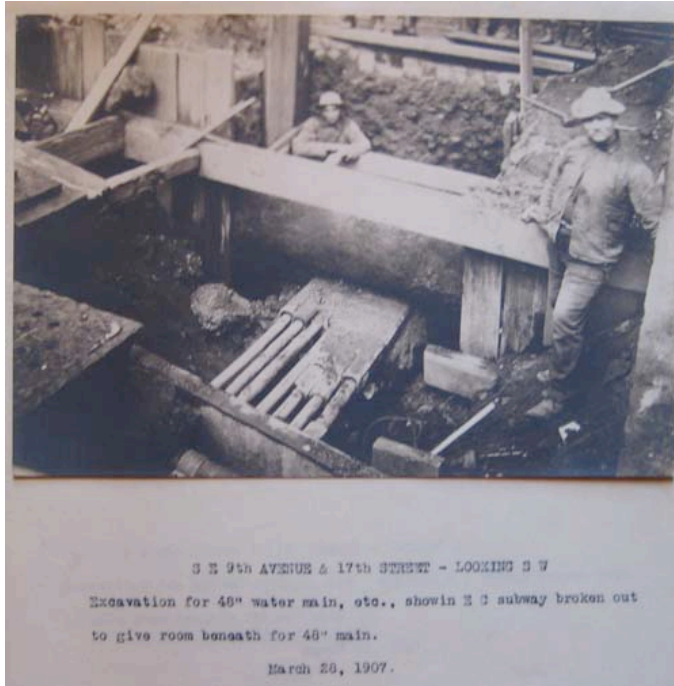# Urban Media Archaeology

NMDS 5539 / CRN 6444

Wednesdays 6:00-8:40pm

66 5th Ave, Room 005

Tech Associate: Rory Solomon

solomonr@newschool.edu

Shannon Mattern, Ph.D.

matterns@newschool.edu

2 West 13th Street, 13th Floor

Office Hours: T 6-7; W 4:30-5:30 + 9-10pm

S E 9th AVENUE & 17th STREET - LOOKING S W

Excavation for 48" water main, etc., showin N C subway broken out
to give room beneath for 48" main.

March 26, 1907.

*T*oday's city is layered with screens of all shapes and sizes and stitched together with a web of wireless networks, but woven into these modern media spaces are other, older urban media networks and infrastructures – many of which have laid the foundation for our newer media. This project-based course is dedicated to excavating and mapping – both theoretically and practically – the layers of mediation that have shaped urban forms and informed urban experiences through several key epochs in communication history, from the oral culture of ancient Athens to the television age. Each student, alone or in pairs, will conduct an urban media excavation – exploring, for example, how pneumatic tubes facilitated the delivery of mail in late-19th century New York, how the rise of the film industry shaped early 20th-century Los Angeles, or how television cables served as the nervous system of new mid-20th-century suburbs. Rather than presenting this work as atomized individual projects, however, everyone will plot their sites and networks, and post relevant archival media, to a collaboratively designed interactive media map. Part of the class will be devoted to designing the platform by analyzing which presentation format is best suited for effectively displaying these layers of urban mediation and exploring the synergies between individual students' projects. The class will lay historical and theoretical groundwork for examining media and the urban environment, and also introduce students to the fields of media archaeology and the digital humanities. While students will participate in the creation of interactive media maps, this hybrid course will have a strong theory component.

COURSE MATERIALS

All readings will be posted as pdfs to the class website: **http://www.wordsinspace.net/urban-media-archaeology/2010-fall/**. You'll be prompted to enter the **user name _____** and **password _____**.

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

Overview		
	Process Blogs	20%
	Map Critique/Creation	15%
	Mapping Project	
	Individual Project Proposal	10%
	Individual Research Dossier + Draft Map	25%
	Final Map	25%
	Self and Group Assessment	5%

Attendance and Participation

We need everyone to show up regularly, on-time, and prepared to ensure that we have sufficient time for discussion and that everyone is contributing meaningfully to the class exhibition project. You will be permitted **one excused absence** ("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 do not require you to complete weekly reading responses, as I do in most of my other graduate courses, simply because your work on the individual and group projects should keep you plenty busy. That said, I still do *encourage* you to take time before class to **annotate the weekly readings, abstract them, and reflect** on how they contribute to your understanding of the overarching themes of the course and to your own research process.

Process Blogs

We'll be thoroughly and publicly [documenting our process](#) — the break-throughs, the triumphs, the frustrations, the dead-ends. This documentation is in keeping with the Digital Humanities' mission to [promote transparency](#) – not only for the benefit of our collaborators in this class, but also in an attempt to welcome other publics into the scholarly process. Our class will be pilot-testing a new mapping tool, the Urban Research Tool, that we're developing in concert with the Parsons "[URTingNYC](#)" class; we intend for this map to serve as a platform for future urban-related faculty and student work at The New School. Therefore, we need to think of our work as laying a foundation. In our project documentation we can not only explain how we've developed the tool throughout the fall semester, but also make recommendations for those who come after us, encourage others to conduct new research on specific topics that will bridge existing student projects; direct our successors to promising collections we found in local archives, but just didn't have the time to review; make recommendations for future tech developers to add new features to the platform so that it's better able to accommodate the methods we want to employ; etc.

Each student will contribute to our collective "process blog." If you already have your own blog, you're welcome to post your UMA work to your own blog, but *we'll need to work out how to aggregate all relevant external blog posts to our central UMA blog*. All other students are welcome to post directly to the UMA blog.

If you have an epiphany, if you stumble upon an amazing special collection or interview subject, if you find yourself questioning your topic selection or your mapping techniques, if you have a cartographic break-through, if you hit a brick wall – if anything significant happens that you think offers an occasion for "critical self-consciousness" (Johanna Drucker 2004) or an opportunity to "illuminate the shadowy process of critical thinking, encouraging readers not only to digest finished works, but also to learn from and evaluate the mechanisms of their creation" (Avi Santo and Christopher Lucas 2009) – blog it, please. Each student will be expected to post regularly – **at least five times throughout the semester, and at least once every three weeks**; at least one post should reflect on your finished, or near-finished, semester project. Your posts should be **substantial** (**roughly 300 words**) and, if appropriate, should include relevant media. Make sure to keep the tone professional – not *con*fessional. Please make sure, too, to **address the relevance of the class readings and in-class discussions and activities**. Your blog contributions are worth **20% of your final grade**.

Map Critique And Creation

Because our final project will be an interactive map, 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.

On the course website we'll maintain an "atlas" of relevant mapping projects, from which you can choose one project to critique. You're also welcome to propose additions to the collection. You're encouraged to **choose a map that both pertains to the critical issues raised in the week's readings and raises practical questions** that we'll need to address as we create our own map(s). Please consult with the other presenters for the week to work out who's chosen which projects.

Your **ten-minute presentation** 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 address some of these issues. As the weeks progress, and as we explore more and more mapping projects and hone our methods for critical evaluation, we'll generate a list of "best practices" or an **evaluation rubric** (see this) with which we can critique and refine our *own* project at the end of the semester. 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 blend in helpful features from some of the other maps in the atlas in order to productively consider mapping techniques that might aid in your own work. Be sure to identify what projects inspired you and why, and how and where we can see those projects' influence in *your* map. Your application can take virtually any form and format – from a quilted map to a hand-dissected map to an audio 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 begins, **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 blog**. In class, you'll have **10 to 12 minutes** for your presentation; please save five of those minutes for discussion. And please be sure to have presentation media loaded/booted/hung/distributed before class begins so we can start on time. Your review is worth **15% of your final grade**.

Individual Project Proposals

Everyone will be responsible for completing an individual research/production project — but you should frame and execute your project in light of how it might eventually "speak to" the others. We're building a *group map*; not a platform hosting 15 atomized mapping projects. In the end, we're looking for synergies, for convergences and divergences, between the projects; for projects to form into thematic clusters; and for a "larger story" that the collective class project can tell. You'll also need to choose and frame your project in lights of how it will lend itself to presentation not in a traditional typewritten text, but in a multimodal, online, *spatial* format. Ask yourself: what kind of arguments can an interactive map help me make, that I couldn't make in another format?

You should begin thinking about potential topics early in the semester. You're welcome to explore project ideas on the UMA website or in conversation with me and your classmates. Before our class on **October 6** I'd like for you to submit **via Google Docs** a **formal 600- to 900-word project proposal** (you'll then post your revised proposal to our **course blog**). This proposal must include (1) a topic description, problem statement, or research question; (2) a discussion of your topic's relevance, significance, and/or timeliness (in other words, why is it worth studying, and why now?); (3) a tentative bibliography containing at least ten sources, half of which must be scholarly sources; and (4) types and formats of media or artifacts you anticipate gathering or creating and posting to URT. You'll be expected to deliver a **short, informal presentation** in class on the day your proposal is due. You'll have an opportunity to revise and resubmit the proposal if necessary. Your proposal is worth **10% of your final grade**.

Individual Research Dossier & Draft Map

Yes, UMA is technically a "studio" course, but our production project is intended to experiment with new modes of performing and sharing scholarship. Research is an integral part of our production process. And although ours is ultimately a group project, each student is expected to do his or her part in researching an urban media place/ network/ infrastructure/etc. and analyzing it/them in relation to the critical concerns of our class. Throughout the semester you should maintain a dossier of the secondary and primary research you conduct on your chosen topic(s). The dossier should contain abstracts of relevant secondary sources you've read/viewed/listened to; scans of original documents you've discovered; clips of relevant photos, videos, audio recordings, etc., you've either collected or created; etc.

The dossier you submit need not be comprehensive; you can choose a representative sample of material that demonstrates the breadth of your research and that illustrates the emerging themes in your critical understanding of your research topics. Each item in your dossier should be **thoroughly cited and annotated** (you'll need this info for when you add your material to URT), and the contents should then be organized into units (thematic, formal, chronological, etc. – whatever organizational scheme makes most sense for your particular project(s) and advances the "spatial argument" (you think) you'll make when you map your material. **Introduce each section of the dossier with a one-page (300-word) summary text**, and preface the entire dossier with a **three-plus-page (900+-word) statement** that summarizes and critically reflects on what you've discovered through your research – in particular, how your research topics pertain to the themes and objectives of our class.

Dossiers are due, **via Google Docs or DVD**, **before class on November 17**, and are worth **25% of your final grade**. PDF form is preferred; you might try using a publishing platform like issuu.com. If your dossier contains material that won't lend itself to pdf presentation, please speak with me about alternative submission formats.

Final Map

As we learn more about one another's projects, and as we add more material to URT, patterns, we hope, will start to emerge, and opportunities for synergy will present themselves.. We'll form "clusters" based on shared topical (e.g., locations of mass entertainment, telecommunications infrastructures, paper-based media networks, sites of public gathering and protest), geographic (e.g., various media networks' histories in the East Village or the Bronx, the mediation of Times Square) or theoretical (e.g., uneven distribution of media resources, alternative media and grassroots politics, the "remediation" of communication infrastructures) interests. We'll then work collectively to link together our individual projects, to explain their convergences and divergences, to *tell* the "larger story" of New York's media history that our individual maps, considered altogether, *show*. Again, we'll need to consider what *kinds of arguments* a map platform allows us to make, and what *modes of argumentation* would best serve our purposes. How can we use the maps form and functions to support our intellectual "content"?

You should make sure to **document your decision-making process** – and apply our collectively designed "evaluation rubric" – on our course blog; this documentation work should be shared by all members of your cluster. (Please make sure to label or tag your posts appropriately, so we can associate them with your project; we'll decide on this tagging system together.) The map will be **presented in our final class, on December 20**, and all students are expected to be present and to participate. Because our class will have been a "pilot test" for the grant-funded Urban Research Tool and an application of pedagogical strategies explored through the Provost's office's Applied Think Tank, we will be inviting **distinguished outside guests** to this presentation. I will provide more details on the final presentation as the end of the semester draws near. The exhibition is worth **25% of your final grade**.

In addition, by Friday, December 17, at 5pm, you are expected to submit, ==**via Google Docs**==, a **300- to 600-word group and self assessment**. You should assess your cluster's and the class's success in meeting our evaluative criteria; discuss your work process, and address the contributions of each member of your cluster; including yourself. Your assessment is worth **5% of your final grade**.

Submitting Work Via Google Docs

(**1**) Please sign up for a Google account if you don't have one already. (**2**) At the Google homepage, click on the "more" drop-down menu at the top of the page, and choose "Google Documents." (**3**) Once in Google Docs, click on the "Create new" button in the top-left, and choose "Folder." Create a new folder named "**UMA_Fall2010_LastName_FirstName**" (to change the name, simply click on the the words "New Folder" in the blue bar). (**4**) Now, under the name of your new folder, click on "Share," then select "share this folder." (**5**) In the pop-up window, under "Add People," type my email address, and set my status to "can edit." Click the buttons that allow you to send a copy to your self and send email notification. Then click "Share," then "Close."

Please create all written assignments as **Word, Pages, or basic text editor files**. I need to be able to edit your text and add comments, so please don't submit pdfs. Please **include your last name and "UMA"** somewhere in your file name.

When you're ready to upload your assignment, (**1**) return to Google Docs, and choose "upload" in the upper-left corner of the page. You'll be directed to a new page, where you can (**2**) click "Select files to upload" and choose the name of your file. Please **unselect both "convert" options**. In the "destination folder" pull-down menu, choose "UMA_Fall2010…"; make sure the privacy settings are set to "Private," so only I can see your document; and click "Start Upload."

Academic Dishonesty   All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the University's academic honesty policy; see "Academic Honesty" on the Media Studies department website. Because our semester project is a collective one, any acts of academic dishonesty reflect poorly not only on the perpetrator(s), but also on the class and the instructor. Academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course.

Late Work   All assignment deadlines are listed on the syllabus. Because we are working collaboratively this semester, it is important that we all move at the same pace. 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.

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 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.

PUNCH LIST

Week 1: September 1	**Introductions & Course Overview**
CASE STUDIES	New York's Series of Tubes: Pneumatics & Telecom
	Shawn Micallef, "Toronto's Corridor of Power" *Spacing Toronto* (October 26, 2008).
MAPS	Google Earth
	Brian McGrath, Mark Watkins, Akiko Hattori, Lucy Lai Wong, Manhattan Timeformations
	Urban Research Tool Excavation

September 8	**No Class: Rosh Hashanah**

Week 2: September 15	**From Tubes to T-1s**
FIELD TRIP	Tour of Downtown Manhattan's Telecommunications Infrastructure with *Wired* and *Metropolis* writer Andrew Blum; I will contact you via email w/ the rendezvous info. If we finish early, we'll probably meet somewhere nearby to continue the conversation.
READINGS	Kate Ascher, "Communications" *The Works: Anatomy of a City* (New York: Penguin, 2005): 122-147.
	Shannon Mattern, "Puffs of Air: Communicating by Vacuum" In John Knechtel, Ed., *Air* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 42-56.
	Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, "Approaching Telecommunications and the City" and "Urban Physical Form" In *Telecommunications and the City: Electronic Spaces, Urban Places* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 79-122, 312-336.
	Andrew Blum, "Netscapes: Tracing the Journey of a Single Bit" *Wired* (December 2009).
	Internet Backbone Maps

Week 3: September 22	**Putting the *Urban* into Media Archaeology**
READINGS	Siegfried Zielinski, "Introduction: The Idea of a Deep Time of the Media" and excerpts from "Fortuitous Finds Instead of Searching in Vain: Methodological Borrowings and Affinities for an Anarchaeology of Seeing and Hearing by Technical Means" In *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006): 1-11, 27-38.
	Jussi Parikka, Interview with Garnet Hertz, "Archaeologies of Media Art" *CTheory* (April 1, 2010). (13 pp.)
	Friedrich A. Kittler, "The City Is a Medium" *New Literary History* 27:4 (1996): 717-729.
	Vyjayanthi Rao, "Embracing Urbanism: The City as Archive" *New Literary History* 40:2 (Spring 2009): 371-383.
	Kazys Varnelis, "Centripetal City" *Cabinet* 17 (Spring 2004/2005): 27-33.
	David Macaulay, excerpts from *Underground* (Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 1976): 46-47, 88-91, 110-111. [consider visualization strategies]

Week 4: September 29	**Digital Humanities & Assessment Rubrics**
GUESTS	Jessica Irish and Jane Pirone
READINGS	Tara McPherson, "Introduction: Media Studies and the Digital Humanities" *Cinema Journal* 48:2 (Winter 2009): 119-123. (5 pp.)
	UCLA Digital Humanities & Media Studies, "Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0" (2009). (14 pp.)
	Steve Anderson, "Regeneration: Multimedia Genres and Emerging Scholarship" [white paper] Institute for Multimedia Literacy, USC. (13 pp.)
	Shannon Mattern, "Evaluating Multimodal Student Work" *Wordsinspace.net* [blog post] (August 11, 2010).
	Shannon Mattern, "Critiquing Maps" *Wordsinspace.net* [blog post] (August 29, 2010).
	Denis Wood and John Fels, Excerpts from "The Nature of Maps" and "The Propositional Logic of the Map" In *The Natures of Maps: Cartographic Constructions of the Natural World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 6-16, 26-28, 31-32. (16 pp.)
MULTIMODAL PROJECTS	Selections from Vectors – especially the "Mobility" Issue, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Fall 2005)
	Trevor Paglen, Craig Dietrich & Raegan Kelly, "Unmarked Planes and Hidden Geographies" *Vectors* 2:2 (Winter 2007).

Week 5: October 6	**Research Strategies**
READINGS	Barbara Heck, Elizabeth Preston & Bill Svec, "A Survival Guide to Archival Research" American Historical Association (December 2004).
	Shannon Mattern, "From Post Offices to Radiograms: Local Primary Resources on Urban Media History" *Wordsinspace.net* [blog post] (July 20, 2010).
	Presentations of Project Proposals

Week 6: October 13	**Mapping Along X, Y, and Z Axes**
	URT: Upload Test & Defining New Custom Research Formats
MAPS	Student Presentations: Choose from Atlas on Class Website
	In-Class Review: HyperCities + Pleriplurban + Urbagram + Stanford Spatial History Project
FILM	Charles and Ray Eames, *Powers of Ten*
READINGS	*Review* Todd Presner, "HyperCities: A Case Study for the Future of Scholarly Publishing" In Jerome McGann, Andrew Stauffer, Dana Wheeles, & Michael Pickard, Eds., *Online Humanities Scholarship: The Shape of Things to Come.* Proceedings of the Mellon Foundation Online Humanities Conference (Rice University Press, 2010). (17 pp.)
	Alison Sant, "Redefining the Basemap" *Intelligent Agent* 6:2 (n.d.). (7 pp.)
	Ole Bouman, "Re:Orientation" In Janet Adams & Peter Hall, Eds., *Else/Where: Mapping New Cartographies of Networks and Territories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 54-57. (4 pp.)
	Jeremy Hight, "Rhizomatic Cartography: Modulated Mapping and the Spatial Net" *NeMe* (May 5, 2009). (7 pp.)
	Jesse Shapins & Brian House, "Designers and Citizens as Critical Media Artists" *Urban Omnibus* (July 1, 2009). (10 pp.)
	James Corner, Intro, "The Agency of Mapping," "Maps and Reality" & "Mapping Operations" from "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention" In Denis Cosgrove, Ed., *Mappings* (London: Reaktion, 1999): 213-217, 221-225, 229-231. (12 pp.)

Week 7: October 20	**Mapping the Urban Database Documentary**
GUEST	[Jesse Shapins](#)
MAPS	Student Presentations: Choose from Atlas on Class Website
READINGS	Jesse Shapins, "Mapping the Urban Database Documentary" *Urban Geographers*, Ed., Mark Street (Berghahn Books, 2011).
SUPPLEMENTAL	Lev Manovich, "Database as Symbolic Form" *Convergence* 5 (1999): 80-99.
	[Man with a Movie Camera](#)

Week 8: October 27	**Modules + URT: Creating Paths**
MAPS	Student Presentations: Choose from Atlas on Class Website
READINGS	TBD

Week 9: November 3	**Modules**
MAPS	Student Presentations: Choose from Atlas on Class Website
READINGS	TBD

Week 10: November 10	**Modules + URT Filer Demo (Finding Connections)**
MAPS	Student Presentations: Choose from Atlas on Class Website
READINGS	TBD

Week 11: November 17	**Draft Map Presentations**
	All students will deliver short presentations of their research. Each will receive feedback.
	Networking Nodes
	Through various group exercises (e.g., "speed dating," interviewing one another) students will explore possible connections between their own projects and their classmates'. We'll discuss what we might learn by layering or networking these projects on the map — and what modes of presentation can help us to convey these larger, multi-project arguments.

November 24	**No Class: Thanksgiving**

Week 12: December 1	**Final Module**
	Group Work

Week 13: December 8	**Group Work**

Week 14: December 15	**Mock Final Presentation**

Week 15: December 20	**Final Exhibition Presentation & Discussion**