

GEO 5934-01 – Strange Spaces (Spring 2009)
Thursdays 10:00-12:30
Bellamy 317

Instructor:

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Strange Spaces

A common theme in much of human geography (especially cultural geography, but also areas of political geography – such as critical geopolitics – and economic geography as it makes its “cultural turn”) is a focus on spaces that, although outside the normative space of society, serve to reproduce ideas about social norms. Interest in these spaces aligns closely with the work of people like Edward Said on the role that European images of other, distant spaces played (and continues to play) in our understanding of “The West” and Michel Foucault’s work (especially in his earlier writings) on spaces like prisons and hospitals where societies define their “internal others.” It also resonates with more recent literature that draws on postcolonial, psychoanalytic, feminist, and queer theory to study the complex ways in which power is asserted through processes by which spaces (and their inhabitants) are constructed as both inside and outside normative structures and institutions [see, for instance, the rapidly growing literature – inspired in particular by Giorgio Agamben – on the way in which sovereign power is asserted through the construction of exceptional spaces that are both within and beyond the rules of sovereignty, like the U.S. prisons at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay].

Strange Format

This course will consist of two units, as follows

- **Introductory Unit:** For the first four weeks, the course will have the format of a traditional seminar, with the instructor assigning readings for each week that propose broad frameworks for interpreting the role of “strange spaces” in society. We will do a “book-of-the-week” format as follows:
 - **Week 1:** In *Places on the Margin* (Routledge, 1992), Rob Shields draws in on Henri Lefebvre and (to a slightly lesser extent) Michel Foucault to discuss the role of marginal spaces that define limits, but also essences, of societies.
 - **Week 2:** In *Badlands of Modernity* (Routledge, 1997), Kevin Hetherington develops some of the same themes raised by Shields (in fact, he has a few pages discussing the Shields book), but he works much more directly with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (and its close relatives, utopia and

dystopia). This book will be supplemented by brief readings from Foucault and David Harvey.

- Week 3: In *Geographies of Exclusion* (Routledge, 1995), David Sibley takes a somewhat different approach to “other” (or “strange”) spaces, borrowing less from Foucault and more from psychoanalytic studies that emphasize the ways in which individuals perpetually define and cross boundaries as they define their “others” (and, in the process, define themselves).
- Week 4: In *The Colonial Present* (Blackwell, 2004), Derek Gregory takes yet a different approach. Gregory builds on Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism (wherein the “othering” of spaces as similar but different is used to justify their domination as well as to construct one’s own identity) to understand contemporary imperialist domination.

In short, these four books – all of which have been ordered at the bookstore – more or less apply Lefebvre, Foucault, Lacan, and Said respectively to “strange spaces.” They should provide a bridge between, on the one hand, some core, but abstract, theorists and, on the other hand, the more detailed case studies with which we’ll be engaging for the rest of the semester. There will be a brief paper (ca. 5-6 pages) due at the end of the unit, in which you will be asked to compare the perspectives of the four authors and the concepts that each author uses for explaining the constitution and function of “strange spaces” (margins, heterotopia, spaces of exclusion, and colonial imaginaries, respectively).

- The rest of the class: For the remainder of the class, each student will be responsible for a week during which he or she will assign readings, prepare a study sheet (introducing the topic and the readings), and lead discussion about a specific “strange space” or spaces. Although I will be happy to work with students in picking readings, discussing class format, and critiquing in-class performance (in fact, this last part is required – see evaluation below), students retain full responsibility for their week. For each week of the second unit, I will take on the role of student, doing the readings and participating in discussions. The class will culminate in a final paper, wherein each student will be required to discuss both his or her strange space and one of the other strange spaces discussed in class. This paper should also directly refer back to the theoretical material from the introductory unit as well.
- Special class session: During the last week of February, the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) will be holding its annual conference in Tallahassee (<http://www.aseh.net/conferences/current-conference>). The mechanics of this are still being worked out, but an international team of Arctic environmental historians and historians of science (headed by Professor Ron Doel of FSU’s History Department) will be coming to Tallahassee for an extended period, both to attend the conference and to work on a European Science Foundation-funded project on ways in which state-building in the 20th century intersected with the imagination, exploration, and scientific understanding of the

Arctic. Several of the members of this group will send me papers in advance, and they will lead a discussion of these readings for the February 26 class session.

To recap, the schedule of classes is as follows:

Jan. 8 – Intro class

Jan. 15 – Lefebvre & Margins

Reading: Rob Shields, *Places on the Margins* (Routledge, 1992)

Jan. 22 – Foucault & Heterotopia

Reading: Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity* (Routledge, 1997);
Michel Foucault “Of Other Spaces” (*Diacritics*, 1984 [originally 1967]);
David Harvey, “Dialectical Utopianism” in *Spaces of Hope* (Blackwell, 2000))

Jan. 29 – Lacan & Boundary-drawing

Reading: David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (Routledge, 1995))

Feb. 5 – Said & Colonial spaces

Reading: Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Blackwell, 2004))

Feb. 12 – Michael W. (and short papers due, with exemption for Michael W.)

Feb. 19 – Adam K. (and Michael W.’s short paper due)

Feb. 26 – Arctic history people

March 5 – Sandra F.

March 12 – No Class (Spring Break)

March 19 – Julie M.

March 26 – No Class (AAG Meeting)

April 2 – Jim M.

April 9 – Jill M.

April 16 – Katie B.

April 23 – Howard K.

April 27 (Monday of finals week) – Michael A.

April 30 (Thursday of final week) – Final paper due

Strange Topics

What counts as a strange space? That’s a good question and one that you’ll likely ask yourself as you try to settle on a topic for your week. I’m open to any level of specificity. For instance, if you’re an urbanist, you could pick “the city” or “the street” as your strange space, or something more concrete like a specific city, neighborhood, street, or building. Other potential topics that have come up as I’ve spoken with students have included spaces like the atmosphere, the ocean, islands, the tropics, the Arctic, Antarctica, America, swamps (or a specific swamp), hurricanes, military bases, intentional communities, the kitchen, the road, the university, etc. Some encounters lend themselves to the construction of a space as strange (e.g. a site for tourism or for military occupation) even if, in another context, there’s nothing particularly strange about the space. Since we’re never too far from science studies in this class, certainly the space of the laboratory (or a specific laboratory) would be acceptable. Although I sometimes get

nervous when students want to go too abstract with their case studies (it's tough to pull off well), one could also look at things like the space of the mind, the space of dreams, the space of time, the space of the novel, the space of computer code, or, dare I suggest, even the space of space. I'm not going into this course with preconceived notions of what is and isn't a "strange space," but remember that part of your burden in putting together your week (and in writing your paper) will be to demonstrate that at least one of the "strange spaces" frameworks introduced in the first weeks of the class is an appropriate one for interpreting your chosen topic. Certainly, as you do the introductory readings (which, although not centered on single case studies, are filled with case-study examples), you should be thinking about whether you could apply those perspectives to the space on which you're planning on presenting.

Strange Students

This course was designed with a small number of geography graduate students in mind. That said, it's certainly not my intention to exclude students from outside that group or from outside the discipline. My usual Spring seminar – Place, Mobility, Identity – has, over the past two years, attracted students from American Studies, Communications, English, Humanities, Modern Languages, and Urban & Regional Planning as well as Geography, and I think that everyone has benefited from the interdisciplinary interaction. I think you'll be able to do fine in this course without being an expert on Foucault, Said, Lefebvre, or Lacan. That said, if you can't even pronounce their names (or, more seriously, if the first paragraph of this syllabus makes absolutely no sense to you), you might have some trouble.

Evaluation (nothing strange about that)

Short paper: The week after the introductory unit ends, you are to submit a short paper – ca. 5-6 pages – discussing that unit's readings): 10%

Your class: I will grade you based on the coherence with which you presented the topic, looking at your choice of readings and how you conducted class. Special attention will be paid to how you fielded questions in class; how you related the topic to others' areas of interests; and how, in your choice of readings and in how you led the discussion of them in class, you connected your topic to broader class themes. I will meet individually with you (probably right after class ends) to discuss your performance and the grade that I am giving you: 25%

Final paper: During the Thursday of finals week, you are to submit a full-length paper (ca. 20-30 pages) discussing your "strange space" and at least one other "strange space" from class. Your discussion should revolve around broad themes that emerged throughout the class, and ideally it should relate directly to some of the themes and readings from the introductory unit: 50%

Class participation: A composite grade will be given for your class participation in all weeks other than the week that you lead: 15%

Strange Use of Blackboard

To facilitate posting of readings (and in keeping with the general democratic nature of this class), Blackboard will be “wikified.” By giving everyone in the class “teaching assistant” status, all students will be able to upload readings (the only thing that an instructor can access that a teaching assistant can’t is the gradebook). To add readings, go to the “control panel” and then click on the “readings” tab. Create a folder for your week, and add readings to the folder.

Things I’m Not Allowed to be Strange About

Academic Honor Policy

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “. . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>.)

Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should:

1. Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC); and
2. Bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for academic accommodations and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
97 Woodward Avenue, South
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167

850-644-9566 (voice)
850-644-8504 (TDD)
sdc@admin.fsu.edu
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>