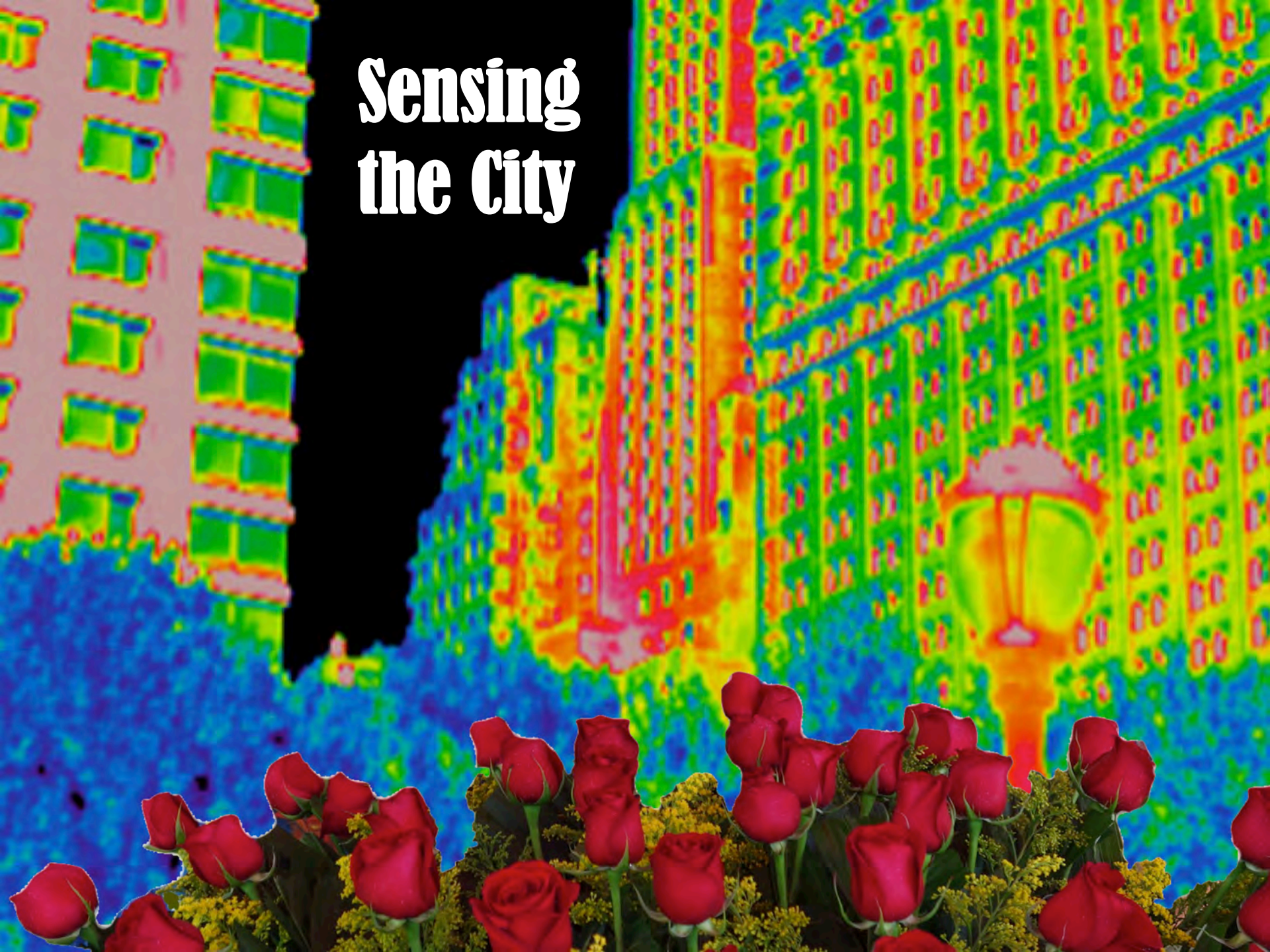


# Sensing the City





UURB 4010 CRN 11390  
UENV 4010 CRN 11391  
**Sensing the City**



Spring 2022  
Mon, 12:10 pm - 2:50 pm  
63 Fifth Ave, Room 304

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Email Molly Simpson  
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40.735555,  
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*I'm asking that we look at the urban world with half-closed eyes. --Keller Easterling*



## Overview

The city reveals itself to us through our senses. In the most naked way, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching all transpose signals from beyond the body into the neuroplastic channels and chemical receptors of the brain; together, they work in a multisensorial matrix to produce affect, emotion, and response, eventually helping us to locate and define a self amid a world awash in noise. But while our senses are superlative evolutionary systems, they are at the same time dumb circuits limited by their corporeality. Much of the world around us sputters under the fault tolerances of our physiology. Some of the world takes grossly misshapen form amid neuropathways disordered by prejudice. And yet more of the world simply recedes undetected into shadows, from where it haunts us in the uncanny spaces of our dreams. And why not? After all, the urban environments where the majority of humans dwell are bewildering and fragmentary, and the pictures we build of them are necessarily incomplete. As Baudelaire wrote, "we are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvelous, but we do not notice it."

This course takes up Baudelaire's implicit challenge to notice the city. Students explore the urban through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, cataloguing how the senses simultaneously reveal and limit what we can know of the world around us. Through the practice of urban mindfulness, we confront the everyday environments in which we live, paying close attention to the ways in which our senses process information into routines of navigation and understanding. We also query the interconnection of biology and ideology in the co-construction of perception, looking for patterns in how our senses map "the real," as well as for moments where we might disrupt these patterns. Where our senses fail us, we turn to the prosthetic machines and cyborg sensory extensions designed to gather in more of the world, from cartography, telecommunication, and geocoded data streams to vast remote sensing and planetary surveillance. Finally, we study the variety of uses made of sensory apparatus by planners, designers, artists, activists, police, military, and others with a vital stake in the urban.

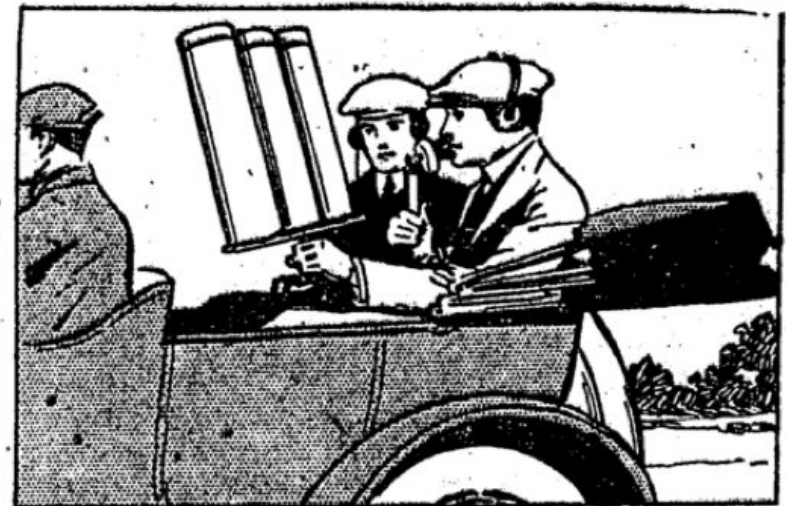


## Purpose and Goals

Sensing the City is a seminar organized around weekly discussion of texts, videos, web projects, and other media, as well as our own experiences walking through the city. The main purpose is threefold: to sharpen our critical engagement with urban perception; to raise basic questions about privacy, power, and social justice in our cities; and to use this awareness to experiment with new counter-narratives, interventions, and imaginaries.

At the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate understanding of the human senses as biological and social constructs
- Speak and write authoritatively on the role of the senses in shaping urban experience and the perception of cities
- Analyze a variety of media (text, film, imagery) produced by scholars, journalists, artists and designers
- Evince conceptual rigor with regard to the course material, and mastery of at least one key theme from the course
- Identify critical issues of justice, equity, and redress with respect to the urban sensorium--particularly in terms of the ethics of mediated sensing, data-gathering, and surveillance systems
- Build a sustained argument about some aspect of the senses / sensing in the urban context



**Transmitting and Receiving a Telephone Message in a Moving Motor Car.**

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## Course Work

Assignments in this course are designed to synthesize materials, provoke critical conversation, and contribute to the knowledge base of cities and urbanism. There are a total of 500 points.

### Participation / 100 points / 20% of final grade

A seminar is a self-organizing space of collaborative learning based on principles of shared purpose and mutual respect. Students should embody these principles by preparing for class, contributing to discussion, and engaging one another on a civil basis. Disagreements and debates should be expressed in ways that advance rather than hinder the process. We should avoid absence, tardiness, and disruptive actions because these diminish our opportunities to learn from each other. Following these guidelines, we can create a supportive and potent learning environment.

### Sensory Walks / 100 points / 20% of final grade

One of the most important activities of this course--and indeed one of the most basic things we do every day--is to move about the city. Students will explore 'walking the city' as a tactic and method, turning routine perambulations into opportunities for urban mindfulness. Each student will develop a Sensory Walk in the form of a brochure with map, descriptions, and critical insights. It is also possible to develop a tour in a motile form other than walking, such as via wheelchair, motorized scooter, ferry, bus, or train. To support this project, we will hold a 'walking tour' workshop during week five.

### Critical Reflections / 100 points / 20% of final grade

Each student will produce ten critical reflections over the course of the semester. The first one is due during week four. The critical reflections comprise one of the main opportunities outside of class where students shape responses to the ideas, themes, and topics explored in the readings. Reflections will consist of three key elements: observations, questions, and supplements. They are due in printed format at the end of class sessions.

### Term Projects / 200 points / 40% of final grade

The core purpose of this course is to build knowledge about the role of the senses in shaping our perception and understanding of cities. To this end, students will conceptualize, design, and execute a final project of their own design. Working individually or in groups, students will select both the topic and format, develop a rationale, write a proposal, conduct a sustained inquiry, and deliver a final product. Formats may range from a standard research paper to long-form journalism, documentary photography, critical cartography / mapping, podcast, musical score, sound file/installation, web site, video, graphic design, or performance. Students might even elect to produce multi-media projects, such as 'urban sensing kits' or an elementary school curriculum.





**PART ONE: THE SENSORIUM**

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WEEK ONE. 24 JAN. INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

Syllabus, course and university policies, assignments, evaluation

Some key concepts, ideas, and terms for the semester

WEEK TWO. 31 JAN. URBAN BRAINS

Nave, Kathry, et al. "Wilding the Predictive Brain." Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science 2020.

Barrett, Lisa. "The Origin of Feelings." In How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

Friston, Karl. "The Mathematics of Mind-Time." Aeon. 18 May 2017.

Miller, Mark. "'Affective realism': The Light and Dark Side of Seeing-with-Feeling." Short video lecture. <https://vimeo.com/165309118>.

Graby, Steve. "Wandering Minds: Autism, Psychogeography, Public Space and the ICD." Paper presented at the Critical Disability Studies conference Theorising Normalcy and the Mundane, Manchester Metropolitan University, 14th September 2011.

Aberg-Riger, Ariel. "We Thought We Would Be Ruled By Robots." CityLab. 7 Aug 2017.

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WEEK THREE. 7 FEB. SENSATION AND EMBODIMENT

Zola, Emile. *The Belly of Paris*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pages 1-12.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Kitchenette Building." *Selected Poems*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Bodies-Cities." In Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. *Feminist Theory and the Body*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Cadogan, Garnette. "Walking While Black." *The Literary Hub*. 8 July 2016.

Degen, Monica. "Sensing the City." *Sensing Cities*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

"New light on link between gut bacteria and anxiety." *ScienceDaily*. 24 August 2017.

WEEK FOUR. 14 FEB. URBAN MINDFULNESS: WALKING AS A CRITICAL URBAN PRACTICE

Benjamin, Walter. "Hashish in Marseilles." In *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Harcourt-Brace-Jovanovich, 1978.

"Theory of the Dérive." *Internationale Situationniste #2* (Paris, December 1958).

De Certeau, Michel. "Walking the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. UC Press, 2011.

Rosa, Brian. "Tours and Detours: Walking in the Ninth Ward." *Triple Canopy* 3 (2008).

Bendiner-Viani, Gabrielle. "Walking, Emotion and Dwelling." *Space and Culture* 8, 4 (2005).





## PART TWO: THE SENSES

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WEEK FIVE. 21 FEB. SIGHT -- THE OPTICAL [PRESIDENT'S DAY—WE WILL NEED TO DOUBLE UP WEEK 5 AND 6]

Jones, Caroline. "The Mediated Sensorium." *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

Wilson, Elizabeth. "The Invisible Flâneur." *New Left Review* 1/191, January-February 1992.

Flanagin, Virginia et al. "Human Exploration of Enclosed Spaces through Echolocation." *Journal of Neuroscience* (10 January 2017), pp. 1566-12.

"How the 'Island of the Colourblind' made Oliver Sacks rethink 'normal'." Short video.

Medinaz, "Eye Anatomy and Function." Short video.

Lotto, Beau. "Optical illusions show us how we see." Short video.

WEEK SIX. 28 FEB. SOUND – THE AUDITORY

Isaza, Miguel. "Silence is the Sound of Listening." Web essay with embedded sound files.

Primeau, Kristy and David Witt. "Soundscapes in the Past: Adding a New Dimension to our Archaeological Picture of Ancient Cultures." *The Conversation*. 2 August 2017.

Bijsterveld, Karin. "Instruments of Torture: Traffic Noise as Uncivilized Behavior." *Mechanical Sound*. MIT Press, 2008.

Paskins, Jacob. "'Stand Clear of the Doors, Please'." Sound file. 17 January 2013.

Slabbekoorn, Hans and Margriet Peet. "Ecology: Birds Sing at a Higher Pitch in Urban Noise." *Nature* (17 July 2003).

Spatial Sound Institute. "On Spatial Sound." Documentary Film. 2019.

[https://vimeo.com/340861350?fbclid=IwAR3Bswe6Ow9Ipa1VA3S3z164inWjZug9fzu0sBICNx\\_Kiyjo6FxDX7xtbg8](https://vimeo.com/340861350?fbclid=IwAR3Bswe6Ow9Ipa1VA3S3z164inWjZug9fzu0sBICNx_Kiyjo6FxDX7xtbg8)

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WEEK SEVEN. 7 MAR. SMELL – THE OLFACTORY

Barbara, Anna and Anthony Perliss. "Morte ed Entropia." *Invisible Architecture: Experiencing Places through the Sense of Smell*. Milano, Italy: Skira, 2006.

McLean, Kate. "Exformation as a Method for Mapping Smellscapes." *Communication Design* 3, 2 (2015).

Bosker, Bianca. "The Graphic Designer Who Maps the World's Cities by Smells." *The New Yorker*. 3 Apr 2017.

Horowitz, Alexandra. "Walking While Smelling." *Being a Dog: Following the Dog Into a World of Smell*. New York: Scribner, 2016.

Bradley, Ryan. "The Rat Paths of New York: How the City's Animals Get Where They're Going." *New York Times*. 23 April 2015.

Hill, Alex. Map: The Smells of Detroit's Midtown Loop. Web site. [detroitography.com](http://detroitography.com).

WEEK EIGHT. 14 MAR. SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS MEETING

WEEK NINE. 21 MAR. TASTE – THE GUSTATORY

Twilley, Nicola. "The Coldscape." *Cabinet* 47 (2012).

Heathcott, Joseph. "A Meal in Stone Town, Zanzibar." *The Inquisitive Eater* (2015).

Fallen Fruit. Art and mapping project. [fallenfruit.org](http://fallenfruit.org).

Al Jazeera. "Street Food—Nairobi" and "Street Food--Jerusalem." Short films, 2016.

Zulfiqar, Moiz. "Street Food Of Karachi, Pakistan." Short film, 2016.

Allen, Stojadin. "Mexico Street Food." Short film, 2017.

"The Flaming Grills of Marrakech. Street Food of Morocco." Short film, 2016.



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WEEK TEN. 28 MAR. TOUCH – THE HAPTIC AND THE AMBIENT

Grunwald, Martin and Juliane Beyer. "Haptics--The Science of Touch. Basics and Applications." In Mădălina Diaconu et al, eds. *Senses and the City*. LIT, 2011.

Fennell, Catherine. "Project Heat and Sensory Politics in Redeveloping Chicago Public Housing." *Ethnography* 12, 1 (2011): pp. 40-64.

Diaconu, Mădălina. "Matter, Movement, Memory: Footnotes to an Urban Tactile Design." In Mădălina Diaconu et al, eds. *Senses and the City*. LIT, 2011.

Case Western Reserve University. "Species appears to evolve quickly enough to endure city temperatures." *Science Daily*. 7 March 2017.

## PART THREE: PROSTHETICS AND CYBORGS



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WEEK ELEVEN. 4 APR. SENSUAL APPARATUS

Crary, Jonathan. Chapter One. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. Verso, 2014.

Mattern, Shannon. "Methodolatry and the Art of Measure: The New Wave of Urban Data Science." *Places* (Nov 2013).

Devlin, Hannah. "AI Programs Exhibit Racial and Gender Biases, Research Reveals." *The Guardian*. 13 April 2017.

Cima, Rosie. "How Photography Was Optimized for White Skin Color." *Priceonomics*. 24 April 2017.

Pettman, Dominic. "After the Beep." *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Campkin, Ben and Rebecca Ross. "Negotiating the City Through Google Street View." In Timothy Wray and Andrew Higgott, eds. *Camera Constructs: Photography, Architecture and the Modern City*. Ashgate, 2011.

WEEK TWELVE. 11 APR. SURVEILLANCE AND THE CITY

Browne, Simone. "B@anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness." *Dark Matters*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

Steiner, Henriette and Kristin Veel. "Visible in Theory: Perceived Visibility as Symbolic Form – A Photo-Expedition into a Contemporary Urban Environment." *Invisibility Studies: Surveillance, Transparency and the Hidden in Contemporary Culture*. Peter Lang AG, 2014.

Yngvesson, Susanne. "To See the World as it Appears: Vision, the Gaze, and the Camera as Technological Eye." In Kristin Veel and Henriette Steiner, eds. *Invisibility Studies: Surveillance, Transparency and the Hidden in Contemporary Culture*. Peter Lang AG, 2014.

Mattern, Shannon. "Public In/Formation." *Places*. November 2016.



WEEK THIRTEEN. 18 APR. SENSING REMOTELY

Halpern, Orit et al. "Test-Bed Urbanism." *Public Culture* 25, 2 (2013), pp. 273-306.

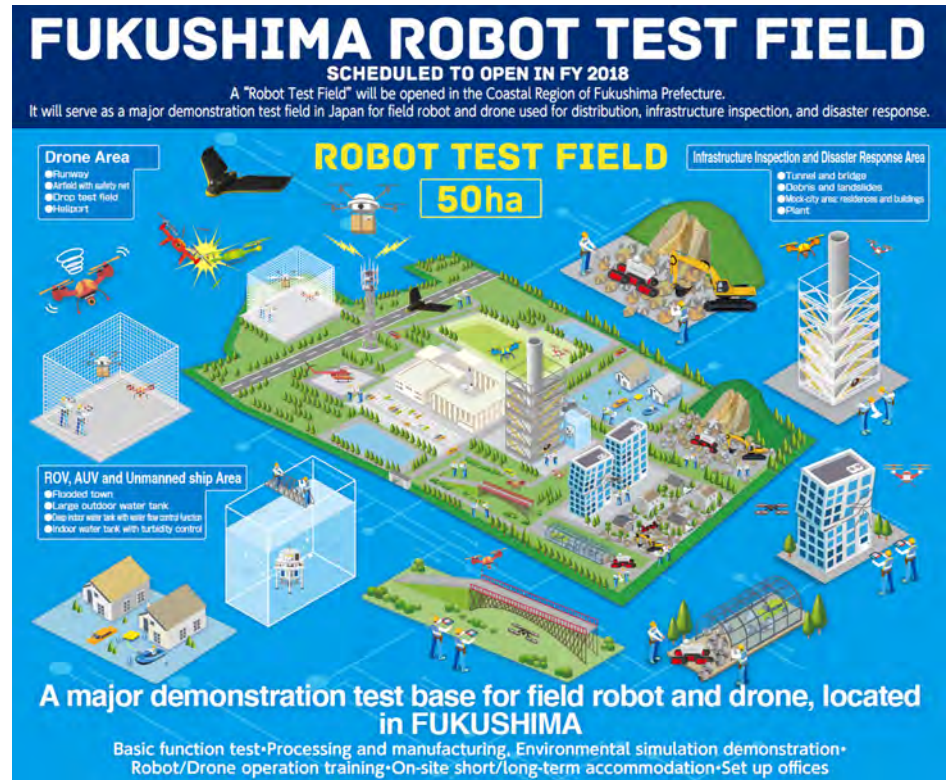
Townsend, Anthony. "Urbanization and Ubiquity." *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia* (New York: Norton, 2013).

Wark, McKenzie. "Securing Security." *Telesnesia*. Polity, 2012.

World Hum Map and Database Project: A Scientific Inquiry into the Worldwide Hum.

"Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest Environmental Protection Liaison Committee held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst." 7 February 2014.

Hill, Dan. "The Street as Platform." *City of Sound*. Blog post from 2008.





**PART FOUR: STUDIO INTENSIVES AND PRESENTATIONS**



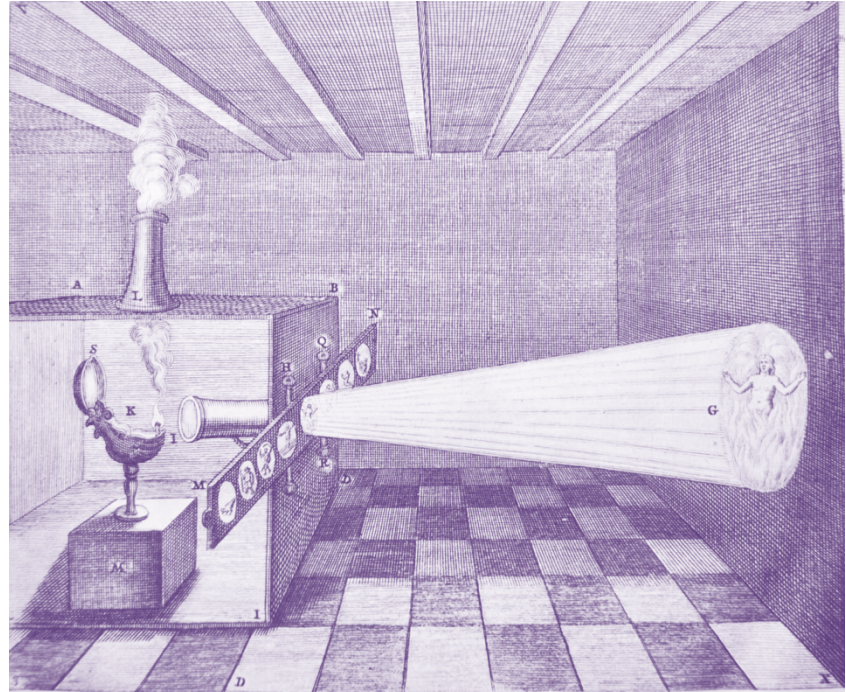
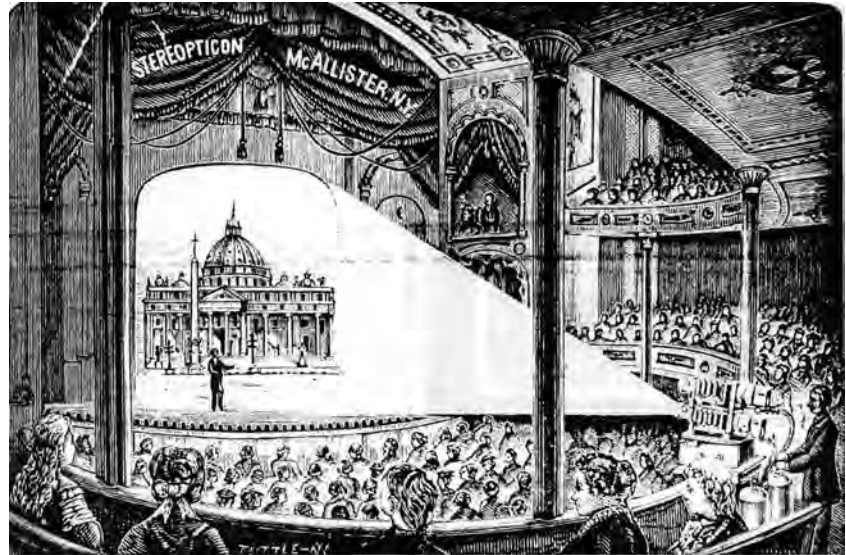


WEEK FOURTEEN. 25 APR. STUDIO INTENSIVE.

WEEK FIFTEEN. 2 MAY. STUDIO INTENSIVE.

WEEK SIXTEEN. 9 MAY. STUDIO INTENSIVE  
PRESENTATIONS.

WEEK SEVENTEEN. 16 MAY. STUDIO INTENSIVE  
PRESENTATIONS.





## Course Policies

We want all of you to be successful in this course. The policies listed here provide the structure within which you can ensure success. You are responsible for all assignments, even if absent. Late assignments, failure to complete the readings, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

Attendance. A seminar is a commitment, and it requires that everyone be present. The only legitimate excuses for absence are: an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician; a family emergency, e.g. serious illness; observance of a religious holiday. More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing course grade. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Participation. Class participation is essential and includes: completing readings, contributing to class discussions, maintaining civil conduct, and attending regularly and on time. Every student is expected to contribute, even if it takes the form of a comment prepared in advance. Attendance and participation constitutes 20% of the grade, and can make a significant difference in the final grade.

Deadlines and formats. Late work in this course will be penalized by the reduction of an assignment grade by one-half letter grade per day. Moreover, all work must be handed in as hard copy, properly formatted and stapled, unless otherwise specified--*note: I am \*not\* a copy/print service*. Exceptions to these policies are very rare, and can be made only in dire emergencies (see attendance policy above).



Electronic Devices. Students should silence their phones. Laptops are permitted for taking notes, reviewing readings, and making presentations. However, students should not use e-mail or social networking websites during class except for emergencies. As an aside, there is mounting evidence that taking notes by hand activates specific neurocircuitry in the brain associated with information integration and recall, and that these circuits are not activated in people using electronic devices. We are not yet cyborgs!

Food and drinks. Since our class meets during lunchtime, students are welcome to eat in class, taking care to respect others and to avoid disrupting the discussions. There will be a break that students can use for getting snacks and drinks. It is mandatory to share the following items with the instructor if you bring them: chocolate, chaats of any kind, beer, wine, baklava, and cheese in whatever form.

Course Website. Canvas is an important resource for this class. Students should check it frequently for readings, assignments and announcements.



## University Policies

Academic Integrity. 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. As the New School policy states: "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." 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.

Writing. The New School's Learning Center offers many resources for students to help with their writing: <https://www.newschool.edu/university-learning-center/>. There are many other useful guides for academic writing. I often direct students to Wesleyan University's Writing Center, which has many great links to resources such as Strunk and White's classic *Elements of Style*, Paul Brians' *Common Errors in English Usage*, and the University of Wisconsin's *Writing Handbook*.

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*, 16th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2010), *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition (University of Chicago Press, 2008), or *A Manual for Writers*, 7th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Student Disability Services. In keeping with the University's commitment to provide equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with the instructor privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with the office of Student Disability Services, which 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. The office is located in 63 Fifth Avenue, room 425. The direct telephone number is (212) 229-5626, ext 3135.