Maps as Media

Fall 2016 | NMDS 5223 | CRN 6225
Wednesdays 4 to 6:45pm | 6 East 16th St #602
http://www.wordsinspace.net/mapsmedia/fall2016/

Shannon Mattern | matterns@newschool.edu | wordsinspace.net | 79 5th Ave, 16th Floor
Course Assistant: Fernando Canteli De Castro | cantf367@newschool.edu

Maps reveal, delineate, verify, orient, navigate, anticipate, historicize, conceal, persuade, and, on occasion, even lie. From the earliest maps in cave paintings and on clay tablets, to the predictive climate visualizations and crime maps and mobile cartographic apps of today and tomorrow, maps have offered far more than an objective representation of a stable reality. In this hybrid theory-practice studio we'll examine the past, present, and future — across myriad geographic and cultural contexts — of our techniques and technologies for mapping space and time. In the process, we'll address various critical frameworks for analyzing the rhetorics, poetics, politics, and epistemologies of spatial and temporal maps. Throughout the semester we'll also experiment with a variety of critical mapping tools and methods, from techniques of critical cartography to sensory mapping to time-lining, using both analog and digital approaches. Course requirements include: individual map critiques; lab exercises; and individual research-based, critical-creative “atlases” composed of at least five maps in a variety of formats.

Your Contributions:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

We want to make sure we get the most out of our discussions, and that we benefit from one another’s expertise and experience in developing our individual projects. Thus, we need everyone to show up regularly, on time, and prepared — i.e., having both completed the assigned reading and any mapping exercises. You will be permitted two excused absences (“excused” means that you must have contacted me prior to class to inform me of your absence) for the semester. Additional excused absences — and any unexcused absences — will negatively affect your grade. More than three absences, excused or unexcused, will result in failure of the course; if you anticipate needing to miss several classes, you are advised to drop the course. A pattern of late arrivals is likewise detrimental.

I don’t require you to complete weekly reading responses. That said, I still do encourage you to take time before class to annotate the weekly readings and reflect on how they contribute to your understanding of the overarching themes of the course and to your own research and making process. Your consistent presence and regular, constructive contributions — including your participation in our in-class labs — account for 20% of your final grade.

MAP CRITIQUE

We’ll dedicate some time in most of our classes to presenting and critiquing several (canonical/ exemplary/ experimental/ overwrought/ elegant/ etc.) maps in a variety of formats, to see what they do right and wrong, what they illuminate and obfuscate, how they integrate form and content effectively and poorly, and what lessons we can take away from them and apply, or avoid, in our own projects.

Each of you will post and publicly present one map critique — ideally, of a map that both addresses (in a direct or tangential way) the week’s theme and pertains to your semester project. Don’t think of this exercise as an additional assignment; instead, use it to advance your own agenda. To identify a map for review, you might look through the websites I list below; and the books I’ll be previewing in Week One. You could also simply Google
“your project topic” + “map”; I’ll bet you a dollar you’ll find a few options. Please consult with the other presenters for the week to work out who’s chosen which projects. You’re welcome to double- or triple-up on a particular map, provided you each offer a distinctive perspective.

Your **fifteen-minute presentation-and-discussion** should consist of two parts: (1) a critique and (2) a critical-creative application *prototype*. The **critique** should focus on a single mapping project and should employ some of the critical tools and criteria we discuss in Week 3. Your **application** is a critical-creative attempt to apply to your own research project the same effective and/or ineffective techniques used in the map you’ve critiqued. You might choose to exaggerate the failures of that map by creating a parody – or you might choose to try out some helpful features from your critique subject in order to generate mapping techniques that might aid in your own work. Be sure to identify what elements inspired you and why, and how and where we can see those elements’ influence in your map. Your application can take virtually any form and format – from a drawing to a paper prototype, from a quilt to a sound map. Keep in mind that this is only a *prototype* – a rough sketch, a maquette, a “napkin drawing”; we’re more concerned in this context with the ideas behind your project than with your execution.

Before class on your presentation day, please **post your 600- to 900-word text** – which should encompass both your critique and the explanation of your application exercise, along with documentation of your application – to our class website. You should aim to wrap up your formal presentation in seven or eight minutes (I’ll cut you off after ten), so we have time for discussion. And please be sure to have your presentation media loaded/booted /hung/distributed before class begins so we can start on time. Your review is worth **20% of your final grade**.

**MAP LABS + ATLAS**

At the beginning of the semester you should begin to think about a fluid, capacious research topic that you’d like to explore through the maps you create over the course of the semester. Ideally, this topic will pertain to projects you’re exploring in your other classes or a thesis project, to a “through-line” you’ve pursued throughout your academic program, or to work you’re doing in your extracurricular life. You’ll need to submit a **600-word proposal for this project**, via Google Drive, before class on **September 14**. This proposal should include (1) a topic description, thematic overview, problem statement, or research question; (2) a discussion of your topic’s personal relevance, larger critical significance, timeliness, etc.; (3) a preliminary discussion of how your topic might lend itself to spatial/cartographic investigation (i.e., what can you learn by *mapping it*?); (4) a description of the geographic area(s) and scale(s) you plan to focus on in your maps; and (5) a tentative bibliography of at least seven sources (some scholarly publications, some popular publications, some precedent maps, etc.) that will likely prove useful in your research and practice. You’ll share your proposal in class, in an **informal three-minute presentation**, on **September 21**. The proposal is worth **20% of your final grade**.

Each of the maps you then create over the course of the semester should pertain to this topic and cumulatively represent myriad ways of illustrating or investigating your subject. You’ll begin exploring a few mapping strategies in/for our in-class labs. You can then continue to develop these prototypes independently, or generate map ideas of your own. By the end of the semester, you should have a minimum of **five completed maps**, in a variety of “media formats” (e.g., hand-drawn, photographic, audio-based, online-interactive, etc.). You’ll then need to compile those maps into an **atlas, which you can present in whatever format you choose** (e.g., a book, a website, an installation, etc.), as long as you frame the contents as a cartographic set – as five “spatial variations on a theme.” You should make sure to offer some means of narratively or argumentatively navigating through your collection; generate connective threads between your individual maps; and provide critical/descriptive commentary reflecting on the unique medial qualities of each piece in the set (see, for example, how Annette Kim addresses the distinctive features of each map in her “Critical Cartography Primer,” pp. 113-145 of *Sidewalk City*).

Please do not email me five separate files or five separate links, or hand me five separate documents; your final submission should be **one integrated collection**, with all components synthesized and contextualized. If your work consists of analog, performative, or ephemeral media that doesn’t readily lend itself to submission, you’ll
need to share with me some coherent form of documentation. Furthermore, as you compose this synthetic “package,” ask yourself: Do my maps stand on their own? Do they speak for themselves? Perhaps they don’t. Consider integrating prefaces, captions, legends, citations (i.e., where do the data come from?), disclaimers, etc., where appropriate.

You'll submit your project at the start of class on December 14*, and during that class each student will deliver a 10- to 15-minute presentation of his/her work (details to come). Your final atlas is worth 40% of your final grade [*I’m heading to Australia on December 15, so I can’t accept any late work!].

Required Texts:

All readings are made available as pdfs on our course website. All copyrighted material is behind a firewall; you’ll be prompted to enter a username (student) and password (seecritfilez). Not so secret, eh?

That said, you’re invited to purchase copies of the following, since we’ll be using significant portions of these resources:

- Shannon Mattern, *Deep Mapping the Media City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

A few notes about the weekly readings/screenings/listening exercises:

- I believe that we can better appreciate the complexity, relevance, and resonance of each of our weekly themes by approaching them from multiple theoretical, historical, practical, and creative directions. That’s why, for each week, I’ve put together a mini “anthology” rather than assigning a single definitive text. Yes, sometimes those reading lists might look intimidatingly long – but the total number of pages hardly ever exceeds 150 (and a lot of those pages are illustrated!), which is a reasonable workload for a graduate student. Plus, each text on that list is there because it has the potential add a distinctive voice to our conversation (you should see the ridiculously long lists of readings that didn’t make the cut!).
- That said, my selection of a particular text does not constitute an endorsement of it. Sometimes I choose texts that annoy me, or with which I disagree, for a few reasons: because they’re widely cited and I think it’d behoove you to be aware of them, because I want to allow you to exercise your own judgment, and because I’m pretty sure they’ll make for good conversation.
- We will not address all the readings in our in-class discussions. Some readings are primarily factual, some are self-explanatory, some simply present interesting illustrations or case studies; we needn’t discuss these sorts of texts in-depth – but they’re still worth your time. They provide valuable nuance and color that will inform our discussions, shape your own understanding, and, ideally, inspire ideas for your own projects.
The following web resources are worth consulting regularly, too:

- *The Atlantic*'s CityLab links to posts on maps
- The Library of Congress’s *Worlds Revealed: Geography and Maps Blog*
- *Making Maps: DIY Cartography* (John Krygier + Denis Wood)
- *Maps Mania*
- Dee Morris & Stephen Voyce’s *series of posts* on *Jacket2*
- Penn State’s online *Cartography and Visualization course*
- *David Rumsey Map Collection*
- *Mapzen’s Blog*
- *Stamen Design*
- *Strange Maps*
- *Territory Journal*
- *Wired Map Lab*
- Andy Woodruff’s *Blog*
- *My own mapping links*

This course draws on insights and inspiration from four years’ worth of students in my “*Urban Media Archaeology*” studio — and is indebted to Jeremy Crampton’s *Critical History of Cartography* reader; Marisa Olson’s “*Media Studies: Experimental Geography Reading List*” (*Rhizome*, March 20, 2009); RISD’s *Experimental Geography Research Cluster;* Matthew Wilson’s “*Critical GIS*” graduate seminar; and Wilson’s “*Critical and Social Cartography*” course. I must also thank the fellows at the Digital Cultures Research Lab at Leuphana University, in Lüneburg, Germany, where I workshops this syllabus in July 2015; as well as Karen Gregory and Lauren Klein for their helpful recommendations.
Policies and Procedures:

SUBMITTING WORK VIA GOOGLE DRIVE

You'll occasionally be asked to submit your work via Google Drive. Because I prefer to insert margin comments and propose revisions directly in/on your text, I need to work with an editable document (e.g., not a pdf). For this reason, I ask that you please either (1) create your documents in Google Drive; (2) convert them to Google Doc format when you upload them; or (3) upload documents in .doc format, which I can then download and annotate using “track changes,” and return to you via email.

POSTING WORK ONLINE

We'll all create accounts for our class’s blog, and we'll briefly review how to post. You’re invited to post any class-related material – events, exhibitions, news, etc. – at any time, and you’ll occasionally be asked to share your work online. If you're not comfortable posting your work, please don't hesitate to talk to me.

DEADLINES

Assignment deadlines are noted on the syllabus. Late work will be penalized, and extensions will be granted only rarely, and only after consulting with me well in advance of the assignment deadline. Sorry – I know some other faculty are a bit more lenient with deadlines, but I tend to set aside big blocks of time for assignment review, and I provide substantial feedback – so missing deadlines means you miss your “window of opportunity” for review, which is an essential part of your learning in this course (and any course, for that matter).

A student who has not submitted all assigned work by the end of the semester does not receive an “Incomplete” by default. “Incompletes” are assigned only in extreme circumstances, and require that the student consult with me well before the end of the semester and sign a contract obligating him or her to complete all outstanding work by a date that we agree upon.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the University’s academic honesty policy. Plagiarism or cheating of any form will result in immediate failure of the course. No joke. If you have any questions regarding proper citation of sources or other academic integrity matters, consult the University Learning Center.
AUGUST 31: ORIENTATION

Introductions
Syllabus Review

Getting our Bearings
I'll be referring to these texts in class; you're welcome to read them, but you're not obligated to do so!

- Aaron Reiss, “My 5 Favorite Maps: Bill Rankin,” The Atlantic CityLab (September 26, 2014). See also Bill's top-10 list.

References & Inspiration: I'll bring these books to class so we can look through them. I've also requested that copies of (almost) all of these titles be placed on reserve in the List Center Library @ 6 East 16th St.; I encourage you to reference them throughout the semester.

- Katharine Harmon, You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004): maps of the body and spirit, maps of emotion and memory, maps of fictional places and cosmology, maps of air routes and stereotypes
- Nato Thompson, Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2008).
SEPTEMBER 7: CARTOGRAPHIC FUTURES, PRESENTS & PASTS

Field Trip: NYPL Map Division, 42nd St + 5th Ave, Room 117 (4-5pm)

The Mapping Revolution…

- Eva Salinas, with Sébastien Caquard, “The Politics of Making Maps,” Canadian International Council (November 12, 2014) [final section, on how the study of mapping has changed].
- Scott Etkin, “Mapping the Earth and Its Future With Big Data,” Data Informed (March 30, 2015) [on predictive mapping].
- Henry Grabar, “Smartphones, and the Uncertain Future of Spatial Thinking,” The Atlantic’s CityLab (September 4, 2014) [on maps’ egocentric framework and liveness].

…Maybe Isn’t So Revolutionary?

- Skim through David Turnbull, Maps are Territories website

SEPTEMBER 14: MAPS AS MEDIA² / LAB #1

Reminder: Your semester project proposals are due, via Google Drive, before class today! For more information, see the first paragraph under “Map Labs and Atlas” under “Your Contributions.”

Tools & Techniques for Critique

- Mike Foster, “The Lost Art of Critical Map Reading,” Graphicarto [blog post] (February 27, 2014).
- Bill Rankin, “Redrawing the Map,” Architecture Boston 18:2 (Summer 2015) [on the programmer as cartographer, and maps’ continued utility as argumentative media].
- Laura Kurgan and Bill Rankin, “Seeing Cities” Guernica (December 15, 2015) [yes, there’s some overlap with the previous article, but this one’s worth your time, too!]
- Shannon Mattern, “Maps as Media,” Words In Space (September 15, 2015).

Lab: Small-Group In-Class Map Critiques

SEPTEMBER 21: CARTOGRAPHIC EPISTEMOLOGIES & BLIND SPOTS

Guest: Bill Rankin (Skype 4-5pm)
Discuss Individual Project Proposals

Epistemology

- Bill Rankin: After the Map, American Slavery, Slavery in the North, Slave Insurance

Frames, Borders, Gaps, Cuts & Boundaries


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SEPTEMBER 28: COGNITIVE MAPPING, DISSONANCE & RESISTANCE / LAB #2

- Lily Bui On, “Dragons, Memory & Navigating the Globe Using Only Your Wits,” Nautilus (October 13, 2014) [a preface to our indigenous mapping discussion in three weeks].
- Check out the Hand Drawn Map Association.
- Tim Wallace, “Kevin Lynch & The Imageable Boston,” Bostonography (December 15, 2010) [and follow Wallace’s link to the “Perceptual Forms of the City” material in the MIT Archives].
- Kevin Lynch, “The Uses of Method” In The Image of the City (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960): 140-159 [consider also other sensory means of comprehending space].

Lab: Discuss methods for cognitive and participatory mapping.

OCTOBER 5: (CRITIQUING) CRITICAL CARTOGRAPHY & COUNTER-MAPPING

Map Critiques: up to three students present their map critiques

- Annette Kim, “Mapping the Unmapped” In Sidewalk City: Remapping Public Space in Ho Chi Minh City (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 84-149. See also http://slab.today/


OCTOBER 12: NO CLASS: Yom Kippur

OCTOBER 19: INDIGENOUS MAPS, SPATIAL ONTOLOGIES & EPSTEMOLOGIES

Map Critiques: up to three students present their map critiques

- Explore the *Aboriginal Mapping Network*: See in particular the “About” page, the “Mapping Resources” and “The Living Atlas”
- Check out *LandMark: Global Platform of Indigenous and Community Lands*, *Pan Inuit Trails*, and the *Ground Truth Initiative*

OCTOBER 26: LAB #3: MAPPING PLATFORMS

Map Critiques: up to three students present their map critiques

- Tentative list of resources (will be updated on course website):
  - Maptime Resources + Tutorials
  - Mapbox
  - Mapzen
  - CartoDB Academy
  - DataUSA
  - Homeland Infrastructure Foundation – Level Data
  - NYC Open Data

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OCTOBER 28: FIELD TRIP
(Joint excursion for “Bookshelves to Big Data” and “Maps as Media”)
3:00pm: Office for Creative Research, 81 Willoughby Street #601, Bklyn
4:30pm: Situ Research, 20 Jay Street #218

NOVEMBER 2: THE TECHNO-CARTOGRAPHIC/MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL/CAPITALIST GAZE

Lab: Map Workshop: Students will share their work in progress. We’ll split the class in half, and each student will have roughly ten minutes – both to present one prototype map in development for his/her final atlas, and to solicit and receive feedback.

- Check out Terrapattern.

NOVEMBER 9: MULTIMODALITY, MULTIVOCALITY & DEEP MAPPING

Map Critiques: up to three students present their map critiques

- Shannon Mattern, Deep Mapping the Media City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

NOVEMBER 16: THE MAPPING ARTS

Guest: Nina Katchadourian (4:00 – 5:30)

- Daniel Rosenberg, “Against Infographics,” Art Journal OPEN (March 11, 2016) [on aesthetics & epistemology].
- Bellerby & Co Globemakers
- See Nina Katchadourian’s map-based work

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NOVEMBER 22 (TUESDAY): MAPPING SENSATION & AFFECT

Map Critiques: up to three students present their map critiques

- Christian Nold, biomapping [leaflet]
- Think about relevant affective/sensory dimensions of, and mapping strategies for, your own projects.

Lab: Sensory Mapping – more info TBA

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NOVEMBER 30: MAPPING TIME

Guest: Bert Spaan, NYPL Space/Time Directory Engineer

- Topotime
- Space/Time Directory

DECEMBER 7: PLUG-IN WEEK

This week, for the first half of class, we can explore topics or practice skills of your choosing. We’ll dedicate the remainder of our time either to (1) an open lab, during which you can work on your final projects and solicit feedback from your classmates and instructors; or (2) our first few final presentations.

DECEMBER 14: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

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11 Speculative Timelines research group | Rethinking Timelines Project @ University of Sydney | Topotime [see especially the documentation]