



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

DIDA
DIPARTIMENTO DI
ARCHITETTURA



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN SPACE

AN INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Seminar (6 credits – 48 hours)

Code: B020765

Feb. 17th-May 11th 2016

Prof. Giulio Giovannoni (principal organizer)
Prof. Silvia Ross, University College Cork (co-organizer)
Prof. Maria Pia Arpioni, Università Ca' Foscari
Prof. Paola Briata, Polytechnic of Milan
Prof. Leonardo Chiesi, University of Florence
Prof. Francesco Chiodelli, Gran Sasso Science Institute
Prof. Richard Ingersoll, Syracuse University of Florence
Prof. Andrea Mecacci, University of Florence
Prof. Davide Papotti, Università di Parma
Prof. Camilla Perrone, University of Florence

1 - DESCRIPTION

Urban space is the physical continuum on which human existence and social life unfold, with their complexities and contradictions, conflicts and fights, passions and needs. However, urban space is not a simple container for human and social life, neutral like an empty theatrical scene which waits to be used by actors and performers. Although inert and difficult to transform, urban space has a natural tendency to form an indistinguishable whole with the society which inhabits and shapes it. Social structures, as well as power relations, inhabiting cultures, and modes of production, are variously encoded in it. Spatial transformations signify social dynamics and changes which are often conflicting and contradictory. Urban planners and designers tend to ignore their controversial and problematic role, hiding themselves behind the supposed neutrality of technical expertise. This is one of the reasons why it is important to critically reconsider the notion of urban space from different disciplinary perspectives, in order to gain a better awareness of the many implications of urban design.

The seminar, organized by Giulio Giovannoni and Silvia Ross, is conceived as an opportunity for critical discussion on the topic of urban space from different disciplinary perspectives. It aims at aggregating scholars from disciplines ranging from urban design, literary studies, urban and architectural history, urban sociology, urban economics, and aesthetics. The seminar is intended to be an open project to be further developed in the future.

2 - GOALS AND OUTCOMES

The "Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Urban Space" seminar has three major goals:

- 1) To introduce students to cross-disciplinary research methods in the field of urban studies;
- 2) To develop critical awareness about the highly complex and problematic (political, social, economic, etc.) effects of architecture and urban design;
- 3) To acquire and practice research and writing skills.



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3 – WEEKLY LECTURES AND ACTIVITIES

‘The Sprawling Literature on Sprawl’: Navigating Urban Studies Literature (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni, University of Florence, Department of Architecture

Wednesday February 17th 2016 – 2.30-5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

This section of the seminar will provide an introduction to urban interdisciplinary research focusing on the risks and opportunities that such kind of research entails. It will then focus on literature review methodologies discussing the goals of literature reviews, data collection techniques, ways of classifying research, ways of mapping and analyzing ideas, and similar. Literature reviews of research on sprawl will be used and discussed.

Urban Space as Art Fake (3 hours)

Andrea Mecacci, University of Florence, Department

Wednesday February 24th 2016, 2.30-5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

What is the role of art work in the frame of diffuse aesthetics? Is it possible to conceive urban space as a great copy, a huge art fake? It is evident that aestheticization processes which have occurred in the last thirty years have changed the status of the work of art. In fact it is not accidental that the discomfort caused by these changes is reflected in a list of negative-meaning metaphors which try to identify the ways in which art has attempted to redefine its mimetic status: «de-definition of art» (Harold Rosenberg), «dematerialization of the art object» (Lucy Lippard), «aesthetics of disappearance» (Paul Virilio), «vanishing point of art» (Jean Baudrillard), «art in a gaseous state» (Yves Michaud), and «philosophical disenfranchisement of art» (Arthur Danto). Also urban space takes an active part in the relationship between the crisis of the artistic (the artwork) and the explosion of the aesthetic (diffuse aesthetics), a scenario that certifies the horizon of contemporaneity and definitively dismisses the equation aesthetic-art that marked the thought of nineteenth-century, in a more problematic way the thought of twentieth-century modernism, and in a still recognizable form, the thought of postmodernism.

The Double Space of Architecture: Methodological Reflections on the Study of Lived Environments (3 hours)

Leonardo Chiesi, University of Florence, Department of Social and Political Sciences

Wednesday March 2nd 2016, 10.00am-1.00pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

People engage with space in a variety of meaningful ways and at all scales: from the immediate space that surrounds the body, to architectural and urban space, to landscape. Designed space reaches its completion only when it is appropriated by people through this very engagement. The lecture will focus on a sociological perspective on this complex relationship, proposing a set of theoretical and empirical tools for the investigation of the social production of space.

Is Tuscany Real? Hyperreality and Urban Space in the Cradle of the Renaissance. (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni

Wednesday Mar 9th 2016, 2.30–5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Hyperreality is considered a typical feature of post-modernity and can be defined as the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality. The concept of hyperreality can be applied to urban space in the sense that in many instances the spaces of myth and of imagination end up producing real spaces. This often makes the distinction between authentic and fake, real and hyperreal, blurred and difficult to draw. This section of the seminar will briefly review the theoretical debate on hyperreality and try to draw a link between hyperreality and the production of urban space using Tuscan spaces at different scales as main case studies. Cases will be considered critically, emphasizing aspects such as the relationship between the production of hyperreal space and social purification, hyperreality and everyday life, among others.



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Ethnographical approaches in urbanism. (3 hours)

Paola Briata

Wednesday Mar 16th 2016, 2.30–5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

This section aims at exploring ethnographical approaches to the city and neighbourhoods. Ethnography is based on a qualitative approach to urban survey that implies direct involvement of the student/researcher in a research field in a specific place. This approach involves actions such as observing people living in a place, getting involved in their lives and activities, gaining the trust of a local community, trying to understand ways of living, problems and opportunities of specific neighbourhoods, developing new intellectual skills related to the complexities and opportunities of urban life (Madden, 2010; Cefai, 2013). Specific attention will be given to how ethnography might be helpful in fostering a critical understanding of the cities with explicit focus to planning and policy outcomes. Different means and “tactics” to develop ethnographical approaches as well as to represent their outcomes will be explored, including filmmaking, photography, developing multimedia and interactive platforms.

The anthropology of modernist mass housing: a tool for urban planners. (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni

Wednesday Mar 23rd 2016, 2.30–5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Although the modernist failure myth largely descends from Jane Jacobs' work, many of its advocates abandoned the observational method on which the American author grounded her work. Not only generalizations about the alleged failure of modernist architecture ignored non-environmental factors and disregarded the differences which characterize modernist public housing neighborhoods, but also they were unable of getting direct knowledge of how real life works in them. If we assume that each modernist public housing neighborhood is unique and different from all the others, as it is certainly the case, then we need to get first-hand knowledge of how it works. Starting from the review of anthropological research on modernist mass-housing in different countries this section of the course will discuss the implications of such research for urban planners.

Narrating cities: strategies of urban interpretation in a series of contemporary Italian short novels (3 hours)

Davide Papotti, Università di Parma

Wednesday Mar 30th 2016, 2.30-5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

In recent years, a new narrative genre has emerged in the contemporary Italian literary world: "urban narration". This is a mixed genre that draws from different literary traditions: travel literature, travel guides, short novels, autobiographical accounts etc. The emergence of a few series of "urban narrations" published by different publishing houses shows a growing interest in the construction of narrative identities of cities and towns, mirroring an increasingly problematic relationship between inhabitants and the urban contexts they inhabit. Following a few examples from one of these series, "Contromano" (literally "Against the flow"), by the Rome-Bari based publishing house Laterza, the talk will touch some of the "hot" topics in the literary portraits of Italian cities and towns: the use of public spaces, the processes of globalization and their impacts in the urban landscapes, conflicts in the use of urban spaces, the sense of belonging of city inhabitants, the relation between tourists and residents, the role of tourism marketing, the formation of "city brands", etc.

Containing Suburban Portland: Introduction to Case Study Research (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni, University of Florence, Department of Architecture

Wednesday February 17th 2016 – 2.30-5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

This section of the seminar will provide an introduction to case study research focusing on the research questions which can be answered using such tool, on the different kinds of case studies, on the variety of tools being used in case study research (documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations), and on the risks and



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difficulties in applying such method. Case studies on the containment of suburban Portland will be used and discussed, among other examples.

Regulating and Designing Urban Space to Promote Pluralism: the Case of Mosques in Italy (3 hours)

Francesco Chiodelli, Gran Sasso Science Institute

Wednesday Apr 13th 2016, 2.30-5.30 pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Religious diversity has significant consequences on the urban environment, starting with the new spaces that it entails and new forms of expression in public. These spaces and forms of expression engender complex problems of regulation, including specific questions related to urban planning. In this lecture, I will chiefly consider the current situation in Italy. My focus will be on the region of Lombardy, in northern Italy, and in particular on the newly introduced regulations governing the construction and location of places of worship and religious facilities. What concerns me is not so much the current legislation of the Lombard authorities per se, as the example that the region's policies provide for a critical rethinking of certain fundamental issues currently affecting many Western countries and cities. In this perspective (and in order to recognize and foster pluralism), I suggest a radical reform of local land-use practices and procedures.

Museality Versus Reality (3 hours)

Richard Ingersoll, Syracuse University in Florence

Wednesday April 20th 2016, 2.30-5.30pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

During the past 30 years the number of museums in the world has increased exponentially. Last year China inaugurated 450 new museums. As many as 10,000 new museums have opened in the US since 2000. While Italy cannot keep up with that pace, almost every major city has inaugurated at least one new museum during the past decade. The increase in museums has been the privileged program for high-style architecture--coaxing Kenneth Frampton to surmise that it is a form of compensation for the ugliness of contemporary cities. While museums have cropped up everywhere and for any number of subjects (shoes, literature, and of course art) cities are being managed increasingly like museums. In this investigation I will try to locate the reality factor in regards to the rise of museality.

Urban Space and Literature Studies: Conflict in Tuscan Spaces (6 hours)

Silvia Ross, University College Cork

Wednesday Apr 27th 2016, 9.30am-0.30pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Wednesday Apr 27th 2016, 2.30-5.30pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

While many monographs and articles have been published on the relationship between the text and a named location (e.g. specific cities such as Paris, London, Rome etc.), literary studies have produced relatively little in terms of spatial-textual theory. In general, literary critics tend to borrow from other, related fields--such as geography, architecture, philosophy or sociology--in order to analyze the spatial in literature. This part of the seminar will concern theories on space and place from both geographical and literary perspectives. Drawing on these (and other, related) theories, we will analyze literary and filmic texts, set in Tuscany, which exemplify spaces of alterity (based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class etc.) and conflict, in order to explore how urban space is configured in contemporary novels (e.g. Avallone's *Swimming to Elba*) and film (e.g. Soldini's *Rom Tour*).

Identity, History, and the Production of Urban Space (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni

Wednesday May 4th - 2.30pm-5.30pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Narratives about community, history, and identity are powerful forces which are often used to create the preconditions for the production of urban space. However, both the concept of community and that of identity are two problematic categories which can easily be misappropriated for questionable political and social goals. The urban rescripting of space in fascist era Tuscan towns studied by Prof. Lasansky is a great example of such misappropriation.



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This section of the seminar will provide a theoretical framework aimed at reconsidering the concepts of community and identity through the review of some major theoretical contributions on the topic. The case of Barcelona will be then discussed, where urban design was connected in the last 150 years to the assertion of a Catalan national identity. This happened in complex ways which should prevent us from drawing overly generalized conclusions on the relationship between history, identity, and urban design.

Hidden urbanities: diversity as the imaginative potential for the urban to become urbanity (3 hours)

Camilla Perrone

Wednesday May 11th – 2.30-5.30pm, Room 7M, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

The concept of urbanity has been recently questioned with reference to the fundamental and far-reaching change in the very nature of the urbanisation processes. Even a new urban question that tackles with the concept of urbanity is being focused to embody the challenges of this change. In the specific literature it is commonly argued that urbanity is pluralising itself in a range of potentialities to be discovered and unveiled, therefore still hidden. They might include multiple ranges of city-ness (whether conceived as urban everyday life, community making processes, socio-cultural and religious fights, conflicts about contested spaces, the claiming of citizenships rights, the unfolding of different styles of life, or otherwise) along with different kinds of urban spaces. The lecture will argue on these questions while providing a plural conceptualisation of urbanity that brings it out of the dark.

Towards Urban Ecologies: Recent Trends in the Literary City (3 hours)

Maria Pia Arpioni, Università Ca' Foscari, Department of Humanities

Wednesday May 18th – 2.30-5.30 pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

From its birth onwards, the city has been a central feature in Western literary works, playing diverse but always fundamental roles across centuries and civilisations. This crucial presence – proven by a number of ancient and modern texts – testifies the complexity and the importance of the relationship between humankind and urban spaces. The city is a highly developed form of social organization on a large scale. Yet, as Burton Pike stated, during the nineteenth century the literary city came more and more to express the isolation or exclusion of the individual from a community, and in the twentieth century to express the fragmentation of the very concept of community. The recent theoretical framework of Urban Ecologies has finally come to underline some positive characteristics of cities, such as being a community, a “web”. This new model may also be profitable in terms of a spatial-textual theory, as the interpretation of filmic and literary texts – and in particular of Adriano Guerrini’s poetry – shows.

Urban Space as a Contested Space: struggles for identity in the Florence area (3 hours)

Giulio Giovannoni

Wednesday May 25th – 2.30-5.30 pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Urban space is often the terrain of encounter-clash between competing users of public spaces. Competition and conflict may depend on differences in age, social status, race, culture, sexuality, among others. Mostly the categories of ‘renewal’ and ‘decay’ are used according to the interests of particular groups. Inevitably urban design is in the benefit of certain groups and to the detriment of others. However the fight is generally masked by the rhetoric/ideology of decay and renewal. This section of the seminar will question, through a wide range of historical and contemporary examples, the very foundations of urban design. A specific case study on competition for public spaces in the Florence area will be presented.

Concluding Session

Giulio Giovannoni, Silvia Ross

Wednesday June 8th – 2.30-5.30 pm, Aula Pietre, Palazzo di San Clemente, Via Micheli 2

Student presentations on selected topics and group discussion.



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5 – ADMISSION AND APPLICATION

The course is open to students from all departments which are enrolled in master's programs and in Phd programs at the University of Florence. Erasmus students enrolled at the University of Florence are well accepted. **Applications from phd students and master's programs students from other universities will also be considered. Diversity in students' scientific background and geographical origin is highly valued.** Only 16 students will be admitted to the course, but all lectures will be open. **The form downloadable at <http://crossdisciplinaryurbanspace.com/call-for-applications/> should be filled and sent by February 12th 2016 to course@crossdisciplinaryurbanspace.com in order to apply. Notification of acceptance will be provided by February 14th 2016.**

6 – ASSESSMENT AND REQUIREMENTS

Each student will: participate in class discussion of readings on a weekly basis; write a 5000-word research paper on the seminar topics. The paper can be written in English or in Italian. Good English reading skills are required.

7 -EVALUATION AND GRADING SYSTEM

Passing the seminar requires:

- 1) Participating actively in class discussion of readings (attendance is mandatory);
- 2) Writing a 5000 words research paper on the seminar topics.

8 -ATTENDANCE AND BEHAVIOR

Class participation is mandatory.

9 –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.