

## Spatial Americas (UC Santa Barbara Apr 07)

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(Please excuse any cross-posting)

Call for Papers

SPATIAL AMERICAS

April 19-20, 2007

University of California, Santa Barbara

<http://spatial.americas.googlepages.com/home>

ABSTRACTS DUE 1/22/07

A recent article in London's Financial Times (FT) warned its market-minded readers that the "plight of La Paz provides an illustration of how a city's unchecked growth can threaten stability."\* The article went on to detail how El Alto, a "slum" city of 1 million located on a plateau above the Bolivian capital, disrupts business as usual not just with by now familiar complaints of "pot-holed roads, belching minibuses, street vendors and packs of stray dogs," but the radical spatial praxis of its inhabitants.

El Alto, the FT asserted anxiously, is the unruly space of urban militancy that has frequently brought international trade to a standstill with strategic roadblocks—the city sits squarely on all main roads leading to the airport and the country's interior—disrupting the flows of global (mostly foreign) capital. Furthermore, El Alto is the site of protests that have toppled two presidents in the past five years and propelled anti-capitalism candidate Evo Morales to power in December 2005, Bolivia's first indigenous head of state.

It is no small irony then that El Alto translates to English as "The High" but also "The Halt." As the FT ascertained, it is El Alto's adjacency, looming over and dangerously supplementing the seat of government, which is worth noting, indeed worth pausing for.

"Spatial Americas" invites graduate students and emerging scholars (recent PhDs and junior faculty) in the humanities and social sciences to take such pause and present works in progress that engage space (both as material and discursive forms) and spatiality (the

theoretical and tactical processes through which space is produced) in the Americas broadly defined: south to north, precontact to the present, or as part of a comparative study.

A principal polemic thrust of postcolonial theory to date has been the centrality of history—time and its mis/use—in the (re)production of both mastering and emancipatory narratives. But if, as John Berger suggests, “it is space not time that hides the consequences from us”<sup>\*\*</sup>—in other words, space is so naturalized within the historical frame as to be inert if not outright duplicitous—then perhaps we should finally attend to space and spatiality of human being and becoming with the same criticality that has been lavished upon time. This has been the call of the so-called spatial turn in the U.S. academe, consolidated in the last two decades around the work of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, David Harvey and Mike Davis.

For Americanists, neither this “turn” nor the Financial Times’s alarmist report is much news. Space and spatiality have facilitated conversations across time period and case study for some time now, defining the converging fields of American and Latin American Studies. Religion, empire, commerce and natural disaster have all generated a rich palimpsest of spatial relations to investigate and to serve as nodes for hemispheric cross-reference.

This said, we still struggle to place the material and discursive aspects of space in a more meaningful dialogue. How are we to put them together methodologically-speaking? Space is too often treated either as something entirely concrete to be mapped and “explained,” or as pure mental construct, ideas about and representations of space flagged for their “significance.” That space is not static and in fact constantly reproduced is often underestimated as well. But it is in this repetition that space is activated as a category of cultural analysis, leaving room for critique at its less than seamless joints. “Spatial Americas” asks that its participants self-consciously attempt to work out in their presentations an architectonics for this dialogue between the material and discursive and envision spatial cultures critically.

Please send abstracts (500 words or less) for a 20-minute presentation along with a short bio and contact information (name, affiliation, phone and e-mail address) to George Flaherty and Amara Solari at [spatial.americas@gmail.com](mailto:spatial.americas@gmail.com) by January 22, 2007. Authors of accepted papers will be notified by February 5, 2007 and must agree to submit a draft to their panel moderator by April 16, 2007. Questions about the conference may also be directed to [spatial.americas@gmail.com](mailto:spatial.americas@gmail.com).

Conference website:

ArtHist.net

<http://spatial.americas.googlepages.com/home>

Notes:

**Hal Weitzman, "Held to Ransom in the Sporadic Siege of the Bolivian State" *Financial Times* (September 12, 2006)**

\* John Berger, *The Look of Things* (1972)

"Spatial Americas" is sponsored by the UCSB History of Art & Architecture Department

Reference:

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