

# Mapping the Americas

## CLIT 321

### Winter 2009

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**Seminar Meeting Times:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 2:30-3:20 p.m.

**Location:** Raith Hall, 116

### **Instructor:**

William Mitchell, Department of Comparative Literature

Email: [wcmitch@u.washington.edu](mailto:wcmitch@u.washington.edu)

Office: Lewis Annex 210

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 3:30-5:00

### **Description:**

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story, "Rigor in Science," the narrator describes the work of a group of imperial cartographers whose map becomes so precise that it eventually covers the entire territory of the empire, nearly consuming the space it was meant to represent. The story points to the possibility that the act of description can come to be co-extensive with the thing itself—the empire merely a set of data compiled by cartographers—and that this new reality can somehow take the place of the thing it sought to represent. More generally, Borges' story underlines the power of narrative to create the reality it seeks to describe, to give body to an otherwise imagined landscape. This class will examine alternative and, at times, competing visions of the Americas and ask how multiple manifestations of realism have been deployed to define the cultural, social and political spaces of the New World. At stake in these visions are issues of class, gender, religion and the status of history and memory. Drawing from a broad range of texts, this course will ask how authors from diverse locations have represented place in fiction and how those manifestations of locality coalesce to create and deconstruct a literature of the Americas.

### **Texts:**

Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*

García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Neruda, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*

Additional readings will be found in a course packet available at the Ave Copy Center 4141 University Way NE, #3.

## **Assignments and Grading:**

### **Participation**

The success of this course will depend largely on your active participation in both class discussions and your work in preparing and presenting group projects. Attendance is crucial but is only the beginning of creating a participatory environment; it is also incumbent that each student contributes his or her utmost. Participation will account for 20% of your grade.

### **Reading Response**

Each Friday, you will bring a series of five to six typed questions based on our readings to class. These questions will serve as the point of departure for our discussion. You will submit these questions at the end of the class. Reading response questions will account for 10% of your grade.

### **Projects and Papers**

Assignments have been designed to engage course material in a variety of projects and papers. The intent is to encourage students to explore course ideas through multiple modes of communication—visual, oral, written. Projects and papers will account for 50% of your grade.

### **Final**

The final will be composed of a meeting during the last week of class and a four to five page paper due on Monday, March 16. At the meeting you will be asked to indicate the elements of the class that most piqued your interest and present a working topic for your final paper. The final will account for 20% of your grade.

## **Course Schedule:**

### ***Week 1***

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#### **Themes:**

Place, memory, history: an introduction to some of the basic concepts of the course.

#### **Readings:**

- Jorge Luis Borges, “Rigor in Science,” “The South,” and “Funes, the Memorious”
- J. B. Harley, “Chapter 2: Maps, Knowledge, and Power” and “Chapter 3: Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe,” from *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*

- Denis Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea.”

**Assignment 1:** due Friday, January 9

Using Borges’ “The South” as a reference, write a 200-250 word short story about place from your experience or personal mythology of the Americas.

## ***Week 2***

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### **Themes:**

Between memory and history.

### **Readings:**

- Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba*
- Pierre Nora, “Introduction,” from *Lieux de Mémoire*

**Assignment 2a:** Friday, January 16

Form groups of four and brainstorm ways to represent the fictional space of Condé’s novel.

## ***Week 3***

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### **Themes:**

Transit, power, the diaspora.

### **Readings:**

- Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba*
- Paul Gilroy, “Masters, Mistresses, Slaves, and the Antinomies of Modernity” from *The Black Atlantic*

**Assignment 2b:** due Friday, January 23

Each group will deliver a ten minute PowerPoint that both presents your representation of *I, Tituba* and explains the rationale behind your project. A hard copy of your PowerPoint must be turned in to me.

## **Week 4**

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### **Themes:**

Picturing a narrative, photography, intermediality.

### **Readings:**

- Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Lorraine Daston and Peter Gallison: "The Image of Objectivity" *Representations* 40, Autumn 1992, 81-128
- Roland Barthes, excerpts from *Camera Lucida*

**Assignment 3a:** due Friday, January 30

Create or gather a series of 20 photographs that you feel represents a coherent body of work and/or narrative. Rip a CD with your photographs and label it with only your student ID number; do not title the photographs or provide captions.

## **Week 5**

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### **Themes:**

Questions of objectivity and the nature of the archive.

### **Readings:**

- Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive." *October*. Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986), pp. 3-64.

**Assignment 3b:** due Friday, February 6

- In a three to four page essay, engage the photographs of one of your colleagues. While the format is open, a successful essay will demonstrate a grasp of the issues raised by Agee and Evans, Sekula and our seminar.
- In addition, you will give a two minute outline of the major theme of your paper while reviewing the photographs in a PowerPoint. Each artist will have a chance to respond.

## **Week 6**

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### **Themes:**

Remaking the world, the great American novel.

### **Readings:**

- Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
- Michael Taussig, from *Mimesis and Alterity* and *The Magic of the State*

## **Week 7**

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### **Themes:**

What's there? Copying copies.

### **Readings:**

- Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
- Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra"

**Assignment 4:** due Friday, February 20

Write a three to four page essay in which you compare Garcia Marquez's fictional space and events with the concepts of mimesis and simulation as discussed by Taussig and Baudrillard.

## **Week 8**

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### **Themes:**

Ethnographic accounts; who tells what?

### **Readings:**

- Pablo Neruda, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu"
- James Clifford, "Palenque Log"

**Assignment 5a:** due Friday, February 27

- Visit James Turrell's *Skyspace* in the Henry Gallery. Thinking of "Palenque Log," make an audio file chronicling your visit. Along with your audio file, bring a written transcript of your visit to class.
- Form groups of 4 and discuss your experience.

**Week 9**

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**Themes:**

Dreams, origins

**Readings:**

- Pablo Neruda, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu"
- Borges, "The Circular Ruins"
- This American Life, "110: Mapping"  
[http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio\\_Episode.aspx?episode=110](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?episode=110)

**Assignment 5b:** due Friday, March 6

Each group will present an eight minute audio experience of Turrell's work.

**Week 10**

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We'll reserve the last week for review and questions.

**Final Part I:** to be scheduled

In groups of three, you will meet with me to discuss the major themes of the course and present your final exam topic.

**Final**

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You will submit a 4-5 page paper to my office by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 16.