

**THE URBAN LANDSCAPE:  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES  
(ANG 6186; Section 7301)**

SYLLABUS: FIRST DRAFT (04/06/2011)

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T: 8-10 (3:00-6:00 pm); Turlington 2341

Summary: The Urban Landscape focuses on diverse questions related to urbanism, urban life and space, the built environment and landscape, through time. It explores variation between forms of urbanism, including diverse non-Western forms, and between elite, middle class, and marginal groups in urban society. The course is broken into three primary segments: (1) pre-modern and non-Western urbanism (2-5); Medieval through 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Urbanism and impacts across globe (6-9); and urban anthropology and ethnography from a practical and theoretical perspective (10-15). While the class focuses on urban studies as practiced in anthropology, materials are drawn from sociology, geography, urban studies and planning, history, critical theory and cultural studies. This is a new graduate seminar and final content and subject matter will be subject to change in the first week on the basis of seminar composition and interests of participants.

Overview: What is the city, urbanism? What variation in urban form, content, or history can be delineated across time and space? What differences can be inferred between cities and urbanized populations - lived worlds, built environments, and representations of urban life – in the contemporary world. The course reviews materials from pre-modern (pre-colonial and early colonial, to 1700), modern (early industrial to late 20<sup>th</sup> century) and post- or neo-modern urban contexts. Case materials are drawn from across the globe. It contrasts public urban life from the top down view of planners, politicians, and patricians, elite social groups and institutions, with the bottom up view, representing diverse subaltern urban groups and lived realities. It also considers the middle ground, where the two extremes of urban society meet and interact, often promoting novelty and creating hybrid institutions, norms, and practices, often in highly dynamic, even volatile and fragmented contexts where norms vary and are contested.

Urban revolutions: Early urban contexts are invariably tied to symbolic and ritual control of belief and propaganda, marked by explicit exclusion of elite groups and the politico-ritual engagements they control in spatial orientations, performance, and material culture. This is the “urban revolution,” coined by V. Gordon Childe (1936, 1950), with reference to the world’s oldest cities, in SW Asia and the Mediterranean. The trait list Childe proposed, e.g., full blown cities, writing, intensive state economies, armies, police, and the like, has to be radically revised to include diverse examples of early major cities, in Asia and nuclear America, as well as alternative forms of urbanism, that have been described across the globe (China, SE Asia and Pacific, Africa, and Native America), as explored here. The city, as it is known and theorized by Western scholars, morphs again in form, content, and representation during the transition from Medieval to modern cities, ultimately giving rise a second “urban revolution,” as discussed by Henri Lefebvre (1970). Today, a third urban revolution can be delineated, as the balance tipped from rural to urban, but regional, national, and global forces integrate urban populations to other regions, other urban settings, and the rural and natural. Nonetheless, anthropological viewpoints on cities remain underdeveloped, particularly cases with histories that span the twentieth century or longer.

Urban populations and planning: The course focuses on the social and political construction of urban space, the control and orientation of human bodies, body movement, and bodily distributions, emphasizing the physicality and materiality of urban built environment and landscape. Urban space is a reflection of both integrated and contested groups and identities, and inclusionary and exclusionary practices in urban planning and development, and representations of cities and city-dwellers in popular media. We consider the nature and relationship of urban subgroups, with respect to key features of urbanism, such as central place and countryside (urban-rural/peasant), functional, social, and political economic organization, notably heterogeneity and segregation, as well as integration, and design and planning. The urban built environment of a reflection of this social anatomy is explored as a means of analyzing differences in space, practice, and experience of different social groups, including marginalized, middle, and elite groups.

Urban Place-Making & Knowledge: In addition to planned features of urbanism, self-organizing aspects of urban built environment, in terms of socio-economic and political institutions, legal norms, performance and embodiment, and thought or knowledge systems are considered. The course takes a “perspectivist” theoretical approach, which is defined less by a theoretical or practical agenda than a lack of one, in other words it is non-paradigmatic. Case materials are historically situated within dynamic, interdisciplinary and dialogic knowledge production communities. The focus is on research context and the issues, perspectives, and dialogues that emerge from them in scientific, humanist, critical and popular discourse. Focus on specific contexts of application highlights the heuristic and highly varied nature of

interdisciplinary empirical research, issues of scale, and the diversity of perspective and voice. It promotes a view that “robusticity” in planning and construction, meaning accessibility and engagement by diverse social groups within broader global contexts is an achievable goal of social scientific and humanistic studies. Urban socio-economic and political realities, and human rights, can be balanced with concerns across the globe with what scientists loosely call “ecological resiliency” and “sustainability.”

Urban Visions: the course considers utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian visions of urbanism, from the view of the development of world civilization and from futuristic visions of utopias in cultural production, from Thomas More to the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. It emphasizes that heterotopian landscapes of actual urban life are “shot through” with utopian and dystopian perspectives, places, and practices, which are considered from the viewpoint of critical theory, particularly contemporary literary criticism and cultural studies.

Evaluation: Class attendance and participation are expected. Final grade will be based on a paper (20 pp.) and in-class presentation.

Required books (other readings tba will be distributed each week that deal with classical urban contexts, theory, and urban anthropology, particularly ethnography):

1. *The Urban Revolution* (Henri Lefebvre, 2003 [1970])
2. *Post-modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Edward Soja, 2011)
3. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests & the Politics of Memory* (Andreas Hyussen 2003)
4. *Noir Urbanisms* (Gyan Prakash, 2010)
5. *Urban Outcasts* (Loïc Wacquant, 2007)

Provisional Course Outline:

1. Introduction: The Three Urban Revolutions (Childe, Weber, Lefebvre, Soja, Jameson)

Part 1: Early Cities

2. Early Cities: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus (Southall 2000 and others)
3. Greco-Roman Cities (Southall 2000 and others)
4. Alternative Urbanisms (Far East, Global South, and Native America) (tba)
5. High Art, Architecture and the Human Body (PNG, Africa, Amazonia, and the Maya) (tba)

## Part II: The Modern City

6. The Medieval Mercantile City & Atlantic World (Weber et al.)
7. Industrial Age Cities (Lefebvre)
8. Garden Cities & Non-urbane (Howard; Jacobs; Native America; Global South)
9. The Urban 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Modernist Visions (Burgess and Park; Le Corbusier; White; Holsten)

## Part III: Social and Political Lives of Cities at the Turn of the Millennium.

10. The Social and Aesthetic Life of Cities (Hyussen)
11. The Gendered, Political Life of Cities (Low, Soja, Caldeira)
12. Mega-cities & Globalization (Harvey; Soja)
13. Contested Cities & Urban Outcasts: Heterotopia (Wacquant; Caldeira)
14. Sex and the City (Baudelaire, Benjamin, Bourgois, Parker)
15. Conclusion: Whither Utopia? Visions of Urban and the Third Enlightenment (Prakash, Jameson, Soja)