Dr. Anne E. Mosher
Associate Professor of Geography
144C Eggers Hall
3-1510
amosher@maxwell.syr.edu

Purpose of the Course: “Understanding the Urban Palimpsest”

Urban history and urban historical geography courses often take a progressive (linear) approach toward presenting their subject matter. When they do, they tend to tend to emphasize the inevitability of urban growth and urbanization—from the ancient seeds of urbanization in Iraq’s Fertile Crescent through the flowering of the contemporary globalized “World City.” This course critiques that approach and offers something different. I start from the premise that cities can be looked upon as a “palimpsest.”

The dictionary defines a palimpsest as a parchment, written upon several times, where the earlier writing has been completely or partially erased to make room for new writing. Such erasures and additions can utterly change the meaning of the text that has been encoded. Cities are similar in that after they are built, bits and pieces of them get: 1) modified through functional and interpretational changes, 2) razed because they are deemed outmoded, 3) preserved or frozen in place because their forms and/or functions are thought to be of some lasting value, 4) resurrected either physically or conceptually after having been destroyed and 5) forgotten about or overlooked entirely. As these sorts of changes occur, so too do changes occur in how we look at these urban elements, how we invest in them financially and emotionally, and how we depict them—in literature, art, newspapers, maps, etc. Our goals are to: a) understand the urban palimpsest by identifying its constituent elements and b) understand the dynamics, trends and histories behind the creation, re-creation, and representation of those elements.

Audience

This course is aimed toward an interdisciplinary audience of students from the social sciences, arts, humanities and design programs (architecture and landscape architecture) who have an interest in cities. It assumes no prior background in urban studies, urban history or urban geography and would be suitable for 2nd-year undergraduate students and above (including graduate students.) This course is typically taught every other year and will not be offered again until 2006-2007.

Readings

A course reader will be available at the Copy Center in Marshall Square. It will contain the journal articles listed in the schedule below (to be provided in a later rendition of the syllabus).

There is also one REQUIRED text, which can be purchased at the Orange Bookstore in Marshall Square:


(There are many editions of this book: I think any of them that post-date 1990 would probably be fine, but you should try to acquire the most recent one.)

Assessment

Assessment in this course will be based on four sorts of activities: two in-class examinations (20% each for a total of 40% of the course grade), one take-home comprehensive final exam (10 page limit worth 10% of the course grade), three five-page writing assignments (10% each for a total of 30% of course grade), and in-class attendance and participation (20% of course grade).
**ATTENDANCE**

Absolutely essential. In other words: **REQUIRED.** If you are going to miss class, please let me know in advance in order to get an approved absence. Other absences will go down as unexcused.

**LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Lateness</th>
<th>Grade Reduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 1 day</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 days</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 days</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ days</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANY assignment that is late will be penalized by half a letter grade (5%) **per day**. Therefore, an assignment that is three days late will receive a grade that has been reduced by a letter grade and one-half (15%) from the grade it would have earned had it been on time.

**CITATION OF SOURCES**

Also note: Original work is expected for all writing that you submit in this course. Consultation of books, articles, the web, and other media is expected. HOWEVER, any sources consulted MUST be referenced IN DETAIL in footnotes and/or a bibliography. I might want to look at your sources and need to know where to find them!

**CALCULATION OF GRADES**

A few words about how the grades will be assigned at the end of the course . . . First off, I do NOT believe in grading on a curve. That pits everyone in competition with each other. I think that if everyone does A work in the class, then everyone gets an A. Or, conversely, if no one does A work, then no one gets an A. Thus I make up the grading criteria beforehand and set what I expect an A-answer, B-essay, to be like. If you meet all the criteria for getting an A, you get an A. I will use the following scale to calculate your grades:

- **A** 95-100%
- **A-** 90-94%
- **B+** 86-89%
- **B** 83-85%
- **B-** 80-82%
- **C+** 76-79%
- **C** 73-75%
- **C-** 70-72%
- **D** 60-69%
- **F** 0-59%

The percentages are important because they are what I will use to quantify the qualitative A, B, and C’s that I assign when presentations and written work. For example, let’s say that your final paper is worthy of a B+. I’ll decide whether that B+ is a low or high B+. Let’s say it is a medium B+: 88%. Since the term-paper is worth 20% of the course grade, I will multiply that 88 times .20. This means that your final paper will count toward 17.6 percent of your entire course grade. I’ll do the same thing for all of your other grades, multiplying the percentage grade you earned by the amount of the course grade that each task is worth. You might consider keeping track of this as the course goes along, too.

**Academic Honesty and Conduct**

Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism and cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct, will not be tolerated. Moreover, in a class this size, cheating is REALLY EASY TO SPOT. So . . . . don’t do it, please!! Cases of academic dishonesty will be handled according to University guidelines. [Please note that the professor was on the College of Arts and Sciences faculty-student
committee that handles cases of academic dishonesty for four years. I know how the system works and I’m not afraid to use it when necessary!]

The professor also expects that students will deport themselves in a professional and polite manner in lecture. This means arriving on time and staying in the lecture until the end of class. It also means respecting the opinions of others, even if you disagree. Rudeness to other students is unacceptable!

Disability

Students who have a certified disability that might impact performance in this course should let the professor know as soon as possible so that any necessary arrangements can be made. If you suspect you may have a learning disability you should contact Learning Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Achievement, Room 303, 804 University Ave.; 443-4498. For other disabilities students should contact the Office for Student Assistance, Room 306 Steele Hall; 443-5019.

Course Schedule (Tentative; Changes to be announced in class; Readings schedule to be added later)

JAN 19 W Course Introduction

Linear Narratives of Urban Evolution

JAN 24 M The American Urban System, 1609 to 2004


JAN 26 W The Internal Structure of the City, 1609 to 2004


Non-Linear Narratives of Urban Change

JAN 31 M Uneven Development of Urban Regions


FEB 2 W The SimCity® Approach to Urban Form


FEB 7 M Aldo Rossi and Urban Artifacts, I

FEB 9 W  Aldo Rossi and Urban Artifacts, II


**Urban Landscapes De Novo (from scratch)**

FEB 14 M  Organic Growth v Pre-Conceived Growth


FEB 16 W  The Religious, Political and Economic Underpinnings to Geographies of Pre-conceived Growth


REVIEW 1 DUE

FEB 21 M  Review for the First Exam

FEB 23 W  Exam 1

**Aging Urban Landscapes**

**Part I: Lost Cities and Lost Urban Landscapes**

FEB 28 M  The Atlantis Mystique (from Virginia to Jordan)


MAR 2 W  The World We Lost to Modernism


MAR 7 M  Ghosts of/in the City

### Part II: Petrified Cities and Petrified Urban Landscapes

**MAR 9 W**  
Inadvertent Petrification: Learning from Pompeii

**REVIEW 2 DUE**


**MAR 14 M**  
SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

**MAR 16 W**  
SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

**MAR 21 M**  
Inadvertent Petrification: The Inertia of the Property Cadastre and Infrastructure


**MAR 23 W**  
Deliberate Petrification: Zoning, Historic Preservation and the Creation of Urban Relics


**MAR 28 M**  
Deliberate Petrification: World’s Fairs and Disney’s Main Street USA

Exam 2 Review Sheet Distributed in Class


**MAR 30 W**  
Review for the Second Exam

**APR 4 M**  
EXAM 2

**APR 6 W**  
NO CLASS

---

### Part III: Resurrected Landscapes in the City

**APR 11 M**  
Resurrecting the Agrarian Past: Suburbanization


**APR 13 W**  
Resurrecting the Urban Past: Gentrification


**Part IV: Forgotten Cities and Forgotten Urban Landscapes**

**APR 18 M**  
Hidden Politics of Landscape: Memorialization


**REVIEW 3 DUE**

**APR 20 W**  
More Hidden Politics of Landscape: Myths


**APR 25 M**  
Landscapes We Don’t Like to See


**APR 27 W**  
Landscapes For Which We Might Not Think to Look


**MAY 2 M**  
Course Conclusion  
Distribution of Take-Home Final

**MAY 9 M**  
Take-Home Final Due by 4:30 p.m.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask! I’m here to help.—Anne Mosher