

“In a city, grace just falls all over the place.”
—Sara Miles, *City of God: Faith in the Streets*

Phase 2A: Site Analysis

DUE: Oral and graphic presentation, September 18, 2015

OBJECTIVE: Site Analysis asks students to become familiar with the Petworth neighborhood in Northwest Washington, DC, not far from the Catholic University campus. Site analysis will include not only the physical settings for the two design assignments, but also the historical/social/economic changes that this neighborhood is undergoing, as shifts in population, property development, and social class change the face of this historically African-American neighborhood. Phase 2A introduces students to the physical and social settings within which they will respond to and design for during the rest of the semester. Work will be done individually and/or teams.

PROCESS: Visit the site and the surrounding Petworth neighborhood. The location of the first design project—a short, 10-day exercise—is the plaza of the Georgia Avenue/Petworth Metro station (bounded by Georgia Avenue, NW to the west; New Hampshire Avenue, NW to the east; and existing commercial/residential buildings to the north). The site for the second design project—which will occupy the bulk of the semester—is at the northwest corner of Georgia Avenue, NW and Randolph Street, NW (a Wendy’s currently occupies the site and will be removed). Document the sites in your analysis, noting: traffic; solar exposure; sources of noise; climatic impacts; the scale, materials, and design language of nearby structures; views onto and off of the sites; current use of these two sites during the course of morning, afternoon, and evening. Note the character of the neighborhood, its people, and its assets. Speak with residents and business operators if possible. Pay particular attention to the neighborhood’s existing sacred spaces, and its potential as a setting for contemporary sacred space.

READINGS and RESOURCES:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petworth,_Washington,_D.C.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate/where-we-live-dcs-petworth-neighborhood/2013/10/10/6634d1fa-0c39-11e3-9941-6711ed662e71_story.html

http://dc.urbanturf.com/articles/blog/petworth_getting_a_vibrancy_of_its_own/2592

<https://www.airbnb.com/locations/washington-dc/petworth>

<http://www.welovedc.com/2009/11/06/where-we-live-petworth/>

<http://dailycaller.com/2014/07/19/street-mob-breaks-out-in-gentrifying-washington-d-c-neighborhood/>

http://wamu.org/programs/metro_connection/15/07/10/door_to_door_petworth_dc_and_laurel_maryland

PRODUCT: You will make a graphic and verbal presentation to the studio class that reflects your analysis of the sites and the Petworth neighborhood.

MODALITY: Team work (three teams of four students each) addressing:

- Metro station square area (to address assignment 2) – ‘objective’ and ‘experiential’ aspects
- Site of future project (Wendy’s currently occupies the site) – ‘objective’ and ‘experiential’ aspects
- Both sites – socio-cultural aspects

GRADE: 5% of course grade

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“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
--Christian prayer for the imposition of ashes

“Teach us to care and not to care
“Teach us to sit still”
--T.S. Eliot, “Ash-Wednesday”

Phase 2B: Situational Sacred Space Structure

DUE: Oral and graphic presentation, September 28, 2015

OBJECTIVE: This quick, 10-day sketch/design problem is set in the Petworth neighborhood in Washington, DC, on the plaza of the Georgia Avenue/Petworth Metro station. Students will design a transitory structure/object suitable for a sacred purpose (the disposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday in the Christian faith tradition). The project invites students to approach design that responds to “situational” versus “substantive” sacred space.

PROCESS: Historian Jeanne Halgren Kilde’s chapter, “A Method of Thinking About Power Dynamics in Christian Space” in her book *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* articulates the notion of “situational” versus “substantive” sacred space. Substantive sacred space is that in which a divine presence is believed to reside, and which in turn makes the space “sacred.” Mircea Eliade describes it as a place that connects heaven, earth, and the underworld, with an *axis mundi* extending vertically through these realms, separating the sacred from the profane. This view posits “sacredness” inherent in objects, including buildings: sacred architecture. But another view sees sacredness as “situational”: anyplace can be sacred depending on the presence, location, and actions of human beings. This kind of sacred space seems to be suggested by Christ who, according to the bible, said: “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” (Matthew 18:20) The verse describes a relational aspect to the sacred among people in community. This means that virtually any place can be sacred or holy, depending on the situation. You are to design a “Situational Sacred Space Structure” on the Metro station plaza so that ashes can be distributed to pedestrians on Ash Wednesday, the day that marks the beginning of the Lenten season in the Christian faith tradition. This “Ashes to Go” phenomenon--where ashes are distributed outside the walls of a church--has become more popular over the past few years, and is beautifully captured by Sara Miles in her book, *City of God: Faith in the Streets*. She describes distributing ashes in the Mission District of San Francisco at a site very similar to the Georgia Avenue/Petworth Metro station plaza.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS: The structure needs to be demountable so that it can be carried in a case and quickly assembled anywhere on the Metro station plaza site, but particular kinds of materials are not proscribed. It should be between 25 and 30 square feet, provide some shelter from inclement weather, should be sturdy on a windy day, and should have a “presence” on the site. It might use religious symbolism, but it doesn’t need to. It does not need to be heated, but it should have some battery-powered illumination. There should be a place for one person to kneel if they wish to when receiving ashes, but ashes should be able to be imposed on a person who remains standing, is in a wheelchair, or has some other physical disability. The structure should display a sign of welcome. There should be a built-in, sturdy horizontal surface, such as a table or shelf, to accommodate items such as holy water, bowels of ashes, and a prayer book or two.

RELEVANT READINGS:

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959)

Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. “A Method of Thinking About Power Dynamics in Christian Space,” in *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford: University Press, 2008, discusses the concept of “situational” sacred space)

Miles, Sara. *City of God: Faith in the Streets* (New York: Jericho Books, 2014, selected excerpts provided)

PRODUCT: You will make a graphic and verbal presentation to the studio class that explains the design of your structure, also shows how it is demounted, and where on the site it is placed. Models are strongly suggested.

MODALITY: Group or Individual work

GRADE: 10% of course grade