

Space and Place in America

050:487 • Spring 2009

Th. 5:35-8:35 RAB 018

Matthew Backes

Office: RAB 205E • Hours Th. 1-3 and by appt.

backes@rci.rutgers.edu • 932-9963

This seminar looks at the ways that people in the United States locate themselves in space. We will explore a range of questions relating to identity and experience. What does it mean to be from somewhere? How does one establish and maintain a sense of place? When and under what circumstances does that sense change? We will also consider the physical spaces and places that American society has produced and in which American lives unfold. Topics in the class range from dialect humor to Las Vegas architecture, from the mythic West to cyberspace, from the European Grand Tour to the drive-through restaurant. Course texts include novels, films, and memoirs, as well as works of history, geography, and anthropology. The class incorporates a historical view, examining the interplay of localism, regionalism, and cosmopolitanism in American life as well as the changing face of the American landscape over two centuries, but ultimately our focus is on contemporary culture and the problems of space and place therein.

Books (available at the Douglass Co-Op Bookstore)

Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (1996)

Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (2006)

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990)

Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (2003)

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time* (1994)

Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (1958)

William Leach, *Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life* (1999)

Additional readings (marked by “*” in the syllabus) will be available through Sakai. You must print out these readings and bring them to class.

Requirements

Class Participation: This class is a discussion-based seminar. Your involvement is what will make the weekly sessions exciting, instructive, and rewarding. So you must prepare every week, you must attend, and you must contribute in class. If you miss more than one class without excuse or if you attend class unprepared, your grade will suffer. As part of your participation in the class, you will also be called upon to join a classmate in

preparing discussion questions and leading a portion of the class twice during the semester. Participation accounts for about twenty percent of your final grade.

Short Papers: There are two short paper assignments (2-4 pp). The first (due 2/12) is a response to the theoretical perspectives introduced in the first couple weeks of the class. The second paper (due 3/13) combines a research proposal with a response to the readings in the class. You will describe your proposed project and place it in a critical framework with regard to the course materials. I will discuss both of these papers in greater detail in class. Together these papers account for about twenty-five percent of your final grade.

Outline, Rough Draft, Research Presentation: The primary assignment in the class is a research paper for which you will submit a detailed outline (with preliminary bibliography) and a rough draft before handing in the final paper. We will devote some class time near the end of the semester to small workshop sessions in which you read and critique each other's work (details to be determined once the roster is set). You will also make a very brief presentation of your projects to the whole group. This work will account for about fifteen percent of your final grade.

Final Research Paper: An original and well-constructed research paper approximately twenty pages long is due at the end of the semester (no later than May 7). This paper will account for about forty percent of your grade.

Schedule of Meetings

I. Location

1/22: Introduction

*Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 8-50.

1/29: Some Theoretical Questions

*Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," and "Spatial Stories," from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1984).

*Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 22-27.

*David Harvey, from *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 201-239.

*Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*, 179-198.

II. Landscapes

2/5 American Landscape

John B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*

2/12 Suburbia

Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*

*Catharine E. Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies...* (1842), selections.

Paper #1 Due

2/19 Urbanization

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 1-220.

Film: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)

2/26 Political Economy and Institutionalized Space

Davis, *City of Quartz*, 221-322.

William Leach, *Country of Exiles*

III. Movement and Perspective

3/5 Travel: Americans Abroad

*Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, selections.

*Edith Wharton, "Italian Villas and Their Gardens," and "French Ways and Their Meaning," from Sara Bird Wright, ed. *Edith Wharton Abroad: Selected Travel Writings, 1888-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 61-86, 169-186.

3/13 Travel: The Road

Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*

*Linda McDowell, "Off the Road: Alternative Views of Rebellion, Resistance and 'The Beats'," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, V. 21, No. 2 (1996), 412-419.

Film: *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969)

Paper #2 Due

3/19: **Spring Break**

3/26: Region and Empire

Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*

*Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Region and Reason," from Edward L. Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, et al., *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 83-104.

Film: *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)

4/2 Diaspora and Exile

*Anzia Yezierska. "How I Found America"

*Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," from *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)

*Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 3-19.

*Gayatri Gopinath, "'Bombay, UK, Yuba City': Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora," in Raiford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, eds., *Popular Culture: A Reader* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2005), 294-308.

*Paul Gilroy, "Wearing Your Art on Your Sleeve: Notes Toward a Diaspora History of Black Ephemera," in Guins and Cruz, *Popular Culture: A Reader*, 495-503.

Paper Outline Due

IV. New Space

4/9: Borderlands

*Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, chaps. 1, 2, 7.

*Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (Jun., 1999), pp. 814-841

Rough Draft Due 4/15 (details TBA)

4/16: Cosmopolitanism and Globalism

Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 1-80.

*Manuel Castells, "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society," *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Sep. 2000), 693-699.

4/23 Cyberspace and Other Spaces

*Jon Stratton, "Cyberspace and the Globalization of Culture," in David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, eds. *The Cybercultures Reader* (London, Routledge, 2000), 721-731.

*Lisa Nakamura, "Head-hunting on the Internet: Identity Tourism, Avatars, and Racial Passing in Textual and Graphic Chat Spaces," in Guins and Cruz, *Popular Culture: A Reader*, 520-533.

Film: *Existenz* (David Cronenberg, 1999)

4/30 Presentations and Conclusions

Final Paper Due by 3:00 pm on May 7 in my mailbox in RAB 024