

NEW YORK CITY PAST PRESENT FUTURE

The New School
UURB/NSOS3501, Spring 2017
Wednesdays, 4-5:50pm
Rm. 502, 66 W. 12th St.

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New York City exists as a physical and imaginary place, both a dense concrete maze and a blowzy personality. This course examines the many contours of this phenomenon by looking at the city across time; we explore specific historical moments for the intertwining force of politics, economics, social struggles, and artistic and cultural flowering, and consider those dynamics in planning for the future. We examine the making, planning, and governing of the city but also the way in which representations of the city – through art, film, novels, dance – construct it as well. We juxtapose well-known stories with more hidden precursors or forces: What remains of Seneca Village in Central Park? What would “Boss” Tweed tell Bill de Blasio about governing the city? Do we need to preserve Coney Island to save New York? We take advantage of the vast array of online resources about the city, learning through and examining too this new layer of spectacle that helps make New York both a catastrophe and a beautiful catastrophe, as Le Corbusier called it.

We complement our broad overview of New York City in time by conducting a semester-long individual project of interest to you. The project should mirror the themes that we discuss about the city overall – mapping, governance, destruction, renewal, preservation, planning – which offers us the opportunity to think about and relay how a large-scale understanding of the city relates to smaller-scale changes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand changes – geographic, political, social, and cultural – in New York City across time.
- Develop attentiveness to the different kinds of information and analysis in primary, secondary, and artistic sources.
- Research the city using both quantitative and qualitative data and provide synthetic interpretations of that research.
- Write papers that convey analytical thinking, a command of the readings, original ideas, and accurate acknowledgement of sources.
- Develop a final project based on personal interest that builds on the materials of the course.

READINGS AND FILMS

The required reading and materials are available on Canvas and are compiled under “Modules” by week. To access the materials directly, log on to canvas.newschool.edu with your New School user name and password.

Required text (widely available in bookstores and on reserve at the University Center Library)
Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas, Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, eds. (University of California Press, 2016)

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Responses (25%): Most weeks there is a small writing assignment (1-2pgs). Specific assignments are written under each week and due at the beginning of that week's class. These will be graded √, √+, √-.

Exhibition Review (25%): Write a critique of the new exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, "New York at Its Core: 400 Years of NYC History." Consider how the exhibition synthesizes the history of the city – do the key themes it identifies make sense to you? How might you modify the exhibition given what we have studied about the history of the city? The paper should be 5pgs, double-spaced, well structured, clearly written, and properly supported with evidence. **Papers are due March 15.** *No late papers accepted.*

Individual Project (35%): This project comprises of steps throughout the semester to build a distinct project based on a personal interest. The outcome can be creative (a performance, e.g.) or academic (a research paper) or a hybrid (a website or a grant proposal). Each project will be worked out with me throughout the semester.

Reflection Paper (15%): Write a 3pg paper that describes the view of the city a visitor would see from the project you researched. What does this perspective tell us about the primary themes of the course (mapping, governance, de/construction, planning)? How does this research and perspective inform your own views of the city?

CLASS SCHEDULE

Wk 1 **Introduction**

Jan 25 Reading: *NonStop Metropolis*, Introduction: Centers and Edges
Film clip: *Manhattan* (1979)
Visualizing 24 Hours of Subway Activity (2016)

I. **Mapping the City**

Wk 2 **Mannahatta**

Feb 1 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 5, 6
Eric Sanderson, from *Mannahatta* (2009): chs. 1-2
Visit: <http://welikia.org/explore/mannahatta-map/>

Response: Find a map of NYC and consider it both as a physical marker of the city as well as a mental one. What does the map tell us about how the city is constructed? And what does it tell us about how we might experience the city?

Wk 3 **The Grid**

Feb 8 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Map 1
Kevin Lynch, from *The Image of the City* (1960): 478-82
Rem Koolhaas, from *Delirious New York* (1994): 13-21
Visit: The Greatest Grid, online exhibition; <http://thegreatestgrid.mcny.org/>

Response: Check out the Randel Farms map from 1818-20 --
<http://thegreatestgrid.mcny.org/greatest-grid/randel-composite-map>

Find 12th Street in Greenwich Village and describe what was there. Are there any remnants of that time still visible on 12th St. today?

Wk 4 **Central Park: Olmsted & Vaux, Zoos, and Gates**

Feb 15 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Map 13

Rosenzweig & Blackmar, *The Park and the People* (1992): 505-30

Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story* (1959)

Film clip: *Hair* (1979)

Project: Identify a possible topic you would like to research for your final project (2-3 sentences). (There will be many opportunities to change or re-define the topic. This is just to get the conversation started.)

II. **Governing the City**

Wk 5 **From Capital City to City of Capital**

Feb 22 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 2, 4

Luc Sante, "The Tiger" from *Low Life* (1991): 251-77

Bruce Berg, *NYC Politics: Governing Gotham* (2007): intro

Response: Consider the mayoralty of Bill de Blasio in light of the readings of the week. Visit nyc.gov and choose a topic to look into (homeless, parking rules, healthcare, schools, policing, etc.). From this, what can you glean about de Blasio's vision of the city and how he governs?

Wk 6 **Unification**

Mar 1 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 12, 19

Lewis Mumford, "The Brooklyn Bridge" (1981)

Burrows and Wallace, from *Gotham* (1999): 1219-36

John Tierney, "Brooklyn Could Have Been a Contender" (1997)

John Burnham Schwartz, "You Can't Go Home Again" (2008)

Film clip: *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)

Response: Walk the Brooklyn Bridge and think about it as both a material and symbolic link between two distinctive boroughs. What does such a link signify? What does each trajectory (from Brooklyn to Manhattan, from Manhattan to Brooklyn) suggest?

Wk 7 **New York at Its Core**

Mar 8 Class visit to the Museum of the City of New York

Meet there at 1220 Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. at 4pm

Project: Write a 1-page outline of your project. This should include the research you will conduct, a short bibliography (5-7 items), and what you expect the final outcome to be (e.g. performance, website, film, paper).

Wk 8 **Serving New Yorkers: Transportation**

Mar 15 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 10, 26

Michael W. Brooks, from *Subway City* (1997): ch. 3
LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Dutchman* (1964)
Film: *Interior New York Subway* (1905)
Exhibition Review due

Mar 22 **Spring Break—No Class**

III. Destruction/Construction

Wk 9 **From Horizontal to Vertical City**

Mar 29 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 20, 21, 22
Hugh Ferriss, from *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929): 14-18, 59-71
Le Corbusier, “The Fairy Catastrophe” (1936)
Film: *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929)

Response: Pick a skyscraper in New York, visit it, and describe it. What is its impact on the street?

Wk 10 **The Highway vs. the Street**

Apr 5 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 15, 16
Robert Caro, from *The Power Broker* (1974): 525-39
Jane Jacobs, from *The Death and Life of American Cities* (1961): 29-54
Marshall Berman, from *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982): 290-329
Film: *West Side Story* (1961): Prologue

Project: Identify a challenge that you are having with your project (2-3 sentences).

Wk 11 **Renewal/Preservation**

Apr 12 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 14, 18, 19, 25
Max Page, from *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan* (1999): ch. 1
Herbert Gans, “Preserving Everyone’s Noo Yawk,” *New York Times* (28Jan1975)
Ada Louise Huxtable, “Preserving Noo Yawk Landmarks,” *New York Times* (4Feb1975)
Kenneth Jackson, “Gotham’s Towering Ambitions,” *New York Times* (29Aug2013)
Visit: <http://placematters.net/>

Response: Visit the Place Matters website and figure out what view of preservation this organization holds. Find a place in the website’s census that relates to your project and explain its significance.

IV. Planning: Past Present Future

Wk 12 **Crossroads of the World: Times Square**

Apr 19 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 8, 9, 24
Lynne B. Sagalyn, from *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* (2001): ch. 14
Sharon Zukin, “Whose Culture, Whose City?” (1995)
Film: *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980)

Response: Visit Times Square or Bryant Park with questions of corporate patronage and public space in mind. Compare Zukin's claims with your own experience and your observations of others. Is she right?

Wk 13 Ground Zero and After

Apr 26 Readings: *NonStop Metropolis*, Maps 3, 17

Siri Hustvedt, "9/11, or One Year Later" from *A Plea for Eros* (2002)

Rem Koolhaas, "Waning Space: Delirium No More" (2003)

CreateNYC draft plan (2016)

Guest: Nadia Elokda, Department of Cultural Affairs, NYC

Visit: <http://911digitalarchive.org/>

<http://www.renewnyc.org/>

Wk 14 Here is New York

May 3 Readings: E.B. White, "Here is New York" (1949)

Colson Whitehead, from *The Colossus of New York* (2003)

Alan Weisman, from *The World Without Us* (2008): ch. 3

Joan Didion, "Goodbye to All That" (1967)

Zadie Smith, "Find Your Beach" (2014)

Final Project due

Wk 15 My New York

May 10 Final Reflection due