



**Seminar (6 credits)**

Prof. Giulio Giovannoni

Prof. Paolo Costa

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 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 (15 hours);
- 2) To assess the consistency of the dominant views on non-places through a sample of cases to be empirically studied (12 hours);
- 3) To envision new ways of conceiving the so-called non-places, explicitly positioning their social function at the center of design (21 hours).

**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 (6<sup>th</sup> week, 12 hours)**

A sample of non-places will be identified and further studied through empirical analysis, including shopping malls, gas stations, and parking lots.

### **3.3. Rethinking non-places through design (7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> week, 21 hours).**

After having studied non-places, design strategies will be defined in order to turn them in to places for public life.

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

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

**First Week – Monday March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Room 8ST, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture (1,5 hours): *The car and the city. Places and non places. Rethinking non-places.* (by Giulio Giovannoni)

Class activity: videos projection.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Second week – Monday March 10<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 3.00-6.00 p.m.**

Lecture (1,5 hours): *Shopping Malls and Public Life.* (by Giulio Giovannoni and Paolo Costa)

Class activity (1,5 hours): class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Third Week – Monday March 17<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture (1,5 hours): *Rethinking Parking Lots.* (by Giulio Giovannoni)

Class activity (1,5 hours): class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Fourth Week – Monday March 24<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 9.00-12.00 a.m.**

Lecture (1,5 hours): *The livable gas station.* (by Giulio Giovannoni)

Class activity (1,5 hours): class discussion of readings.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on the lecture topics.

**Fifth week – Friday April 4<sup>th</sup>**

Written exam on the topics and readings of lessons 1-4 (1,5 hours)

Lecture (1,5 hours): *How to study public life in non-places: research methodologies.* (by Paolo Costa)

### **Part 2. The social life of non-places: empirical analysis**

### **Sixth week – April 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>**

Three sessions of four hours each of fieldwork (12 hours)

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

### **Seventh week – Monday April 14<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 1.30-7.00 p.m.**

Class workshop (5,30 hours)

### **Eighth week – Wednesday April 23<sup>st</sup>, Room 8ST, 1.30-7.00 p.m.**

Class workshop (5,30 hours)

### **Ninth week – Monday April 28<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 1.30-7.00 p.m.**

Class workshop (5,30 hours)

### **Tenth week – Monday May 5<sup>th</sup>, Room 8ST, 1.30-7.00 p.m.**

Class workshop (5,30 hours)

### **Final deadline for the delivery of part III: May 15<sup>th</sup>**

The final delivery will consist of: a Power Point Presentation, a Design Dossier and a Panel.

## **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 instructors;
- 3) Developing a design of a (non-)place agreed upon with instructors.

## **7 -ATTENDANCE AND BEHAVIOR**

Class participation is required.

## **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.