Playing with the Built City

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Playing with Built City

• We are an urban species
• Cities are power systems
• Cities change their residents
• We want to change our cities
• Urbanism is political
• Causing change for a more alive city
• Acting outside the state and capital
Three Ways to Understand the City

Tools to understand the subjective, human city
The City We See

- People live in different cities
- We navigate via different mental maps
- The concept of an “imaginary”
- The imaginary is a cultural object
- Change the imaginary and you change the city

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Affordances

- Properties of objects determine their use
- Affordance mismatch — the door handle
- Affordances for life — the city bench
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The Liveness of Space

- How well a space supports life
- Subjective but general and cross-cultural
- Two city squares
- A concrete aspect of space
- Small changes and large effects
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Forces on Cities

Understanding the shape of our cities
Context for change

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Capitalism and the City

• Cities are economic structures
• Capital forces the valuation of space
• Highest and best use vs. quality of life
• Short time scales
• Coercive efficiency
Capital and Urban Renewal

• Control of the working class
• Providing an outlet for capital
• Large-scale urban destruction
Suburbanization and Zoning

- Zoning laws appear as transport alters cities
- Zoning enforces class segregation against the integrative threat of cars
- Capital preservation
Suburbanization and Zoning

- Open space laws and homeowners’ associations
- Variances as selective enforcement
- Non-living “public spaces” cause by incentives
Gentrification and the New City

• Flight from the urban core
• Countercultural “urban pioneers”
• Cycle of gentrification
• The Viennese counterexample
• Common ownership as an effective response
Commercialization of Public Space

- The plaza, king, and creation of publics
- Public space is intellectually contested
- Restricted access and reasonable actions
- Retail desirability and private-public spaces
- Private-public space in the city
Architecture of Fear

- Fear as a byproduct of modernity and control
- Controlled environments for commerce
- Gated communities and office parks
- Technologies of control
- Abuse and silence
Responding to the City
The Right to the City

• How do we justify our intervention?
• Self-determination in urban environments
• Spatial justice
Working with the Inclusive City

• The right to the city is founded on equality
• Limited resources claimed by intervention
• Reaching across race, sex, gender, ability, orientation, language, nationality, etc.
• Imagining others out of “our” space
• Working with others
Informality and Tactical Urbanism

• Informality subverts control
• Tactical urbanism works, at a cost
• State responses to informality
Interventions

- Intentional actions changing their spaces
- Limits to design for social issues
- Returning to first principles
- Space as an event; thin space
- Altering imaginaries; play, not shock
- Creating affordances; invisible intervention
- Material hierarchy:
  - data, light, paint, fabric, brick

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Examples
Mapping and Imaginaries
Urban Exploration

- Exploring the empty places
- Remaking the city as a place of wonder
- Breaking out of routines
- City games and psychogeographic walks
- Existing community
AR as Architecture
Functional Graffiti

• Video overlays and locative computing
• 2D barcodes to project information into space
• Visualizations; WTC on iPhone
• Community organization; FixMyStreet
• AR to tell stories
• Class division and consumer mindset
Mapping Resources

- Cities are rich; we don’t know what’s there
- Small resources maps are easy
  - The Fallen Fruit Map
- Mapping breaks down barriers
Public Art

• Art makes people think, especially street art

• Getting permission can rob it of power
  • Not having consent can cause a bad reception

• Temporary art can be productive
Guide Book

- What a Woman Must Know about Berlin
- Introduction to a way of interacting with the city
- Guidebook to the hacker’s city
Semi-legal WiFi

- Information is citizenship
- Free mobile access democratizes space
- Point-to-point links for non-profits
- Shadow infrastructure projects care
Citizen CCTV

- CCTV is a tool of social control and police power
- Rarely works against police, even in police brutality cases
- Decentralized cameras with off-site storage
- Admissible in court; consult your lawyer
- The right to the city is the right to be heard
- Safe demonstrations encourage ownership

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DIY Bike Lanes

• Bikes make good cities
• Bike lanes aren’t perfect but can be the only safe option
• Not always forthcoming, even when critical
• Why wait? Just paint them
• Reflective vests, planning, and familiarity with other actions
Street Furniture

- Streets determine the degree of life
- Furnishing a street lets it live
- Add a table and chair, bench, or hammock
- Work cheaply, or match the originals
Guerrilla Gardens

• Concrete and bare dirt don’t make cities live
• Gardens desterilize cities
• Vegetables grow fine on abandoned lots
  • Easier with land owner permission
• Cement looks better covered in ivy
• Work with existing movements
The Event City
BART Swings and Subway Tea Parties

• Mass transit is considered purely functional space
• Events on mass transit show anywhere can be fun and playful
• The transit experience as theater
• Don't put on a spectacle, involve strangers

Thanks to Mike Burnstein
Public City Games

• Using the city as a playground changes imaginaries
• Games let us tell stories directly
• Single evening like Journey to the End of the Year
• Large and ongoing, like SFZero
• Need to escape a subculture
Parking Day

• Turning parking spaces into parks
• Draws attention to limited open space in cities
• Function as real parks
Temporary Art Spaces

• Space for art is more scarce now than ever
• Commercial real estate sits empty
• Owners don't want it empty too long
• Putting on events is hard but useful
The Inflatable Cafe

- Third spaces don't need bricks
- Sheets of plastic, cargo bikes, a blower, and LED lights
- Goes up in a park or a parking lot
- Disappears quickly
Affordances for Life

How our frameworks scale up
Third Spaces and Hackerspaces

• Temporary spaces don't accumulate resources
• It's hard to build lasting culture
• Physical spaces matter
• Hackerspaces are good, but exclusive
• Partially unavoidable, but new spaces aren't the only answer
• Ignoring our neighbors recreates class segregation

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Squats

• Direct subversion of capital control of land
• Very difficult without community support
• Almost impossible in many places
Housing for Non-Normative Families

- Housing only accommodates a few types of households
- Single largest expense; can't customize
- Poly families, groups of single parents, etc.
- Groups of households; co-op or cohousing
- More housing stock variety means more family variety
Unselfish Building

• The human city happens step by step
• If you are involved in a project, do the right thing
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Go change your city!  Right now!

Questions?

Special thanks to my editor and partner Ari Lacenski

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http://sldrc.com/talks/26C3-built.pdf

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