REPRESENTING PLACE

This course seeks to stimulate a dialogue between art and geography. On the one hand, artists increasingly are sensitive to issues of space. Formerly taken for granted as the context in which things happen, artists (and scholars from throughout the humanities) are problematizing space as something that is constituted by connections across distance, by continual transformations of nature, by the experience of the individual in-place, and by multiple subjectivities. This rethinking of space as dynamic, subjective, and multi-dimensional has led visual artists to reconsider whether space can be represented and, if so, how this representation should be achieved. In asking these questions, artists have turned to the insights of geographers who have long been intrigued by problems in the (non-)representation of space and, in particular, its visualization through the map.

At the same time, even though the paradigmatic tool of geography – the map – is an explicitly representational tool, geographers increasingly are influenced by work from outside the discipline that asserts that representation may not be the ideal means for understanding a world that is forever “in progress.” Spurred by this insight, as well as by technologies that are making alternate modes of geographic visualization possible, geographers are turning to the visual arts as a source of inspiration in their efforts to rethink (as well as redraw) the map.

This course seeks to fuse these two lines of inquiry by spurring a dialogue between faculty and graduate students in the two fields. Although most students will probably have some background in either art or geography, others with an interest and a perspective on the changing nature of space, its visualization, and/or its (non-)representation are welcome.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 6: Introductory Class

UNIT I – Space and Place

Several key concepts that will guide this class emanate from human (and especially cultural) geography. The first two weeks interrogate some of the meanings of space and place and begin to explore these meanings’ implications for artistic expression.
Jan. 13: **The Spatial Turn.** Why are the humanities and the arts undergoing a “spatial turn” and what are the implication of the growing consensus that stories are made out of spaces and spaces are made out of stories?

Barney Warf & Santa Arias, eds., *The Spatial Turn* (2009): Chapter 1 (“Introduction” by Warf & Arias) and Chapter 4 (“From Surfaces to Networks” by Warf).


Jan. 20: **Place.** At the root of most efforts to use art to represent (or construct) space is the concept of *place*: locations (or intersections) in space that are embedded with meaning through the practices of everyday (or not-so-everyday) life.


Steven Feld & Keith Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (1996): Chapter 1 (“How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time” by Edward Casey).

UNIT II – Representations

If one pillar of this class is geographic theories of place, the other pillar is artistic theories of (non-)representation and visualization. Thus, the third and fourth weeks develop a foundation in theories of representation, paralleling the foundation in geographic theories of place developed in the first two weeks.

Jan. 27: **Representation, Non-Representation, & Performativity.** Although the divide between representation and non-representational art is, arguably, spurious (since all representations are, by definition, partial depictions and hence partly non-representational), one can still make a general distinction between art that seeks to reproduce an object (or place) as it is perceived in “the original” and art that seeks to do something else, either because there is no “original” to be represented or because the power of art is in its ability to probe beyond face-value perceptions.


Feb. 3: **Representing Place.** Perhaps the place representation most encountered in art is the concept of place as landscape. A landscape is representational in (at least) two ways.
On the one hand, a landscape is a representation of a place (as is evident in, for instance, a landscape painting). On the other hand, the concept of landscape illustrates the way in which a place is itself a representation (as when we say that a place encapsulates a landscape of fear). These points are made by Mitchell and they inform much of the work on representations of place that are considered in later units. After the Mitchell article, however, the remaining readings in this unit turn to the quintessential geographic representation of place: the map. Integrating the readings from the first week of Unit II with those from Unit I, these readings explore the potential and limits as maps as representations, thereby setting the stage for the remainder of the course, when we investigate the potential for developing non-representational (or non-non-representational) visualizations of place.


**UNIT III, IV, & V**

The final three units of the course, each three weeks long, examine visualizations of place that seek to go beyond representation. That said, the goals of these experimental visualizations vary greatly, from those that seek to uncover hidden processes and power structures that underlie specific places (or social institutions) to others that seek to destabilize the very notion of “place” as a fixed entity. Each unit focuses on a specific technique used to generate an alternative visualization (although some of the artists profiled arguably straddle two or three techniques), and readings for each unit include both theoretical essays about the technique being mobilized and profiles (or examples) of individual artists.

For each of these three units, students will be required to either write a paper (8-10 pages double-spaced) or produce a non-textual, visual project. Papers should compare two or more of the artists featured in the unit’s readings, examining how they employ the visualization in question, what their goals are for problematizing place (or space), and how and why they succeed or fail in achieving those goals. Students writing papers are strongly encouraged to seek out additional material on or by the artists in question (e.g. on their websites) and to make links with the literature on place and representation discussed in the first two units of class. Students creating projects should also write 1-2-page summaries explaining their project. Group projects, especially by interdisciplinary groups of students, are encouraged. Over the course of the three units, each student is required to write at least one paper and create (or participate in creating) at least one project (i.e. one can either do two papers and one project, or one paper and two projects). Week three of each unit will be devoted to presentations of projects and papers. More
details on the assignments, as well as division of readings between weeks within a unit, will be forthcoming.


UNIT IV: Using Landscape Visualizations to Resituate Place (March 3, 17, & 24). This unit examines the work of artists who work with artifacts of place to make one rethink the meaning of place. For these artists, place is not so much the object of one’s art as its artifacts are used as vehicles to make an artistic product; i.e. the act of displaying the art is not itself place-creating or, if it is, that's not the artist's main intention. Edward Casey, *Earth-Mapping* (2005): Entire book.

BOOKS FOR PURCHASE

We will be reading four books in their entirety (in addition to other readings). These four books will be available at the University Bookstore and Bill’s under both GEO 5934-01 and ART 5929-01 (prices listed are current best prices for new copies on Amazon.com):


GRADING

The final grade will be based on an average of one’s grades for the three projects/papers. Once that average is calculated, it may be adjusted up or down by as much as one full letter grade based on the quantity and quality of one’s participation in class.

NOTES

- This is an experimental class. It’s the first time either of the instructors has co-taught, and things will almost certainly be adjusted as the class proceeds. Readings for Units III through V are particularly tentative, and may be modified once we get to those units.
- The class schedule on this draft syllabus ends one week before the end of class. Current plans are for an extra class session with a guest speaker to be inserted at some point during the semester, after which all classes will occur one week after their scheduled date on the syllabus. Stay tuned for more details.
- Just as this is an experimental interdisciplinary venture for the instructors, we expect that it will be similarly experimental for the students. Students from art, geography, and other disciplines are expected to come to this class with open minds not only about the substance covered but also about the format that a class can take. Crossing disciplinary boundaries can be exceptionally productive, but it also can be disconcerting. Students are encouraged to bring up any class expectations that seem unusual to them. The resulting discussion may itself be highly educational as we learn each other’s institutional and disciplinary norms.
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 DISABILITY ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation 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:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu