

Sarah Lopez
Associate Professor

Graduate Course
Fall 2024
Wed. 1:45-4:45pm
Location: DRLB 2N36
David Rittenhouse Lab on the corner of Walnut and 33rd

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Material Histories and Ethnographic methods

What does it mean for students in the spatial disciplines (outside of anthropology, sociology, and history) to engage human subjects as primary sources of evidence? How can students in design, planning, and preservation both learn from the social sciences and transform classic ethnographic and historical methods to address the unique contexts of buildings, landscapes, and cities? This class focuses on how to conduct built environment research that views human subjects as repositories of knowledge and critical sources of primary evidence. We will move between research on the history of the built environment (dependent on maps, plats, documentation of sites) and human centered spatial research as we design—collectively—best practices and spatially oriented interview and observation techniques. We will address multiple scales (sidewalks, commercial store fronts, post offices, neighborhoods) as we problematize human experience, perception, and knowledge of the built world.

Course Goals:

- * reading buildings in their spatial context
- * historic context as a living palimpsest
- * critical engagement with the city through observation, mapping, interviews
- * the art of interviewing
- * the relationship between oral history, ethnography, narrative, and autoethnography
- * comparative and cross-disciplinary methods for studying the history of the built environment

Course Requirements:

1. Ongoing: class attendance and readings. Students are expected to attend classes regularly and to read. NOTE: It is more important that you read one article or book chapter deeply than that you read everything assigned. Please **email me in advance** if you miss a class, as otherwise I will expect to see you there. **More than two unexcused absences will automatically lower your grade by one whole letter.**
2. Sept. 11: Conduct a Cross-Section (see week 3)
3. Sept. 18: Watch Oral History recordings and consider methods (see week 4)
4. Sept. 25: Interview a family member or close friend (see week 5)
5. Oct. 9: Interview #2, and transcribe (see week 7)

- 6. Oct. 23: Interview #3, transcribe and code (see week 9)
- 7. Nov. 6: Conduct *dérive* (see week 11)
- 8. Nov. 27 & Dec. 4: Present final project, which likely entails conducting one to three more interviews (see week 14)

*required text (pdf of Delaney available on Canvas): Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*; Joan Didion, *Where I was From*

*recommended text: Ritchie, Donald, *Doing Oral History*, third edition, 2015.

*readings in this syllabus have **short citations**, if anybody has questions about other chapters or full citations, please ask.

Grading Structure

Attendance and participation in class (questions, discussion, in-class notations): 35%

Short Assignments: 40%

Final assignment: 25%

Office Hours: By appt. & Wed 10.00-12.00pm.

**I reserve the right to change the syllabus according to group discussion/needs. Please look out for e-mails I send or canvas updates regarding any changes to the syllabus.

WEEK 1

August 28

Subjects (Self, Other, Built / Environment)

Part 1: My disciplinary position / my subject position / my environmental position /
Part 2: Course overview

Reading:

- Listen to Ezra Klein, “This is your mind on deep reading”:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-maryanne-wolf.html>
- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Intro, Ch. 1 and 2: 1-34

Going Further:

- Denis Cosgrove, “New Directions in Cultural Geography”
- Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* and *Topophilia*
- Paul Groth, “New Connections in Vernacular Architecture”
- Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, “The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Studies,” Ch 1, *Everyday America* (pg. 1-22).

WEEK 2

Sept. 4

Positioning Ourselves in the Land

Part 1: The idea of Nature, Land, and First Effective Settlement
Part 2: You

Reading:

- Liboiron, Max, “Land, Nature, Resource, Property,” *Pollution is Colonialism*, 39-80, 2021.
- Kimmerer, Robin, “Learning the language of animacy,” *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, 48-59.
- Colton, Jennifer and Jesse Vogler, “Significant and Insignificant Mounds,”
<http://theamericanbottom.org/itineraryTwo.html>

Going Further:

- King, Tiffany L., “The map (settlement) and the territory (the incompleteness of conquest),” *The Black Shoals*, 74-110.

WEEK 3

Sept. 11

Positioning Ourselves in the National Ordinance and Urban Grid

Part 1: What does it mean to live in a grid? To what extent does the spatial determine the social?

Part 2: US Land Ordinance

Part 3: Discuss cross-section. What would it mean to know where you are?

Reading for next week:

- Dell Upton, "The Grid and the Republican Spatial Imagination," *Another City* (pg. 113-144).
- Paul Groth, "Street grids as Frameworks for Urban Variety," *Harvard Architecture Review* 2 (1981): 68-75.
- Grady Clay, "Crossing the American Grain with Vesalius, Geddes, and Jackson: the cross-section as a learning tool," *Everyday America*, Ch. 7: 109-129.

Going Further:

- Hildegard Binder Johnson, "Gridding a national landscape," *Making the American Landscape* (pg. 142-161).
- 99% invisible, episode 240, Plat of Zion, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/plat-of-zion/>
- J. B. Jackson, "Sense of Place, Sense of Time," in *Sense of Place, Sense of Time* (Yale University Press, 1994): 151-163.
- J. B. Jackson, "Almost Perfect Town," 1-7.
- Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," and "Belief and the Body," chap. 3, 4 in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (1980; Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Milestone: pick a cross-section either near campus or where you live and document walking through it with either description and observation (one to three paragraphs) or quick sketches/photographs coupled with description and observation (up to two pages). Please bring it to class printed out or emailed to me, and be prepared to discuss.

WEEK 4

Sept. 18

Post Office and Postal Roads

Part 1: Federal Institutions and the building of national infrastructure

Part 2: Oral History Methods

Part 3: Oral History vs. Journalism (story, narrative?); workshop

Reading for next week:

- David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth Century America*, Intro: 1-12, Chapter 3: 63-90.
- Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018), 1-24, 25-54.
- SKIM: <https://oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/>
- SKIM: <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/>

Going Further:

- <https://oralhistory.org/archives-principles-and-best-practices-overview/>
- <https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/fifty-years-of-service-1971-2021.pdf>
- NYT, “A Fight for Post Offices and Town’s Souls,” 2012.
- NYT, “Post Office Buildings with Character and Maybe a Sales Price,” 2013.
- <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/research-article/the-railway-mail-service/oral-histories>
- <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/the-revolutionary-post/>

Milestone: Listen to video & audio of oral histories (I will explain below links)

<https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/7#video>

<https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/19>

<https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/1>

https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/browse?search=cleveland+culture+gardens&sort_field=relevance&submit_header-search=

<https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/67>

How would you describe the audio –affect, person’s comfort level, tenor? What did you think about the questions asked? What question would you ask next if given the chance? Critiques or comments about this oral history project?

WEEK 5

Sept. 25

Farms: Corn, Capital, Kinship

Part 1: Farms as a built landscape and google group exploration

Part 2: Farms as a racialized landscape

Part 3: Decoding interviews and investigative journalism

Part 4: Discuss interview and interview Lopez in class (if time permits)

Reading for next week:

- Brown, Mary Ann, “Vanished Black Rural Communities in Western Ohio,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* (1982): 97-113.
- 1619 Podcast, episode 5, The Land of Our Fathers Part 1 and 11: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>

- LISTEN: Audie Cornish, “The Burning Question,” <https://transom.org/2012/the-burning-question/>
- Richie, Donald, “Conducting Interviews,” *Doing Oral History*, chapter 3: 73-102.

Going Further:

- Thomas Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England*, 1984.
- J. B. Jackson, “Westward Moving House” in *Landscape in Sight* (pg. 81-105).
- Korsunsky, Alex, “Putting Workers on the Map: Agricultural Atlases and the Willamette Valley’s Hidden Labor Landscape,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* (2020): 409-437.

Milestone: Interview somebody in your family or closest circle of friends about a landscape that is memorable to them and why. Before you interview, think carefully about if you will use handwritten notes, typed notes as they speak (which can be distancing), or record the interview with your phone or a digital tape recorder. Upon reflection, write out one thing that stands out from the interview and the experience of interviewing. Can you weave a quote from the interview into your observation? Can you paraphrase their words? What is the effect of each? Submit in paper-form or email at the beginning of class.

WEEK 6

Oct. 2

The Street and Street Life

Part 1: Ethnography and the built environment

Part 2: Stories as scholarship and the “sociological imagination” vs. “spatial imagination”

Part 3: Sanborn maps for studying streets and street life (if time permits)

Part 4: interviews

Reading for next week:

- Duneier, Mitchell, Hakim Hasan, and Ovie Carter, “Introduction,” “Part 1,” and “Afterward,” 1-16, 17-114, 318-330 in *Sidewalk* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

Going Further:

- Mills, C., “The Sociological Imagination,” 1959 [1977]
- Gelman, Andrew and Thomas Basbøll, “When Do Stories Work: Evidence and Illustration in the Social Sciences,” *Sociological Methods & Research*, vol. 43, 4, 2014, 547-570.

In class workshop: Interview somebody in class about an interstitial urban space (parking lot, alley, etc) or street that is memorable to them. Then follow surprise prompt (GSV)...

WEEK 7

Oct. 9

Squatting, Tenements, SROS

Part 1: A built environment perspective on SROs

Part 2: Focusing on peoples' stories of squatting

Part 3: Discuss your interviews (listening, transcription and analysis)

Reading:

- Paul Groth, "San Francisco--Third and Howard: Skid Row and the Limits of Architecture," chap. 1 in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, ed. Zeynep Celik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- Starechesnki, "Squatting History: The Power of Oral history as a History Making Practice," *Oral History Review*, 2014, 182-216.

Going Further:

- Trouillot, Michel-Ralph, "The Power in the Story." In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1-30. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- NYT, "Invisible Child, Dasani's Homeless Life," 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/invisible-child/index.html#/?chapt=1>

WEEK 8

Oct. 16

Indian & Pakistani Commercial District and Transnational Mexican/American Placemaking

Part 1: *The Remittance Landscape* – overview of methods

Part 2: Observation

Part 3: workshop- interviews

Reading:

- Lopez, *The Remittance Landscape*, Introduction and Ch. 1, 1-70, 2015.
- Sen, Arijit, *Transcultural Placemaking: Intertwined Spaces of Sacred and Secular on Devon Avenue, Chicago*, 31-62, 2013.
- Cheng, "'Flesh and Blood Archives': Embodying the Oral History Transcript" in *Oral History Review* 45:1 (2018): 127-42.

Going Further:

- Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History*, Chapter 1, "Claiming Urban Landscape as Public History," 1-13.
- Becky Nicholaides and James Zasadias, "Design Assimilation in Suburbia: Asian Americans, Built Landscapes, and Suburban Advantage" (pgs. 332-371).
- Mazé, Elinor, "The Uneasy Page: Transcribing and Editing Oral History" in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodologies*, 2007.

- Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analysis” in *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd Edition, New York: Routledge, 2016, 179-192.

Milestone: Interview somebody. They can be related to another project you have going on or related to a question you have about place, history, politics, social life (but in relation to some aspect of the material world/built environment). If you are not working on another project and do not have a research question in mind related to the built environment, you can again interview family and friends about a place that is of central importance to them (we will discuss). At this point it is more important to practice an interview than to have a clear research agenda or interview subject. This time you will **record and transcribe** the interview into a written word document. **Pull out salient moments.** If this were a part of a larger project, how might you code the interview? Once finished, what would you do differently? Submit by email or in paper at the beginning of class.

WEEK 9

Oct. 23

“Indian” Residential Schools and Trauma

Part 1: “Indian” Residential Schools—their architectural history

Part 2: Trauma, investigative journalism, and autoethnography

Part 3: “Best Practices?”

Reading:

- Rina Swentzell, “Conflicting Landscape Values: The Santa Clara Pueblo and Day School,” *Places*, 19-27, 1990.
- **Listen:** Connie Walker, *Stolen: Surviving St. Michael*, 9 episodes, <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/stolen/episodes#show-tab-picker>
- Crystal Mun-hye Baik, “From “Best” to Situated and Relational: Notes Towards a Decolonizing Praxis,” *The Oral History Review*
- Alexander Freund, “Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History.” In *Oral History Off the Record*.
- Martha Norkuna, “The Vulnerable Listener,” in *Oral History Off the Record*, 81-95, 2013.

Milestone: Putting interdisciplinarity to work. Pick a reading you have done for either this class or another class that discusses some aspect of the built environment (can be design, planning, preservation, history). Now, try to find oral histories or ethnographic accounts of a related subject on-line. When considering the two together and comparing one against the other: can you design new research questions? What lines of inquiry does this comparison open for you? Alternatively, if you’re not having luck with this, go ahead with a reading from this class that focuses on either the history of the built environment or an oral history/ethnography and ask of the piece: how could the arguments and examples be strengthened by applying a built environment / or oral history lens? What questions are left unanswered? What is omitted due to

the focus on either buildings/landscapes or people? Write a one-paragraph response and submit by the start of class.

WEEK 10

Oct. 30

Prisons / Carceral

Part 1: Immigrant detention in Texas—overview of Lopez/student project for HAL

Part 2: The idea of shared authority and legal and ethical issues in oral history, ethnography, and people-centered research.

Reading:

- Listen: <https://www.futuromediagroup.org/suave/> (6 episodes)
- Shopes, Linda, “Legal and Ethical Issues in Oral History” in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, 125-159, 2007.
- Lopez, Sarah, “A Personal Reflection on People as “Subjects” for Built Environment Research,” *Buildings & Landscapes* (2022).

Going Further:

- Mahuika, Nepia, “The Indigenous Truth of Oral History,” *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: an indigenous perspective*, 166-178.
- Rouverol, Alicia, “Collaborative Oral History in a Correctional Setting: Promise and Pitfall,” *Oral History Review*, 61-85, 2003.

WEEK 11

Nov. 6

Description and Walking

Part 1: How can walking be a method for people-centered spatial and historical research?

Part 2: Workshop.

Reading:

- Guy Debord, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1958
- Garnette Cadogan, “Walking While Black,” *Literary Hub*, July 8, 2016
- J. B. Jackson, “Stranger’s Path” in *Landscape in Sight*, 1997.
- Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What happens after they are built* (Penguin Books, 1994). Ch. 1 & Ch. 2, pgs. 1-23.

Going Further:

- William Littman, “Viewpoint: Walk This Way: Reconsidering Walking for the Study of Cultural Landscapes,” *Buildings & Landscapes*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 3-16.
- Solnit, Rebecca, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001)

- Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 91-110.
- Podcast: 99% Invisible: 68 Built for Speed
- Guy Debord, *Two Accounts of the Dérive*, 1956

Milestone: Go on dérive that is no less than 1 hour and no more than 2. After reading Cadogan and Jackson, do a very short experimental writing exercise where you “describe” your path (fine to focus on the material aspects, or the subjective ones, or both). I do not want images. I want text. Submit at the beginning of class and be prepared to share.

*Also, start thinking about how you want to direct the class of week 13. One way to do this is to design an assignment that you would like to see in future iterations of this class. Design a second assignment for Sarah Lopez.

WEEK 12

Nov. 13

Autoethnography

Part 1: What are the boundaries between personal narrative and built environment stories? What is the difference between memoir and autoethnography?

Part 2: In pairs, begin to sketch a memoir or autoethnography style narrative of some aspect of your life. One of the main narrative threads should be place, landscape, and/or buildings...

Part 3: Group discussion about next class

Reading:

- Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*
- The Colour of Water: an autoethnographically inspired journey of my becoming a researcher

Going Further

- Cooper and Lilyea, “I am interested in Autoethnography, but how do I do it?,” *Qualitative Report*, 2022.
- James McBride, *The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to his White Mother* (1995)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015).

WEEK 13

Nov. 20

Memoir

In addition to exploring first person memoir that is known for a thick description of place, students will evaluate where we are, and what they want more time to process. We will develop the class accordingly.

Reading:

- Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps, “Narrating the Self,” 1996, 19-43.
- Joan Didion, *Where I was From* (2003)

WEEK 14

Nov. 27

- Final Project, i.e. Initiating a Project...

WEEK 15

Dec. 4

Final Project, i.e. Initiating a Project...

We will discuss this in detail throughout the class. The final project should not be thought about as a final product. Rather, this class aims to identify methods that open new lines of inquiry for you within academia, in relation to place and history, and in how you understand and situate your history in place. The final project is experimental. It can take the form of narrative prose, of academic text, of photographic prose, audio text, or video text. Note: it must include words, but they can be written, spoken, or recorded. The medium is your choice. It will either be a piece you design in relation to interviews you conducted during the semester, or a piece you design based on an autoethnographic approach.

USEFUL LINKS:

ORAL HISTORY

On technique:

- <https://oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/>
- <https://oralhistory.org/remote-interviewing-resources/>
- <https://training.npr.org/2017/01/31/the-ear-training-guide-for-audio-producers/>
- <https://transom.org/2012/the-burning-question/>

On collections:

- <https://oralhistory.org/centers-and-collections/>
- <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center>

On Penn’s IRB requirements:

- <https://irb.upenn.edu/homepage/social-behavioral-homepage/guidance/types-of-social-behavioral-research/survey-interview-research/>

On Consent:

- <https://columbia.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=d3fc0d48-5152-4c36-a2a9-ac3900fd3a6a>

EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS:

- <https://www.nybg.org/learn/humanities-institute/bronx-foodways-oral-histories-project/bronx-foodways-oral-histories-project-2021-participants/>
- <https://medium.com/community-archives>

Oral history meets journalism:

- <https://www.futuromediagroup.org/suave/>
- <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/latino-usa-95725/episodes/the-quevedos-43990281>
- Wilkerson, Isabel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (2010)

EXAMPLE OF ETHNOGRAPHY:

- Tang, Eric, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto* (2015)

Experimental Ethnography:

- De Leon, Jason, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (2015)

EXAMPLES OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY:

- Whitworth, Colin, "Finding My Front Porch: An Autoethnography of Queer Southern Intersections" *Journal of Autoethnography* (2023)
- Han, Clara, *Seeing Like a Child: Inheriting the Korean War* (2020)

Experimental Autoethnographic Podcast:

- Espera: <https://www.sayrequevedo.com/espera>

MAPPING

- Sanborn Maps, digital, on Pennsylvania
https://franklin.library.upenn.edu/catalog/FRANKLIN_9940043353503681
- USGS Maps