

## RE-COMMISSIONING ENGAGING TABOOS OF THE 21ST CENTURY METROPOLIS



1931. Aerial view of Central Park, looking north from about East 72nd Street. A pair of dirigibles hovers above the park. The Lower Croton Reservoir is being filled in to make space for the Great Lawn. Among other material, stones from the building of Rockefeller Center are being used to fill in the obsolete 33-acre receiving reservoir, which held 180 million gallons of water piped in from the Croton River in Westchester.

**THE METROPOLIS EMBODIES A MORTAL PALIMPSEST** — accumulations and traces of humanity and temporality. The work of the studio will examine how we live with death in the city, and how progressive architectural intervention may couple with urban infrastructure to radically re-qualify public space.

We no longer live in an epoch of solidity with a steady belief in the eternal. Cities are living, responsive organisms, and it is our aim to shape their evolution. The present environment is ripe for the architectures of our public and post-mortem circumstances to respond to the fluidity of contemporary urban life.

Challenging lingering preconceptions, the **decommissioned central park reservoir** and adjacent spaces will be augmented and transformed to support civic and environmental education and sanctuary. Projects will engage the secular-sacred nature of this (huge, 106 acre, 1 billion gallon) urban water body, the taboo of building in central park, and the opportunities of reconceiving civic space within the 21st century metropolis.

*"...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 (Spaces of Hope, 2000)

Students will work at urban and intimate scales simultaneously. Proposals will address  $\pm 10\%$  of annual deaths in NYC; intimate and public assembly from 1 - 50,000 people; 24/7 "shelter" for 500 living bodies; the ability to support massive pop-up music events and political demonstrations – on-going **public education related to urban and social ecologies and connected to our ubiquitous human mortality.**

Design will incorporate emergent forms of corpse disposition – looking beyond earthen burial and cremation to alternatives which more sensibly accelerate biological decomposition, enabling innovative models of secular space and new modalities of remembrance, while questioning the need for permanent repositories and epitaphs in the urban landscape.

**TRANSFERRING JURISDICTION: THE TABOO OF CENTRAL PARK** — Conceived in the salons of wealthy New Yorkers in the early 1850's, the construction of Central Park spanned more than a decade and cost the city ten million dollars (at the time, a massive public investment). Using the power of eminent domain and displacing a community of perhaps 1,600 people, the city acquired 840 acres in the center of Manhattan. The native rocky, swampy terrain -- intentionally chosen by city planners due to its relative undesirability for commercial development -- was to be refined, enhanced, and re-made to emulate a park in the style of European public grounds.

The park's location, which at its origin was far removed from the commercial and residential centers of the working class, rendered it an exclusive oasis for the super-wealthy. Throughout time, however, its uses and meaning were transformed by the needs of the growing population of New York City. The atmosphere, aesthetics and architecture, its historical status and reputation, and its visual cultures subtly define **performances of public social life and intentions of urban culture.** Along with its programmatic evolution, the meaning and symbolism of the park has been mythologized through popular culture. As such, physical space has become ossified within an ever transforming and ephemeral web of representation; caught within a sacred image of itself, and suppressed by the taboo of its evolution.

The studio will explore the site of the park, and in particular, the armature and environment of the decommissioned Reservoir, from 85th Street to 96th across the width of the park, as a means through which to respond to the civic and environmental needs of NYC in the 21st century. Who defines public space? How do such places generate and sustain symbolic meaning? How is civic space shaped by our subjective perceptions? Given the already secular-sacred nature of the Park, how will we envision and re-shape its future?

**PROGRAM: THE TABOO OF DEATH + THE BODY** — In our increasingly dense world, the environmental toll of traditional burial and cremation calls for innovative procedures and new relationships to corporeal disposition. While existing cemetery territories serve a passive role in metropolitan ecologies, these sacred lands are socially marginalized and psychically and spatially repressed from the experience of most inhabitants.

Rather than piously pondering an illusive afterlife, we will focus on what an urban space of remembrance can offer the living. Our reverence for the deceased will be manifest beyond the traditional constructions of vane and inert monuments. Transcending representational imagery and symbolic narrative, **we will discuss ethical and social positions and design inspiring tangible-temporal-ephemeral places that engage memory and celebrate life.**



Atta Kim. **The Museum Project.** 1997



Atta Kim. **Field Series #001.** 1995.

*"If the museum is a place where the dead live forever, my museum is a place that lives forever with what is already alive... Long exposure is an important concept—everything eventually disappears."*

**Atta Kim, 2005.**



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

Gloria Steinem

Al Nadav Kander. **Yangtze River Project 03**. 2011.

**EXPECTATIONS** — Students should possess a willingness for unorthodoxy and risk-taking. We will work intensively and prolifically through both digital and material spatial exploration.

Be prepared to work hard, think rigorously, and get a little dirty en route to exquisite spatial development. Studio work will mine the power of physical space and material phenomena to **impact experience, anticipate future desires, and explore always-elusive realities.**

Multitasking is an awesome capacity, unrelentingly enabled by technology. It can also be inefficient and distracting. You will be asked to **focus and work precisely**, not at the expense of broad and iterative exploration, but rather to enable it. Exercises will intersect and overlap, challenging you to journey to places you cannot yet imagine. Discipline is required to capitalize upon the restlessness of our age.

Your ability to think and work deeply will be stimulated and challenged.

**SCHEDULE** — We will meet in Avery 409 on Friday 22 January, at 2pm. Students are required to have a physical portfolio of their studio work to date. Please bring your portfolio and come prepared to introduce yourself with a 3-minute digital / visual presentation to the group. Following introductory discussions we will dive into diverse research areas and intense critical investigation.

Architecture is a practice and it requires focus. Focus necessitates the removal of distractions. During studio hours students are expected to be both mentally and physically engaged in individual design+research related pursuits and the aggregate aspirations of the group. Respect for your peers is crucial to the studio dynamic, and active dialogue is critical to effective exploration. **Work will be individual, but inherently also intertwined.** All students are strongly advised to work primarily IN STUDIO.

Relevant research excursions—coordinated with and shared to enhance the studio's collective awareness of potential—are encouraged.



Lois Greenfield. **Breaking Bounds.** 1992

## RESOURCES

Corner, James. *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Theory*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

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Federal Writers' Project. *The WPA Guide to New York City*. New York : New Press, 1992.

Kitcher, Philip. *Life After Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Ontario: Knopf Canada, 2014.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996.

Miller, James. *Miller's Guide to Central Park and Mercantile Directory*. New York, N.Y.: James Miller, 1874.

Rogers, Elizabeth Barlow. *Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan*. Cambridge, M.A.: The MIT Press, 1987.

Rosenzweig, Roy, and Blackmar, Elizabeth. *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Savas, E.S.. *A Study of Central Park*. New York : The Center, 1976.

Taylor, Mark C. *After God (Religion and Postmodernism)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

**KARLA MARIA ROTHSTEIN** — Karla Maria Rothstein is an architect and an educator. Founder and Director of Columbia University's trans-disciplinary DeathLAB, Rothstein is adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia GSAPP where she has taught graduate design studios for eighteen years. Her areas of research and design focus span the intimate spaces of urban life, death and memory, to intersections of social justice and the built environment. In 2013, Rothstein was honored as a finalist for Columbia University's Presidential Teaching Award.

Rothstein is an active member of the Columbia University Interdisciplinary Faculty Seminar on Death. In 2013, her essay 'Reconfiguring Urban Spaces of Disposal, Sanctuary and Remembrance' was published in ABC-CLIO Praeger's two volume anthology *Our Changing Journey to the End: The New Realities and Controversies of Dying in America*. Rothstein has most recently lectured on DeathLAB's initiative in Stockholm and Tokyo, and will be delivering a keynote at the University of São Paulo's 7th International Congress on Death: 'Time and spaces of Death in Society' in July 2016.

Her architecture practice, LATENT Productions, was founded with Salvatore Perry to liberate the specific potential embedded within every design project, celebrating innovative spatial and material quality. Rigorously conceived and executed, each project LATENT produces is an alchemical celebration of concept, context, and opportunity. Currently LATENT is bringing new and diverse life to a 240,000 SF former cotton spinning complex in North Adams, MA; working with Habitat for Humanity to realize 25 new affordable homes in Brownsville, Brooklyn; building six condos cloaked by a translucent facade atop a former garage; and trying to obtain DOB approval for a private meandering oasis for a client in Carroll Gardens.

In 2015 Rothstein was honored by Built by Women New York City (BxW NYC) celebrating the leadership and achievements of women working in the building professions. 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, 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, NPR, OZY.com, Wallpaper City Guide NYC, and WIRED Japan.

**Y-D. KONSTANTINIDIS** — Yvonne-Demitra Konstantinidis graduated with a Master of Architecture from Columbia University in 2013, and a BSc. in General Architectural Studies from the University of Bath, U.K. in 2007. Her interests lay at the intersections of spirituality and space, and in the potential of enabling a greater collective consciousness through their union. Yvonne-Demitra is currently working on a 6,000 SF. non-profit co-working space in Hell's Kitchen, and a private residence in Gallatin, New York. Her previous projects include the Masterplan for the 2012 London Olympics and Legacy (AECOM).

**DAVID ZHAI** — David Zhai is a partner at CO-Office, a spatial design consultancy working at the intersection of live, work, and play. 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 BIM and computational technologies lead for the design of World Trade Tower 2 at Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), where he also led research and development 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. He has assisted teaching at Columbia GSAPP in both the Core and Advanced Studios since 2012.