Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Researching, Drawing, and Knowing the Social Uses of Space

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• Abstract (300 words):
We (an architect and a sociologist) explore how we might translate sociological understandings into design education. Our research group, the Society&Design Lab, based at the Center for Cultural Analysis at Rutgers University, has been exploring how designers can be better equipped to create places for the social and how sociologists may inform the design process. To this end we have been working to develop strategies that enable designers to move beyond assumptions that are often made about how people use spaces. We instead seek to encourage sociologically-inspired strategies and methodologies that expand on the traditionally used design methods of site mappings, inventory, and analysis. This talk outlines where design education falls short, offers examples of sociological research and its lens into space, and makes
recommendations for the teaching of representational techniques for investigating the social by presenting a sample syllabus for a course we are developing together.

Despite the prevalence of discussions of the need for greater interdisciplinarity, most designers are not trained in collaborative or participatory processes, and social and cultural aspects of design are only lightly covered in design curriculum. We leave it to historians or social scientists to critique and expose these issues, which happens largely outside of the design disciplines, and rarely in practice. It is obvious that designers need to know about people—what kind of training will be most helpful? We question the norms of architectural representation and consider strategies for representations of people and social practices. We make suggestions about how to map people in space, how to document and draw social uses of space, and strategies for thinking through which people are represented in renderings and what activities are shown. We propose models for use in design school education, and consider how an architectural lens into social space may offer new insights into the ways space informs social life.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Zaire Dinzey-Flores is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University, and a NYCHA Board Member since 2015. Her research focuses on housing policy and design and understanding how urban space mediates community life and race, class, and social inequality, and how design is interpreted, used, and experienced. She is the author of the award winning book, Locked In, Locked Out: Gated Communities in a Puerto Rican City (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2013), looking at residential neighborhoods and public housing in Puerto Rico. She is a fellow of the University of Pennsylvania Institute for Urban Research and a Board Member of the New York City Housing Authority.

Anita Bakshi is the author of Topographies of Memories: A New Poetics of Commemoration (Palgrave Macmillan 2017). She is an Instructor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Rutgers University, teaching courses on Housing and Open Space Design, Architectural Design, and Research Methods. She is also associate graduate faculty for the Cultural Heritage and Preservation Studies (CHAPS) Program, teaching courses on Heritage and Planning in Divided Cities. Following several years in architectural practice in Chicago, California and Istanbul, she received her PhD in the History and Theory of Architecture from Cambridge University with the Conflict in Cities Research Programme.