

The Politics and Poetics of Urban Space

Cross-elective | 4 Credits | 15 weeks

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“The Theory of Other Worlds. Simply put, it said that when knowledge or power went out of this world it did two things: first, it created another place; and second, it left a hole, a door between this world where it had once existed and the new place it had made.” Susanna Clarke, Piranesi

Can the history of the world be written as the history of the methods of organizing wardrobes and their relation to consumption patterns and global trade? What do designs of modern hospitals have in common with the 18th-century sketches of imaginary underground prisons? Can the maze of the bureaucracy be solved or is it designed to infinitely stretch in all directions? If the law were a building, as Kafka suggests, what would be its architecture? What relation does the planning of the modern city have with the history of protesting crowds and techniques deployed to prevent them? This course explores how space is a foundational concept in understanding the contemporary world.

Open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students of any discipline, this course focuses on the theory of space: it explores space as a concept, as a metaphor, as an imagination of an alternate world, and that of realities hidden in dark corners. We are interested in how spaces are imagined, planned, navigated, folded, subdivided and inscribed. In doing so we will find out how the social, political, economic, legal and aesthetic questions of our times are connected to how we act upon spaces, and spaces, in turn, act upon us.

Keywords: Space, city, build-environment, theory, planning

Course Material

UNIT 1

Of closets, drawers, trunks and other spaces of hoarding life

Essential reading

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (chapter 1)

Suggested readings

Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (selections)

Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres I*(selections)

“How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.”

Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*

UNIT 2

Of cellars, taverns, brothels, graveyards and other topologies of encountering darkness

Essential reading

Christopher Nolan: *Dark Knight* (and other cinematic material on Gotham City)

Suggested readings

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Novel)

Giovanni Piranesi, *Invisible Prisons*

Charles Baudelaire, *The flower of the evil*

Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon, or the Inspection House*

Manto, *Kali Salwar* (short story)

“Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.”

— Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

UNIT 3**Of parks, cafes, town halls and other spheres of public reasoning****Essential reading**

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (selections)

Suggested readings

bell hooks, ‘Choosing the margin as the space of radical openness’

David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (selections)

Phanishwar Nath Renu, *Parti Parikatha* (Novel)

“We expect too much of new buildings, and too little of ourselves.” Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

UNIT 4**Of streets, protests, ghettos and other trajectories of moving crowds****Essential reading**

Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (selections)

Suggested Readings

De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (selections)

Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project* (selections)

Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (selections)

“The hallucinations of alcoholics provide us with an opportunity to study crowds as they appear in the minds of individuals.”

— Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*

UNIT 5**Of folds, crevices, cracks and other knots in the soul****Essential Readings**

Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (selections)

Suggested Readings

Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias*

Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (selections)

“The city seems to be a labyrinth that can be ordered. The world is an infinite series of curvatures or inflexions, and the entire world is enclosed in the soul from one point of view.”

— Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*

UNIT 6**Of maps, traces, diagrams and other ways of navigating the labyrinth****Essential reading**

Borges, *Labyrinths* (short story collection)

Suggested Readings

Pandolfo *Impasse of Angels* (selections)

Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus* (selections)

Susanna Clarke, *Piranesi* (novel)

“The worst labyrinth is not that intricate form that can entrap us forever, but a single and precise straight line” - Jorge Luis Borges

“... in the experience of people in the qsar, truth often comes in dreams. It seldom comes in maps. When it was made to coincide with maps, it became the truth of colonization”
— Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels*

Learning Outcomes

Course Intended Learning Outcomes	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessments/ Activities
Space as a concept	Lectures and close reading	In class exercises
Representations of space	Lectures and close reading	Response essay
Control/escape	Lectures and close reading	Term paper/creative project
Imaginary worlds	Lectures and close reading	Term paper/creative project

What to expect in the classroom?

The course consists of 5 essential readings and one movie. Each unit will be spread across four classes. Two will be devoted to close reading excerpts from the essential text and discussion on students' queries/responses/critiques. The other two would be lectures on the theme referring to the essential text and suggested readings.

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Assignment 1: A response essay on one or more readings

1500 words | Due in 6th week | 30 marks

Assignment 2: Attempt one of the following options:

Option 1: A conceptual essay on a real, fictional or imaginary space, or

Option 2: A creative project (sketch/painting/short story/photo-essay/poetry/any other genre) on spaces at the edge of the imagination

1800-3000 words | Due in 13th week | 40 marks

Assignment 3: End-term exam | 30 marks

Grade definitions

Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Value	Grade Definitions
O	80% and Above	8.0	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability
A+	75%-79%	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability
A	70%-74%	7.0	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing materials and originality in thinking and presentation

A-	65%-69%	6.0	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills
B+	60%-64%	5.0	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills. Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills
B	55%-59%	4.0	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of study and reasonable critical and analytical skills
B-	50%-54%	3.0	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials and, poor critical and analytical skills
P1	45%-49%	2.0	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter
P2	40%-44%	1.0	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40%	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course

Session Plan

	Class Plan	Readings	Approach/pedagogy
Week 1	Of closets, drawers, trunks and other spaces of hoarding life	Lefebvre, <i>The Production of Space</i> (chapter 1)	Lectures
Week 2	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 3	Of cellars, taverns, brothels, graveyards and other topologies of encountering	Christopher Nolan: <i>Dark Knight</i> (and other cinematic material on Gotham City)	Lectures
Week 4	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 5	Of parks, cafes, town halls and other spheres of public reasoning	Jane Jacobs, <i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i> (selections)	Lectures
Week 6	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 7	Of streets, protests, ghettos and other trajectories of moving crowds	Richard Sennett, <i>Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization</i> (selections)	Lectures
Week 8	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 9	Of folds, crevices, cracks and other knots in the soul	Deleuze, The Fold: Leibniz and	Lectures

		the Baroque (selections)	
Week 10	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 11	Of maps, traces, diagrams and other ways of navigating the labyrinth	Borges, <i>Labyrinths</i> (short story collection)	Lectures
Week 12	Contd.	Contd.	Close Reading
Week 13	Responses/Reflections		Workshop
Week 14	Responses/Reflections		Workshop
Week 15	Responses/Reflections		Workshop