

Architecture 344a: Urban Life and Landscape

The built environment is a text – a tool for constructing narratives of human activity, aspiration, and struggle. The physical fabric of the city can be seen as the material sedimentation of economic processes, social relations, and cultural trends. As built and later adapted, architecture enables and constrains the possibilities for public life and sociability; asserting or questioning local norms of privacy, propriety, and citizenship.

Method:

Taking the 20th century American city as our subject, and New Haven in particular, this seminar proposes a method of looking at the ordinary landscape: pulling apart its historical layers, speculating on its social meanings, and observing how it functions today. We will introduce several modes of urban inquiry and strategies of representation (including video, public presentation, field trips, photography, writing, and design.)

Requirements and Expectations:

- You are required to submit a reading response each week, each no shorter than a single paragraph and not exceeding a single page.
- You are expected to complete three short assignments (weeks 4, 7, and 9). These include 1) preparation of a building-history for a field trip, 2) urban observation exercise, and 3) execution of an urban “drift.”
- You will prepare a final project based on an expansive investigation of your chosen topic. Final projects represent original research, and may be submitted in the form of a written paper (12 – 15 pages), multi-media, video, or design proposal, depending on the nature of your work and subject to approval by instructor.
- You are expected to attend seminar, to conscientiously prepare the readings, and to participate in class discussion.

Grading Structure:

20 %	Class participation and reading responses
40%	Short assignments #1-3
40%	Final Project

Reading:

All readings this semester will be available on-line in PDF format as well as in a supplemental reader available for photocopying as students see fit. The following books have been ordered at Labyrinth on York Street:

Mitchell Duneier. 1999. *Sidewalk*.
Elizabeth Mills Brown. 1977. *New Haven: Architecture and Urbanism*

Week 1: September 9

Introduction: Looking at Cities

The city is both a place and a process. In architecture we find the physical evidence of urban growth, decline, revitalization, and adaptation. At the same time, we awaken our senses to the more transitory qualities of the city – sound, smell, climate, time of day or night -- and the various rhythms of human activity as they surge through space. There are multiple avenues toward a study of *urbanism*, that multifarious blend of urban space, social life, and individual experience. In our first meeting, I outline the goals and expectations for the course, and introduce central themes and concerns.

Week 2: September 16

Cultural Landscapes

The Cultural Landscape is an approach to observing and studying the city. This approach embraces the whole of the built environment – from monumental architecture to lawn ornaments – as expressions of culture. The breadth of human experience and the accumulation of countless daily patterns are inscribed on the landscape, which can be excavated as a source of public history.

Reading:

- Dolores Hayden. 1997. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. (Part I)
- J.B. Jackson. "The Stranger's Path," *Landscape in Sight*
- Paul Groth ed. 1997. "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Studies," *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*.
- Richard Schein. 1997. "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87:4.

Video:

- American Beat. 2002. *Convergence and other Rituals of the New Haven Green*.
- American Beat. 2000. *On Broadway: a New Haven Streetscape*

(note: evening screening time for videos TBA)

Week 3: September 23

Urban Building Types and Assembling the City

To understand the American city as it stands today, we need to appreciate how its built environment was produced during its most active phase of industrial city-building. Sam Bass Warner's book is still the best introduction to this process, showing the relationship between transportation technology (the streetcar) and housing development in Metropolitan Boston. Studies of ordinary urban building types can offer perspectives on the social history of cities. Brainard's essay is a model of this type of scholarship, opening up a variety of social narratives by taking a close look at a single urban block.

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*.
- Sam Bass Warner, Jr. 1962. *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston. 1870-1900*.
- Stewart Brand. 1994. *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built*. (Chapter 1-2)

Week 4: September 30

Field Trip: Housing, Commerce, and the Renewal Landscape

This week, we take our first walking tour of New Haven. Themes of this field trip include: learning to see urban vernacular architecture; lots, tracts, and strips; "reading" the city; the hierarchy of streets; working with material culture and architectural style to pull apart historical layers of urban development. **First Assignment is due: prepare a short history of a particular building or site along the route of our tour.** There will be no reading response due this week.

Reading:

- Elizabeth Mills Brown. 1976. *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*.
- Paul Groth. 1994. *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States*. (Chapters 1, 4)
- Kevin Lynch. 1960. *The Image of the City*. (Chapter 3)

Week 5: October 7

Street – Highway – Strip

This seminar explores the social functions of the street, its role in the internal structure of cities, the connection between streets and city planning, and the postwar vision of the street as a limited-access expressway.

Reading:

- Chester H. Liebs. 1985. *Main Street to Miracle Mile*. (Chapter 1, "Space")
- Raymond A. Muhl. 1993. *Race and Space in the Modern City: Interstate-95 and the Black Community in Miami*, in Arnold Hirsch and Raymond Muhl, eds. *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America*.
- Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris. 1997. "Inner-city Commercial Strips: Evolution, Decay – Retrofit?" University of California Transportation Center Working Paper #353.

Video:

- Elihu Rubin. 2005. *Introducing San Pablo Avenue: Signs of a Great Street*.
- Sophie Turrell. 2006. *What's Wrong with Whalley Avenue?*

Week 6: October 14

Urban Behavior

From Milgram's experimental method of probing social norms in the city; Whyte's observational method; and Simmel's theoretical suppositions regarding the intense stimuli of urban life, these authors suggest an approach to studying the city that foreground the social psychology of the urbanism.

Reading:

- Georg Simmel. 1950. "The Metropolis and Mental Life."
- Stanley Milgram. 1977. "Part 1: The Individual in the City," *The Individual in a Social World*.

Film:

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

Week 7: October 21

The Politics of Public Space:

This seminar explores the political functions of public space, the politics of access to public space, and the relationship between architecture and democratic organization. We will explore how the diversity of interests and agendas represented by designers, planners, politicians and community members affect conversations about the function and design of public spaces.

Assignment #2 is due: Students will briefly present an exercise in urban observation through verbal presentation (2-3 min max.) enhanced by visual representation (photography, video, sketch).

Reading:

- Don Mitchell. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. (Chapter 4)
- Ocean Howell. 2005. "The Creative Class and the Gentrifying City: Skateboarding in Philadelphia's Love Park," *Journal of Architectural Education*.

Week 8: October 28

Field Trip: Public Realm

This walking tour explores the public realm of New Haven in its different scales – from ordinary sidewalks to East Rock Park. Themes will include the distinctions between public and civic architecture; the dilemmas of privately-owned public space; as well as parks, greens, and plazas.

Final project proposals are due at beginning of class.

Reading:

- Carlo Rotella. 2000. "Industry, Nature, and Identity in an Iron Footbridge," in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman.

Week 9: November 4

Mapping, Planning, and Resistance

Urban planners substantiate their physical proposals for the city with maps, statistics, and renderings. Those who seek to subvert these normative claims on urban space have used similar techniques to chart geographies of resistance.

Assignment #3 is due: an exercise in cognitive mapping and the *dérive* (or, urban *drift*).

Reading:

- Simon Sadler. 1999. *The Situationist City* (chapters 1 & 2)
- Guy Debord. 1958. "Theory of the *Dérive*," in Ken Knabb, ed. *Situationist International Anthology*

Week 10: November 11

Special Topic: Housing and Crisis; New Orleans and The Gulf Coast

This week we assemble a roundtable of designers, planners, and writers who have addressed the questions of housing and urban development in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Our discussion will range across the social, physical, and historical geographies of the city, the politics of rebuilding, and challenges for architects and designers.

Reading:

- Michael P. Powers. 2006. "A Matter of Choice: Historical Lessons for Disaster Recovery" in Hartman and Squires ed. *There is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster: Race, Class and Hurricane Katrina*.
- Peter Marcuse. 2006. "Rebuilding a Tortured Past or Creating A Model Future: The Limits and Potentials of Planning." *Ibid*.
- Richard Campanella. 2006. *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm*.

Week 11: November 18

Field Trip: Industry, Infrastructure, and Re-Use

In our last field trip, we will walk through the workshop, warehouse, and manufacturing districts of New Haven, watching for their coordination with rivers, canals, railroads, and highway infrastructure. What's happening with some of these spaces today? How are they being re-used? What future do they have, as industry has evacuated these spaces?

Reading:

- Robert B. Gordon. 2004. "Industrial Archaeology of New Haven's Harborside Area."
- Diana Balmori. 2004. "Industry and Water in New Haven."

Both articles are published in: *Carriages and Clocks, Corsets and Locks: The Rise and Fall of an Industrial City – New Haven, Connecticut*, eds. Preston Maynard and Marjorie B. Noyes.

Fall Recess: No class November 25

Week 12: December 2

Urban Ethnography and Community Studies

Sociologists such as Duneier offer a compelling model for urban ethnography in which the social meaning of urban space is unraveled after extended commitment as a participant observer. In *Sidewalk*, Duneier addresses the social functions of street vendors and the idea of the “public character,” also described by Jane Jacobs in *Death and Life of American Cities*. Jon Chase, a photographer, combines oral history and photography in a portrait of a neighborhood that was displaced by the construction of a highway. He offers a model of grassroots community studies, which seeks to record public memory and *sense of place*.

Reading:

- Mitchell Duneier. 1999. *Sidewalk*
- Jon Chase. 1983. *The Fight for Newton Corner*

Week 13: December 9

Student Presentations and Final Thoughts