

AgorAkademi
organized by Nilüfer Göle

Transforming Public Space From the Margins



La Gaîté Lyrique, a cultural institution in Paris, occupied by over 400 migrants – March 2025

Thursday May 15, 2025
9 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Columbia Global Paris Center
Reid Hall – Salle des conférences
4 Rue de Chevreuse 75006 Paris

Access subject to prior registration with sumeyyeulu@gmail.com



Transforming Public Space from the Margins

In contemporary urban contexts, migrants, marginalized individuals, and underrepresented groups increasingly contest dominant paradigms of spatial organization and urban governance. Through their everyday practices and spatial claims, they challenge normative assumptions about who has the right to the city, how public space should be used, and under what conditions urban belonging is granted or denied.

This seminar seeks to critically engage with the complex and often conflictual encounters between marginalized populations and the socio-political structures that shape urban life. Through a multidisciplinary lens, participants will examine how alternative forms of spatial organization—enacted through urban planning, cultural interventions, design practices, and performative arts—redefine the uses and meanings of public space. These practices frequently emerge as creative responses to institutional exclusion, regulatory constraints, and systemic neglect. By foregrounding acts of resistance, reappropriation, and experimentation, the seminar brings together the notions of the public good and public space to reflect on new frameworks for collective life.

Program:

9:00 - 9:30 : welcome coffee

9:30 - 11:30 : Unsettling from the margins

- **Nilüfer Göle** : "Reading Public Space from the Margins"
- **Madeleine Varin**: "Cultural Places and Social Responsibility: A Case Study of La Gaîté Lyrique"
- **Susana Arias**: "A Museum 'In Between'. Cultural mediation, Complexity, and Conflict"
- **Zeynep Uğur**: "Istanbul Fringe Festival: Rethinking the Center and Urban Margins through the Performing Arts"

11:30 - coffee break

11:45 - 13:00 : Conflictual encounters

- **Melora Koepke**: "Between Crisis and Imperceptibility: Migrants, Urbanity and Parisian Public Space, 2015-2025"
- **Claudia Nigrelli**: "Public Spaces Between Governance and Theory: A Critical Reading Through the Case of Bologna"

13:00 - 14:30 pm : lunch break

14:30 -16:30 pm : Alternative uses of design and space

- **Amira Louadah**: "Experiencing Obstacles in the Public Space"
- **Akil Scafe-Smith**: "Draft Infrastructures for Public Redistribution: Selected works of RESOLVE Collective"
- **Iva Cukic**: "Commoning the Space: Practices of collective spatial production in Belgrade"

16:30 : coffee break

17:00 - 17:30 : General Discussion

Participants and abstracts:



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Nilüfer Göle

Nilüfer Göle is an emeritus sociology professor at EHESS, Paris. Her research focuses on Islam, public space, gender, secularism, and multiple modernities. She aims to open a new reading of modernity from a non-western perspective and engages a broader critique of Eurocentrism. After finishing her ERC funded research project on Islamic visibility, secularism and intercultural controversies in European public spheres (2008-2013), she explores the emerging forms of social agency, collectivity and creative expressivity within the newly emerging Maidan protest movements in her project on Public Space Democracy - Nomis (2016-2019) and the emancipatory potential in public space making with art and humanities in her current AgorAkademi - Nomis project. Her books include *The Forbidden Modern. Veiling and Civilization* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1996), *Musulmans au quotidien. Une enquête européenne sur les controverses autour de l'islam* (La Découverte, Paris, 2015), *Public Space Democracy. Performative, Visual and Normative Dimensions of Politics in a Global Age* (ed., Routledge, 2022), *Revendiquer l'espace public* (with Richard Rechtman, Sandra Laugier, Yves Cohen, CNRS éditions, Paris, 2022).



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Madeleine Varin

After studying cultural engineering, **Madeleine Varin** first worked in communication and production for festivals, exhibitions and other multidisciplinary events. She then joined the Gaîté Lyrique as artistic project coordinator, before moving naturally into programming the talks and conferences of the venue – between creation and social engagement. She aims to bring together singular voices to reflect on issues like gender representations, power dynamics, earth habitability and living in society. She is interested in how personal narratives can echo the major issues of our time. She believes in the need to decentralize the gaze, while encouraging a sensitive approach.

Cultural Places and Social Responsibility: A Case Study of La Gaîté Lyrique

La Gaîté Lyrique, Factory of our times is a cultural center that seeks to address pressing cultural, social, democratic and climate issues. Located in the heart of Paris, the center aims to coordinate and break down barriers between communities from different backgrounds and areas, who can commingle and interact, building the collective. A place for people and groups to congregate both during the day and in the evening, on weekdays and weekends, but also where they can attend concerts, exhibitions, talks, screenings, workshops.

What happens when it suddenly becomes occupied by hundreds of people demanding housing solutions? How do we organize ourselves collectively to manage such a situation? And above all, what does it remind us about the responsibilities of a cultural place today?



Susana Arias

Susana Arias is the Head of the Mediation Programme at the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB), a laboratory that develops educational and creative projects aimed at opening the institution to new formats and audiences. She has been involved with the CCCB since 2010, curating and coordinating programmes ranging from debate series and seminars to educational and audiovisual creation projects, such as the essay film collection *A Vocabulary for the Future*. Between 2014 and 2019, she was responsible for programming and management at the Institute of Humanities of Barcelona.

She holds a degree in Communication Sciences from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and completed a Master of Arts in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She has worked as an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Journalism at UAB, and as an editor and publications manager at Herder Editorial.

A Museum “In Between”. Cultural Mediation, Complexity, and Conflict

To refer to the world we share—the contested space where encounter is possible—Hannah Arendt uses the term “in-between.” This fragile yet essential ground is where we find ourselves with others, where we come together to form opinions, debate ideas, and create a common world. The greatest challenge for cultural institutions lies precisely in enabling and nurturing these “in-between” spaces ensuring that they are at least as pluralistic, diverse and complex as the society in which they exist. The emphasis is therefore on the “we”—on who is invited to participate in the conversation and in which terms. Reflecting on the experience of the Centre for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB), specially their educational and community project “School in Residence”, we will reflect on how to open up cultural institutions, broaden them and guarantee access to and participation in culture, especially for those who are normally excluded from museums and cultural centres.



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Zeynep Uğur

Zeynep Uğur is a PhD candidate at EHESS, CESPRA in political studies, under the supervision of Nilüfer Göle, with her dissertation titled “Transformation of Public Culture in Turkey since the 2000s: Theater as a Space for the Emergence of New Political Imaginaries.” She is currently an ATER at INALCO, where she teaches in the Department of Turkish Studies. She is also the Co-founder and Cultural Policy Director of the international performing arts festival Istanbul Fringe.

Istanbul Fringe Festival: Rethinking the Center and Urban Margins through the Performing Arts

The Istanbul Fringe Festival is an international performing arts festival founded in 2019, showcasing experimental creations in theater, dance, and performance by emerging artists from Turkey and the international scene. Its name originates from the Latin verb *fringere*, meaning to open outward, to create a crack through which light can get in and movement can occur. Inspired by this dynamic, the festival questions the boundaries between the binary categories inside-outside, mainstream-alternative and center-periphery. By investing in public and private institutions, public spaces, and unconventional venues in Istanbul, it creates a playground where these oppositions can interpenetrate, transform each other, and give rise to new possibilities that escape binary definitions. Each year, new methods are experimented with to foster meaningful intercultural interaction. Through various examples of projects created within the Istanbul Fringe Festival, we will examine how the reclaiming of public space through performative artistic expressions allows for the emergence of new publics, composed of unexpected social mixities.



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Melora Koepke

Dr. Melora Koepke is an urban geographer and a widely published nonfiction writer/journalist working between Vancouver, Canada and Paris, France. Her work focuses on public politics, urban policy and governance and activism related to “urban crises” engendered by the presence of marginalized people who depend on public space. She was postdoctoral researcher at the Lab'Urba at Université Paris-Est Créteil (2022-2024). She remained engaged in several research projects with Associative partners in Paris, and is currently a Research Affiliate at the University of Victoria’s School of Public Health and Social Policy in British Columbia, Canada, where she is working on a community-centred project on Urban Indigenous peoples’ experiences of encampment evictions (among other projects). Dr. Koepke is an active member of the editorial collective of *the Radical Housing Journal* (since 2022) and co-founder of a transnational community-led research group, Collectif SoCS Collective (since 2021).

“Between Crisis and Imperceptibility: Migrants, Urbanity and Parisian public space, 2015-2025”

Since 2015, the European “crisis of Migration” has become visible in urban spaces in many forms, but most significantly due to encampments that have proliferated in urban public spaces. Drawing examples from a decade of ethnographic research in the northeast of Paris with migrants and volunteers who support them, I briefly review the history of these provisional dwelling spaces and their recurrent cycles of installation and removal, as authorities’ strategies have evolved in the last decade and notoriously in the lead-up to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The most highly securitized Olympics in modern history saw the transformation of iconic urban spaces into sanitized, corporate-sponsored staging grounds and the largest police presence in history. Indeed, lead-up to Paris 2024 also saw novel forms of focused political action on behalf of people who depend on public space and those who support them, as activist designed interventions to expose and mitigate various forms of violence brought by Olympics frenzy where over 20 000 unauthorized migrants and others who depend on public space were removed by authorities from the city, with new forms of carceral banishment installed in their stead. Mostly these “artist” interventions emblazoned or projected protest messages onto symbolic monuments, transforming tightly surveilled, post-covid public spaces of a conventional, tourist-friendly Paris into fugitive, momentary landscapes of exuberant artistic and political expression:

At once minor and meme-worthy, makeshift and grandiose, they achieved global visibility through sheer insurgency and forced the term “social cleansing” into the vernacular. Working backwards from this past year of global renown for the migrants who place-hold their futures in Parisian public space, I consider the recent history of encampments in this city, and how they can be understood as “liminal prax(es)s of the many” (Lancione & Simone, 2021) that persist and proliferate beyond municipal-technocratic efforts to contain and remove them. Working with themes of freedom and fugitivity as offered by recent Black-geographic renderings of constrained spaces as well as the lived experiences of interlocutors, I trace the political and pragmatic purposes of encampments that emerges as a “mode of living on” outside of State provisions; more than just survival projects, they are also novel forms of resistance. I argue encampments must therefore – provisionally – be understood as necessary forms of endurance and emplacement, but also as resistance to ongoing colonial projects of urban removal, exclusion and banishment and indeed, crucial work of imagining other urban futures by inhabiting the city otherwise.



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Claudia Nigrelli

Claudia Nigrelli holds a PhD in philosophy, jointly awarded by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Bologna and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (CESPRA). Her doctoral research revealed the presence of a genuine philosophy of architecture in the thought of the German philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner. By placing Plessner's ideas in dialogue with early 20th-century architectural theories, she examined the issues that led to the formation of the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus, as well as the position of Mies van der Rohe. She is currently a teaching assistant at the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio, Switzerland, where she focuses on the philosophy and sociology of space, architecture, and the city – engaging with both classical and contemporary theoretical approaches. She recently received a research grant from the University of Bologna to further investigate the concept of public space through fieldwork in the city of Bologna. She has organized several international conferences, including recent events on German philosophical anthropology (2023) and on theoretical approaches to the city and public space (2024).

Public spaces between governance and theory: a critical reading through the case of Bologna

What do we talk about when we talk about public spaces? By examining the literature on the subject, it is possible to distinguish at least three interwoven dimensions that help us grasp essential aspects of public spaces: a material dimension, a social dimension, and a legal-political dimension. Authors such as Jürgen Habermas, Walter Benjamin, Marcel Mauss, and more recently Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, or Richard Sennett have each, in their own way, shown how the social—through its practices—both produces and is produced by spatial typologies with specific qualities. From literary salons to cafés, from passages to boulevards, from squares to neighborhoods, the intertwining of the aesthetic-material dimension of public spaces with the bourgeois public sphere—central to the self-awareness of Western modernity—opens the possibility of reflecting on which spatial typologies and urban planning interventions have been identified as most conducive to democratic political forms. This materiality, as Scott McQuire notes, cannot be separated from its medial form which, today, inscribes cities into the flows of global goods and capital, turning them into nodes of interconnection that transcend their physical boundaries and reconfigure the political arrangements in which they are embedded.

Within this context, the social and everyday dimension of practices often takes on a conflictual form, as evidenced by struggles for the reappropriation of public spaces and for political recognition—understood as a fundamental dimension of political and symbolic participation in the production of shared space. This is highlighted, for instance, in the works of Erving Goffman, Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, Henri Lefebvre, and later Judith Butler or Leslie Kern. Clearly, the conflictual nature embodied in practices of spatial reappropriation also entails a recognition of space as a manifestation of power—symbolic, coercive, and normative. This implies a legislative dimension that either preserves or undermines the public character of a space, and defines the scope of the concept of “public” to the benefit of some and the detriment of others, shaping the times and spaces of practices deemed legitimate and determining the availability of spaces for openness, movement, and access in a given society. Governance practices—at the level of urban policies—must be situated within this framework as they concern public spaces. However, an analysis of public space policies in the metropolitan city of Bologna (Italy) reveals an initial problem: there is no shared definition of “public space” among the various administrative offices, and the management of the “public space” issue is divided across multiple departments (urban planning, housing, environment, heritage; public works, green spaces, mobility; general secretariat, neighborhoods, shared administration; welfare and community well-being; culture, sport, and city promotion). In this context, then, what can theoretical models contribute to the governance of public spaces, and conversely, what can the study of their political and legislative management practices contribute to theory?



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Amira Louadah

Amira Louadah is a visual artist and filmmaker. Having grown up in Algeria in a multilingual environment, often exclusionary, she views audiovisual languages as tools for communication beyond words, through sensation. A graduate of ENSCI in Paris, she draws on her designer's background to reframe informal practices as acts of freedom, decolonizing the notion of « development ». Her work aims to renew the imaginary around the city of Algiers, exploring forms of control and resistance of marginalized communities. Her film *The Ark* won the Renaud Victor Prize at FidMarseille, awarded by the inmates of Baumettes prison. She was laureate of the « Cultures d'avenir » artistic research program on the future of cities, organized by the Centre Pompidou, CCCB Barcelona, and HKW Berlin.

Experiencing Obstacles in the Public Space

In "Urban Bodies, Performed Bodies" (2021), I explore the possibility of opening up dialogue in public space through an in situ installation in a neighborhood of Algiers, where each day a new obstacle is placed in the path of passersby. These objects, which amplify a certain reality—that of urban constraint—intrigue residents enough to draw them toward my team and me. During these encounters, passersby share their feelings about the lack of urban planning. We use these conversations as an opportunity to engage them in a consultation and fabrication workshop. Through these interventions, we explore how citizens react to, navigate around, and reconfigure their environment, transforming obstruction into a catalyst for reflection and action.



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Akil Scafe-Smith

Akil Scafe-Smith is a director of RESOLVE Collective, an interdisciplinary design collective that combines architecture, engineering, technology, and art to address social challenges. They have delivered numerous projects, workshops, publications, and talks in the UK and across the world, all of which look toward realising just and equitable visions of change in our built environment. RESOLVE are currently the commissioned artists as part of a forthcoming group exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, resident artists at Camberwell Space, part of University Arts London, and have recently completed exhibitions at Tate Liverpool and the Design Museum and have co-created community spaces with young people in Nelson with In-Situ in Pendle, and residents in Angell Town in Brixton.

Draft Infrastructures for Public Redistribution: Selected works of RESOLVE Collective

“Piracy can extend beyond those open geographies and remake otherwise governed, regulated space accessible for pirating”.

-Jovan Scott Lewis, *Scammer’s Yard: The Crime of Black Repair in Jamaica*

Questions of public access are laden with a subtext that implicates power and its design: what are the structures and systems that police our access to space and as such material, fiscal, political, ancestral, or knowledge resources and who designs them?

Redistribution, a central tenet in our practice at RESOLVE, is the lens through which we ask these questions. Over the past 8 years, we have taken material resources from places of surplus and redirected them to local communities, community-focused practitioners, and social justice organisations. We do this in order to ask questions of and move toward dismantling systems that police our access to resource. This practice has developed, sometimes surreptitiously, through a number of formats, such as exhibitions, strategy documents, workshops, teaching, residency hosting, public programming, and critical resource sharing.

Redistribution moves us to both disorder and reimagine the inequitable landscape in which Black, POC, and marginalised identity folk across the 'Global North' and 'Global South' are disproportionately affected by what transdisciplinary geographer Kathryn Yusoff describes as "historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism." For many in our 'ecology of practice' – the global proliferation of locally-situated, community-focused practitioners from marginalised backgrounds we collaborate and share resources with – the climate emergency is inextricable from social and political justice, and consequently the material realities we are fighting to change. As such, to redistribute material is not just an action to address wasteful industries, but an affirmation of agency in the face of the "White Genealogy of the Anthropocene".



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Iva Čukić

Iva Čukić graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade where she earned her PhD in urban planning. The areas of her research include urban commons and urban transformation, which she pursues through intersecting academic and practice-based perspective. She actively works with the community - supporting local initiatives in their efforts to address spatial issues and contribute to socio-political change in line with the principles of social justice. In 2010, she co-founded the collective Ministry of Space / Ministarstvo prostora, which aims to contribute to the democratic and just development of cities. When it comes to her academic career, Čukić is a member of the Laboratory for Planning Culture and Spatial Policy Design (LPCSPD) at the Research Centre of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. She also regularly participates as a guest lecturer and critic at various universities across Europe and beyond, including TU Berlin, ETH Zurich, and MIT. Iva's work was featured in the book "100 Women: Architects in Practice", published by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The book highlights women architects from around the world whose professional contributions promote the public good and environmental improvement.

Commoning the Space: Practices of collective spatial production in Belgrade

This presentation explores the concept of commoning as a dynamic, collective practice of shaping urban space beyond the frameworks of private ownership and state control. Rather than treating space as a commodity or a neutral backdrop to urban life, commoning the space recognizes it as a socially produced and politically contested arena. Through this lens, the presentation will highlight how citizens in Belgrade have mobilized to reclaim, protect, and co-create spaces in response to growing privatization, exclusion, and urban injustice.

Drawing on concrete examples from Belgrade this talk will examine how practices of commoning challenge dominant urban planning paradigms and offer alternative models of spatial governance based on solidarity, care, and democratic participation. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to broader discussions on spatial justice, offering insights into how collective practices from the margins can reimagine the public good and foster more inclusive, resilient urban futures.