New York University / Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
Shadow Cities: Literary Alterity and Urban Otherworlds  
Syllabus

FIRST-UG778 (Spring 2017)

Schedule: Mon/Wed, 3:30-4:45pm  
Location: Silver 409

Instructor: Adrian Versteegh  
adrian.versteegh@nyu.edu  
Office: 1 Washington Pl., Room 506  
Office Hours: Wed, 1:30-3:30pm, and by appointment

The city we see is not all there is. Over seven thousand miles of sewers undergird the five boroughs of New York; centuries of occluded catastrophe dictate the architectural fabric of modern London; and in metropolises around the world the labor of an unacknowledged precariat lets us pass through the urban everyday without reflection. This course looks at how these invisible cities are made visible through literature. We’ll grapple with the pathological, the potential, the evanescent, and even the scatological, as we ask how literature maps on to hidden registers of the built environment. Alongside conventional exercises in essay writing, research, and in-class presentations, students can expect to put theory into practice with assignments involving urban exploration, literary fieldwork, night walking, and urban audition. Writing requirements will include formal papers responding to readings; an exploration journal linking texts and experiences; construction of a city itinerary (and corresponding reaction to a classmate’s); and a final research project (which can, with permission, incorporate creative elements). Events at the Morbid Anatomy Museum and excursions with the Atlas Obscura collective may be arranged. Readings may include fiction (Daniel Defoe, China Miéville, Neil Gaiman), film (Undercity, Dark Days), photography (Wayne Barrar), sensation journalism (G.W.M. Reynolds, Eugène Sue, and the files of The Illustrated Police News), literary history (David Pike, W.G. Sebald), and social science (Margaret Morton, Robert Neuwirth, Russell and Cheryl Sharman).

Required Texts

Recommended Texts


The books above are on order at the NYU Bookstore. Other required texts will be distributed via NYU Classes or placed on reserve at Bobst Library.

Course Objectives

In this course, students will:

1. Develop an understanding of the relation between literature and the occluded or repudiated underside of urban environments.
2. Articulate both interpretive and argumentative responses to this relation by honing close reading and writing skills.
3. Broaden and complicate conceptions of “research” by melding scholarly inquiry with urban fieldwork.
4. Put these conceptions to the test by framing a research topic and carrying through a guided project.
5. Engage with the principal ethical questions of urban research and representation.

Assignments

You are expected to attend all meetings having prepared in advance to discuss the scheduled material. Unexcused absences or repeated tardiness will severely harm your final grade, potentially to the point of failure. If you must miss class for a legitimate (i.e., documented medical) reason, please contact me. Other assignments are as follows:

1. Weekly forum postings, which will be of two types: reading responses (brief, informal reactions that may address any aspect of the assigned reading) and fieldwork exercises (involving more specific observation, investigation, and reflection; you will receive detailed instructions on weeks when fieldwork exercises replace reading responses). These should be uploaded to our NYU Classes forum by 8pm on the day before the material is scheduled for discussion. You should also be sure to read your colleagues’ contributions before coming to class, as these will help structure our conversations. These postings will serve as entries in, respectively, a reading journal and a fieldwork journal, which you will collect and submit at the end of term. Your first posting, due before our second class on January 25, will be a short reaction to this syllabus: it should affirm your understanding of the course requirements and can include any questions or uncertainties you’d like me to address.
2. A city exploration itinerary, which will develop from your fieldwork exercises and personal research interests. Toward the end of term, you will exchange itineraries with a classmate and write a short response.

3. One brief in-class presentation on a reading or topic of your choice, to culminate in a series of discussion questions for the class. You will submit a short presentation write-up exactly one week after your talk. You’ll receive additional instructions and be given a chance to sign up once the semester begins.

4. One short (4-5 pages) midterm paper and one longer (8-10 pages) research project, due on March 8 and at the end of term, respectively.

5. Active participation. This class will rely on our conversations, so please attend with a mind to engage with each topic. Note that your attendance is taken for granted; simply being present will not garner you any participation points. To fulfill this requirement, make a habit of voicing your thoughts on each of our texts and participating robustly in all class discussions and exercises.

Grading

Online responses (reading and fieldwork journals): 20%
Midterm paper: 15%
Presentation: 10%
City itinerary: 10%
Final project: 30%
Participation: 15%

Schedule

Jan 23 Mon Part I: Penumbra
Introductions

Jan 25 Wed Orbis alias
Neil Gaiman, Neverwhere
Workshop: Interpretive writing

Jan 30 M Neverwhere cont’d

Feb 1 W Infraordinary
Georges Perec, An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris

Feb 6 M Katabasis
Peter Ackroyd, London Under

Feb 8 W London Under cont’d
Wayne Barrar, photographs
Workshop: Argumentative writing

Feb 13 M Animality
Robert Sullivan, Rats (excerpt)
Colin Jerolmack, *The Global Pigeon* (excerpt)

Feb 15 W  **Noctivagation**
Sukhdev Sandhu, *Night Haunts*

Feb 20 M  NO CLASS

Feb 22 W  *Night Haunts* cont’d
Charles Dickens, “Lying Awake” and “Night Walks”
Workshop: Topics and theses

Feb 27 M  **Non-places**
J. G. Ballard, *Concrete Island*

Mar 1 W  *Concrete Island* cont’d
Marc Auge, *Non-places* (excerpt)

Mar 6 M  **Precariat**
Floris-Jan van Luyn, *A Floating City of Peasants* (excerpt)

Mar 8 W  *A Floating City of Peasants* cont’d
Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities* (excerpt)

**Midterm paper due**

Mar 13 M  NO CLASS

Mar 15 W  NO CLASS

Mar 20 M  **Part II: Umbra**
Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Mar 22 W  *Invisible Cities* cont’d

Mar 27 M  **Cloaca**
Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit* (excerpt)

Mar 29 W  *History of Shit* cont’d
Workshop: Framing research questions

Apr 3 M  **Abjection**
Teun Voeten, *Tunnel People* (excerpt)

Apr 5 W  *Tunnel People* cont’d
Marc Singer, *Dark Days* (film)
Workshop: Sources

Apr 10 M  **Urbex**
Ninjalicious, *Access All Areas*
**Course Policies**

No electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, recorders, etc.) are to be used during class. Exceptions will be made for documented disabilities. Students should bring hard copies of texts on the day for which they are assigned. Please see me if you encounter difficulty acquiring any of our readings. Also, you may find it useful to exchange contact information with one or two of your colleagues to deal with any questions or missed material.

**Written Work**

You will be expected to produce two formal papers for this course, which will cumulatively account for 45% of your final grade. All papers should be typed, double-spaced, left-justified, stapled, and page-numbered. Please include your name, class section, and due date on the first page. Each essay should have an appropriately descriptive title. Papers must follow current **MLA style** and include a list of works cited. For more on the MLA style guide, see the *MLA Handbook* and this helpful resource: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/).
Papers will be graded on strength of argument (tenability of thesis, effective use of evidence, and overall persuasiveness); clarity of expression (organization, style, and writing mechanics); adherence to correct structure, formatting, and assignment guidelines; and originality.

Remember to proofread your work carefully. I will happily discuss any paper in greater detail during office hours. Please take advantage of office hours as an opportunity to improve your written work. You might also want to visit the Gallatin Writing Center.

Note that late assignments cannot be accepted.

**Gallatin ePortfolio Program**

You are among the first to participate in Gallatin’s new ePortfolio program. You will be asked to add content to your ePortfolio at least three times this semester, and we encourage you to maintain your ePortfolio through the rest of your time at Gallatin. For example, you might want to show your adviser your ePortfolio during advisement sessions to demonstrate your progress. You should have already received instructions via email on how to access and use your ePortfolio. Please note that students are expected to adhere to NYU’s Code of Conduct ([https://www.nyu.edu/about/policiesguidelinescompliance/compliance/codeofethicalconduct.html](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policiesguidelinescompliance/compliance/codeofethicalconduct.html)) and must comply with NYU Web Publishing’s Terms of Use ([https://wp.nyu.edu/termsofuse/](https://wp.nyu.edu/termsofuse/)). Any questions about the ePortfolio program can be directed to gallatin.edtech@nyu.edu.

**Academic Integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)).

Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense: it will result in a failure of the course and must be reported to your dean. You should familiarize yourself with the section on plagiarism in the *MLA Handbook* and with the College of Art and Science’s “Statement of Academic Integrity” ([www.nyu.edu/cas/map/integrity.html](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/integrity.html)).