Transmedia and Sounding Publics: Refugee Stories in Pittsburgh

Seminar Description

“Transmedia and Sounding Publics: Refugee Stories In Pittsburgh” (TSP) aims to shift the focus from a traditional graduate seminar format of individual growth and expression, to collaboration and continuing procedural engagement based in hands-on skills training, collaborative teamwork, participatory research, and ethnographic engagement. At the heart of this seminar is transmedia, an innovative methodology of participatory and collaborative storytelling conducted across multiple media platforms to spur community outreach and engagement. Through transmedia, participants learn and interact through diverse media forms and create new multidimensional textual meanings. Designed to bridge [sub]disciplinary boundaries within music and across the humanities and social sciences, this course will guide Ph.D. students in learning multimedia skills, conducting ethnographic research, working outside of academia in public/non-profit sectors, and collaborating with refugee community members in Pittsburgh. We will draw on the already-in-place skill sets of students and develop others to prepare students for diverse careers in the humanities and social sciences beyond academia.
Participation and Collaboration

Designed to bridge [sub]disciplinary boundaries in music and humanities/social sciences, this seminar seeks to bring communities together through sound, music, and storytelling. The transmedia focus of the course is integrally performative, involving the creation, sharing, and ongoing engagement with content by using ubiquitous technologies that already permeate our everyday lives. While this course, listed through the Department of Music, will emphasize sound and music as mediums for communication, central to the course is the idea of publics as socially organized groups, performers/audiences, and communities that come into being in relation to texts (broadly conceived as cultural expressions) and their circulation. The seminar will be interdisciplinary and unique to the students and their projects by drawing on the students’ diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and interests. Students will build teamwork skills by collaborating with each other on small projects throughout the semester. Students will learn about opportunities in the non-profit sector by volunteering and developing content for the host organization(s) for the course. Students will partner with Pittsburgh-based organizations in the public/non-profit sector and also work with Pittsburgh-based refugees through personal interaction, community outreach, and structured interactions. Dependent on citywide and university connections, students will interact with community members, organizational leaders, and various Pitt faculty as seminar guests.

Course Content

Bi-Weekly Assignments. Every other week, in addition to engaging with the assigned readings, students will turn in a written assignment that relates to that week’s seminar subject. For example, for the week, “ALT-AC | BEYOND THE ACADEMY,” students will be asked to read and analyze online job ads in fields they are interested in outside of academia. They will then create a LinkedIn profile for that job and workshop each others’ ideas and profiles during our seminar meeting that week. For the week, “TRANSMEDIA | INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING | DIGITAL HUMANITIES,” students will be asked to review an online transmedia project of their choosing and share their review with the class during our seminar meeting that week. During the week, “COMMUNITY OUTREACH,” students will research the host non-profit organization(s) and their work and write a number of short journal entries about their experiences working with the organization and team members, paying close attention to ethics, power relations, and best practices for ethnographic engagement. Throughout the semester, students will practice developing public-facing writing and multimedia content.
**Ethnographic Engagement.** Throughout the semester, students will engage in ethnographic research. This research will provide data and experiences to shape the Final Collaborative Project for the course. Students will keep a “fieldwork journal” in which they will document their time and experiences working with the most non-profit organization(s).

**Internship/Volunteering.** At the beginning of the semester, students will develop a relationship with a host non-profit organization and a particular local refugee community, member, organization. Throughout the semester students will devote 5 hours a week to volunteering, engaging, and conducting ethnographic research to further the mission of the organization(s), help provide for refugee families in Pittsburgh, and develop a final collaborative project topic.

**Final Collaborative Project.** Throughout the semester, students will be asked to think through portions of their final project. This project should be collaborative with fellow students in the seminar, host organizations for the course, and refugee community members. Possible collaborative projects might include organizing and carrying out a public and inclusive discussion among Bhutanese refugees about how soundscapes affect lived experience, culminating in short audio/video interviews that are then edited collaboratively and put together in a short film to be screened by the larger community. Students might launch a pop-up storytelling audio workshop with Afghan refugees to tell their stories of immigration through words, sound, and music. Students might facilitate musical collaboration between a musician from a refugee community and found sounds recorded by community members. Students may contribute to development and research for host organizations through their projects.
**Course Schedule**

**Please note, readings will be divided among students to cover more ground.**

**This tentative schedule is subject to change**

**Week 1 | SEMINAR INTRODUCTIONS |**

**Week 2 | SITE, PITTSBURGH | “SHARING OUR STORY” ORGANIZATION |**

- “Sharing Our Story.” http://www.sharingourstory.com/

**Week 3 | COMMUNITY OUTREACH |**


**Week 4 | COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH |**


**Week 5 | TRANSMEDIA | INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING | DIGITAL HUMANITIES |**


**Week 6 | FIELDWORK |**


**Week 7 | REFUGEE STUDIES |**


Week 8 | ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ETHICS |


Week 9 | AUDIO RECORDING | WORKSHOP |


Week 10 | VIDEO RECORDING | WORKSHOP |

Week 11 | SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY |


Week 12 | APPLIED ETHNOMUSICOLOGY | APPLIED HUMANITIES |


Week 13 | ALT-AC | BEYOND THE ACADEMY


Week 14 | KEEPING THE CONVERSATIONS—COLLABORATIONS GOING |
• Seminar workshop with community collaborators and interlocutors

Week 15 | SEMINAR SHOWCASE |
• Public presentations of ongoing work and collaborations