

## Urban Traces: Insurgent Rituals and Countermapping the City



*A Little Bit of Beijing: Nan Luo Gu Xiang*, Drawing Architecture Studio 2017

“...What I know is that the nail salon is more than a place of work and workshop for beauty... The salon is also a kitchen where, in the back rooms, our women squat on the floor over huge woks that pop and sizzle over electric burners, cauldrons of pho simmer and steam up the cramped spaces with aromas of cloves, cinnamon, ginger, mint, and cardamom mixing with formaldehyde, toluene, acetone, Pine-sol and bleach...” – *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong 2019

Stories are embodied, practiced, and transcribed through rituals and actions. They can be incredibly powerful in communicating ideas, allow us to maintain memory, build community, and inspire new actions to take place. Rossi in *Architecture of the City* argues that the constructed environment are sites of *collective memory*.<sup>1</sup> Buildings, yards, sidewalks, and streets are built narratives constantly written and re-written as people, objects, patterns, and practices weave with each other collectively building a sense of belonging. Traces of inhabitation occurs through interweaving clotheslines, posters, and static of the radio chiming from sills. These small rituals create an ensemble that alters the environment, a radical reversal where urbanization is a morphogenetic growth from the bottom up.

The *Urban Traces* Seminar weaves history, ethnography, storytelling, and the delayering of the built environment through fieldwork to examine and [counter-map](#) the representation of the city. Countermapping is resistance - to render visible and legitimized perspectives that differ from the mainstream narrative, and, as a result, offer, “alternative ways of visualizing and inhabiting the world.”<sup>2</sup> We will explore the tensions between how the city is made through collective architectural expression, and how individual buildings are informed by the architecture of the city itself and social practices. We will unpack Pittsburgh through neighborhood case-studies and produce a series of experimental [multi-media illustrations](#) around rituals of care, memory, and resistance. The course will follow rhythms of lectures, seminar family led reading discussions, drawing, and modeling assignment pin-ups culminating in three public forums. The final work synthesizing *Urban Traces* will contextualize in a digital archive of Pittsburgh Place Stories.

<sup>1</sup> Rossi, Aldo, Eisenman, Peter, and Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. *The Architecture of the City*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Infinite Cities: A Trilogy of Atlases*—San Francisco, New Orleans, New York, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).