

Arijit Sen

Arch 302: Architecture and Human Behavior

Assignment: "Mapping Place: Arch 302"

Digital Humanities tools/methods: Image analysis, mapping, oral histories; Google maps, spreadsheets, audio recording equipment and software

Description

Architecture 302 is a required [lecture +discussion section] course that introduces students to ways of reading, observing, and interpreting the built environment as material culture. This semester-long assignment identifies a series of culturally relevant, but ordinary vernacular buildings along Milwaukee's Green Line bus route. Each student (or student group) chooses one building and critically examines its material, social, cultural, and experiential features. The end-goal is to discover the complex meaning and significance of place — to see place as a palimpsest. The students are asked to experiment with mapping as an analytic tool to describe the complexity of place. Such maps can be easily reproduced by GIS programs, but GIS requires access to software and knowledge of GIS data entry skills that many students lack.

This presentation highlights a smaller assignment that asks students to use basic smart phone technology to create an easily accessible architectural tour.

The experiment was somewhat successful but didn't meet initial expectations and goals. Lessons learnt from this experiment include a better understanding of the difficulties of implementing such projects in a larger lecture class, difficulties due to time limitations, difficulties with the digital interface, and work load on undergraduate students.

Students engage four kinds of media.

1. Visual Images and analysis using hand drawn sketches and photographs. They use imaging and rendering software such as InDesign, Photoshop, and Lightroom;
2. Aggregate data analysis using tables, charts, and maps. Digital tools include spreadsheet and rendering software;
3. Archival and historical data using written narratives;
4. Oral histories, soundscapes, and short interviews using PixStori, smartphone audio recording apps, Audacity, or movie making software. Then they are asked to transfer relevant data on to google maps. Google maps serve as the final user interface that makes the collected data available to potential users.

Goal: To see ordinary buildings as human artifacts located within a larger socio-spatial context, also known as the "urban cultural landscape."

Outcomes

- a) Historical understanding of the building and its neighborhood from secondary and archival sources. Narrative text, citations, and hot-linked sources.
- b) Visual and formal analysis of buildings. Images, Photographs, scaled drawings, and spatial analysis.
- c) Ethnographic data analysis and an understanding of how users understand a building. Curated, indexed, and clipped oral history interviews.
- d) The section map showing how each building site is located and linked to a larger transit route and settlement geography.

Sample assignments:

"https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1YKcgXvo_KYKsO2GzB8bsQ1V8YPANm9-w&ll=43.15745048100258%2C-88.00008056367187&z=11

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Pvg3LtfpPzo2VxtnHeGnPxNbslY&ll=43.02565307411721%2C-87.89200564528255&z=13>

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?hl=en&mid=1qIRQYbt_IZnv-9vZiaVTRwelYmg&ll=43.05710428110862%2C-87.87999271601564&z=12"