

# UC Berkeley

## Courses

### Title

**Siteworks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance** | Spring 2018  
Studio Course

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# SITWORKS:

UNDERSTANDING PLACE THROUGH  
DESIGN AND PERFORMANCE

GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES  
UNDERGRADUATE  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH STUDIO  
CASE STUDY

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# WHY READ THIS CASE STUDY?

This case study of the course *Siteworks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance* may be useful to teachers of urban studies, architecture, landscape architecture, design, theater, dance, and multiple humanities disciplines. This interdisciplinary research studio course combined **landscape architecture methods** including site analysis, mapping, graphic representation and oral presentation; **performance methods** including sensory immersion, embodied exercises, and engagement with an audience; and **humanities methods** including writing and interpretation.

This case study explains the steps of site analysis, research, and iteration that led to the creation of a site-based performance that aimed to share the students' understanding of the site with an invited audience.

It describes the ways that three instructors from the fields of performance, landscape architecture, and urban planning team-taught a course with undergraduates from majors including architecture, computer science, development studies, and political science.

The conclusions of the case study include:

- Place-based, project-based learning encourages students to road-test concepts in a concrete fashion that may have greater staying power than book learning alone.
- Fieldwork can be useful in arts and humanities education.
- Design students benefit from exercises that deepen awareness of social factors.
- Collaborative, hands-on projects provide training in teamwork and time management for students and graduate teaching assistants that is useful both inside and outside academia.
- Writing exercises associated with project-based learning produce critical thinking of a quality that might not have been achieved without the place-based, hands-on work.

**Location:** San Francisco Bay Area

**Keywords:**

**Interdisciplinary pedagogy, experiential learning, social factors, embodiment, mapping, performance studies, dance, theater, site-specific performance, sensory immersion, nature, space, commons, landfill, informality.**

*This case study is part of an archive of the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative and its Future Histories Lab, supported by the Mellon Foundation. The entire archive, including course case studies, faculty and student reflections, digital projects, symposia, exhibitions, and publications, is available at [https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb\\_guh\\_fhl](https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_guh_fhl).*



The Albany Bulb is a former construction debris landfill that sticks out a mile into San Francisco Bay. This rubble-filled peninsula is now an undeveloped park and has become overgrown with large trees and vegetation and for years has attracted large-scale guerrilla art, and in the past, a community of unhoused people. **Siteworks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance** was an interdisciplinary, project-based, place-based course that sought to research this site and share the research through a site-specific performance. Students addressed the central question: “What is a commons? How does it function?”  
Photo: Robin Lasser

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Students investigated the history and materiality of their study site-the Albany Bulb, a waterfront landfill-through sensory immersion exercises and unconventional mapping techniques. As their final project, they created a site-specific performance that invited the audience to intervene in the site by manipulating foraged materials.

# COURSE DESCRIPTION

## SITWORKS: UNDERSTANDING PLACE THROUGH DESIGN AND PERFORMANCE



GUERRILLA ART AT THE ALBANY BULB  
LANDFILL

*GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES UNDERGRADUATE  
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH STUDIO*

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**Landscape Architecture 154, Theater 114**

**4 Units, Spring 2018**

**Instructors:**

**Ghigo di Tommaso** (Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning)

**Erika Chong Shuch** (Theater, Dance & Performance Studies)

**Susan Moffat** (City and Regional Planning)

**Graduate Student Instructor:**

**Annie Danis** (Archaeology/Anthropology)

Each year, the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at UC Berkeley offered a fieldwork-based course that allowed undergraduates to explore an urban Bay Area site using methods from architecture, city planning, the arts, performance, and the humanities. In 2018, the Research Studio focused on the Albany Bulb, a construction debris landfill in San Francisco Bay known for its informal art, spectacular views, and for many years, a longstanding homeless community. We sought to answer the question, “What will the Bulb become?” Using methods of urban and natural observation and experiments in performance and documentation, students sought to understand this complex space.

## THE INSTRUCTORS

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**Ghigo di Tommaso**

Ghigo is a Director at Gehl, where he leads master plans, public life studies and urban prototyping projects in Northern, Central and South America. Trained as an architect and urban designer in Florence, Ghigo practiced the profession, conducted research, and taught in Barcelona for several years before relocating to San Francisco and joining the Rebar Art & Design Studio in 2012. A member of Gehl's San Francisco Office from its founding, Ghigo is also affiliated with the UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design, where he has been teaching since 2014.



**Erika Chong Shuch**

Erika Chong Shuch is a performance maker, choreographer and director whose topic-driven ruminations coalesce into imagistic assemblages of music, movement, text, and design. Interested in expanding ideas around how performance is created and shared, Shuch's work has been performed in city halls, theaters, industrial offices spaces, diners, parking lots and food courts. Shuch's original performance works have been supported and commissioned by Berkeley Rep's Groundfloor, Intersection for the Arts, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, deYoung Museum, Headlands Center for the Arts, Djerassi, Dancers' Group, Liz Lerman's Dance Exchange/Corcoran Gallery/DC and in Korea: Daejeon Metropolitan Company, Chang Mu Company, Mullae Art Space.



**Susan Moffat**

Susan Moffat is the project director for the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative. She coordinates the academic program, organizes symposia, supports the development of publications, and conducts outreach across disciplines to faculty, graduate students, and the off-campus community. She is responsible for grant management, budgeting, fundraising, curriculum coordination, and communications. Susan also teaches courses in the Initiative, including a course on Cities and Bodies, an interdisciplinary colloquium and a course on mapping and storytelling. Her research focuses on issues including perceptions of nature and culture in public space, parks, homelessness, and methods of spatial narratives. She has also has taught planning and leadership development at San Jose State University and UC Berkeley's Center for Cities and Schools.





# COURSE SUMMARY

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## CONTEXT

The Undergraduate Certificate in Global Urban Humanities provided an interdisciplinary structure through which students could study urban form and experience. The certificate required students to take elective courses on cities in both the College of Environmental Design and the College of Letters and Science. The goal of the program was to expose students to humanities methods such as close reading, formal analysis, and archival research; interpretive social science methods such as interviewing, ethnography, and qualitative analysis; methods of investigation from the arts including performance and the creation of art objects; and environmental design methods including spatial analysis, mapping, and visual representation. The program emphasized the role of the arts and literature both in the life of cities and as a means to understanding urban life.

**Siteworks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance** was one iteration of a specially designed course, the Interdisciplinary Research Studio, which was required as the core experience for students pursuing the certificate. Each year, we offered a fieldwork-based course that allowed undergraduates to explore an urban Bay Area site using methods from disciplines that included architecture, landscape architecture, city planning, the arts, and the humanities.

## INTRODUCTION

**Siteworks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance** focused on the Albany Bulb, a construction debris landfill in San Francisco Bay known for its informal art, spectacular views, and, for many years, a longstanding homeless community. The site was in the midst of transitioning from an ad hoc/laissez-faire style of management by the City of Albany to more active and consistent management by the East Bay Regional Park District; there were plans at the time for the District to manage the incorporation of the site into the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park (which in the end, however, did not occur). Using methods of urban and natural observation and experiments in performance and documentation, students sought to understand this complex space. What is the nature of the Bulb, and what will it become?

We asked students to bring their own questions about space, place, nature, bodies, and performance and to apply what they learned in each session to their encounters with the world around you outside of class hours.

Central question: throughout the semester, students explored this question:

- In what ways does public space operate as “the commons”?  
How can we use performance and design to understand the commons and support its function?

## **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The course aimed to help students:

- Develop tools for making effective and ethical decisions in urban places, taking into account space, place, gender, race, equity, and power
- Develop individual and group skills for observation and analysis of urban spaces including built and natural features and individual and social human experience
- Use creative expression as a means of asking questions about human urban experience
- Learn to think spatially, temporally, emotionally, and critically
- Plan research with an eye to communicating its conclusions

## **BY THE END OF THE COURSE, STUDENTS WERE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN CONCEPTS FROM THE FOLLOWING DISCIPLINES:**

- **CITY PLANNING:** the basic processes underlying urban change and planning process in California including the interaction of elected officials, advocacy groups, and public employees, etc.
- **URBAN DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY:** systems and issues including circulation, enclosure, comfort, eyes on the street; conventions of representation, etc.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING:** the interaction of natural systems and human intervention, regulation; mapping in layers, etc.
- **PERFORMANCE:** some fundamental concepts of performance including body, space, audience, etc.

## **BY THE END OF THE COURSE STUDENTS WERE EXPECTED TO KNOW HOW TO USE RESEARCH, COMMUNICATION, AND CREATIVE METHODS INCLUDING:**

- Field-based observation
- Quantitative and qualitative surveys of human activity at a site
- Sketching and diagramming
- Cognitive mapping
- Mapping in layers
- Photography
- The use of urban interventions as a means of inquiry
- Creation of a small-scale performance
- Creation of a design proposal for a small site
- Posters and graphic communication
- Oral presentations

# SEMESTER MAP

## ARC OF THE SEMESTER

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This chronicle of the semester is based on a blog written by graduate student instructor Annie Danis.



### WEEK 1- WHO ARE WE AND WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

**METHODS: COMMUNITY-BUILDING THROUGH BODILY EXERCISES**

In week one of the class we got to know each other, our practice space, the aims of the course, and the first set of methods we would employ to explore the Albany Bulb.



### WEEK 2- LISTENING TO THE SITE, LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

**METHODS: SENSORY IMMERSION, ORAL STORYTELLING, LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS**

We spent both class sessions this week outdoors at the Albany Bulb. First, we got a tour of the Bulb from Susan, who explained the history of the place, from landfill, to encampment, to future state park. Second, used practices of listening with our ears, bodies, and minds. Finally, Ghigo led an exercise based on the landscape architectural method of drawing a cross-section. Along 150 feet of rope we laid across the land, students mapped different elements of the Bulb: materials, vegetation, view, emotion, and weather.



### WEEK 3- FINDING OUR SUPERPOWERS AND PUTTING THEM TO WORK

**METHODS: COLLABORATIVE DRAWING; EMOTIONAL CONNECTION; PERFORMANCE**

How to represent a place to ourselves and others? This week we continued our exploration of the section drawing method by combining our layers into a single drawing. Performer and activist Keith Hennessy joined us to set our imaginations on fire. Erika led us in an exploration of our “superpowers” and we started brainstorming how to put them to work in performance. We also discussed the possible audiences for a performance at the Bulb and why we would choose different groups to focus on. Finally, Ghigo and Annie gave presentations on their own work in landscape architecture and anthropology.



## WEEK 4- OBSERVING, MEASURING, ENVISIONING

**METHODS: OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY OF URBAN BEHAVIOR; ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY; SITE-INSPIRED THEATER**

This week we experienced the Bulb using three different methods. First, Ghigo led us in a public space survey of the sort he uses in his practice at the urban design firm Gehl. Then, Annie shared archaeological techniques for producing scale maps of sites, comparing them to a performance of paying attention to detail. Finally, we spent a whole class session with Ava Roy from We Players, learning about her process of directing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the Bulb. We then made our own 1 minute "performances." We broke into five groups or two to three people, with each team taking responsibility to research and represent the characteristics, meaning, and potential of their chosen site at the Bulb.



## WEEK 5- PROCESS, PRESENTATION, PRACTICE

**METHODS: GRAPHIC DESIGN; MAPPING; COLLAGE; DATA VISUALIZATION**

This week we brought the data we collected at five sites and our cumulative experiences at the Bulb so far back to the studio. Our goal this week was to distill what we had learned about these sites into plan maps, sections, and photo collages for presentation. Each group was tasked with converting their sketches, scaled maps, and photographs into a cohesive poster they will present next week to a group of artists and designers interested in our process and the Bulb. Each poster included an investigation of the physical and emotional affordances of the site as a performance location. Graduate student instructor Ettore Santi led two workshops on using InDesign for the layout of the posters, and Photoshop for the photo collages.



## WEEK 6- SITE ANALYSIS PRESENTATIONS

**METHODS: ORAL PRESENTATION, CRITIQUE**

Using plan view and section illustrations representing the physical and emotional properties of each site, each team gave a 15 minute presentation about what they had learned about their site and some potential ideas for a performance. We received feedback from invited practitioners and scholars: Trena Noval (artist and scholar, California College of the Arts), Carol Mancke (architect and artist, University of San Francisco), Rene Davids (architecture professor, UC Berkeley), and Joe Orrach (dancer).



## WEEK 7- CREATING MOMENTS BY COMPOSING AND MOVING OUR BODIES

**METHODS: EMBODIED MOVEMENT; SPATIAL COMPOSITION; THEATER**

Following several weeks of deep dives into urban planning, landscape architecture, and archaeological methods, we now began to develop our performance toolbox. In an acting studio room, Erika led exercises that included making one-minute performances with a focus on composition (screen, frame, respond, oppose), moments (of surprise, about current events, that are irreversible), and tasks (small, concise, everyday).



## WEEK 8- PERFORMING INSIDE/OUTSIDE

**METHODS: PERFORMANCE CREATION INDOORS AND IN PUBLIC SPACE**

This week we composed performances using the awareness of composition, moments, tasks and audience interaction in the classroom and on campus. In the classroom, we experimented with performances designed by a few students for the whole group, and one-to-one experiences designed by one student for one other student. These exercises developed our understanding of the possibilities of each modality.

Outside, we chose locations on campus to create and perform site-specific work. We used the modalities from the first half of the week to explore and change our perspectives on very familiar places on campus. Focusing on transitions, getting from one site to another, and using the materials of the sites themselves, the students transformed the area around Strawberry Creek on the UC Berkeley campus into a mythic playground.



## WEEK 9- BRAINSTORM!

**METHODS: BRAINSTORMING ON GIANT PIECES OF PAPER; DRAWING, WORDS**

This week was all about creative ways to think together. After experimenting for two weeks with different performance modalities we brought our focus back to the Albany Bulb. Thinking through images that inspire us and moments we want to create, we discovered common themes of myth, ritual, nature/human, and thresholds. Building on these through on paper and out loud brainstorming we developed performance ideas incorporating installations, one-to-one interactions, “theater-theater,” and task-based performances in groups.



## WEEK 10- TRANSITIONS AND IMAGES

**METHODS: PERFORMANCE PROTOTYPING AT THE SITE; REACTING TO OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT**

Back at the Bulb, we explored the themes from last week (myth, ritual, natural/human, thresholds). We also explored non-verbal ways to draw an audience deeper into the place. We experienced the Bulb in wind, rain, sun and sometimes a combination of all three, engaging with the weather as part of the place and site-based performance. Guest artist Neil Goldberg helped us develop a better understanding of how all parts of embodiment contribute to experience.



## WEEK 11- GETTING IT TOGETHER

**METHODS: PERFORMANCE DEVSING**

This week we talked, dreamed, and collaborated. We talked about what we learned bringing our themes and modalities back to the sites we studied at the Bulb in the first part of the class. We dreamed about what we envisioned for the final performance. We collaborated on how to make it happen. We developed more robust ideas for different elements of the performance and figured out what we would need to execute the vision. We left for spring break with a set of ideas to prototype at the Bulb in April.



## WEEK 12- PROCESS AND PRODUCTION

**METHODS: DEVISING AND REHEARSAL ON-SITE**

This week we brought all our research, ideas, compositions, and dreams back to the Bulb to set the production of a performance in motion. We tested sites with prototypes, brainstormed in place, and developed a final theme, direction, and opening for the performance. Susan and Ghigo guided students in thinking about the physical affordances of sites at the Bulb and Erika put on her directors' cap to help design the opening moments.



## WEEK 13- PERFORMANCE!

**METHODS: SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE**

We led a small invited audience on a performance along a 1.75 mile-long walk, sharing the place-based knowledge we had developed over the semester.

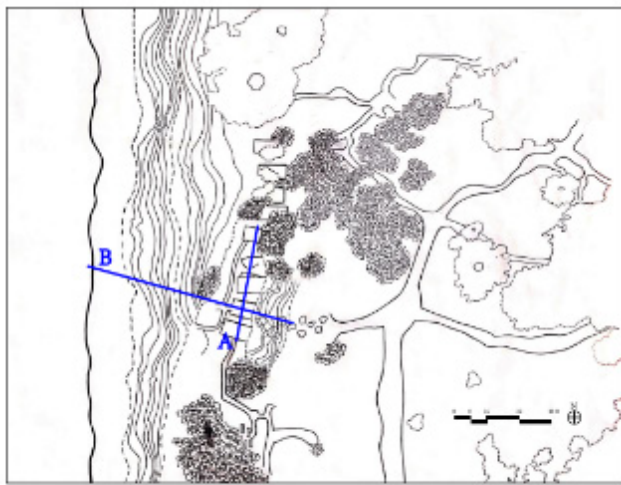


At a site characterized by rubble, waste, and informal uses such as the production of guerrilla art, the students drew attention through their performance to the intersection of the “natural” and built environment.

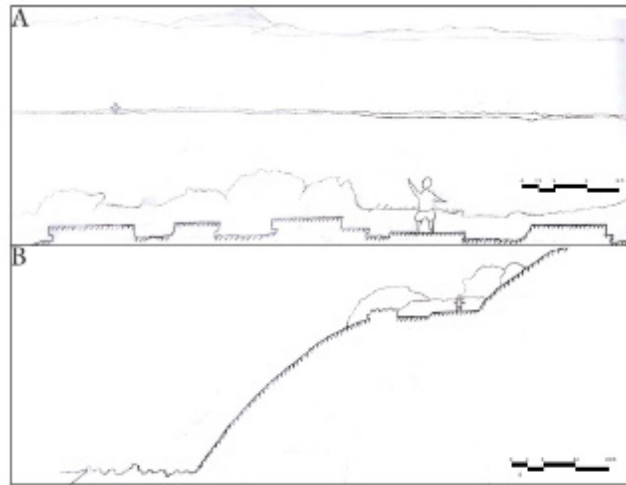


# STUDENT WORK

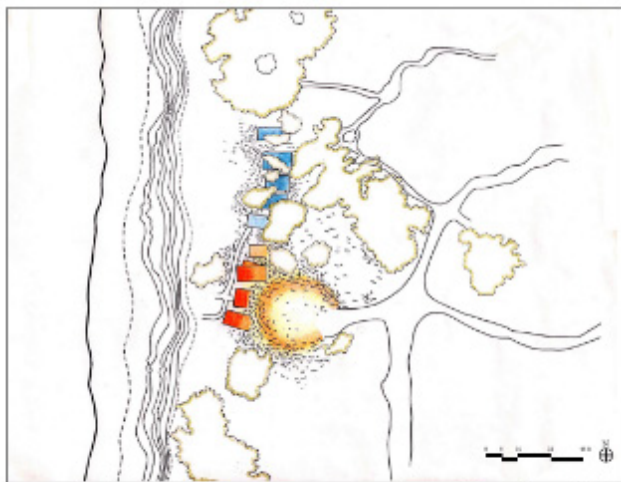
## SITE ANALYSIS: MAPPING PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS



Site Map  
Base map, dimensions, materials, views, physical elements of interest



Site Sections  
Base section, dimensions, material, vertical and horizontal elements



Emotional Map  
Interpretative data layered on the base map



Emotional Sections  
Interpretative data layered on the base sections

Students combined traditional methods of analysis and representation from landscape architecture with experimental methods.

In the top two drawings, a team of students represented the physical dimensions of a steep waterside slope and its vegetation by doing a scaled plan-view drawing with topographic measurements (left) and a scaled cross-section (right) showing concrete slabs that were potential performance sites.

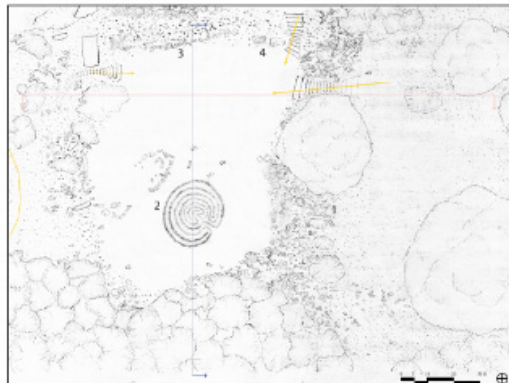
In the bottom two drawings, the students represented the emotional “temperature” of different parts of the same site using colors sketched in by hand.

For both analyses, fieldwork at the site was essential. This site analysis informed their development of the final performance, which grew out of the site rather than being placed upon it.

Student Team: Hannah Ricker (Development Studies), Tiffany Meng (Urban Studies), Michael Qi (Undeclared).

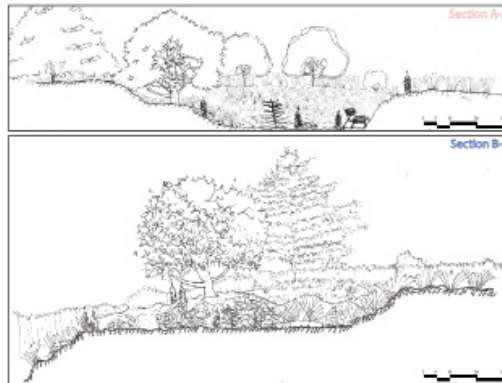
# SITE ANALYSIS: MAPPING PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS

## Agora in the Amphitheater



**Site Map**

Base map, dimensions, materials, views, physical elements of interest



**Site Sections**

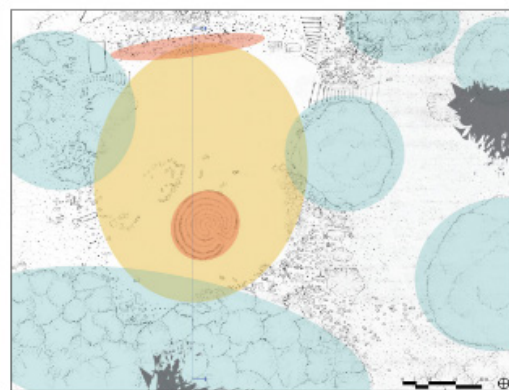
Base section, dimensions, material, vertical and horizontal elements



**Amphitheater**  
Key map, site location, site analysis

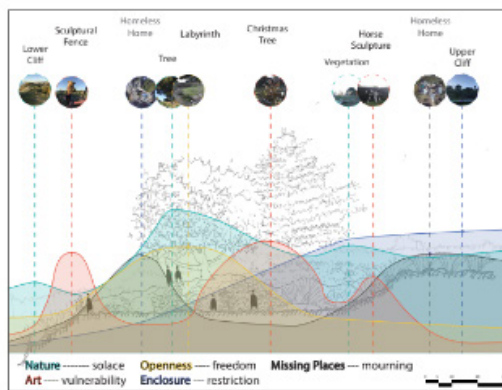


1. Overlook onto Amphitheater



**Emotional Map**

Interpretative data layered on the base map



**Emotional Sections**

Interpretative data layered on the base sections



2. Labyrinth



3. Sculptural Fence



4. Clay Brick Ovens

This student team chose a different part of the landfill to analyze: a bowl-shaped depression known as “The Amphitheater,” where park visitors had built a labyrinth out of rubble and where informal performances were sometimes held.

These students also represented their research through a combination of scaled drawings and emotional maps, along with photographs of the site.

They defined the space as an agora based on readings earlier in the semester; these readings and discussions about them were more extensive than what is typical in an architecture studio course.

Their focus on the affective experience of people and animals at the site shows how the course combined humanities and arts thinking with traditional representational methods of landscape architecture.



© 2014 Urban Environments Research Institute - Research Matters | Networks: Understanding Place through Design and Performance | Theater: Urban and Performance Studies 111 | Landscape Architecture 154 | Cheng School of Planning, Urban and Environmental Design | Peihan Qian (Landscape Architecture), Riccardo Montali (Art)

**Student team: Briana Salmon (Architecture), Peihan Qian (Architecture), Riccardo Montali (Art).**

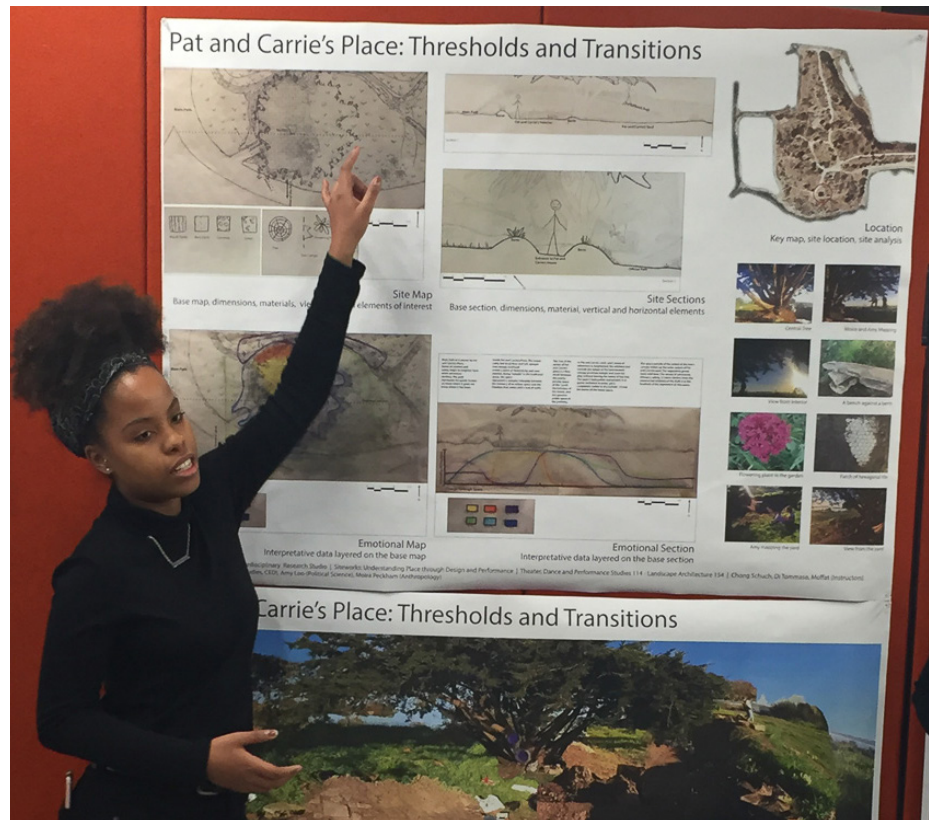
## ORAL PRESENTATION: PROVIDING CONTEXT, RECEIVING CRITIQUE, ITERATING

Oral presentation using graphic materials is an essential part of studio education. Outside guests, typically professionals in the field and community members with ties to the site, are invited to hear and respond to presentations. This process requires students to contextualize their arguments and research methods for people unfamiliar with the site; it hones students' abilities to listen to and assess suggestions given and to create new iterations based on this input.

Unlike grades or assessments by a single professor, critique by outsiders who sometimes disagree with each other provides multiple viewpoints that help students understand there is no single right answer. The reactions of the critics also often reveal to the students that the intention they have for their drawings and words do not always come across clearly to the audience. Hearing from the audience what was confusing or misunderstood helps students refine their descriptive and representational skills.

Semi-public presentation also forces students to address ethical issues in their work.

In this photo, "Pat and Carrie's Place" refers to the former homestead of two unhoused people who had built a beautifully laid brick floor for their tent before they were evicted. The unhoused community had been evicted three years before this class took place, but students acknowledged not just the physical remnants of the community such as the brick floor, but the stories of the people as part of the history and meaning of the place.



The students spent significant time discussing control and ownership of narratives. They listened to feedback about their projects from one former Bulb resident and one advocate for the unhoused people. But because students were only able to make very limited contact with former residents of the site (who were hard to track down), they decided that it would be ethically more sound not to use stories about these people as the center of their performance.

Therefore, instead of recounting stories of former residents of the Bulb, the students used their many-layered site analyses to choose resonant locations at the site and focused on connecting the audience to their own senses and emotions at the site in order to ask questions about the natural and human worlds that are both visible and hidden there.

## WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

Reflecting and writing was as important in this course as drawing and performing. While it was hard in the course of one semester to squeeze in a writing project on top of the fieldwork, the landscape architecture-based projects, and the development of the performance, the instructors thought it essential that students digest and represent their experiences and their conclusions in writing.

At the end of the semester students were asked to reflect on what they had learned in the course, with an emphasis on what it had revealed about the central question “what is a commons”?

In their final essays, students combined personal reflections on the process of the class with analytical arguments about themes of the course including notions of the commons; access and inclusion in public space; research ethics; spatial justice; ritual and performance; and landscape and memory.

Many of the essays reflected on the social and emotional interactions that occurred within the group in the process of researching and collaborating on creative and analytical assignments. They sometimes argued that the social and spatial relations within the student group and their spaces of learning mirrored social and spatial relations at the landfill.

The students demonstrated they had assimilated the theoretical readings in the syllabus well; they reflected on the ways that course readings illuminated and were illuminated by both fieldwork and embodied movement. Students said they came away with tools and questions that they would carry into future research and creative work.

The following excerpts from student essays show some of what they took away from the course.

**Theater, Dance and Performance Studies**  
**Major Kathleen O'Connor describes how**  
**the performance was developed:**

Through measuring, mapping, documenting, and reading, we implemented precise tools to extract every bit of meaning we could muster out of the space. As the deadline for our performance drew nearer, we were suddenly called to make sense of all the material we had spent weeks chewing apart. Immediately, we turned our attention toward each other to pool each of our own creative impulses. Though our professors certainly played a role in decision-making... no single person was in total control at any given time.

Unlike many traditional performance contexts, in which playwrights, directors, and choreographers determine the minutiae of the performance, we operated as a collective to generate creative material and turned to our director [Erika Chong Shuch] and other professors primarily for advice, editing, and consolidation...

Each of us wanted to tell our story of the Bulb, but like the Bulb's many visitors, each of us had a different version of what that should mean. Our vested interest in the outcome gave us room to compromise, negotiate, and experiment, which ultimately led to a more flexible and holistic performance...

Our collaborative, decentralized artistic and representational practice introduced me to a new way of understanding art making, community, and the commons.

**Architecture student Briana Salmon**  
**describes the impact on her creative**  
**practice:**

Siteworks accomplished more than teaching me to 'understand place through design and performance.' Rather, it helped me to better understand myself through bodily actions and critical discussions...

***“Our collaborative,  
decentralized artistic and  
representational practice  
introduced me to a new  
way of understanding art  
making, community, and the  
commons.”***

The interdisciplinary nature of Siteworks allowed for a group of academically and socially diverse students to become collaborators in both small-group analysis projects and performance exercises as well as a large-scale performance event...The experience has altered my perspective on the ways in which a creative like myself can stimulate the engagement between people and spaces.

**Hannah Ricker, a Development Studies**  
**Student, describes the combination of**  
**embodied and graphic exercises:**

What I think this class has achieved best is that it has proposed solutions to many of the problems that such an undertaking of place-based research might typically come across... In a matter of a couple of hours [of embodied exercises], the class had moved from a strongly felt sense of corporeal and emotional individuality to one of communal empathy and togetherness...

[On the other hand], beginning with a more conventional city planning approach inculcated a strong sense of intimacy between person and place, using structured methodology to foster a keen sense of observation. Completing a transect of the various sites...gave us the time and space to observe and continually reexamine those observations.

**Tiffany Meng, an Urban Studies student, describes what she learned about ritual:**

Looking back at this class, I feel that I have grown and learned more than I thought possible...

Through the various kinds of in-class exercises, we gradually developed a shared vision and direction, commitment to realizing shared goals and interests, and engendering a feeling of empowerment.

It became apparent to us that rituals happen when we create moments to spark something meaningful with our target audiences... a transformation occurred when rituals deviated from the conventional notion of religious practices, literary theory, or history, and turned into a broader and more diverse analytical vocabulary, taking on the character of an interdisciplinary enterprise.

***“The experience has altered my perspective on the ways in which a creative like myself can stimulate the engagement between people and spaces.”***

# STUDENT REFLECTIONS

*Performative Rituals as Portals of Transition, Transformation, and Transcendence*  
(excerpt from student paper)

-Tiffany Meng

Looking back at this class, I feel that I have grown and learned more than I thought possible. The course, which debuted this semester, provides a diverse array of activities through the use of theme-based approach as to how we view our shared public spaces as “the commons,” as well as, to think about the urban commons – not through eminently physical, concrete manifestations, but through interventionist actions and collective experiences within a theoretical and experimentally augmented framework.

There are many thematic concepts covered throughout the semester, though 'ritual' is not brought up until later of the course; it is ever-implemented and evolving. It is utilized by us in the beginning for a conceptual foundation to constitute collective identity (or the shared sense of belonging), during the brainstorming process for transforming strategic vision into practical reality, and ultimately rooted in the performance as the so-called 'performative rituals' to generate a transcendent reality experienced by all participants.

In my reflection, I aim to analyze both the course's development and achievement and my personal journey of learning. The analysis corresponds with three build-up and implementation phases of, firstly, transition and identity formation through the conceptual foundation- ritualistic learning from individuals to group, secondly, innovation spaces: transformation in collaborative design process- ritualistic behaviors of turning concept into reality, and lastly, performance as paradigm of a transcendent reality- ritualistic interaction between performers and audiences.



*Photo Credit to Robbie Sweeny.*

*Taken at April 18th, Performance Day*



# STUDENT REFLECTIONS

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*Reflections on Siteworks:*

*Understanding Place Through Material and People*

*(excerpt from student paper)*

*-Briana Salmon*

Siteworks accomplished more than teaching me to ‘understand place through design and performance’. Rather, it helped me to better understand myself through bodily actions and critical discussions. Attempting to understand myself, I’ve defined three things I am most interested in: Cities, Art, and People. These three categories stand well on their own yet have very complex, intricate relationships. The Albany Bulb’s character is rich in each of these areas. The Bulb has a complicated spatial, social and political history within the city, having been the home of a construction landfill, homeless encampment, and now primarily an art and dog park. Yet, traces of the people and objects from each of these phases still remain. Almost everything in our environment was created by someone. Just as the concrete and rebar remnants at the Bulb were dumped there by someone, many of the plants were too planted or landscaped, like the gardens created by Susan and Love The Bulb. The sculptures that animate the bulb were created by artists and the benches and paths that we sit and walk on were too made by someone. All of these people are ‘siteworkers’. Everyone who inhabits this space across time molds the place in both obscured and seen ways...

A recurring theme during this semester was focused on the tensions between the natural and the artificial. In class, we contemplated the importance of man-made objects and the importance of natural objects. I find it interesting how much those two categories are blurred in the space of the Bulb.

This tensions between natural and built objects was particularly interesting in Rene Davids’ Cities, Landscape, and Technology seminar, where we designed and built the key elements of a traditional performance space: the stage and seating. Given that this site is not a traditional performance setting, our design choices reflected the site’s environment. The final product was a stage constructed from pallets, an easily reusable material reflective of how much and how often building materials are transported through space. Secondly, the gabion-inspired benches utilize rocks located from the site of the amphitheater, topped with cut plywood. Both materials are representative of both natural and man-made objects throughout their process of sourcing, producing and ultimately building with the material.



The pictures show myself and the final built design in the amphitheater site at the Bulb.



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