

Notes on the Course Project

Write a five to seven page paper about a specific example of San Jose/Santa Clara region architecture, monumental structure, or other form of built environment. I strongly urge you to select a site that has not been often analyzed. Focus instead upon an overlooked component of our local urban landscape. To support your analysis, provide at least five separate in-text citations. Classroom notes should offer background to your research, but do not count as cited evidence. Your paper shall be organized in the following manner.

- (1) Introduction, forecast, and justification of topic
- (2) Site origin and purpose
- (3) Site analysis (using a key concept from the class)
- (4) Proposal for future research
- (5) Summary and review

How might you approach this challenge? For convenience sake, take a walk around the SJSU campus. Plan on strolling the edges of the property for about an hour (being aware of your surroundings and personal safety, of course). You'll pass dorms built in the drab international style of the 1960s. You'll observe low-slung shops whose plate-glass windows invite consumer gaze. Peering down the roads that stretch away from the sidewalk, you'll catch glimpses of stately Victorian homes whose odd curlicues evoke a quaint nineteenth century aesthetic. These structures represent sites of visual communication whose meanings and histories contain more than mere architectural response to our needs to seek protection from the natural environment. They shape behavior, invite community, and contain culture. Thinking beyond San Jose State University, take a drive through Santa Clara County and consider the buildings and monuments and places that you typically overlook. When selecting a site, I suggest you focus less on the structure and more on a specific detail. Train your eye to attend to the posters of a barbershop, the mural in an alley, a shaft of light in a cathedral. In other words, look for surprising uses of a place and then expand your interest into the place itself.

Once you select a promising site, you will explore its history and usage. How might your research this locale? You might start with a personal interview with its owner or manager. You'd be surprised how many folks keep newspaper clippings and old photos of their buildings. You might also visit the downtown San Jose Development Agency, asking for insight on the changes that have swept through this area over the past two decades. Once you identify the name of the building (of structure or monument) and its architect or designer, you might conduct a key word search in the *San Jose Mercury News* for articles that shed light on the site's original intent and how it has changed through time. Don't forget: not all of your research has to address your selected site, specifically. Sources may shed light on larger themes found in your paper.

Following the historical overview, you will provide an analysis (about two to three pages) that employs an approach we've discussed in class. Examples: How might the Quetzalcoatl statue be read from the perspective of semiotics? How does the Tech Museum reveal itself through Marxist critique? How does the new library authorize certain forms of gaze? You may mix and match more than one approach, but I recommend you offer a deep analysis with one method rather than offer a potentially superficial analysis with several approaches.

Plan on completing a draft one week before the paper is due. On that day, we'll have time in class to discuss your efforts and share ideas with colleagues before the paper is due the following week. Of course, I hope you will share questions and concerns with me throughout the semester so that you can feel confident about your work. I certainly hope you enjoy the opportunity.

So get started and have fun!