

Arch 470D
Graduate Seminar, Architecture and Urban Design
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
Knowing and Sensing: The Description of Place
Jodi Polzin (Rios), Spring 2009

We live in the description of a place and not the place itself.

Wallace Stephens

Representation gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible.....it reaches beyond the 'visual givens' and opens upon a texture of Being of which the messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae. The eye lives in this texture as the man lives in his house.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Objective

The means by which we come to understand a place profoundly effects any subsequent action taken in that place – specifically the action of building. The possibility for place to gather and hold, not only things, but also ourselves, our memories and our imaginations—the event of place—is denied as place becomes concretely defined and choreographed as a static background for action, rather than as a fluid and dynamic action itself. In order to reassert the active reflecting and gathering power of place and subsequently, of architecture, the processes we use to know, describe, and understand where we build need to be reconsidered.

This seminar will focus on the potential for alternative descriptions to effect different readings of place that are otherwise obscured. The course is divided equally between theory and making. In addition to discussions surrounding assigned readings, students will select and study a specific place in St. Louis from which they will develop different methodologies for observation, analysis, and description over the course of the semester. Students will have a choice of submitting either a final paper or project which speculates as to what new understandings have emerged and what possible actions could result from the study.

Readings and Discussion

Readings rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, geography, and architecture theory will be discussed in relationship to perception, representation, design, and the city. Weekly meetings will alternate between reading discussions and student project presentations.

Students are expected to come to class prepared to talk about the assigned readings. Each student will lead one reading discussion during the semester for which additional preparation is required. In addition, students will write a paragraph responding to each reading – this is not a summary.

Projects

Seven representations will be assigned, each with a specific focus that is loosely tied to the readings of the previous week. A review of these representations will occur on alternate weeks. Students are expected to speak about the process and the outcome, as well as give feedback on the other work presented.

Participation in both the reading discussions and the reviews is extremely important.

Discussion Topics, Readings, and Assignment Schedule

(The course bibliography and all readings may be found on reserve in the Art and Arch. Library, either in the source book or in a Pam file, or both.)

1/19 Intro

Assignments:

- Identify your *place* (Due 1/26)
- Look at an artist or architect who brings an alternative understanding to *some place* – select a few examples and drop them into the group power pt. presentation on the course drive prior to 1/26 class.
- Representation One assigned (Due 2/2)

1/26 Giving Visible Existence

the artist, mapping, and the body

Present Artist Examples

Discuss readings:

- Casey, *Earth-Mapping*, selected chapters
- Corner, “The Agency of Mapping”
- Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”
- Bachelard, “Intimate Immensity,” *The Poetics of Space*

2/2 Giving Visible Existence, cont.

Review Representation One

Assignments:

- Representation Two assigned (Due 2/16)

2/9 Memory/Language/Body

Discuss Readings:

- Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*
- Pallasmaa, “Lived Space,” and *The Eyes of the Skin*
- Foucault, “The Surface of Things,” *Death and the Labyrinth*

2/16 Memory/Language/Body cont.

Review Representation Two

Assignments:

- Representation Three assigned (Due 3/2)

- 2/23 **Surface/Touch/Imagination**
 Discuss Readings:
 Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm"
 Deleuze, *Negotiations*
 Gass, "The Face of the City"
 Rodaway, "Haptic Geographies"
- 3/2 **Surface/Touch/Imagination, cont.**
 Review Representation Three
Assignment:
 -Representations Four and Five assigned (Due 3/23)
- 3/9 **Smell/Taste/Sound**
 Discuss Readings:
 Porteous, "Smellscape"
 Ibid, "Soundscape"
 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, Part 2
 Ihde, "The Shapes of Sounds"
- 3/16 **Spring Break**
- 3/21 **(Additional class) Discussion with Juhani Pallasmaa**
- 3/23 **Smell/Taste/Sound, cont.**
 Review Representations Four and Five
Assignment:
 -Representation Six assigned (Due 4/6)
- 3/30 **Difference/Irony/Idiosyncrasy**
 Discuss Readings:
 Dewsbury, "Witnessing Space"
 Smith, "The Lie that Blinds"
 Stock, "Reading Community and a Sense of Place"
 Duncan/Ley, *place/culture/representation*, Intro
 Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography"
- 4/6 **Difference/Irony/Idiosyncrasy, cont.**
 Review Representation Six
Assignment:
 -Representation Seven assigned (Due 4/20)
- 4/13 **Spatial Imaginaries**
 Discuss Readings:
 Hayden, "The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space"
 Tuan, "American Cities: symbolism, imagery, perception"
 Allen, "mapping the unmappable: on notation"
 Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place"

4/20 Spatial Imaginaries, cont.

Review Representation Seven

Assignment:

-Final Project or Paper assigned

4/27 Reconfigurations

Discuss Readings:

Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism"

Linzey, "On the Secondness of Architectural Intuition"

Latour, "Connecting Sites," *Reassembling the Social*

Perez-Gomez, "Questions of Perception"

5/8 Final Project or Paper Due