

A.Y. 2014/2015



**Seminar (6 credits – 48 hours)**

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With a lecture by Prof.ssa Silvia Ross, University College Cork

Seminar topic:

**RETHINKING NON-PLACES.**

**From spaces of alienation to places for public life.**

**1 -DESCRIPTION**

One of the major transformations of contemporary cities is the trend to a dramatic redistribution of 'central' functions which were – up to only a few decades ago – an almost exclusive prerogative of historical cores. This is due to two main factors: on the one hand a dimensional growth of urbanized areas which increased the distance between center and periphery «to the breaking point» (Koolhaas 1994, p. 1248), and on the other hand a relocation of traffic flows which made in fact marginal many of the historic urban centers.

Such transformations led to a spread of public life to areas which were not explicitly conceived for that, but which are in fact depicted in literature as non-places, that is as spaces of a rootless alienated life: from parking lots to gas stations, from malls to airports and stations. Our idea is that conceiving such spaces as non-places we miss the opportunity of taking advantage of their social potential to turn them into good and livable places.

In the words of Marc Augé, «if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place» (Augé 1995, p. 77-78). «Non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself» (*ibidem* p. 79).

Now, although many of the places listed above are in fact not historical, having been almost exclusively developed in very recent times, we don't know very much of their social life and of their relationship to groups' and to subgroups' identities. Therefore it is worthwhile better investigating on the nature of such (non-)places through empirical analysis and to explore new possibilities to foster their public life and social functions through design.

**2 - GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

The "Rethinking Non-Places" seminar has three major goals:

- 1) To provide a framework which permits us to understand the current debate on places and non-places and to critically review it;
- 2) To assess the consistency of the dominant views on non-places through a sample of cases to be empirically studied;
- 3) To envision new ways of conceiving the so-called non-places, explicitly positioning their social function at the center of design.

### **3 – METHOD AND TIMING**

#### **3.1. Theoretical framework (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> week – 15 hours).**

Weekly lectures will be provided and weekly readings will be assigned on the subsequent topics:

- places and non places
- the car and the city
- shopping malls
- parking lots
- gas stations
- survey and research methods

#### **3.2. The social life of non-places: empirical analysis. Techniques and tools for designing non-places for public life (6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> week, 9 hours)**

A sample of non-places will be identified and further studied through empirical analysis, including shopping malls, gas stations, and parking lots. In the meantime, techniques and tools will be presented in order to design nonplaces as places for public life.

#### **3.3. Rethinking non-places through design (9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> week, 24 hours).**

After having studied non-places and defined techniques and strategies for their re-design, workshops will be held in order to rethink non-places through design.

### **4- WEEKLY READINGS AND ACTIVITIES**

#### **Part 1. Theoretical Framework**

**First Week – Friday November 7<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop (Via Micheli 2), 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *The car and the city. Places and non places. Rethinking non-places.*

Class activity: videos projection.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Second week – Friday November 21<sup>st</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 p.m.**

Lecture: *Shopping Malls and Public Life.*

Class activity: class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Third Week – Monday November 28<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *Rethinking Parking Lots.*

Class activity: class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Fourth Week – Friday December 5<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *The livable gas station.*

Class activity: class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Fifth week – Friday December 12<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *How to study public life in non-places: research methodologies.*

Class activity: class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

Deadline: selection in agreement with the instructor of a non-place to be analyzed and redesigned.

## **Part 2. The social life of non-places: empirical analysis. Techniques for the redesign of non-places.**

**Sixth week – Friday January 16<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-13.00 a.m.**

Written exam on the readings provided in Part 1 (1 hour)

Lecture: *How to design livable parking lots.*

Class activity: review of the empirical analysis of a non-place.

Assigned Activities: development of the empirical analysis on the social life of a non-place.

**Seventh week – Friday January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *Hybridizing shopping malls.*

Class activity: review of the empirical analysis of a non-place.

Assigned Activities: development of the empirical analysis on the social life of a non-place.

**Eighth week – Friday January 30<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture: *Techniques and tools for realizing livable gas stations.*

Class activity: review of the empirical analysis of a non-place.

Assigned Activities: development of the empirical analysis on the social life of a non-place.

Deadlines: delivery of a report with the analysis of the social life of a non-place.

## **Part 3. Rethinking non-places**

**Ninth week – Friday February 6<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 p.m.**

Lecture: *on demand on specific design issues.*

Class activity: review of students' design proposals.

Assigned Activities: development of the design proposal.

**Tenth week – Friday February 13<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 p.m.**

Lecture: *on demand on specific design issues.*

Class activity: review of students' design proposals.

Assigned Activities: development of the design proposal.

**Eleventh week – Friday February 20<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 p.m.**

Lecture: *on demand on specific design issues.*

Class activity: review of students' design proposals.

Assigned Activities: development of the design proposal.

**Twelfth week – Friday February 27<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 pm**

Lecture: *Non-places in Italian literature*, Prof. Silvia Ross, University College Cork (2.30-4.30 pm)

*This section of the seminar concerns literary and filmic representations of non-places or spaces in-between. The discussion will focus on selections from literary texts and film clips that explore such themes as urban sprawl, edge-cities, the megalopolis, and spaces of the airport.*

Assigned activity: selected readings provided by Prof. Ross on the lecture topics; development of design proposal.

Class activities: readings discussion; review of students' design proposals (4.30-6.30 pm)

**Thirteenth week – Friday March 6<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 p.m.**

Class activity: review of students' design proposals.

**Fourteenth week – Friday March 13<sup>th</sup>, Aula Workshop, 2.30-6.30 p.m.**

Class activity: review of students' design proposals.

**Final deadline for the delivery of part III: March 30<sup>th</sup> 2015**

The final delivery will consist of: a Power Point Presentation; a Design Dossier; 1 to 2 A1 Design Panels.

**5 - ASSESSMENT**

Each student will: participate to class discussion of readings on a weekly basis; hold a written exam on the topics presented in the lectures and in the readings; perform the empirical analysis on the social life of a non-place; develop a design proposal on a non-place.

**6 -EVALUATION AND GRADING SYSTEM**

Passing the seminar requires:

- 1) Participating actively to class discussion of readings and passing a written test on the seminar bibliography;
- 2) Performing a field analysis on the social life of a (non-)place agreed upon with the instructor;
- 3) Developing a design of a (non-)place agreed upon with the instructor.

**7-ATTENDANCE AND BEHAVIOR**

Attendance is mandatory.

**8 –ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Should issues of academic dishonesty arise (plagiarism and so on), the teacher will refer to the Degree Course Director and to the Degree Course Council, which will adopt appropriate measures.