



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Urban Studies Program
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Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2



Cities: A Discussion Guide¹

September, 2008

¹ Prepared to accompany Urban Studies 200 / Geography 250. This is a *guide* with suggestions to stimulate conversation and discussion; it is not a *straightjacket*. Teaching Assistants and students in discussion sections may decide to explore other questions, and to devote more time for exam review and other activities. Photographs: Vancouver, June, 2006 (top), July, 2005 (bottom), Elvin Wylly.

Welcome to the discussion sections for Urban Studies 200 and Geography 250! These discussion sections are intended to provide a friendly, supportive setting where you can a) ask questions about topics covered in class, b) explore a few topics in greater depth, c) share ideas for the written projects, and d) get advice on preparing for the examinations.

The meeting times for discussion sections are:

Section		Time	Room
URST 200 L1A	Discussion 1	Wed, 12:00 13:00	Geog 242
URST 200 L1B	Discussion 1	Wed, 13:00 14:00	Geog 215
URST 200 L1C	Discussion 1	Fri, 10:00 11:00	Geog 242
URST 200 L1D	Discussion 1	Fri, 13:00 14:00	Geog 242
GEOG 250 L1A	Discussion 1	Thu, 13:00 14:00	Geog 242

If the only discussion section that fits your schedule is already full, then feel free to register for any one of the sections the system permits, and then attend the section that actually fits your schedule. If the system won't let you in to any of the discussion sections, contact Karen Young, young@geog.ubc.ca

It doesn't matter which discussion section you're registered for. But you must attend the same section consistently throughout the term, and you must inform your Teaching Assistant at the first discussion meeting you attend.

There are no discussion meetings in the first week of class.

Discussion readings are available at

<http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/Private/u200/discussion>

Tentative Schedule

Discussion 1, week of September 9. Introduction.

Introduction to the Teaching Assistants. Outline of the purpose of the discussion groups, and then a low-impact introduction to an ongoing conversation in urban studies. Read the first five pages of this essay before you come to the discussion:

Michael Kahn (1971). "The Seminar." Santa Cruz: Kresge College, University of California - Santa Cruz.

You should also skim this article:

Taylor, Peter J., and Robert E. Lang. 2004. "The Shock of the New: 100 Concepts Describing Recent Urban Change." *Environment and Planning A* 36, 951-958.

The first essay introduces the concept of barn-raising, a valuable metaphor which helps to inspire friendly, productive, and useful discussions in the seminar room. The Taylor and Lang piece reflects on the proliferation of new words coined in recent years to describe changes in cities and urban studies. Don't worry if you don't recognize many of these terms -- and under no

circumstances should you try to memorize these lists! The key point is to appreciate how changes in cities (and how we think about cities) have a new and fascinating vocabulary. Taylor and Lang regard this new vocabulary as an indicator of two simultaneous trends over the last thirty years: shifting ideas of high-level theory and epistemology (questions of what we know, and how we know what we know), and the more immediate tasks of describing rapid changes in what we see in cities and urban processes. “At the coalface, social scientists have been forced to keep reconceptualizing their particular subject matters in order to maintain credible descriptions.” Taylor and Lang compile a list of new terms coined in the attempt to maintain credible descriptions of new urban things; they sifted through some of the most widely-debated books and articles in urban studies to come up with this list, so their bibliography is a valuable starting point for further reading and research.

Consider some of these questions to guide your reading and discussion: Do you recognize any of these terms? If so, do you recall where you first saw specific terms? Which terms do you find most helpful or interesting, and which do you think are simply confusing? Finally, what terms would you add to Taylor and Lang’s list based on your own acquaintance with and experience of metropolitan life?

Discussion 2, week of September 16. Urban Archaeology and Contemporary Relevance.

Scholarship on ancient cities has been shaped by debates in archaeology for many years, with the most important shift prompted by the excavation of Çatal Hüyük in the 1960s -- a site that contradicted the conventional wisdom on when the first cities emerged, and that unsettled assumptions about the relationships between societal change and urbanization. The debate continues today, with new archaeological excavations and new scholarship providing insights from more and more sites around the world, in turn raising important new theoretical questions. But what is the contemporary and popular relevance of specialized scholarly debates over cities that emerged thousands of years ago?

For today’s discussion, you should read this essay:

Smith, Michael E. (2008). “Just How Comparative is Comparative Urban Geography? A Perspective from Archaeology.” Editorial, forthcoming in *Urban Geography*.

What is “recentism”? What are the implications of ignoring “the 96% urban history prior to the Industrial Revolution”?

Discussion 3, week of September 23. Discussion of Project Option: Writing the City with Light.

This week we begin exploring the choices you have for written projects in this course. You need to complete any two projects, chosen from five options. You should first read the ‘General Guidelines,’ which apply to all written submissions. I apologize if there’s a strident tone in some of these guidelines -- I encourage creativity, and the projects are intended to be fun. But after many thousands of last-minute, late-night emails, I’ve learned that it’s best to provide detailed

guidelines up-front. You'd be surprised if you saw some of the bizarre, 3:00AM emails I've received from students who don't know what a scholarly source is, or who can't find any information on their chosen topic, or who missed all the opportunities for advice and help during office hours or the discussion sections.

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "General Guidelines for Written Projects." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/guidelines.html>

Then read the background paper for the first project option:

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "Writing the City with Light." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/u200/light.pdf>

Discussion 4, week of September 30. Discussion of Project Option: City Book Review.

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "City Book Review." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/u200/book.pdf>

Discussion 5, week of October 7. Review for mid-term examination.

[No discussion the week of October 14; mid-term examination, Thursday, October 16]

Discussion 6, week of October 21. Discussion of Project Option: City Media Analysis.

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "City Media Analysis." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/u200/media.pdf>

Discussion 7, week of October 28. Discussion of Project Option: City Power Networks.

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "City Power Networks." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/u200/networks.pdf>

Discussion 8, week of November 4. Discussion of Project Option: Mapping Cities of the Mind.

Wyly, Elvin (2008). "Mapping Cities of the Mind." Vancouver, BC: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Available at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/u200/mind.pdf>

Discussion 9, week of November 11. Place and Sense of Place.

Place and “sense of place” are seemingly “natural,” self-apparent notions. But geographers have long suggested that this is far from the case, as the two definitions from *The Dictionary of Human Geography* illustrate. This week, we’ll examine these definitions and look at an article on the meaning and significance of the design of the Vancouver Public Library as a public space which draws on these concepts to raise issues of exclusion and belonging. Read the two definitions and skim the article by Loretta Lees. The definitions should give you a sense of the scope of the wider literature within human geography, while Lees’ article offers a textured example of this approach to urban issues.

Duncan, James (2000). “Place.” In *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, R.J. Johnston, D. Gregory, G. Pratt, and M. Watts, Eds., pp. 582-584. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Cosgrove, Denis (2000). “Sense of Place.” In *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, R.J. Johnston, D. Gregory, G. Pratt, and M. Watts, Eds., 731-734. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Lees, Loretta (2001). “Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of an Ersatz Colosseum.” *Ecumene* 8(1), 51-86.

What does Lees reveal about the nature and meaning of contemporary public space? What struggles over meaning and place-making does she highlight? What notions of place and sense of place does she draw on? What inherent ambiguities in the notion of a “sense of place” does this piece raise? How does her narrative of life at the VPL compare to your own experiences of the library? What moral or political issues does Lees raise about being and belonging in public space?

Discussion 10, week of November 18. Discussion and Advice on Projects.

Discussion 11, week of November 25. Preparing for the Final Examination.