

Digital Literary Studies: The Map of the City that Is this Novel

<http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/map-city-novel-2016/>

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Tuesdays & Thursdays, 16:55–18:10

Office hours: Wednesdays, 14:00–16:00, 244 Greene, 506

Course description

What is the relationship between the city and the novel? A century ago, the pioneers of American sociology in Chicago often looked to literature for inspiration. Later authors returned the favor in showing sociological influences in their own urban imaginations. This class returns to this old push and pull with a distinct, contemporary spin. Three units — one on reading about the city, one on reading novels about the city, and one on making maps of the city as revealed in the novels — make up the semester and push us toward our goal of visualizing what the relationships between city and novel were, are, and could be. The maps we make will be digital, but no previous experience in programming or mapping is required. Students will learn everything during the semester, and they will be able to make their own maps and draw spatial conclusions about textual works for their final projects. The novels we read will be American works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and they will focus geographically on the U.S. as well. The early sociological texts will be supplemented by more contemporary writings on the city as well as texts from the digital mapping debates in the field of geography.

Goals of the course

- to introduce you to general concepts bridging sociology and literary criticism through the objects of the city and the novel as well as concepts pertaining to the geospatial digital humanities and qualitative GIS;
- to develop skills in
 - reading analytical and literary texts as well as geographic data sources and maps,
 - writing analyses that are cogent and syncretic, making use of the various methods on hand, and
 - creating (as well as using and distributing) geospatial datasets, GISes, and cartographic visualizations of the former; and
- to develop, refine, and present scholarship that exists, spatially and temporally, beyond the boundaries of the course.

Novels available at NYU BookCenter (hardcopies required)

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 1920 (Modern Library).

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 1925 (Mariner).

Teju Cole, *Open City*, 2012 (Random House).

Rachel Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, 2014 (Scribner).

Course requirements & policies

Assessment

CLASS PARTICIPATION (20–60%): The success of any course is directly related to the levels of engagement brought both by the instructor and the students. As such, class participation is vitally important. Similarly, though attendance is logically required for class participation, it is not sufficient. This class requires active participation both inside the classroom and outside. No “passive consumers,” as a professor of mine put it.

You can miss up to three meetings without penalty, and you can use these opportunities tactically, to provide space and time to either fulfill other obligations or recuperate from the previous night. I don’t care why you didn’t come. I start to care with the fourth absence, and I start to require documentation. Repeated unexcused absence quickly gobbles up the class participation component of the grade and begins to threaten your ability to even *pass* the course.

Because this course is discussion-oriented, active participation means, most importantly, participating in the discussions in class. But useful and engaged participation in discussions also depends on good preparation, which includes doing the reading for the course. I encourage (but will not collect) you to think of one or two points of entry into a discussion of a text for each meeting. This could be a point of confusion (don’t be shy!), a point of comparison/contrast between passages to another work, or a useful parallel to something outside the coursework. Come to class with questions, in other words, and writing them out as mini-prompts may be especially helpful.

DÉRIVE PROJECT (20–60%): You will undertake two dérives during the semester. The first will be at the end of the first unit, and the second will be at the end of the second unit. In the first, your starting point will be assigned completely at random. The second will begin with a randomly chosen point from one of the novels we have read. In both, you will get lost in Manhattan (and beyond?), while also documenting and tracking yourself.

In order to direct your dérive, you will use either an app for your smartphone or a set of cards printed out ahead of time. In order to track the dérive, you are required to trace your path and take notes on a Field Papers atlas and, if possible, track yourself using GPS.

During the course of the dérive, which can last hours, you should reflect on the readings we have already done for the class, both in what you observe while getting lost, but also in the process of getting lost itself.

At the end, you will write up a short (1,100–1,250 words) report in Markdown for each dérive, including textual references from our readings. The report will be joined by a polyline shapefile of your journey and the original Field Papers atlas with notes. You can and are encouraged to use other forms of media to supplement the report.

NYWalker (20–60%): This class, similarly to a class being co-taught this semester by myself and Prof. Thomas Augst, will be contributing to a geospatial data collection forked from the one dedicated to New York novels known as “NYWalker” (<http://github.com/nyscapes/nywalker/>). All four novels we read will be geocoded by hand, with the last three done by you and your classmates without substantial direction from me. Each of you will be assigned a portion of one of the novels, and then it will be your responsibility to populate the NYWalker database.

Once you are done geocoding, you will submit a very short (700–800 words) report of the process, including examples of difficulties faced and suggestions for improvements.

FINAL PROJECT (20–60%): For a final project, you will create a digital story about one or two of the novels we read in class that will incorporate both textual interpretation informed by the critical readings we have done this semester as well as an original geospatial analysis of places mentioned in the novel, as revealed by our geospatial database. The goal is to tie together both methods of approaching a novel and seeing how the different methods complement and resonate with each other.

The story itself will be an interactive version of a long paper (2,500–3,000 words) that forms the intellectual backbone of the story. This paper should argue a specific point, using both “traditional” literary modes of analysis (such as close reading or symptomatic reading) and geospatial digital analysis to persuasive effect.

Both the story and the paper should follow standard scholarly guidelines regarding citation.

Policies

ASSIGNMENTS: The assignment instructions, though detailed in the syllabus, may be enhanced or supplemented during the course. If you have any questions about an assignment, you should ask for clarification early. The assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus.

Nearly everything can be submitted electronically. Shapefiles, Markdown texts of *dérives*, and digital stories, of course, must be. On the other hand, anything with a word-count can additionally be submitted during class, printed out. I don't want to deny you the pleasure of dropping a physical manifestation of your hard work on a hard surface at the start of class. The Field Papers atlas from each *dérive* absolutely must be submitted as a physical object.

Late assignments jeopardize both your and my rhythms in the class, so they will be penalized. I will give you feedback and will happily discuss any work with you, but grades should be considered final.

Additionally, grading is variable based on what you feel your strengths are. Each assignment will be worth at least 20% of your final grade, but the upper limit of the grade is set by you. You should email me how you slice up the pie by the end of the second week.

ATTENDANCE: As indicated above, attendance is required. Three absences will be excused without supplemental documentation, and I encourage you to use these tactically. Catching up is your responsibility.

Subsequent absence requires formal documentation. Otherwise it begins to harm your final grade. Though class participation is only 25% of the final grade, extreme absenteeism (more than six meetings missed) may put your ability to pass the course at risk.

Please show up on time to class, as well.

DIGITAL LEARNING: I, along with my colleagues at NYU Data Services, will be exposing you to a lot of new tools and concepts. Our class will occasionally meet in Bobst Library, where we will learn how to use ArcGIS and how to create digital stories that incorporate cartographic elements. These skills are difficult, and both I and the team at Data Services will try to help as much as possible. But please aim to attend each of the teaching classes at the library, in order to gain familiarity with the technology that will come in handy later.

In addition to what Data Services offers, during the course of the class we will also learn how to write digital documents in Markdown, complete with embedded multimedia objects. We will also learn how to use a gazetteer as part of the NYWalker project.

None of this requires special previous knowledge.

ELECTRONICS: Despite the presence of the digital, especially as the class gets deeper into the semester, our time in class is meant as a sanctuary from the distractions of the rest of the world. Furthermore, the class relies on discussion and engagement, and the front of a laptop screen is a brilliant shield behind which a student can hide, even unintentionally. During our meetings, then, there can be no use of electronic devices. Please also set whatever devices you have but aren't using to silent mode.

COURSE WEBSITE: A public website, mostly including this syllabus but with richer bibliographic detail and assignment descriptions, is available at <http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/map-city-novel-2016/>.

COMMUNICATION: Communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process, and this course depends on clear communication in both directions. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, the best course of action is to come visit me during my office hours (Wednesdays, 14:00–16:00, 244 Greene, 506). If your questions, etc., cannot wait until then, then clearly you can also email me at moacir@nyu.edu. I should respond within 48 hours.

This is a new course, meaning that there will be even more unfinished edges ready to scratch someone than in a typical course. We have a collective goal of learning, however, so if the unfinished edges get to be overwhelming, I'll adjust the parameters of the course appropriately. I'm not out to catch you, nor is this course a process of grotesque punishment. Please don't treat it as such.

Once more, with feeling: *communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process*. If you have concerns or worries, please let me know about them sooner rather than later.

DISABILITIES: If you have a disability, you should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. Please inform me *at the beginning of the semester* if you need any special accommodations regarding the assignments.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Please look at NYU's full statement on academic integrity, available at <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in an F and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. Remember that plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intention. Know what it is, and don't do it.

THIS DOCUMENT: This source code and documentation for this syllabus is available at <https://github.com/muziejus/the-map-of-the-city-that-is-this-novel>. The syllabus is © 2015, Moacir P. de Sá Pereira. It is licensed as Creative Commons 3.0 BY-NC-SA, giving you permission to share and alter it in any way, as long as it is for non-commercial purposes, maintains the license, and gives proper attribution. Further information regarding the license, the history of the document, and influences can be viewed at the Github repository.

Readings & classes schedule

Readings that are not the four novels listed above will be available on reserve or by other means. See the list of references at the end for details.

1. The organic, responsive city

This unit is made up almost entirely of scholarly work on the city in general from the fields of sociology, anthropology, and geography. Some texts, however, have a specific literary component to them as being influenced by, responses to, or examples of literary practice.

1. Tuesday, 26 Jan: Introduction, getting-to-know-you, fantasies and expectations, Whitehead, “City Limits”
Thursday, 28 Jan: Park, “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment” (p. 1–12!), Burgess, “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project,” and Wright, “Introduction”
2. Tuesday, 2 Feb: Harvey, “Henri Lefebvre’s Vision,” “The Right to the City,” “The Creation of the Urban Commons,” and “#OWS: The Party of Wall Street Meets Its Nemesis”
Thursday, 4 Feb: De Certeau, “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” “Walking in the City,” and “Spatial Stories”
3. Tuesday, 9 Feb: Latour, “Introduction: How to Resume the Task of Tracing Associations,” and “On the Difficulty of Being an ANT: An Interlude in the Form of a Dialog”
Thursday, 11 Feb: ArcGIS training day. We will meet in Bobst 617. Debord, “Definitions,” “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” and “Theory of the Dérive”

2. The city in the novel

Having read different ways we can consider the city as a process, bubbling with potential, it’s now time to see how (or if) these novels play with what emanates from that view of the city.

4. Tuesday, 16 Feb: GPS, Markdown, dérive omnibus training day. We will meet in Bobst 617.
Thursday, 18 Feb: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, chs. 1–11
5. Tuesday, 23 Feb: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, chs. 12–24
Thursday, 25 Feb: **Dérive 1 due**, Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, chs. 25–end
6. Tuesday, 1 Mar: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, “Ferry slip”–“Tracks”
Thursday, 3 Mar: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, “Steamroller”–“Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus”
7. Tuesday, 8 Mar: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, “Nine Days Wonder”–“Nickelodeon”
Thursday, 10 Mar: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, “Revolving Doors”–end

8. Spring Break, no class

9. Tuesday, 22 Mar: Cole, *Open City*, chs. 1–15
Thursday, 24 Mar: Cole, *Open City*, chs. 16–end
10. Tuesday, 29 Mar: Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, chs. 1–4
Thursday, 31 Mar: Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, chs. 5–9
11. Tuesday, 5 Apr: Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, chs. 10–13
Thursday, 7 Apr: Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, chs. 14 & 15
12. Tuesday, 12 Apr: Kushner, *The Flamethrowers*, chs. 16–end
Thursday, 14 Apr: Esri Story Maps training day. We will meet in Bobst 617.

3. Qualitative GIS

As we wind down the semester, our thoughts turn to how we can synthesize our different approaches to the text. We've read social scientific takes on the city followed by novels that are engaged with New York City (and other places!). In the meantime, we've been collecting a pile of geographic data about these novels and don't yet really know what to do with it. Now, with a few caveats, we'll try to figure out new paths for analysis.

13. Tuesday, 19 Apr: **Dérive 2 due**, Geospatial analysis training day. We will meet in Bobst 617.
Thursday, 21 Apr: Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective"
14. Tuesday, 26 Apr: **NYWalker report due**, Woodward, Jones, and Marston, "Of Eagles and Flies: Orientations toward the Site," Gibson-Graham, "Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for 'Other Worlds'"
Thursday, 28 Apr: Elwood and Cope, "Introduction: Qualitative GIS: Forging Mixed Methods through Representations, Analytical Innovations, and Conceptual Engagements," Pavlovskaya, "Non-quantitative GIS"
15. Tuesday, 3 May: Liu, "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?" Risam, "Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities"
Thursday, 5 May: Class wrap-up and review
16. Thursday, 12 May: **Digital story due**

Calendar for “Digital Literary Studies: The Map of the City that Is this Novel,” Spring 2016

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1. 26.1, 28.1	Introductions, Whitehead	Park (p. 1–12!), Burgess, & Wright
2. 2.2, 4.2	Harvey	De Certeau
3. 9.2, 11.2	Latour	ArcGIS (Bobst 617), Debord
4. 16.2, 18.2	GPS, Markdown, <i>dérive</i> omnibus (Bobst 617)	Wharton, chs. 1–12
5. 23.2, 25.2	Wharton, chs. 12–24	Dérive 1 due , Wharton, chs. 25–end
6. 1.3, 3.3	Dos Passos, “Ferry slip”–“Tracks”	Dos Passos, “Steamroller”–“Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus”
7. 8.3, 10.3	Dos Passos, “Nine Days Wonder”– “Nickelodeon”	Dos Passos, “Revolving Doors”–end
8. 15.3, 17.3	Spring Break, no class	
9. 22.3, 24.3	Cole, chs. 1–15	Cole, chs. 16–end
10. 29.3, 31.3	Kushner, chs. 1–4	Kushner, chs. 5–9
11. 5.4, 7.4	Kushner, chs. 10–13	Kushner, chs. 14 & 15
12. 12.4, 14.4	Kushner, chs. 16–end	Esri Story Maps (Bobst 617)
13. 19.4, 21.4	Dérive 2 due , Geospatial analysis (Bobst 617)	Haraway
14. 26.4, 28.4	NYWalker report due , Woodward et al., Gibson-Graham	Elwood and Cope, Pavlovskaya
15. 3.5, 5.5	Liu, Risam	Class wrap-up and review
16. 10.5, 12.5		Digital story due

References

- Burgess, Ernest Watson. "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project." In Park and Burgess, *The City*, 47–63.
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- Wright, Richard. "Introduction." In *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, by St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, xvii–xxxiv. 1945. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962.