

CALL FOR PAPERS

Spirits of the City: Refabulations, Mobilities, Underscapes

A Graduate Conference and Workshop, May 30 & 31, 2015
University of California, Santa Barbara

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Sponsored by the “Religiosity and Urban Place-Making” Multi-campus Research Group, University of California Humanities Network
<http://www.urbanreligions.net>

We invite submissions for an interdisciplinary graduate conference and workshop to be held at UC-Santa Barbara on May 30-31, 2015. Participants will have opportunities to present their research in progress, as well as to engage in a post-conference research development workshop with faculty mentors. The conference, “Spirits of the City: Refabulations, Mobilities, Underscapes,” stems from the recognition that even as cities are tagged as sites of grotesque pathology, danger, and dystopia, they have also persistently connoted cultural possibility, renewal, and hope—as places where pasts are shed and new lives, selves, and modalities of cultural being are created, whether through the insurgent citizenship of the Occupy movement and the Arab uprisings, or through experiments with intentional communities or urban farming. We aim to intervene in discourses on urban life by considering the diverse religiosities/spiritualities that mediate the urban and by which the urban, itself, is shaped. Rather than treating the city as either the preeminent space of the secular or the site of religion’s violent return, we follow Hancock and Srinivas (2008) in asking how religious/spiritual practices, experiences and spaces are yoked to the possibilities and futures that urban spaces may embody. And further, what analytics may be called upon to frame the study of urban futures – theoretically and methodologically – in ways that integrate the religiosities/spiritualities of urban actors, spaces and practices?

While attention is often drawn to the ways in which the urban is produced by the state, capital or the market, such productions are never total. Recognizing that the city is a “nexus of situated and transnational ideas, institutions, actors and practices that together demand an analytic of assemblage” (Ong 2011:4), this conference takes as its point of departure the spatial, material, and sensory media with which the religious and the spiritual are enacted within urban life worlds. While drawing upon the secular critique of religiosity, we are concerned with the ways that different publics create designs for and of urban life through religious/spiritual practices that may run parallel to, interrogate, or challenge modernist, liberal, or postcolonial/postsocialist programs and geographies and with the ways that urbanity and the religious/spiritual are mutually invoked, “as two sides of a continual process in which the urban and the religious reciprocally interact, mutually interlace, producing defining and transforming each other.” (Becker et al. pp. 25-26; see also DeBoeck 2012, Simone 2004).

Working from these keywords---*place-making, re-fabulation, mobilities, religiosity, underscapes*--- this conference continues an interdisciplinary and comparative project launched with the 2013 formation of the University of California Humanities Network-sponsored Multi-campus Research Group on Religiosity and Urban Place-making (convenors, Mary Hancock, UC-Santa Barbara and Smriti Srinivas, UC-Davis, <http://www.urbanreligions.net>) and a symposium, *Spirited Topographies*, held at UC-Davis in May 2014. We invite submissions that explore questions such as (but not limited to) the

following: Given the challenges of globalization and neo-liberal restructuring for urban lifeworlds, how have vernacular imaginations of modernity, citizenship and civic space emerged from articulations of religiosity, spirituality and changing urban landscapes? How does a mobilities paradigm (see Urry 2007) allow us to engage these vernacular imaginations and their urban mediation? And how might cities be mapped, seen, heard and occupied as places of possibility or utopian spaces by, for and with religious/spiritual practices and imaginative desires?

References

Becker, John et al., eds. 2013. *Global Prayers: Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City* (metroZones 13). Berlin: metroZones, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Europa-Universität Viadrina.

De Boeck, F. 2012. "Kinshasa and its (un)certainities: the polis and the sacred." In Van Herck W., Gomez L. (Eds.), *The Sacred in the City*. London: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 191-207.

Hancock, Mary and Smriti Srinivas. 2008. "Spaces of Modernity: Religion and the Urban in Asia and Africa." In Mary Hancock and Smriti Srinivas, ed. *Symposium on Religion and the Formation of Modern Urban Space in Asia and Africa*, pp. 617-709. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 32, 3: 617-630.

Ong, Aihwa. 2011. "Introduction: Worlding Cities or the Art of Being Global," in Roy, A. and Ong, A. (Eds.), *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Cambridge: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 1-26.

Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Conference Format:

The conference and workshop will take place at the University of California, Santa Barbara, on May 30-31, 2015. The day-long conference (May 30) will consist of 3 panels, each with 3 presenters and a faculty discussant, as well as a keynote address by an invited speaker (TBA). The conference will be followed by a half-day faculty-graduate workshop (May 31), aimed at offering in-depth discussion of the conference contributions and addressing related issues of research planning, professional opportunities and pedagogy, as appropriate.

Submission Information:

Graduate students within the University of California system are invited to submit proposals for conference presentations. Presentations may take the form of papers, audio productions or videos. Please provide an abstract (250 words, maximum length) of your proposed submission by January 15, 2015 to Lauren Smyth (lsmyth@umail.ucsb.edu) and Bascom Guffin (mbguffin@ucdavis.edu).

Presenters will be notified of acceptance by February 1, 2015. In order to pre-circulate presentations among conference participants, working versions of papers, videos and/or audio productions will be due by May 8, 2015.