Spring 2010
Home in America: A Critical Geographic Inquiry

GEOG 383.45 & GEOG 703.89
Wednesday: 10.10 – 13.00
Room: HN 1004

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Description:
This course will explore the geography of ‘home’ in the United States following three broad themes: housing history, contemporary political economics, and philosophical inquiry. The focus on home will provide for a different approach to housing, one that allows for questions to be asked that fuse the built environment and the 'imaginary' or the 'social'. Further we will aim to understand the significance of 'home' as it operates on a variety of scales, from the individual to the nation-state to the global. A central concern of the course will be to think about the current housing crisis in ways different from and in addition to those through which news organizations typically cover it.

Some of the questions we will take up are: What is at stake in the popular reification of ‘home”? What types of contradictions are embodied in the ‘home”? What kinds of social relations and practices are occluded, physically and discursively, in the ‘home”? What does it mean to speak of ‘home”? What are the space-times of ‘home”?

Objectives and Expectations:
The main objective of the course is to develop students’ critical thinking skills so that they are able to coherently grapple with the diversity and dynamism of social and spatial phenomena. Specifically, we will try to make sense of the myriad aspects of what it means to be at ‘home” in America by looking at US housing history, the ongoing economic crisis, and contemporary social theory. As critical and creative thought must be coherently argued in language, this course will be writing intensive, and students will be expected to improve on all aspects of their writing, including grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Moreover, as class readings will be compiled from a variety of sources, it will be of the utmost importance for students to cultivate a sensitive reading eye; so a further objective of the course will be to hone reading skills in order to understand how authorial intentions, semantic ambiguities, and cultural allusions add to and/or subtract from the texts.

Assessment:
This will be a writing and discussion intensive course. All students will be expected to turn in well-composed and proofread writing assignments and to come to class prepared to engage in thoughtful and critical conversation.

Class Participation: 1/3
Reading Responses: 1/3
Final Paper: 1/3
Late assignments will be accepted up to one week after the original due date, after that no credit will be given. Incompletes will not be given except in the case of exceptional and well-documented circumstances.

**Hunter College Statement on Academic Integrity:**
Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

**Required Texts (Available at Bluestockings Bookstore at 172 Allen St. or at Shakespeare & Co.):**


- Alyssa Katz. *Our Lot: How Real Estate Came to Own Us*. Bloomsbury USA. 2009


All other readings will be made available on the course website as a PDF or through a hyperlink.

**Week-by-Week Syllabus:**

**Introduction**

Feb 3 – **Course Overview:** Introductions, Discussion of what is at stake in critically analyzing the home, Discussion of where we want the class to go during the semester, specifically what kind of work do we want to do – Options: Weekly 2-page responses and two 5-page papers OR Weekly 1-page responses and a larger final paper/project OR Weekly 2-page responses and group project OR other.

**Part I – Home and Political Economy**

Feb 10 – **Introduction to Political Economy:**
  Wolff and Resnick - *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical* (Chapter 1)
  F. Engles - *The Housing Question*: Parts I & II
  Recommended: Marx - ‘The Commodity’ from *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*

Feb 17 – **US Housing History:** (part 1: Suburbanization)
  Dolores Hayden *Building Suburbia*: selections
  Setha Low: “Incorporation and Gated Communities” in *Home Cultures*
Feb 24 – **US Housing History** (part 2: Neoliberalism, and Gentrification):
   - David Harvey *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp1-39)
   - Neil Smith *The New Urban Frontier*: Part I (Chapters 3-4, pp. 51-90)

March 3 – **US Housing History**: (part 3: Housing Affordability?)
   - Rohe and Watson (eds.) *Chasing the American Dream* (selections TBA - Chapters 1-3)
   - Bratt, Stone, Hartman (eds.) *A Right to Housing* (selections TBA - Introduction, Chapters 4-6, 8, 11, 12, 18)

March 10 – **Crisis**: (part 1)
   - Alyssa Katz: *Our Lot* (Chapters 1-4)
   - Brett Christophers ‘Complexity, Finance and Progress in Human Geography’ in *Progress in Human Geography* 33(6) 2009

March 17 – **Crisis**: (part 2)
   - Alyssa Katz: *Our Lot* (Chapters 4-Epilogue)

March 24 – **Crisis**: (part 3)
   - Max Rameau: *Take Back the Land* (All)
   - Bratt, Stone, Hartman (eds.) *A Right to Housing* (Chapter 15)

March 31 (Spring Break)

**Part II – Home and Theory**

April 7 – **Social Reproduction**: (part 1: Habitus, Social Reproduction, and Capitalism)
   - Bourdieu and Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*: Part 2, Sections 3-4 (pp. 94-139)

April 14 (AAG) – **Social Reproduction**: (part 2: Language and Thought)
   - Saussure – selections from *Course on General Linguistics* (pp. 1-33, 65-78)
   - Deleuze & Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*: Plateaus 1 & 4

April 21 – **Dasein and Agonism**:
   - Martin Heidegger - ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’
   - Joel Wainwright: ‘Nietzsche contra the real world’ in *ACME*
   - F. Nietzsche - selection TBA

April 28 – **Materialities of Home**:
   - Louis Hyde: *The Gift* – selections TBA (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 7)
   - Russel Hitchings: ‘At Home with Someone Nonhuman’ in *Home Cultures* 2004, 1:2 169-86

May 5 – **Affect and Non-Representational Theory**: (Part 1)
   - Brian Massumi *Parable of the Virtual* – Introduction
   - Nigel Thrift ‘But Malice Aforethought: Cities and the Natural History of Hatred’ in *Transactions in the Institute of British Geographers* 2005
   - Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon* - selections (Chapters 6 and 13)
May 12 – **Affect and Non-Representational Theory**: (Part 2)
Kathleen Stewart – *Ordinary Affects* (All)
Nigel Thrift ‘I Just Don’t Know What Got Into Me: Where Is The Subject?’ in *Subjectivity* 2008
May 19 (Finals Week) – Semester Review/Discussion/Project Discussion