

## URBAN DESIGN NOW: New Paradigms & New Practices

Columbia University in the City of New York

Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation / GSAPP A6832

FALL 2016 Tuesdays 11am-1pm UD Seminar II

Avery Hall, Rm 115

Note: Some books are on our seminar shelf #358 or on reserve at Avery Library

### Instructor:

Kate Orff RLA [ko2111@columbia.edu](mailto:ko2111@columbia.edu)

Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design

Office Hours Avery 411: Tuesdays 10-11am by appt.

This course explores urban design practice through the lens of infrastructure and activism. Critical readings that conceptualize the contemporary city from 1960 through the present are interspersed with analyses of case studies of catalytic urban design projects and emergent forms of design practice. Our aim is to gain new perspectives on how to better transform **knowledge** into world-changing design **practice**.

Students will examine a range of new modes of urban design practice today from non-profits, to global NGOs, to local, experimental research units based in academia to labs based within for-profit firms. We will explore how research-driven design culture moves beyond traditional notions of site- and service based practice to define interventions at multiple scales with social and environmental purpose. The seminar also marshals the expertise of the Columbia Urban Design Faculty at large to convene a series of conversations that link across semesters, developing a shared understanding of tools and techniques to shape the built environment.

Faced with massive challenges of climate change, social inequity and privatization, we tend towards inaction, bogged down by contrasting perceptions, overwhelmed by the scope and interrelated extents of the most pressing issues of our time. This seminar aims to hone tools for research, analysis, decision making, and participation and reveal avenues of transformative practice. We will study the problematic of SCALE and study how to working simultaneously at multiple scales as an approach. We will look at experimentation and research in design as a driver of advocacy. We will survey paradigms of thinking and study specific design practices that embrace multi-scalar analysis and navigate toward scenarios of multi-scalar proposals. We speculate on forms of next century infrastructure as jointly physical and social. We will investigate the role of

design and policy thinking – not just for designers but for everyone working towards sustainable new energy futures. We will discuss the idea of design as not just making something (buildings, chairs, plazas, renderings) - but as making change.

## **Objectives**

This seminar intends to marshal thinking in design and policy towards developing a toolkit of strategies and scenarios for change. Through faculty guidance and relevant readings, this seminar will facilitate informed discussion and exchange. Interspersed with a series of video talks and guest speakers choreographed to run in parallel with joint seminar discussions, this seminar will consider the idea of connection and collaboration and ultimately explore the value of thinking horizontally to mesh together different perspectives and disciplines. Through a focus on different practice typologies, speculative projects and case studies, the seminar will highlight the reciprocity between thinking and making, researching and doing, desk work and fieldwork – the idea and the thing. We will explore avenues of common purpose, shared techniques, and collaborative approaches.

## **Format**

The class includes lectures by the instructor, videos, invited speakers, library research, student-led discussions and presentations on case studies and readings, and discussions of timely issues. There will be assigned readings for each week which students are expected to be prepared to discuss these readings and engage the invited speakers in a lively debate. Students will choose a case study of a design practice and sample project where they will be asked to explore & explain the benefits and pitfalls of new forms of practice, research examples of world-changing work and speculate on future directions and opportunities.

## **Course Requirements**

Students are expected to do all of the assigned reading, to actively participate in class discussion, and to prepare questions for invited speakers and engage actively in dialogue. Students will be asked to work in small teams of no more than 2 to do a presentation. This presentation is an investigation and critical understanding, to include drawings, diagrams and text, of one case study of a mode of practice and representative project(s) that emphasize synergistic thinking between community organizing, science, design and engineering in an urban context. Some class time will be dedicated to desk crits on this exercise. This presentation will be critiqued and translated into narrative and will serve as the basis for the final paper, due at the end of the semester. Students may also be asked to prepare 1-2 brief issues paragraph reactions to specific readings or prepare questions in advance for invited speakers. Students will also be asked to draft and share an Urban Design Mission Statement part way through the semester. In order to reduce paper consumption, PDFs of readings will be made available on Courseworks/Canvas, and books will be placed on our reserve shelf in Avery Library where possible. The readings are divided into *required* and *recommended*. Note that your final paper (approximately 15 pages) must source at least three required or recommended readings.

## **Schedule**

9/06

Week 1           **INTRODUCTION / THE PURPOSE - DRIVEN DESIGN PRACTICE**

*A discussion of the goals and format of the course.*

An introductory discussion on the objectives for the course, review of the course schedule and expectations. Initial discussion on methodologies and strategies for changing the conversation. What is the agency of the urban designer? What is the role of form, aesthetics vs. strategy, tactics? What are we doing and how do we do it? What should we be doing?

Required Readings:

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Frampton, Kenneth. "Toward an Urban Landscape" Columbia Documents of Architecture and Theory 4 (1995): 83-94 (on Courseworks/Canvas)

Kolbert, Elizabeth "Man in the Anthropocene" (April 2005) (on Courseworks/Canvas)

Plus follow up article "Reeling From Effects of Climate Change, Alaskan Village Votes to Relocate" NYTimes August 2016

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Klein, Naomi. This Changes Everything Simon & Schuster (2014) Introduction (on CC) & Seminar Shelf

Brenner, Neil. "The Agent" (on CC)

Recommended Readings:

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Diamond, Jared. Collapse: How Societies Succeed or Fail Prologue (on CC)

9/13           **GLOBAL CHANGE NETWORKS: DESIGNING SOCIAL AGENCY**

Week 2       **USER GENERATED URBANISM**

**INVITED SPEAKER : GEETA MEHTA**

**\*\*\*do the reading & prepare 3 questions for Geeta**

Geeta Mehta is a co-founder of URBZ, Mumbai and Asia Initiatives.

Required Reading:

The Right to the City by David Harvey (on CC)

Recommended Reading:

Davis, Mike. “Slum Ecology” in Planet of Slums, 2006

Also see multiple articles on URBZ posted to Courseworks/ Canvas.

*Presentation & paper topics distributed. Begin to research and select presentation topics, form teams of 2, and develop a research thread.*

9/20

Week 3              **ACTIVIST PRACTICE**

**Toward an Urban Ecology: SCAPE**

Lecture & Discussion

Required reading:

Toward an Urban Ecology, INTRODUCTION and SCALE Chapters (on Seminar shelf)

Tom Fisher, “Public Interest Architecture” and “Design for the 99%”

Recommended Reading:

Petrochemical America. ‘Introduction’ (p. 115-117) and ‘Oil’ (p.119-129) (on reserve)

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert, 2014 (on CC)

9/27

Week 4

## NGO MODELS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS & PRACTICE OF URBAN DESIGN

### INVITED SPEAKER: ANDREW RUDD

UNITED NATIONS Urban Environment Officer, Urban Planning and Design Branch

**\*\*\*do the reading & prepare 3 questions for Andrew**

Required Reading:

Thomas L. Friedman, “Connecting Nature’s Dots” NYTimes, Aug 23, 2009 (on CC)

Sachs, J. Commonwealth: Economics for A Crowded Planet (Ch 1 & Ch 2 on CC)

Lefebvre, H. “From the City to Urban Society” in Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2003) (if you read this for Noah Chasin’s class, read it again!)

Recommended: VIDEO: Jeffrey Sachs on Sustainable Urbanization <http://vimeo.com/3395587> (Links to an external site.)

And book The Age of Sustainable Development

<http://issuu.com/columbiaup/docs/sachs-sustainable-excerpt?e=8118850/11496725> (Links to an external site.)

Brenner, N., “Urban Theory without an Outside,” in Brenner ed., Implosions/Explosions: Toward a Study of Planetary Urbanization (Jovis, 2014), pp. 15–31

10/4

Week 5

## URBAN PATCHERS

### Invited Speaker: JUSTIN G. MOORE

### Case Study: Urban Patch

**\*\*\*do the reading & prepare 3 questions for Justin**

Required Reading:

“Past Forward: Roots and Recovery in the American City” by Justin Moore (on CC)

Recommended Reading:

Eric Klinenberg, Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago.

New Preface and Chapter 2 Race, Place and Vulnerability: Urban Neighborhoods and the Ecology of Support (.PDF on CC)

“Ferguson and Failing Suburbs” by James Russell August 17, 2015 (on CC)

10/11

Week 6            **PUBLIC SPACE ADVOCATES**

**Invited Speaker: SHIN-PEI TSAI**

**Executive Director, Gehl Institute**

**Case Study: Gehl Institute**

**\*\*\*do the reading & prepare 3 questions for Shin-Pei**

Reading:

Peruse the book by Jan Gehl, Cities for People (On Seminar Shelf)

Please see the link below to read the Public Life Diversity Toolkit - a set of metrics that Gehl Institute is prototyping to see how effectively they measure public life (life and space) in communities.

[https://issuu.com/gehlinstitute/docs/20160128\\_toolkit\\_2.0](https://issuu.com/gehlinstitute/docs/20160128_toolkit_2.0) (Links to an external site.)

REVIEW THIS REPORT:

<http://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/A-Peoples-History-of-Recent-Urban-Transportation-Innovation-Report-Pages.pdf> (Links to an external site.)

<http://transitcenter.org/peoples-history/executivesummary/> (Links to an external site.)

David Owen, Green Metropolis & “More Like Manhattan” (on Canvas/ Courseworks)

Jane Jacobs, The Uses of Sidewalks & Downtown is For People (on Canvas/ Courseworks)

10/18

Week 7

**WHAT U CAN DO\*\***

**MISSION STATEMENT ROUGH DRAFT DUE**

(\*\*see Shadrach Woods, Team X)

*“Mission statements are at best part of our PR, and at worst, the entire genre seems too naive to embrace. But mission statements are also contracts with the future; and that alone should allow us to consider the usefulness of even our smallest organizational, cultural, technical or aesthetic offering within the context bigger than our own pet projects and personal life stories.”*

--- Ana Miljaki

Do architects and urban designers write manifestos anymore? What does urban design mean to you? Why did you study urban design? What is an example from your background that inspired you to be an urban designer? What is your purpose? As Ana writes, a mission statement is a contract with the future. What do you aim to accomplish as an urban designer? What are the most intractable issues in your home country? What changes in the urban landscape have you witnessed? What have you discovered about the city that engages you? A two-page mission statement DRAFT is due. Please be prepared to share. Please read sections of TWO of the below resources.

Please read:

Friedman, Tom “Tubas and Test Tubes” in The World is Flat.

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And (PICK TWO):

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What U Can Do by Shadrach Woods

Design with Nature by Ian McHarg

Learning from Las Vegas By Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour

Generic City , Singapore essays by Rem Koolhaas, SMLXL

Whole Earth Catalog (1968) by Stewart Brand

Collage City by Colin Rowe

Cities for People by Jan Gehl

Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies by Reyner Banham

Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space by M. Sorkin

10/25

Week 8           **DREDGE COLLECTIVISTS**

**INVITED SPEAKER: BRIAN DAVIS**

**Case Study: Dredge Collective**

**\*\*\*do the reading & prepare 3 questions for Brian**

Required Reading:

“Public Sediment” by Brian Davis, Toward an Urban Ecology (Monacelli 2016)

Recommended Reading:

“Land as Infrastructure for Living” by Saskia Sassen, Topos 2014 (on CC)

“The Geopolitics of Subtraction” by Keller Easterling (originally published in Domus 963 / November 2012)  
(on CC)

Berger, Alan. Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).  
(seminar shelf)

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11/1

Week 9           **FOR-PROFIT FIRMS: RESEARCH LABS AS INNOVATION DRIVERS**

**GENSLER / CHRISTINE BARBER Senior Associate, Director of Research**

*Note: for this class we will meet at the Gensler office at address below – to be confirmed week prior*

1700 Broadway, Suite 400

New York, NY 10019

Required Reading:

<http://www.gensleron.com/cities/2016/7/15/uncovering-providencia-gensler-goes-to-venice-> (Links to an external site.) biennale.html

11/08

Week 10           **ELECTION DAY / NO CLASS**

11/15

Week 11           **CASE STUDIES IN UD PRACTICE GROUP I**  
**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION**

Required Reading: TBD

11/22

Week 12+          **CASE STUDIES IN UD PRACTICE GROUP II**  
**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION**

Required Reading: TBD

**THANKSGIVING BREAK 11/24-11/25**

11/29

Week 13           **CASE STUDIES IN UD PRACTICE GROUP III**

**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION**

Required Reading: TBD

12/2           Last day of Architecture classes

12/16           **PAPERS DUE 5pm**

12/21           Grades due

**Bibliography**

Students should consider purchasing these books for background reading and reference materials:

The following books will be placed on the seminar shelf in Avery Library:

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Beyond Patronage: Reconsidering Models of Practice, Joyce Hwang and Martha Bohm , (Actar, 2015) (ordered..)

Toward An Urban Ecology, by Kate Orff Monacelli Press, 2016

Designing Our Way to a Better World by Thomas Fisher

Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement Lepik & Bergdoll, eds.

Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism by Bryan Bell

The Sixth Extinction, by Elizabeth Kolbert

This Changes Everything by Naomi Klein

Collapse: How Societies Succeed or Fail by Jared Diamond (2011)

Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet Jeffrey Sachs, (2009)

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson

Soil Not Oil by Vandana Shiva

Friedman, Thomas L. "The Ten Forces that Flattened the World" in The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2007)

Klein, Naomi This Changes Everything (2015)

Mostafavi, Mohsen and Gareth Doherty, eds. Ecological Urbanism (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Muller Publishers,

2010).

Owen, David Green Metropolis: Why Living Smaller, Living Closer, and Driving Less Are the Keys to Sustainability, 2009

Steffen, Alex ed. Worldchanging: A User's Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Abrams, 2009

Kolbert, Elizabeth The Sixth Extinction and Field Notes from a Catastrophe

Misrach, Richard and Orff, Kate Petrochemical America, Aperture 2012

Waldheim, Charles. The Landscape Urbanism Reader (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

The Diversity of Life E.O. Wilson

## **Electronic Resources:**

<https://urbanext.net/expandingdesignpractices/> (Links to an external site.)

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/> (Links to an external site.)

<http://blogs.nature.com/climatefeedback/> (Links to an external site.)

<http://sustsci.aaas.org/category.html?categoryid=52> (Links to an external site.)

<http://climateprogress.org/> (Links to an external site.)

<http://ecogeek.org/> (Links to an external site.)

## **Grades will be based on the following:**

You are asked to regularly and thoughtfully participate in discussions, and to prepare questions for speakers, and responses to readings. You cannot miss more than 3 classes. Please inform the instructor in advance should you have to miss class for any reason.

### **Case Study (60%)**

Research one ‘world changing’ concept or project and present a profile of both the project and the typology of office that created it. Each student is responsible for working in a team of two to produce an oral presentation and critical analysis with speculative discussion of constraints and opportunities of the project case study chosen. Time to research the topic is crucial – you will be asked by the instructor to work together to discover a fruitful line of inquiry. Therefore it is advised that students meet with the instructor prior to their presentation for guidance on overall approach and to shortlist research source material. A separate handout will be distributed week two with more information and a sign-up sheet.

1. Context. Begin with a profile of the organization (non-profit? Size? Number of people? Mission Statement?) and a tour of the project case study or urban condition and its site to acquaint the class with its historical and geographical conditions. Include scale and relation of project to town or rural area. Include background on disciplinary collaboration or unexpected consequences.
2. Critical Analysis. What is the mission statement? What problems are the designers aiming to address? Describe how the project or action or idea connects or separates objects and spaces, and the processes and events that it carries. Who made the project? How is the firm or office organized? How does the project structure new relationships and organize new cultural or ecological functions? How does it create the conditions for future events or behaviors? What are its effects?
3. Conclusion. Situate the work: describe strengths and weaknesses, missed opportunities and latent potential. How can an understanding of the project inform current practice of science and design? What are new avenues of understanding and speculations that could help move the discussion forward? What failed? What succeeded?

Oral presentations will take place on the dates listed above. A final project to include images, drawings of approx 15-20 pages total length will be due at the end of the term. Your aim should be to produce a work that is approximately 15-20 pages in overall weight, although well researched charts, finely crafted diagrams, and the sequencing or juxtaposition of images and precedents will count for a lot. The ratio of text to image/diagram will depend on the project itself and individual student's interest and experience. I expect a range of responses from text-heavy papers to those consisting of primarily diagrams and analytical drawings that explain the structure and flow of the project in its context. Include citations from the course readings where appropriate - these will be very helpful for your audience to understand the relevance of the case study and how it intersects with cultural and conceptual issues raised in the course. The best papers have a clear structure, and an introduction, body and conclusion. Structure your writing in outline form and organize your ideas visually as a storyboard sketch if it is useful.

Please include your full name and email/UNI on all submitted materials. A list of potential case studies will be provided but students are encouraged to explore alternatives.

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**POTENTIAL CASE STUDIES FOR STUDENT PRESENTATIONS & FINAL PAPER** *Please research and add to the list.*

- ASSEMBLAGE \_ London Rural Urban Framework, Hong Kong (Village Research & 2 projects)
- Place Lab Chicago, IL (Chicago neighborhood regeneration, Dorchester projects, etc.)
- ENNEAD / Research / Refugee Housing
- OMA / AMO Rotterdam “The Image of Europe” United Nations & Roadmap 2050
- Center for Urban Pedagogy, New York “Envisioning Development” & “What is Affordable Housing”
- Rural Studio / Samuel Mockbee et. al
- IOBY / In Our Back Yard
- Growing Power, Milwaukee
- Situ Studio Research / SPEA & Situ Studio
- Bryan Bell / Public Interest Design “Migrant Housing for North Carolina blueberry pickers” “FEMA housing” or other
- Alex Felson, Urban Ecology and Design Lab
- Reed Hildebrand, The State of City Soils, and R-H Practice (Eric Kramer)
- Hector / Damon Rich, Newark Riverfront Park & Environmental Justice  
<http://urbanomnibus.net/2014/01/walking-to-the-water-environmental-justice-and-newarks-riverfront-park/> (Links to an external site.)
- Balmori Lab / Gowanus
- Rosanne Haggerty / Community Solutions <https://cmtrysolutions.org> (Links to an external site.) (see her lecture at Cooper Hewitt)
- Health Habitat <http://www.healthabitat.com/> (Links to an external site.)
- MASS Design Group
- Sasaki / Sea Change