

# CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

## The Cultural Study of Space

Date: Sept 7 – Nov 23, Thursdays | Time: 2:30-5:15pm | Location: Li Dak Sum, LDS 214  
Prof. Xuenan Cao, appointment by email

### Course Description:

Space is personal, intimate, and abstract and mediated all at the same time. What makes a place yours or not? How do we demarcate an otherwise abstract space into concrete places of living? How are the rules and laws that make up our living spaces mediated by new technologies? And ultimately, how to live better through creating places? This class frames the concerns of cultural studies in the philosophy and media studies of space. We will read histories and watch films and documentaries related to how a person experience space. We will learn some concepts about space, but that is not the main goal. The ultimate purpose of this class is to provide a range of perspectives for you to name the politics in everyday space and participate in actions about how we make future places.

### Course Objectives:

- **Comprehension:**  
Explain the key theoretical concepts in the cultural study of space. Describe the connections and differences between these concepts.
- **Analysis:**  
Chose appropriate conceptual frameworks about space to analyze an place, be it in Hong Kong or elsewhere. The student should be able to articulate in written and oral form the following: the nature of the space, the group occupying and interacting in the space, and the cultural processes.
- **Critique:**  
State a social and political issue in terms of space and explain the perceived problems and contradictions.

### Grading:

Attendance and In-Class Participation	25%
Tutorial Presentation	25%
City Walk and Photography	25%
<u>Group City Ethnography</u>	<u>25%</u>
Total	100%

### Course Assignments:

#### 1. Attendance and Participation —25%

Attendance and contribution to the in-class activities are critical components of the course and of your grade.

- It is essential that students complete all of the required readings before each class and be ready to **speak up** or **respond in the Blackboard Forum**. Efforts to engage with peers will also be taken into consideration when calculating the participation grade.
- Each week we will also have at least one session of **guided close-reading**. You are expected to actively respond in this close-reading activity.

## 2. Tutorial Presentation— 25%

In the presentation, you are not only expected to read the article, present the relevant concepts introduced in the article, but more importantly, use your own observations to enrich/revise the article's claim. You can ask questions in the middle of the presentation or invite participation of your classmates in whatever way you choose.

## 3. First Assignment

**City Walk and Photography (Individual)** —25% minimum of 750 words.

In this assignment, you will walk around a space in Hong Kong and take pictures of what you think are the most descriptive details of that space. You will then explain what you have photographed using a bit more conceptual language that you have learned in this class. This assignment includes **5 photos and 5 passages** accompanying each photo. For example, Shatin reclamation park is one space. The Mong Kok night market is another space. In your assignment, you should be very descriptive of what the place entails and how it uses space.

## 4. Second Assignment

**Group City Ethnography (Group)** —25% minimum of 1500 words.

In this assignment, you will form a group of 2-4 people, find a theme and then walk around Hong Kong to take pictures illustrative of that theme. You will then explain why a certain theme is important to you, and then show the **8-15 relevant photos and the argument that your photographs illustrate**. The photos themselves should have a narrative thread that exemplifies your understanding of theme. For example, narrow apartment building could be a theme. Another example of theme could be appropriated public space (such as parks). Waste, boundaries, and homelessness are other examples of themes.

In both assignments, you need to articulate the nature of the space studied, the nature of the group, and the nature of the cultural processes.

# Weekly Agenda

## Introduction

- **September 7**

Why study space and culture?

-Power from above (James Scott, *seeing the city like a state*)

-Resistance from below

-The mid-level structures (above street level and below the tops of skyscrapers: power grids, traffic signs, upstairs bookstores)

The cycle of learning: from concept to active experimentation, then to reflective observations of theory in local context.

Activity 1: fun quiz on items in the Syllabus. – this activity helps you understand the syllabus

## Theme I: City Walks

- September 14

### Unit 1: de Certeau (The Use of Space)

Reading: Michel de Certeau, “The chorus of idle footsteps,” “Spaces and Places,” “Marking out boundaries,” from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), page 107-111, 124-125, 129-133.

HK case study 1: City on public transportations (we will also introduce the short stories in 黄怡 《挤迫之城的恋爱方法》)

Activity 1: Tutorial group signing up

Activity 2: When do you notice space? What kind of spatial arrangement attracted your attention the most?

- September 21

### Unit 2: Lewis Mumford and James Scott (Space as the display of state power)

Reading: James Scott, excerpts from “Legibility and Simplification,” *Seeing Like a State*, 53-63.

#### Tutorial Presentation 1:

Chen Yi’En, “Telling Stories of the City: Walking Ethnography, Affective Materiality, and Mobile Encounter,” *Space and Culture* (2014): 211-223. The presentation should focus on 213-221, in which the author’s city photographs exemplify de Certeau’s ideas.

HK case study 2: seeing the Victoria Park like the state.

- September 23 (Make-up class on Saturday)

Unit 3: City and Sound workshop

Global case study 3: sound mapping the city

## Theme II: Sharing Space

- September 28

### Unit 4: Lefebvre (Space, Class, and the State)

Reading: Chapter 11, “Space and the State” in *State, Space, World Selected Essays* by Henri Lefebvre.

#### Tutorial Presentation 2:

Ngai Ming Yip, “The Struggle to Create Alternative Urban Spaces: An Attempt by a Theatre Group in Hong Kong,” in *Cities in Asia by and for the People*. The

presentation should reflect on Scott's reading and ask questions such as "how has the state in this case succeeded/failed to secure legitimacy in the street?"

**First city walking and photography due before class.**

- **October 5**

**Unit 5: How can we share space? From Lefebvre to Butler, Massey, and Harvey.**

Reading: David Harvey, "The Right to the City."

**Tutorial Presentation 3:**

Chi Kwok and Ngai Keung Chan, "The Making of Contentious Political Space: The Transformation of Hong Kong's Victoria Park," *Space and Culture* (2022): 615-632. The presentation should focus on page 622-630, where the authors discuss how a 1970s' social movement has transformed the space of Victoria Park.

**Tutorial Presentation 4:**

Ana Gabriela Medina, "Toward a Radical Spatiality: Dissident Architecture Practices in Contemporary Occupations," *Space and Culture* (2021): 97-112. The presentation should focus on page 97-105, where the author discusses how the Umbrella Movement alters the spatial architecture in Hong Kong.

- **October 12**

**Unit 6: How can we share space? From Lefebvre to Butler, Massey, and Harvey.**

Reading: Ngai Keung Chan, "Place-Making and Communication Practice: Everyday Precarity in Night Market in Hong Kong," *Space and Culture* (2018): 439-454.

**Tutorial Presentation 5:**

Xu Wang, Yu Ye, and Chris King-chi Chan, "Space in a Social Movement: A Case Study of Occupy Central in Hong Kong in 2014," *Space and Culture* (2019): 434-448.

**Tutorial Presentation 6:**

Kin-Ling Tang, "Privatization of Public Space: Spatial Practice in the Umbrella Movement," *Space and Culture* (2019): 449-459.

HK case study 4: Mong Kok Night Markets

## **Theme III: Logistics and Borders**

- **October 19**

**Unit 6: Smart Cities: surveillance, control, and borders**

Reading: Keller Easterling, "Introduction," *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (2016).

**Tutorial Presentation 7: (a chapter on smart cities)**

**Global case study 5: the control of NYC**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 26</li> </ul> <p><b>Unit 7: Smart Cities: Unseen Spaces</b></p> <p><b>Tutorial Summaries: what have we learned from all the tutorial cases? A seminar led by the professor</b></p> <p><b><u>Second group city ethnography due before class.</u></b></p>
<p><b>Screening</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 2 Screening</li> </ul> <p>HK independent film, dir. Jun Li, <i>Drifting</i> 濁水漂流 (2021)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 9 Screening</li> </ul> <p>China independent documentary, dir. David Borenstein, <i>Dream Empire</i> (2016)</p>
<p><b>Theme IV: Your City</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 16</li> <li>• November 23</li> </ul> <p><b>In-class presentation and group discussion of your second city ethnographies</b></p>

### **Class Policies:**

**Late Work:** No work will be accepted after the deadline.

**Late Attendance and Absence:** Attendance is mandatory and is part of the requirement for passing the course. Late attendance will result in loss of attendance and participation points. Please communicate with the professor about absences. Absences must be accompanied with a formal explanation in accordance with university guidelines. Each absence will incur the loss of one attendance point. More than 25% absence (i.e., missing more than 3 weeks out of a 13-week module) will result in the lowering of one grade level (e.g. A- to B-).

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Work for which plagiarism is proved will be awarded a grade of zero and relevant disciplinary procedures will be followed with the institution.

**Email Notice:** All students must check their emails for last minute changes, useful information and class announcements.