

August 10, 2014

**The Piedmont Project and the new course proposal:  
Freshmen Seminar  
ITAL 190 Fall 2014**

When I received the email announcing the Emory Piedmont Project for the year 2014-2015, my reaction was a mixture of interest and frustration. On the one hand, I saw the initiative as a wonderful opportunity to incorporate the notion of sustainability into some of my courses. On the other hand, I imagined that an historical approach to sustainability in literature would be too unwieldy for a freshmen seminar, and it was hard to nail down a specific theme on which I wanted to focus. This is one of the ways in which the Piedmont Project workshop proved to be so useful to me. Spending a week with scholars from many different disciplines outside the humanities helped me think about what my discipline can specifically contribute to discussions about sustainability, both within the university and beyond its borders. What is one unique thing about the way in which scholars and teachers from the humanities try to approach these issues? For me, it is a preoccupation with beauty.

As this idea came into my mind, I was reminded of one my favorite scenes from Marco Tullio Giordans's film, *I cento passi (One Hundred Steps)*, one that expresses for me the approach I want to adopt in this course. A young environmental activist named Peppino Impastato and his friend are perched at the top of a mountain, looking at a new airport built thanks to the intervention of the mafia, interested only in economic gain with absolute lack of concern for the damaging impact of the construction on the landscape and surrounding territory. Peppino, surprises his friend with the following words:

**Peppino Impastato:** You know what I think? That this airport is really not so bad

...

**Salvo Vitale:** What are you saying?

**Peppino Impastato:** Well ... Seen from up here, from up high, one might even think that nature always wins, that it is stronger than man but this is not true! In the end, all things, even the worst, find their own logic when they are done, a justification for their very existence; they make these crappy houses with aluminum windows and fake brick walls... Are you following me? ...

**Salvo Vitale:** Yes, I'm following!

**Peppino Impastato:** ... the balconies, people go there to live, they decorate the houses with the curtains, geraniums, television, and after a while...it is all part of the landscape... No one remembers anymore what it was like before...But we should not let anything destroy the beauty.

**Salvo Vitale:** Ok, I understand, but so what?

**Peppino Impastato:** Well...then, instead of political struggle, class-consciousness, all that bullshit...we should remind people what beauty is, help them to recognize it, to defend it.

**Salvo Vitale:** Beauty?

**Peppino Impastato:** Yeah, beauty, beauty is important, since that is what everything else comes from...

So the topic of my course would not be study of a particular theme (i.e. pollution, social justice, human rights) from the perspective of the humanities, but rather the link between our efforts to promote sustainability and its vision of natural and social space and that perspective itself.

## **Natural and Social Space in Italian culture** **ITAL 190, Fall 2014**

**Italian 190, Fall 2014**  
**Spring 2014**  
**Few Building 131**  
**Office hours:**

**Instructor: Angela Porcarelli**  
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### **Course description:**

In an age of global warming, the alarming scarcity of essential global resources such as food and water, and an every growing gap between the poor and the wealthy, sustainability has become one of the major issues of our time. How can we exist responsibly on our planet, respecting the world in which we are born, recognizing the importance of social justice, and leaving our environment intact for future life? How do we balance the desire for development against the real consequences that development produces, both for our ecosystem and for the socio-economic balance in the world? In this course we will use the notion of beauty, or the disruption of beauty, as a lens through which to conceptualize sustainability. We will look at how the arts (e.g. literature, painting, film) shape and influence the idea we have of our place in the world, turning specifically to Italian and Italian American works in order to analyze the representation of natural and social spaces.

### **Learning Outcomes: by the end of Italian 190, students will demonstrate**

- the ability to problematize the notion of beauty, viewing it from an array of disciplinary perspectives;
- the ability to formulate a solid understanding of the notion of sustainability as it relates to environmental, aesthetic, socio-economic, and political questions;
- the ability to synthesize and evaluate divergent critical perspectives, to develop and support an argument and express a personal interpretation of the topics discussed
- a broad understanding of the interaction between cultural/historical factors, the notion of sustainability, and the arts in both Italy and the Italian diaspora in the United States.

### **Format**

The course will be conducted as a lecture / seminar. Students will be expected to complete the assigned readings, write reaction papers and write an end-of-class paper. Details are provided below.

## Course Materials

### Books:

- Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974. Print.
- Saviano, Roberto, and Virginia Jewiss. *Gomorra: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples' Organized Crime System*. New York: Picador, 2008. Print.
- DeLillo, Don. *Underworld*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1997. Print.
- Strada, Gino, and Howard Zinn. *Green Parrots: A War Surgeon's Diary*. Milan: Charta, 2004. Print.

### Movies:

- *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone, 2008
- *The Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino, 2013

## Course Requirements

**Class preparation and participation:** Students should be sure to read every assigned text carefully prior to class. Students are required to bring the assigned reading(s) to class. To receive a high grade for participation, students must actively engage in class discussions.

**Tickets.** For each class, students must turn in a “ticket.” The tickets should have two parts: a comment and a question. In formulating your ticket, you might begin with an observation (the comment part), and then raise a question. Alternatively, you might begin with a question, and then propose an answer. Your tickets should be about 120 words and turned in at the end of class. Your tickets will be graded as either submitted or unsubmitted. Other writing assignments might be requested together with class readings (questions/answers; comments; definitions etc....)

**Course Final Paper:** Students will need to write a class paper, which will be due the last day of class. The paper should be “thesis-driven.” Start the paper by identifying a problem or question and then state your thesis. Once you state your thesis, you should then briefly outline how you plan to defend it. The rest of the paper should constitute your defense and final conclusions. Your defense should cite studies and theories from the literature.

**Exams:** For exams, you are not required to go beyond the readings covered in the course. You will be given a list of 10 questions in advance and in class you will be asked to answer three of them writing 3 short mini-essays. You can prepare for this “assignment” either on your own or organize study groups with your classmates. The exams will provide you with an opportunity to synthesize the readings covered during the course as

well as to express your personal reflections on the material covered.

**In-class presentation:** During the semester you will give one 10 to 15-minute presentation based on a class reading. The purpose of the presentation is to help orient class discussion by defining a problem or question that merits further exploration.

**Presentation:**

**Grades**

<b>Exams (X2)</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>1 final paper</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Tickets</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>HW and Participation</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>In-class presentation</b>	<b>15%</b>

The following scale will be used at the end of the semester to determine final grades:

94-100=A	90-93=A-	87-89=B+	84-86=B	80-83=B-	77-79=C+
74-76=C	70-73=C-	60-69=D	below 60=Failure		

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is essential in Italian 190, as you will develop your critical thinking skills and knowledge of the content through discussions with your Professor and your peers. Over the course of the semester, students are allowed two unexcused absences, after which one percentage point shall be deducted from the final course grade for each unexcused absence. Students who arrive more than 10 minutes late will be considered absent.

**Unexcused absences:** please note that the following constitutes a **non-exhaustive** list of reasons for unexcused absences:

- minor illness such as colds, headaches, or the flu
- classes missed for medical appointments
- absences due to personal exigency.

**Excused absences:** the following constitute excused absences

- classes missed for university-recognized religious holidays
- absences due to prolonged illness that involves hospitalization (documentation will be required)
- classes missed because the student is representing Emory in some official capacity (athletics, music, etc.)

\* For university activities and religious holidays, students are required to notify the instructor of dates when classes will be missed at least one week in advance.

**HONOR CODE:** Your conduct in Italian/Education 190 is governed by the Emory University Honor Code. The Honor Code applies to all papers, tests, oral presentations, and daily assignments. Please be aware that you are bound by the Emory College Honor Code. Any perceived violation will be reported to the Honor Council. For a description of Emory College's Honor Code policy, please see the following website:  
<http://conduct.emory.edu/policies/code/index.html>

### **Week 1-4: symbolic and imaginary space in literature and art**

#### **Readings:**

1. The ideal city in Renaissance paintings
2. Extracts from Marco Polo's *The Travels of Marco Polo*
3. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*

### **Week 5-9: The center and the Periphery**

#### **Readings:**

1. Don De Lillo's *Underworld*
2. Representation of the Urban Periphery in Italian Contemporary Poetry.

#### **Movie:**

1. *The Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino

Week 10-11: Space, politics and organized crime

#### **Readings:**

1. Saviano Roberto, *Gomorra: A personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples' Organized Crime System*

#### **Movie:**

1. *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone, 2008

### **Week 12-14: Space, War and Social Justice**

#### **Readings:**

1. Gino Strada's *The Green Parrot*
2. Representation of war in Italian Poetry

## **Conclusion**

### NOTES TO THE PIEDMONT PROJECT COMMITTEE

The syllabus is intended to be flexible and could be adapted to the students' interests. The teacher reserves the right to make changes to the material covered and its organization. In addition, the teacher reserves the right to adjust the reading load as she get to know the class better, and as class topics and interests begin to define themselves.