Course Syllabus

Conflict Urbanism

Course Number: ARCH A4890 - 3 Credits

Wednesday 9am-11am, 300 Buell South

Laura Kurgan, Professor of Architecture

Wednesday 1-3

CSR TA, Nadine Fatalehe

Office Hours by Appointment

Technical Assistance Hours TBD in CSR: 654 Schermerhorn Extension

Conflict Urbanism as a term designates not simply that conflict that take place in cities, but also that conflict is a structuring principle of cities, as a way of inhabiting and creating urban space. The theme is topical in light of the increasing urbanization of warfare and the policing and surveillance of everyday life, however, conflict is not limited to war and violence. Cities are not only destroyed but also built through conflict. Our seminar will look at the ways in which cities have long been arenas of friction, difference, and dissidence, as well as the ways in which their irreducibly conflictual character manifests itself in everything from neighborhood borders, to differences of opinion and status, to ordinary encounters on the street. Student work in Conflict Urbanism will take place through a single city or by comparing a series of cities examining the role conflicts of all sorts play in the making and remaking of cities around the world. Conflicts can (and should) be investigated with maps and data, but they often turn out to be propelled or propagated by them as well. Bringing humanistic inquiry together with spatial data and basic mapping techniques will allow us to produce powerful representations as well as challenge conventional narratives of cities and conflict today. Cities will be “seen” through a number of lenses including: mass incarceration, infrapolitics, urbanization of war, language ecology, migration(political, economic and climate), debt, algorithms and surveillance.

Methods and Course Requirements: Students will be required to read assigned texts and discuss these in seminars each week. For a semester long project, work will be multi-media. Each project will center around critical and counter cartographies: mapping as a creative and analytic research tool. For the final assignment, students will create a map(web-based or a series of static images) as well as written reflections, incorporating analogue as well as digital media. (see Mapping Labs below)
**Midterm, Final, and Presentations:** The midterm will be in the form of a written project proposal where students will have an opportunity to get feedback on their a. The project idea, b. methodology, c. a data collection or analysis plan. Near the end of the semester, students will present the results of their work and specific plans for their final projects. These presentations are an integral component of the course as they give students an opportunity to share their findings and explain the decisions they made both in data collection and presentation. This is also an opportunity for students to give and receive feedback before the final project is submitted. The final project will be submitted after the presentations, and be a combination of writing and maps in which students share qualitative and quantitative information about their chosen neighborhood.

**Mapping Labs:**

To support your work on your final projects for this course there are a number of resources available:

For students who have already taken Geographic Information Systems (or an equivalent course), there are tutorials on methods using open source QGIS software, and web-based mapping. Please familiarize yourself with the topics and methods in the tutorials listed below, especially tutorial 6.

If you have not taken Geographic Information Systems, then this class works in tandem with:

**A4407-1, Methods in Spatial Research,** Instructor Carsten Rodin

Note: You may enroll in this course for 1.5 credits, or you may audit the class.

This session A course will introduce key concepts related to work with geographic information systems, and critical mapping. It will meet for six sessions with the following topics. Each session has an associated tutorial to be completed outside of class:

1. Introduction to GIS concepts
2. Working with cartographic projections
3. Making spatial datasets through observation and sensing
4. Making spatial datasets through archival research
5. Cartographic design principles
6. Producing public work through interactive maps on the web (mandatory)

**Grading Breakdown – Graduate and Undergraduate**

*Technological skill is not factored into the grade*

10% Participation

20% Midterm
20% Presentation

50% Final project

This course is part of a multi-year research theme in Conflict Urbanism being undertaken by the Center for Spatial Research (CSR). See past work at c4sr.columbia.edu.

WEEKLY PLAN

Week 1: January 22: Introduction

Week 2: January 29: Cities

Required Reading:


David Wachsmuth, “City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept,” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 87

Recommended Reading:


Tutorial 1

Week 3: February 05: Conflict

Required Reading:


Recommended:

Rao, Vyjayanthi V. Beneath the Tent of a Horizonless Sky, in Conditions Series, e-flux architecture, November 05 2019:
Tutorial 2

**Week 4: February 12 : Maps and Data**

**Required Reading:**

Hall, Peter, *Critical Visualization*, Design and the Elastic Mind, MoMA, 2008. 120-133

Harley, J. B. “*Deconstructing the Map.*” Cartographica; North York 26, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 1.


Tutorial 3

**Week 5: February 19: Spatial Inequality | Mass Incarceration**

**Required Reading:**


Tutorial 4

**Week 6: Feb 26: Infrapolitics**

**Required Reading:**


Scott, James, *InfraPolitics and Mobilizations: An Afterward*
Simone, A.M “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg.”
Public Culture, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp. 407-429

Tutorial 5

Week 7: March 04: Urbanization of Warfare.

MIDTERM DUE.

Required Reading:


Kurgan et el. Patterns of Damage, Beyond Winning the War, Ways of Knowing Cities, Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2019, 94-120


Recommended Reading:


Tutorial 6

Week 8: March 11: Language Ecologies

Required Reading:

Liu, Lydia “Scripts in Motion:Writing as ImperialTechnology, Past and Present.” PMLA 130:2 375-383


Recommended Reading:


Week 9: March 18 - SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Mar 25: Migration (Political, Climate)

Required Reading:


Project Description Link: [http://c4sr.columbia.edu/projects/exitLinks to an external site.]

Video Link: [EXIT - Virilio, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Hansen, Kurgan, Rubin, Pietrusko](http://c4sr.columbia.edu/projects/exitLinks to an external site.)

**Week 11: April 01: Migration (Economic, Remittances).**

Required Reading:


**6pm:** Wednesday (optional) Film Screening and Q&A with Film Director “Not in My Neighborhood, Wood Auditorium

**Week 12: April 08: Algorithms and Surveillance**

Required Reading:


Crawford, Kate and Joler, Vladan, “Anatomy of an AI (Links to an external site.)” (2018)


Other resources:


Green, Ben: The False Promise of Risk Assessments: Epistemic Reform and the Limits of Fairness


**Week 13: April 15: Student Presentations**

**Week 14: April 22: Student Presentations**

**Week 15: April 29: Optional Class**