

Pavilion Seminars – Fall 2019

Section 002: NYC's Central Park. Public space as conceived, perceived and lived (Elizabeth K. Meyer)

Central Park is our text and context for exploring how urban parks shape and are shaped by everyday social interactions; how spatial practices are entangled with conceptions of public and nature. Cultural landscape theory, visual studies methods and digital spatial analysis techniques will be introduced to interpret one of America's most iconic public spaces. Through texts, prints, paintings, photography and maps as well as the creation of a digital web-based exhibit, students will explore these questions. How are cultural conceptions of the public, community, difference and democracy enacted, and altered, through the form and experience of constructed nature? How do changes over time alter the landscape and the social routines that take place in it? How do the designers' intentions compare to the lived experiences of city residents from varied classes, genders and races? UVA Special Collections' Central Park annual reports, guidebooks and ephemera provide opportunities for archival research. Interviews with Central Park Conservancy staff (historians, designers, biologists) during a funded field trip will enrich understanding of the park. With them, we will explore four places: Seneca Village (an Irish and German immigrant and Free Black settlement displaced by the park's construction); Great Lawn, the site of a city reservoir and many 1960s-70s protests and concerts; North Woods, an urban wild with historic sites, unique geological formations and hydrological systems; and Bethesda Terrace/Rambles, a gathering space juxtaposed with the park's most picturesque woods, a site of bird-watching as well as gay cruising for over a century. The seminar pedagogy has been developed within UVA's Landscape's Landscape Studies Initiative (Mellon Foundation funding).

Section 003: Refugees & Representation (Mrinalini Chakravorty)

Ours is arguably the age of refugees. Everyday we encounter heated political discourse about refugees in terms citizenship rights, legal bans, family separations, walls, deportations, humanitarianism, border security, war and strife. This seminar will explore how refugees have portrayed themselves and have been portrayed in literature, memoir, testimony, film, and art. Given the current political crisis over refugees, we will focus mainly on the post-45 years to contextualize our study of refugee art. How, we will ask, do artistic representations of refugees mediate the personal, social, psychological and material terrain of forced migration? If refugees are legally framed as aliens or non-citizens, we will consider how seeking refuge or asylum presents unique problems that arise when states are faced with those who are stateless. Our study will take certain mass displacements as flashpoints—Jewish and Palestinian displacements, the Southern U.S. Border, the Partition of India, decolonial wars in Africa, Vietnam, and Syria—to see how the refugee experience is given depth through artistic engagements. We will consider how the experience of being in camps, journeying across borders, homelessness, dispossession, familial loss, and trauma shapes the precarious condition of refugees. The refugee's need for shelter often becomes a limit case for ideas about hospitality, sympathy, sharing, compassion, estrangement, and notions of cultural bearing. To understand how the figure of the refugee raises these concerns we will also read widely from law, political and citizenship theory, border studies, anthropology, history, and policy. Our goal will be to appraise whether and how aesthetic attempts to capture the condition of refugees respond to and at times revise political discourses about those in exile. Among others, we will engage with the work of Hannah Arendt,

Primo Levi, Giorgio Agamben, Edward Said, Gloria Anzaldua, W.G. Sebald, Mahmoud Darwish, Caryl Phillips, Ghassan Kanafani, and Viet Nguyen.

This seminar is for students interested in thinking deeply about the refugee crisis from a variety of perspectives. We will read widely and across disciplines, and engage experts in other fields such as the law, social work, and politics. The course will also involve some outreach work.

Section 004: Studying Difference (Vikram Jaswal)

The scientific and popular press routinely publish claims about how the ability to X is “uniquely human,” or that people with a particular psychiatric condition lack Y. This seminar will address questions about the limits of our ability to know what others who are different from us (in, for example, species, neurology, age, culture) can think and do. What kinds of assumptions underlie claims about fundamental differences between “us” and “them”? What should we do when different approaches and methods lead to conflicting claims? What are the real-world consequences of getting it wrong? Readings will draw on work in psychology, philosophy, disability studies, design, art, and literature.

Section 005: Eugenics-Then and Now (Sarah Elizabeth Milov)

“Eugenics”—literally “well-born”—was a term coined in the late nineteenth century by Sir Francis Galton, a statistician, racial theorist, and cousin of Charles Darwin. Throughout the twentieth century—and even into the present-day—ideas about perfecting society through human breeding have animated scientists, activists, writers, artists, and politicians. In the United States, more than 60,000 people were forcibly sterilized for the purposes of eugenic betterment—and a disproportionate number of those sterilizations occurred in Virginia. But not all manifestations of eugenics were quite so coercive: IQ testing, “Better Baby” contests, population control movements, and prenatal genetic screenings can all be considered part of the eugenic legacy.

In this course we will try to understand the intellectual, scientific, legal and cultural forces that have made eugenic ideas so appealing and enduring. A number of questions will guide our inquiry: what role did experts play in advocating for eugenic programs? What is the relationship between eugenics and genetics? To what extent have notions of race (and biological racism) shaped eugenic projects? How did eugenics shape the intellectual and political landscape of the University of Virginia and the state of Virginia? How have artists portrayed and influenced the quest for biological betterment? How should society commemorate a history of eugenics—how can we commemorate a generation that never existed? We will approach these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective. We will read historical, legal, bioethical, and medical texts, as well as engage with art, literature, and film. We will also take a field trip to an institution where coercive sterilizations were carried out.

Section 006: Anthrochemistry (Cassandra Fraser)

Anthrochemistry means human chemistry—our actions and their consequences, to us and our surroundings. In the Anthropocene, human activity has effected dramatic changes to geologic, atmospheric, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes. This course aims to recruit students from creative arts, humanities, social sciences, science and other fields to work together as a transdisciplinary research team to explore ways that humans intersect with material

trajectories through the lens of element, molecule and material case studies and compelling crosscutting themes. Particular attention will be paid to ways that materials map onto and into our bodies, communities and everyday lives. Human intersections with matter lifecycles—extraction, production, use, waste and downstream effects—will be considered from varied perspectives (e.g. scientific, health, societal, ethical, environmental, aesthetic, cultural). Class sessions and projects will involve discussion, problem solving, concept tutorials, individual and collaborative investigation and production, expert consultation, and honing research and communication skills. Course topics and projects will be finalized with participant input. Elements from different parts of the periodic table will be investigated. Possibilities include lithium, alternative energy; copper, historically, new clean tech; lead, health effects; radioactive uranium and rare earths in devices; conflict-free metals, global shortages and unprecedented mineral diversity in the Anthropocene. Carbon materials include fossil fuels, plastics and other petrochemicals in food, water, clothing, shelter, and everyday objects. Synthetic chemicals with benefits but unintended consequences, e.g., in food production (pesticides, additives), personal care products (sunscreens), drugs and addiction, hormones (fertility, endocrine disruption, sexual development), and halogenated chemicals in coolants, nonstick, stain-, fire- and water-proof materials may be considered. Ways that materials cross boundaries (national, state, fence lines, containers, skin) and elude containment is also of interest. Both sustainability challenges and proposed solutions will be explored.