

LURBS 2103--The Everyday City

Second Paper: Visual Analysis

Overview:

This paper will put you in contact with a set of visual artifacts from the early to late twentieth century. You will write a paper that describes and interprets the artifacts, and that places them in the contexts of American city life. To do this effectively, you should deploy the criteria and methods for visual analysis that we reviewed in class.

Scope:

For the second paper you will examine an image or set of images of the city from the period 1945-1970. The range of available artifacts is significant, and you are limited only by your imagination. The images may come in any form, but they must be mass mediated, e.g. films, magazine advertisements, television shows, commercials, exhibitions, home décor journals, architectural plan books, educational pamphlets, children's reading primers and tourist brochures.

The paper should discuss the historical and cultural contexts that shape these images, their production, their circulation, and their use. The paper should then interpret the ideas encoded in the images, examining them for their rhetorical meanings--that is, their arguments. Finally, the paper should draw conclusions about the implications of the images for the trajectory of city life at the time. To accomplish these goals, you will have to spend a good deal of time studying your visual artifact carefully, examining all of its elements, and drawing out both the surface meanings as well as the deeper subtexts.

The point is not so much what you choose to examine, but how you examine it. The goal is for you to breathe life into your visual artifact through rich historical interpretation, to layer it with meanings drawn from readings, in-class visual exercises, and discussions.

Format:

The paper should be between 750-1000 words (no more or less), using 1.25-inch side margins and 12-pt Times font. The short paper format does not necessarily equal an "easy" assignment. In fact, quite the contrary is true. The short paper format is designed to foster concision, so papers must be tightly focused and highly economical in their prose. The motto is "creative yet spare!" This means that you will have to perfect the art of careful editing. You should construct a detailed outline before you write your paper, and then develop your prose with clarity, coherence, and brevity.

Assessment:

This paper will count for 100 points, or 20% of your total grade. The paper will be graded first and foremost on your ability to convey sound interpretation and argument. Just as important, however, will be the clarity and concision of your prose.