



RETHINKING NON-PLACES.

From spaces of alienation to places for public life.

Short syllabus

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

With a contribution by Cosimo Balestri, Olivia Gori, and Emanuele Barili

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 four 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 (6 hours);
- 2) To introduce empirical research methodologies for studying the social life of so-called 'non-places' (6 hours);
- 3) To reassess the consistency of dominant views of specific 'non-places' such as shopping malls, parking lots, and gas stations (9 hours);
- 4) To explore new ways of designing 'non-places', explicitly positioning their social function at the center of design (21 hours).



3- WEEKLY LECTURES AND ACTIVITIES

PART 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

WEEK 1 – The ideology of non-places: a course introduction

Wednesday Feb 17th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, videos projection and readings discussion.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on lecture topics.

WEEK 2 – The car, the city, and the magic of infrastructures.

Wednesday Feb 24th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 p.m.

Class activities: lecture, videos projection and readings discussion.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on lecture topics.

PART 2. UNVEILING THE SOCIAL LIFE OF NON-PLACES

WEEK 3 – Suburban drifting and the social life of suburbs.

Wednesday March 2nd 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, preparation to fieldwork.

Assigned Activities: selected readings on lecture topics.

WEEK 4 – The public life of non-places: research methodologies.

Wednesday March 9th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, preparation to fieldwork.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & fieldwork development.

PART 3. NON-PLACES AND EVERYDAY LIFE: A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

WEEK 5 – Shopping malls and public life.

Wednesday March 16th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, review of fieldwork.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & fieldwork development.

WEEK 6 – Rethinking parking lots.

Wednesday March 23rd 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, review of fieldwork.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & fieldwork development.

WEEK 7 – Livable gas stations.

Wednesday March 30th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.



Class activities: lecture, presentation of the results of the fieldwork.

Assigned Activities: delivery of final fieldwork report.

PART 4. REDESIGNING NON-PLACES

WEEK 8 – Hybridizing shopping malls.

Wednesday April 6th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, review of projects.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & project development.

WEEK 9 – From parking lots to public spaces (with Cosimo Balestri, Olivia Gori, and Emanuele Barili).

Wednesday April 13th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m., Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lecture, review of projects.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & project development.

WEEK 10 – Redesigning gas stations to host public life

Wednesday April 20th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00-12.00 a.m.

Class activities: lectures, review of projects.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & project development.

SPECIAL SESSION – NON-PLACES IN LITERATURE AND MOVIES

WEEK 11 – Literary and filmic representations of non-places: the cases of Calvino's 'Invisible Cities' and of Reitman's 'Up in the Air'. By Silvia Ross, University College Cork

Tuesday April 26th 2016, Room 7M, 2.30-5.30 p.m.

Class activities: lecture, review of projects.

Assigned Activities: selected readings & project development.

PART 5. DESIGN WORKSHOPS

WEEKS 12/14 – Design Workshops

Wednesday May 4th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00a.m.-1.00 p.m.

Wednesday May 11th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00a.m.-1.00 p.m.

Wednesday May 18th 2016, Room 7M, 9.00a.m.-1.00 p.m.

Class activities: review of projects.

Assigned Activities: project development.



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A.Y. 2015/2016 – Spring Semester
Seminar (6 credits – 48 hours)
Code: B021636

Final deadline for the delivery of the work: June 1st 2016

The final delivery will consist of: a Power Point Presentation, a Dossier on the social life of a 'non-place' and one or more design panels.

5 - ASSESSMENT

Each student will: participate to class discussion of readings on a weekly basis; 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;
- 2) Conducting a field analysis of the social life of a 'non-place';
- 3) Developing a redesign proposal of the previously investigated 'non-place'.

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.