He comes to my table in his hungry wounds
and his hunger.


But hunger was a more immediate sorrow…

It is our sorrow. Shall it melt? Ah, water
Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these valleys,
And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands.

W.H. Auden, “Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,” May 1933

A culture, we all know, is made by its cities.


**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course on “Detroit” is an experimental seminar in Critical Theory and Practice that aims to explore the intersection of thinking, practice, and production for a new kind of open seminar where production will be both theoretical and material, that is, embodied reflection / thoughtfulness. The ostensible subject, that is, our point of departure, is the critical theory of the city conceived as medium. Detroit is the example of that subject, but Detroit in dialogue with … Passaic (Robert Smithson), and may be Gordon Matta-Clark’s voids, and Scott Hocking’s urban archeology of the future. And if we consider the status of ruins (ruination), then we shall do so in relation to the ruin of thought from Simmel, through Heidegger, Arendt and Derek Walcott. We shall also explore the medium of the city as part of a developing ethic of care (and re-thinking of ecologies).

The first two days will be an immersive one of shared reading, conversation, and thought. Thereafter, each day will be divided into one of shared reading and conversation, followed by an afternoon of explorations in chosen neighborhoods of the city. The readings below are only indicative as it is expected that the shared conversation and research generated by this laboratory of thought will result in new, unforeseen directions which it will be our responsibility to pursue. This will be the function of the dossier.

This collaborative / laboratory work will be intensive, but will be appropriate for motivated juniors / seniors as well as graduates. It is hoped that each day will include one shared meal where conversation can encounter the open…
Key Works

CARE:

Ellen F. Davis, “Rupture and Re-membering,” Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 8-20, especially the sections “Destroying the Heartland” and “The Pain of Seeing.”


RUINS:


URBAN GARDENING / CITY AND SPIRITUALITY / URBAN ECOLOGY:


The Black / Land Project: http://www.blacklandproject.org/


Ingo Vetter, “Urban Agriculture,” Detroit, i.e., Infrastructure 1 (Spring, 2006): 17-23.

Kyong Park / iCUE, Urban Ecology: Detroit and Beyond (Hong Kong: MAP Book Publishers, 2005).

CRITICAL THEORY / GUY DEBORD:


Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* [MUST be in Black and Red Detroit edition – available cheaply directly from Black and Red, Detroit]


GORDON MATTA-CLARK:


**PDF’s of selected material will be made available.**

SCREENINGS:

It is hoped that the Critical Theory Study Group will organize a set of film screenings of experimental film.

*Urbanized*, color, 2011, dir. Gary Hustwit;


*From the East*, color, 1993, dir. Chantal Akerman;


*Finally got the news*, b&w, and color, collective (The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Detroit), 1970.

**Assignments:**

**DOSSIER:** 25 % Dossier consists of DOCUMENTATION (visual, aural, literary, digital, etc.) made of relevant works – individually or in groups – which record emergent possibilities from conversations, explorations in the city, or seminar discussions. It is intended that the dossier will provide raw material for subsequent work written, performed, or creative. **PRESENTATIONS:** 25 % ; **ESSAY** 50 % Topics and length variable but based upon individual interest and to be decided through conversation.
PART I ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL THEORY

Day I. Introduction and Overview: Enlightenment, Reason, Modernity, Waste

“[The goal of critical theory] is man’s emancipation from slavery.” Max Horkheimer.


BACKGROUND

Karl Marx, “Theses on Fuerbach,” 1845 / 1888.


ADVANCED READING


Day II. Care, not Dominion: Re-thinking the Theology and Language of the Hebrew Scriptures, or, Where, then, was the city?

Readings:

Theology:

Ellen F. Davis, “Rupture and Re-membering,” Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 8-20, especially the sections “Destroying the Heartland” and “The Pain of Seeing.”

Phenomenology:


The following literary works will be discussed throughout our collaboration:


Day III. Between Catastrophe and Waste


Creative Time in New Orleans / Paul Chan’s *Waiting for Godot*:  

CRITICAL THEORY:


POEMS:

W.H. Auden, “Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys”;


PART II BETWEEN THE CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE PROBLEM OF HABIT

Day IV. Logics of Separation and the Critique of Everyday Life (I): Guy Debord and “a provisional microsociety”
Screening (I): *On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time*, b&w, 35 mm, dir. Guy Debord

http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/passage.html

Screening (II): *Critique of Separation*, b&w, 35 mm, dir. Guy Debord

http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/separation.html


CONTEXT


All work on the Situationist International should begin with the founding document of the movement (1957), *The Report on the Construction of Situations*. Here is a link to an English translation:

http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html

PART III MAPPING THE CITY, READING THE CITY: Smithson, Detroit

“So this is where people come in order to live, I would have rather thought to die. […] I looked on my map […]” Rainer Maria Rilke, *Malte Laurids Brigge*, 1910.

Day V. Mapping the City: Psycho-geography and the City

“The ecological analysis of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, or the role of microclimates…” Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive”

READING


http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html
Guy Debord, “The Organization of Territory,” The Society of the Spectacle, theses 165-179. CRUCIAL.


Day VI. Reading the City (I): Robert Smithson

Topic (I):


Topic (II):


READING


CONTEXT


Day VII. Reading the City (II): Mapscapes or Cartographic Sites


READING


Dan Hoffman, “Erasing Detroit,” in ed. Georgia Daskalakis et al, Stalking Detroit (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), 100-103; also available in Dan Hoffman, Architecture Studio:


For Maps of Vacant Land in Detroit, cf. the GIS (Geographic Information System) Map Site at:


especially the Thematic Map at the above link.

Day VIII. Healing a Wounded Landscape: Detroit, Wetlands, Daylighting

Topic(s) I and II:

Jennifer Dowdell, Harrison Fraker, and Joan Nassuer, “Replacing a Shopping Center with an Ecological Neighborhood,” PDF.


BACKGROUND


Day IX. The Medium of the City: Scott Hocking’s Archeology of the Future

Hocking’ Detroit in dialogue with Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark

http://scotthocking.com/

Scott Hocking, “A Nice Spot Along the Water,” in Under the Influence, 6, The Detroit Issue (Fall / Winter 2009-2010), non-paginated. The whole issue of this magazine should be consulted for photography, fashion, music, dance, performance in Detroit.

Day X. Community: Jean-Luc Nancy…With the loss of “the community of dialogue”:

Guy Debord

Guy Debord, “Negation and Consumption within Culture,” *Society of the Spectacle*, theses 180-211.


Day XI. The Practice of the City: The PowerHouse Project

The PowerHouse Project:


and *Juxtapoz* magazine:


The PowerHouse Project is significantly represented in the following:


Mitch Cope and Lynn Crawford, ed. *Detroit*, 1, *Detroit, i.e., Infrastructure* (Spring, 2006).

Mitch Cope, “Fortification Architecture Detroit,” in *Shrinking Cities*, vol. 1, 288-293. PDF.


Gina Reichert and Danielle Aubert, ed. *Detroit* (Spring, 2007), *Imaginary Cities*. 