The global city and the nature of the urban: Anthropological perspectives

Readings and lecture titles for PhD course, Paris, 4-7 May 2020
Organizers: Bjørn Enge Bertelsen and Knut Rio, University of Bergen

Image: The high-rises of Maputo as seen from its periphery
1) **Organization of lectures and readings**

There are five lectures already planned for the PhD course. The relevant themes and literature for each of these—which participants are meant to have familiarized themselves with—are listed below.

On page seven, there is a list of books. Participants are also expected to have read one (1) of these prior to the course as well as to have seen the lecture and listened to the podcast listed on the same page.

This list may be changed slightly prior to the seminar, and if so, participants will be informed well in time before May 2020.

*Image: Birdseye view of Haussmann’s Paris.*
2) Lectures, themes and readings

Yasmeen Arif

City – Aesthetic

To help us anchor the idea, we make use of Susan Buck-Morss’ etymology of the Greek idea of aisthitikos – the original Greek work for that which is “perceptive by feeling”. As she writes, “The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality – corporeal, material nature.” How do we recognize the contemporary sense of ‘city-reality/aesthetics’ as it appears in the conjunction of bodies/politics/matter/technologies?


Bjørn Enge Bertelsen

Territorializing and de-territorializing the urban

What dynamics and forces contribute to produce urban orders—i.e. territories? And what modes of engagement unsettles or (sometimes fleetingly) reshapes these orders—i.e. de-territorializes them? In this lecture, a range of territorializing and re-reterritorializing dynamics will be broached, including also a discussion of methodological choices for approaching the urban.


Protests and space

In this lecture, I explore how urban protest creates the city and vice versa. Protests – street marches, riots, occupations – are experiential and aesthetic acts on and in public space, which appropriate and create the city. The city also shapes protest, through its topology and physicality as much as through government and politics.


* = *Book also from lecture on “Commons and un-commons”*
Morten Nielsen

Changing urban topographies: The verticalization of the city

Urban development is conventionally imagined on the basis of a horizontal topography: A planned inner-city extends outwards, often ending in some lesser planned suburban or peri-urban areas. However, if we take a closer look at the vertical dynamics of urban developments, it is evident – both visibly and conceptually – that the rhythm of many cities throughout the world is driven by other kinds of contrasts, strategies, ruptures, which cannot be understood in terms of horizontalism. In this lecture, we will discuss different urban topographies and the effects of increasing verticalization on the viability and pace of cities today.


Jacobs, Jane, Stephen Cairns, et al. 2007. “‘A tall storey ... but, a fact just the same’: The red road high-rise as a black box”. Urban Studies, 44(3): 609–629.


Knut Rio

The city, its commons and un-commons

In this talk, I will outline issues coming up when studying the Bois de Boulogne Park in Paris. It is a commons for the public of Paris, while at the same time being a space of bourgeois appropriation. This is an historical and organizational survey of the city’s changing management of the park, the role of the many private, elitist associations in the park, the part played by leisure industry and the circumstances of the establishment of new private associations in the park. I will raise some ideas about the public space and the city, seen in the perspective of recent developments where government and civil society become more and more entangled. I am interested in how people build ways of life that are integral to the relations with governing orders or that escape, evade or in other ways establish themselves outside of these.


3) Elective books for the whole course

Choose and read one of the books below


4) Lectures and podcasts (optional)

Richard Sennet: The Organic City
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLl0kTMjMhs