

Critical Fieldwork

LA 410 | 510 • 4 credits

Tuesdays and Thursdays 12-1:50 | LA 231

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Critical fieldwork is a text-based theory seminar and fieldwork class. The course sets out to create an engaged mode of exploration, analysis and reflection in service of a critical design process. Through a multiplicity of theoretical standpoints, students are enabled to frame realities of identity, power, and justice as they are inscribed in our daily physical environment. This course will explore topics ranging from race, gender and sexuality, socioeconomic class and ability to ecology, philosophy, and aesthetics. Critical fieldwork is a pathway toward more complex engagements with space as determinant of social, political and personal realities. **Through these engagements we become more aware and empowered designers.**

This is not a lecture class. Students will be expected to actively participate in discussion and assignments in every class. Students will lead specific discussions and activities. Engaged participation, from active listening to discussions, is an essential part of this learning experience.

The course explores a sequence of theoretical perspectives through lines of analytical questioning. How do we explore the spaces around us through the lens of social justice? Feminism? Ecology? These lenses or frameworks exist in the tension between our identities and complex systems in which we live. Integrating different perspectives as a critical mode of seeing creates the potential for reflection, engagement, and action.

The learning structure of the class relies on four interrelated modes of engagement:

Reading, Looking, Reporting, and Reflecting.

- **Critical reading** is a process of analyzing, interpreting and evaluating theoretical perspectives. Students are asked to engage with texts, explain concepts in their own words, give examples from their own experience, and question both the text and their reading of it.
- **Looking** describes the action of holding a theoretical frame within one's mind as a way to examine, explore, and question the places around us. With the set of questions that emerged from the reading, and that were also the result of discussion in class, students are asked to go on an exploration of place.
- **Reporting** is the core of the critical fieldwork approach. How does one articulate and synthesize insights and conclusions from reading and looking? Products of this mode will be mappings, drawings, photographs, videos, textual responses and combinations thereof.
- **Reflecting** upon the fruits of these informed explorations will allow students to begin articulating their own worldviews as a basis for their own critical spatial engagements. Writing will accompany visual work. Weekly pin-ups in class will be a crucial way to generate discussion and feedback for the work.

Course Objectives

At the end of this class, you will be able to...

- Absorb critical perspectives from a diverse range of sources, from the theoretical and artistic to the political and scientific and understand their relevance to a critical reading of space.
- Formulate and articulate individual critical responses in both written, verbal and visual formats.
- Examine the operation and implications of intersectionality, emphasizing articulations of identity such as race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, indigeneity, and ability.
- Understand how principles, values, and ideologies shape design process.
- Develop a personal mode of critical fieldwork and articulate this through visual responses and clear writing, informing design thinking.

Prerequisites

Undergraduate enrolment with instructor permission. **This is not a lecture based class. Engaged reading and discussion in every class is critical to the class session and an important part of your grade.** Basic fluency in graphics is desirable as you will be expected to record your fieldwork through visual work. Photography, hand drawing, digital media and combinations of any visual media are acceptable.