

4.406

Ecologies of Construction:

the resource consumption of our built environment

Assignment 1

Due March 21, 2007

Description

This assignment asks for a thoughtful response to a key question. Thus far in the class, we've been through a great deal of reading and covered a wide breadth of intellectual territory. The links between fields that we have discussed – such as, natural and industrial ecology, systems theory and ecological footprint accounting – are sometimes strong and clear, or weak and tenuous. Emerging from these links are questions that both support and criticize basic premises for action. This assignment will serve as an opportunity to address one key question and provide an answer based in current thinking and well-informed debate.

So, the essay of this assignment asks that you articulate one key question and proceed to render the various positions that have been taken for the purpose of reaching a conclusion. This conclusion may not be in the form of a direct answer but will certainly provide a current state of affairs in the debate.

Some examples:

- *“What is the most effective path toward reducing society's ecological footprint?”*
- *“How has systems theory influenced thinking about environmental and resource issues?”*
- *“How has the definition of industrial ecology failed to address significant factors?”*
- *“How can the current context for the extraction of resources and the manufacture of products begin to resemble an ecology?”*
- *“Accepting the notion that we are deep into overshoot, what can one expect in the near future?”*

In answering these questions, I do want to know what you think but I am more interested in what, and from whom, you have learned primarily as a result of some of the assigned readings (and any additional ones you find). You have three weeks to complete this assignment and it accounts for a full 20 percent of your final grade. Major points made should be supported by citation. References for statements of fact should be noted. A clear outline should progress from a full rendering of the intellectual context of the question, including all relevant research work, to a dissection of the working parts of an answer. I suggest (but do not require) that you use the following outline:

1. Statement of the key question: including a brief explanation of its relevance to environmental and ecologically-oriented production and consumption.
2. Background: including a brief but complete outline of the most important relevant work in the area of your question.
3. Discussion: including a listing and explanation of all previous answers to the question as well as your own answer. Again, your answer, while partly based in judgment and opinion, should proceed from a 'culture' that has attempted to answer, dismiss, ignore or refute the question.

Product

An essay of 1500 words, double spaced. Please use Lucida Sans Unicode, 8 pt. for text and 10 pt. for section Headings (the font used here).