

AAD Summer Studio 2017  
**Karla Rothstein, critic**  
with David Zhai and Zhida Wu

## **DEATH and the CITY** *Reimagining 21<sup>st</sup> Century Urban Life*



Enamul Hoque, 2010

Navigating contemporaneous positions on the Civic, the Sacred and the Profane, this studio will generate ideas about the future city, re-qualify infrastructural typologies, and radically reimagine the urban public domain.

Over the past two centuries, as society's needs and technological capacities have evolved, New York City's municipal services and systems have accrued in intertwined and ad hoc layers. 6,000 miles of roadways, 788 bridges and tunnels, a fleet of ferryboats, and diverse networks for information and resources of all definitions are threaded across, over and between the archipelago of the five boroughs. Amidst this infrastructural *mélange*, cemeteries comprise an aggregate gated area more than five times the size of Central Park. While providing advantageous ecological habitat, these vast yet intimate territories are largely sequestered from the streams of everyday life.

The studio will envision the city through strategic, hybridized co-existence and accountability for the future, to produce new occupational alliances and spatial innovation. We will design new public spaces, integrated into urban life, that recognize death and remembrance as part of essential civic and social infrastructure. Student teams will speculate on and design elegantly conceived structures across scales from object to building to city and back again. Transcending religious dogma and the absence of belief, projects will support vibrant collective urban life and intimate forms of contemplation.



Ian Brampton, *Sound of the Crowd*, 2010

*...Our thinking about ideals becomes visionary or extended to the extent that it holds up a picture, however partial or fragmentary, of a radically altered scheme of social life and appeals to justifications that do not stick close to familiar and established models of human association. The visionary is the person who claims not to be bound by limits of the tradition he or his interlocutors are in... Notice that visionary thought is not inherently millenarian, perfectionist, or utopian (in the vulgar sense of the term). It need not and does not ordinarily present the picture of a perfected society. But it does require that we be conscious of redrawing the map of possible desirable forms of human association, of inventing new models of human association and designing new practical arrangements to embody them."*

- Roberto Unger, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task*, 1987, as referenced by David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope*, 2000

## 5 SCALES

At a time when debates pit 'systems' against 'buildings' and 'space' against 'object,' we will strategically engage all of the above as essential constituents of the complexity the metropolis. Design proposals, produced in partnership, will encompass 5 interdependent scales:

- a **vessel or object** to contain or embody the inorganic remains of a single individual
- a **building** that offers civic-sanctuary
- a **system** of accelerated decomposition and commemoration
- an **urban public landscape** of celebration and contemplation
- a **collective urban imaginary** of death and the city

Decisions will be informed by the argument of your project and produce consequences larger and more impactful than the sum of its multi-scaled parts.

## 5 SITES

Responding to and interpreting distinct civic and individual priorities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, each team will engage and radically re-fashion one of the following existing infrastructural sites:

- a **bridge**
- a **subway**
- the **Citi-bike network**
- a **pier / the urban littoral edge**
- an **existing cemetery or urban park**

Dissonance among proximal programs and apparent asymmetry of occupational intent will be calibrated to yield propositions that support vibrant civic relations and intimate exchange. Engaging in the politics of today, projects will serve as a catalyst for accommodating the mesmerizing civic alchemy of multiple, simultaneous truths.

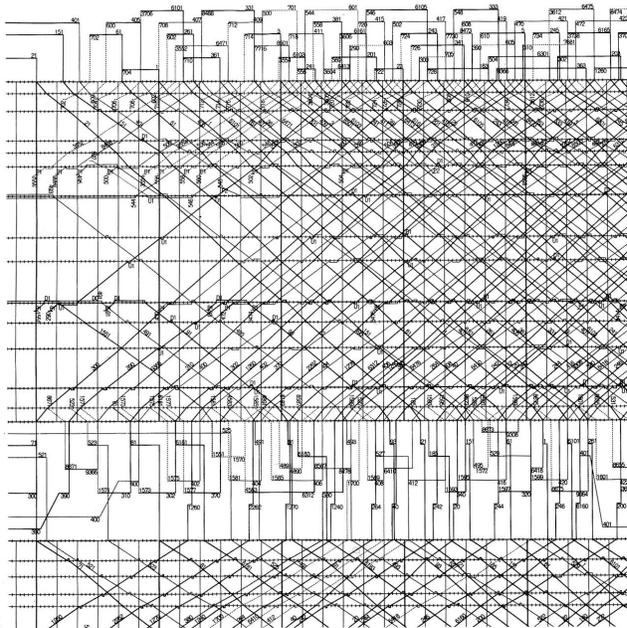
*“You see things; and you say “Why?”  
But I dream things that never were; and say “Why not?”*

- George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, 1921

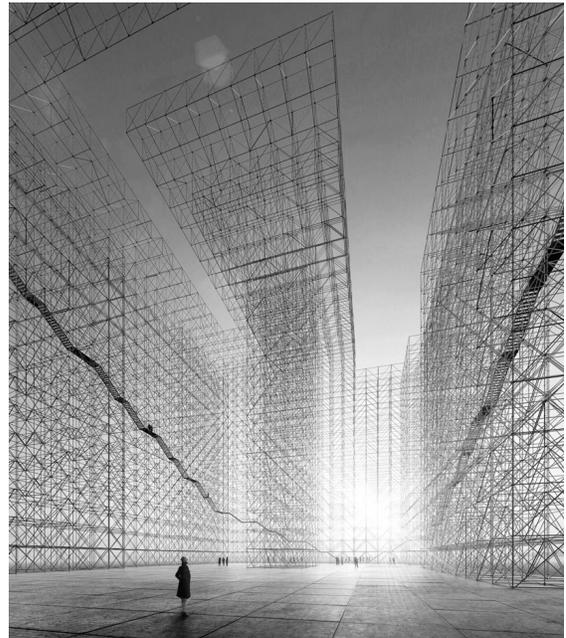
**DESIGN** — Design is an act of production with regenerative capacity. As architects, we engage our projects as instruments with which to re-qualify reality and to propagate change.

**CONCEPT** — A concept facilitates focus and clarity. Students should be willing to mobilize skills and intellect to work outside of their comfort zone. Critical conceptual intent will frame exploration and purposeful invention.

**THEORY** — Robust ideological arguments will build and clarify through engaged conversation and debate. Projects will formulate and test hypotheses on architecture’s role in shaping and remembering the future. The logics of your contentions and propositions should be meticulous, but not preconceived.



Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information*, 1990



Guillaume Mazars, *Reveal the Absence*, 2013

**NOTATION** — Ideas and potential will be explored iteratively through writing, drawings, digital and physical models. Graphic techniques shall be inventive and commensurate with your project’s critical aspirations. Manifestoes will evolve as the project emerges. These succinct articulations of intent will be rigorously tested and evaluated in dialogue with your developing architectural proposals.

*“Like art, revolutions come from combining what exists into what has never existed before.”*

- Gloria Steinem, *Moving Beyond Words*, 1994

**MORTALITY** — The ineffability of mortal limits is registered in the reality of corporeal transience. Death occupies the margins of life and the city. Yet it also defines our mortal connection to the cycles of the organic world. At Columbia GSAPP DeathLAB we are critically re-imagining the city’s relationship with death, and through this work designing new forms of civic space. DeathLAB is an inter-disciplinary initiative directed by architects in close dialogue with environmental engineers, a philosopher / theologian, sociologists and sustainability experts. Supported by the Earth Institute, we are currently developing a process that transforms the biomass of the corpse into the energy that we literally embody. As an alternative to the excessive resource consumption of both casketed burial and cremation, this system engages the disposition of the body on its biological basis.

**TEMPORALITY** — Projects will engage time, duration and the cognitive difference between experience and reflection—identifying misalignments between the physics of palpable spatial and material presence and how we choose to remember, establish the value of absence, and commune with strangers. Innovative models of civic-sacred space and new modalities of remembrance will question the need for permanent repositories and epitaphs in the urban landscape.



Lois Greenfield, *Breaking Bounds*, 1992

**ETHOS** — The Summer Studio will be intense and prolific. Students should possess a willingness to work incredibly hard, take calculated risks, and be comfortable with ethical disobedience to outdated cultural practices. Respect for your peers is crucial to the studio dynamic, and active dialogue will inspire effective exploration. Our best work emerges when we intensively engage content and uncover possibility – you should take equal pleasure in intense critical investigation and beautiful, analytically creative production of all definitions.

**SCHEDULE** — On Thursday, 01.June we will meet in 300 Avery. Please bring your portfolios and any other material that you'd like to share as a means with which to introduce yourself to the group.

Beginning Monday 05 June we will have pin-ups to initiate each week of the semester.

**Midterm:** Thursday, 06 July  
**Final:** Wednesday, 02 August

	MON	TU	WED	TH	FRI	SA	SU	
<b>Wk 1</b>			31.05	1.06	2.06	3+4.06		
<i>Reveal</i>			LOTTERY	INTRO 300 Avery	METROPOLIS	DESIGN-RESEARCH memory-vessel-object-city		J
<b>Wk 2</b>	5.06	6.06	7.06	8.06	9.06	10+11.06		
<i>Notice</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	DESIGN-ANALYZE		U
<b>Wk 3</b>	12.06	13.06	14.06	15.06	16.06	17+18.06		
<i>Materialize</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	INFRASTRUCTURE Sunset Circle Line Cruise		N
<b>Wk 4</b>	19.06	20.06	21.06	22.06	23.06	24+25.06		
<i>Position</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	ARGUMENT Why? Where? How? What?		E
<b>Wk 5</b>	26.06	27.06	28.06	29.06	30.06	1+2.07		
<i>Translate</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	1st MIDTERM	METROPOLIS	PRECEDENTS NYC + Global Cemeteries		
<b>Wk 6</b>	3.07	4.07	5.07	6.07	7.07	8+9.07		
<i>Test</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	MIDTERM	METROPOLIS	REFLECT		J
<b>Wk 7</b>	10.07	11.07	12.07	13.07	14.07	15+16.07		
<i>Develop</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	PROTOTYPE Material Detail Specificity		U
<b>Wk 8</b>	17.07	18.07	19.07	20.07	21.07	22+23.07		
<i>Synthesize</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	CLARIFY Spatial + Social Consequence		L
<b>Wk 9</b>	24.07	25.07	26.07	27.07	28.07	29+30.07		
<i>Re-present</i>	PIN-UP	ARGUMENTS	STUDIO	STUDIO	METROPOLIS	INTENSIFY		Y
<b>Wk 10</b>	31.07	1.08	2.08	3.08	4.08	5+6.08		
<i>Refine</i>	STUDIO	ARGUMENTS	FINAL			CELEBRATE		

## RESOURCES

- Stan Allen, "Mapping the Unmappable: On Notation" in *Practice: Architecture, Technique and Representation*. London, 2009
- Kate Ascher, *The Works: Anatomy of a City*. New York, 2005
- James Corner, *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Theory*. Princeton, 1999
- James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention" in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove. London, 1999, 214-252.
- Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair et.al. eds. *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. Tuscaloosa, 2010
- Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists*. Oxford, 2012
- Eric Kester, "Making Light of Death: At Columbia's DeathLAB, The Search for a Cleaner, Smarter Alternative to Burial is a Deeply Serious Matter," *Columbia Magazine*, New York, 2016
- Philip Kitcher, *Life After Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism*. New Haven, 2014
- Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Ontario, 2014
- Karla Rothstein, "Reconfiguring Urban Spaces of Disposal, Sanctuary and Remembrance," in *Our Changing Journey to the End: Reshaping Death, Dying, and Grief in America, Vol. I: Trends in How and Where We Die and Grieve*. Santa Barbara, 2013
- Mark C. Taylor, *After God (Religion and Postmodernism)*. Chicago, 2007
- Pew Research, Religion and Public Life Project, "Nones" on the Rise, the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2013-dot-sustainable-streets-5-infrastructure.pdf>  
<http://juanfrans.com/projects/citibikeRebalancing.html>

## PEOPLE

### **Kartik Chandran**

Environmental Engineer, MacArthur Fellow for sustainable resource recovery

### **Juan Francisco Saldarriaga**

Senior Data Visualization and GIS Analyst at Columbia University's Center for Spatial Research

### **Amy Cunningham**

Death Educator, NYC's 'eco friendly' Funeral Director

**Karla Rothstein** — is a practicing architect and Associate Professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. She is the founder and director of Columbia's trans-disciplinary DeathLAB and a member of the Columbia University *Seminar on Death*. Rothstein's areas of inquiry and teaching weave intimate spaces of urban life, death and memory with intersections of social justice, the environment, and civic infrastructure.

Rothstein is also Design Director at LATENT Productions, the architecture, research, and development firm she co-founded with Salvatore Perry. In this role, she has gained a deep understanding of the political and practical aspects of realizing built work, and the importance of the societal and cultural levers that promote positive change within communities. LATENT Productions is currently re-vivifying a 240,000 SF former cotton spinning mill campus on 9-acres in the northern Berkshires, building 25 units of affordable housing for home-ownership in Brownsville Brooklyn, and a meandering vertical oasis for a private client.

Since 2015, Rothstein's research with co-PI Kartik Chandran has been supported by the Earth Institute's *Cross Cutting Initiative*. In 2016, LATENT Productions and DeathLAB were awarded first place in the international *Future Cemetery* competition, and DeathLAB was recognized as one of *New York Magazine's* 47 'Reasons to Love New York.' Most recently, DeathLAB was named a finalist in the category of Behavioral Change for Katerva's *Accelerating the Future Award*.

Rothstein has been honored by Built by Women New York City (BxW NYC) celebrating the leadership and achievements of women working in the building professions, and as a finalist for Columbia University's Presidential Teaching Award. Supported as a Jacob Javits Fellow in Fine Arts from 1988–1992, a William Kinne Traveling Fellow in 1992, and a NYFA recipient in 2000, Rothstein's professional and academic work has been featured and/or exhibited at Storefront for Art and Architecture, Sir John Soane's Museum, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Barnard College, Columbia University, Van Alen Institute, Max Protetch Gallery, the Center for Architecture, architizer.com, Gizmodo, Architecture magazine, Casabella, The New York Times, London Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal Magazine, Columbia Magazine, New York Magazine, NPR, OZY.com, Wallpaper City Guide NYC, UnCubed, WIRED Japan.

**David Zhai** — is a partner at CO-Office, a user-experience design firm. As partner, David leads applied R&D, integrating technology in the design of collaborative work environments, experiential retail, and community-driven residential. Prior to this role, David was the computational technologies and exterior envelope lead for the design of World Trade Tower 2 at Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), where he also led R&D in virtual reality. David is a recipient of the Graham Foundation grant on his research into company and organizational culture and its effects on workplace environments, domestic life, and urban transformation. David holds a Master of Architecture from Columbia University GSAPP, where he was the recipient of the Kinne Fellowship Award, the Lowenfish Memorial Award, and the Design Excellence Award, and where he has assisted in the Masters program in both the Core and Advanced studios since 2012. He has been an adjunct associate professor at NJIT since Spring 2017.

**Zhida Wu** — is a critical thinker and a practical project architect. He holds a B.Arch from South China University of Technology and has recently completed his Master of Science in Advanced Architecture Design at Columbia University GSAPP. Zhida is co-founder and partner of the Shenzhen-based research and curation association Center of Decentralization (JIXI Salon), an open platform focused on educational justice and retro-territorialization of cultural institutions. The forthcoming issue of BLYNKT magazine explores the intertwined complexity of individual and society in the pan-media era, and reimagined the municipal services and systems in the concubine villages in Shenzhen, which will be exhibited in HK-SZ Design Biennale 2017. Zhida has a background in parametric design and emulation technology, and his research paper *Meteorological Architecture in Uncertainty* will be presented at the Design Modeling Symposium in Paris 2017.