

INTRODUCTION TO GEO-HUMANITIES: Practicing the Art of Cultural Geography

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Class meets Tuesdays & Thursdays / 3:00-4:15 / 543 Sarkeys (Studio)

Readings available on Canvas.

Description

This course gives undergraduate students a foundation in the broad field known as Geo-Humanities. It is a practice-based course, meaning that as a student in the class you will almost always be making one thing or another, an approach known as *rapid prototyping*. As a field, the distinguishing characteristic of Geo-Humanities is that it is the meeting point of geographic thought with the creative arts. What new insights emerge by addressing geographical questions and theories with “alternative” media? The thesis I propose to you for this course, which is also perhaps the greatest take-home message, is that the medium (plural=media) one chooses to work with profoundly impacts one’s conclusions about a topic with which they are concerned. Not only does medium *carry*, or communicate, arguments, but it also *carries out*, or aids one in performing, the research itself. This is an important distinction: that the medium itself has something to do with the conclusions achieved; media are not only communication tools. Curiosity, creativity, passion, and self-motivation should define your guiding psychological approach to this course. You will be disappointed if you are looking for rote memorization, facts, or straightforward instructions on how to do something. For much of this class, you’re the boss.

To prepare students for further study in Geo-Humanities, either as an undergraduate major or for graduate studies, the seven most utilized media in the Geo-Humanities are introduced and briefly practiced: creative writing, (carto)graphics, audio, photography, video, sculpture, and fieldworks. Notice the type of progression we make, from the written word, to sound, to visual arts, to the tactile and performative. Broadly speaking this is a move from the inward-looking, imaginative, and intellectual to the embodied, corporeal, tactile, and outward-looking. Most of these media are, or at least can be digital in nature, and therefore you will practice your basic and more nuanced computer skills a lot in this class, preparing you for many employment fields.

There are seven media units in just 15 weeks, meaning that the thing you produce for each unit will be modest. You will get used to learning the basics and history of the medium as it relates to geography, then conceptualize and carry out a small contribution and share it with the class every two weeks.

Pick a Topic for the Semester

Moving quickly from medium to medium through the duration of the class, you may be asking yourself “what ties all this together?” The answer is: your topical research interest. You, the learner and researcher, choose a topic and/or a region that you’d like to hone in on and study in depth throughout the semester. Each medium, i.e. every two weeks, you approach understanding your topic from a new perspective. Thus, as this may seem like a class in practice (which it is!), it is also **fundamental research training** because you will need to look things up, check out books, read articles, etc. about your topic in order to complete the assignment for each unit. Things will be messy at first because your topical knowledge about your specialty will be limited. But as the term progresses, as you constantly continue researching your topic to produce your media prototypes, you will become quite knowledgeable about the topic that interests you most. Your topic is a launching pad, and the goal of the class is for you to creatively articulate your problem, imagine new futures, and build those visions out.

Project Inspirations

- Geography News Sources—these are in Canvas
 - New York Times Geography <http://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/geography>
 - Royal Geographic Society <http://www.geographyinthenews.rgs.org/>
 - Los Angeles Times Geography <http://articles.latimes.com/keyword/geography>
 - TED talks, Geography <http://www.ted.com/search?q=geography>
 - BBC Science & Env't. http://www.bbc.com/news/science_and_environment
 - The Guardian Geography <https://www.theguardian.com/science/geography>

Some Requirements

- As a three-credit class, you are expected to spend on average 10 hours per week outside of class time doing your readings and projects. You are required to spend **at least three hours per week** working in the Experimental Geography Studio. The reason for this is to participate in and build our Geo-Humanities community in the department and on campus. You will only benefit from hanging around the Studio, as the professor and your classmates will be on hand to answer questions, share ideas, and offer technological help.
- During lecture, I have a **no technology** policy. This means no laptops, tablets, or cell phones. Here is why:
 - Our class time is sacred space. We are on a journey together to build and refine our knowledge about geography. With open laptops and phones at the ready, you *will* be distracted at some point, or worse, you *will* distract others, and at the absolute worst, you *will* distract the professor.
 - Having said this, I love exploring digital technology and building things with it. When the time comes, I will tell you when it’s ok to use your devices in class, when we’re working on projects together, or when we have an open work time.

Grading

I have a distaste for grades. You should be motivated to make simple, beautiful things that speak to what we’re learning in class, and what you’re learning about your topic. Your motivation for learning should be to change the world, not to get some letter grade. You should read assigned articles carefully, thinking about how they apply to you, your journey as a student-

scholar, and what you might say about them in class. If you are genuinely motivated to learn, show up prepared and on-time to class, seek to build community, are a good communicator, and have a constructive, open attitude, then it will come through in your work. If those qualities come through in your work, you will undoubtedly earn a high grade.

To digress: since I am required to give you a grade, you should know that my philosophy on grades is that a grade is a snapshot reflection of *what you actually did at the time the assignment was due*. Were you genuinely motivated to experiment, learn, and challenge yourself? Did you perform and actually do the assignment at a high level? If you can answer yes to these questions, you will earn a high grade. Note that this is not what you thought you might have done, or what you are capable of, or what you tried to do. The grade is based on what you did at the time it is due.

Please recognize that I am usually put off by questions that suggest you are trying to manipulate something to decide whether or not you should expend effort on a given assignment. This goes against my love for, and approach to education. You should always do your best at everything you commit to, regardless of how many points you think it might be worth.

70% -- unit project assignments (7 x 10% each)

10% -- reading quizzes (3 total)

15% -- final article review

5% -- final digital portfolio

1% each -- extra credit

- Attend a Geo-Humanities Tea Hour, or a screening of the Geo-Humanities Film Series. Turn in a 500-550-word essay about what the event *made you think about*, and what *you* learned. Simply describing the event, lecture, or film will not earn you the extra credit point.
- Essays are due no later than five calendar days after the event is completed.
- Event Schedule is here: <http://www.geographystudio.org/events/>
- Follow on Twitter for updates: @geographystudio

A = 93-100

B = 83-92

C = 73-82

D = 63-72

F = 62 and below

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday, January 17

Lecture: topics of concern to cultural geography | outline of course

Thursday, January 19

Lecture: What is Geo-Humanities?

Readings due before class:

Le Feuvre, Lisa. 2010. "Introduction: Strive to fail." In *Failure*, edited by Lisa Le Feuvre. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Thompson, Nato, ed. 2008. *Experimental Geography: Radical approaches to landscape, cartography, and urbanism*. New York: Melville House.

UNIT 1: CREATIVE WRITING

Week 2:

Tuesday, January 24

Readings due before class:

Welty, Eudora. 2002. *On Writing*. New York: The Modern Library; "Place in Fiction," pp. 39-59.

Lopez, Barry. 1988. *Crossing Open Ground*. London: MacMillan.

Thursday, January 26

In class: Reading Quiz #1

Readings due before class:

Maheer, Susan Naramore. 2015. "Great Plains' Vernacular: Why spatial idiolect matters." In *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life: Memory, place and the senses*, edited by Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell and Robert Hudson. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate.

Week 3:

Tuesday, January 31

Readings due before class:

McPhee, John. 2013. "Draft No. 4." *The New Yorker*, April 29, 32-38.

Bauch, Nicholas. 2016. "Listening to the Mojave Desert: A magical confusion." *Association of Pacific Coast Geographers Yearbook* 78:65-79.

Thursday, February 2

DUE: Creative writing project

Readings due before class:

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1991. "Language and the Making of Place: A narrative-descriptive approach." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81 (4):684-696.

UNIT 2: (CARTO)GRAPHICS

Week 4:

Tuesday, February 7

In class: look at digital history/mapping projects

Readings due before class:

Knowles, Anne Kelly, Levi Westerveld, and Laura Strom. 2015. "Inductive Visualization: A humanistic alternative to GIS." *GeoHumanities* 1 (2):233-265.

Thursday, February 9

Readings due before class:

Burdick, Anne. 2015. "Meta!Meta!Meta!: A speculative design brief for the digital humanities." *Visible Language* 49 (3):13-33.

Week 5

*Tuesday, February 14

Readings due before class:

Drucker, Johanna. 2014. *Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production, metaLABprojects*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

*Thursday, February 16

In class: Reading Quiz #2

DUE: (Carto)graphic project

UNIT 3: AUDIO

Week 6:

Tuesday, February 21

In class: Guest speaker Ryan Bird

Readings due before class:

Tyner, James A., Mark Rhodes, and Sokvisal Kimsroy. 2016. "Music, Nature, Power, and Place: An ecomusicology of Khmer Rouge songs." *GeoHumanities* 2 (2):395-412.

Thursday, February 23

In class: Audacity instruction

Readings due before class:

Thulin, Samuel. 2016. "Sound Maps Matter: Expanding cartophony." *Social and Cultural Geography*:1-19. doi: 10.1080/14649365.2016.1266028.

Week 7:

Tuesday, February 28

Readings due before class:

Revill, George. 2016. "How is Space Made in Sound? Spatial mediation, critical phenomenology and the political agency of sound." *Progress in Human Geography* 40 (2):240-256.

Thursday, March 2

DUE: Audio project

Readings due before class:

Kanngieser, Anja. 2015. "Geopolitics and the Anthropocene: Five propositions for sound." *GeoHumanities* 1 (1):80-85.

UNIT 4: PHOTOGRAPHY

Week 8:

Tuesday, March 7

In class: Photoshop instruction

Readings due before class:

Fox, William L. 2001. *View Finder: Mark Klett, photography, and the reinvention of landscape*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Klett, Mark, and Byron Wolfe. 2011. *Reconstructing the View*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thursday, March 9

Readings due before class:

Anais, Seantel, and William Walters. 2016. "Hazardous Material Photography: An interview with Paul Shambroom." *Cultural Geographies* 23 (1):159-168.

Klett, Mark, and William L. Fox. 2011. *The Half-Life of History: The atomic bomb and Wendover air base*. Santa Fe, N.M.: Radius Books.

{SPRING BREAK}

Week 9:

Tuesday, March 21

Readings due before class:

Paglen, Trevor. 2012. *The Last Pictures*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bright, Deborah. 1989. "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An inquiry into the cultural meanings of landscape photography." In *The Contest of Meaning: Critical histories of photography*, edited by Richard Bolton. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Thursday, March 23

DUE: Photo project

Readings due before class:

Cosgrove, Denis. 2008. *Geography and Vision: Seeing, imagining and representing the world*. London: I.B. Tauris.

UNIT 5: SCULPTURE

Week 10:

Tuesday, March 28

Readings due before class:

Jorgensen, Finn Arne. 2016. "The Internet of Things." In *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth, 42-53. Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell.

Thursday, March 30

In class: Reading Quiz #3

Readings due before class:

Jansen, Theo. 2007. *The Great Pretender*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.

Week 11

***Tuesday, April 4**

In class: guest instruction on Arduino technology. Cody Taylor, Emerging Technology Librarian from the OU Digital Scholarship Laboratory.

***Thursday, April 6**

In class: Arduino workshop. Cody Taylor, Emerging Technology Librarian from the OU Digital Scholarship Laboratory.

Week 12:

Tuesday, April 11

DUE: Sculpture project

Readings due before class:

Tinguely, Jean. 1973 [1961]. "Untitled Statement." In *ZERO*, edited by Otto Piene and Heinz Mack. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

UNIT 6: VIDEO

Thursday, April 13

In class: make a video and edit it—Adobe premiere basics

Watch before class:

Biemann, Ursula. *Forest Law*. Video, 2014, 38 min.

Readings due before class:

Biemann, Ursula. 2015. "The Cosmo-Political Forest: A theoretical and aesthetic discussion of the video *Forest Law*." *GeoHumanities* 1 (1):157-170.

Week 13:

Tuesday, April 18

In class: Watch "Substrait / Underground Dailies," by Gordon Matta-Clark

Readings due before class:

Walker, Stephen. 2003. "Baffling Archaeology: The strange gravity of Gordon Matta-Clark's experience-optics." *Journal of Visual Culture* 2 (2):161-185.

Lynch, David. 2007. *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, consciousness, and creativity*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin.

***Thursday, April 20 (UNM)**

In class: Guest lecture by Laurel Smith and Filo Gomez

Readings due before class:

Watch before class:

Week 14:

Tuesday, April 25

DUE: Video project

UNIT 7: FIELD WORKS

Thursday, April 27

Readings due before class:

Garrett, Bradley L. 2013. *Explore Everything: Place-hacking the city*. New York: Verso.

Week 15

Tuesday, May 2

In class: walking tour outside

Readings due before class:

Ingold, T. (2010), Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16: S121–S139.

Thursday, May 4

DUE: Field Works project

Readings due before class:

Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. 1997. *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Your digital portfolio is due no later than **Wednesday, May 10**. Late submissions will be penalized with a substantial grade reduction.

FINAL EXAM

This is a take-home exam, due no later than **Wednesday, May 10**. Late submissions will be penalized with a substantial grade reduction. You do not need to show up to the final exam room at the prescribed time. You have three options for this final exam:

1. Write a full review for the Experimental Geography Studio (EGS) website on one of the items in the online EGS library <http://www.geographystudio.org/library/>
2. Make an expanded version of one of the unit projects you did this term. It is a thoroughly re-imagined and executed version of what you did in the prototype phase.
3. Write a formal design brief for a project you'd like to do in the medium of your choice. While you do not necessarily have to build anything for this option, you are expected to plan out in great detail a robust project that you would do for a capstone, a Master's thesis project, or a Ph.D.-level project.