Introduction

The study of the city has undergone a transformation during the past ten years integrating ever wider theoretical perspectives from anthropology, cultural geography, political economy, urban sociology, and regional and city planning, and expanding its attention to the city as physical, architectural and virtual form. An emphasis on spatial relations and consumption as well as urban planning and design decision-making provides new insights into material, ideological and metaphorical aspects of the urban environment. Reliance on ethnography of space and place allows researchers to present an experience-near account of everyday life in urban housing or local markets, while at the same time addressing macro-processes such as globalization and the new urban social order.

This course sketches some of the methodological implications of the ethnographic study of the contemporary city using anthropological tools of participant observation, interviewing, behavioral mapping, and theories of space and place to illuminate spaces in modern/post-modern cities and their transformations. In doing so, I wish to underscore links between the shape, vision and experience of cities and the meanings that their citizens read off screens and streets into their own lives. It begins with a discussion of spatializing culture, that is the way that culture is produced and expressed spatially, and the way that space reflects and changes culture. The subsequent weeks explore different theoretical dimensions, embodied space, the social construction of space, the social production of space, language and discursive space, and translocal and transnational space. The course also explores a number of special topics including how urban fear is transforming the built environment and the nature of public space both in the ways that we are conceiving the re/building our cities, and in the ways that residential suburbs are being transformed into gated and walled enclaves of private privilege and public exclusion. The privatization of public space first signaled the profound changes that American cities are undergoing in terms of their physical, social and cultural design. Currently, however, increased fear of violence and others particularly in urban areas is producing new community and public space forms; locked neighborhoods, blank faced malls in urban areas, armed guard dogs on public plazas, and limited access housing developments are just some examples of how the cultural mood is being “written” on the landscape.

Course Requirements:

1. Weekly reading and discussion in class. Each student will be assigned a week to present a reading review and act as the discussion facilitator. The second half of the
semester meetings will utilize student fieldwork experience and data collected as the basis for discussion of the readings.

2. Book review of an ethnography—both oral and written presentation. Oral presentations will be integrated with the theoretical and methodological content of weekly discussions.

3. Fieldwork project—both oral and written presentation. Students will participate in a fieldwork project related to the course using data collected and analyzed as part of the course content. The analysis will be presented at the conclusion as part of the final requirement to write a paper. Students will be asked to use theoretical materials from the course to recast or rethink their research projects for their final papers.

**Required texts:** The cheapest way to order the books is online through the used sources available through Amazon.com. Scanned and xeroxed articles will be available when other articles are not on ereserves

Low, Setha, and Denise Lawrence-Zuñiga (2003 edition) *The Anthropology of Space and Place*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. (Book on reserve. Cheapest way to purchase is used on line)

Low, Setha (2000) *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press. (Cheapest way to purchase is of used copies for $11 on Amazon.com)

**Ethnographies: Please select one for your report.**


- Jackson, John (2001) *Harlem World*. Chicago. (Harlem and class in New York)

- Taylor, Monique (2002) *Harlem (Between Heaven and Hell)*. Minnesota. (Harlem, New York City, gentrification)


- Holston, James (1990) *The Modernist City*. Chicago. (Structuralist theory, Brazilia, Brazil)
Caldeira, Teresa (1999) *City of Walls*. California. (Sao Paulo, Brazil)


Merry, Sally (1980) *Urban Danger*. Temple University Press. (Boston area housing projects)


Cerwonka, Allaine (2004) *Native to the Nation: Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Melbourne)


Other ethnographies will be identified in your area of interest to fulfill this requirement.

**Syllabus**

1/29 **Introduction: The Anthropology of Space and Place**

What constitutes the anthropology of space and place? How is it different from a geography of space and place? Why would this be a helpful body of theory and methodology for my research and scholarly development? What will be covered in this course?

1) Review the course syllabus  
2) Review course requirements  
3) Review readings for course  
4) Identify weeks for class participation  
5) History of theory in the anthropology of space and place and its importance  
6) Spatializing culture—the co-production of space and place

**Readings:**


**PART I: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

2/5 **Embodied Space (Alison, Duygu, Natascia)**

Within the field of space and culture there has been increasing interest in theories that include the body as an integral part of spatial analysis. These concerns have been partially resolved through the historical analysis of the docile body to social structure and power in work of Michel Foucault (1975, 1984, 1986) and sociologically in the notions of *habitus* by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), and “structuration” by Anthony Giddens (1984) as well as many others (Low and Lawrence 2003). Nonetheless, many researchers need theoretical formulations that provide an everyday, material grounding and experiential, cognitive and/or emotional understanding of the intersection and interpenetration of body, space, and culture (Low 1996, 2000). I call this material and experiential intersection “embodied space.” These understandings require theories of body and space that are experience-near and yet allow for linkages to be made to larger, social and political processes.

Anthropological spatial analyses often neglect the body because of difficulties in
resolving the dualism of the subjective and objective body and distinctions between the material and representational aspects of body space. The concept of embodied space, however, draws these disparate notions together underscoring the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world.

“Embodied space” is the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form. In this section we trace the evolution of approaches to embodied space focusing on phenomenology (Richardson 1984), spatial orientation (Munn 2003), dwelling (Gray 2003) and walking (Ingold 2004).

**Is embodied space a new way of thinking about space and place? What are the historical bases of such a perspective (feminism, phenomenology, performance studies, etc)? Does the concept of embodied space solve some of the problems of anthropologists who are concerned with how space and place are created through individual’s everyday practices? Does embodied space expand Bourdieu’s concept of habitus because of its ability to encompass agency?**

**Readings:**


2/12 The Graduate Center is closed.

2/19 Social Construction of Space: Class and Religion (Manissa, Sean, Zahra)

In order to focus on the social construction of space, it is important to distinguish between these two terms that are often used interchangeably. The social production of space as discussed next week, includes all those factors--social, economic, ideological, and technological--that result, or seek to result, in the physical creation of the material setting. The materialist emphasis of the term social production is useful in defining the historical emergence and political/economic formation of urban space. The term social construction may then be conveniently reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and
control. Thus, the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space--through peoples' social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting--into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning.

Contemporary debates concerning ethnographic methodologies and writing strategies emphasize the importance of characterizing social actors in terms of their experience of the theorized phenomena. The co-producers of the ethnography must be given a voice and a place in the written document (Rodman 1992), and ethnographic research is increasingly judged by its ability to portray the impact of macro and micro processes through the "lived experience" of individuals. Thus, an effective anthropological theory of the spatialization of culture and human experience must integrate the perspectives of social production and social construction of space, both contextualizing the forces that produce it and showing people as social agents constructing their own realities and symbolic meanings (Low 2000).

What is meant by the social construction of space and place? Why is a constructivist approach important in the anthropological study of space and place? How do race, class, gender, religion, and other social categories reframe and claim space through active engagement? How are meanings of space and place contested and negotiated through everyday practices?

Readings:


2/26 Social Construction of Space (continued) Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality (Joana, Gabriel, Piper, Kelly)

3/5 Social Production of Space: History, Political Economy, Planning and Power (Amy, Jacob, Miranda, Dionne)

The social production of space includes all those factors—social, economic, ideological, and technological—that result, or seek to result, in the physical creation of the material setting. As part of an overall anthropological theory of space and place it refers to a materialist emphasis on historical emergence and the political and economic formation of space. Henri Lefebvre (1991) is best known for his theorization of this area, however, there are other theorists who have contributed, including many anthropologists who use ethnographic research to uncover cultural, historical, and sociopolitical processes that produce spatial configurations and meanings.

Theories of the social production of space focus on the social, political, and economic forces that produce space, and conversely the impact of socially produced space on social action. Much of the important work has been written by Marxist and cultural geographers (Smith 1990, Harvey 2003), and urban sociologists (Zukin, Logan and Molotch), historians (King, Blackmar), and anthropologists. This section focuses mostly on the contributions of anthropologists to this endeavor, especially in terms of the political economy and histories of the built environment and spatial configurations of (post)colonial towns and cities. Two of the articles (Mitchell and Staeheli, geographers, and Holston) also emphasize the role of planning in social production.

What is the social production of space? Why is this a critical component of understanding space and place? How is a built environment or spatial configuration “produced and reproduced”? What is the role of government, the market, the global economy, political and social relationships, ideology, and planning and design? Is it useful (or not) to analyze social production separately from social construction?
Readings:


Suggested Reading:


3/12 Language and Space, Discursive Space (Karen, Carolina, Robin, Matt)

In a letter that accompanied the publication of “Proxemics” (Hall 1968) Dell Hymes (1968) criticizes the use of linguistic theory to understand body space. He comments that if current linguistic theory was taken as model, it would not place primary emphasis on phonological units, but on grammatical relationships, and chides linguists for not undertaking transcultural proxemic ethnography as well as transcultural descriptive linguistics. More recent critiques of the use of language models dispute whether experience can be studied at all, because experience is mediated by language, and language itself is a representation. This tension between “language” and “experience” and the subsequent dominance of semiotics over phenomenology is resolved by Paul Ricoeur (1991) in this argument that language is a modality of being-in-the-world, such that language not only represents or refers, but “discloses” our being-in-the-world (Csordas 1994:11).

Alessandro Duranti (1992) corrects these omissions through his empirical investigation of the inter-penetration of words, body movements, and lived space in interactional practice in Western Samoa. He examines the sequence of acts that include bodily movements in ceremonial greeting, explicating that the words used cannot be fully understood without reference to such movements (Duranti 1992).
Further, both the performance of ceremonial greetings and the interpretation of words are understood as located in and at the same time constitutive of the socio-cultural organization of space inside the house (Duranti 1992). His theory of “sighting” embodies language and space through “an interactional step whereby participants not only gather information about each other and about the setting but also engage in an negotiated process at the end of which they find themselves physically located in the relevant social hierarchies and ready to assume particular institutional roles” (Duranti 1992: 657). In his analysis, Duranti reinterprets proxemics within a linguistic model that includes language, spatial orientation, and body movement.

What is the relationship of language to space—theoretically, culturally, and materially? How do linguistic models influence the way we think about and study space? How does “talk” and other forms of everyday discourse transform space? How do other discursive practices reconfigure the physical environment and its interpretation? What is meant by discourses of the city in terms of urban planning and design?

Readings:


Low, Setha (2003) “The Edge and the Center: Gated Communities and The Discourse of Fear”. In Anthropology of Space and Place, S. Low and D. Lawrence-Zuiga, eds. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell.


3/19 Translocal/Transnational Space (Rocio, Christian, Hunter)

I use the term Atransnational spaces@ to encompass global, transnational, and translocal spatial transformations produced by the economy of late capitalism, focusing on people on the move and identify three approaches to defining how space has been
transformed:

1) Global spaces—The global economy and flows of capital transform local places, creating homogenized, deterritorialized spaces. These analyses of how capital and political economy produce space and place focus on the importance of the global and informational city, uneven development, and flexibility of capital and labor in the social production of space (Sassen 1991, 1996, Castells 1996, Harvey 1990).


3) Translocal spaces—Globalization also radically changes social relations and local places due to interventions of electronic media and migration, and the consequent breakdown in the isomorphism of space, place, and culture. This process of cultural globalization creates new translocal spaces and forms of public culture embedded in the imaginings of people that dissolves notions of state-based territoriality (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Appadurai 1996).

In discussing each of these perspectives, and their usefulness in formulating an anthropological approach to transnational/translocal space, I emphasize the movement of peoples rather than the flow of capital and commodities.

What is transnational/translocal space? Why does this conceptualization help us to think more creatively about current spatial practices? What is the experience by individuals living in these spaces? What spaces and places in New York City characterize these processes?

Readings:


Ethnographic book review due. Paper should be a 4-5 page critical review
identifying the author’s theoretical and methodological approach, the importance of the findings, and the policy/design implications.

PART II: Ethnography of Space and Place

3/26 The Ethnography of Space and Place I: Unobtrusive Methods--Participant Observation and Field notes, Physical Traces Mapping, Behavioral Mapping, Movement Mapping, Photography and Population Counts

Readings: On the Plaza, Chapters 1, 2 and 7

Chose one of the following texts from the library if you are unfamiliar with these methods that are on reserve in the library:

Assignment: Try out some of the unobtrusive methods such as behavioral mapping, populations counts, and physical traces mapping over the spring break. Act like a participant observer and keep field notes. Bring observations and field notes to class after the break for general discussion.

4/9 The Ethnography of Space and Place II: Ethnohistorical and Archival Methods for the Study of Urban Space

Readings: On the Plaza, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Assignment: Select one documentary method (newspaper article, historical document, map, zoning ordinances, etc.) to pursue and bring materials to discuss in the next class.

4/16 AAG meeting. David Chapin will be invited to give a presentation on photography and video recording.

4/23 The Ethnography of Space and Place III: Interview Methods for the Study of Urban Space
Interviewing—Structured and Unstructured, Key Informant Interviews, Group Interviews, Focus Groups, Transect Walks, Guided Tours

Readings: On the Plaza, Chapters 6, 10 and 8.

Assignment: Develop a preliminary set of questions based on a research
A question drawn from one of the theoretical approaches of the course. If possible, test out your set of questions with a friend or someone from the course. If the questions seem to work, then try out on your site.

5/30 Final Presentations

5/7 Final Presentations (may have to be rescheduled)

5/20 Final papers in hard copy due sent to 46 Landfall Road, East Hampton, NY 11937. Copy must be sent by email to slow@gc.cuny.edu. Email copy is not adequate for grade. Grade is based on class participation, book review, field work assignments, and final paper.