space and place in human communication

Course Description:
How do we conceptualize and represent space? How do we locate ourselves and Others in space (“here” and “there”)? How do we divide spaces into socially significant regions, or, to put it another way, how do we construct places? How do we identify ourselves and others through places and regions? How do we order and control spaces and places? Answers to these questions vary depending on where and when “we” are. In this class we look at some classic arguments on space and place derived from investigations into:

1. Language—the diversity of expressions of spatial and directional concepts in different languages (including deixis)
2. Communication—face-to-face and mediated interactions that depend on and construct spatial frames, divisions, and orientations.
3. Spatial representations—paintings, photographs, paper maps, film, interactive satellite maps, etc.
4. Spatial structures—buildings, roads, bridges, doors, fences, etc.
5. Spatial practices— territory and sovereignty; land as power, land as wealth; policing, regulating.

Course Goals:
1. Develop a sophisticated understanding of how conceptions of space, spatial divisions, and places (as social structures, that may or may not be realized architecturally) are formed and organized through social and communicative practice (and, ipso facto, language).
2. Develop a basic familiarity with a range of research methods used in social science, including ethnographic observation, archival research, textual analysis, and data collection.
3. Explore techniques of representation for research, including maps, diagrams, narrative descriptions, photography, film, and audio. Students will be expected to try out different forms of representation over the course of the semester: write an essay, make a map, make a short film or audio segment, etc.

Assignments:
1. Class participation—prepared, sustained, respectful, productive contributions to our conversations (20 pts.)
2. 6 research based problem sets (total 60 pts: assignment 1 is worth 5 points, assignment 4 is worth 15 points, all others are worth 10 points)
3. Final Presentation and paper (20 pts.)

Readings access:
Students are encouraged to buy books whenever possible, especially those that are underlined. All the books used in this course are readily available on reserve in the library through book-markets such as abe and amazon or access services such as scribd. However, out of consideration for limited budgets, all readings will be available electronically, either as pdfs, e-books or e-journals. If you find yourself having difficulty concentrating or retaining information, consider 1) printing your readings on paper, 2) taking copious notes on paper, or 3) buying books.

Course rules:
1. Always be respectful in class and research.
2. Always know who wrote what you’re reading (name, time period, etc.) and when and where it was published (book, journal article, etc.).
3. Give credit where credit is due; always cite all your sources.
4. “Be here now”. If there’s something you need to do on the internet, don’t come to class.
5. Each day an assignment is late costs 1 point.
course schedule

Week 1-2.

Orienting in social space: in and out, front and back, up and down, public and private

1/25
Introduction to the course
Lecture on conceptions of space
Drawing exercise 1: draw where we are

1/27
Needham, Rodney. Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification

2/1

In-class slideshow: The Salon Doré from the Hôtel de la Trémoille, edited by Martin Chapman
In-class drawing exercise: draw your house and mark its significant regions

2/3
Discuss assignment 1:
Find/record a significant social boundary in a living or working space, whether public or private. How is it constructed? Walls? Lights? Sound? Color? Screens? Flooring? Signs? Or is it “invisible” except through behavior? 1 paragraph description and 1-2 good photographs OR 1-minute video OR hand-drawn map
Week 3-4.

**Moving** embodied through ecological space

2/8


2/10


2/15 (no class)

2/17

Edward T. Hall, Proxemics (and comments and replies) In: *Current Anthropology* Volume 9 1968 (e-journal)


2/22

Discuss assignment 2:

option a: Observe and depict (in writing, film, sound, animation, or on paper) a journey (walking, riding, driving, biking, etc.) through social space. Describe the traveler's behavior throughout the journey and the structures that guide them as they move, and combine that description with a map.

option b: Ask a person to describe a journey they have taken; record their description, and combine it with a map.

For each of these options, your map may be: drawn from a city-map, a google-map, hand-drawn; it may be planar or linear.

2-page description or three-minute video, and map of the journey from origin to destination.
Week 5-6

**Here and there: locating** “us” and “them” in places

2/24

Keith Basso. 1996. Chapters 1, 2, 3 in *Wisdom sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. University of New Mexico.

In-class drawing exercise: draw a NYC neighborhood that you are familiar with and mark as many place-names as you can in the time limit.

2/29


Website: SF Street names project

3/2

Ralph and Chance, “Legacies of Fear”, Transition 113 2014, 137-143


3/7

Discuss assignment 3:

Step 1. Record (audio or film) an event of place-formulation, whether “here” or “there”. This could be in a natural conversation, an interview, or from a pre-existing film, fiction or non-fiction.

Step 2. Research the history and meaning of the placename used in that event. Turn in your notes and documents discovered through historical research. Searching the internet for a wiki page or references is just a start; here are some other possibilities: 1) use the library (NYU, CUNY, NYPL, etc) to find archives related to that place; 2) talk to a local: interview people about what they think the name means; 3) pull up descriptions and references from history books; 4) if it’s the sort of place-name that would appear on a map, try to find the earliest map that lists it; 5) look for a corpus through which to study the use of the name over time/space (ask a subject librarian for help with this)
Week 7-9

**Space and place as forms of social power**

3/9

Johnson, James W. Black Manhattan. 1930


Drawing exercise: draw NYC and mark who owns where.

3/14-16—**Spring Break**

3/21


**View:** Bill Rankin, maps of Chicago

3/23

Discuss assignment 4:

Document the social or political power or economic value of a place or space. Possibilities might include: a history based on records of real-estate transactions; a map/diagram/etc. based on statistical or census data relating to traffic patterns, whether derived from pre-existing data-sources or from your own data-collection; an ethnographic essay based on interviews; a social experiment, such as asking people to guess the value of a place, or fill out a map.
Weeks 10-11

**Regulating space and place**

3/28

*Siegell, Solo in the New Order, Ch.1, The Javanese Language and Related Matters, Ch.2, A Neighborhood in the New Order: Hierarchy and Social Order*

3/30

*Chronopoulos, Spatial Regulation in New York City
Ch. 1 The Betrayal of the Liberal Assumptions of Urban Renewal; Ch. 4 Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism and Spatial Regulation (ebook)*

*Tissot (Broder trans), Good Neighbors: Gentrifying Diversity in Boston’s South End 2015 (Ch. 1, 2)*

4/4

*Gal, Susan. A Semiotics of the Public-Private Distinction. In: differences. A journal of feminist cultural studies. (e-journals)*


4/6

Discuss assignment 5:

Map/diagram/document/film/photograph a form of spatial regulation, interior or exterior, public or private: regulating, policing, protecting, cleaning, decorating, organizing, proxemic distance-regulation etc.
Week 12-13

**Mapping** space as cosmology

*4/11*


In-class viewing: Cosmos (intro)

*4/13*

Tseng, Picturing Heaven in Early China, Ch. 1, Ch. 5

*4/18*

Jeremy Crampton, Maps as social constructions; Explore Google Earth


*4/20*

Discuss Assignment 6:
Analyze a map to discover its cosmology and worldview. That means: look at some kind of map or mapping system (e.g. google maps on your phone) and describe the spatial awareness that it promotes or facilitates, and the theory of space implicit in that awareness, and the forms of power it legitimates. Examples: an old map, a new map, GPS, etc. Map and 1-page analysis

Week 14: Review Discussions

*4/25*

Lefebvre, “From Absolute Space to Abstract Space”, “From the Contradictions of Space to Differential Space”

*4/27*


Week 15: Presentations

*5/2*

*5/4*

*5/9*

Develop a 15-minute presentation based on 2-4 of your research assignments. Conduct additional research; extend your analysis; develop and refine your map or diagram; edit your video. Multiple formats will be accepted but the final presentation must be informed, informative, and well-crafted.