

# UC Berkeley

## Courses

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Cities and Bodies | Fall 2016 Colloquium

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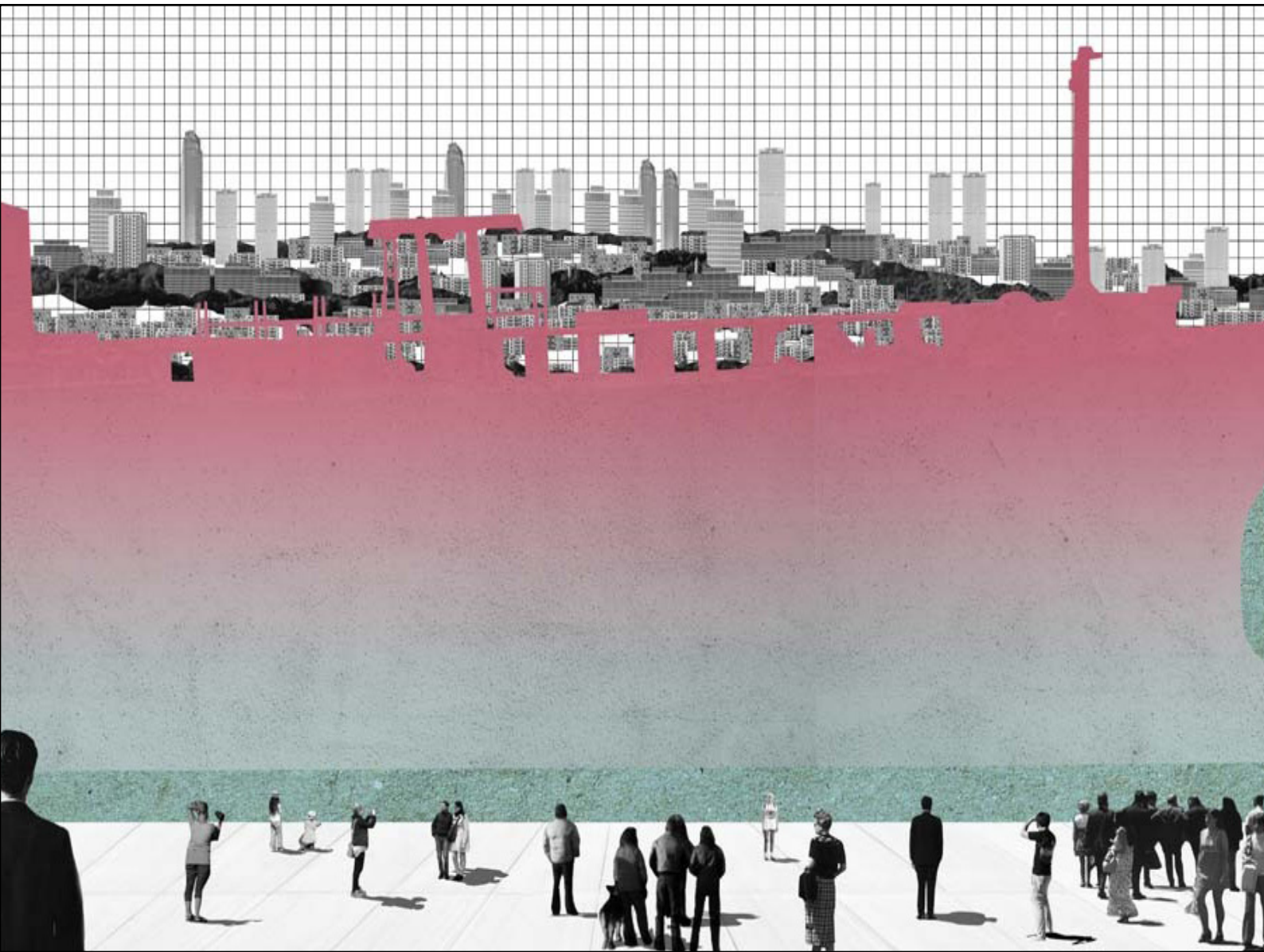
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# CITIES AND BODIES A GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

FALL 2016  
COLLOQUIUM

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# COLLOQUIUM POSTER

global urban humanities initiative presents

## Cities & Bodies

Fall Speaker Series

Tuesdays 12 to 2\*

Cal Design Lab

494 Wurster, South Tower

\*November 22 event will begin at 1 PM



September 13

### Black Bodies in Nature and Wilderness

Rue Mapp, Outdoor Afro, Activist

September 27

### Using Bodies to Measure Urban Public Space

Erika Chong Shuch, Choreographer

Ghigo di Tommaso, Urban Planner, Gehl Studio

October 11

### Whole-Body Navigation in Cities

Chris Downey, Architecture for the Blind

October 25

### Gaming Virtual Bodies: Video Games in South Asian Cities

Irene Chien, Muhlenberg College, Media Studies

November 1

### The Visitor: Film Set in São Paulo, Mumbai, and Shanghai

Katarina Schröter, Director [Film Only]

November 15

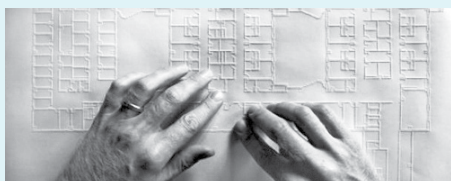
### Traces Still Alive: Homeless Archaeology and Contemporary Cities

Annie Danis, UC Berkeley Anthropology

November 22 (at 1 PM)

### Bosphorus Strait: Architectural Imagination of a Resource Geography

Neyran Turan, NEMESTUDIO & UC Berkeley



More info at [globalurbanhumanities.berkeley.edu](http://globalurbanhumanities.berkeley.edu)



We will be examining methods of studying cities from different disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, architecture, city planning, journalism, literature, media studies, performance studies and urban design. In this wide-ranging colloquium, speakers from a variety of disciplines will offer perspectives on urban form and experience that are rooted in diverse and sometimes hybrid methodologies.

Instructor: Susan Moffat, Project Director  
RHETOR 244 Sec 002 / CY PLAN 290 Sec C  
Class Number: Rhetoric 34650, CY 34540

global  
urban  
humanities  
University of California, Berkeley

# CONTENTS

**4 COLLOQUIUM DESCRIPTION**

**5 COLLOQUIUM SUMMARY**

**7 SEMESTER MAP**

**11 COLLOQUIUM REFLECTIONS**

# COLLOQUIUM DESCRIPTION

## CITIES AND BODIES

*A GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM*

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**City Planing 290, Rhetoric 244, 2 Units**

**Instructor:**

**Susan Moffat**, Executive Director, Global Urban Humanities Initiative  
& Creative Director, Future Histories Lab

What does it mean for a human body to experience a city? How does the built environment affect our feelings of safety, stimulation, and comfort? How do our assumptions about different users of public space affect design? What is the role of emotions and memory in our experience of cities? For whom are cities designed, and how does this design shape experiences for others?

How do we choose to represent cities and domestic spaces in children's books, film, literature, and scholarship, and how do we represent people of different races, genders, abilities, and identities in those spaces? And how do these representations affect our experiences and the way cities are built and managed?

Some central themes we investigated are the tension between map and itinerary—between the totalizing, often single-moment, 2-dimensional snapshot from on high and the linear, landmark-oriented, street-level experience of a city. The first view is often used by city planners, the second by novelists. What does each perspective have to offer and can they be combined through new technologies such as geolocated storytelling apps? We looked at the way that space and place interact and consider the neurological and bodily structures that affect our understanding of cities.

We examined methods of studying cities from different disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, architecture, city planning, journalism, literature, media studies, performance studies and urban design. In this wide-ranging colloquium, speakers from a variety of disciplines offered perspectives on urban form and experience that are rooted in diverse and sometimes hybrid methodologies.

An important goal of the colloquium was to provide a gathering place where people from different disciplines can learn about each other's work on global cities. This colloquium was part of the Global Urban Humanities Initiative, a joint project of the Arts & Humanities Division and the College of Environmental Design. The Initiative, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, supported interdisciplinary courses, symposia, exhibits, and publications.

The course was open to graduate students and advanced undergraduates by approval of the instructor. All lectures were open to the campus and broader community, and drop-in visitors were welcome for guest lectures.

# COLLOQUIUM SUMMARY

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## SCHEDULE- NOVEMBER 1, 2013

- 09/13 **Rue Mapp**, Outdoor Afro (Activist): Black Bodies in Nature and Wilderness
- 09/27 **Erika Chong Shuch** (Choreographer), **Ghigo di Tommaso**, Gehl Studio (Urban Designer): Using Bodies to Measure Urban Public Space
- 10/11 **Chris Downey**, Architecture for the Blind (Architect): Whole-body Navigation in Cities
- 10/25 **Irene Chien**, Muhlenberg College (Media Studies): Gaming Virtual Bodies: Video Games in South Asian Cities
- 11/01 **The Visitor** (Film set in Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Shanghai, 2014), by Katarina Schröter (no speaker, film only)
- 11/15 **Annie Danis**, UC Berkeley (Archaeology): Traces Still Alive: Homeless Archaeology and Contemporary Cities
- 11/22 **Neyran Turan**, UC Berkeley (Architect): Bosphorus Strait: Architectural Imagination of a Resource Geography.



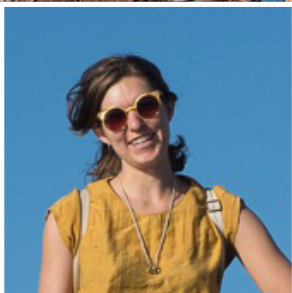
Colloquium participants participating in an exercise conducted during “Using Bodies to Measure Urban Public Space” by Erika Chong Shuch and Ghigo di Tommaso

global urban humanities initiative presents

# Traces Still Alive: Homeless Archaeology and Contemporary Cities

Annie Danis

*UC Berkeley Anthropology*



**Tuesday, November 15**  
**12 - 2 PM**  
**Cal Design Lab**  
**494 Wurster Hall, South Tower**

Annie Danis is a Berkeley Fellow in the department of Anthropology whose work explores the intersection of art and archaeology through a sensory approach to historic landscapes. Her current research takes a creative approach to community-based historic and contemporary archaeology, where a team of researchers are currently organizing data from the "Archaeology of the Albany Bulb," a former landfill and recent homeless encampment. The data was collected in consultation with former residents, shortly after their eviction by a group of volunteer undergraduate and graduate students and presented in preliminary form at the "Refuge in Refuse" exhibition at SoMarts Gallery in San Francisco.

Part of the Global Urban Humanities Initiative's Cities and Bodies colloquium.

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Full list of speakers available at:  
[globalurbanhumanities.berkeley.edu](http://globalurbanhumanities.berkeley.edu)

Poster for the Colloquium's weekly speaker series

# SEMESTER MAP

## ARC OF THE SEMESTER

### WEEK 1- BLACK BODIES IN NATURE AND WILDERNESS



[Rue Mapp](#) founded [Outdoor Afro](#) to celebrate and inspire Black connections to nature. Mapp focuses on building outdoor leadership and creating a new narrative of who gets outdoors. She will discuss how she draws on literature, history, music, and radicalism to create relevant outdoor experiences.

Originally beginning in 2009 as a blog, Outdoor Afro has since captured the attention and imagination of millions through a multi-media approach, grounded in personal connections and community organizing. From its grassroots beginning, now Outdoor Afro enjoys national sponsorship and is recognized by major organizations for

the importance of diversity in the outdoors.

Mapp's ongoing work has been recognized with numerous Awards and Distinctions: The Root 100 as one of the most influential African Americans in the country, Outdoor Industry Inspiration Award, 2014 National Wildlife Federation Communication award (received alongside President Bill Clinton) and in May 2015, Family Circle Magazine selected Rue as one of America's 20 Most Influential Moms. She is proud to serve on the board of the American Camp Association, and the Outdoor Industry Association. In 2014, Rue was appointed to the California State Parks Commission by Governor Jerry Brown.

Mapp is a graduate of UC Berkeley (with a Degree in Art History), resides in Oakland, CA and is the proud mother of three active teenage children.

### WEEK 2- USING BODIES TO MEASURE URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

The built environment of cities is created by human bodies, for human bodies. But too often, cities fail to meet the people's physical needs—as well as associated emotional and psychic needs. Is it possible to use techniques rooted in dance and theater to better understand and design space? How can we use bodies not only to measure quantifiable space but also to determine how well it performs in terms of publicness, equity, comfort, etc.?

Choreographer [Erika Chong Shuch](#) and urban designer [A. Ghigo DiTommaso](#) conducted experiments in using performance as a design tool in their 2015 Global Urban Humanities course called *Public Space: Placemaking and Performance*. Their students created performances in spaces ranging from a Costco warehouse store to a plaza in Downtown Berkeley in order to ask questions about place, space, and the right to the city. In this talk, they'll describe their experience of working across disciplines, what they learned from each other, and how their professional practices were influenced by their pedagogical experiments.



Erika Chong Shuch is a choreographer, director, and performer as well as a teacher. She is the artistic director of the Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project, a group of artists and galvanizers who create and present original performance work. Valuing vulnerability and humor, the company's ruminations coalesce into imagistic assemblages of music, movement, text, and scenic design. Shuch has a BA in Theater Arts with an emphasis in Dance from UC Santa Cruz and an MFA in Creative Inquiry from the New College of California.



A. Ghigo DiTommaso was a core member of the Rebar Art & Design Studio, which pioneered experiments in tactical urbanism including parklets and other temporary installations. Since 2014 he has been part of Gehl Studio, based in San Francisco. He was trained as an architect and urban designer in Florence and sharpened the tools of the trade in Barcelona, where he had a professional practice and conducted academic research. At the College of Environmental Design, besides teaching, Ghigo also coordinates the Adaptive Metropolis Alliance and leads a new undergraduate summer program focusing on urban innovation called Disc. Ghigo holds a PhD and a MScArch from EtsaB, Barcelona School of Architecture, and a M.Arch and a B.Arch from the Università di Firenze.

## WEEK 3- ARCHITECTURE FOR THE BLIND: WHOLE-BODY NAVIGATION IN CITIES

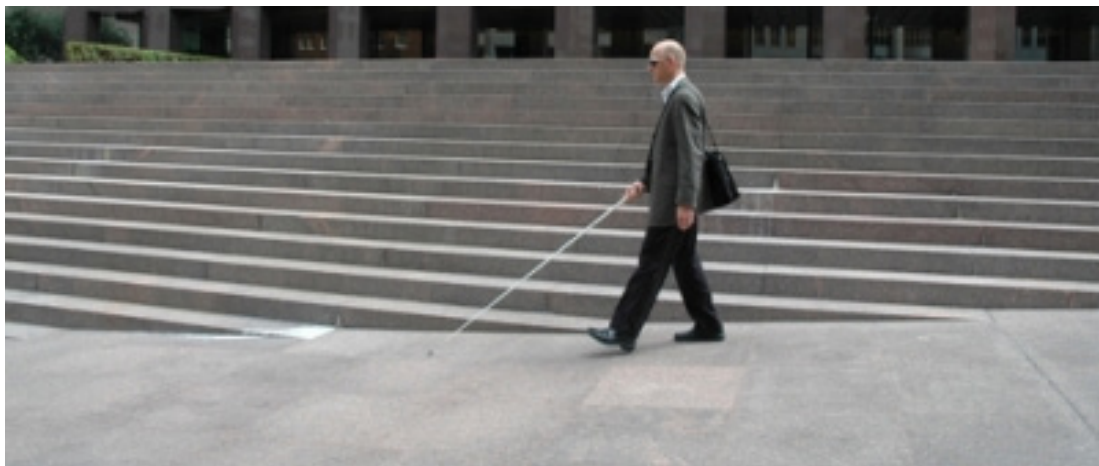
[Christopher Downey](#), AIA, is an architect, planner and consultant who lost all sight in 2008. Today, he is dedicated to creating more helpful and enriching environments for the blind and visually impaired.

Architecture and city planning tend to be dominated by visual thinking. What can designers learn by paying attention to all of our senses? Downey will speak about what he has learned about employing previously underused senses to navigate in the city and how these lessons have affected his design practice. Together we'll discuss the classic phenomenological text on vision and other senses by Junahi Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* and will consider what the growing interdisciplinary field of sound studies can contribute to design.

Downey consults on design for the blind and visually impaired, encompassing specialized centers as well as facilities serving the broader public. His work ranges from a new Department of Veterans Affairs blind rehabilitation center, to renovations of housing for the blind in New York City, and to the new Transbay Transit Center in San Francisco.

As one of the few practicing blind architects in the world, Downey has been featured in local, national and international media stories and speaks regularly about architecture and visual impairment. He also teaches accessibility and universal design at UC Berkeley and serves on the Board of Directors for the [Lighthouse for the Blind](#) in San Francisco.

He starts each day rowing with the East Bay Rowing Club on the Oakland Estuary before commuting on public transit to his office in San Francisco.



## WEEK 4- GAMING VIRTUAL BODIES: VIDEO GAMES IN SOUTH ASIAN CITIES



[Irene Chien](#), Assistant Professor of Media and Communication at Muhlenberg College, speaks about moving through South Asian cities both within video games and while playing and producing such experiences. She will talk about her field research exploring the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, which is the backdrop for some video games. Because of its low-cost technical labor pool, the city is also a production site for games set in other cities and played around the world.

Professor Chien writes about the politics of race and gender in digital media, with a focus on videogames. She is writing a book manuscript based on her dissertation titled *Programmed Moves: Race and Embodiment in Fighting and Dancing Videogames*. *Programmed Moves* examines the intertwined history and transnational circulation of two major videogame genres, martial arts fighting games and rhythm dancing games. Dr. Chien argues that fighting and dancing games point to a key dynamic in videogame play: the programming of the body into the algorithmic logic of the game, a logic that increasingly organizes the informatic structure of everyday work and leisure in a globally interconnected information economy. She explores how games make bodily habituation to new forms of digital technology both intelligible and pleasurable by investing players in familiar racial, sexual, and national identifications. Dr. Chien has published on gaming in *Film Quarterly* and has contributed essays to *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games* and the forthcoming *Identity Matters: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Game Studies*.

## WEEK 5- FILM: THE VISITOR BY KATARINA SCHRÖTER



*The city is always about glimpsing other lives. There's something about the city which breeds the fantasy of human interchangeability.*

*-Tim Etchell*

Part documentary and part performance, the experimental film *The Visitor* subverts notions of ethnography, journalism, and fiction in a surprising journey through Mumbai, Shanghai, and São Paulo.

“The visitor,” a silent figure enacted by the filmmaker, roams through three mega-cities, creating wordless encounters with random people, following a dramaturgy of chance, in which both the protagonist and the outcome of each story is not predetermined. First simply a mute presence, she becomes an intruder, friend and even beloved who shares the daily life of her protagonists, their sleeping places and their worries. Through this new presence in their life, not only does the loneliness of the people becomes apparent, but, as the relation intensifies, the border between “I” and “the other” starts to blur.

“[The Visitor](#)” was created entirely through un-staged improvisations with random encounters on the streets of the three cities. Without script, with no previous idea of what was going to happen, the filmmaker and her camerawoman threw themselves into some of the biggest metropolises in the world, trying to overcome borders of fear while examining and sometimes flipping narratives of South/North and East/West.

[Katarina Schröter's](#) original plan was to become a journalist. But because she mistrusted objective reporting, she instead became a director, actress and author for theatre and experimental cinema. She discovered filming in public space as a way to report about stories of our time while creating them. Katarina Schröter (1977) studied acting in Leipzig, dramaturgy in Munich, did her Master in Performing Arts at Dasarts Amsterdam and worked amongst others for the National Theater Dresden, the Residenztheater Munich, the Campo theatre Gent, the Kaii-Theatre Brussels, the Brut Wien, the Melbourne International Arts Festival as a performer, director and author. From 2010 till 2013 she worked at the company of the Neumarkt Theater Zurich as a director, author and actress. Her work has been shown in various international festivals. “The Visitor” (2014), her first feature movie, successfully ran in cinema and on festivals worldwide.

## WEEK 6- TRACES STILL ALIVE: HOMELESS ARCHAEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY CITIES

[Annie Danis](#) is a Berkeley Fellow in the department of Anthropology whose work explores the intersection of art and archaeology through a sensory approach to historic landscapes. Her current research takes a creative approach to community-based historic and contemporary archaeology, where a team of researchers are currently organizing data from the “Archaeology of the Albany Bulb,” a former landfill and recent homeless encampment. The data was collected in consultation with former residents, shortly after their eviction by a group of volunteer undergraduate and graduate students and presented in preliminary form at the “Refuge in Refuse” exhibition at SoMarts Gallery in San Francisco.

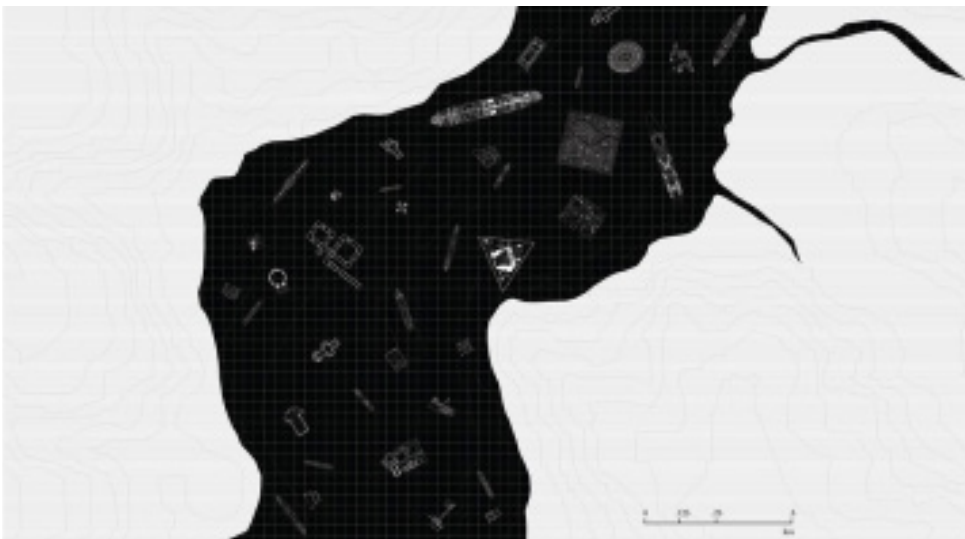


## WEEK 7- BOSPHORUS STRAIT: ARCHITECTURAL IMAGINATION OF A RESOURCE GEOGRAPHY

Architect [Neyran Turan](#) will speak about her investigations of Istanbul, including her solo installation titled [STRAIT](#), which considered scales ranging from the body to the region. Her current book project, *Geographic Istanbul: Episodes in the History of a City’s Relationship with its Landscape*, focuses on today’s Bosphorus Strait in the context of geography, politics and urbanism.

Neyran Turan is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of California-Berkeley and a partner at NEMESTUDIO, founded by Neyran Turan and Mete Sonmez, an architectural office that produces work ranging from buildings and installations to speculative projects in various scales. [NEMESTUDIO](#) has recently received the 2016 Architectural League of New York Prize for Young Architects. The work of the office has been featured at various design magazines and platforms including *Wallpaper\**, *ICON* magazine, *RevistaPLOT*, *Artwort*, *ItsNiceThat*, *Socks*, *Designboom*, and has been exhibited at the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial (curated by Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley), the Chicago Architecture Biennial, *SALT*, and the Aronson Gallery at the Parsons School of Design in New York.

Turan’s work draws on the relationship between geography and design to highlight their interaction for new aesthetic and political trajectories within architecture and urbanism. Her current research focuses on questions of representation and resource in relation to climate change and on new conceptions of the ordinary and the familiar in architecture.



# COLLOQUIUM REFLECTIONS

September 2016

By Crister Brady

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*The stereotypical American explorer of wilderness is usually portrayed as a white male. The word “urban” is often a code word for “black.” Oakland native Rue Mapp stands stereotypes on their head. She grew up with a deep appreciation of nature developed over summers at her grandparents’ ranch in rural Lake County. She has become nationally recognized for her leadership in encouraging fellow African Americans to get outdoors. On September 13th, she came to speak to the course Cities and Bodies, taught by Global Urban Humanities Project Director Susan Moffat.*

*Crister Brady, a student in the class who is pursuing both an MD and a master’s degree in Public Health, describes the two-hour session:*

Rue Mapp is founder of the Oakland-based national organization Outdoor Afro, “a network that celebrates and inspires African American connections and leadership in nature.” Mapp’s talk on “Black Bodies in Nature and Wilderness” illuminated our class readings and the week’s theme: “the Nature of Race.”

Our readings addressed American conceptions of race, wilderness, and the freedom to move through public and natural space. We took a look at the Jim Crow-era Negro Motorist Green Book, which served as a guide to lodging and restaurants with practical and safe resources that “assured protection for the Negro traveler.” Gillian White’s Atlantic article noted the “defensive and proactive mechanism” of the Green Book. We also read an interview with the renowned author James Baldwin that connected directly to Mapp’s work: “What one has to do as a black American is to take white history as written by whites and claim it all...”

Ta-Nehisi Coates, in an essay written to his son from the book *Between the World and Me*, identified racism as a visceral experience for black bodies in contrast to “the dream” lived by much of white America, which enjoys access to safe public spaces under a veil of “American innocence” that accepts racism as “beyond the handiwork of men.” Similarly, William Cronon in *Uncommon Ground* explores the concept of an uninhabited wilderness as a human invention set aside initially for the wealthiest (white male) citizens as a form of “cultural imperialism.”

Mapp shared stories and photos from her youth in the outdoors, her high school days in Oakland, and her experience as a re-entry student juggling parenthood with the pursuit of a degree in art history at UC Berkeley. After graduation, she grew Outdoor Afro from modest beginnings as a blog into a national organization.

Two aspects of Mapp’s story that affected me most as a medical and public health student were her focus on the healing communities through the power of being in nature as a group and her focus on families and caregivers. Given the recently documented and ongoing police violence towards black communities, Mapp and Outdoor Afro have organized “healing hikes” as a way to respond and return to the healing power of nature that has brought black communities together in the US for centuries.

In a blog post after the first healing hike in 2014 following the death of Eric Garner during the course of his arrest in New York, Mapp wrote, “We recall how Harriet Tubman led our people with and through nature to help us find freedom. The March on Washington brought together thousands of all hues in a national park to demand civil rights.” I was struck both by the creativity of this approach towards violence, but also by the power of calling upon a community’s own history for strength. By stepping outside of the cities that hold violent memories and confrontations for many people of color, healing was able to occur.

Mapp pointed out that Outdoor Afro does not focus its programs only on young people of color, but specifically on families and caregivers as those who will have the most impact on consistently empowering others to be able to enjoy nature and find their place in it. This comprehensive approach seems to be unique in a non-profit environment that involves competing for funding that specifically targets certain slices of communities.

Finally, one of Mapp’s fans in the audience, author and publisher Malcolm Margolin, said

that he feels Mapp embodies the concept of deep hanging out, because of how inclusive she is in her work with Outdoor Afro and the joy she brings with her. I felt that this defined Mapp's story well.

In terms of my own medical and public health studies with people experiencing homelessness, Mapp's approach to community engagement and empowerment reminded me of the importance of joy and shared experience. Just as Mapp has identified, I've seen that issues of representation in nature and other health-promoting environments are deeply intertwined with community health.

I'm reminded of the interactions between people experiencing homeless along the river in Sacramento and the lycra-clad road bikers and runners on the river trails. The nature trails are viewed as paths towards home and refuge by some, and by others as public space to be enjoyed and admired for its lack of a human footprint. Could the interaction between these two groups form a common ground for health advocacy or are they too incompatible with the dominant views of nature to allow for inhabited public space?



Rue Mapp presenting on her organization and work with, Outdoor Afro

# USING BODIES TO MEASURE PUBLIC SPACE

September 2016

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By Ashley Hickman

*Environmental design starts with the body as well as the site. In the course Cities and Bodies, taught by Global Urban Humanities Project Director Susan Moffat, students from a variety of disciplines are exploring the physical dimensions of urban form and experience. On September 27, 2016, choreographer Erika Chong Shuch and urban designer Ghigo di Tommaso led the class in exercises designed to sharpen awareness of how we use our senses to understand space and place. They also discussed their cross-disciplinary course Public Space: Placemaking and Performance.*

*Undergraduate Architecture student Ashley Hickman describes the two-hour session:*



Exercises were conducted during the Colloquium to showcase how we use our senses

During the presentation, Chong Shuch said she was a performer who likes to make people feel uncomfortable. She described Di Tommaso as a urban designer who, by contrast, seeks to make people feel comfortable. Their presentation was focused on exploring and challenging our own feelings of comfort and discomfort in space.

Chong Shuch and Di Tommaso began the session with a series of exercises designed to test our feeling of comfort in a group of people. Once we had arranged ourselves comfortably on chairs in a circle, Chong Shuch instructed us to quickly move to something that was physically uncomfortable. Some placed chairs on their heads, carried many bags at once, or hugged a trash can while standing on a table. While unpacking the feeling of discomfort, people explained they felt “unfocused” and “antagonistic.” Chong Shuch then asked for everyone to remain in their uncomfortable position while trying their best to make themselves somehow comfortable. One person explained that she made herself comfortable by “becoming internal.” Another participant said that, to the contrary, sharing a gaze with another uncomfortable person was comforting to them.

We moved on to exploring social discomfort. For most, social discomfort involved touching or looking at a stranger in a way more intimate than usual. Participants leaned on someone they didn’t know, squatted above someone lying down, and moved much closer together. One participant explained that as her body started working together with another body, she began to feel more socially comfortable than she initially had.

In the next exercise we began by walking aimlessly around in a sea of people attempting to make meaningful eye contact. Chong Shuch instructed us to stop and make eye contact with one person with whom we would now be paired. The exercise entailed one partner being blindfolded and the other leading the blindfolded. Throughout the entire exercise we were not allowed to speak to each other and were allowed only to guide our partners using touch. I was blindfolded first and my partner slowly began to lead me around the room, out into the hall, and into an adjacent room. As I gained trust in my partner we began to move more quickly. I touched the materials of the wall and room around me with my hands, and eventually I was led to sit down.

We then switched places and I led my blindfolded partner around the room, feeling the walls and furniture, and finally to a seated position. The exercise had scripted moments in which Chong Shuch interjected and gave directions to the seeing partner. It also allowed for unscripted moments in which the partners were allowed to explore their own interpretation of the instructions. The exercise concluded with 2-minute free writes on the topics of protection, comfort, and delight. Di Tommaso and Chong Shuch explained that successful public spaces

need to provide these elements.

Di Tommaso and Chong Shuch then described a semester-long course in which they had employed exercises like this. Through team and individual experiments the students in that class created a provisional, working definition of the term “public space,” drafted and endlessly revised on a crowdsourced online Google Doc that was itself an experimental object.

Throughout the session, although some of the exercises were uncomfortable to perform with a stranger at first, my feeling of comfort evolved. By the end of the exercises it no longer felt awkward to lead a blindfolded stranger across the room by holding their hand. The session ended with a general feeling of comfort.

The most important lesson I learned from this presentation was the difference between social and physical discomfort in space, topics which are very applicable to my field of architecture. The exercises made me more questioning of the experience in public space, for example, how someone uses a bench. Say the bench is unused. It could be either due to social or physical discomfort and separating the two could be of use when studying it. The physical discomfort could relate to the feeling of sitting on it while the social discomfort is that it is too close to a busy street. If a designer is to assume it’s physically uncomfortable and simply replace the bench with a new, more comfortable one, they might miss the true reason it’s unused. I will now think of and use this distinction between physical and social comfort in both my studies and future practice.



Participants during the blindfolded partner exercise



The interactive discussions had during the Colloquium

# DIGGING COMMON PEOPLE'S HISTORY

September 2016

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By Jaime Gomez

*Gomez is a doctoral student in Architecture and describes the two-hour session:*

In any biography, the subject is usually someone important or, at least, someone whose actions have influenced the course of an important event. Usually no one is interested in reading the biography of a common person with discrete achievements. However, when the life of a common person can shed light on the life of a group and, ultimately, teach us about our society, things become more interesting. But, how to access the life of a common person who is not present or who has not left any testimony about himself? Even if that person is alive, how to overcome the silences and biases of his or her testimony in order to have an account closer to reality? The answer seems to be in the material culture associated with that person, including his or her habitat and objects.

Annie Danis, PhD candidate in Archaeology at UC Berkeley, shared her experience and theoretical basis of her work documenting the traces people who inhabited the Albany Bulb left in the place. Using the set of methods provided by archaeology, she and a group of student-volunteers spent eight weekends doing fieldwork in the Albany Bulb back in 2014. The aim was to register the artifacts that could shed light on the homeless community that made this place their home from the mid-1980s until their eviction in 2014. Based on maps made as part of the "Atlas of the Albany Bulb" project, she and her students relocated the places where people had lived. Once they identified patterns of occupation, they selected representative areas in order to document in detail the artifacts found there. Their findings included the out-of-place dumped materials used to build the Albany Bulb (a human artifact itself), salvaged materials used for the inhabitants' homes, books, letters, food and beverage containers, and even bones (although not human).

Her work brought to my mind photojournalist Peter Menzel's book where 30 families from around the world were photographed in front

of their homes twenty years ago, surrounded by all the objects they possessed (Material World: A Global Family Portrait, Counterpoint, 1995). Although not an academic approach, the artifacts in the images tell us a lot about the lives of these families by making us imagine how and when they are used, and where they are placed. Similarly, Danis' work also reminds me of a more recent book published by the UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families. It documents and interprets the material life of 32 middle-class families in the Los Angeles area, showing us a more in-depth account of how artifacts can lead us to understand their users (Live at Home in the Twenty-first Century, The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2012).

These books, as well as Annie Danis work, are highly political because they use artifacts to shed light on issues that are currently impacting our world. In the case of Danis, the "archaeology of the contemporary past" approach she uses helps her uncover a recent past whose influence in the present is still strong. By choosing to focus on a former homeless community, she is bringing attention to the unsolved issues around homelessness. By asking students to help her in her research, she is feeding new generations with ideas on how archaeology can contribute to deal with unsolved contemporary issues. By deciding that the outcome of her work will not be limited to be published in the highly specialized archaeological journals, but accessible to a wider audience, she is stating the need for a higher involvement of certain disciplines in present-day discussions. Ultimately, by giving importance to common people, she is recognizing that our reality is not only made by the heroes that are on the covers of popular biographies.

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