MONUMENTS TO THE PASSAIC
Landscape Architecture Graduate Studio Fall 2018
Tuesday: 12:35-5:15 & Thursday 2:15-5:15
Instructor: Kathleen John-Alder  kathleen.johnalder@rutgers.edu, johnalde@sebs.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 12:00 to 2:00, or by appointment

INTRODUCTION:
The challenges that our society faces in the domain of environment are deeply entangled with human history, society, and culture in ways that exclusive reliance on technical and scientific solutions are unlikely to be able to solve them. Therefore, investigating the ways that human cultures have responded to and shaped the natural environment is central to our quest for addressing environmental challenges.

This course will focus on the Passaic River and the built and lived environment along its path. Through readings, fieldwork, class discussions, critical and creative writing and mapping exercises, we will explore the river’s interaction with the surrounding region and communities. Moving among multiple scales, from the intimate scale of body and embodied experience to a distant perspective of the region, we explore different ways that the river has participated in the life of these societies as a resource, a conduit, an environmental and health hazard, or a site for recreation. Consequently, we use these explorations as an opportunity to envision future possibilities.

SCOPE OF THE COURSE:
The first part of the semester will be dedicated to developing a deeper understanding of the Passaic River from various scientific, socio-cultural, and experiential angles. This will be accomplished through readings, discussion sessions, workshops and field trips to the Passaic and sites associated with it, as well as guest lectures by urban professionals, scientists, and community activists. We will dedicate the second half of the semester to producing reactions to the conditions that we have already observed and explored. The objective is for the students to take the intangible qualities of the river and make them tangible, developing the skills to employ different forms and modes of expression that are needed to capture, shape, and share what they have discovered.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
Monuments to the Passaic River is a collaboration between the Department of Landscape Architecture at Rutgers-New Brunswick and Rutgers-Newark, with the intent of sharing research and communication skills across institutions, programs and disciplines.

The class is designed to bring together students from design, humanities, and natural sciences. A primary goal is to inspire discussion among different disciplines to develop a complex sense of the interplay between natural environment and socioeconomic conditions, and to encourage creative and re-visioned thinking about our perceptions and actions towards the environment.

Throughout the semester, as we explore the landscapes along the river, we will reflect on the ways that our perception of the environment shapes our understanding and actions towards it. We will also explore concepts such as memory, monument, and heritage and what we individually and as a society deem historically significant and worthy of remembrance.

SKILLS:
Students will receive training in various practices of “environmental documentation” employing data, science, multi-media, historical research, mapping, critical observation, creative writing to approach Passaic River from multiple angles. Students will work in groups and individually to create written, multimedia, and design projects that respond to specific sites or issues that reflect the past or current relationship between Passaic River, and its surrounding landscape and people. Working in groups will inspire conversation and collaboration among students from different disciplines, and encourage analytical thinking, creative writing, verbal and visual communication, historical research, and mapping through peer learning process. Working individually will allow students to develop their impressions into a form readily accessible to the public.

**Conceptual**
Understand site as palimpsest
Understand the importance of on-site observation
Understand relationship between data collection, critical thinking, and verbal and visual representation

**Social**
Understand the value of teamwork, and how to move seamlessly between group and individual efforts
Recognize design as an inclusive process that encompasses diverse needs and interests

**Technical**
Visualize physical and social relationships through written and visual narratives that include maps, diagrams, language, photography, models, site design, sections, plans and perspectives

**THE SITE:**
In our multi-scalar examination of the Passaic, we will follow the river from its mountain source to its entry to the sea. At various locations along its path, from the Paterson Fall to the Lenape fish weir, to sites associated with well-known figures such as William Carlos William and Robert Smithson, to pristine looking swamps and reclaimed meadows, to post-industrial and contaminated areas the river offers various opportunities for further exploration and reflection.

**THE TASK:**
To create a tourist route along the Passaic that narrates the story of the river and its people. The route, in keeping with the course learning objectives, will involve individual and group efforts, and different forms of visual and written communication. Material will be presented at a mid-term and final design presentations and reviews.

Inspiration for the Passaic tourist route is a 1967 essay by the artist Robert Smithson entitled “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey.” In this essay, Smithson went to the Port Authority, purchased “a copy of The New York Times and a Signet paperback called Earthworks by Brian W. Aldiss”, and boarded the number 30 bus. His destination was Passaic, New Jersey. He disembarked at the Corner of Union Avenue and River Drive and began taking photographs with an Instamatic camera. The question he posed to himself (and his readers) was whether or not Passaic had replaced Rome as the Eternal City. His convoluted answer, composed after a stop for lunch at The Golden Coach Diner involved, time, ruins, metaphor and things:
After that [lunch] I returned to Passaic, or was it the hereafter—for all I know that unimaginative suburb could have been a clumsy eternity, a cheap copy of The City of the Immortals. But who am I to entertain such a thought? I walked down a parking lot that covered the old railroad tracks which at one time ran through the middle of Passaic. The monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and reflection. One never knew what side of the mirror one was on. There was nothing interesting even strange about the flat monument, yet it echoed a kind of cliché idea of infinity; perhaps the “secrets of the universe” are just as pedestrian—not to say dreary. Everything about the site remained wrapped in blandness and littered with shiny cars—one after another they extended into shiny nebulosity. I took a few listless, entropic snapshots of that lustrous moment. If the future is “out of date” and “old fashioned,” then I had been in the future. I had been on a planet that had a map of Passaic drawn over it, and a rather imperfect map at that. A sidereal map marked up with “lines” the size of streets, and “squares” and “blocks” the size of buildings. At any moment my feet apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past; it is in yesterday’s newspapers, in the jejune advertisements of science-fiction movies, in the false mirror of rejected dreams. Time turns metaphors into things, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs. (Robert Smithson 1967)

The proposed tourist route developed in this course will unpack this vision of time, metaphor, past, present, map and things by revealing the complex natural and cultural history of the Passaic River.

PART 1: INDUSTRIAL TOURISM, VIEWING PRACTICES, RIVER DESCRIPTIONS
(Weeks 1-9, includes a Sunday excursion to DIA Beacon, and a road trip along the Passaic)

The following studio exercises explore and document physical data, scientific knowledge, language and narrative, and their intersections in time and space.

- **EXERCISE 1: DRAWING THE RIVER**
  Tracing Roads and Towns (1 week, everyone)

- **EXERCISE 2: MODELING THE TERRAIN**
  Topographic Sections of the River Valley combined into a 3-D Model (2 weeks, everyone)

- **EXERCISE 4: TRACING THE WATER**
  The Terrain of Water Movement (1 week, group a)

- **EXERCISE 3: WRITING THE RIVER**
  A Cultural Excursion into New Jersey’s Literary History (1 week, group b)

- **EXERCISE 4: MAPPING INDUSTRY**
  A Natural History Excursion into Pollution (2 weeks, group a-1)

- **EXERCISE 5: NOTATING NATURE**
  Creating a Data Score of Useful Information (2 weeks, group b-1)

- **EXERCISE 6: MIRROR TRAVELS**
  Photographic Documentation of Field Research (1 week, everyone)

- **EXERCISE 7: SURPRISE ME**
A river inventory devised by the students that adheres to the ideas of Smithson and supports past research. It must also adhere to the representation format and the spatial scales of the other studies. (1 week, everyone)

PART 2: PROPOSALS  
(Weeks 10-11)

- **DYMAXION TOURISM**  
  A folded dymaxion cube that explains the proposal; cubes must be easily assembled with other class proposals. Proposals must be considered through the lens of energy.

  Thoughts to consider: what do you want people to see; how do the existing roads, paths and waterways create linkages; how does your proposal address natural and cultural history; what viewing traditions does the proposal elevate and predicate; is the framing experience panoramic, intimate, or a little of both; how does a visitor encounter the structure and the ground; does your idea repudiate or reinforce the normative vision of New Jersey; what is its materiality and how does this reinforce the design intent; how does this proposed intervention speak to, or interact with the existing landscape and the other proposals in the class; is the route (journey) as important as the individual experience; how does it express the concept of water, flow, people, energy and time.

PART 3: DESIGN  
(Weeks 12-15)

- **INDIVIDUAL DESIGNS, MODELS AND PERSPECTIVES**  
  Drawn in plan and section, and as a site scale model positioned within the terrain.

- **GROUP MODEL**  
  Configured as spatial fragments in a vertical model of the river corridor.

- **GROUP TOURIST MAP**  
  Map of the Passaic that locates all of the class interventions, as well as the existing monuments of the Passaic.

CLASS READINGS:  

**WEEK 1:**  


**WEEK 2:**  


**WEEK 3:**  

**WEEK 4:**
Civil Engineering News. “Dredging of Contaminated Sediment in New Jersey’s Passaic River to Begin” Civil Engineering (February 2012): 22-15


WEEK 5:


WEEK 6:

WEEK 7:

Norwegian Scenic Routes, https://www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en

GUESTS LECTURES:
Timothy Raphael (September 27, class in Newark) and Katharine Woodhouse Beyer (TBD)

GRADING PROCEDURES AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICIES:
Final course grades will be given as letters. When an assignment or project is given a number out of 100 it corresponds to these letter grades:

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<th>Grade</th>
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Grades and feedback for assignments will be provided to the student on a timely basis. Students should be aware of their current course average. It is up to you to speak with the Instructor if there are any discrepancies or concerns about your course performance.

If personal circumstances inhibit your ability to fulfill the course requirements, immediately contact the instructor. Any student with a special need should make an appointment to see the instructor the first week of classes.
The syllabus and course schedule are subject to change. Any changes to the syllabus or schedule will be announced in the scheduled lecture periods. It is your responsibility to stay informed!

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