

Exercise No. 1

The Beholding Eye*

Rationale/Goal: A fun exercise to encourage students to realize any landscape (or the environment) is composed of not only what lies before our eyes, but what lies within our heads. Different visions, both literal and metaphorical, will affect our worldviews (and assessment of environmental/population & health problems).

Objective: For students to recognize and work with different perspectives on the environment, and realize the different human interactions with that environment. Then to discuss how the exercise can be broadened to consider how to see and work with different worldviews.

Caveat: probably all students will have a “Western” background, so be sure to explore what that might mean, and explore variations within that background.

Exercise: Explain only that you’re going on a short field trip. Hand each student a 3x5 index card. Walk with them to the nearest vantage point (e.g. bridge over Pacific Street between Kincaid and Hitchcock Halls if not too far from classroom). Point them all to the west, toward Lake Union, and ask them to write down key words and phrases that come to their minds (can be sights, sounds, smells). Spend ~ 10 minutes. Back in the classroom, have students read and categorize their observations, place into categories they suggest on board. Expand categories to those they might not have considered.

The key to making this exercise work, is not telling the students anything about the activity in advance. Just give them a card and tell them to go out and jot down 5 or more things that they observe or pick up on (don't use the word "see").

Then bring them back into the class room and round robin style ask each of them for one thing that they observed until there are no more new items. Then the TA should lead the discussion in trying to group the various observations -- natural vs. anthropogenic; living vs. dead; light vs. dark; emotions (e.g., stark/ dreary vs. alive and vibrant) whatever. Make sure to include sounds and smells (maybe tactile?) at this point, even if no one identified any of these.

Meinig speaks of Landscape:

1) as Nature; 2) as Habitat; 3) as Artifact; 4) as System; 5) as Problem; 6) as Wealth; 7) as Ideology; 8) as History; 9) as Place; 10) as Aesthetic. These are likely more abstract/conceptual categories than they come up with. What other ones might there be? Our tendency is to seek order as we interact with nature (will discuss in lecture).

* Adapted from D.W. Meinig (1979). “The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes.” New York, Oxford University Press.

If you have any biologists, they might “see” the flow of matter through ecosystems. Others might note political boundaries; note sounds, color their observations negatively or positively.

Questions for students:

- What was the goal of the exercise?
- What categories might they have missed? What do they reveal about how we think of our surroundings?
- Bring discussion back to central focus of class.
- One conclusion: Our initial assumptions and observations will color how we consider population and health.