Urban Theory II
Contemporary Spatial Practices

UST 801
Helen Liggett Fall 2005

New concepts must relate to our problems, to our history and above all to our becomings

Deleuze and Guattari

This course explores urbanity as a set of socially constructed articulations of experience. Each section of the class is organized as an arena for discussing a subset of contemporary spatial practices. In each the issues of presentation and conceptualization, real and virtual are interwoven. This is to suggest that some intellectual open endedness attends what used to be assumed to be the solid ground for judgment, knowledge and debate about cities. That is to say, truth about the “really real” is less the pursuit of current urban thought than attempts to express what is going on. Marshall Berman repeated a deep insight into this aspect of current urban existence when he titled his book with a famous phrase from the Communist Manifesto, “All that is solid melts into air.”

Three arenas that are salient to developing urban thought are: Image, virtual space and world cities. These are interwoven both in current research and in urban experience itself. Some theorists, for example, use metaphors from one arena to talk about another. See for example, “. . . ‘Better than (Real) Life’: Cyberspace as Urban Space” by Gordon Fletcher. Images of cities have become part of urban public policy. See for example, “Ephemera, Temporary Urbanism, and Imaging” by J. Mark Schuster.

The philosopher whose work best provides a framework the work of conceptualizing these and other developing spatial practices is Gill Deleuze. The class will begin with discussion of his method and application of that to urban topics. See, “Connections” by John Rajchman (in The Deleuze Connections) and “Forward”, “Constructions”, “Future Cities” and “The Virtual House” by John Rajchman.
The class will move from this methodological framework to consider each of the following arenas of urban experience:

1. Areas to arenas and cities as states of mind
2. Space, place and the hope for community
3. Public squares and residual spaces
4. Narratives and resistances on the world stage
5. World cities, shared space and urban encounters

Class procedures

Students will write a paper and make a class presentation in one of these arenas, or another of their own making. This project will contain an image component. This will be either visual interpretation or interpretation of textual images or conceptual frameworks. It will also have an empirical component. That is, the project will be tied in some way to spatial practices. It is not expected that the
project will have a programmatic component. Instead the emphasis is illumination that will facilitate further thought.

This project will have three parts: Topic Selection (10%), Presentation (30%) Final Paper (30%). The rest of the grade will be based on class participation (30%)

Short readings for the class will be provided or made available electronically. Urban Encounters (Helen Liggett, U of Minnesota Press 2003. Available on Amazon.com) is also required. A reading schedule will accompany each section.

The first week will be introduction. In addition to explaining the course and discussing procedures, students will introduce themselves, discuss their work, and we will compile an e-mail and phone contact list.

Because this is spring (?) term, there is the possibility of storms. In case of increment weather, follow Cleveland public schools and look for an e-mail from me.

Happy to be starting again . . . .