

Course Design

Writing New York: Using Google Maps as a Platform for Electronic Portfolios

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Course Description

English 302: Writing about the Arts is a practicum course offered at the University of Windsor for upper-level English undergraduate students. The course asks students to write about a variety of art forms and requires engagement with multiple genres of writing as a way for students to effectively order their experiences, reconstruct meaning in those experiences, and communicate that meaning to their readers. This version of the course involves a two-week introductory reading and writing commitment at the University of Windsor campus and then a three-week visit to New York City. In New York, the students work toward building a final portfolio using Google Maps as a showcase for their writing.

Institutional Context

The University of Windsor sits on the United States-Canada border, across from Detroit, Michigan. A comprehensive university with approximately 14,000 undergraduate and 1,600 graduate students, the University of Windsor is a compact urban campus with a large commuter population. Presently, Windsor is a city particularly challenged by the recent economic recession (especially as the downturn affects the automotive sector), with an unemployment rate of 14.3% (as of July 2009, according to Statistics Canada). Given this reality, we were unsure about the response we would receive when offering a course involving an extended field trip to New York.¹

This particular iteration of English 302: Writing about the Arts took place during the Spring semester in 2009. The course is not mandatory for English majors, but it does satisfy departmental requirements for completing an English BA. The University of Windsor requires students earning a general English BA to complete two composition, rhetoric, linguistics, and theory courses. The majority of courses taken by English majors at the University of Windsor are literature courses, while practicum courses themselves are relatively few in number. The University of Windsor's practicum courses are designed to give students a hands-on learning experience with a smaller class size. Writing about the Arts is a regularly offered course that is usually taught on campus by Dale and, under normal circumstances, Dale has

students attend and write about cultural institutions and events in the city of Windsor. However, Spring 2009's course presented students with opportunities beyond those typically granted to students in the course.

The Spring 2009 session of English 302: Writing about the Arts allowed students to move beyond the traditional classroom setting, positioning themselves within a cityscape which is much different from their own. Because of Dale's familiarity with New York City and because the city provided the necessary material for the course, Dale tried incorporating an extended field trip to New York in this term's offering. Students took Writing about the Arts in conjunction with English 376: Contemporary Drama, which also had a New York field trip component in the Spring 2009 semester. The decision to move the class outside of the city of Windsor expanded the possibilities open to students taking these courses.

Writing about the Arts came to be team taught by Dale and two graduate students, Janine and Hollie, as a result of their work together in a directed reading course, Contemporary Issues in Composition Theory, held in the 2009 Winter semester. In that course, we examined a number of trends in current Composition Theory, including the recent turn towards exploring spatial modes of meaning-making. Our readings of Nedra Reynolds, Jonathan Mauk, Richard Marback, Geoffrey Clark, and the New London Group led us to consider how we might use their ideas in the classroom. When Janine and Hollie approached Dale about the possibility of going to New York, it seemed like a perfect opportunity to put these theoretical ideas into practice.

Embracing the Council of Writing Program Administrators' guidelines, we encouraged students in this course to position themselves within an "electronic environment, to use digital technology for a multitude of purposes, [and] use electronic environments to share their texts" (Council of Writing Program Administrators). The students eventually produced a final writing portfolio on their experiences in the form of a Google Map (<http://maps.google.com>). We gave students certain general criteria that their maps needed to include, such as an art exhibition, a musical event, a piece of public art or architecture, a restaurant, and one arts event/place of their choice, but overall they made their decisions independently.

Before we continue, it is necessary to explain Google Maps and its use for English 302. Google Maps, in its most conventional use, is a free, Web-based virtual atlas. Through the site, users are able to control the scope of the map, from global to street level, while searching for businesses, addresses, and places of interest. Once found, such places appear as markers on the map and corresponding contact information appears in a side-bar window. Users can then select one of the locations from the side bar, prompting its marker on the map to expand to a speech bubble. The expanded marker provides users with additional information, including photos, reviews, directions, and

a link to view the location at street level. For example, if you were trying to find a Starbucks Coffee in Seattle, you would type in the business name and all of the locations would pop up as place markers on a map of Seattle. From there, you can select the desired location from the sidebar or from the map itself. After making a selection, contact information, reviews, and photographs all appear on the map for that location. Similar searches can be done for other businesses, such as a restaurant, or for particular cultural institutions or landmarks, such as the Seattle Art Museum or the Space Needle. Maps of this kind can be used for planning or navigational purposes and, in fact, these are the predominant uses of Google Maps.

In 2007, Google implemented a new feature called “My Maps” to allow users to customize, annotate, and personalize their own Google Maps. Once a user creates her map (by selecting the desired location), she can add a title, description, and pre-designed place markers, each with an editable tag. The user can further customize her map by adding her own text, links, photos, and videos to the HTML tag. The user may decide to keep the map unlisted, or may make it public, including it in the Google Maps search database. It is the “My Maps” function that we incorporated into our class design and will be discussing in the remainder of this essay.

Throughout the term, students read articles from *The New Yorker* and *Time Out New York* to get a sense of published “arts” writing. In the Windsor sessions, students read previews and reviews of art exhibits, musical performances, and restaurants. For their first assignment, we asked students to collaboratively compose a Google Map prior to their trip to NYC, consisting of previews similar in nature to the writing that we assigned as mandatory reading. We assigned each student a visual arts institution and required them to choose a musical event along with one other cultural event/institution. With a class size of seventeen and now three instructors, the Windsor sessions were an ideal place to workshop students’ writing, which they would then place at the appropriate locations on a collaborative Google Map. In working on this map, we asked students to seriously consider audience, purpose, context, and detail as this map was a resource for everyone who was going on the trip. Ideas about rhetoric, space, and mapping taken up through this initial activity were reinforced and considered as the term progressed.

We paid attention to the multimodal turn in the field of Composition because we wanted students to work towards a final portfolio that highlighted digital media in writing as a way to complicate the traditional written portfolio. This course was developed as way to think beyond traditional writing environments and formats as it drew on digital media to encourage students to consider the meaning of audience, context, and purpose when writing for an online, public readership. As we thought about the possibilities of using digital media, it occurred to us that Google Maps could not only provide

a pre-trip resource, but also serve as a powerful platform for showcasing students' experiences of and writing about New York. Ultimately, we decided that students would collect and present their writing over the course of the term using Google Maps instead of a traditional portfolio. Students were asked to reflect on their movement throughout the city as they re-created their experience in a public forum and consider the impact of audience on a publicly accessible document. The final portfolios consisted of each student collecting his or her writing and creating an individual map, centering on a theme of his or her choice. By having students pinpoint, put into context, and make meaning of their encounters with New York, they became central in creating and re-creating the city. Each student was required to write a short introduction to his or her Google Map, engaging both the theme of the map and the act of mapping itself. The development of theme in response to the given criteria required students to think about how they were spatially positioned in the city and how their responses to the places they encountered and marked on their map could persuade and affect a public audience. By overlaying their written engagement with place on an actual map of the city, students were better able to see how their writing was shaped by their interactions with the physical place.

In New York, the class stayed at an NYU dormitory on 5th Avenue and 10th Street. From this base, the students visited museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, attended performances at Bargemusic and the New York Ballet, explored galleries throughout the city, and attended a large number of events on their own. The activities involved students' ability to rely on maps to navigate the city; from these experiences and these acts of mapping, students prepared writing for each class session. As a result of being placed in a new location, mapping became an essential feature of the course, not only for the day-to-day activities of the students, but as a way to think beyond the classroom and realize the importance of place in their work.

Theoretical Rationale

While we held class in a small black box theater on the second floor of our NYU residence hall, the city effectively became the classroom. We knew maps of the area would be essential for navigating the terrain of this new space, but we felt we needed to do more than simply hand students a detailed street map and send them on their way. Additionally, when it came time for the students to become mapmakers rather than map readers, we wanted to discourage them from viewing their maps as objective, accurate, transparent, or neutral, descriptors which Dennis Wood claims, "all conspire to disguise the map as a . . . *reproduction* . . . of the world, disabling us from recognizing it for a social construction" (22).

Although we would not be able to sufficiently train our English students in the theories of Cartography, still we felt it necessary to illuminate the nature of maps, empowering our students to regard them not only as wayfaring guides to be consulted but also as texts to be interpreted. Viewing maps as interpretive documents is in line with what Wood claims is their very nature: “maps, all maps, inevitably, unavoidably, necessarily embody their author’s prejudices, biases and partialities (not to mention the less frequently observed art, curiosity, elegance, focus, care, imagination, attention, intelligence and scholarship their makers bring to their labor)” (24). Heeding Wood’s cautionary claims about the power of maps, we felt it necessary to explore the implications of map authorship with our students.

We hoped that students would come to recognize that in producing a map they are essentially *creating* a subjective notion of space rather than *reproducing* an objective reality. Audiences often fail to consider the authorship of a map in the same way one considers the authorship of other “written” documents. The mapmaker, much like any other author, must make choices about what to include and exclude, what argument to make, to whom the argument will be directed, and how to shape the document for that intended audience. Consequently, as J.B. Harley concludes, “all maps are *rhetorical* texts. . . . All maps employ the common devices of rhetoric such as invocation of authority. . . . Rhetoric may be concealed but it is always present” (242, emphasis added). For example, a city map in a guidebook points the reader toward certain conclusions about where to go and what to see, while a transit map offers information about public transportation routes. Both claim authority within a certain domain through the choices authors make about what to include and what to exclude. As principles of rhetoric are central to our course, the use of mapping acts as another way to reinforce these principles.

The rhetorical nature of maps grants students decision-making agency and authority as they learn to reconcile issues of purpose, audience, and context. In our case, students were required to ask themselves which larger idea about New York City they wished to convey and to whom. Through writing their Google Maps, students made choices along the way about diction, arrangement, and voice, and through the reflective writing in the introductions to their maps, students analyzed their choices. This assignment required students to distance themselves from their own texts in order to critically engage them much like they were asked to do with more traditional forms of writing about the arts (reviews from *The New Yorker*, for example).

In our attempt to forge connections between Cartography and Composition, we turned to compositionists whose work engages the rhetorical nature of space and place. We were particularly interested in Nedra Reynolds’ *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*,

which calls attention to the spatiality of writers' identities and the making of meaning.² Reynolds reminds us that geography literally means "writing the earth" and thus encourages a geographical turn in Composition Studies (51). She argues, "Geography gives us the metaphorical and methodological tools to change our ways of imagining writing through both movement and dwelling—to see writing as a set of spatial practices informed by everyday negotiations of space" (6). It only seemed fitting that we borrow Geography's tools during the relocation of our writing class from Windsor to New York, as our movement through and dwelling within the city were highlighted in ways that were taken for granted back on our home campus. Stressing the fact that all writing is geographic, we required students to write geography, to write the city of New York. On this issue, Reynolds maintains,

Geographies of writing suggest that college students in writing classes, as agents who move through the world, know a great deal more about "writing" than they think they do—not that they are holding out on us, but that we haven't yet tapped their spatial imaginations or studied their moves. (176)

We felt that in requesting students to self-examine their movement through the city we could tap these "spatial imaginations," requiring them to do something rarely asked of them in the English department—to negotiate space and place through their writing.

We, like Reynolds, see writing as material, tied to a place and time (in this case New York City), and wanted to empower our students to see the role of materiality in how they construct meaning in their writing. We could think of no better way to do so than to have students plot their documents on a map, which then acted like a palimpsest, a visual reminder of spatiality beneath the writing etched over it. Writing virtually on the map, we hoped, would better prompt students to consider how the place they visited or the event they took part in was necessarily tied to its spatial context—to the cultural, political, or economic fabric of its surrounding neighborhood. Students were encouraged to view their experience of the city spatially, taking up Reynolds's call to attend to the *where* of writing as well as navigation, arrangement, memory, and composition—elements tied to acts of both mapping and writing. Similarly, we hoped students would begin to see how their identities as writers had been shaped in much the same way, leading to inherent biases and prejudices, not to be overcome or denied, but to be recognized and explored in their writing. Reynolds argues that teachers of writing "need to know more about the spatial practices that students bring with them and how to tap into their embodied practices—in screen culture as well as street culture—for their acts of composing, their habitats and places meaningful to them" (175). The platform of the Google Map allowed us to succinctly combine screen culture and street culture, overlaying the spatiality

of writing on a map with the opportunities for multimodality embedded in composing with new media.

Cynthia Selfe defines “new media texts” as texts “primarily created in digital environments, composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, among others), and designed for the presentation and exchange in digital venues” (44). She further writes that these texts heavily value visual elements and often incorporate interactivity. The Google Maps assignment embodies Selfe’s definition, as well as the ideas of the New London Group. In their work, the New London Group identifies six design elements: the linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, and spatial modes, as well as the multimodal, the combined effect of all of the preceding modes (5). Though the text of the map may have initially begun as ideas sketched in pocket notebooks as students navigated the city, the final incarnations appear solely in multimodal digital form, within the text blocks afforded by Google Maps accompanied by pictures, links, and/or video to help convey the students’ multi-layered ideas about the place, providing the reader with an interactive space to navigate.

To draw attention to the importance of audience, we encouraged students to share their document in its digital venue with the public—friends or family members interested in hearing about their experience or prospective travelers to New York City. The fact that their Google Map would become part of public domain on the Internet meant they had to develop their ideas into meaningful, reader-based prose in ways that texts-for-the-teacher’s-eyes-only may not promote. In this way, the map assignment addresses the recent push in Composition Studies toward making student writing public, hence less akin to writing practice.³

Google Maps not only allows but also encourages the use of multimodality and interaction in ways that a traditional word-processed document does not. Hypertext links can be added by simply highlighting a word, clicking a button, and entering a Web address. Images and video can easily be added to the portfolios as well, taking up the call of many in the field to not overlook visual modes of meaning-making.⁴ In this regard, we were inspired by Kathleen Blake Yancey’s 2004 CCCC Chair’s Address, in which she champions the digital, multimodal portfolio:

In arrangement, a digital portfolio . . . is defined by links. Because you can link externally as well as internally, and because those links are material, you have more contexts you can link to, more strata you can layer, more “you” to invent, more invention to represent. In sum, the potential of arrangement is a function of delivery, and *what and how you arrange*—which become a function of the medium you choose—*is who you invent*. (318)

Moreover, John Trimbur argues that in equating composition solely with the act of writing, we neglect “the complex delivery systems through which

writing circulates” (190). The incorporation of hypertext links and images/video into the map serves to mirror the complex delivery systems and provides a less one-sided view of meaning production.

What stands out to us in both theoretical discussions and classroom practice are the ways in which mapping in general and online mapping in particular provide rhetorical possibilities that word-based texts alone do not. To some degree, the same can be said of any kind of multimodal portfolio or writing assignment, but we have come to believe that the act of online mapping as a kind of spatial network can help students to think about invention, arrangement, and delivery in new ways. As Jeff Rice writes in “Urban Mapping: A Rhetoric of the Network,”

the power of networks comes not from the identification of certain “things” and how they connect, but from the process of connections themselves. Generalized to a “thing” like a city space or a map, the emphasis shifts from pure analysis or representation to working with the types of connections that may or may not be generated within the space’s various processes. The emphasis, in other words, is rhetorical as it teaches another perspective regarding how spaces are organized, arranged, or delivered. (209)

By mapping the city space in Google Maps, students engage in the process of making connections, seeing not only how spaces are organized, but also thinking about the choices they made in their own rhetorical arrangement of such spaces.

Unfortunately, in discussions of teaching scholars often treat the spatial and the visual as mutually exclusive modes of meaning-making. While Compositionists currently laud the visual aspect of multimodality, the spatial receives much less attention. Reynolds reminds us that the medium of the map necessarily unites “screen culture and street culture” (175); while Geography is defined as “writing the earth,” it is chiefly a visual discipline. In drawing from Cartography to construct our Google Map portfolio assignment, we can encourage multimodality, especially the visual aspects, promote interactivity, and endorse public writing, while attending to the spatiality of meaning-making and ultimately retaining a focus on the writing itself.

Critical Reflection

In reflecting on our experience in teaching this class, we considered a number of questions. How did the use of Google Maps contribute to our ability to teach rhetorical ideas of composing? Did it help students engage in spatial meaning-making? Did it increase students’ attention to arrangement? Were students better able to make connections between place, movement,

and identity? Between visual, spatial, and linguistic practices? How did using Google Maps alter our experience as teachers and the experience of students? In thinking through these questions, we consider both the strengths and the weaknesses of this iteration of the course, focusing especially on the introductions that students wrote for their Google Maps, as these introductions provide the best lens for viewing their processes.

As students worked on their maps, we encouraged them to make connections between the five sites they were expected to include in ways that would help them understand how their maps serve as rhetorical, public documents. Connective themes, such as bodies in performance, fusion, modernity, communication, popular culture, artistic interpretation, and serendipity emerged from these projects, working to greater or lesser degrees to help students think through their interactions with New York City as a space and their maps as representations of their experiences in that space. For example, one student, Hope Marion, who was initially intimidated by the idea of New York, used the project to work through the themes of communication and connection. For her, the mapping project reinforced the ways in which the idea of spatiality is crucial to the way we make meaning, especially as we encounter a new place. Through the Google Maps project, Hope⁵ was able to make connections between place, movement, and identity in ways that she had not anticipated prior to composing her map. In her introduction she writes,

I had never been to New York City, and was intimidated by my impressions of it. Descriptions of New York to those outside the city often paint a picture of a city so massive that anything personal is entirely lost. It is also often depicted as a highly uncommunicative city, in which individuals are so wrapped up in their own lives that there is little sense of community. My experience of New York counteracted all of these impressions. I found that all around me was evidence of people striving to connect with others. The New Yorkers I spoke to were all friendly and more than willing to give me a moment of their time to provide directions, or even make suggestions about what to see and do while in the city. While this map does not include those people, I hope that the overall impression left is one of welcome and inclusiveness. The map is restricted to Manhattan solely due to my limited travels outside of that part of the city. I wonder how much my experience would have differed in different areas. I also hope this map serves to “shrink” New York to a certain extent. One of the major factors that intimidated me about the city was its sheer size. The truth is, while New York is massive, it is not possible to grasp the scale of the city at street (or subway) level. It is only possible to experience a few blocks of the city at any given time, which is just as it should be. By citing the locations I have chosen, largely in Greenwich Village, I hope to draw attention to the smaller communities that exist within the gargantuan metropolis that is New York City. (1)

In this case, the map facilitates her theme, helping her to make the city more manageable for her and her readers; for Hope, the spatial representation of the city aids in the creation of both meaning and identity.

For Hope, like many of our students, working with Google Maps made New York City manageable in scope, both as they experienced it and as they represented it. The main reason for this feeling, expressed by a number of students, is related to the ways in which users (both readers and writers) of Google Maps can control/customize how they interact with digital space. As Shauna Pellow describes in her introduction,

The visual display of the Google Map allows the user to see New York City in a way that is not overwhelming, as the city is usually viewed. The context of this map allows me to zoom in to the particular area I have marked, and place a pin in the location of each of the events. As a result, users are able to view more information at their leisure, instead of feeling flooded with all material at once. This is particularly useful as [the] point of my map is to help the audience view New York City as a smaller, communal city, instead of a large and overwhelming metropolis. The layout and features of Google Map help to humanize the tool of a map, and in this case, to humanize New York City. (1)

In other words, it's not just the act of putting together a writing portfolio or the act of mapping that led students to the kinds of observations that Shauna and Hope depict, but rather it's the particular confluence of writing on the Google Map platform, using its customizable features that allows for this private-public spatial meaning to occur.

Of course, not all students were able to see how the act of mapping and the use of the spatial helped them create meaning, nor how the features of Google Maps helped them convey their ideas to an intended audience. For these students, the written text they produced was only marginally connected to the map and the multimodal possibilities remained unexplored; to a large extent, Google Maps simply acted as a folder for their writing. The most successful students not only demonstrated an increased awareness of spatial meaning-making, but also rhetorical ideas of invention, arrangement, and delivery in their final Google Maps projects. One example is Justin Quenneville, who took inspiration from Bob Dylan in titling his map "Modern Gomorrah." In his introduction he writes,

Thinking about my work and the city as a large Google Map made me appreciate the space I covered and see New York as one grand work of art. Using a map not as reference point but as canvas really makes this portfolio project come to life because my work becomes part of the city's landscape. Placing my articles down exactly where they belong makes them more real in my own mind. . . . It exists as a fluid and functioning

whole with all the pieces, no matter how Godless or sacred, as a beautiful machine. (1)

As with Shauna and Hope, the act of mapping forced Justin to think spatially and make connections in ways he might not otherwise have made them. The Google Maps assignment did not just exist on the computer screen but informed Justin's experience of the city itself and, like Hope's map, made it more manageable. However, Justin's writing, both in his introduction and on his map, is not confined to writer-based prose, but embodies a concern for public writing. This identification of writing as a public act can be seen even more fully in Cristina's work.

Cristina Naccarato whose map is entitled "D.I.Y. New York City," writes in her introduction that

The use of a map helped me to contextualize the space of the map I used, versus the actual spaces that I wrote about. In a sense, by placing these points on a map, rather than writing about them on a blog or in a book, I'm visually creating a space for my reader/viewer where they can interpret the framework I wrote about. (1)

Cristina, even more explicitly than the other students, sees the use of Google Maps as a rhetorical endeavor. Her attention to rhetorical ideas such as audience is evident in her reference to her map as a space created specifically for her reader/viewer, as well as in her map's cohesiveness. The relatively "underground" sites she reviews are consistent with her map's theme of exploring the D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) aesthetic currently thriving in New York. In choosing sites that are emblematic of radical counter-culture, her writing is consistently aware of its potential audience beyond that of her instructor.

Cristina recognizes that those who would be interested in "D.I.Y. New York City" are likely young adults, avid listeners of music beyond Top 40 rotation, enthusiasts of non-commercial art, sympathizers to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, and those who are familiar with such terms as "hipster" and "indie" (not to mention "D.I.Y."). Reviewing Hillstock, a permit-less rooftop music festival in Brooklyn, she directly addresses this particular audience: "Mixing a wide variety of underground artists, any fan of non-commercial music would be able to find something they could bob their head to or hum along with. From indie, to punk, to pop, to ska, to electronic, you name it, chances are, you could find it at this fest" ("D.I.Y. New York City: Hillstock," par. 2). Likewise, when writing about The Renegade Craft Fair, she makes similar assumptions of her reader:

At the fair, you'll be sure to find tons of cute and original pieces, ranging from homemade knitted, reconstructed, stenciled and hand sewn clothing, hand-made and designed jewelry, vintage treasures and other knick

knacks you'll never be able to find anywhere else. With 300+ vendors and artists, there's sure to be an original piece screaming your name. ("D.I.Y. New York City: The Renegade Craft Fair," par. 2)

In making such assumptions and tailoring her writing appropriately, Cristina's portfolio successfully moves beyond mere personal writer-based reflection to a more meaningful reader-based prose as it becomes a useful public resource for those interested in seeking out New York City's counter-culture. Not only is the writing strong, but also her map is aesthetically pleasing, inviting readership and interactivity.

With an abundance of relevant photographs, images, and hypertext links, Cristina's map makes meaning beyond the textual level. Her map builds on the best aspects of multimodal portfolios, moving into the sphere of public writing and emphasizing the spatial as a mode of meaning-making. Christina's map exemplifies the ways in which we, as instructors, strived to situate rhetorical ideas of invention, arrangement, and delivery at the forefront of our course and our assignments.

Not all students were able to make such complex connections or use Google Maps to produce effective public writing; for example, some portfolios read more like personal travel journals, without any clear overarching purpose or sense of audience. One of the ways we would attempt to address this issue in the future is to use the collaborative Google Map as a better scaffold to the final Google Maps project in order to help students see how meaning can be made spatially and that Google Maps can be a rhetorical tool. In retrospect, we should have enabled and encouraged comments on the collaborative map, resulting in greater collaboration before, during, and after the trip so that while students were making sense of their experience, they could represent that experience collaboratively. In addition, we would also spend even more time in class addressing the idea of mapping as a rhetorical act. We would perhaps have students read some introductory material on mapping and examine maps with an eye to their rhetorical construction. Now that we have a collection of sample material from the Spring 2009 class, such work could extend to a new semester's examination of previous Google Maps as a way to show both rhetorical strategies and the multimodal possibilities inherent in the use of Google Maps.

Of course, teaching a course with an extensive field trip component is rarely an option. How, then, could this idea of using Google Maps as a writing platform be adapted to courses taught at one's home institution? A number of ideas come to mind. In teaching the Writing about the Arts course described here without a field trip component, Google Maps would still be an effective way to have students think through issues of space as they move through the Windsor-Detroit area, engaging with various types of art and art events. In this case, Windsor-Detroit (rather than NYC) becomes

the spatial locus of their experiences, and their mapping of it becomes a way to think through their subjective senses of that space. Another such themed course could focus on the city of Windsor itself, requiring students to write in a mix of genres such as profiles, historical vignettes, opinion pieces, and proposals for change as a way to represent and make meaning from the city. Combined with photographs, video, and the other possibilities within Google Maps, students could create a rich portrait of the city in which they live and study. Maps of this kind could be used as a way to inform members and prospective members of the community, contributing to public dialogue, and possibly inspiring change within a community. Both of these course ideas could be adapted to any region/city either as full courses or as one segment of a larger course; these are just two of the many possibilities afforded by Google Maps as a writing platform. In any case, writing of this kind would push students to begin to think more about the ways in which they create meaning from the spaces around them.

As teachers, we learned a great deal about the possibilities that exist in using Google Maps as a platform for final portfolios. Before this course, the three of us had read the work of Reynolds, Mauk, Marback, Clark, and the New London Group and talked about the ways in which the spatial was an overlooked mode of meaning-making in the composition classroom, but it wasn't until we taught this course that we really understood the full implications of these ideas as they filtered through student experience. Additionally, we came to appreciate the rhetorical possibilities for students in producing this kind of text. While we realize that the extended field trip made this particular course unusual, we see the potential for using mapping and Google Maps in future courses that do not have a travel component (such as mapping one's own campus or city) but that nonetheless ask students to pay attention to their surroundings and make spatial meaning from them.

Notes

- 1 In addition to tuition and transportation costs, the course required students to pay a fee of \$1,900 to cover room, board, and admissions to all required events/outings. Unfortunately, no funding was available for students to further defray these costs.
- 2 For more on these connections, see also Mauk, Clark, and Marback.
- 3 See Weisser for an in-depth analysis of public writing.
- 4 See Hayles, Haas, Rice, Shipka, and Wysocki for additional ways that the visual mode can be incorporated into the composition classroom.
- 5 The final student Google Maps can be viewed at the following URLs:

Hope Marion <<http://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=100988966170789336776.00046d1214c8d4d8de8f4&ll=40.761431,-73.966999&spn=0.043687,0.093727&z=13>>

Cristina Naccarato <<http://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=106101561373386268305.00046d0e04ad84ddd2845&ll=40.683762,-73.858337&spn=0.144754,0.307961&z=12>>

Shauna Pellow <<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=103183357056614029047.00046cf3fe9e70c3c8435&ll=40.840308,-73.931808&spn=0.126751,0.30899&z=12>>

Justin Quenneville <<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=118433904883706129242.00046cf0a66bcccaad9d6&z=12>>

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Syllabus

English 26-302 Writing about the Arts

Dr. Dale Jacobs

Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.

—Variously attributed to Laurie Anderson, Tom Stoppard, and/or
Steve Martin

Course Description

Writing about the arts is a difficult project that involves the translation of one medium of expression into another. It involves the ordering of our experiences, the (re)construction of meaning in those experiences, and the communication of that meaning to readers. It is difficult, but rewarding work that involves slowing down, attending to detail, and carefully watching and listening as you engage with a variety of art forms. In engaging these diverse art forms, you will use writing as a way to explore connections between art and your own lived experiences and between art and its social and cultural contexts (including the immediate context of New York). Over the course of the semester, we will write about various art forms and read current and recent magazine articles in order to think about a variety of approaches to writing about the arts. In this course, I will encourage you to be creative, to try out new techniques and approaches, and to stretch yourselves as writers. I will encourage you to engage with a number of different art forms and write in a variety of styles and genres; we will concentrate on thinking about purposes, audiences, and the contexts for your writing. This course will provide you with many opportunities to interact with each other and with me as we form a community of writers and readers engaged in thinking about the arts. I hope that in questioning, exploring and working together, we will become better writers and readers and that we will be better able to engage with and write about the arts.

Course Texts

In Windsor:

Course Handouts (Available from Heather Patterson)

The New Yorker

In New York:

The New Yorker

The Village Voice
Time Out New York
New York Magazine

Be active readers. Do not read for information only, but instead think about what approaches the writers are using, how they have structured their pieces, how they have envisioned purpose, audience, and context, etc. In other words, read with an eye towards how it might help your own writing.

Course Requirements

Contribution to Collaborative Google Map (20%) – Each of you will contribute to a collaborative Google Map before we go to New York (I will send you an invitation in the next couple of days); the map will then serve as a resource for everyone as they plan their activities. I encourage you to begin your research as soon as possible. There are plenty of resources to help you begin thinking about what’s going on, including (but certainly not limited to) *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* (online at www.nytimes.com and through electronic subscription at Leddy), *Time Out New York* online (newyork.timeout.com), *Village Voice* online (www.villagevoice.com), *New York Magazine* online (nymag.com), Pollstar (pollstar.com), and Metromix (newyork.metromix.com). Guidebooks are also a good source as you begin your research (Chapters will have a good selection of NYC guides, as will Windsor Public Library).

This assignment has three (3) parts.

(1) I have assigned each of you a visual arts institution (see list below). For your assigned institution, you will write a 750-1,000 word entry that will be embedded on the map at the appropriate location (the pins have already been placed). Provide context (historical, geographical, cultural, etc.) for the institution so that your readers will understand how it fits into the cultural fabric of New York as a city and/or the art world as a whole. As well, provide a description of the major exhibitions currently on display. Remember that you are providing a resource.

(2) Pick a musical event (any genre) and mark it on the map with a light blue marker (click on icon and it will give you a list of options); in the title, include the names of the artist and venue, as well as your name. Write a 500-750 word entry in which you try to convince your classmates to attend this event. Provide background context for both the venue and the artist.

(3) Pick any other arts event/institution (dance, theater, film, music, visual art, performing art, food, etc.) and mark it on the map with a red marker with a black dot (click on icon and it will give you a list of options). Write a 250-500 word entry in which you try to convince your classmates to attend this event/institution. Provide contextual information.

Due by 9 a.m., Monday, May 18, 2009.

Visual Arts Institutions

New Museum of Contemporary Art
Morgan Library & Museum
Neue Gallerie New York
Fashion Institute of Technology: The Museum at FIT
Guggenheim Museum
The Cloisters
Cooper-Hewitt Museum
International Center for Photography
Whitney Museum of American Art
Frick Collection
Brooklyn Museum of Art
Museum of Arts & Design
American Folk Art Museum
P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center
Jewish Museum
Studio Museum Harlem
Bronx Museum of the Arts

Panel Discussion (10%) – While in New York, each of you will be part of a group that will lead class discussion. Each group will lead class on one of the following activities: Visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Liz Magnes at Bargemusic; Visit to the Museum of Modern Art; New York City Ballet performance. Each group (4-5 people per group) will give a 15-minute presentation designed to get everyone thinking about the specific experience. Your group presentation should include any observations your group wants to make about the event, questions you want to discuss about the event, and questions/activities designed to help us think about writing about this event. The presentation is designed to set up the subsequent discussion period and will lead into a 45-minute discussion that your group will facilitate.

Final Portfolio/Individual Google Map (50%) – The final portfolio for this course will be in the form of an individual Google Map. On this map, you must include writing/entries on the following events of your choosing:

Art exhibition; Musical event; Architecture or piece of public art; Restaurant; One other event/site of your choice. Each of these entries can be up to 1,200 words (the maximum for a Google map entry); remember that you should be concentrating on providing both context and detail for your entries. As well, you can include photographs and video as part of your map. You should also include a 3-4 page introduction in which you show how this map works as a coherent whole. Explain what you are trying to do with this project. Who is your audience? What is your purpose? How does the context of mapping affect the way you put this project together? If you have included photos and/or video, how does it fit into the overall project of your map? The URL for your map and your introduction (a Word file with a .doc or .rtf extension) should be emailed to djacobs@uwindsor.ca.

Due by 9 a.m. on Wednesday, June 24, 2009.

Class Participation and Attendance (20%) – Every member of the class is important and so everyone will be expected to attend all classes and participate fully in class activities, including peer response, writing activities, field trip activities, and discussion.

Grade Distribution	
Contribution to Collaborative Google Map	20%
Panel Discussion	10%
Final Portfolio/Individual Google Map	50%
Class Participation and Attendance	20%

Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day. If an unavoidable problem arises, talk to me before the due date.