Special Spring 2012 Topic: *Ideals and Action for Shrinking Cities*

Instructor: Brent D. Ryan bdr@mit.edu
Seminar meetings: Mondays, 1 to 3 PM, Room 10-401
Public lectures: Mondays, 6 to 8 PM, Room 10-485 or 7-431 (AVT)

The Spring 2012 11.337j/4.247j will focus on urban design ideals and action in shrinking cities. These are troubled cities with diminishing populations, declining economies, and an evaporating built environment. Shrinking cities are difficult conditions for design, but they also present opportunities for innovation and critical design thinking. This semester’s course will investigate different disciplinary perspectives on urban design in shrinking cities. Some of the question that this course will investigate are:

- How do different urban design-related disciplines, such as landscape, planning, or photography, shape understandings of shrinking cities?
- How does different disciplinary understandings of shrinking cities shape urban design ideals for those places?
- How do urban designers translate these different design ideals into action? Are these design ideals in competition, or are they complementary to each other?
- Can shrinking-city urban design ideals shape or influence urban design ideals for other contexts, like high-density cities or low-density suburbs?

This course is focused around both ideals and action. **Ideals** are theories about the form of the city and region. Ideals are proposed both in theory and in practice, and they usually occupy both of these terrains. Their esthetic assertions about the form of the city often compete with one another, and each ideal rarely admits the legitimacy of its competitors. **Actions** denote the ability for an urban designer to actually influence any given development condition. Actions both shape and are shaped by ideals. Actions require power, but urban designers have widely varying access to power in different settings; not all actions are available to all designers, nor all ideals. Shrinking cities challenge conventional urban design ideals and action, and oblige new directions and creative thinking in both areas.

The Spring 2012 11.337j/4.247j will operate as a seminar and public lecture series, the City Design and Development (CDD) Forum. Seminar sessions will take place on Monday afternoons, while lectures will occur on four Monday evenings at 6 PM (see course schedule for details). Each lecturer will represent different disciplinary mode of seeing, understanding, and acting in the shrinking city. Course members should attend both seminar sessions and public lectures.
Course Schedule and Calendar

The Spring 2012 course will feature four CDD Forum lectures:

February 21 - Daniel D’Oca, Principal, Interboro Partners: informal and bottom-up urbanism
March 5 - Justin Hollander, Assistant Professor, Tufts: regulation and ‘smart decline’
March 19 - Jill Desimini, Assistant Professor, Harvard GSD: landscape and vacancy
April 30 - Camilo Jose Vergara, photographer and MacArthur Fellow: photography and memory

Seminar sessions will meet on Mondays, 1 to 3 PM in 10-401 and lectures will meet on Monday, 6 to 8 PM in 10-485 or 7-431 (AVT).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td></td>
<td>First Day of Classes (UDI does not meet this week)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>lecture</td>
<td>Interboro Partners: Informality and Blotting, AVT (Monday classes meet Tuesday b/c of Presidents’ Day)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Discussion: informality and the shrinking city Hand out urban design ideals paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>lecture</td>
<td>Justin Hollander: Regulation and Smart Decline, 10-485</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Discussion: regulating the shrinking city</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>lecture</td>
<td>Jill Desimini: Landscape and Vacancy, 10-485</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>26-30</td>
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<td>No Classes this week- Spring Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Discussion: landscape urbanism in shrinking cities Urban design ideals paper due; Hand out UD exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Discussion: the power of architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mon</td>
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<td>No class today- Patriots’ Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Meetings to discuss urban design guideline project</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>lecture</td>
<td>Camilo Jose Vergara, Photography and Shrinkage, AVT</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Discuss photography and the shrinking city</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1 – 3 PM</td>
<td>seminar</td>
<td>Urban design guideline project presentations Hand in urban design project document</td>
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**Course structure**

Participants will be responsible for attending both seminar sessions and lectures; reading course materials prior to each session; and participating in class discussions.

There are two primary course requirements:

- a midterm paper (4,000 words or approximately 12 1.5 spaced pages) on urban design ideals, due April 2. Paper details will be circulated on February 27.
- An urban design guideline project, applying urban design ideals on a shrinking-city site of your choice. Exercise will be circulated on April 2.

Please complete readings prior to each seminar session. Readings will be posted on the course Stellar site at the beginning of the semester. Each week’s readings will comprise between 75 to 100 pages.

Note that seminar and lecture weeks will generally alternate weeks, but that lectures will be paired with individual meetings in April to discuss urban design project ideas.

Course grades will be based on weekly class participation (20%); midterm urban design paper (30%); urban design project presentation (25%); and urban design project writeup (25%).

**Course Readings**

**February 13: Introduction: Which Urbanism?**

February 21 (Interboro lecture) and February 27: Informality, Everyday Urbanism, and Bottom-Up Design


March 5 (Hollander lecture) and March 12: Regulation, Shrinkage, and the End of Rational Planning


March 19 (Desimini lecture) and April 2: Landscape and Urbanism


April 9: The Power of Architecture


April 30 (lecture) and May 7: Photography: the Image of the Shrinking City

3. Leaf through any of the Detroit “ruin photography” books on reserve in Rotch library:

There are many more ruin photograph sites, comments, and critiques online.