

**CULS5415: City Imaginaries and Cinema Poetics**  
**The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2025-26 Term 1)**  
**Fridays, 6.45-9.30pm,**  
**Hui Yeung Shing Building (HYS), G01 (G/F)**

Dr Chieng Wei Shieng  
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Medium of Instruction: English  
Teaching Assistant: To be confirmed.

This course explores the multiple ways of seeing and relating to cities, more specifically, how they have been seen thus far through cinema(tic) aesthetics and poetics. While imaginaries of cities often seem to take a cinematic or visual expression, this course would also like to explore how images, imaginations and imaginaries, as well as cinema(tic) poetics are more than merely translating cities into visuals. Rather, it is also an epistemic process, employing various logics and practices of what we think we know, and how we think cities are, or could be known and imagined. Some such examples include the exercise of framing, implicit and explicit hierarchies that shape or create what one sees (or cannot see), as well as through sounds and our affinities with 'nonhumans'.

In so doing, this course also engages with a range of questions, such as, what are some of the ways cities have been imagined and expressed? How and whose cities are imagined and visualised? For whom are these cities? What are the possible relations between imaginaries, visualising, seeing and thinking about cities? This would be done through four broad aspects, namely 1. Urban Materi(e)alities, 2. Urban Aesthetics, 3. Urban Underbellies and 4. Urban Futurities.

These explorations and questions would also see us move across various geographies mostly in (but not exclusively to) Asia (including South and Southeast Asia), as we engage with artworks and exhibitions, creative literary works, film, and music in relation to cities' spaces and architecture, groups of communities as well as the nonhuman and technologies. Classes would usually consist of a lecture overview on the topic at hand alongside that week's readings, accompanied by discussions within small groups on Canva, Miro or Padlet. This would be followed by group-led presentations and discussions on the recommended readings each week. There would also be 1-2 compulsory field trips/outings.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- To be made conscious of, and be able to articulate various theories and logics of how and why cities are being visualised and expressed
- To be acquainted with, and explain how different artistic, aural, media and technological modes/poetics visualise and complicate various aspects and conditions of cities
- To be cognisant of one's own urban and cultural location, and bring them into comparative conversations with other cities and perspectives covered in the course

**Assessment:**Class Attendance and Participation: 10%

You are expected to read the readings, and express your own thoughts and questions relevant to the readings. This would translate to your contribution during class discussions in a small group you would be with during this course. Members of each small group would take turns to be called upon during class to share your group's discussions or questions. The questions I am looking for are not 'yes/no' questions, or general questions (eg. what is film noir, what are some famous hyperbuildings, etc.) that can be quickly answered by searching online. Rather, the questions and comments should come from how you have understood the reading, what you may not still understand, or in relation to the ideas/concepts and argument of the readings.

If you have difficulties understanding the readings, you could use AI translation tools (eg. DeepL, etc.) to translate the article from English to Chinese (unfortunately as of now, there is no Cantonese). The translation is not perfect, but you may be able to get an initial and broad understanding of the article, and at least what the article is trying to say. However, please be prepared that you may need to go back and forth between reading the AI-translated Chinese text and checking it again with the article in English.

Link to DeepL: <https://www.deepl.com/en/translator/files>

Group-led presentation and facilitation of discussion

(15mins presentation + 10mins discussion): 20%

Starting **26 Sept 2025** (after add-drop period), each group of students would present one of the recommended readings to the class, as well as facilitate a discussion each week.

The presentation would focus on: 1) What are some of the key ideas, concepts and arguments of the article about the city and its expressions, in relation to the week's topic/theme, and 2) Choose an example not mentioned in that week's readings, and discuss how these ideas and concepts engage with your example, how your example may also highlight some new insights, or possible challenges/limitations of these ideas and concepts.

Critical Reflection piece (500-600 words and 1-2 images of an artwork): 25%

Choose and comment on a piece of creative cultural text from Asia (including South Asia and Southeast Asia), which could be a short film clip, poster, advertisement, short segment from a song, part of a novel/short story, an artwork, social media video or image, short video game scene or clip, etc. If you are not too sure whether your chosen Asian cultural text is ok, please feel free to ask me.

Your critical reflection should be related to one idea/concept/theory covered in the course, in relation to the city and cinema poetics. However, your reflection should not be just about the description of your creative artwork or the idea/concept/theory, or what you like and do not like. Rather, it should briefly state your understanding of the idea/concept/theory in your own words, how and why you think this idea/concept/theory is relevant to the analysis of your chosen cultural text, and how this cultural texts illustrates, expands and/or challenges the idea/concept/theory.

In other words, this short critical reflection piece should demonstrate your understanding of the reading through the links and connections between your chosen

Asian creative cultural text and the reading's idea/concept/theory you have chosen. You can include 1-2 images to your reflection piece, but it would be great if these images are part of your analysis, rather than just serving as mere references images.

Submission deadline is **13 October 2025 (Monday), 2359hours/11.59pm** on Blackboard.

Final Assignment: 40%, and Final Presentation: 5%

You can choose if you would like to write a final essay (individual) OR a group project that would produce a creative work.

A **summary** of the proposed project (no more than 1 A4 page, either in point-form or short paragraphs) should be submitted by **28 October (Tuesday), 12pm**, on Blackboard for the final assignment consultation in-class session on 30 October.

Final assignment deadline is **30 November, 2359hrs/11.59pm**, to be submitted via Blackboard.

- Final Essay (5000-6000 words in English, excluding references):

You are expected to choose an Asian cultural text alongside 2-3 readings' ideas/concepts in relation to this course's topics and its readings, and conduct an analysis of your cultural text with your chosen ideas and concepts. Your essay should reflect your understanding of these readings and their key concepts/ideas, as well as how your close and concrete analysis of your chosen Asian cultural text engages with these ideas/concepts.

- Group Project:

In your group (group size subject to confirmation, depending on class size), you and your group members are to produce a creative work (eg. original or re-interpreted short story/poem/song lyrics between 1500-2000 words; short film of no more than 4 minutes; photography; curated online exhibition; artwork, etc.).

The conceptualisation of this creative work would be inspired by 2-3 ideas/concepts from and related to this course's reading materials discussed in different classes. The creative work would also build on, elaborate and/or challenge these chosen ideas/concepts. This creative work would be accompanied by an essay between 3500-4000 words, explaining and elaborating what were the ideas/concepts and readings that inspired your creative work, demonstrate an understanding of these readings and their ideas/concepts, as well as the links made between the readings and your creative work. It should also explain how these ideas/concepts and readings have informed your decisions and process in the production of your creative work.

The paper and creative artwork would be graded based on the group's understanding, depth of engagement with, and explanation of their chosen ideas/concepts, and the suitability of the artwork in engaging with these ideas/concepts about the city and cinema(tic) poetics.

## Academic Ethics

You are expected to abide by the university's principles and regulations on academic honesty. Please take some time to familiarise yourself with the information on the following webpage: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

Violations such as plagiarised papers or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form. These will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited.

I allow the use of AI tools for this course for translations of readings (eg. DeepL), or checking the grammar of your writing (eg. Grammarly). **However, the use of AI to create content in any of your written assignments would have to be declared in your essay, and how AI has contributed to your content.** You should **keep a record of your AI sessions** (including screenshots of prompts and content created by the AI, as well as the time and date of these entries). You should also **cite the AI in your essay and bibliography.**

All written assignments must be accompanied by a VeriGuide receipt, a signed declaration acknowledging your awareness of and subscription to the university's policies and regulations on academic integrity. Written assignments submitted without a VeriGuide receipt will not be accepted and graded.

If you are in doubt about an assignment with a possible violation, please feel free to consult me.

**Course Schedule:****1. URBAN MATERI(E)ALITIES****Week 1 (5 Sept): Introduction Lecture**

- Abdoumalig Simone and Edgar Pieterse, "Chapter 1: Paradoxes of the Urban", in *New Urban Worlds: Inhabiting Dissonant Times*, pp. 1-30 (Polity Press, London, 2017).

Please also read through this course outline document.

**Week 2 (12 Sept): Seeing Cities through logics and textures**

Required:

- James C. Scott, "Chapter 2: Cities, People and Language" and "Chapter 3: Authoritarian High Modernism", in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*, pp. 53-63, 72-83 and pp. 87-102 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

Recommended:

- Maria Helena B.V. da Costa, "Chapter 4: A Loud Cinematic City: Recife's Motion Condition in *Neighbouring Sounds*", in *Urban Latin America: Images, Words, Flows and the Built Environment*, edited by Bianca Freire-Medeiros and Julia O'Donnell, pp. 69-90 (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

**Week 3 (19 Sept): Seeing the Cities through Gods and the Ground**

Required:

- Thongchai Winichakul, "Chapter 1: Indigenous Space and Ancient Maps" and "Chapter 2: The Coming of a New Geography", in *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, pp. 20-36 and pp. 47-56 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).

Recommended:

- Abdoumalig Simone, "Chapter 5: The Politics of Increments in Collective Urban Action", in *Routledge Handbook of Urbanisation in Southeast Asia*, edited by Rita Padawangi, pp. 64-74 (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).
- Xixi, *Marvels of a Floating City*, translated by Eva Hung, pp. 1-28 (Renditions Paperback, 1997). Also available here in English: <https://www.ourxixiourcity.com/en/3-texts-by-xixi/marvel-of-a-floating-city/> and Chinese: <https://www.ourxixiourcity.com/西西作品及簡介/浮城誌異>

## Week 4 (26 Sept): Underground and Island-Cities

Required:

- Stephen Graham, "Chapter 12: Basement/Cellar: Urban Undergrounds" and "Chapter 14: Bunker/Tunnel: Subsurface Sanctuaries", in *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers* (London and New York: Verso, 2016)

Recommended:

- Sean Martin-Iverson, "The Value of the Underground: Punk, Politics and Creative Urbanism in Bandung, Indonesia", *Cultural Studies* 35, no. 1 (2021): 110-135
- Louis Lo, "Always Liminal, always in Transition: Hong Kong as Staircase City", *Shima* 16, no. 1 (2021): 225-255

## 2. URBAN AESTHETICS

### Week 5 (3 Oct): Architecture and Urban Desires

Required:

- Ong Aihwa, "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty", in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of being Global*, edited by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, pp.205-226 (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

Recommended:

- Loo Yat Ming, "Chapter 4: Duplicating Colonial Identification-KLCC and Putrajaya", in *Architecture and Urban Form in Kuala Lumpur: Race and Chinese Spaces in a Postcolonial City*, pp.75-108 (England and USA: Ashgate).
- Michael Herzfeld, "The Blight of Beautification: Bangkok and the Pursuit of Class-Based Urban Purity", *Journal of Urban Design* 22, no. 3 (2017): 291-307

### Week 6 (10 Oct): Sounds and Colours of Cities

Required:

- Lin Feng, "Old Shanghai and Film Noir Cross Over", in *Renegotiating Film Genres in East Asian Cinemas and Beyond*, edited by Lin Feng and James Aston, pp. 217-246 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Recommended:

- James Zuhri, "Traversing the Urban Soundscape: Black Sonic Geographies within the Minneapolis Sound", *Antipode* (2024): 1-26
- Katrina Macapagal, "Chapter 8: Sounds of Youth-the Production of Noise and Chronotopes of Performance in *Respeto*", in *Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema*, pp.156-174 (Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

## Week 7 (17 Oct): Art in a Nocturnal City

A visit to Greg Girard's Screening of *HK:PM* at M+ Facade (to be confirmed)

Required:

- Nick Dunn, "Dark Practices: Sensing the City After Dusk", in *Urban Nightlife and Contested Spaces: Cultural Encounters After Dusk*, edited by Brandellero, Sara, Kamila Krakowska Rodrigues and Derek Pardue, Vol. 13, 21–36 (Amsterdam University Press, 2025).
- Julie Peteet, "The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996): 139–159.

### 3. URBAN UNDERBELLIES

## Week 8 (24 Oct): Disabling and Queering the City

Required:

- Sara Ahmed, "Disorientation and Queer Objects", in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, pp. 157-179 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006)

Recommended:

- Radhika Govindrajan, "Chapter 6: The Bear Who Loved a Woman-the Intersection of Queer Desires", in *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*, pp. 146-172 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018)
- Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, "Chapter 5: Always, Blind and Silenced- Disability Discourses in Contemporary South Korean Cinema", in *Movie Minorities: Transnational Rights Advocacy and South Korean Cinema*, pp. 105-123 (Rutgers University Press, 2021)

## Week 9 (31 Oct): Final Assignment Consultations

## Week 10 (7 Nov): Nonhumans and the City

Required:

- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Part I Interlude: Smelling, Chapter 11: Life of the Forest" and "Chapter 13: Resurgence", in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, pp. 45-52, and pp.179-190 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Recommended:

- Randy Malamud, "Chapter 1 Introduction: Framed Animals", in *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture*, pp. 1-21 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
- Cajetan Iheka, "Chapter 1: Waste Reconsidered: Afrofuturism, Technologies of the Past, and the History of the Future," In *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics*, pp. 26-63, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

### Week 11 (14 Nov): Labour, Ghosts and Movements of the Invisible

Visit to Tsim Sha Tsui Mosque and/or Sham Shui Po district during the evening or weekend (15 or 16 November); to be confirmed.

Required:

- Parthiban Muniandy, "Chapter 2: Life in the Kongsì Settlements of KL and Penang", in *Ghost Lives of the Pendatang: Informality and Cosmopolitan Contaminations in Urban Malaysia*, pp. 21-67 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)
- Yun, Jieheerah. "Seoul's Nocturnal Urbanism: An Emergent Night-Time Economy of Substitute Driving and Fast Deliveries." *Urban Studies* (Edinburgh, Scotland) 59, no. 6 (May 1, 2022): 1238–1254.

## 4. URBAN FUTURITIES

### Week 12 (21 Nov): Technology(-Orientalism) and Futures of/for the City

Film screening of *The Long Walk* (2019), by Laotian film maker, Mattie Do

Required:

- David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu. "Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction", in *Techno-Orientalism*, pp. 1–20 (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

### Week 13 (28 Nov): Final Group Presentations



**Grading Rubric:****A (Exceptional):**

The paper or project greatly exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented not only about the chosen example but also about the concepts used. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the concepts used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the concept and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organised. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**A- (Outstanding):**

The paper or project exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organised. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**B+ (Very Good):**

The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is coherently organised. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**B (Good):**

The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example could have been developed further. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**B- (More than Satisfactory):**

The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**C+ (Satisfactory):**

The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a basic understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is slightly coherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**C, C- (Fair):**

The paper or project barely meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used are vaguely elaborated. The paper or project fails to display a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is virtually understandable. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**D+, D (Pass):**

The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. No additional insights are presented about the chosen example or the theory used on top of what was discussed in class. The language used to explain the theory and its application are almost incomprehensible. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example is irrelevant. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**F (Fail):**

The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. The language and writing are poor. The chosen example is irrelevant. The theory used was not covered in class. The paper or project may have been submitted long past the deadline.