reading

Romedi Passini. "Wayfinding: Backbone of Graphic Support Systems"

Kevin Lynch. 1960. *Image of the City* (Chap. 3)

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown & Steven Izenour. 1970. *Learning From Las Vegas*
(Part I)

Assignment

Document a Wayfinding System or Design

Week 5, February 10

Field Trip: Learning from Whalley Avenue

Reading

Elizabeth Mills Brown. 1976. *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*
Chester Liebs. *Main Street to Miracle Mile* (Chap. 1)

Assignment

Building History Report

Week 6, February 17

The Urban Condition: Exposure and Estrangement

Reading

Georg Simmel. 1905. "The Metropolis and Mental Life."
Stanley Milgram. 1977. *The Individual in a Social World*. (Chaps. 1 - 4, pp. 24 – 53)
Anthony Vidler. 1991. "Agoraphobia: Spatial Estrangement in Georg Simmel and
Siegfried Kracauer."

Week 7, February 24

Walking: The Street, the Flâneur, and the Crowd

Reading

Edgar Allan Poe. 1840. "The Man of the Crowd"
Walter Benjamin. 1969. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.
("The Flâneur.")
Elizabeth Wilson. 1991. *Sphinx in the City*. (chap. 1, "Into the Labyrinth")
Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift. 2002. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. (Chapter 1: The
Legibility of the Everyday City.)

Assignment

Document your Research Site

Week 8, March 3 (mid-term week)

Wandering: Disorientation and the Discovery of Social Space

Reading

Guy Debord. 1958. "Theory of the Dérive," in Ken Knabb, ed. *Situationist International
Anthology*
Guy Debord. "Two Accounts of a Dérive."
Thomas F. McDonough. 1994. "Situationist Space," *October*.
Simon Sadler. 1999. *The Situationist City* (chs. 1 & 2)

Assignment

Urban Dérive

-- SPRING RECESS --

Week 9, March 24

Access, Encounter, Observation, and the Public Realm

Reading

Don Mitchell. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. (Ch. 4)

Ocean Howell. 2005. "The Creative Class and the Gentrifying City: Skateboarding in Philadelphia's Love Park," *Journal of Architectural Education*.

Sikivu Hutchinson. 2000. "Waiting for the Bus," *Social Text*, Vol. 63, No. 2.

Film

William H. Whyte. 1980. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*

Week 10, March 31

Pin-Up: Wayfinding and Design for the Near Environment

Assignment

Pin-Up Design for your Research Site

Week 11, April 7

Ethics of Ethnography

Reading

Mitchell Duneier. 1999. *Sidewalk*

Week 12, April 14

Cities from the Street, Cities from the Sky

Readings

Thomas Campanella. 2001. *Cities from the Sky: An Aerial Portrait of America*.

(Introduction, "Sherman M. Fairchild and the Airborne Camera," and Epilogue, "The Airplane and the City.")

Geoff Dyer. 2005. *The Ongoing Moment*

Edward Ruscha. 2005. *Then and Now*

The Ultimate Capitalist/Socialist Film Festival (time to be announced . . .)

Walter Ruttmann. 1929. "Berlin, Symphony of a City." (72 minutes)

Dziga Vertov. 1929. "Man with a Movie Camera." (68 minutes)

Week 13, April 21

Student Presentations

Week 14, April 28 (Jury Week)

Overflow Week . . . I reserve the right to hold a meeting this week if we have missed too many weeks for studio travel, etc.