

PROJECT 2: ASSIGNMENT 2B



SPATIAL AGENCY, HUMAN AGENCY, POWER, CONTROL AND WAITING

Based upon your personal experiences, and the following statements, write a 500-word essay answering the resulting 4 questions as they relate to the assigned readings/observations (The Hidden Dimension, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, The Eyes of the Skin, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)

AGENCY AND SPACE

Anthony Giddens states that “agency presumes the capability of acting otherwise.”

QUESTION 1: How is Giddens’s definition of agency exercised by the New Yorkers in The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces film, and do the results achieve Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs?

AGENCY AND POWER

“Spatial agency thus inevitably exposes the architect to issues of power - and in particular of how power might be used and how it might be abused by architects acting as spatial agents. Agency, as Giddens reminds us, is intractably tied to power - an early definition of agent in the Oxford English Dictionary is: ‘one who exerts power or produces an effect’. The words used here are telling: power exerted is the power of one person over another, which is hardly consistent with the notion of responsibility. And then there is the ‘or’ - as if one can either exert power or produce an effect but not both. A better definition in relation to spatial agency is that the agent is one who effects change through the empowerment of others. Empowerment here stands for allowing others to ‘take control’ over their environment, for something that is participative without being opportunistic, for something that is pro-active instead of re-active.”

QUESTION 2: What is your reaction to Edward T. Hall’s characterization of “what kind of spaces are best suited to the Negro” and how does the housing architecture he describes exert power? Does the architecture afford its users empowerment, and if so, is human agency gained from this process?

AGENCY AND WAITING

“The queue is still a theatrical thing. It’s tedious but it’s the most visibly fair way of rationing a resource. It also makes something look popular.”—Dr. Joe Moran

Waiting is a cultural condition that we universally accept, but there are limits to that acceptance. Airports are notorious for their seemingly endless queues —giving the illusion of security, they are consequences of spatial pinches, trapping the users between departure and destination. The primary condition of waiting is simultaneously collective and singular. The destination space is secondary to the space of the line and its impact on human psychology. When we observe human behavior through the lens of nonverbal communication and proxemics, an individual’s ‘public space’ is

PROJECT 2: ASSIGNMENT 2B

defined by a distance of twenty-five feet or greater. Smaller distances, defined as social, personal, and intimate space, yield expectations of familiarity and acquaintance, expectations that are consistently violated in queues. Lines are often structured to conserve space [the serpentine line], but this creates a constant violation of the law of proxemics. The effects of waiting lines produce hostile environments, where comfort is compromised in an effort to minimize the line's spatial footprint.

QUESTION 3: At what dimension (while queuing) is your personal space (distance) violated, and how have you mitigated the adverse effects of this violation?

Territoriality is extremely prevalent throughout the occupation of the waiting line. Like animals, people establish territories marked by their proximate surroundings. In waiting spaces, people literally demarcate space. Pre-occupation observes both the literal occupation of space leading up to the destination and the various activities that alleviate the misery of waiting. Trapped in the program of pending, people become preoccupied while they preoccupy. The body occupies a physical place, but self is suspended in pre-occupation, where the self is regained by complete introversion. Preoccupation is both physical and mental, manifesting itself as literal forms of activity [reading, organizing, scrolling, sleeping], but also as a state of mind, a state of contemplation. Spatial agency wields power via constriction, and simultaneously empowers constructive activity. Users must constantly decide between spending their time securing their position in space via territoriality, or distracting themselves with consumption.

QUESTION 4: Does pre-occupation, distraction, and consumption provided by our electronic devices support or hinder human agency? Explain why.