

Columbia University
A4337 GSAPP
Spring 2015
Mary McLeod

Friday: 11-1
Buell Hall 300S

Politics of Space: Cities, Institutions, Events

This seminar explores the relation between space, power, and politics in the urban environment from the Enlightenment period to the present. In contrast to some Marxist approaches that see architecture primarily as an ideological reflection of dominant economic forces, this seminar investigates how power is actually produced and embodied in the physical environment. In other words, space and architecture are seen as active participants in the structuring of our daily lives and relations, not merely as passive reflections of political and economic institutions. Two theorists will be critical to this exploration: the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre and the philosopher/historian Michel Foucault. Lefebvre's work, which draws heavily on both Marxism (especially Marx's early writings on alienation) and existentialism, introduced the notion of daily life as a critical political construct. Lefebvre saw the city and architecture as integrally contributing to power relations, and viewed the urban festival as an important strategy in overcoming the monotony of what he called "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption." Foucault, on the other hand, rejects Lefebvre's humanism and emphasis on subjectivity in his analysis of the relation between space, power, and social institutions. Both theorists, however, share a skepticism towards Enlightenment rationality, and both attempt to counter the traditional Marxist/Hegelian emphasis on historical time by placing a new importance on space. The writings of more recent theorists (such as Michel de Certeau, Teresa Caldeira, Mike Davis, Guy Debord, Andreas Huyssen, Elizabeth Wilson, Marshall Berman) will also be examined with regard to issues concerning the politics of space.

Course Structure

The first three sessions of the class will be devoted to a general theoretical introduction. The following ten classes will examine specific aspects of the urban environment—institutions, public/private dichotomies, urban monuments, events—to consider the relation between space and power in actual situations. These case studies will be roughly chronological, moving from those institutions that gained identity in the eighteenth century—prisons, asylums, clinics—to contemporary situations of spectacle and consumption, such as Disneyland or Times Square. The final class will be devoted to the World Trade Center site and contemporary debates about redevelopment.

Course Requirements

The class will be organized somewhat like a reading/study group. All assigned readings are to be completed before class. In addition each student will be asked to lead the discussion of approximately three or four readings in the course of the term (these can be very short, 5-10 minute, presentations). The written requirements include two short essays approximately 3 typed pages, on themes raised by the readings, as well as one longer essay/paper, approximately 10–12

typed pages. This essay can either be an extended book review (critical rather than descriptive—comparative reviews are generally easier in this regard) or else a research essay exploring a theme, space, or institution suggested by the readings. A version of this paper is to be given to the instructor by April 1 or ideally before a related class presentation. A final version of this paper incorporating revisions is due at the end of the semester.

Class Enrollment

Limited to 15 students. .

Class Meeting

Friday, 11-1, Buell 300S

Office Hours

Friday 2–3:30, 306 Buell Hall or by appointment (854-8262).

Seminars

1. Space/Power: Introduction
2. The Politics of Everyday Life: Lefebvre
3. The Production of Space
4. The Clinic/the Asylum/the Enlightenment City of Control
5. Prisons
6. The Public and Private Spheres: "The Fall of Public Man"
7. Monument and Memory
8. Spectacle and Its Critique: the Situationists and Cedric Price
9. Massculture, Women, and the City of Everyday Life
10. Fortress Cities: Los Angeles and Sao Paolo
11. Spectacle and Entertainment: Las Vegas and Times Square
12. Case Study: Rem Koolhaas's Urbanism: Delirium, Sobriety, Cynicism