

Sarah Lopez - Associate Professor
Graduate Course
Spring 2026
Thurs. 1:45-4:45pm
Location: MCNB 582

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office: Weitzman Hall 231; office hours by appointment.

Walking Philadelphia: Architectural History & Cultural Institutions

This course combines the idea of a walking seminar with an investigation of how Philadelphia's cultural and scientific institutions and archives have shaped its urban environment and its cultural and social milieu. Taking advantage of the rich history of archiving and collecting in Philadelphia, we turn from the nineteenth century to ask questions of the twentieth and twenty-first: 1) When (and how) does a body of knowledge crystalize into an archive? 2) How do archives function not only as a reservoir of knowledge but also as an urban catalyst for change? We begin with the foundational ideas and built legacy of Philadelphia's 19th (and turn of the 20th) century institutions like the Wagner Free Institute of Science, the Mütter Museum, the Free Library, and Ethical Society of Philadelphia. We then explore a collection of alternative "archives" and institutions, mostly from the 20th century, such as the Mother Bethel Church, the Clef Club, the Wooden Shoe Anarchist Bookshop and the Norris Square Neighborhood Garden. What does the arc of archiving in Philadelphia from the 19th to the 21st centuries tell us about how knowledge is stored and shared and the relationship between "archives," community and urban space? How important are buildings to archives and cultural institutions? What opportunities and what limitations do buildings impose on these organizations? How does gender, race, and class play into the creation and cultivation of archives and institutions past and present? Do these institutions play a role in cultivating a civic imagination and social orientation? If so, how?

Course Goals:

- *Explore the relationship between collections, knowledge, public access & civic orientation.
- *Access Philadelphia's oldest archives and institutions in situ to better understand how they serve community and shape history.
- *Destabilizing bounded definitions of archives
- *Creating "walking nodes" in Philadelphia that leverage the archive as an anchor for urban exploration.
- *Explore the city as archive.
- *Practice the art of observation and description of the built environment

Course Requirements:

1. ¡Presente! Students are expected to be present. What does that mean? You show up. You engage. You read, think and talk. Please **email me in advance** if you miss a class. **More than two unexcused absences will automatically lower your grade by one whole letter.**

2. Six very short reflections will be due AFTER visits to particular sites. More description of this assignment is found in this syllabus under the weeks they are due.
3. Final teaching module (if you are a graduate student who needs to write a more traditional paper, please talk to me).

By **Monday MARCH 16**, please pick a cultural or scientific institution in Philadelphia OR an idea/theme/vector that we discussed in class but didn't develop and create a teaching module. For institutions, consider foundational ideas, institutional history, the relationship between institutional history and building history, and community impact broadly defined. The teaching module does not need to cover all of these aspects equally, and there may be limited information about the place/organization you choose, but you should be creative about leveraging sources to tell an urban story about the place that addresses both its material history as well as its spatial and more ephemeral influences.

Please note you can choose one of the places we have already visited since we are only scratching the surface of these vast reserves of knowledge and urban change.

*For example, the Mütter museum has an archive that contains documentation about when they built the building and the kinds of conversations that went into its location and style. You can sign up to visit their archives in advance and create a teaching module about the architecture of the Mütter—and neoclassical architecture more broadly—in turn of the century Philadelphia.

*For example, you could visit the archives of the Wagner to understand how ideas about species, human evolution, and hierarchy (or whatever you discover) played out in the material presentation of artifacts and create a teaching module about this.

For those students who choose ideas, themes, theory and vectors, rather than a particular place or locust of knowledge, here are some thoughts to consider:

*Perhaps you are more interested in “alternative” places of knowledge and archives, and you want to learn more about a place that has been demolished (a music club, a social club, a notable church, etc), a place that used to function as an anchor for the neighborhood but no longer exists. You could use historical sources (Sanborn maps, Fire Insurance, Historic Newspapers, Census Data, and City Directories) to learn about what was, where it was, and create a module about absences and voids, things lost, in the urban fabric. What would be the idea, in this case, that would carry this exploration forward?

*Perhaps you would like to explore the argument that the city itself is an archive. If so, how would you create a teaching module that explored this idea? Would you pick a street to do an urban cut or a cross-section of the city? Would you pick an area to excavate places of knowledge and gathering as networked? What sources would you use to illustrate your ideas?

*Perhaps you are interested in ideas of race, power, and/or settler/settler colonialism – how can you explore these ideas in relationship to building museums, archives, and urban nodes? How could you explore the land we visited? How could you explore the idea of architecture itself as a tool that fossilizes attitudes and norms?

Each teaching module should have these components (please upload your teaching module to Canvas):

- 1) A framing set of questions and ideas
- 2) At least ONE and no more than TWO readings (unless they are short, such as memos, newspaper articles, etc); OR/AND a podcast, media clips.
- 3) A place in the urban environment where your ideas are located (an institution, or some other part of the material fabric of the city). For those who choose to pursue a theme or theory, how is it related to Philadelphia urbanism and social life? Where does theory touch the ground?
- 4) An illustrative deliverable that will take the form of either a short 10-minute lecture/ a powerpoint, OR an urban walking experience/ visit to site. Discussion should be a part of whatever format you choose.

These aspects are optional:

- 1) An interactive component (where we get to make, discuss, participate) either inside or outside the classroom

The final three classes are dedicated to your teaching modules. Depending on the final number of students in this class, that will be 3 to 4 students per class. Student clusters will be assigned once everybody has picked their place/unit of analysis/theme. **Students will then collectively decide in their small groups how they want to use the 3 hours.** If each student uses the time independently to discuss their site and lead a discussion about it, that would be 4 segments of about 30-40 minutes each. Alternatively, students can work together to divide the class as they see fit. The class can also take place outside in the city, as a walking seminar. Students are expected to assign readings **one week prior** to their date.

Grading Structure

Attendance and participation during class: 50%

Reflections: 20%

Final teaching module: 30%

WEEK 1

January 15

The City as Infrastructure for Knowledge & Culture

Questions about each site:

- What are the foundational ideas of this institute/place/school/church?
- How do those ideas match up (or not) with the physical form of the building *where those ideas are housed?*
- How did the building then shape the surrounding block? Neighborhood?

And in sum:

- How can the city itself become an incubator for critical thinking? For critical culture? For knowledge based community?
- How does race, gender, class, and country play into the production of spatial and urban knowledge in the 19th versus 20th century?

WEEK 2

January 22

The Wagner (1859-65) Logistics: UBER, meet at 1.45 in front of Weitzman Hall

<https://www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org/>

Reading:

- National Historic Landmark Nomination (1989)
- Trustees Majority Report (July 1885)
- Trustees Minority Report (Oct 1885)
- Leidy Letter to Trustees (1890)
- Act of Incorporation (1855/1864), pgs. 12.
- Brand, Meika, "Gating the Union: The Politics of Making a Historically Black Community." (pgs. 27-45)

Of Note:

- Howard, "Medical Politics and the Founding of the Jardin de Plantes in Paris" (1980)
- Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, Intro, 1-13, Ch. 4 Systeme de politique positive: Natural and Social Philosophy, 246-311.
- Charles Darwin, "Affinities and Classifications, & Unity or Affinity of Type in the Great Classes," *The Condition of the Origins of the Species*.
- What is Philosophy? <https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2020/10/10/philosophy/>
- Thinking Geographically About Science in the Nineteenth Century
- Paola Bertucci "The Architecture of Knowledge," (18th-century Naples, where collections of art, science, and natural history were spatially interwoven—arguing that architecture itself organized knowledge through object arrangement and spatial taxonomy)

Assignment: After class, write a short—up to one page single spaced and as short as one substantial single-spaced paragraph—reflection piece on the visit that addresses *some or all* of

the following questions, and please remember that *description* is your friend if it is linked to close looking! **Submit to me via Canvas by 5pm on Friday Jan. 23:**

- 1) What thoughts did our discussions during the visit or/and readings inspire for you?
- 2) How does the institution present their institutional past, and how does their past relate to the current archives and exhibits?
- 3) What aspect/s of the core ideas that animated the place long ago are present in its current incarnation?
- 4) How does the building “fit” or “not fit” with the building program and use?
- 5) How does the place “sit” on its block, and in its neighborhood?

WEEK 3

January 29

Mütter Museum (1863, built 1909)

Logistics: meet at Weitzman Hall/ 1.45pm and walk

Reading:

- COPP, *Images of America: The College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (2012), e-book on Franklin
- Willoughby, “Professors of Racial Medicine: imperialism and race in 19th century United States medical schools,” (2024) 146-161.
- William Littman, “Viewpoint: Walk This Way: Reconsidering Walking for the Study of Cultural Landscapes,” *Buildings & Landscapes*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 3-16.

Of Note:

- Foucault, *Birth of a Clinic* (preface), (1) Spaces and Classes, 3-21, 5) The Lesson of the Hospital, 8) Opening up a few Corpses

Assignment: Write a reflection; use the SAME assignment description as found under week 3.

Submit Friday by 5pm.

WEEK 4

Feb. 5

Central Parkway Free Library (1917-1927)

Logistics: meet @ Weitzman Hall, public transit.

In advance of our visit please [register online](#) for Free Library cards. You will present ID during the visit to receive a physical card.

Reading:

- Van Slyck, Introduction, Ch. 1: Giving: The Reform of American Library Philanthropy, Ch. 3: Taking: Libraries and Cultural Politics, *Free to All: Carnegie Library & American Culture*, 1890-1920.

- Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1889) 1-37.
- Derrida, “Forward,” *Archive Fever* (1995)
- Please review the “History Overview” on the Free Library website: <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/feature/75th/history> (why if they will repeat some of this? Because being mentally prepared for what one encounters is how one creates mental space to have critical questions.)

Of Note:

- [Historical images](#) of the Parkway Central Library and its surroundings.
- Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England*, 1629-1855
- Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018

Assignment: After class, write a short (up to one page) reflection. Same as above. **Please submit by 5pm Friday.**

WEEK 5

Feb. 12

Ethical Society (founded 1885, built 1929)

Logistics: meet @ Weitzman Hall and walk.

Reading:

- Felix Adler, founding address, New York Ethical Society, 1876, 1-7
- Samuel Weston, Ethical Culture: Four Lectures Delivered at Institute Hall (1885)
- <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/>
- <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto2/>
- <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Applied Ethics. <https://iep.utm.edu/applied-ethics/>
- Foucault, PART III, Ch. 5, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969)
- Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What happens after they are built* (Penguin Books, 1994). Ch. 1 & Ch. 2, pgs. 1-23. (skim)

Of Note:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics>

<https://onlineethics.org/cases/corporate-power-and-moral-transparency-rethinking-ethics-age-ai>

Assignment: After class, write a short reflection. **Please submit by 5pm Friday.**

WEEK 6

Feb. 19

Part I: PROCESS & THEORY

Part II: SANBORNS in MAP ROOM (last hour)

Reading:

- This week we may pick **one** of the above readings to **re-read**.
- Dell Upton, “Introduction,” *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008): 1-15.
- Upton, “The Grid and the Republican Spatial Imagination,” *Another City*, 113-144.

WEEK 7

Feb. 26 (studio travel week)

Mother Bethel Church & Museum (founded 1794, building 1890)

Logistics: meet @ Weitzman, public transit

Reading:

- “Our Pastoral History,” <https://motherbethel.org/our-pastoral-history/>
- Building Culture of the African American Episcopal Church, <https://sah-archipedia.org/essays/PF-01-ART005>
- W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, Ch. XII. “The Organized Life of Negroes,” 197-234.

WEEK 8

March 5

Philadelphia Clef Club for Jazz and the Performing Arts (1966)

Logistics: meet @ Weitzman, potentially walk or public transit

Reading (these may change, check modules for latest choices):

- Richard Turner, “Jazz Brothers in Rhythm and Spirit,” 1-14, Ch. 4, Hard Bop, Free Jazz, and Islam: Black Liberation and Global Religious and Musical Consciousness in the Late 1950s and 1960s,” 125-198, in *Soundtrack to a Movement: African American Islam, Jazz, and Black Internationalism*
- William Whyte, “How do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation for the History of Architecture” (2006)
- ONLY available in Van Pelt Music Library/ **Optional**. Turner, Diane, “Organizing and Improvising: A History of Philadelphia’s Black Musicians’ Protective Union Local 274,” Dissertation, 1993.

Part II: How is knowledge stored and reproduced?

Assignment: After class, write a short reflection. You may only discuss Mother Bethel Church and the Club, or just the Church or Club. You decide. **Please submit by 5pm Friday.**

WEEK 9

March 12- SPRING BREAK – be thinking about your project, and catching up on readings or visiting sites...

PLEASE SEND ME + ROBIN YOUR SITE OR IDEA FOR YOUR FINAL TEACHING MODULE BY MONDAY MARCH 16.

WEEK 10

March 19

PROCESS + THEORY and TEACHING MODULE WORKSHOP

meet w/o Lopez

I am giving a talk in New Mexico. In advance of this class, I will prepare various questions and exercises to structure the class in my absence, and Robin will help orchestrate.

Please use this session to start working on your final teaching module. This will take coordination amongst the class to design factors, format and flow.

WEEK 11

March 26

Wooden Shoe: Anarchist and Radical Books (1976)

Logistics: Meet @ Weitzman, public transit.

Reading:

- Shultz, “Anarchism,” *Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy* (11 pages)
- Pamphlets from Wooden Shoe (will distribute in advance)
- One other reading **TBD**

Of note:

- <https://radicalarchive.tumblr.com/> West Philly Archive that we will not visit
- n+1 anarchist journal: <https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/book-review/n1breading-2/>

WEEK 12

April 2

Norris Square Neighborhood Garden.

Logistics: meet @ Weitzman, public transit.

Part II: Process and theory

We will continue the conversations from week 6 and week 10 with some new questions to consider:

What core ideas animate the Wooden Shoe and the Norris Square Neighborhood Garden?

How have those core ideas changed over the decades?

Why did those ‘institutions’ get built?
How did the building influence the program and impact?
What did the place mean for the surrounding blocks? What does it mean today?
Can we consider these places to be urban archives?
How is knowledge stored and reproduced in them?

In sum: How does ‘neighborhood,’ informal gatherings, community events, and foundational ethics play into the production of spatial and urban knowledge in the 20th versus 21th century?

Reading:

- **TBD**

Assignment: After class, write a short reflection on either the Wooden Shoe OR Norris Square Garden or summation thoughts about the sweep of sites we have visited. **Please submit by 5pm Friday.**

COLLABORATIVE FINAL TEACHING MODULES (see explanations on pages 1 & 2)

WEEK 13

April 9

Student Lead

WEEK 14

April 16

Student Lead

WEEK 15

April 23

Student Lead

Some knowledge-sites we *did not* visit:

Academy of Natural Sciences (Founded 1812, built 1876)

Rosenbach Museum and Library (1954)

Franklin Institute (1825)

Athenaeum (1845)

Armstrong Association (Af-Am, collections at Temple)

Indian Rights Association (1879-closed 1994) at Pennsylvania Historical Society

Colored Girls Museum (2015 onward)

William Penn Foundation – [urban garden program](#)

R.F. Kampfer Revolutionary Literature Archive (N.S.)

...

New Philadelphia History

Gillette, Mires, et. al., *Greater Philadelphia: A New History for the Twenty-First Century* (3 volumes) 2025

Critical Archive Readings:

- Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*. (2009)
- Sadiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" (2008)

Walking & Street Readings:

- Paul Groth, "Street grids as Frameworks for Urban Variety," *Harvard Architecture Review* 2 (1981): 68-75.
- Grady Clay, "Crossing the American Grain with Vesalius, Geddes, and Jackson: the cross-section as a learning tool," *Everyday America*, Ch. 7: 109-129.
- Guy Debord, *Theory of the Dérive*, 1958
- Garnette Cadogan, "Walking While Black," *Literary Hub*, July 8, 2016
- J. B. Jackson, "Stranger's Path" in *Landscape in Sight*, 1997.
- Solnit, Rebecca, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001)
- Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 91-110.

Landscape Methods:

- Denis Cosgrove, "New Directions in Cultural Geography"
- Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* and *Topophilia*
- Paul Groth, "New Connections in Vernacular Architecture"
- Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, "The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Studies," Ch 1, *Everyday America* (pg. 1-22).

Theory

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," and "Belief and the Body," chap. 3, 4 in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (1980; Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Foucault, *Birth of a Clinic*,

Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*

Foucault, *The Order of Things*,

Cheng, Davis, & Wilson, *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (2020)

Mills, C., "The Sociological Imagination," 1959 [1977]

Historic Sources

Census data

Zoning history or zoning present

Sanborn maps

Atlases

Historic Photographs

Geohistory Philly maps or data

<https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/>

<https://www.philageohistory.org/geohistory/>

<http://www.philageohistory.org/tiles/viewer/>