

The Urban Environment: History, Thought, and Practice

G.E. Freshman Cluster Program – 21CW

Spring 2010 – U.C.L.A.

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Office hours: T 12:00-2:00

Class meets Tuesdays from 9:00-11:50 in A-162 Bunche Hall

*Please note that we meet at **8:00am on Tuesday, May 18** for a field trip to the Los Angeles River. We arrive back at UCLA no later than 12:00. This is a mandatory field trip. Please re-arrange your schedules as necessary.*

Course Description and Objectives.

In this seminar we examine how concepts of nature have overlapped (or not) with urban theory, and the material landscape implications of these philosophical connections. While conceptual opposites for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, geographers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have begun to think of nature and cities as categorically inseparable. This challenges us to re-think how we understand cities equally as much as places like wilderness preserves.

We use this interrogation of nature as a tool for re-imagining what nature and cities could or must mean now in the twenty-first century. Our current notions of creating a sustainable society are fully dependent on how we make our cities: how closely we pay attention to the often hidden connections between them and other places around the world, how we create and dispose of waste, and how we manage food and water resources. Making cities that observe and react to these phenomena depends on complicating and renewing our definition of the concepts “nature” and “city,” something to which as educated, global citizens we should be seriously committed.

Within this context, students will learn scholarly research and writing skills. There will be weekly readings and discussions. Students will design their own final projects. There will be abundant opportunities for fieldwork. The course can be roughly divided into three segments. One, the idea of nature is contextualized in Western thought. This segment focuses on wilderness, preservation vs. conservation, and environmentalism. Two, we learn how geographers think about the environment today. This segment focuses on hybridity, political ecology, and networks. And three, we apply these lessons to urban areas, focusing on Los Angeles. This segment focuses on environmental art, urban agriculture, and infrastructure.

Assignments.

1. Reading Responses. Each week you must write a reading response between 250-300 words that demonstrates you have thought about the reading(s) for that week. This is *not* a report of what the author said. Since we all read the assignment we all already know that. The response papers are a platform for you to articulate what the article made you think about. In your responses describe something you learned that will help you in your final research paper and museum exhibit project. For each response paper you must cite all the reading(s) for the week using in-text citation, and have a properly formatted bibliography. There are ten weeks for which there is a reading assignment. You must do at least eight of them, i.e. you can skip one if you so choose. There is no extra credit for doing all ten. These are all **due at the beginning of class each week**. Late papers will not be accepted, and receive a 0 score.

2. Final Research Project. Pick a place in the Los Angeles region, one that you can easily access and spend time at. You will use this place to formulate an original research project that uncovers the elements that make it important for our understanding of urban environments. We will have weekly discussions and activities to help find suitable places and to focus the projects.

The projects have two components:

- a. *Paper*. The paper must be between 2,500-3,000 words (do not count the bibliography in this figure). The paper is **due on Monday, June 7 at 3:00pm** printed out, in my mailbox in room 1250 Bunche Hall. Late papers will not be accepted, and receive a 0 score.
- b. *Museum of Urban Environmental History*. As a class we create a museum exhibit in the format of what one might find at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Only the subject of our exhibit will be the urban environmental history of Los Angeles. Using each of our research sites, we will work collectively to make an exhibit. What is important to display? Documents? Artifacts? Found objects? How should these be presented? What theme brings all of it together? What do they all mean? What does the exhibit tell us about ourselves? To get us thinking we will visit the museum on **Saturday, April 24 between 10:30-3:30**.

Participation and attendance.

I take attendance at every meeting. You are allowed to miss one class without penalty. I make no distinction between an “excused” and an “unexcused” absence. So, if you know you will be gone, or if you think you might be sick, etc, I suggest you save your one absence for that day.

Grades

500 points total for the course

- Final Research Paper (200 points)
- 8 Weekly response papers (15 points each, 120 total)
- Annotated Bibliography (15 points)
- Museum Project (115 points)
- Participation/Attendance (50 points)

Class Schedule

Week 1 - Tuesday, March 30

Topic: Introduction to the course

Readings: Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1978. The City: Its distance from nature. *The Geographical Review* 68 (1), p. 1-12.

Professional development: What is a research paper?

Week 2 - Tuesday, April 6

Topic: Nineteenth century thought about nature and cities

Readings: Thoreau, Henry David. 1863. *Excursions*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields; "Walking," pp. 251-279.

And

Worster, Donald. 1977. *Nature's Economy: A history of ecological ideas*. New York: Cambridge University Press; "Darwinian Ecology," pp. 130-169.

And

Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. 2001. *Splintering Urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*. New York: Routledge; "Constructing the Modern Networked City, 1850-1960," pp. 39-65.

Week 3 - Tuesday, April 13

Topic: Early twentieth century thought about nature and cities

Readings: Pinchot, Gifford. 1910. *The Fight For Conservation*. New York: Doubleday; "Principles of Conservation," pp. 40-52.

And

Muir, John. 1901. *Our National Parks*. Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press; "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West," pp. 1-36.

And

Park, Robert E., Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie. 1925. *The City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; "The Growth of the City" and "The Ecological Approach," pp. 47-79.

Professional development: Visit to Powell Library

Due at beginning of class: written description of your research site, 100-200 words.

Week 4 - Tuesday, April 20

Topic: Problematizing nature

Reading: Cronon, William. 1996. The Trouble With Wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong nature. In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by W. Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton.

And

Gold, Mick. 1984. A History of Nature. In *Geography Matters! A reader*, edited by D. Massey and J. Allen. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Professional development: Visit to Young Research Library. How to research government documents.
Due at beginning of class: Citation for mystery bibliography.

Saturday, April 24

10:30-3:00. Visit to Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. I will lead a tour through the museum. While it is mandatory that you visit the museum, you do not have to come on this day. However, unless you have already made plans that you cannot change, please come on this day so that we can benefit each other by going and learning as a group. We will arrange transportation as necessary.

Readings: Pool, Bob. 2010. Looking for Lizards Across Los Angeles. *Los Angeles Times*, March 13.

And

Theil, Stefan. 2006. The New Jungles. *Newsweek*, July 3.

Week 5 - Tuesday, April 27

Topic: Nature and cities represented

Reading: Wilson, Alexander. 1992. *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell; "Looking at the Non-Human: Nature movies and TV," pp. 117-155.

In class: Viewing of BBC Planet Earth

Due at beginning of class: Annotated bibliography

Week 6 - Tuesday, May 4

Topic: Urban political ecology

Readings: Kaika, Maria. 2005. *City of Flows: Modernity, nature, and the city*. New York: Routledge; "The Urbanization of Nature," pp. 11-26.

And

Robbins, Paul, and Julie Sharp. 2006. Turfgrass Subjects: The political economy of urban monoculture. In *In the Nature of Cities: Urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism*, edited by N. C. Heynen, M. Kaika and E. Swyngedouw. New York: Routledge.

Due at beginning of class: Introduction to your paper (500-600 words)

Week 7 - Tuesday, May 11

Topic: L.A. nature classics

Readings: "Silver Torrent Crowns the City's Mighty Achievement." *Los Angeles Times*. Nov. 6, 1913. Section II, page 1.

And

McPhee, John. 2005. Los Angeles Against the Mountains. In *Land of Sunshine: An environmental history of metropolitan Los Angeles*, edited by W. Deverell and G. Hise. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

And

Davis, Mike. 1998. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books; "The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster," pp. 5-55.

Due at the beginning of class: Bring in at least two artifacts from your research site, and be prepared to tell us a story about them. We will use this time to help each other brainstorm about how we, as a group, want to make our collective Museum of Urban Environment.

Week 8 - Tuesday, May 18

8:00-12:00. Field Trip to the Los Angeles River, led by Jenny Price

Reading: Price, Jennifer. 2006. Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A. *The Believer*, April.

Week 9 - Tuesday, May 25

Topic: Urban Agriculture

Reading: Pollan, Michael. 1992. *Second Nature: A gardener's education*. New York: Laurel.; pp. 37-65, 176-228.

Guest speaker: Sara Carnochan, Heart Beet Gardeners, Los Angeles

Film: *The Garden*; 2008; Director: S.H. Kennedy; 80 min.; U.S.A.

Week 10 - Tuesday, June 1

Topic: Infrastructure

Readings: Lehrman, Barry. 2008. Owens Lake: Reconstructing the void. In *The Infrastructural City: Networked ecologies in Los Angeles*, edited by K. Varnelis. Barcelona: Actar.

And

Ruchala, Frank. 2008. Oil: Crude city. In *The Infrastructural City: Networked ecologies in Los Angeles*, edited by K. Varnelis. Barcelona: Actar.

And

Coolidge, Matthew. 2008. Gravel: Margins in our midst. In *The Infrastructural City: Networked ecologies in Los Angeles*, edited by K. Varnelis. Barcelona: Actar.

Due: Your museum exhibit items, as outlined in the assignment handout.

Course Bibliography & Related Readings

- Asma, Stephen T. 2001. *Stuffed Animals & Pickled Heads: The culture and evolution of natural history museums*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bakker, Karen, and Gavin Bridge. 2006. Material Worlds? Resource geographies and the 'matter of nature'. *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (5):5-27.
- Beauregard, Robert. 2003. Positioning Urban Theory. *Antipode* 35 (5):999-1007.
- Berkowitz, Alan R., Charles H. Nilon, and Karen S. Hollweg, eds. 1999. *Understanding Urban Ecosystems: A new frontier for science and education*. New York: Springer.
- Biehler, Dawn Day. 2009. Permeable Homes: A historical political ecology of insects and pesticides in US public housing. *Geoforum* 40:1014-1023.
- . 2010. Flies, Manure, and Window Screens: Medical entomology and environmental reform in early-twentieth-century US cities. *Journal of Historical Geography* 36:68-78.
- Braun, Bruce. 2005. Environmental Issues: Writing a more-than-human urban geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (5):635-650.
- . 2008. Environmental Issues: Inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (5):667-679.
- Brulle, Robert J., and David N. Pellow. 2006. Environmental Justice: Human health and environmental inequalities. *Annual Review of Public Health* 27:103-124.
- Calvino, Italo. 1983. *Marcopolo, or, The Seasons in the City*. New York: Harcourt.
- Castree, Noel. 2005. *Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Castree, Noel, and Bruce Braun, eds. 2001. *Social Nature: Theory, practice, and politics*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Colwell, Robert K. 1985. The Evolution of Ecology. *American Zoology* 25:771-777.
- Coolidge, Matthew. 2008. Gravel: Margins in our midst. In *The Infrastructural City: Networked ecologies in Los Angeles*, edited by K. Varnelis. Barcelona: Actar.
- Cranz, Galen. 1982. *The Politics of Park Design: A history of urban parks in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Davis, Mike. 1998. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
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- Davison, Graeme. 1983. The City as a Natural System: Theories of urban society in early nineteenth-century Britain. In *The Pursuit of Urban History*, edited by D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe. London: Edward Arnold.
- Denevan, William M. 1992. The Pristine Myth: The landscape of the Americas in 1492. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (3):369-385.
- Dennis, Richard. 2008. *Cities in Modernity: Representations and productions of metropolitan space, 1840-1930*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Desfor, Gene, and Roger Keil. 2004. *Nature and the City: Making environmental policy in Toronto and Los Angeles*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Detwyler, Thomas R., and Melvin G. Marcus. 1972. *Urbanization and Environment: The physical geography of the city*. Belmont, Calif.: Duxbury.
- Farabee, Charles R. 2003. *National Park Ranger: An American icon*. Lanham, Md.: Roberts Rinehart.
- Findlay, John M. 1992. *Magic Lands: Western cityscapes and American culture after 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fishman, Robert. 1982. *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Fortey, Richard. 2008. *Dry Storeroom No. 1: The secret life of the natural history museum*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Gandy, Matthew. 2002. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking nature in New York City*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Gold, Mick. 1984. A History of Nature. In *Geography Matters! A reader*, edited by D. Massey and J. Allen. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gottlieb, Robert, and Margaret FitzSimmons. 1991. *Thirst for Growth: Water agencies as hidden government in California*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. 2001. *Splintering Urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Hall, Peter. 1988. *Cities of Tomorrow: An intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Havlick, Spenser W. 1974. *The Urban Organism: The city's natural resources from an environmental perspective*. New York: Macmillan.
- Heiman, Michael K. 2003. From Concrete and Clay to Planning in the Service of Capital Accumulation: Reworking Matthew Gandy's Conceptualization of Urban Form and Resistance in New York City. *Antipode* 35 (5):1008-1012.
- Heynen, Nikolas C. 2003. The Scalar Production of Injustice within the Urban Forest. *Antipode* 35 (5):980-998.
- Heynen, Nikolas C., Maria Kaika, and E. Swyngedouw, eds. 2006. *In the Nature of Cities: Urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism*. New York: Routledge.
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