

Psychology 50:830:499:01
**The culture, psychology and neuroscience of urban spaces:
An environmental psychology of Philadelphia and Paris**

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Schedule: Spring 2025, TBD

Abstract:

In this course, we will explore the psychology of urban life. For much of our species' evolutionary history, we humans lived mainly within small kinship groups in rural environments subsisting through hunting and gathering. These social relationships and agronomic practices required the evolution and development of certain psychological competencies, or mental skills, that helped navigate life and facilitate survival. With the advent of modern agriculture and pasturage, along with economic systems and technological advances, humans began settling into increasingly larger communities. Today, over 80% of the world's population live in urban areas, and that number is increasing, presenting a new set of opportunities and challenges especially in the face of climate change and resource depletion.

In this course we will consider both Philadelphia and Paris as urban environments for exploring issues at the interface of psychology, urban studies, sociology, and neuroscience. Some of the topics addressed in this interdisciplinary course include the psychological, social, and neural impacts of natural and built settings, the environmental psychology of personal and public space; the social psychology of intergroup relations particularly in regard to neighborhoods, race, and class; the neuropsychology of the brain regions that govern spatial understanding and wayfinding; the social neuroscience governing interpersonal interactions, the sociology of "third spaces" where information and knowledge is exchanged, and the economic history of urban practices and spaces such as markets, restaurants, museums, and other urban realms. This course aims to show that psychology can help us better understand how individuals and groups coalesce into larger communities and how our brains allow us to form social bonds, shape cultural practices, and build physical environments that help make modern life enriching, meaningful, and fulfilling.

Caveat Emptor: This will be a hands on course. You will have opportunities to go to Philadelphia and experience some of the spaces that we address in the course.

This syllabus is in a preparation phase. Not a final version.
I would appreciate any comments or suggestions at all so feel free to distribute.
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Course Goals:

1. To think critically about recent advances in the fields of environmental psychology and neuroscience, as well as engage in interdisciplinary engagement with materials from other disciplines such as sociology, economics, public policy, history, anthropology, and art history
2. To experience the urban environment first hand and engage in its cultural affordances, as well as experience the urban contexts of food, markets, educational institutions, and so on.
3. To improve upon writing and critical thinking skills that are increasingly relevant and meaningful in our modern world
4. To appreciate and take advantage of the fact that we have access (both real and virtual) to almost the entire world, and have the technology to engage with different cultures, environments, histories, narratives, perspectives, and world views.
5. To develop an appreciation of the important role that culture plays in the panoply of human social and psychological processes, and through investigating other cultures and worlds develop an appreciation for our own.

Grading:

1. Weekly discussion questions regarding readings and responses to your classmates (25%)
2. Presenter for one of the weekly sessions (i.e., lecture and discussion leader) (25%)
3. Bi-Weekly Philadelphia assignments and civic engagement opportunities (5% each for 25%)
4. Hands on research project and or paper addressing a core component of the course. You have to not only write, but DO something. (25%)

Course schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to the course / Discussion / Planning

In this week we will discuss the basic parameters of this course and some of the basics required for the assignments, such as using public transit and the physical layout of Philadelphia. You will become very familiar with the following map that is published by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). It is your [key to the region](#). And become familiar with the Port Authority Transit Company (PATCO) as well. It's your [freedom pass](#) to Philadelphia!

Readings:

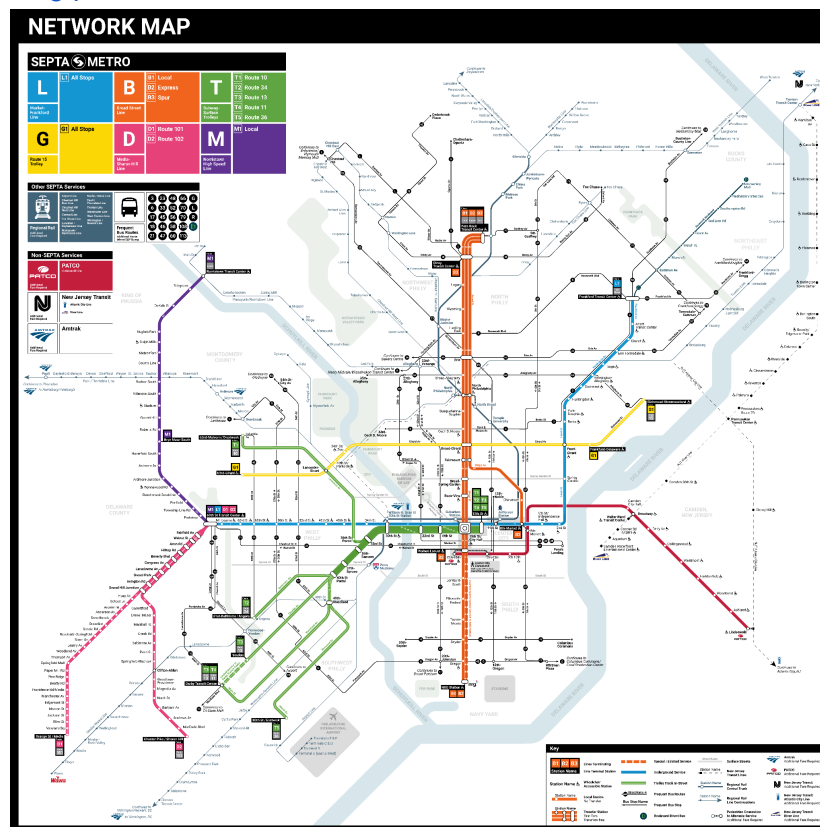
A guide to Philadelphia

<https://www.septa.org/wp-content/uploads/travel/map-center-city-transit-street.pdf>

<https://www.septa.org/wp-content/uploads/travel/map-philadelphia-transit-street.pdf>

<https://www.septa.org/wp-content/uploads/travel/map-suburban-transit-street.pdf>

<https://www.drpa.org/patco/>



Get to know this map, you'll need it for this course.!

Film:

2 Days in Paris (2007 by Julie Delpy)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/525717>

Stand up and Shout (2023, by Amy Schatz)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/1402055>

Week 2: Why city life matters: Urban psychology

In week 1 we consider some of the fundamentals of the topic addressed by this course and learn a bit more of the vocabulary we use when discussing urban spaces, psychology, and neuroscience.

Readings:

1. Simon, R. D. (2017). *Philadelphia : A brief history*. Pennsylvania Historical Association. Chapter 1: Establishing a community, building an economy: Beginnings to 1800.
2. Wirth, L. (1938). Urbanism as a Way of Life. *American journal of sociology*, 44(1), 1-24.
3. Romice, O., Thwaites, K., Porta, S., Greaves, M., Barbour, G., & Pasino, P. (2017). Urban design and quality of life. *Handbook of Environmental Psychology and Quality of Life Research*, 241-273.
4. Karakas, T., & Yildiz, D. (2020). Exploring the influence of the built environment on human experience through a neuroscience approach: A systematic review. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 9(1), 236-247.

Film:

Watch URBANIZED (2011, Gary Hustwitt):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/watch/video/2874827>

Assignment 1: Go to Philadelphia, explore City Hall, the area, the parkway (Due in 2 weeks)

I want you each to take PATCO to Philadelphia. Yes, you must take PATCO. I want you to notice, document, and record things you have never seen before. Take note of the paths that you take around the facility. The traffic, the people, the buildings. Walk around a bit, sit down somewhere, think about what these buildings tacitly say to you. Reflect on how this made you think and feel. Discuss the emotions and feelings you experienced, the memories and mental states that the experience elicited. Create a film or video montage. (More details posted on Canvas Site).

Maybe go to Museum (Art or Barnes) as part of this.

Week 3: History of urbanism and the cities of Philadelphia and Paris

What is the history and future of urban environments? What were the historical, economic, technological, and sociological factors that led to the rise of cities over rural or subsistence living?

Readings:

1. Simon, R. D. (2017). *Philadelphia : A brief history*. Pennsylvania Historical Association. Chapter 2: Community Good/Manufacturing City 1800-1865.
2. Jared Diamond piece on the history of agriculture
3. Hunter, M. A., Loughran, K., & Fine, G. A. (2018). Memory politics: Growth coalitions, urban pasts, and the creation of "historic" Philadelphia. *City & Community*, 17(2), 330-349.
4. ANOTHER

Film:

Watch Cleo from 5 to 7 (1962, Agnes Varga) <https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/113375>

Watch Vivre sa vie (1960, Jean Luc Godard) <https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/113397>

Week 4: Environmental Psychology and urban life: A once and future field

Environmental psychology is a branch of psychology that studies the interface between human psychological processing and the kinds of environments thought typically occurs. Some environments are designed to be efficient and effective, while others meant to stymie and stifle thought and action. We will consider this theoretical branch of psychology in this section and reflect on how environmental psychology can be applied in the design of urban environments.

Readings:

1. Simon, R. D. (2017). *Philadelphia : A brief history*. Pennsylvania Historical Association. Chapter 3: Industry Triumphant/Civic Failure 1865-1930.
2. Gifford, R. (2014). Environmental psychology matters. *Annual review of psychology*, 65, 541-579.
3. Berman, M. G., Kardan, O., Kotabe, H. P., Nusbaum, H. C., & London, S. E. (2019). The promise of environmental neuroscience. *Nature human behaviour*, 3(5), 414-417.
4. Humphrey, C., Jensen, S. T., Small, D. S., & Thurston, R. (2020). Urban vibrancy and safety in Philadelphia. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 47(9), 1573-1587.

Film:

Watch City Lights (1920, Charlie Chaplin) <https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/113147>

***Assignment 1 Due.

Assignment 2: Explore Philadelphia Center City through its four parks

Take PATCO to Rittenhouse Square, Walk to Logan Circle, Walk to Franklin Square, then walk to Washington Square. Visit the liberty bell, Independence Hall, Curtis Center, photograph and video project. (Full description to be written up in the Assignment section of canvas)

Week 5: Architecture, Emotion, and Memory: Architecture and Museums

We live in a built environment of structures that provide a context for our lives. In this week we will ask questions regarding how the structure of the physical environment shapes thoughts, feelings, and our minds.

Readings:

1. Simon, R. D. (2017). *Philadelphia : A brief history*. Pennsylvania Historical Association. Chapter 4: Economic Decline / Community Turmoil 1930-1980
2. Smith, B.C. (2020), Museums and the Embodied Mind: Sensory Engagement with Artworks and Architecture. *Archit. Design*, 90: 88-93.
3. Lehmbruck, M. (2001), Museum, psychology and architecture. *Museum International*, 53: 60-64.
4. Eberhard, J. P. (2009). Applying neuroscience to architecture. *Neuron*, 62(6), 753-756.
5. Coburn, A., Vartanian, O., & Chatterjee, A. (2017). Buildings, beauty, and the brain: A neuroscience of architectural experience. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 29(9), 1521-1531.

Film:

Watch My Architect (2003, Khan): [Find link]

Week 6: The cultural psychology of food: Restaurant culture

Restaurants and their cultures play a pivotal role in all cities, but Paris and Philadelphia have particularly vibrant food scenes. In this week we will explore the history of the restaurant and learn their important role as a “third place” in which people interact, engage, and learn.

Readings:

1. Simon, R. D. (2017). *Philadelphia : A brief history*. Pennsylvania Historical Association. Chapter 5: Struggling Toward the Post-Industrial City 1980-2016.
2. Anderson, E. N. (2014). *Everyone eats: Understanding food and culture*. NYU Press. Introductory Chapter
Obligatory Omnivores
3. Lepping, R., Papa, V. & Martin, L. (2015). Cognitive Neuroscience Perspectives on Food Decision-Making: A Brief Introduction. *Journal of Agricultural & Food Industrial Organization*, 13(1), 5-14.
4. Niedziela, M. M., & Ambroze, K. (2021). The future of consumer neuroscience in food research. *Food Quality and Preference*, 92, 104124.
5. Spang, R. L. (2020). *The invention of the restaurant : Paris and modern gastronomic culture*. Harvard University Press.
Introduction
Private Appetites in Public Spaces
Putting Paris on the Menu
Epilogue

Film:

Watch King Georges (Le Bec Fin) [free on one of the free channels]

(Maybe Watch a few Chef Table Episodes?)

Le Chef (1996 by Daniel Cohen)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/5745142>

***Assignment 2 Due

Assignment 3: Shopping and Dining in Philadelphia: Reading Terminal and China Town

For this assignment, you will go to Philadelphia and try one of its many restaurants and create an audio-visual presentation about what you experienced. In this age of tik toks and social media, it is important to go out and experience a Philadelphia restaurant. And there are many to chose from from many cost points. One could find a bowl of noodles in Chinatown for under \$10 or go big and have an amazing haute cuisine meal at any of Philadelphia's fine establishments. (Note: There are some New Jersey restaurants that are urban enough (i.e. you can take PATCO there that I would agree to consider them part of restaurant's scene but you would need to get the professor's permission beforehand.

Here is a somewhat recent book about the food scene in Philadelphia.

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?pg-origsite=primo&docID=2065790> However there are new places that you may explore. You must run your ideas by me in class.

I want you to go to the restaurant, research the history of the food in question, and film the experience in a sort of tik tok (brief) fashion. I want you to reach out to the restaurant and see if you can't interview the chef or owner - like no more than a ten minute phone interview, or an email response - in which you ask important questions about the cultural background of the food, where the chef learned how to prepare the food, etc.

Week 7: Third Spaces and the sociology of community belonging

Since COVID, there has been some attention given to the notion of loneliness and the existence of "third spaces" outside of work and home where people meet and engage in information exchange. In this week we will consider such spaces and how they play a critical role in urban spaces.

Readings:

1. Paris History book Ch. 1 (find correct citation)
2. Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and schuster. Precip and Excerpt
3. Mehta, V., & Bosson, J. K. (2010). Third places and the social life of streets. *Environment and behavior*, 42(6), 779-805.
4. Bosman, C., & Dolley, J. (2019). Rethinking third places and community building. In *Rethinking Third Places* (pp. 1-19). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Film:

Breathless (1960 by Jean Luc Godard)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/113371>

Week 8: Future utopias: The concept of "15 minute cities"

In recent years there has been some controversy over the idea of cities being walkable and manageable unlike the large megalopolises. In this week we will consider the controversial "15 minute city" where everything one would need would be accessible within a 15 minute walk. Fewer cars, more density - what do you think?

Readings:

1. Paris History book Ch. 2 (find correct citation)
2. Moreno, C., Allam, Z., Chabaud, D., Gall, C., & Pralong, F. (2021). Introducing the "15-Minute City": Sustainability, resilience and place identity in future post-pandemic cities. *Smart cities*, 4(1), 93-111.
3. Allam, Z., Bibri, S. E., Chabaud, D., & Moreno, C. (2022). The '15-Minute City' concept can shape a net-zero urban future. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 1-5.

Film:

Delicacy (La delicatessen) (2012, David Foenkinos)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/video/5741746>

Assignment 3 Due

[Assignment 4: Visit the Italian, Mexican, and Asian Markets of South Philadelphia.](#)

Take PATCO to 9th Locust, walk down 9th to Italian Market. Interview people in the market. Try 3 new foods you never had before (Durian? Soursop?). EXPAND

Week 9: Olmstead and the restorative psychology of urban nature

Central park in New York city is renown as an area of natural beauty, and yet it was designed - every rock there was planned and placed. But Olmstead was inspired by Paris and his influence affected Philadelphia as well - most notably Fairmount park, the largest urban park in America.

Readings:

1. Paris History book Ch. 1 (find correct citation)
2. Loughran, K. (2020). Urban parks and urban problems: An historical perspective on green space development as a cultural fix. *Urban Studies*, 57(11), 2321-2338.
3. Xie, J., Luo, S., Furuya, K., & Sun, D. (2020). Urban parks as green buffers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sustainability*, 12(17), 6751.
4. Shanahan, D. F., Fuller, R. A., Bush, R., Lin, B. B., & Gaston, K. J. (2015). The health benefits of urban nature: how much do we need?. *BioScience*, 65(5), 476-485.

Film:

Ben Franklin PBS

Olmstead PBS show [link added later]

***Assignment 4 Due

Assignment 5: Visit Laurel Hill Cemetery

Take Patco then the 28 bus to Laurel Hill Cemetery. Research a few of its residents.
EXPAND

Week 11: Physical and mental health in urban contexts

Are urban environments healthy? IS there strong evidence for the hypothesis that cities are bad for us? Here we will consider the evidence.

Readings:

1. Senkler, B., Freymueller, J., Lopez Lumbi, S., Hornberg, C., Schmid, H. L., Hennig-Fast, K., ... & Mc Call, T. (2022). Urbanicity—Perspectives from Neuroscience and Public Health: A Scoping Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1), 688.
2. e Silva, J. A. C., & Steffen, R. E. (2019). Urban environment and psychiatric disorders: a review of the neuroscience and biology. *Metabolism*, 100, 153940.
3. Lambert, K. G., Nelson, R. J., Jovanovic, T., & Cerdá, M. (2015). Brains in the city: Neurobiological effects of urbanization. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 58, 107-122.
4. Ventriglio, A., Torales, J., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., De Berardis, D., & Bhugra, D. (2021). Urbanization and emerging mental health issues. *CNS spectrums*, 26(1), 43-50.

Film:

Philadelphia (1993) [will insert link later]

Week 12: *Fin*: Cemeteries, memories, and final resting places

Cemeteries play an interesting role in urban life, celebrating the lives of those that came before us, many of whom shaped the environments in which we live.

Readings:

1. Rugg, J. (2000). Defining the place of burial: what makes a cemetery a cemetery?. *Mortality*, 5(3), 259-275.
2. Toussaint, S., & Decrop, A. (2013). 2 The Père-Lachaise Cemetery: Between dark tourism and heterotopic consumption. In *Dark tourism and place identity* (pp. 13-27). Routledge.
3. Miller, D. S., & Rivera, J. D. (2006). Hallowed ground, place, and culture: The cemetery and the creation of place. *Space and Culture*, 9(4), 334-350.
4. Harvey, T. (2006). Sacred Spaces, Common Places: The Cemetery in the Contemporary American City. *Geographical Review*, 96(2), 295–312.
5. Spoon River Anthology excerpts

Watch:

In a Dream (Isaiah Zagar)

Week 13: Presentations of your projects

***Assignment 5 due

Final Project due on the date of final exam TBA.

Recommended watching, just for fun: The Rabbi's Cat

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/rutgers/watch/video/1021748>