Space, Power, and Politics
Anthropology 2590  Wednesdays, 6:00-8:20pm
Instructor: Parker VanValkenburgh  Giddings House – Room 212

Course Description:
For much of our history, anthropologists in general (and anthropological archaeologists in particular) have been predominantly concerned with studying how societies change over time. Since the “spatial turn” of the last decades of the 20th century and the first of the 21st, however, space has become one of the key foci of scholarship in anthropology and many corollary social sciences, leading to the production of a diverse, expansive, and ambitious literature on the subject. This seminar charts a course through that literature, focusing in particular on the political production of space – from the scale of bodies, to cities, states, and international systems.

The course is divided into three units. In the first five weeks of the term, we will engage with a series of key readings on the ontology and epistemology of space, place and landscape and consider questions that are central to their study – namely, what are these things, and how should we make sense of them? More specifically, how is it that space is produced, experienced, and politicized? After establishing our conceptual foundations and surveying a range of different approaches, we will move on to examine the politics of space at different scales and read three recent monographs that employ quite different lenses to make sense of spatial dilemmas in their respective areas of study – Smith’s The Political Machine, Shabazz’s Spatializing Blackness, and Weizman’s Hollow Land. Having covered analytics and a series of case studies, we’ll finish the course with a final unit on critical cartography. Here, we’ll examine how maps mediate social and political relations and consider techniques and interventions for capturing space’s complexity in the digital age.

A short rant:
The big questions that are worth answering in the social sciences transcend disciplines, and it’s often the case that the best answers to a particular question are offered by people who don’t wear the same disciplinary badges that we do. Today, many of the most creative and thoughtful studies of space and place in the social sciences are being conducted by scholars based in geography departments – something that Brown (and indeed, no other Ivy League University other than Dartmouth) actually has. So, needless to say, we’re going to read a great deal of geographic literature in this course. But we’ll also be reading a good deal of archaeology, social anthropology, and history, as well as some political philosophy. In offering this mélange to you, I hope to encourage you to seek far and wide for inspiration in your own work – to look for the most creative and thought-provoking stuff you can find as you pursue your dissertation research and publications, rather than just reaching for low hanging fruit.
Roles and Responsibilities
This is a graduate seminar, in which you will read hundreds of pages of challenging material each week. The quality of your course experience – and that of your peers – will depend in large part on the effort you put into critically engaging with this material. In formal terms, you will be responsible for completing weekly response papers, leading one weekly discussion, and completing a final research project. To facilitate the final project, you will hand in a prospectus near the 2/3 mark in the course and present a short (approximately 10-minute) presentation in the final class meeting. For the purpose of grading, you can break down your responsibilities as follows:

1. Class Participation (active, critical engagement)  25%
2. Discussion leadership (once during term)   10%
3. Weekly Response papers (1-2 pages each, 8 total)  20%
4. Paper Prospectus (3-4 pages, due April 12th)   5%
4. Final Presentation (10 minutes, May 3rd)   10%
5. Final Paper or Creative Project (15-25 pages, May 17th) 30%

Response Papers
- Each paper should be 1-2 pages long (single-spaced), reference all (or almost all!) of the week’s readings, and provide a critical response to them. Responses should be uploaded onto the class blog – whose URL I’ll provide at our first meeting.
- The purpose of the papers is threefold: 1) to encourage thorough, critical reading of course material, which will in turn improve our discussions; 2) to provide discussion leaders with a foundation on which they can base their class plans; and 3) to reinforce your understanding of the material by encouraging you to formally articulate some of your opinions about the readings and back them up with concrete examples
- You don’t need to write a response on the following dates: the first week of class (January 25th), the date on which you will be leading course discussion (TBD), the date of our final presentations (May 3rd)
- In addition, you may skip your writing responses during two weeks of your choosing during the term.
- Because we will have a total of and TWO random dates of your choosing
- Additional guidelines will be provided in class

Discussion Leadership
- In week 1, you will select one class session for which you will be responsible for organizing the discussion, in conjunction with the instructor.
- You are free to lead discussion how you see fit, but I recommend that you think about providing a critical summary of the course readings at the outset of the class, that you draw in outside examples (and even practical activities) to engage
the class, and that you prepare a series of questions to spark discussion. Depending on course enrollment, you may be teamed up with 1-2 additional discussion leaders.

- I encourage you to sign up to lead a session on a topic that may be of significant interest to you, so that your preparation for the discussion can serve as a foundation for your final research project.
- Evaluation for this assignment will be based on the care with which you prepare and execute our plan for the class discussion. I will provide you with written feedback.

Course Policies
- Come to class prepared and turn in assignments on time. Late assignments will be docked one letter grade per late day (24 hours), beginning the minute after they are due.
- Don’t mess around with your digital devices unless they’re facilitating your work in class, rather than distracting you from discussion or collaboration. It’s typically quite obvious – and quite distracting – when someone in the room is busy.
- Write to the instructor ahead of time if you will have to miss the class session, as a professional courtesy. More than one missed class will result in a deduction in your participation grade.

Books you should buy

Reading List
Texts listed in suggested order by which you should read them.

UNIT 1: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Week 1 January 25th – The Problem of Space

* Please read these articles BEFORE our first class. *


Recommended


Week 2 February 1st – Space, Place, and Experience


Week 3. February 8th – Spatial Production: Structure, Praxis and Power


Kosiba, Steven B., and Andrew M. Bauer. 2012. “Mapping the Political Landscape: Toward a GIS Analysis of Environmental and Social Difference.” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*.

**Week 4. February 15th - Designing Spaces: Modernism and Crisis in the City**


Harvey, David. 1989. “Chapter 4 – Postmodernism in the City: architecture and urban design” and “Chapter 17 – Time-Space compression and the postmodern condition” in *The Condition of Postmodernity*.


**Week 5. February 22nd - Marxian Approaches and Attempts at Synthesis**


**Recommended reading on Non-Representational and Affective Geographies**


**UNIT 2 – Studying Political Space**

**Week 6. March 1st - Spectacle and Surveillance**


**Week 7. March 8th – State and National Space(s)**


Recommended


Week 8. March 15th – Rethinking Sovereignty


Recommended


Week 9. March 22nd – Architecture and Occupation


**March 29th – No Class – Spring Break**

Week 10. April 5th – Space, Race and Carceral Power in the United States


UNIT 3 – CARTOGRAPHY

Week 11. April 12th – Drawing the Line
Instructor leads discussion: Paper Prospectii Due


Sketch of the “GIS Wars” in the Early 1990's (13 pages total)

Two short articles on Cartography in the Digital Age

Week 12. April 19th – Critical Responses: “Deep” maps, Counter-mapping


Byrne, Denis. 2008. “Counter-mapping in the archaeological landscape.” In Handbook of landscape archaeology. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press. Ch. 59.


**Week 13. April 26th – Evaluating Geospatial Technologies**


Week 14. May 3rd – Final Presentations

Week 16. May 17th – Final Papers Due