



## Dr. Angela Storey

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Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup> at Noon  
Alumni Gallery,  
William T. Young Library

### Problematically Public:

Thinking Ethnographically about Use-ful Urban Things and Places

**Abstract:** What might an abandoned cemetery in Louisville and a temporary toilet in Cape Town tell us about public spaces and private things? Starting with everyday uses and community interactions, this talk explores the spaces between public and private — defining these categories not by provision or policy, but as understood through use and in the context of state neglect and the failures of ownership. I draw examples from two on-going ethnographic projects: first, work in Louisville, KY with volunteers who maintain Eastern Cemetery, a massively over-buried site that has experienced decades of legal limbo; and second, research with residents of informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa about their struggles to expand access to basic service infrastructures beyond minimal municipal provision. Building from distinct socio-political histories and economic contexts, a focus on use reveals the uneven and troublesome ways in which spaces and objects can be shared, and argues for the need to re-evaluate our collective responsibilities for a wider set of problematically public things.