

**CA 877 G100: Selected Topics in Fine and Performing Arts**

**ENGL 811 G100: Studies in Theory II**

**SA 887 G200: Special Topics in Sociology & Anthropology**

**SA 474 E100: Cultures, Politics, Performance: Conversations with Performance Studies**

## **Performance, Place, and Sensory Ethnography**

### Instructors:

Dara Culhane (Sociology and Anthropology; [culhane@sfu.ca](mailto:culhane@sfu.ca); Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30-3:00 pm, GCA 3510)\*

Peter Dickinson (Contemporary Arts and English; [peter\\_dickinson@sfu.ca](mailto:peter_dickinson@sfu.ca); Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30-3:00 pm, GCA 3510)\*

\*We are happy to arrange to meet together or separately with students outside of these times.

### Meeting Time:

Thursdays, 5:30-9:20 pm, SFU Woodward's/GCA 4390

### Course Description:

Performance, as an object of study and a method of critical research and analysis, has increasingly become a way to bridge scholarly inquiry across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Among other things, this has meant paying attention to how the body and the senses produce knowledge and ways of being in the world. In this **practice-based** course, co-taught by performance studies scholars in Anthropology and Contemporary Arts/English, we will explore the theoretical and methodological intersections among performance studies and two emerging fields in anthropology: multisensory ethnography, which explores relationships between embodied sensory experience and historical, cultural, and political contexts; and multimodal ethnography, which engages media in conducting fieldwork, and in analyzing and communicating ethnographic work.

As both performance studies and ethnography speak meaningfully to our relationships to place, and how we embody and are entangled with different material spaces, we will take as our primary objects of study our immediate sensory environments. How do we engage with questions of relationships to place, acknowledging that we are situated on unceded Indigenous territories? How do the neighbourhoods we live and play in, or the institutions we work at, perform on and for us? And how do we perform in and with them? How might paying ethnographic attention to the everyday micro-performances of our city—the “sensescapes” of sound, smell, sight, taste, and touch we experience on the way to an appointment, for example—speak otherwise to official narratives of urban branding, or help to reveal sedimented layers of history and belonging? What sensoria may be excluded from the conventional western scheme of five senses, hierarchically ordered? We will take up these concerns by engaging with a range of sensory studies (texts, films, material archives) exemplary of researchers’ sensuous and often practice-based entanglements with the multiple and overlapping worlds they embody, including the scholarly, the artistic, the activist, and the

community-engaged. We will also use walking/ambuling as a central course methodology. To this end, students will be asked to engage in a series of walking/ambuling exercises; to keep a **multimedia** journal recording field notes from their walks/ambles (as well as other assigned tasks); and to complete a final trans-medial project that may combine writing, video, sound, performance, etc., and that applies the embodied research of their walks/ambles to ideas of sense- and place-making. **In-class instruction on how to work ethnographically across different media will be part of the syllabus, and will include visual design, audio/podcasting, and smartphone video-making.**

#### Texts:

Required and recommended readings will be made available on Canvas as online pdfs.

#### Course Requirements:

Four multimodal ethnography diary exercises	20%
Seminar reading response and discussion prompt	10%
Project proposal presentation, abstract, and schedule of work	20%
Final project	50%

#### Weekly Syllabus:

Week 1	Jan 3	<p>Introduction to the Course</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> 1) Deborah S. Vidali, “Multi-Sensorial Anthropology: A Retrofit Cracking Open of the Field” (2016); 2) Carl Lavery, “Teaching Performance Studies: 25 instructions for performance in cities” (2005)</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> Althea Arnaquq-Baril’s <i>Angry Inuk</i> (NFB Free Access available through <a href="#">SFU Lib</a>)</p>
Week 2	Jan 10	<p>Discussion of Multi-Modal Diary Entry 1 (see instructions below) and Visit by Duane Woods</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> 1) Christine Walley, “Transmedia as experimental ethnography: The Exit Zero Project, deindustrialization, and the politics of nostalgia” (2015); 2) Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous place-thought &amp; agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)” (2013)</p> <p><u>Explore:</u> Examples of multi-modal ethnography in the journal <i>Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography</i> (<a href="https://entanglementsjournal.org/">https://entanglementsjournal.org/</a>); be prepared to talk about something that speaks to you in terms of form and content</p>
Week 3	Jan 17	<p>Discussion of Multi-Modal Diary Entry 2 (see instructions below)</p>

Readings: 1) Kimberly Powell, "Multimodal Mapmaking: Working Toward an Entangled Methodology of Place" (2016); 2) Tim Ingold, "Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing" (2010); 3) Kelsey Blair et al, "Memory, Milestones, and Monuments: A Peripatetic Exploration of the West Side of UBC Campus" (2018)

Bring to Class: A paragraph or an image or a sound, etc, that telegraphs in some way your first thoughts/impulses about a final project.

Week 4	Jan 24	Discussion of Multi-Modal Diary Entry 3 (see instructions below)
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Readings: 1) Deidre Sklar, "The Footfall of Words: A Reverie on Walking with Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe" (2005); 2) Karin Animoto Ingersoll, "Introduction," from *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (2016); 3) Rosemary Georgeson and Jessica Hallenbeck, "We Have Stories: Five Generations of Indigenous Women in Water" (2018)

Week 5	Jan 31	Discussion of Multi-Modal Diary Entry 4 (see instructions below)
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Readings: 1) Kelvin E.Y. Low, "The Sensuous City: Sensory methodologies in urban ethnography" (2015); 2) Dylan Robinson, "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger: Being Idle No More" (2017)

Bring to Class: Final diary entries for submission

Week 6	Feb 7	Workshopping of Final Project Proposals
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Reading: 1) Guylaine Racine, Karoline Truchon, and Merdad Hage, "And We Are Still Walking...: When a Protest Walk Becomes a Step Towards Research on the Move" (2008)

Bring to Class: A draft proposal for your final project (see below) to be workshopped in class.

Week 7	Feb 14	Presentation of Group Walks Tied to Final Project Proposals (see below)
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<b>Feb 21</b>	<b>READING BREAK</b>
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Week 8	Feb 28	TBA + Duane Woods Check-In
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Week 9	March 7	TBA
Week 10	March 14	TBA
Week 11	March 21	TBA + Duane Woods Consultation
Week 12	March 28	Final Project Presentations (Form TBA)
Week 13	April 4	Final Project Presentations (Form TBA)

### Course Readings

PDF documents of each of the readings listed above have been posted to a common course Canvas site. Log into Canvas (<http://canvas.sfu.ca>) with your SFU computing id and password, click on the combined CA 877/ENGL 811/SA 474/SA 887 link, and then navigate to the weekly readings folder. Additional required readings pertaining to the second half of the course, as well as recommended readings and resources that intersect with general course themes and student research interests will be posted on an ongoing basis. We will also use the Discussion function in Canvas (see below).

### Multimodal Ethnographic Diary Assignment

- Developing a practice of keeping a diary/field notebook is key to ethnographic work in general, and to the focus on sensory embodied knowing in this course more particularly.
- While there are four required entries for the graded portion of this assignment, you will likely find yourself making additional entries as relevant experiences and reflections emerge in response to: course readings and viewings; classroom discussions; what you are doing in your other courses/the rest of your life; informal conversations; dreams; questions and imaginings that come to you in various ways throughout the semester in relation to performance, place, and sensory ethnography.
- Your entries may appear in words/text AND/OR in any/all of the following (blurred) genres: still and/or moving images; drawings; collections of objects; sound recordings; performance scripts/scores. Your diary may be a notebook, and/or a phone/camera/recorder/computer, and/or a box of things, and/or a bulletin board/wall, and/or ????. Most often ethnographers work with combinations of genres and in multiple forms when creating ethnographic diaries. Your ethnographic diary is a private document always initially created for your eyes/ears/minds/bodies only.
- Getting started: You will find yourself making entries unpredictably as relevant experiences and reflections emerge, but we encourage you to set aside at least two 30-minute time slots per week to work specifically on your diary: recording reflexive entries and noting themes/questions/disturbances/inspirations that come to you while reviewing past entries; making plans for the next week's work. Some questions to provoke initial diary entries:
  - Who are you? Introduce yourself to yourself.
  - Why are you undertaking a degree in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - What attracted you to this course?
  - What work do you want to do and why?

- What do the terms “performance,” “place,” and “ethnography” mean to you?
- What does it mean to you to practice embodied/sensory knowing?
- What conversations do you have, and with whom, about your university work?
- What course readings/viewings/assignments spark your attention? Why? How do they “grab” you?
- What do you do re: writing, reading, collecting images and/or audio/visuals and/or objects as you work through this course?
- What readings and viewings inspire you? challenge you? enrage you? bore you?
- What conversations inspire you? challenge you? enrage you? bore you?
- What surprises you?
- First Diary Entry: Either before or after completing the readings for Week 2 (see above), take a short (15-20 minute) walk/amble of your choosing at a time of your choosing: near your home; around or within any of the buildings on SFU’s campuses; to or from work; elsewhere. The principal goal of this first session is to begin a “thick, sensory, embodied, affective, critical and reflexive description” of your process of selecting your site/route, of your physical and mental preparation for your walk/amble, and of your embodied temporal and spatial experience of completing the walk/amble. To this end, describe the physical or topographical or organizational or atmospheric conditions/parameters of the spaces you explored/traversed, the layout of your route, aspects of the built environment that caught your attention or that were involved in co-composing your ambulation, people/animals/things you encountered/interacted with, images/sounds/events that stayed with you, how/what/when your body was sensing/feeling as you moved through space. You may record notes and reflections by hand, computer, voice recorder, or camera. You may also choose to walk alone, with a partner, or as part of a group. (We will discuss the different ethics requirements for specific sites and specific methods in class.) Please bring your notes to class, having also considered the following questions in your diary to facilitate your participation in class discussion:
  - How and why did you choose the site/route for your walk/amble?
  - How did you describe your walk/amble?
  - Who/what did you encounter, where, and how?
  - What doings transpired over the course of your walk/amble? How did you describe these activities and their relationships to: those engaged in them; to the place/space in which you encountered them; and to you (and you to them)?
  - How different (or not) was your experience from your expectations?
  - Consider the broader context: what are the conditions of possibility that bring you to be doing this exercise in this place at this time?
  - Consider how the readings for this week amplify/comment on/complicate/make you question any or all of the above.
- Second Diary Entry: Either before or after completing the readings for Week 3 (see above), continue your work on this assignment by taking another walk/amble. Stick to the same site/route, but feel free to vary the time of day. Follow the same method for recording your observations/experiences, but this time “thicken” your description by focusing on including sights, sounds, smells, touches, tastes, and “+ senses.” Pay close attention to the

relationships between bodies (including your own), affect (including your own) and space. Here are some prompts for questions to consider during your second session. Please bring your notes to class for discussion:

- How do the people you observe/encounter on your walk/amble communicate with each other and with you: e.g., through conversations expressed verbally and/or through body movement and gesture?
- In addition to the conventional five senses, note how your own body and emotions signal additional insights and responses (the “+ senses”).
- How are differences in political/social power expressed in the design/layout of the space/environment/location you are wayfaring through, and how do you register this affecting the people you encounter along the way?
- **Third Diary Entry:** Either before or after completing the readings for Week 4 (see above), take a third walk, once again following the same route. This time pay particular attention to questions of embodied reflexivity—that is, how you sense yourself sensing the world you are walking through (by, for example, noting a change in your pace or heart rate, being aware of different muscular responses, and otherwise attuning yourself to different second-order sensations). Think as well about memory-based, associative, and affective charges that your body registers. Come to class on Week 4 prepared to share a three-minute talk/movement/video/audio about your experience of completing walk 3 that you are prepared to share with the class.
- **Fourth Diary Entry:** Either before or after completing the readings for Week 5 (see above), take a fourth and final walk, paying particular attention to senses of belonging and exclusion. Come to class on Week 5 with a drawing, or an image, or a sound, or a movement communicating your experience of belonging or exclusion anywhere along the route you have been walking/ambling for this assignment. Also come prepared to hand in your diaries documenting your four walks for assessment (see next bullet point).
- **Instructions for Submission of Diaries:** Your diary entries—which may be multimedia, and in experimental or conventional forms—are your primary source. Supplement the fieldnotes from your walks/ambles with notes from readings and our class discussions. Cite readings and indicate where or if this work resonates with your own, how or if the readings offered productive insights that led you to reconsider your own, when or if you found yourself in radical disagreement with authors’ assumptions. **Flag for our reading the following items:** 1) at least one page (or alternative equivalent) from your fieldnotes for each of your four walks/ambles; 2) at least one page (or alternative equivalent) from your reading/class discussion notes related to our weekly investigations of this exercise; 3) a 500-word written statement summarizing the cumulative experience of your walks/ambles; and 4) any other items you find relevant (photos, videos, miscellaneous “stuff”). **Your diaries are due to be submitted in class on Week 5, January 31<sup>st</sup>.**

### **Seminar Reading Response and Discussion Prompt**

- In advance of our class meetings during Weeks 2-6 (Jan 10-Feb 7), a selection of you will be asked to post to a Canvas Discussion Thread a short 250-word response to one or more of the readings under consideration that week. These responses must be posted by noon on the Wednesday before our Thursday evening class.

- Because of class numbers there will be several of you posting each week, and you should therefore feel free to respond to each other as well as to the readings.
- Also because of numbers, in lieu of formal in-class presentations we will be asking for scheduled posters to instead make a short one-minute prompt/intervention to help spark general conversation. These prompts can take the form of a question or object or image you'd like us to collectively consider in relation to the readings and/or your walks/ambles, or they may be more performative in nature: e.g., a bit of Lefebvrian "rhythmanalysis" you have us undertake in the form of a gestural phrase or sonic score.
- Assignments for the weekly reading responses/prompts will be made during the first class.

### **Project Proposal Presentation, Abstract, and Schedule of Work**

- We envision your final projects as emanating from a cumulative research process that ideally intersects with your weekly walks (see below).
- To that end, there are several stages to the submission of your formal project proposals.
- For example, in Week 3 (Jan 17) we are asking everyone to bring to class a place-holder prompt (which can be text-, image-, sound-, etc-based) for their initial thoughts around their projects.
- By Week 6 (Feb 7), we are asking everyone to have a first draft of their plans for a final project. To do this, come to class with: a rough project proposal that includes an abstract (no more than 300 words) detailing your focus of study, the methods and form you will employ to undertake and present this study, and any considerations regarding ethics approval (to be discussed in class); a bibliography of 4-6 resources that you anticipate consulting during the course of your research; and a fairly comprehensive schedule of how and when you will undertake your research.
- In groups you will workshop these proposals, refining them by answering outstanding questions, responding to peer critiques regarding conceptual focus and practical feasibility, etc. In addition, each group will collectively come up with an idea for a supplementary walk for the class as a whole to complete the following week that summarizes the general spirit of your projects (more details on this part of the proposal presentations will be provided in class).
- **Final revised project proposals (300-word abstract + bibliography + work schedule) should be submitted electronically as Word attachments to both Dara and Peter by noon on February 14<sup>th</sup>.**

### **Final Project**

- For your final project, you are encouraged to build on your ethnographic walks/ambles to make a performative and multi-modal intervention into sense- and place-making in the city.
- The idea for your project may arise organically from the documentation of and reflection on your initial walks/ambles: e.g., audio or still/moving image recordings that you may wish to supplement and edit into a sound or photographic or video essay/installation. Alternatively, you may wish to interview individuals you encounter on your walks/ambles about their sensory experiences of place, combining their stories into a multi-modal performance text that might touch on any or all of the following issues: Indigenous survivance and

sovereignty; genealogies of community and migration; economic gentrification; etc. Perhaps there is a specific building or architectural site or public space whose history you would like to research further.

- You are not limited to the sites of your ethnographic walks/ambles, nor to strict delimitations of what constitutes sensory or performative places. If you are having trouble coming up with project ideas, consider as possible prompts some of the “instructions for performance in cities” listed by Carl Lavery in his essay.
- Some of you will be well versed in working across different media. For others, this will be new. DO NOT PANIC! Our baseline assumption in developing this assignment has always been that it had to be something that could be accomplished with minimal expertise (with the two of us as the default here) and technical requirements (i.e., a smartphone). On top of this, we have built into the course hands-on workshops in smartphone videography, editing, audio recording, podcasting, and webcasting courtesy of Duane Woods, who is an Audio Video Design Specialist in the Teaching and Learning Centre’s Creative Studio.
- Taking seriously the sensory, performative, and place-based methods of research that are the foundation of this course, we are interested with this project in disrupting traditional scholarly and epistemological models that tend to privilege language, asking what other kinds of embodied, creative, and practice-based research in the university might look like, and especially how such research might be transmitted as new knowledge—e.g., in multi-media/modal forms of documentation, etc.
- That said, we welcome writing as one form of such documentation, and regardless of the extent to which writing figures in your final project, we are asking for all students to submit with their final projects a 750-word statement reflecting on the process of undertaking your site-based and multi-modal research, including any problems encountered, assumptions you may have had to revise, and discoveries that enriched your understanding of your topic. **All written work for this assignment should be submitted electronically as Word attachments to Dara and Peter.**
- Finally, we have reserved the last two weeks of class for in-class presentations of your projects, or portions thereof: e.g., a photo essay, an installation, a sound or video work, a short performance, etc. Due to time constraints, these presentations will need to be brief and more information on exact formal parameters will be provided in class after Reading Break.
- **Completed final projects are due Monday, April 8<sup>th</sup>.**