Humanities Studio 4 // Mixed-Reality City: Transit Symphony
Spring 2015 // Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 // Gund 522

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with Joe Steele, Kyle Parry, and the metaLAB team

The contemporary city is constituted by multiple overlapping, intermixing realities articulated across built form and imagined space, individual experience and collective memory, embodied sensation and digital mediation. Often, these multiple realities are invisible or illegible, with certain narratives dominating particular environments. However, realities always leave traces, to be excavated and reconstructed. The Mixed-Reality City is an exploratory research seminar and workshop in which students pursue studies of urbanism-in-the-making through means and methods emerging in the digital arts and humanities, including: data narrative, digital ethnography, adversarial design, and critical technical practice. The course focuses in equal parts on unpacking discourses and developing interpretative digital artifacts.

For Spring 2015, Mixed-Reality City takes on transit as a heuristic for understanding and experiencing the city, and travel as a means of performing the urban. We’ll proceed through five modules, touring dominant modes of moving through urban spaces, surveying their alternative and corollary modalities along the way. Modules are as follows: Pedestrian, Bicycle, Subway, Automobile, and Aerial/Transit Futurism. The course will devote two weeks to each module, with reading/looking and discussion in the first week and design experiments in the second, with the balance of the term devoted to studio for student projects.

Note: Humanities Studios are project-based courses designed to foster translational thinking. They combine in-depth research, design thinking, and hands-on training with digital tools and media in an environment that involves sustained cross-disciplinary teamwork. At once practical and experimental, Humanities Studio courses renew the relevance of the critical and narrative tools of the arts and sciences for a world in which technology is a means of inquiry.
COURSE COMPONENTS

Discussion: The historical and theoretical portion of the course is guided by weekly readings, film screenings and audio listenings. It is expected that each student substantively engage these materials weekly and be prepared to deeply discuss each work in class. The first weeks generally attempt to pair material relevant to the group’s exercises; the later weeks generally focus upon contemporary topics that aim to inform each student’s final projects.

Design Experiments: In a series of short design exercises and experiments, students will explore issues of public media and public space. These experiments will begin in the first class meeting, to be built upon in subsequent studio meetings.

Precedent Studies: The subject matter of this course is constantly evolving, and as such, it is crucial that we also work together to track new developments, develop historical perspective and enhance each other’s learning. Towards this aim, each student will be required to write 2 brief case studies (ca. 500 words) critically analyzing a contemporary or historical project of relevance to the course. Think of these as short essays to help us build a collection of shared references and inspirations for your final projects.

Final Project: The final project can be a speculative proposal for a large-scale design intervention in or across cities. You can choose to use existing tools or develop your own forms of technical (or nontechnical) mediation. The project can draw upon media you or others have recorded/catalogued earlier in the semester, but it is not required. The project can be individual or collaborative with others in the class. Projects will be reviewed by critics in a juried presentation/critique.

EVALUATION

Discussion: 30%
Final Project: 40%
Design Experiments: 15%
Precedent Studies: 15%
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE [sample readings/viewings]

1/28. Entering the Mixed-Reality City / Initial Experiments
Walter Benjamin, “The Flâneur” in The Arcades Project
Excerpt from The Examined Life

2/4. Walking
Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City”
Mitchell Duneier, Sidewalk
Jane Jacobs, “The Uses of Sidewalks”
Germany Year Zero

2/11. Walking / Experiments

2/18. Biking
Zack Furness, One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility
Steven Fleming, Cycle Space
Excerpts from Jacques Tati
CitiBike tricks

2/25. Biking / Experiments

3/4. Riding
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey
Daumier, Les plaisirs des chemins de fer
Pound, “In a Station of the Metro”
The Warriors

3/11. Riding / Precedent Studies

INITIAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE

3/18. Spring Recess

3/25. Driving
Excerpts from Car Country: An Environmental History
Kevin Lynch, The View from the Road
Crash

4/1. Driving / Precedent Studies

PROJECT MID-REVIEWS

4/8. Flying/Transit Futures
[TBA]

4/15. Studio
4/22. Studio

4/29. Studio

FINAL PROJECT DUE 5/12

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