

PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN

**URBAN POETICS**

PLVS 4000.A.7375

FALL 2012

66 5<sup>TH</sup> Avenue, Room 603

Tuesday/12:00-2:40 pm

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Office hours *by appointment* only

**Course Description**

This seminar is an introduction to the theory and practices of sensory urbanism. It is founded on an exploration of the senses as a route to understanding urban spaces and on the premise that the human sensorium is simultaneously physical/bodily, cultural and historical – that is, our sensory understanding is both innate, constructed and learned.

The spaces of the city produce extraordinary and habitual ways of interaction – seen in embodiment, perceptions, identity – that, in turn produce the ways in which we characterize and imagine the urban – through song, text, image and other forms of representation. In this course, we will be concerned with the process of “making and unmaking” of place/space, taking into account the entire spectrum of sensory engagement of our bodies with the environment, through which we ourselves are made into urban inhabitants.

We will actively engage in this *poiesis* – a reflective and creative construction -- through close reading, experiments, performance, listening, walking, and deep exchange and experience. Through this, we will bring into being the thoroughly real cities of our imagination.

**Course Outline**

This is a seminar and while I will lead the discussion, it is incumbent on you to participate. When readings and activities are assigned to a class, it is assumed that you will have completed them prior to the session and are prepared to discuss, present or submit, as appropriate. Each week, you are required to bring 3 keywords or concepts derived from the readings to share. These will provide the foundation for our discussion.

A substantive portion of your grade for this course rests on class activity so please review the preparation expectations for each session.

- When it says “bring to class”, you must be prepared to present this material.

- Suggestions are also included for your final assignment under “for ‘your’ city. These are suggestions for ongoing research, which you are not required to bring to the class session but should be working on through the semester.

**IMPORTANT:** There are **two mandatory** all-day workshops scheduled for Saturday, November 10 and Saturday, November 17. Our regular class meetings for those weeks are cancelled. These workshops provide valuable opportunities to work closely with noted artists, choreographers, designers and scientists. Please do not miss them.

Details of course assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

**Please note:** This is our guide for the semester but it is not set in stone. Readings may be added or the sequence adjusted depending on our trajectory in the classroom. Therefore, I advise you to check this weekly and also look for announcements on Blackboard.

### **WEEK 1: August 28**

**Introduction.** Discussion of syllabus. In-class activity

The following cities will be assigned in class as the focus of your semester’s urban sensory code project.

Athens	Shanghai	Manila	Mexico City	Phnom Penh
Port au Prince	Lagos	Dubai	Cairo	Kabul

### **WEEK 2: September 4**

#### **SKIN: MAP/BODY/MEMORY**

Howes, David: Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment IN Classen, Constance (ed.) The Book of Touch pp. 27-39

Bruno, Giuliana: An Atlas of Emotions IN Atlas of Emotion pp. 206-245

*Bring to class:* 3 keywords/concepts from the readings

Think about: What if your skin was a map? What is the story it tells? What journeys are drawn on it?

For “your” city: Find it on a map. What is the closest city to it that you have visited? Measure the distance from NY to “your” city on a map using your fingers.

### **WEEK 3: September 11**

#### **SENSING SELF, A SENSE OF PLACE**

Bachelard, Gaston: Corners IN The Poetics of Space pp. 136- 147

Perec, Georges: The Town AND Space in Species of Spaces and Other Pieces pp. 60-67 + 80-92.

Grosz, Elizabeth: Bodies-Cities IN Colomina, Beatriz Sexuality and Space pp. 241-253

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts from the readings

Think about: What does it mean to be “in place”? How and when do you know you are “in place”? Can you think of at least 3 specific items or sensations that give you that feeling.

*For “your” city:* Identify a place. This is not a monument or a notable building but a place that people seem to have had an experience. Think about how you would go about doing this for a place you have never visited. What kinds of websites might you research? What books or magazines could you read?

#### **WEEK 4: September 18**

##### **EAR: SOUND/ENVIRONMENT/NOISE**

Schafer, Murray: Selections from Soundscape

Evelyn Glennie: Hearing Essay:

<http://www.evelyn.co.uk/Resources/Essays/Hearing%20Essay.pdf>

Listen to Andrea Polli: Heat and the Heartbeat of the City at:

<http://turbulence.org/Works/heat/index2.html>

You will need headphones to get the full effect. Listen to all four time periods and take note of the suggestions for listening.

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords.

Be prepared to describe an urban event using only sounds. We will play a kind of charades in class.

Think about: How we use words to describe sounds – babble, whoosh, bing, honk, bang, click.

*For “your” city:* What are the sounds of your city? What is its music? Find and listen to some.

#### **WEEK 5: September 25**

##### **TONGUE: TASTE/LANGUAGE/MIGRATION**

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang: Coffee and the Protestant Ethic from The Tastes of Paradise pp. 15-84

Jurafsky, Dan: Macarons, Macaroons, Macaroni

[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2011/11/macarons\\_macaroons\\_and\\_macaroni\\_the\\_curious\\_history.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2011/11/macarons_macaroons_and_macaroni_the_curious_history.single.html)

#### **Assignment #1 due: Making Sense of NY (details posted in assignment section on Blackboard)**

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts

1 edible item found in NY that comes from somewhere else. Be prepared to tell us its story. If there is enough to share, we will have a little tasting bar.

*For “your” city:* Find a food item from your city in NY. Taste it. How did it get here? What is its story?. What information does it give you about the connections between NY and “your” city? If it is a prepared dish, what are its ingredients? What do the ingredients tell you about “your” city?

## **WEEK 6: October 2**

### **NOSE: SMELL/WASTE/DIFFERENCE**

Corbin, Alain: *The Stench of the Poor*

Illich, Ivan: Selections from H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness pp. 47-76

De Certeau et al “When it Comes Down to It, Cooking Worries Me...” IN The Practice of Everyday Life Vol 2: Living and Cooking pp. 223-247

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts

A smell. (this is not a description of a smell or of an object that smells. You must find a way to bring a smell itself)

5 descriptions of smells – “lemon fresh” (you might look at menus, wine magazines, your grocery store)

Think about: Your associations with smells – what do they bring to mind? What is the difference between a “good” smell and a “bad smell”? Do we always agree? Can you think of occasions when your nose has told you something that your eyes have not?

*For “your” city:* Find descriptions of smells in your city. Buy a spice or consider making a recipe and experiencing the aroma in your kitchen and prior to tasting.

## **WEEK 7: October 9**

### **HAND: TOUCH/FEAR/TEXTURE**

Sennett, Richard: *Fear of Touching* IN Flesh and Stone pp. 212-251

Paterson, Mark W. D.: *Digital Touch* IN *Classen* *ibid.* pp. 431-435

Miller, William Ian: *Darwin’s Disgust* IN *Howes, David (ed.) Empire of the Senses* pp. 335-354

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts

Model: Make an object that represents an urban sound. This is not an object that makes sound such as a musical instrument but a translation of a sound you hear in the city by hand, into physical terms. Think about the materials you should use, the shape, how you would convey volume, pitch, duration. Be conscious of what your hands do to shape it.

*For “your” city:* What is the “feel” of your city? What are the words used to describe it? Cool, laidback, tense, loud... Is there an object or item you might choose to represent that feeling.

**WEEK 8: October 16**

**Basecamp.exe: Urban Hike with Ecoarttech/Cary Peppermint and Leila Nadir. We will meet in front of the Kellen Gallery at 2 West 13 Street.**

The artists will lead an excursion into the city with their mobile app Indeterminate Hikes+ (IH+), available on Android/iPhone. Rather than define nature or dictate a predetermined trail, IH+ cultivates environmental imagination un-hierarchically. The app imports the rhetoric of wilderness everywhere, encouraging its users to treat often disregarded spaces with the attention we usually grant “natural” wonders—so that a city sidewalk may become a site of bio-cultural diversity and wild happenings. Moving from the gallery into the street and back again, hiker-participants will collect unexpected eco-data—digital artifacts, natural debris, and industrial rubble—and integrate them into basecamp.exe’s evolving design. The result will be a collaboratively built exploratory outpost of wild urban bio-cultural diversity in the gallery. This event is part of the Art Environment Action! lab.

For “your” city: What is the quality of “nature” in the city? How is it “wild”?

**WEEK 9: October 23****EYE: SIGHT/NIGHT/DISCIPLINE**

Schör, Joachim: Digression: In a new light AND Night and Security IN Nights in the Big City pp. 57-70 + 71-72.

Berman, Marshall: The Family of Eyes AND The Mire of the Macadam IN All that is Solid Melts into Air pp. 148-164.

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts

Be prepared to discuss the Ecoarttech walk.

In-class: Blind walk exercise

**WEEK 10: October 30****BETWEEN SENSES: ISOLATION/CIRCULATION**

Jukes, Peter: Street as Thoroughfare IN A Shout in the Street pp. 217-233

Raban, Jonathan: No Fixed Address IN Soft City pp. 148-179

bell hooks: IN OUR GLORY: Photography and Black Life IN Wells, Liz The Photography Reader pp.387-394

*Bring to class:*

3 keywords/concepts

A short update on “your” city (5 minutes). Be prepared to discuss what and how you have learned about your city using various “remote sensing” means.

**WEEK 11: November 6**

**NO CLASS TODAY. CLASS MEETS INSTEAD ON**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10: Studying the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge through Dance and Design**

**6 a.m. – 5 pm.**

A site-specific workshop led by choreographer Jennifer Monson and architect Kate Cahill, this all day activity starts at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge at 6 am. The morning walk will draw on collaborative practices created in SIP (sustained immersive process)/watershed between Monson, Cahill, composer, Chris Coghurn, and dance maker Maggie Bennett, as well as Monson's on-going practice developed with Welsh environmental movement artist Simon Whitehead. Informed by sensory/ perceptual awareness exercises, scientific observation and the natural history of the location, we will create simple movement, listening and compositional exercises that continually shift our point of view as we experience the refuge. In the afternoon, we will return to the Kellen Gallery. The results of the day will create actions, objects or texts that will be left in the gallery both as a record of the morning at the refuge as well as a suggestive push towards ways of generating and understanding relationships of place and body through creative processes derived from movement, sound, and architectural design practices. The artists will lead you in creating performative scores, drawings and actions as both a record and jumping off point for choreographic and design projects.

**Assignment #2 – Part 1 Report on workshop (details on Blackboard)  
Due electronically on November 13.**

**WEEK 12: November 13**

**NO CLASS TODAY. CLASS MEETS INSTEAD ON**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17: The Phantom Economy of Torrents: A Workshop in (mis) perception**

**10 a.m. – 5 p.m.**

Drawing from an ongoing cross-disciplinary art/science research project conducted by the Cotard Syndicate – two artists and one neuroscientist -- this workshop is an exploration of the fallibility and malleability of our senses in order to examine the ways in which urban dwellers respond to their perceived alienation from the 'natural'.

Our realities are established through the physical limitations of our sense organs – we sense more at our fingertips and with our tongue than with our backs or thighs; our ability to see is restricted by the Blue-Red color range that our eye receptors perceive; our ears are susceptible to a certain limited range of mechanical vibrations – between 20 – 20,000Hz. Our senses and our perceptions grow and learn -- for instance, the salt content in food has slowly increased over time, and now our tongues have 'adapted' to that high salt taste. This all day workshop will lead participants through a range of olfactory, sonic, visual, taste and touch tests that measure responses and highlight some of the limitations and permutations of our sense receptors.

**Assignment #2: Part 2 Report on workshop (details on Blackboard)**

**Due electronically on Nov 20.**

**WEEK 13: November 27**

**ARCHIVES AND EVENTS**

Guest Lecture: Designer/urbanist Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani will discuss her project, the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Open Archive and Museum.

Review this website:

<http://rememberthetrianglefire.org/open-archive/>

Additional readings will be assigned by the speaker.

*For “your” city:* Is there an event that has changed life in your city in small or big ways? How did it change? How do newspapers discuss it? Can you find quotes from people that describe the transformation? What remains of the previous way of life? This need not be a traumatic event such as a fire, accident, or economic collapse but could be new infrastructure such as the building of roads, bridges or a new metro system that transforms transportation, commuting, labor, and public interactions.

**WEEK 14: December 4**

**URBAN SENSORY CODE PRESENTATIONS**

Presenters: Athens, Port au Prince, Shanghai, Lagos, Manila  
(10 minutes each)

Discussants:

**WEEK 15: December 11**

**URBAN SENSORY CODE PRESENTATIONS**

Presenters: Dubai, Mexico City, Cairo, Phnom Penh, Kabul  
10 minutes each

Discussants

FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 3 P.M. IN MY OFFICE  
AT  
2 WEST 13<sup>TH</sup> STREET, Z 101 (MEZZANINE). LEAVE PAPER IN BOX BY THE DOOR IN  
AN ENVELOPE WITH YOUR NAME ON IT.

## Assessable Outcomes

There are three assignments, details of which will be posted on Blackboard.

### 1. Short Assignments

Assignment #1 is a sensory map of NYC.

Assignment #2 is a two-part assignment that requires you to reflect on the two all-day workshops. You must complete both parts of this assignment for a grade.

### 2. Final Project: Urban Sensory Code

Using the approaches and techniques studied through the semester, you will map the “urban sensory code” (a sort of sensory DNA) of your assigned city. This is a dossier, derived from various forms of representation that creates a sensory profile for your city. You will be asked to write an introductory text that organizes this profile. Details of this will be provided on Blackboard and your ongoing research is guided by weekly assignments.

### 3. Class Participation

Class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading or other preparation, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, presentations and coming to class regularly and on time.

### Final Grade Calculation

Class Participation	35%
Assignment 1	10%
Assignment 2 (2 parts)	20%
Final Assignment	35%
TOTAL	100%

### Readings

All readings are posted on Blackboard.

For reference: Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.



## Grading Standards

**F** Failing grades are given for required work that is not submitted, for incomplete final projects or for examinations that are not taken (without prior notification and approval). Make-up work may be permitted only with the approval of the instructor.

**D** The paper adheres to all of the general guidelines of formatting, page-length, and the minimum terms of the assignment. Written work receiving a “D” grade may be a simple restatement of fact or commonly-held opinion. These kinds of papers also will tend to put forward obviously contradictory or conflicting points of view. “D” papers may also have serious organizational and grammatical errors in evidence, which may or may not impede the reader’s ability to understand the author’s point.

**C/C+** These are average papers. They will demonstrate some success in engaging with the assigned readings or material. The paper will show that the student can identify and work with key terms and passages in a text and apply them to ideas and examples found in other texts, or other outside material. Additionally, the paper will demonstrate effort in the areas of analysis and critical thinking by posing an interesting problem or question. Typical of a “C/C+” paper, however, is that the original problem or question, once asked, does not move the paper forward. Often, there is no real solution given, or there is a variety of possible solutions put forward without a clear sense of where the author’s commitment lies. “C/C+” papers may also have significant organizational, grammatical and/or editorial errors in evidence. These errors may periodically impede the reader’s ability to understand the author’s point, or may lead to a paper that seems repetitive or circular.

**B/B+** These are very good papers. The “B/B+” paper does everything a “C/C+” paper does, but offers a sustained and meaningful structure to a critical endeavor that is more complex than a paper at the “C/C+” level. What also distinguishes a “B/B+” paper is the author’s ability to offer a unique insight, to ask questions of primary or secondary source material, and/or to set up a debate between texts or points of view. The author’s point of view is clear and an argument is sustained fairly consistently throughout the paper. “B/B+” papers are logically organized, and also respond to the assignment in thoughtful and distinctive ways. Although minor grammatical and editorial errors may be present, they are under control and do not impede meaning or clarity in the paper.

**A** These are exceptionally good papers that go above and beyond the expectations and requirements set forth in the assignment. They demonstrate substantial effort and achievement in the areas of critical thinking and scholarship. They also demonstrate considerable interpretive connections between concrete ideas or textual moments, a high level of analysis, and flexibility of argument. The argument or point of view that is offered is consistent throughout the paper, and governs the use and interpretation of all examples, and primary and/or secondary source

material. "A" papers are very well organized, and are free of grammatical and editorial errors.

### **No Incompletes.**

### **Divisional, Program and Class Policies**

- Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent. Late papers, failure to complete the readings assigned for class discussion, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

- Attendance

Faculty members may fail any student who is absent for a significant portion of class time. A significant portion of class time is defined as three absences for classes that meet once per week and four absences for classes that meet two or more times per week. During intensive summer sessions a significant portion of class time is defined as two absences. Lateness or early departure from class may also translate into one full absence.

- Blackboard

Use of Blackboard is an important resource for this class. Students should check it for announcements before coming to class each week.

- Delays

In rare instances, I may be delayed arriving to class. If I have not arrived by the time class is scheduled to start, you must wait a minimum of thirty minutes for my arrival. In the event that I will miss class entirely, a sign will be posted at the classroom indicating your assignment for the next class meeting.

- Academic Integrity

This is the university's Statement on Academic Integrity: "Plagiarism and cheating of any kind in the course of academic work will not be tolerated. Academic honesty includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing and describing ideas, or reporting on research findings or any aspect of the work of others (including that of instructors and other students). These standards of academic honesty and citation of sources apply to all forms of academic work (examinations, essays, theses, computer work, art and design work, oral presentations, and other projects)."

It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work

from that of others. Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university.

Every student at Parsons signs an Academic Integrity Statement as a part of the registration process. Thus, you are held responsible for being familiar with, understanding, adhering to and upholding the spirit and standards of academic integrity as set forth by the Parsons Student Handbook.

#### Guidelines for Written Assignments

Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas in any academic work using books, journals, internet postings, or other student papers without proper acknowledgment. For further information on proper acknowledgment and plagiarism, including expectations for paraphrasing source material and proper forms of citation in research and writing, students should consult the Chicago Manual of Style (cf. Turabian, 6<sup>th</sup> edition). The University Writing Center also provides useful on-line resources to help students understand and avoid plagiarism. See <http://www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter/>.

Students must receive prior permission from instructors to submit the same or substantially overlapping material for two different assignments. Submission of the same work for two assignments without the prior permission of instructors is plagiarism.

#### ● Student Disability Services

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with me privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Jason Luchs in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter to you to bring to me. At that point I will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course. Mr. Luchs' office is located in 79 Fifth Avenue, 5<sup>th</sup> floor. His direct line is (212) 229-5626 x3135. You may also access more information through the University's web site at

<http://www.newschool.edu/studentservices/disability/>