

***DETROIT, CRITICAL THEORY, AND THE CARE OF THE CITY***

FALL 2011 / SUMMER 2012 / WINTER 2013

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

Robert Hayden, "Words in the Mourning Time, III," 1970

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.

Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," 1992

***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."

Carol Gilligan, "Images of Relationship," *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, 1993), 24-63. Please consult the index for "Care, ethic of."

Martin Heidegger, "Confirmation of the Existential Interpretation of Dasein as Care in terms of Dasein's Pre-Ontological Way of Interpreting Itself," section 42, *Being and Time* (1927), trans. Robert Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and London: Harper, 1962, 2008), 241-246.

### RUINS:

Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, "Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Ruins," *New Formations* 71 (Spring, 2011): 110-124.

Jerry Herron, *Afterculture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit: WSU Press, 1993).

Felix O. Murchada, "Being as Ruination: Heidegger, Simmel, and the Phenomenology of Ruins," *Philosophy Today* 46 (2002): 10-18.

Benjamin Péret, "Ruines: Ruine des Ruines," *Minotaure* 12-13 (1939): 57-65 (trans to be provided).

Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23.2 (May, 2008): 191-219.

### URBAN GARDENING / CITY AND SPIRITUALITY / URBAN ECOLOGY:

Mary Caroline Richards, "The Renewal of Art through Agriculture," *Opening our Moral Eye: Essays, Talks and Poems Embracing Creativity and Community* (Hudson, NY.: Lindisfarne Books, 1996), 134-139.

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

Kenneth I. Helphand, *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006). Chapter 3, "Ghetto Gardens: Nazi Europe, 1939-44," 60-105.

Volker M. Welter, "The City and Spirituality," *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2002), 74-212.

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).

Georgia Diskalakis et al, *Stalking Detroit* (Barcelona: Actar, 2001).

CRITICAL THEORY / GUY DEBORD:

David Macey, *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

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

Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). The best book available in English on Debord.

David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1980; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

GORDON MATTA-CLARK:

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Works and Collected Writing*, ed. Gloria Moure (Madrid: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2006).

Pamela Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001).

**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;

*A Grin Without a Cat*, b&w, and color, 1978, dir. Chris Marker.

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

*An Encounter with Simone Weil*, b&w, and color, 2010, dir. Julia Haslett.

*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.

Zygmunt Bauman, “To each waste its dumping site, Or, The waste of globalization,” *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2004), 63-93.

### BACKGROUND

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

Herbert Marcuse with Bryan Magee, “Marcuse and the Frankfurth School: Dialogue with Herbert Marcuse,” in Bryan Magee, *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy* (London: BBC Books, 1978), 61-73.

### ADVANCED READING

Herbert Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory” (1937), *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, 1972), 134-158.

Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937), in *Critical Sociology*, ed. Paul Connerton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 206 – 224.

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:

Martin Heidegger, “Confirmation of the Existential Interpretation of Dasein as Care in terms of Dasein’s Pre-Ontological Way of Interpreting Itself,” section 42, *Being and Time* (1927), trans. Robert Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and London: Harper, 1962, 2008), 241-246.

The following literary works will be discussed throughout our collaboration:

Maurice Blanchot, Chapter XII, *Thomas the Obscure* (1941), trans. Robert Lambertson (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988), 113-117.

W.H. Auden, "Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys" (May 1933), *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 104-106.

W.H. Auden, "City without Walls" (1967), *Collected Poems*, 562-565.

Jim Gustafson, *The Idea of Detroit*, originally published as broadside by *The Alternative Press*, 1976, rpd in *Considering Detroit* (Detroit: MOCAD, 2008), 30.

EVENING SCREENING: *Waste Land*, color, 2010, dir. Vik Muniz.

Day III. Between Catastrophe and Waste

Charles Esche, Kerstin Niemann, and Stephanie Smith, *Heartland* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago and Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2009).

Joshua Decter, "Art, Urban Rebuilding, Social Justice, and Sustainability: Toward a Case Study of New Orleans," in Esche et al, *Heartland*, 37-45.

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

<http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/welcome.html>

CRITICAL THEORY:

Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1: *Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 19-77.

Zygmunt Bauman, "Culture of Waste," *Wasted Lives*, 94-133.

POEMS:

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

Jim Gustafson, "The Idea of Detroit."

## **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 micro-society"

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>

Guy Debord, "Separation Perfected," *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), theses 1-34.

## CONTEXT

Vincent Kaufmann, "The Poetics of the Dérive," *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. Robert Bonnono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 108-118.

Henri Lefebvre, on habit, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 3 vols (London: Verso, 2008).

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

Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive"(1956), *Situationist International 2* (December 1958):

<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>

Guy Debord, "The Organization of Territory," *The Society of the Spectacle*, theses 165-179. CRUCIAL.

Simon Sadler, "Formulary for a new Urbanism: Rethinking the City," *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998), 69-103, esp.: "A passion for maps," and "Drifting as a revolution of everyday life."

Vincent Kaufmann, "*Cartes du Tendre* [maps of tenderness]," *Guy Debord*, 100-108.

Gregor Harbusch, "Walk the City, Flex your Mind: Walking as an Artistic and Everyday Practice," in Philipp Oswald, ed. *Shrinking Cities*, vol. 2: *Interventions* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 706-713.

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

Topic (I):

Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 10-23.

Topic (II):

Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), *The Collected Writings*, 68-74.

READING

Ann Reynolds, "A Guide to the Monuments of Passaic," *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 100-122.

CONTEXT

Cornelia Butler, "A Lurid Presence: Smithson's Legacy and Post-Studio Art," in *Robert Smithson, ex cat* (Los Angeles: MCA, 2004), 224-243.

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

Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (1968), *The Collected Writings*, 78-94, especially "Mapscapes or Cartographic Sites," 91-94.

READING

Ann Reynolds, "The Cartographic Premise," *Robert Smithson*, 125-133.

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

*Cranbrook Academy of Art 1986-1993* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 28-29.

Dan Hoffman, "9119 St Cyril, January 1988," *Architecture Studio*, 30-45. (A photo-essay in un-building Detroit.)

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

<http://www.detroitmi.gov/DepartmentsandAgencies/InformationTechnologyServices/GISMaps.aspx>

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.

John Gallagher, "Healing a Wounded Landscape," *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City* (Detroit: WSU Press, 2010), 85-96.

Joan Nassauer, "Monitoring the Success of Metropolitan Wetland Restorations: Cultural Sustainability and Ecological Function" *Wetlands* 24.4 (2004): 756-65.

BACKGROUND

Guy Debord, *A Sick Planet* (2004), trans Donald Nicholson-Smith (Seagull Books, 2008).

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

Jean-Luc Nancy and Chantal Pontbriand, "An Exchange," *Parachute*, no. 100: *The Idea of Community* (2000): 14-31.



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

Anselme Jappe, "History and Community as the Essence of Man," *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31-43.

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

The PowerHouse Project:

<http://www.mitchcope.com/woodshop/power-house/>

and *Juxtapoz* magazine:

<http://www.juxtapoz.com/Current/juxtapoz-x-detroit-power-house-productions-artist-line-up-announced>

The PowerHouse Project is significantly represented in the following:

Charles Esche, Kerstin Niemann, and Stephanie Smith, *Heartland* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago and Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2009).

Toby Barlow, "For Sale: The \$100 House," op-ed in *The New York Times*, March 7, 2009, hyperlink:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/opinion/08barlow.html>

<http://www.mitchcope.com/>

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.

W.H. Auden, "City without Walls" (1967), *Collected Poems*, 562-565.

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