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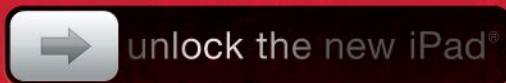
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Vigilante Architecture

Yes, this issue of ARCHITECT looks different. And no, the change isn't permanent: Next month we'll return to formula. Meanwhile, what you have in hand is a very special, one-time production: the catalog for *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*, which is the exhibition being presented in the U.S. Pavilion at the 13th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale.

Why, exactly, are we devoting an entire issue of ARCHITECT to a single exhibition? I'm so glad you asked.

For starters, the commissioner and curator Cathy Lang Ho is a contributing editor to ARCHITECT and one of the nation's leading design thinkers, forever peeking under rocks and around corners for the overlooked and unexpected. So when Cathy explained the show concept, which came out of an article she wrote for ARCHITECT, and invited me to be her co-curator, alongside the Guggenheim's amazing David van der Leer, the opportunity was just too good to pass up. In turn, I asked Cathy to be guest editor of this issue. Erik Adigard and Patricia McShane of M-A-D, who did the graphics for the exhibition installation, agreed to execute the design. The leadership at Hanley Wood generously signed on as media sponsor, and our partners at the AIA gave their blessing. (CEO Robert Ivy was commissioner of the U.S. Pavilion three times while he was editor-in-chief at *Architectural Record*.) All the pieces were in place, so off we went.

Furthermore, the Biennale is the world's most important architecture festival, and being tapped to participate is a big honor. The event takes place in a lagoon-side park, the Giardini, where 29 countries have erected permanent national pavilions. (The pavilions themselves form a kind of open-air museum of 20th century architecture: Delano & Aldrich designed the U.S. Pavilion, Alvar Aalto the Finnish, Gerrit Reitveld the Dutch, Josef Hoffmann the Austrian.) To determine who gets to represent American architecture by curating an exhibition in the U.S. Pavilion, the State Department announces a call for proposals, and a National Endowment for the Arts advisory committee reviews the submissions and recommends a winner.

Most importantly, while it's rewarding to collaborate with smart colleagues on a high-profile project, the real joy and purpose in devoting the August 2012 ARCHITECT to *Spontaneous Interventions* is that we get to share the topic with the architecture profession. The curatorial

Unlike the many architecture exhibitions that have attempted to define a movement in stylistic terms—think of Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock's *The International Style* of 1932 and Johnson and Mark Wigley's *Deconstructivist Architecture* of 1988, both held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York—*Spontaneous Interventions* is about design as a direct agent of social change rather than as an aesthetic and theoretical expression of the spirit of the times. In fact, some of the 124 projects in the show are kind of ugly. Others don't look like anything at all, for the simple reason that they're actions or processes, not objects.

The architects, urbanists, designers, activists, and artists who created the work in *Spontaneous Interventions* want to improve their communities and the lives of their neighbors. They have good intentions and exhibit great creativity, but they are coping with limited resources and often operating at a modest scale. They paint bike lanes on busy streets, plant vegetable gardens in vacant lots, and replace illegal street advertising with artwork. They often avoid working through official channels, because official channels so rarely seem to work. And in relying on themselves to get the job done, sometimes they go so far as to break the law.

What motivates this vigilante approach to the public realm? One factor is our weak economy: Shrinking tax revenues and austerity policies have left local governments with little option but to cut budgets, workers, and services, so concerned citizens are stepping into the breach. Another factor is generational: While the projects in *Spontaneous Interventions* have been created by people of all ages, much of the work embodies the "I can achieve anything" mentality that baby boomer helicopter parents have instilled in their Millennial children. Yet another factor is psychological: American faith in big institutions has faltered, as exemplified by the civil disobedience of Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party, Congress's historically low approval ratings, and the nearly universal indignation about runaway executive pay.

While architects admirably think of themselves as working for the betterment of all humanity, just as doctors do, the self-image doesn't always match circumstance. Architecture as an institution is predicated on licensure and regulation—law enforcement for the built environment. How then should architects respond to a new design movement predicated in civil disobedience? With an open mind, hopefully. Many of the projects included in the exhibition understandably might offend the sensibilities of some architects—indeed the very premise of the show could. And that's a good thing. The architecture profession has much to learn from these *Spontaneous Interventions*. They illustrate an eternal paradox of the American experience: our simultaneous impulses toward rugged individualism and big-hearted collectivism. One person's

Çatal Hüyük and other Asian settlements among earliest to display urban characteristics. **1772 BC** Babylonian Code of Hammurabi introduces building codes. **5th century BC** Greek

statement on page 8 describes it best, but basically the exhibition and the corresponding issue-as-catalog celebrate a trend that has been percolating for some time and has recently achieved critical velocity as an informal design movement—with emphasis on the informal.

disobedience is another's entrepreneurialism. In the space between lies the future of architecture.

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agorae become blueprint for public squares; term "democracy" comes into use in Athens. **c. 650 AD** Rise of Cahokia, first city in U.S. **c. 1000 AD** Foundation of Acoma and Taos

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Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

Cities have always been built by their citizens. For millennia this was literally so and our cities have grown through myriad forms of participation and creativity into a brilliant synthesis of the ideas and actions of millions. The exponential growth of the modern city has also inadvertently estranged us from a role in shaping it. For many, the city seems just too big, too intractable, too inaccessible. But around the world, scores of people and organizations are intervening directly in their own environments, bringing incremental improvements to their streets, blocks, and neighborhoods. These acts of micro-urbanism, of informal urban design, are characteristically small in scale, and often temporary—the opposite of the qualities we traditionally associate with good design—yet their power resides not so much in their forms as in their impacts, in their immediate ability to infuse places with value and meaning. » *Spontaneous Interventions* celebrates a movement for democratic change in cities in the United States, inspired by a kindred activism around the world. The actions—planting abandoned lots, occupying and reprogramming public spaces, and generally making cities more beautiful, inclusive, productive, and healthy—are planning at its most direct, expressions of a desire for good places that cannot simply await the sanction of the “authorities” to find their form. As these small but powerful works multiply and coalesce, a just and sustainable city, a city of all its communities, is being born. This is a celebration of a long and vibrant history of urban activism and takes particular pride in representing the U.S. during the tenure of a president whose career began as an urban community organizer. **SI**

peoples in New Mexico, earliest still-inhabited cities in U.S. **1521** Spanish colonists found San Juan, Puerto Rico, oldest continuously occupied, European-built

Curators: Cathy Lang Ho, David van der Leer, Ned Cramer

Advisers: Michael Sorkin, Erik Adigard, Anne Guiney, Paola Antonelli, and Zoë Ryan

Organization: Institute for Urban Design on behalf of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

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contributors



CATHY LANG HO
Guest editor
Commissioner and curator

Cathy Lang Ho is commissioner of the U.S. Pavilion at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale and curator of *Spontaneous Interventions*, the exhibition being staged there. An architecture critic and Institute for Urban Design board member, Cathy is an ARCHITECT contributing editor, was founding editor-in-chief of *The Architect's Newspaper*, and was the recipient of the Rome Prize in Design in 2008–09. She has reviewed every Venice Architecture Biennale since 2000, mostly as an excuse to return on a regular basis. *Spontaneous Interventions* grew out of a June 2010 article Cathy wrote for ARCHITECT, “Hold This Site,” about architects’ interim uses for stalled development sites. This led to an interest in participatory and tactical urbanism and the ways it is affecting cities and the profession. She guest-edited this special monograph issue of ARCHITECT devoted to the U.S. Pavilion.



DAVID VAN DER LEER
Co-curator

David van der Leer is a co-curator of *Spontaneous Interventions*. His work addresses contemporary urban issues through dialogue, experiments, exhibitions, and experiential installations. He co-curates the BMW Guggenheim Lab, a mobile laboratory that addresses issues of contemporary urban life through programs and public discourse; the Lab’s third iteration will open in Mumbai next year. David is also the assistant curator of architecture and urban studies at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where he has organized a number of exhibitions showcasing interventions into the urban realm. The most recent of these is *stillspotting nyc*, an ongoing project dedicated to finding and creating spots of stillness and repose in the city. In this issue of ARCHITECT, David writes about how his European perspective gave him a deep appreciation for the uniquely American characteristics of the interventions featured in *Spontaneous Interventions*.



NED CRAMER
ARCHITECT editor-in-chief
Co-curator

Ned Cramer is a co-curator of *Spontaneous Interventions*. He is the founding editor-in-chief of ARCHITECT, the official magazine of the American Institute of Architects, and the editorial director of the commercial design group at Hanley Wood, the proud media sponsor of the U.S. Pavilion. He was the first full-time curator of the Chicago Architecture Foundation, where he organized exhibitions about the future of architecture in the city that Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe called home. Before that, Ned was executive editor of *Architecture* magazine, where he and Cathy Lang Ho were colleagues. A trustee of Archeworks, Ned is also a member of the GSA’s Design Excellence National Peer Registry, the National Building Museum’s Scully Prize selection committee, and the Cranbrook Academy of Art National Advisory Committee.

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MICHAEL SORKIN
Curatorial adviser and writer

Michael Sorkin is a curatorial adviser of *Spontaneous Interventions* and is the president of the Institute for Urban Design. He is the principal of Michael Sorkin Studio in New York, a design practice devoted to both practical and theoretical projects at all scales, with a special interest in the city and in green architecture. In addition, Michael is the founding president of Terreform, a nonprofit organization engaged in research and intervention in issues of urban morphology, sustainability, equity, and community planning. No stranger to Venice, he exhibited Terreform's project *New York City (Steady) State*, which outlined strategies for a city to become self-sufficient, in the U.S. Pavilion at the 2010 Biennale. Michael is also distinguished professor of architecture and the director of the Graduate Urban Design Program at the City College of New York. He has written and edited numerous books including *Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* (2009) and *All Over the Map* (2011). On page 88, he writes on the salience of the Occupy movement as a model for urban betterment.



GORDON DOUGLAS
Project manager, co-guest editor, and writer

Gordon Douglas is a project manager for *Spontaneous Interventions*, and co-guest editor of this special monograph issue of ARCHITECT. He is a writer, researcher, photographer, and lecturer whose work centers on the phenomenon of do-it-yourself urban projects and the individuals who create them. As a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Chicago, Gordon studies the intersection of urban culture, politics, planning, and development. His research investigates issues of local identity and people's interactions with the built environment and seeks to inform how and for whom our cities are organized, designed, and understood. His articles and photographs have appeared in *GOOD*, *Urban Studies*, *The Journal of Urban Design*, *Sociological Perspectives*, and *The Magazine for Urban Documentation Opinion and Theory*. On page 43, he outlines the historical framework for and context of DIY urbanism as it is practiced today.



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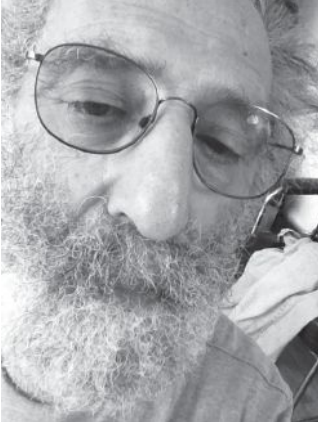


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D. GRAHAME SHANE
Writer

David Grahame Shane is a career-long scholar of urban design and the city landscape. He currently teaches graduate urban design at Columbia University and undergraduate courses at the Cooper Union in New York. He has lectured widely in the U.S., Europe, and Asia and his articles have been published in architectural journals worldwide. Grahame is the author of *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design and City Theory* (2005) and *Urban Design Since 1945: A Global Perspective* (2011). In this issue, on page 62, he argues that the pop-up is central to the history of American urbanism from Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs to Janette Sadik-Khan.



MIMI ZEIGER
Project manager and writer

Mimi Zeiger is a project manager for *Spontaneous Interventions*. As a writer and critic dedicated to increasing the volume of architectural discourse, Mimi is the editor and publisher of *loud paper*, a zine and blog, and also covers art, architecture, and design for a number of publications, including *The New York Times*, *Domus*, *Dwell*, and *ARCHITECT*, where she is a contributing editor. Her books include *New Museums* (2005), *Tiny Houses* (2009), and *Micro Green: Tiny Houses in Nature* (2011), and she serves as director of communications at the Woodbury School of Architecture in Burbank. Mimi is the author of "The Interventionist Toolkit," a series of articles for *Places* that documents the rise of the DIY ethos of architecture and design and strategies of tactical urbanism. Her essay on page 95 explores the importance of open-source knowledge as a tool for social engagement.



TONI L. GRIFFIN
Writer

Toni L. Griffin has dedicated her career to maintaining the vitality of cities. She is a board member of the Institute for Urban Design and the director of the J. Max Bond Center on Design for the Just City at the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York. She also runs a private practice, Urban Planning and Design for the American City, through which she advises struggling cities such as Newark, N.J., and Detroit, Mich. She began her career as an architect, and later became the director of community development for the City of Newark, where she was responsible for creating a centralized division of planning and urban design. At the Bond Center, her work on legacy cities that struggle with the effects of industrial decline and subsequent population loss involves equal parts of design and policy. On page 52, Toni argues that tactics like those in *Spontaneous Interventions* can help us rethink our approach to public policy and community engagement efforts.

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M-A-D

Guest art directors Communication/exhibition design

Erik Adigard and Patricia McShane, the founders of M-A-D, are interdisciplinary communication designers focusing on the convergence of cultural and technological change. They are recipients of the Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design for a body of work that ranges from corporate branding to multimedia exhibitions. They have taught at the California College of the Arts, and Erik frequently writes on design and media for industry publications, serves on juries, and lectures internationally. He is also this year's Rome Prize winner in the Design category. Previous exhibition commissions include AirXY for the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2008.

In designing *Spontaneous Interventions* for the U.S. Pavilion, “the notion of history and the moment are really critical, more than anything,” says Erik. “There was this ongoing aim to do something that would be on the edge of the design tradition, to have a fresh perspective,” he says of the design process, citing the need to combine history and information with a lightness of presentation. To meet this challenge, they decided to use the ceiling and floor as their main display areas, and to leave the walls largely bare.

M-A-D and Freecell collaborated on the design of the exhibition, in which 124 interventions are highlighted; each intervention is displayed on an individual banner that is suspended from an open framework above the exhibition floor. To create a unifying language for these disparate projects, the team devised a code based on a series of six colors: blue signals information, orange represents accessibility, pink is for community, lime green for economy, dark green means sustainability, and cyan equals pleasure. These overarching themes created a common vocabulary, and each interventionist team decided which themes had influenced them and applied to their project. They were then instructed

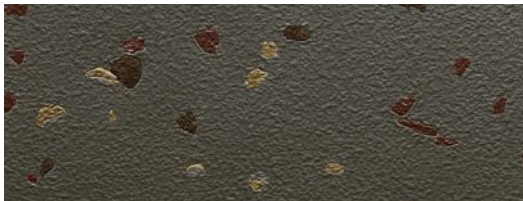
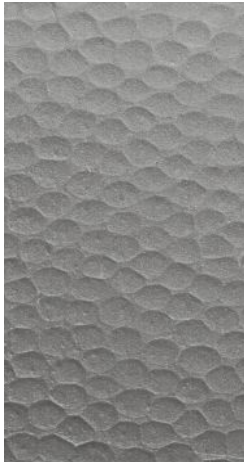
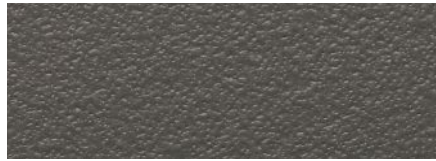
to assign a percentage to each color. These values were used to create the striped code of influence on the back of each banner, forming what Erik calls a “colorful cloud” suspended from the ceiling.

Serving as a counterpoint to the banners overhead is a timeline that runs across the floor of the galleries, outlining the development of the modern city. The path of the line in each gallery was designed to answer the themes of citizenship, equity, protest, and participation—all tenets of urban interventionists—forming a modern labyrinth that gives a historic context through which to analyze the projects on display.

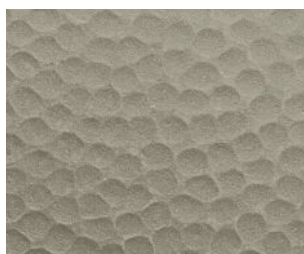
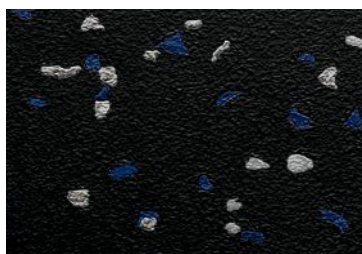
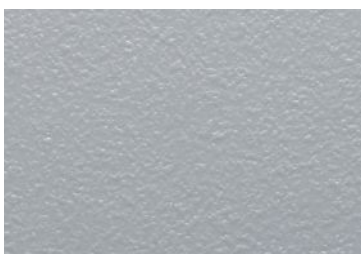
As guest art directors of this issue of ARCHITECT, Erik and Patricia were tasked with translating these principles from the pavilion to the page. The color-coding is deployed throughout the discussion of specific interventions, and the timeline cuts across all sections, leading the reader through the progression of the movement as a whole.

As for what visitors to the U.S. Pavilion in Venice will take away, Erik says that he hopes they will realize that they have the opportunity to write history, not just observe it. Even more important, they have the opportunity to “rethink what we can do in this world.”

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FREECELL Exhibition design

Freecell is a Brooklyn, N.Y.–based design and fabrication studio founded by Lauren Crahan and John Hartmann. Together they pursue an active professional practice and a course of experimental work, which is strengthened by their drawing, modeling, prototyping, and fabricating skills. Their site-specific installations, which question the use and perception of space, have been exhibited at SFMOMA, Henry Urbach Architecture, and Artists Space galleries. Freecell's recent work includes "Point to Line," a public art commission at the University of Akron, and custom furniture for fashion designer Alexander Wang. For the U.S. Pavilion, Freecell designed an exhibition that spans five galleries, with 124 banners—each featuring one of the spontaneous interventions—suspended from an open scaffold. Visitors can pull each banner down to eye level to view the material. "People are being asked to actually physically engage with the work," Lauren says, "which we are excited about because the projects being exhibited are so physical."



INTERBORO Courtyard design

Interboro Partners is a New York–based office of architects, urban designers, and planners. Led by Daniel D'Oca, Georgeen Theodore, and Tobias Armorst (pictured left to right), the firm strives to improve cities through innovative, experimental design ideas. Interboro's awards include the MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program, the AIA New York Chapter's New Practices Award, and the Architectural League of New York's Emerging Voices and Young Architects awards. In designing *Commonplace*, the courtyard for the U.S. Pavilion, Georgeen says that the curators challenged the team to consider "the commons," truly public space that invites a multitude of uses. Interboro developed a flexible "outdoor living room," with movable components that can be easily configured for workshops, lectures, socializing, or children's play. Touching on key themes of the exhibition, Georgeen says, "The ideal of the American City is not some imagined utopia where we start from scratch. It's working in the places we know, cracking them open with imaginative uses of existing and new tools to make a more inclusive city."

You can find out more about the design of the U.S. Pavilion and the courtyard on page 136.

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ARCHITECT

by Cathy Lang Ho » Provisional, informal, guerrilla, insurgent, DIY, hands-on, informal, unsolicited, unplanned, participatory, tactical, micro, open-source—these are just a few of the words floating around to describe a type of interventionist urbanism sweeping through cities around the world. The fact that there are so many concurrent, competing names for these myriad citizen-led urban improvements suggests that they remain a phenomenon-in-the-making,

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

ripe for analysis. With mayors' conferences recently featuring sessions on "lighter, quicker, cheaper" tactics (the term of choice for placemaking experts at the nonprofit Projects for Public Spaces) as alternative recession-era approaches to urban revitalization, and with "social impact design" burgeoning into a veritable cottage industry that young designers and established firms alike are eager to join, the trend might in fact be close to a tipping point. The subtitle of Malcom Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference*, could

Cities have long attracted those in search of greater freedom of opportunity, of expression, of association. These core possibilities are tightly bound up with the demands of **citizenship**, the idea that to live in a city is to be part of a community, indeed, a community of communities. A willingness and a capacity to equitably transact our relationships with the city's innumerable others is foundational for urban citizenship.

Cyclists establish Good Roads Movement. 1884

1884

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1889

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just as easily be the tagline for *Spontaneous Interventions*, the exhibition of the U.S. Pavilion at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale.

On the most straightforward level, without overly complex theorizing, this movement is about action, about multitudes of individual responses to problems as small as the cracks on the sidewalk, or as ubiquitous as unsafe intersections, or as large as crater-sized vacant lots stalled by a depressed economy. Architects and designers are trained to observe and solve problems, as we know, and one cornerstone of their education is the studio class that challenges them to develop hypothetical solutions to real, local, social, or urban problems. Moving ideas off the drawing board and into the world is the tricky part. *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good* celebrates those who act, who take the initiative to transform problematic urban situations into new opportunities or amenities to be shared by the public, without waiting for clients or permission, and in some cases, risking fines or arrest. Rolling up one's sleeves, personally bankrolling or finding creative sources of funding, using every tool at hand to network and form tribes, mobilizing for the sake of shared passions, and simply making things *happen*—these are the *modi operandi* of a new class of citizen activists who are changing the shape of cities today.

In researching projects for the exhibition, we found hundreds of examples even before we issued an open call in January, which itself yielded over 450 compelling self-initiated urban improvements. We narrowed our choice to 124—the maximum number we could fit in the 4,000-square-foot permanent American pavilion in the Giardini, the public gardens of Venice—though we wish we could have included many more. We were expansive in our consideration of what qualifies as a “spontaneous intervention,” including projects that encroach on the territory of art and graffiti, well aware that some acts are more about self-expression than tactics for long-term change. Our goal was to find a diversity of original projects that transform public urban space to better serve the common good, seeking those that would add up to a useful archive of actionable strategies that could be replicated in other cities facing similar problems.

The notion of the “common good” is mutable and subjective, to be sure—what's good for some might not be for others—but in selecting projects we adhered to the idea of what is beneficial to the most people with respect to everyday needs. New bike lanes in New York City might irk drivers; guerrilla gardeners might be annoying squatters to property owners; culture-jamming billboard pranks might be classifiable as vandalism; and *all* of these acts might be gentrification by another name. But we believe that the positive impacts of our featured examples of hands-on city-making far outweigh the negative.

More appropriate than considering these works with respect to how they address the “common good” is how they address the “commons,” the space and resources we share, harkening to the originary political conception of the “common wealth,” or public wealth, and how it should be administered. The commons have been under assault for centuries, but intensely so since the dawn of industrialism with the extreme privatization and pillaging of land and natural resources combined with the sad mismanagement by our entrusted public entities of our public spaces, parks, infrastructure, schools, and other shared assets. The word “commons” suggests medieval laws involving free-grazing animals and the right to forage in forests, but we can't forget that it remains central to our everyday lives, from the water running through our taps to the streets that get us where we need to go. With the commons so threatened, so in disrepair, is it any wonder that “commoners” feel compelled to step in? Spontaneous interventions embody innumerable ways of rethinking our collective well-being, both physical and emotional.

Our exhibition, selected to represent the country by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, focuses on projects realized in U.S. cities, which raised the question within the curatorial team of what distinguishes urban interventions in this country from those in the rest of the world. For this reason, we inventoried the problems to which our featured interventions are primarily responding, and arrived at 10 rough categories: (1) urban blight, crumbling infrastructure, and disinvestment in cities; (2) unsafe, banal, or wasted places created by autocentric planning; (3) vacancies, property abandonment, and damaged landscapes defined by shrinking cities (related to postindustrial job loss); (4) a different order of vacancies left by the post-speculation real estate bust; (5) lack of access to amenities (such as open space, parks, playgrounds, culture, recreation, fresh healthy food, etc.); (6) insufficient mobility options; (7) pollution; (8) disenfranchisement, exclusion, social alienation, and lack of information or knowledge about how to participate in civic affairs; (9) privatization or

bike path in U.S., along Brooklyn's Ocean Parkway. 1895 First Venice Biennale. 1897 Boston builds

In America, equity has long had a predicate of property. But *Spontaneous Interventions* seeks to reassert the meaning of the word as not only about financial stakes and stocks but about fairness and justice. Our most engaged urban activists seek to provide a lost sense of generosity in parts of the city that have been left behind. For them, equity is the outcome of action, of solidarity, of a sense that the city must offer a foundation of fairness for all.

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corporatization of public space; and (10) surplus or underutilized spaces caused by hasty, insensitive, or over-development.

These problems are evident in cities all over the world, and are the result of processes and phenomena that span decades, even centuries. To comprehend how we got here—what is it about today's cities that make people want to intervene in them?—we created a timeline of important milestones in city-making and urban activism (a fraction of which snakes through this issue): Spontaneity might be a defining characteristic of these urban actions, but they must be understood against their long and complex historical, political, and cultural contexts. Admittedly imperfect, biased, and quirky, the timeline is meant above all to convey that cities are eternally works in progress, and that actions, large and small, top-down and bottom-up, formal and informal, have always had unforeseen consequences and counter-actions.

American cities are vastly different not only from their international counterparts but from each other. They share qualities, naturally—cars and parking everywhere, and more wasted space than one might see in tight historic cities in other parts of the world—but Dallas is different from New Orleans is different from Pittsburgh. Place-based and social policies have played a role in stratifying populations within cities, as Toni Griffin describes in her article on page 52, in a manner that's very specific to the U.S., though cities in the rest of the world also deal with the uneven distribution of amenities and hazards along the lines of race and class.

There's an important cultural difference, too, that informs Americans' expectations and use of public spaces: We're not exactly a European café-sitting culture, or an Asian street-market one, or a Latin public-lounging one. But the explosion of coffee culture, farmers' and flea markets, food vendors, street festivals, and more, seems to suggest that we are moving towards an increasingly globalized idea of what vibrant urban life is all about, embracing all the benefits it can bring—sociality, safety, economic activity, civility, and so on. As urban populations steadily grow and cities compete with each other to top "livability" lists to attract residents, investment, and tourists, they are naturally learning from each other and adopting best practices. Some spontaneous interventions appear to be efforts to "Europeanize" American cities: If it means more bike lanes, car-free pedestrian zones, and places for sitting and enjoying the city, this isn't a bad thing, though urban sociologist Sharon Zukin has warned of the confusion of expanding public space with consumerism-driven development in the name of urbanity, or as she wryly puts it, "pacification by cappuccino." To put this in a global context of another sort, we must acknowledge that what we call tactical urbanism is simply a way of life in parts of the developing world where people's tenuous existences rely on self-help solutions.

All of this is which to say, *Spontaneous Interventions* is informed by innumerable factors and desires, and is comprised of countless parallel strands of thinking, each deserving of longer analyses—much longer than we are able to cover in this monograph issue of ARCHITECT, though our insightful contributors do a fantastic job of touching on dominant influences and themes. When you have 124 projects, you find yourself doing a lot of taxonomizing, deliberating whether projects should be grouped by type (infrastructure, landscape, digital, process, art), by scale, by problem. Every way you cut it, intriguing patterns and trends surfaced. For example, a good dozen projects deal with food. Another dozen or so deal with vacancies or underutilized public land. A handful deal with play. At least three address POPS (privately own public spaces) specifically. Ten or so were crowdfunded through Kickstarter. Twenty-odd are information projects, printed or digital resources aimed at sharing, disseminating, digesting, mapping, or

1890 Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* exposes tenement squalor. 1890 Chicago population hits

At the heart of *Spontaneous Interventions* lies a subversive streak. These unsolicited and unauthorized acts are de facto forms of rebellion, critiques of cities as they exist. The settlements that sprang to life in 2011 demonstrate that cities have always been scenes of democratic expression. Like mass **protest**, interventions are forms of local advocacy that demand a better city, society, and world.

1 million, with three-quarters born outside U.S. 1896 Supreme Court

visualizing information. The majority of the projects by far are located in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, suggesting that big urban centers with high concentrations of creatives are especially fertile ground. This kind of breakdown could go on.

We did decide to encode one level of analysis, asking our protagonists to assess the type of improvements their projects brought about, choosing from six categories: information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, and pleasure. The reason for this exercise was to understand the desires of the actors and what they hoped their actions would accomplish. Each category was assigned a color, allowing us to create a sort of bar code to quickly convey the essence of each project. (The colors corresponding to the above categories appear on the cover, from left to right.)

The proportions of the colors seen on the cover reflect the average of the 124 projects in the exhibition. By a wide margin, community (pink) is the category cited most by interventionists. So while a project like San Francisco Garden Registry is overtly about mapping and quantifying the amount of urban farms in the city, its creators, Futurefarmers, note that building community is an equally important aspect of this online resource; or while Intersection Repair in Portland, Ore., appears to be about slowing down traffic in unsafe intersections by painting them into plazas, it is primarily a community-building exercise that brings neighbors together in

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a common annual task; or that artist Candy Chang's *I Wish This Was* sticker campaign in New Orleans has inspired similar public message boards across the country, all in the name of sparking civic engagement. The overwhelming concern for community is a resounding affirmation of people's desire to connect to each other and their belief that a strengthened community is the baseline for creating responsive, successful urban environments.

We asked our participants to name their inspirations as well as ideas about the ideal city, capturing some responses in filmed interviews that will appear in the Pavilion as well as online. We prompted participants to think big, blue sky, and to argue their case as if they were running for office. It's an election year, after all. Some participants cite a generational shift, with Millennials and their heightened expectation of immediate results and collaborative exchange. Others cite a disappointment with institutions and a lack of confidence in their ability to solve problems. Some feel that every act is political, while others don't self-identify as activists at all, but simply as conscientious citizens who hate to see a wasted opportunity. Many are as well versed in Guy Debord and David Harvey as in Jane Jacobs and Kevin Lynch. Some are running away from the dullness of their suburban upbringings. Situationism, Archigram, Abbie Hoffman, squatter settlements, Hugh Ferriss' *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, Fluxus, Dada, Jersey Devils, William Whyte are cited alongside democracy, equal rights, hacking, government efficiency, a desire for human interaction, a backlash against the car—the list of references runs long.

The ideal city doesn't exist, of course, just as the ideal person doesn't exist. But sights must be set high, with a combination of optimism and not just know-how but do-how, if we will ever approximate the just, sustainable, happy, healthy urban existence we all crave. Worth highlighting are four overriding themes that

seem to pervade every one of the 124 projects:

Citizenship, Equity, Protest, and Participation. These are elaborated upon on these pages (thanks to Michael Sorkin for his eloquence).

Spontaneous Interventions is not the first to recognize this uprising, and it's just the tip of an iceberg. Other projects, notably the Canadian Centre for Architecture's fine exhibition *Actions: What You Can Do With the City*, Ole Bouman's Studio for Unsolicited Architecture at the NAI, the exhibition *Hands-on Urbanism* at the Architekturzentrum Wien, the Hack the City festival in Dublin, TED's City 2.0 competition, Kylie Legge's book *Doing It Differently*, Peter Bishop and Lesley Williams' book *The Temporary City*, Nato Thompson's (who is a contributor to this issue) exhibition *Living as Form*, and various other recent efforts—these all signal a Zeitgeist, each adding a new wrinkle of understanding to a broad movement.

"Elections don't mean shit—Vote where the power is—Our power is in the street." This was the resolution adopted by the Students for a Democratic Society in 1968, advocating a true participatory democracy. "Taking it to the streets" remains as thrilling and energizing as it ever was, maybe even more so with the possibility of even minor acts going viral. Still, *Spontaneous Interventions* documents a rebellion, not a revolution: These micro urban moments—vast in numbers, ephemeral, situational, intelligent, idiosyncratic—can't replace the effectiveness and reach of top-down planning. But somewhere in between, the two seem to be finding common ground. Some of the interventions featured in this exhibition have in fact made institutional inroads—Rebar's PARK(ing) Day has morphed into city-issued Parklet Permits in San Francisco and Pop-Up Café licenses in New York, for example. New York and Washington, D.C., have launched competitions, making city data available for anyone to transform into apps that make them more navigable, transparent, accountable, democratic. Commons-based solutions are taking hold everywhere. One senses a relaxing sense of proprietariness all around. These are signs of triumph, and encouragement to any budding urban interventionist.

upholds "separate but equal" policy, justifying segregation of public places. **1900** California's Cycleway opens,

earliest commuter bike path in U.S. **1900** 30 percent of U.S. population lives in

cities. **1902** Macy's department store in New York installs first escalator.

The worst enemy of democracy is indifference. Every project featured in *Spontaneous Interventions* is a testament to its opposite: **participation**. Across the U.S. and indeed the world, design activists and community organizers are inventing new practices to make their own—and their neighbors'—environments richer, more responsive, and more definitively theirs.

PARTICIPATION >



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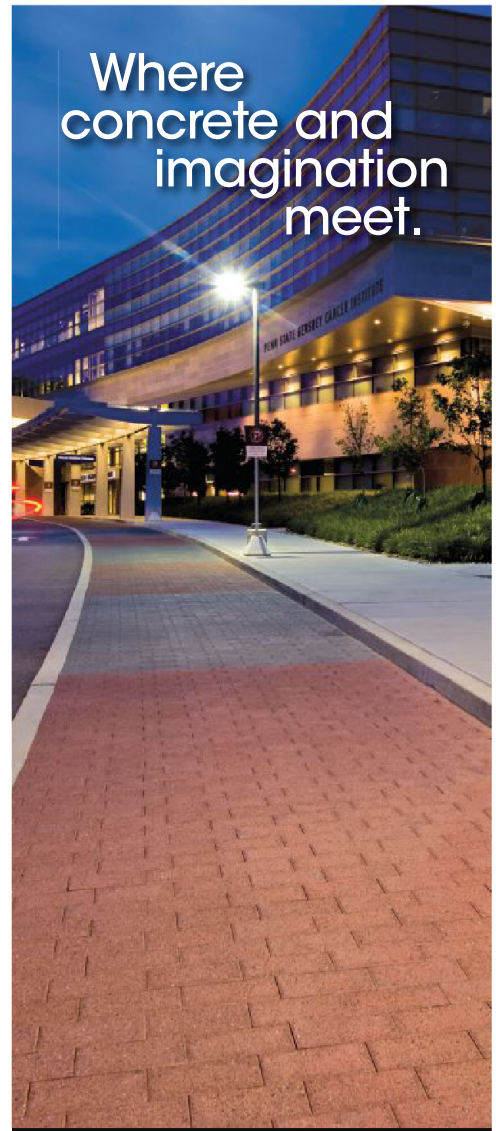
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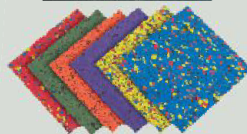


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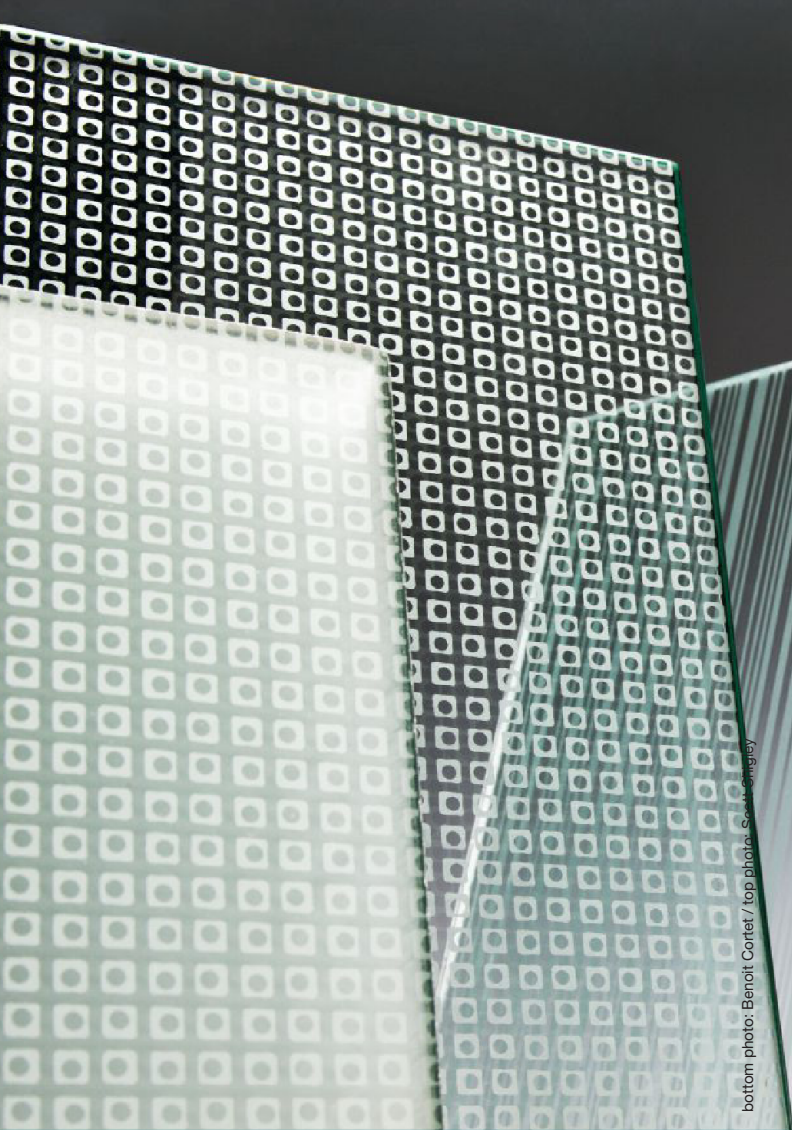
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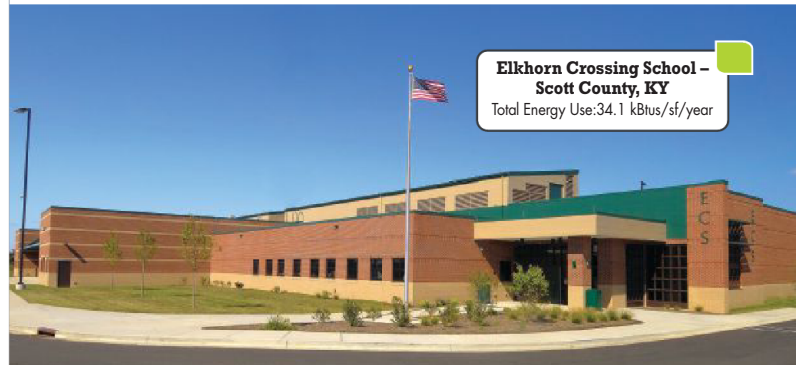
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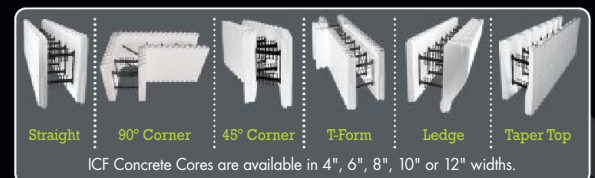
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AIA VOICES

THE GRADUATE | TAKING ON A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Brandon McBrien graduated in May from the University of Arizona with bachelor's degrees in architecture, regional planning, and business management. Given the long tail of the current economic recession, he and his classmates face uncertain job prospects whether they have three undergraduate degrees or one. Still, McBrien, a native of Iowa, remains optimistic about opportunities in architecture. "Regional development allowed me to look at the macro scale, business management gave me a foundation in economics, and architecture allowed me to synthesize my design ideas," he says. "I hope to be an architect that can respond in a thoughtful and meaningful way to this current generation's values."

MY CHOSEN PROFESSION, AND THE DEGREE I WAS PURSUING

first, was architecture. I began my two minors—one in regional development and the other in business management—but quickly realized I needed to find a fuller way to complement my design aspirations. As I got further into the minors, I found them to be interesting and very much related to architecture. So I figured if I could push myself a little harder, I could do all three as majors.

For me, I didn't feel like I had to make a huge effort to synthesize the three disciplines. They naturally fit. But I always tried to relate some of the more exclusive questions about each field to the other fields. If I read something in the *Harvard Business Review* or *Businessweek*, for instance, I'd ask about how those questions related to design.

For the most part, a lot of my classmates weren't aware I was pursuing so many degrees. I'm not a secretive person, but I wasn't announcing it on a regular basis. The core friends I had in studio were really supportive of me doing this and extremely flexible in helping me manage my time during group projects. My other majors were intense, sure, but in the end I spent more time on architecture than on the other two majors combined. It was difficult because I kept very different studio hours, so that level of camaraderie that you have in the studio was not always available to me. But I had a very wide spectrum of people I interacted with across other fields, and I made a lot of friends outside of the College of Architecture.

I was raised with a strong consciousness for community service. I wanted my degrees to mean something and incorporate a sense of giving back through architecture. I originally hoped to own my own firm at a certain point, but once I learned about all the components of running a business, I decided that aligning myself with an established firm that paralleled my own values is a better idea—a firm that has a sense of corporate responsibility.

So that is my first long-term goal. I also have an interest in managing groups and exploring business strategies—even at the same time I love that I practice architecture. My dream job would involve design work, but also helping to make strategic decisions about growth. —As told to William Richards **AIA**



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ACROSS THE INSTITUTE

Compiled by William Richards

1. Postcards from the Edge. After four years of construction and 1.2 million rivets, the Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1937. To mark 75 years, AIA San Francisco is launching “Postcards from the Edge,” an exhibition of postcard views from around the Bay Area (including the iconic stretch of California State Route 1). The exhibition runs Aug. 1–Oct. 1. And be sure to congratulate the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge, which celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

➔ Learn more at aiaf.org.

2 Urban Studies. Prior to flipping our calendars to 2100, India’s population will surpass China’s, cities will grow larger, new energy strategies will emerge, potable water will become more precious, and sea levels will rise. Architecture’s localized and thoughtful response to these developments will be critical, and it’s the subject of the iCities: International Forum on Innovative Planning Education and Studio Exhibition organized by the College of Planning and Design at Taiwan’s National Cheng Kung University in conjunction with the International Forum on Urbanism, Aug. 20–24.

➔ Learn more at www.up.ncku.edu.tw/2012icities.

4 Crafting a Legacy. Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto, Hon. AIA, has a university, a prestigious architecture award, and at least three streets in Finland named after him. He’s also appeared on a Finnish stamp and the 50 markka note—until 2002 when Finland adopted the euro. So it’s not surprising to come across an Alvar Aalto symposium. This year’s 12th International Alvar Aalto Symposium, “Crafted: The Ingredients of Architecture,” will be held Aug. 10–12 at the University of Jyväskylä, in Jyväskylä, Finland.

➔ Learn more at alvaraaltosymposium.fi.

6 Grand Opening. This month, Morgan State University—Baltimore, Md.’s largest historically black university—is home to the new \$59 million Center for the Built Environment and Infrastructure Studies. The building, by Baltimore’s Hord Coplan Macht and Durham, N.C.’s Freelon Group, brings together under one roof the School of Architecture and Planning as well as programs in construction management and landscape architecture.

➔ Learn more at morgan.edu and freelon.com.

3 Oregon Trail. If you live in Eugene, Ore., you’d have to travel about 5,000 miles to attend the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London. But during a brief window this summer, the AA comes to the University of Oregon to run a short course on biodiversity in the woodlands. “Marking the Forest” will explore ecosystems and what course organizers call “the commodification of the tree.” The course will run Aug. 11–20.

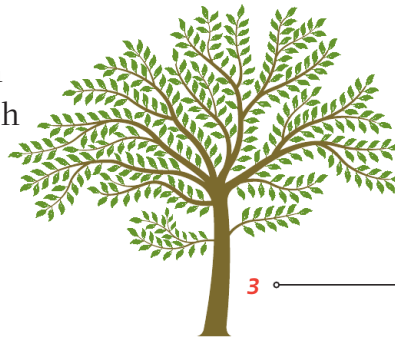
➔ Learn more at eugene.aaschool.ac.uk.

5 Best Practices. Design/build, as a delivery method, has gained more ground in the last decade, owing in part to its greater curricular exposure in schools of architecture. Recognizing that reality, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) launched the Design-Build Award this year, which honors best practices in school-based design/build initiatives. The program is open to faculty primarily engaged in teaching at an ACSA member school, and the deadline for submissions is Sept. 19.

➔ Learn more at acsa-arch.org/programs-events/awards.

7 Last Call. Improving public health by reversing obesity, reducing heart disease, and treating depression may be a Herculean task, but good design can certainly help. Entries are due at the end of this month for an ideas competition, Active Lifestyles for Better Health, cosponsored by the AIA Young Architects Forum (YAF) and the AIA Committee on Design (COD), which asks entrants to employ architecture to boost public education about health and wellness. Deadline for submissions is Aug. 31.

➔ Learn more at aia.org/ideascompetition.



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The last in a three-part series on balancing design and business.

AS PROFESSIONALS, ARCHITECTS UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE of working as part of a collaborative team. Starting with the design studio model in architecture school to working at a firm on a project with engineers and contractors, collaboration is the backdrop of architectural practice. However, when it comes to your own business model—how you run your business, and to what end—do you also think in terms of your team? Who do you surround yourself with? Which advisers and experts are on your side? How do you design your own collaborative enterprise? If you are thinking about starting out, or have just opened shop, it's never too early to put together your team—and even if you have been in business for a while, it's never too late.

Before addressing how you might form a team of advisers, a word on the reason for the team's existence is in order. The problems we encounter in our day-to-day practice cut across areas like project delivery, sustainability, material performance, land-use planning, scheduling, cost estimating, construction claims, financial analysis, workplace strategies, and research. But in school, these areas exist largely outside of our architectural training, and we encounter them only as interns or young architects. Those of us who have worked at larger firms have been able to swivel our chairs around and ask an experienced colleague how they've handled certain challenges in the past. That option is no longer available to the architects who lost their jobs during the recession or are working on their own.

There are a few things that sole practitioners can do to create the kind of collaborative network that exists in larger firms. Here are some things to keep in mind or to try out:

- Keep a little black book of treasured contacts. When you work with someone who's good, add his or her name.

- In the same book, keep track of people whose approach is wildly different than yours. You may find that ying to your yang useful later.
- Join a service organization. In volunteering for a good cause, you will meet other like-minded professionals.
- Organize monthly coffee times or informal charrettes with other architects to critique your work—and don't be afraid to invite others, such as land-use attorneys or contractors, into the fold.
- Build a virtual network of advisers on email by creating a group list. If you have a pressing business or development question, one email to the group is a quick way to get a response.
- Enroll in an executive education program in law, business, or construction management through a local university or community college. Also, many AIA components and chapters organize leadership development academies, where you and a dozen people from different backgrounds can get together for a common purpose.
- Have you read a good book lately? Crossed an amazing plaza? Attended a memorable gallery opening? Reach out to those authors, landscape architects, and artists and engage them about their work. It may lead to a collaborative project.

The days of one person having the potential to know it all are gone, and solving a complicated problem for a client (or for yourself) is directly related to the strength of your network of trusted advisers. Creating that network is a design problem in and of itself, though. Tending to that network today, no matter where you are in your career, represents billable hours that will pay you handsomely tomorrow. —William J. Nichols, Assoc. AIA **AIA**

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. Consult your own advisers based upon your specific circumstances. | Learn more at architectmagazine.com/aia.



Tipping Point



Two bike-share programs look to set a standard for healthier cities.

BY BILL MILLARD

BIKE-SHARING PROGRAMS IN MONTRÉAL, PARIS, BARCELONA, Melbourne, and Hangzhou, China, are transforming the way those cities function at rush hour, to say nothing of the collateral health benefits for their participants. In the United States, the most notable success story has been Capital Bikeshare in Washington, D.C., which has drawn acclaim for its convenient operations and admirable safety record: Only 24 reported crashes in more than 2 million trips. And when New York City launches the largest bike-sharing system in North America this month, it will demonstrate whether short-term, one-way rental bikes can fill a critical niche in one of America's most demanding transportation ecosystems.

With an initial rollout of 7,000 bikes and over 400 docking stations in high-demand areas of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, Citi Bike builds on the burgeoning bike-path network spearheaded by New York's Department of Transportation (DoT). Under DoT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan, Hon. AIA NY, the city plans to install 200 more stations and 10,000 total bikes by spring 2013. Given the environmental and public health advantages of cycling over motor vehicles, observers see transformative possibilities in Citi Bike.

Its docking stations appear every few blocks at sites chosen through community input, and it's a lot cheaper than cabs or even subways, with an annual membership fee of \$95 (less than a one-month Metro-Card). Capital Bikeshare, operated by Portland, Ore.-based Alta Bicycle Share, is funded by the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program. Citi Bike is supported by a \$47 million partnership between Citibank and MasterCard. If it expands as steadily as planned, Citi Bike can be a game-changer in the nation's largest city; and even though the bikes will be Citibank blue, the potential effects are exuberantly green.

In addition, Alta, having established a track record in Boston and Melbourne as well, has been selected to operate Chicago's new system. The company's Chattanooga system also opened in June. Alta's bikes, manufactured by Bixi of Montréal, are built for urban conditions: Heavy-framed, with a step-through design, cargo basket, high handlebars, and self-powered, always-on LED headlights and taillights, they place the rider in a safe upright position with broad visibility, rather than a forward-leaning racing stance. Other systems, like Bike Nation in Los Angeles, DecoBike in Miami Beach, Nice Ride Minnesota in Minneapolis-St. Paul, and B-cycle in a dozen locations (including Denver, Des Moines, Iowa, and Spartanburg, S.C.) define a lively and increasingly crowded public-private economic sector.

Bike-sharing is affected by what economists call a network effect: A bike without ample destination docks would be as impractical as an



ILLUSTRATION: JUN KWON



isolated phone with no one to call. To that end, the Capital Bikeshare system has grown impressively, owing to Washington’s density, relative flatness, tourist base, and commuting patterns. Josh Moskowitz, who manages Capital Bikeshare, notes that its approximately 16,600 annual members largely represent D.C.-based commuters, while most of the more than 168,000 casual riders each year tend to be tourists or visitors. Whether each ride means one fewer car on the road is less clear. Alta president Alison Cohen loosely estimates that anywhere between 5 and 40 percent of rides would otherwise have been single-occupancy-vehicle trips.

In a 2012 report for Arlington County—which is across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., in northern Virginia—Ralph Buehler, assistant professor of urban affairs and planning at Virginia Tech, notes that Capital Bikeshare trips are 50 percent more likely to replace walking and 35 percent more likely to replace subway trips than car trips. Mode-shift data are conjectural, but even if Capital Bikeshare is doing more to decongest Washington’s Metro subway system and sidewalks than to reduce vehicle-miles traveled, it is a welcome relief to commuters, since it thins out peak-time crowds.

New Yorkers accustomed to grim rush hours may expect a similar effect, but the biggest battle will be public opinion. Sadik-Khan has been something of a flak magnet, particularly among observers who see bikes as a passing and unsustainable trend. But her numbers don’t lie. Since she took office in 2007, the city has expanded its network

AIA FEATURE

of protected lanes, painted on-street lanes, and separated greenways to 700 miles. The measured cyclist population has doubled in the past four years, and the number of bike commuters has quadrupled over the past decade. Per capita accident rates among cyclists and pedestrians have fallen to the lowest figures seen since recordkeeping began a century ago. The streets are more accessible and noticeably safer, in part through design innovation and in part through the accompanying safety-in-numbers effect, as more motorists accept the need to share the right-of-way. “I think it’s all paid big dividends, and you’re seeing it on the streets,” Sadik-Khan comments. “People are voting with their pedals.”

In this atmosphere—with a loud political “bikelash” possibly fading after Neighbors for Better Bike Lanes and Seniors for Safety, two Brooklyn civic groups, unsuccessfully sued the city to remove the Prospect Park West bike lane—public approval of the lanes holds a solid majority, recently polling at 66 percent. Bike-sharing commands 72 percent support. There’s just one catch: greater physical exposure. Cars, trucks, and pedestrians unaccustomed to looking out for bikes while crossing the street pose a continuous risk to themselves and the bicyclists. The difference between a balanced ecosystem and bloodshed is about training, says John Pucher, who is a Rutgers University professor of urban planning and a co-editor (with Buehler) of the forthcoming book *City Cycling*. “Safety in numbers effectively could be the saving grace here, but I think there’s going to be a transition period,” he says, citing Paris bike-sharing program as a cautionary tale, where injuries rose by about 50 percent right after the city rolled out the 20,000-bike Vélib program too rapidly and with no training for riders (the injury rate has declined slightly since then).

Most NYC riders obey the laws, Pucher finds, but a few run red lights aggressively, endangering pedestrians and fueling the bikelash. The New York Police Department has been working with the DoT on an effort to improve practices among commercial cyclists by issuing summonses. But bike culture does not map neatly onto the city’s more ingrained car culture, and NYPD officers struggling to keep bike lanes cleared of delivery vehicles at times fail to keep the lanes cleared of their own patrol vehicles.

Transportation officials have promoted safety, multilingually, in restaurants and other businesses that pressure employees to accelerate deliveries by any means necessary, which includes riding on sidewalks. Fatalities are dropping amid the DoT’s “Heads Up!” safety promotions, police enforcement against speeders and drunk drivers, Transportation Alternatives’ “Biking Rules” civility campaign, and countless informal efforts by cyclists who see all too clearly the link between rogue riding and anti-bike sentiment.

Still, New York cyclists observe a destructive cultural gap in the so-called windshield perspective that makes many NYPD officers prone to give cars the benefit of the doubt while subjecting bikes to tactics ranging from neglect to borderline entrapment. Pucher cites cases where cyclists swerving to avoid illegally parked vehicles get ticketed for not using the lane. Such imbalances hardly bode well for the Citi Bike era, but it’s still early in the game.

“The bicycle is the most civilized conveyance known to man,” wrote novelist Iris Murdoch in *The Red and the Green*. “Other forms of transport grow daily more nightmarish. Only the bicycle remains pure in heart.” New York’s streets have long been more hospitable to nightmares than to purity of heart. But Washington and other cities offer valuable lessons for making room in the transportation ecosystem for Murdoch’s agile (if fragile) conveyances. **AIA**



PHOTO: WILLIAM STEWART

ATTENDEES OF THE AIA NATIONAL CONVENTION IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,” saw a city largely transformed for the better since 1991, the last time we met in our nation’s capital. There was a lot to take in, from the forest of construction cranes towering over large swaths of the city to the gleaming, light-filled convention center itself. However, as an avid cyclist, I continue to be impressed by the designated bike lanes throughout the city and the phenomenal success of Washington’s tax-supported bike-share program.

Similar initiatives are under way in New York, Boston, Denver, and Miami. Even in my own hometown of Dallas, automobile, cycling, and pedestrian cultures are working through their differences, opening up avenues for alternative modes of transport. If this is more than a passing fad, then we’re approaching a tipping point that has profound implications for a host of issues, from public health to the health of America’s car manufacturers. As a citizen, I’m interested in all of these. As an architect, I’m struck by how this may play out in urban design and placemaking, in particular what appears to be a growing reappraisal of our streets as vital elements of the public realm.

Until the advent of the automobile, streets were shared common spaces that supported the needs of a broad range of users. With certain exceptions, these were not designed spaces. They might follow a pre-existing Native American trail or, if legend can be believed, the paths favored by cows in colonial Boston.

The automobile changed that in two interrelated ways. First, cars increasingly narrowed the function of streets as shared public spaces, which previously had accommodated multiple functions, including mass transit. Signage in the public realm—one of my particular concerns—became optimized for highway speeds, not the pace of pedestrians. In the years following World War II, it was axiomatic that streets belonged to motorists. This view of the street paved the way—literally—for a disastrous legacy: the slicing and dicing of

our cities by limited-access interstate highways, the scarring of the urban fabric with surface parking lots, and the narrowing of sidewalks to feed the bottomless appetite for travel lanes and parking. Even municipal lighting was reoriented away from the pedestrian to the motorist cruising down the street.

It could have been worse. While I was in Washington, I walked over to the National Building Museum to see “Unbuilt Washington,” an exhibition of design proposals that never saw the light of day. One of the most incredible was a 1946 scheme to run freeways on both sides of the Mall. Residents and visitors eager to experience the landmarks of our democracy would have been relegated to tunnels to gain access to the vast lawn stretching between the Capitol and the Washington Monument. That this now seems outrageous is an indication of a welcome change in our perspective.

As the role of the automobile in designing our communities is increasingly challenged, architects have an opportunity to lead the way in reconsidering the possibilities of shared public spaces. This is not a special plea for those on bikes; it’s a call to our profession to consider an emerging body of clients who need the integrative skills of architects sensitive to how the parts of healthy communities hang together, including the experience we have in going from one place to another.

To get the message out that livability is a design issue, the AIA is the proud sponsor of “The Cities Project,” a National Public Radio series on city life and urban issues. Tune in because people (and your clients) will be talking about it. The future of our cities is tied to our investment in them today and the design thinking of architects, as the NPR series will underscore, is integral to its success. **AIA**

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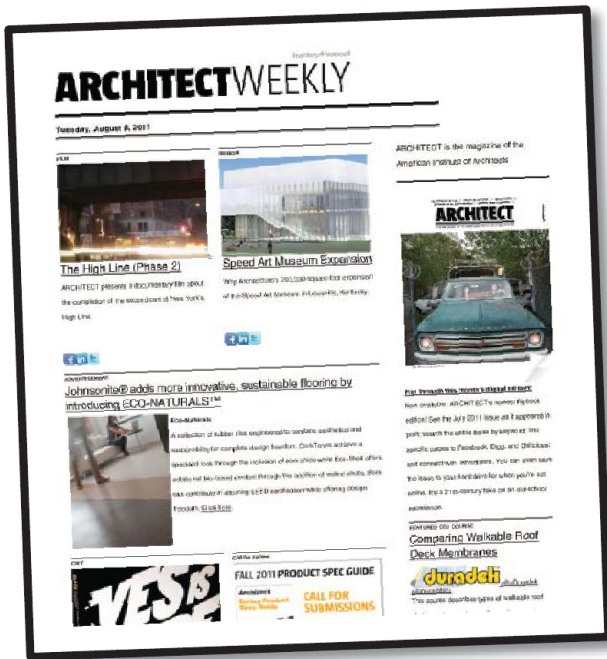
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construction over masonry. **1909** Plan of Chicago published, inspired by Haussmann's Paris. **1910** In the First Great Migration, which lasts until

by Gordon Douglas » As the geographer and urbanist Edward Soja wrote in 2000, “Something extraordinary happened to cities in the late 20th century.” This is one of the simpler statements ever penned by the usually verbose theorist, yet it still says a mouthful. The city of today—especially the “Western” city, the city of the global north, the city of advanced capitalism, the American city—is unique in history for its diversity, its size, its complexity, its interconnectivity, its unevenness, and its unwieldiness. But in other ways, the city appears to be turning toward (or rediscovering) a way of making and remaking itself that is on some counts rather instinctive, quaint, and even traditional. People are doing it themselves, informally and spontaneously—whether as needed or simply as inspiration strikes. People are installing fanciful and functional infrastructure which is intended to improve everyday life, firms are developing projects in underutilized spaces to make contributions even when there is no client, and community groups are taking neighborhood planning into their own hands.

From what social and spatial context does the current trend toward an informal, spontaneous, and do-it-yourself (DIY) urbanism emerge? And what, in turn, does this trend say about the American city?

The concept of informal design is fairly recent, and imperfect at that. We are creatures who transform our surroundings, and the formality with which we build our environment is relative. As recently as a couple of centuries ago, the Western city was still largely the popular bricolage it had always been. It featured a considerable amount of top-down design, as even ancient cities had, but was constructed day-in and day-out by its inhabitants as a specific need arose, right down to a good deal of the architecture and streetscaping. It was largely during the 18th and 19th centuries that the shaping of the urban built environment became increasingly formalized and professionalized, in keeping with the wider standardization that came with the enlightenment, modernity, and industrialization. From the planning efforts of John Nash, Baron Haussmann, and Frederick Law Olmsted in the 19th century, to the widespread adoption of building and zoning codes, to the introduction of Le Corbusier's

1906 Great San Francisco

DO-IT-YOURSELF URBAN DESIGN IN THE HEART OF YOURSELF

modernism, and then to the development of broken windows theory, by the 20th century Western cities were not only master-planned but tightly controlled and regulated, right down to the streets and sidewalks—to be altered only by professionals.

There were exceptions: Graffiti persisted, as did the operation of informal commercial spaces and the construction of illegal shelter. So too did small-scale, local beautification efforts, and the time-honored (now often legally required) practice of clearing the public sidewalk in front of your home or business. But on the whole, we stopped thinking of the urban environment as open to popular reinterpretation. It is now remarkable to most people that someone might apply their design skills to create a functional infrastructural improvement outside of the formal process, such as painting a bike lane where the city hasn't bothered, converting a derelict phone booth into a book exchange, fostering community and engagement through a whimsical public installation, or building a project whose only client is the common good.

This trend of spontaneous interventions has arisen in just a couple of decades. So where did it come from?

These interventions do have deeply rooted historical antecedents, though the most obvious precursors have only been a part of urban life in recognizable forms for the last half-century. For example, the first academic program in urban design was founded (at Harvard, in 1960) and that the discipline has become an issue of social concern (Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities* a year later).

Critical site-specific interventions were pioneered by the Situationists in the 1960s. Related so-called culture-jamming practices, from guerrilla theater to flash mobs, have since become common in art and activism. Graffiti-writing emerged alongside hip-hop in Philadelphia and New York, then diversified globally in the form of urban street art by the mid-1990s.

The projects that we call “spontaneous interventions” came about in step with these other movements. Gordon Matta-Clark's seminal *Anarchitecture* projects of the early 1970s (including an early pop-up restaurant in SoHo) embraced Situationist and deconstructionist ideals in altering existing urban structures. Guerrilla gardening first appeared in 1973 along with squatting

1930, 1.6 million blacks leave the rural South for the industrialized Northeast and Midwest. **1911** Triangle Shirtwaist Fire prompts activists to fight for improved working conditions and building



and other place-based strategies that were used to resist development in New York's Lower East Side. The installation of public seating and repurposing of infrastructure such as fire hydrants derive in part from informal urban spatial experiments of the late 1960s as well as public and interventionist art in the 1960s and 1970s. And they are even more connected to the street art installations and “place hacking” that have arisen in the last decade. Other standout examples—including faux-official signage, street improvements, and aspirational development strategies—appear even more recently.¹

Given that these forebears of informal design developed in close temporal proximity, we ought then to look to the several decades of urban processes and cultural shifts with which they coincided and from which they emerged. With their origins in the late 1960s and 1970s, and their own boom in just the last two decades, spontaneous interventions may be a reaction to the formalized process of urbanism itself, and they may be the unexpected byproducts of post-industrialism, globalism, or neoliberalism.

Whichever of those terms you decide to use, the world did enter a new political and economic phase beginning with the “long crisis” of global restructuring in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Following the age



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of industrialization and Keynesian regulation, as well as—especially in the United States—the postwar boom of Fordist manufacturing and suburbanization, the world's advanced economies responded to globalization with massive economic diversification, deindustrialization, and deregulation.² These had dramatic impacts on the spatial organization of cities. (The city is, after all, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, “a projection of society on the ground.”)³

What scholars Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore have called the “neoliberalization” of the city, which has been dominant since the 1970s, amounts to state disinvestment and an unflinchingly market-based regulatory environment that “strives to intensify commodification in all realms of social life” and essentially opens urban development to the whims of capital.⁴ The result is a general intensification of unevenness across urban space—a help-yourself city in which one area might see the spoils of global finance and urban renewal while another sees utter neglect.⁵ Considering these circumstances, a trend toward do-it-yourself urban improvement seems a pretty reasonable response.

Whimsical installations, spontaneous beautification, creative adaptations, and street improvements are reactions to the abandonment, neglect, hyper-commodification, or overdevelopment of other spaces.

Indeed, we might note that the rise of spontaneous interventions has occurred not only in tandem with cold, spatial exploitations, but in the more fitting company of the democratization of urban design as a social concern. Talk of how the city can and should function with regard to more livable, locally sensitive, human- or people-centric architecture and planning has become a popular meme. This is being increasingly formalized through everything from historic preservation and local consumption movements to corporate-sponsored community gardens and the (very official) pedestrianization of Times Square. But is there something special about informality itself?

Spontaneous interventions reflect a reaction to the formalism of the city. Over the past century, the rise of industrial manufacturing, mass culture, and mechanical reproduction (and the accompanying decline of small-scale craft production) yielded a strong desire for customization—everything from rolled-up shirt-sleeves, detailed hot rods, and bedazzled electronics to the impassioned personalization of our dwellings, our bodies, and our online presentations of self. Now, the formality and control of the city itself may lead its inhabitants to seek opportunities for personal expression. Michel de Certeau wrote, “If in discourse the city serves as a totalizing and almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies, urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded.” Despite the control of the state, elites, and capital, “the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside

1914 First electric traffic signal, installed in Salt Lake City, Utah. 1916 New York City adopts nation's first comprehensive zoning ordinance. 1916 Earliest indoor mall opens in





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the reach of panoptic power. ... The ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer.”⁶

It's not surprising that the informal alteration of urban space is as old as cities themselves. Nor is it surprising that, even in the face of considerable centralization of control, everyday folks and professional designers alike are making alterations outside the system. Perhaps spontaneous interventions are the unregulated freedom of the everyday urbanite. One man's telephone

booth is another's book exchange; a signpost is the support for a chair; a billboard is a canvas. Streets and underpasses, civic plazas and undeveloped lots—opportunities all. As media and popular culture scholar John Fiske so poignantly quipped, “People can, and do, tear their jeans.”⁷ In some sense, in a bold, unabashed, and perhaps surprisingly unrevolutionary way, spontaneous interventions begin to sound a lot like sociologist Henri Lefebvre's ideas of “the right to the city,” “autogestion,” and “moments.”

But if spontaneous interventions are reactions to the state of the contemporary city, are they not in some ways contributors to it too? Certainly they do have impacts, or at least they hope to. Certainly they are products of many skilled designers, architects, artists, and other members of the so-called creative class, often working in places from which they may not originally hail. Might these design interventions, intended for the common good, also contribute to an uneven development, just like

official improvements? Could the very arrival of these actions (and their creators) pre-empt or even encourage gentrification in some places, and be viewed as quite unwelcome in others? Connecting individual interventions to changes in property values, median monthly rents, or the displacement of particular groups is a tall order.

But whether they happen to be formal or informal, bike lanes, benches, gardens, and anything considered creative, trendy, and helpful is likely to do more good than harm to a neighborhood's appeal. But one person's right to improve his or her surroundings may present a potential infringement upon another's “right to stay put.”⁸ Neoliberal conditions, including uneven development, make space for spontaneous interventions, but it may also be the case that some spontaneous interventions enable and contribute to the continuation of those conditions.

In the final accounting, this may be too harsh. At the very least, it is premature, and it is important to be mindful of the complexities of these situations. But the possibility that the interventions might reinforce the world they are trying to change need not take away from the value and incredible potential that is inherent in the simple act of taking urban improvement into one's own hands. This is no small step to take. If the medium is the message, informal urbanism speaks volumes.

The phenomenon of DIY urbanism poses a fairly explicit challenge to basic assumptions about who owns, controls, designs, pays for, and makes particular spaces or types of spaces. It questions the very formality of the city and its logic of unregulated and uneven

Duluth, Minn. 1917 U.S. Supreme Court makes zoning by race illegal. 1917

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investment, and it questions the very wisdom of going through formal channels to affect local change. The movement toward informal, spontaneous, DIY urbanism suggests a more malleable, democratic, and dynamic city. This is truly the oeuvre Lefebvre described. It is the collective work of us all.

NOTES

1. I draw many of these specific details on informal designers from my ongoing research on do-it-yourself (DIY) urban design across several contexts, including my academic work on the subject at the University of Chicago. Please see seedyurbandesign.com for more.

2. The list of urbanists who explore and debate these concepts is a long one, including Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, Saskia Sassen, Alan Scott, and William Julius Wilson. But in particular, see Edward Soja's work for a trenchant summary and analysis, *Postmetropolis*:

National War Garden Commission established to promote cultivation of food on private and public land. **1920** 54 million Americans live in cities. Prohibition of alcohol sparks

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Critical Studies in Cities and Regions (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

3. Henri Lefebvre's 1968 essay "The Right to the City," in Kofman & Lebas, eds., *Writings on Cities* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1996), p. 109. According to Lefebvre, in the bourgeois capitalist epoch, the city represents (even embodies) the ideology of capitalism and of organized consumption; in the next stage, what has been called neoliberalism, it is at risk of becoming "exchange value in its pure state" (p 115).

4. See Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore, "After Neoliberalization?" in *Globalizations*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2010), p. 310. Although the phrase is now being thrown around on a scale to match that of "globalization" a decade ago, neoliberalism has powerful descriptive value for framing many of the most urgent issues that cities—or rather, citizens—are facing today. While the argument has been made that the era of unregulated free-market capitalism came to an end, at least ideologically and politically, with the economic crisis of 2008, this perspective seems shortsighted. It has certainly not proven true in the reality of America's cities, where inequality, commodification, gentrification, and uneven development show no signs of disappearing.

5. On uneven development, see Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1984). Also, on the so-called "Keno-capitalism" of postmodern urban space, see Michael Dear & Steven Flusty "Postmodern Urbanism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 88, no. 1 (1996).

6. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. trans., S. Rendall (Berkeley, Calif., and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 96.

7. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 26.

8. Chester Hartman, "The Right to Stay Put," in Geisler & Popper, eds., *Land Reform, American Style* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984).

urban crime wave. **1921** Germany builds world's first express highway. **1924** Le Corbusier

proposes

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AMERICAN CITY INTERRUPTED: WHAT SPONTANEOUS INTERVENTIONS CAN TEACH US ABOUT TAKING BACK THE CITY

restricts number of immigrants from any one country. 1925 Air conditioning becomes

commonplace in movie theaters. First television signal transmitted. Santa Barbara, Calif., enacts first seismic building code in U.S. following

by Toni L. Griffin » Fifty-one years after the publication of Jane Jacobs's seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, our nation is still marked by a portfolio of "legacy cities"—a recently adopted term-of-art developed by the American Assembly at Columbia University to describe the phenomenon of American cities that have been losing population, increasing the area of unproductive land, and retaining a high majority of the region's poor, unemployed, and undereducated citizens.

The current conditions of these cities can be traced directly back to many of the urban policies of the last century—policies that allowed regional sprawl to decentralize the urban core, leaving behind underutilized and crumbling infrastructure, antiquated and inflexible land-use regulations that discourage innovation, and concentrations of generational poverty resulting in weakened civic capacity. There is no better illustration of our collective desensitization to this condition than the country's nonchalant reaction to Detroit's dramatic 25 percent population loss over the last decade, and the suggestion that, for some cities, "death" may be a more viable option than "life."

We must reject the notion that American cities of this type cannot become productive and competitive places to live, work, and play again. After all, Detroit is still a city of 713,000 residents, including families with children. What would become of them if death were chosen over life? Instead, this condition should inspire us as designers and planners to take on the task of reinventing the American city—reprogramming its function, redesigning its urban form and architecture, and identifying and legitimizing a new and expanded range of protagonists with the authority to act. The resurgence of our legacy cities and the neighborhoods within them depends on a willingness to embrace certain strategies: innovative infrastructure technologies that reduce the spatial and social divides between race and opportunity; limits on urban growth with amended standards for permanent and transitional urban density; revised zoning that allows for more ingenuity in urban planning, building design, and ecological restoration; and new models of leadership and cooperation that facilitate a shared vision for the more productive and sustainable utilization of land and labor.

The Boom and Bust of the American City

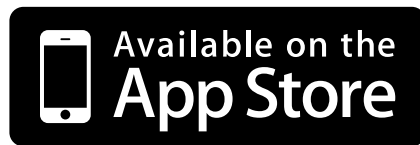
Issues of equity, inclusion, race, justice, access, and connection are still unresolved in many American communities, leaving a context of urban landscapes where the work of uplifting people and place remains a large task. These issues have created a series of marginalizing conditions that continue to have a devastating impact on civic identity and participation, household wealth and health, and social equity and justice. The impacts of regional sprawl, urban abandonment, race and class segregation, and economic, spatial, social, and civic isolation have been well

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documented as explanations for the depressed conditions of our legacy cities today.

So, how did we get here? Several American cities saw the beginning of their population growth fueled by the Great Migration, the period between 1916 and 1930 where nearly 6 million African Americans migrated from the rural south to the industrialized cities of the north. The rail- and automobile-production industries offered these migrants unprecedented opportunities and freedoms to earn a living wage. Automobile pioneer Henry Ford's revolutionary "five-dollar day," together with the five-day work week, provided the average worker, one with a high school education or less, the ability

Industrialism, Urbanization, and the Great Migration

6.3 earthquake. **1926** Mass transit ridership in Chicago peaks. **Walter Gropius designs Bauhaus Dessau.** **1928** Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) founded.

to afford a piece of the American dream—a car and a single-family home in a neighborhood with local schools, churches, play areas, and shopping.

In some industrial cities, the Great Migration propelled municipalities to expand through the annexation of neighboring towns, creating more space for housing. In other industrial cities, there were fewer options for geographic expansion, which rapidly resulted in overcrowding and the deterioration of infrastructure. As production technologies advanced, the regions around these overcrowded cities expanded to keep up with the pace of industrial innovation and growth.

But as we now know, in many cases this regional urbanization ultimately came at the expense of the city. In 1955, Detroit held over 55 percent of its regional population, while today it retains only 15 percent. Simultaneously, issues of race and class became more spatialized as greater mobility in housing choice also meant furthering the preference for racial separation, a dynamic that remains very present in today's regional geography. These trends were in part facilitated by a series of urban programs and practices implemented between 1933 and 1956 that offered the first opportunities for class ascension and a better quality of life outside of the congested city.

Two such programs are of particular note. The first, the Housing Act of 1949, allowed returning war veterans, among others, to purchase homes in the less-congested suburbs, while the lending practice of redlining between 1934 and 1968 and the restrictive covenants of the 1960s had the effect of keeping people of color rooted in increasingly under-resourced neighborhoods. In more recent times, the aftermath of the subprime lending crisis of 2004–2007 (the lending tactics of which were often



Pittsburgh steel mill, 1906



African-American workers find employment in northern industrial cities.



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especially predatory towards low-income households) has created a new portfolio of undervalued neighborhoods by adding unprecedented numbers of foreclosed properties to the housing market.

Similar to the correlation between housing access and abandonment, the growth of the suburbs had led to the creation of suburban shopping centers and malls which, in turn, precipitated the decline of the historic retail spaces of downtown main streets and neighborhood centers.

The second program, the Federal Highways Act of 1956, facilitated even greater mobility of people and goods, meaning that people could live outside of the city and commute to jobs anywhere in the region. This

Federal Policies

1933 The New Deal

1949 Housing Act

1956 Federal Transportation Act

First car-oriented shopping mall, in Ohio. **1929** Stock market crash launches Great Depression. Ludwig Mies van

lessened the dependence on the city for concentrated dwelling, production, and jobs. Henry Ford was either prescient—or, some might argue, an instigator—by arguing, as early as 1925, that industrial production did not require spatial concentration.¹

It is important to note that running parallel to these place-based interventions were significant social movements involving education (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954) and civil liberties (the Civil Rights Act of 1964) that were aimed at dismantling the 1876 Jim Crow laws that enforced “separate but equal.” However, despite the best intentions and positive outcomes of these important public policy reforms, many citizens of color in legacy cities remain in segregated isolation today.

Suburban Boom

Levittown, Long Island, N.Y., c. 1950

Urban Bust

Demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, St. Louis, Mo., 1972

der Rohe finishes Barcelona Pavilion. **1930** Delano & Aldrich's U.S. Pavilion for Venice Biennale opens. Chrysler Building completed.





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AMERICAN CITY INTERLUDE

Can Designers and Spontaneous Interventions Help to Reinvent the American City?

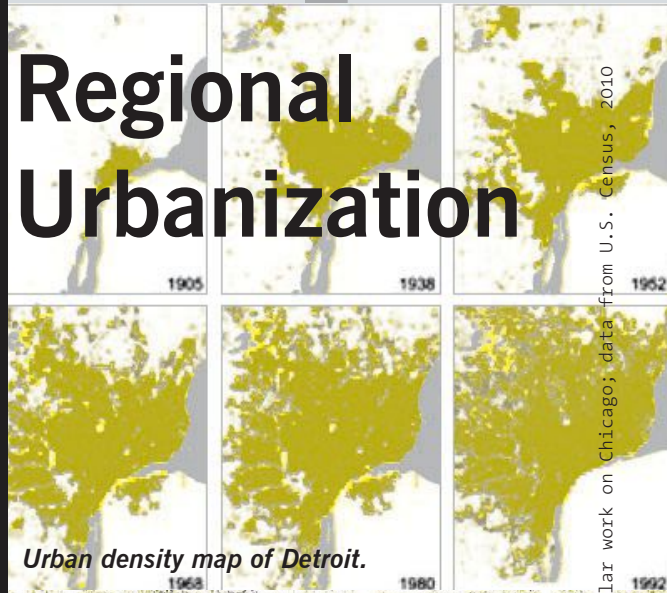
Try though they may, legacy cities have not found solutions able to lift up city and citizen alike. Population loss, economic decline, and property abandonment all contribute to a growing supply of vacant urban spaces that are becoming canvases for spontaneous interventions. The depreciation of public sector resources and the urgency of maintaining neighborhood health and safety compels community organizations, designers, and local residents to step in as the new agents of change, introducing innovative practices that require fewer resources and permissions from “top-down” authorities.

These trends suggest an opportunity for integrating new design innovations into public policy that are aimed at remediating longstanding structural inequalities and progressing toward a more just and inclusive city. Harvard professor Susan Fainstein suggests that the principle components of urban justice are equity, diversity, and democracy.² The concept of a just city has been at the forefront of national debate as various ad hoc communities are rising up to “occupy” public space in protest against the uneven allocation of wealth and power, reward and respect. University of Washington professor Sharon E. Sutton observes, “[In] the last half century, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in personal freedom, mobility, individual rights, and the reorienting of culture around individual needs. While this loosening of restraints on individuals has had many positive outcomes, it has simultaneously led privileged Americans to lose sight of struggling together in a hard country.”³

As designers, we must acknowledge that the “places of marginality” and the “places of opportunity” are one and the same.⁴ As Americans struggle together in the challenged conditions of legacy cities, their efforts give us an opportunity to consider how their innovation and entrepreneurialism are helping to make cities more just. Since some traditional, top-down public policy programs clearly further the spatialization of economic and social inequities in our cities, what might the trend of these less formal initiatives teach us about a more balanced distribution of access, power, and inclusion? We must accept the fact that literally left behind in these cities are too often our most marginalized populations, the very folks who are disadvantaged by a lack of equity, access, and justice. When we create interventions in these communities, some of which are already experiencing gentrification, we should be thinking about how our

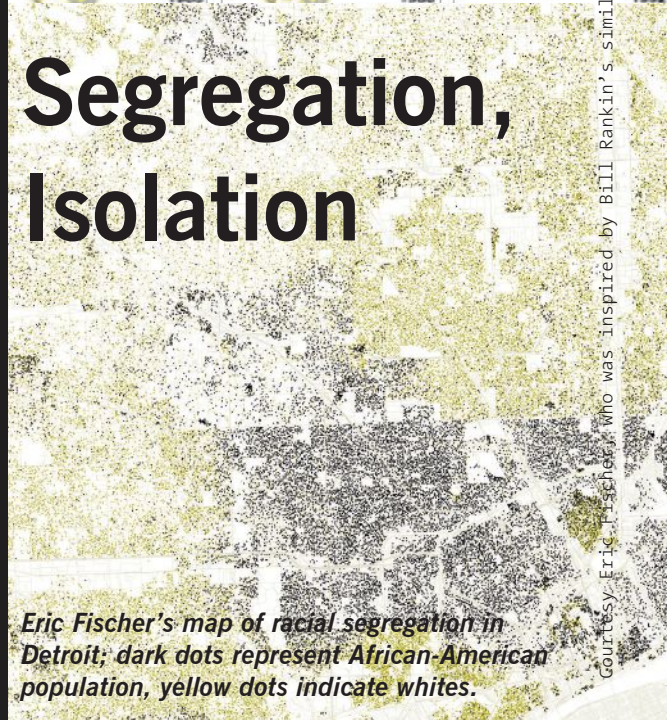
1931 Empire State Building completed. World population approaches 2 billion. 1932 Bonus Army of WWI veterans occupies Washington, D.C. One in four

Regional Urbanization



Urban density map of Detroit.

Segregation, Isolation



Eric Fischer's map of racial segregation in Detroit; dark dots represent African-American population, yellow dots indicate whites.

Courtesy Eric Fischer, who was inspired by Bill Rankin's similar work on Chicago; data from U.S. Census, 2010

American workers is unemployed. Rise of “Hooverville” homeless camps.



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AMERICAN CITY INTERVENTIONS

work can expose the underlying inequalities of isolation and about how we might help to raise the awareness and capacity of long-time residents to be their own change agents and participate effectively alongside other actors.

If we begin to embrace design as not only an outcome but also as a process by which the physical designer (architect, planner, or other professional) and cultural designer (resident, community activist, social entrepreneur, or other participant) can engage and build capacity through a spontaneous intervention, then we might use this work to inform and alter the ways that design and community development are regulated, subsidized, and effectively deployed in the future. Physical designers have the ability to create outcomes and develop innovative processes that accommodate cultural differences and multiple, changing uses and users. Cultural designers, who are an even broader range of change agents, have the potential to create innovations in participation that bring new and underrepresented voices to the table where design is happening and decisions are being made. For example, the untapped skills and ingenuity of low-income residents can be harnessed via entrepreneurial ventures that take advantage of new crowd-funding networks. These ventures can, in turn, promote leadership development that identifies and educates young people so that they become involved in the process and ultimately sustain the community.

As designers are empowered to further develop these ideas, our public policymakers must seriously examine what can be learned from the trend of spontaneous interventions and the people and organizations producing them. If these informal contributions were formally authorized and properly resourced as effective strategies to help redefine the American city, rather than only temporary installations

International Style exhibit at Museum of Modern Art introduces U.S. to modern architecture. **1933** Roosevelt

to help bring greater safety, stability, and civic activism to improve blighted communities, might they do more to inform permanent strategies for neighborhood revitalization, zoning, community development, and long-term civic capacity building?

Let us take a close and thoughtful look at this spontaneous body of work and recognize its contributions toward keeping our cities “alive” and the promise it might hold for transforming design and city planning practices as well as uplifting the values of access, equity, and inclusion that should be deeply embedded in our policymaking.



Spaces for Spontaneous Interventions



American Midwest prompts mass migration. **1935** Frank Lloyd Wright



launches New Deal recovery programs. Dust Bowl in

1. Charles Waldheim, *CASE: Hilberseimer/Mies Van Der Rohe: Lafayette Park Detroit* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), p. 21.

2. Susan Fainstein, *The Just City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 5.

3. Sharon E. Sutton, “Creating Landscapes of Safety,” in Nan Ellin, editor, *Architecture of Fear* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p. 249.

4. Sharon E. Sutton and Susan P. Kemp, “Introduction: Place as Marginality and Possibility,” in Sutton and Kemp, editors, *The Paradox of Urban Space: Inequality and Transformation in the Marginalized Communities* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4-5.

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A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN POP-UPS

and slum clearance. Mies and Gropius emigrate to

U.S. as Hitler labels modern art

unveils Broadacre City. First parking meters in U.S., in Oklahoma City. **1937** U.S. Housing Act appropriates \$500 million for low-income housing

by D. Grahame Shane » Cities have always contained flexible, temporary elements that allow for special events, emergencies, wars, disasters, or mass migrations. What distinguishes American urbanism is the speed with which a modern, industrial metropolis like Chicago, New York, or Detroit could pop-up and then shrink, or even disappear. Indeed, the history of American urbanism can be understood as a history of pop-ups at different scales. » The relatively small population of the continent and ease of migration within a single large country have meant that Americans are perpetually on the move, relocating, on average, once every seven years. American cities have grown and shrunk with each shift in government or commercial policy favoring shipping, canals, railways, roads, airways, or airwaves. The public space of the nation seems to be constantly morphing, with ghost towns and dead malls littering the continent.

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A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN POP-UPS

Americans have always had to adjust at a personal level to these shifts, seeking communal solutions to common problems through associations of various kinds based on particular issues. This self-help, do-it-yourself, communal tradition, often shielded by labor, academic, or religious freedoms, provided the background to such grassroots efforts as the Civil Rights, anti-war, and pro-democracy movements of the 1960s and 1970s. At Woodstock, the pop-up instant city, rock-and-roll provided the anthems for the nomadic youth culture of the period. Meanwhile, the streets and squares of San Francisco and other metropolises were the stage for marches and public protests.

The political pop-ups of the 1960s sought to address the faults of the emerging consumer society of the 1950s, itself a pop-up culture fueled by the excess industrial capacity and oil production created by the previous decade's war effort. During World War II, workers in Seattle lived in mobile homes around new aircraft factories and shopped at temporary, wood-framed, prototype shopping malls. Young architects such as Victor Gruen, who designed many of these open-air mini-malls, went on to develop this new type of public space across America. Wood-framed buildings housed the first McDonald's on the commercial strips that popped up to serve the massive industrial production line housing tracts, like the 440,000-acre Levittown built between 1947 and 1951 on Long Island, N.Y. (near a Grumman aircraft factory). Forty million Americans moved to these pop-up, timber-framed suburbs in just 15 years, and then they kept moving further and further out along expanding highway systems, draining the inner city of tax revenue, jobs, and industry.

In 1961, French geographer Jean Gottmann described the suburban-dream pop-up of the American East Coast as one of the wonders of the world, a "megalopolis" stretching 400 miles from Boston to Washington, D.C., where 32 million people lived in peace, with a higher standard of living than ever before. Subsequent urban riots and pop-up political events of the late 1960s made Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)—a call for an alternative to urban renewal and the demolition of inner cities—seem the more prescient vision. Jacobs wrote as artists' studios popped into the vacant industrial loft spaces of SoHo, in the path of Robert Moses's proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway. Hidden behind darkened windows to conceal illegal living, a new culture popped up with love-ins, be-ins, performance artists, and Beat poets, only to be commercialized in Andy Warhol's Factory, a shrine to another meaning of "Pop." Developers soon learned to capitalize on this arts-led pop-up development trend, following urban pioneers as they opened new galleries, restaurants, or bars in declining low-rent industrial areas.

With the malling and fragmentation of the U.S. in carefully regulated new public spaces, a new kind of official, commercial pop-up has become the norm. Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace (1976) showed the way, with its populist historic preservation and lively mix of licensed carts and stands. The same logic is seen in temporary street closures and pop-up festivals in major cities. This movement is also evident in the resurgence

and architecture "degenerate." San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge opens. **1938** Louis Wirth publishes

study "Urbanism as a Way of Life." **1939** Street vendors pushed off streets of New York. **1940** First McDonald's opens. **1941**

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A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN POP-UP

Robert Moses proposes Lower Manhattan Expressway.

5 million blacks leave the South in

Second Great Migration, which lasts until 1970. 1943 Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles pit white servicemen against young Latinos. Eleanor Roosevelt

of pop-up farmers' markets in American streets and suburban parking lots. When the country's drive-in cinemas were decimated by the growth of television in the 1980s and 1990s, pop-ups again provided an alternative use for these swaths of asphalt—as massive flea markets. More recently, in cities like Austin, Texas, Los Angeles, and Portland, Ore., the combination of youth culture and underused inner-city parking lots has produced more trendy swap shops and hipster bazaars, as well as the gourmet food-truck craze.

As American personal mobility slowly declines due to the rising cost of gasoline, once frowned-upon inner-city locations have become attractive venues easily accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, and riders of public transportation. Public space that was once occupied by the car has become available for other citizens, as in New York, where transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan realized that eliminating parking spaces, widening sidewalks, designating bike lanes, planting trees, and issuing licenses for pop-up cafés could radically alter the street culture.

The beauty of American pop-ups is their immediacy and apparent spontaneity. But usually they are complex phenomena operating at a variety of levels, involving many participants with varied short-term and long-term strategic goals. The reallocation of public space in Times Square from vehicles to pedestrians began with temporary beach furniture and folding chairs before more permanent landscaping and benches were installed. A pop-up food park in a parking lot in Austin or Portland may serve in a mutually beneficial relationship with the bar next door; it affects the character of the city itself, every bit as does new zoning that encourages storefronts, cafés, and street life in general, or a light-rail line that supports clusters of apartment buildings, services, and workplaces around each stop. Pop-up culture offers a very different, often pedestrian- and bicycle-based vision of the American urban future.

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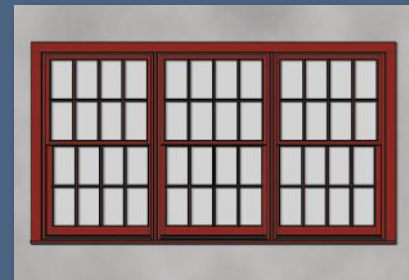
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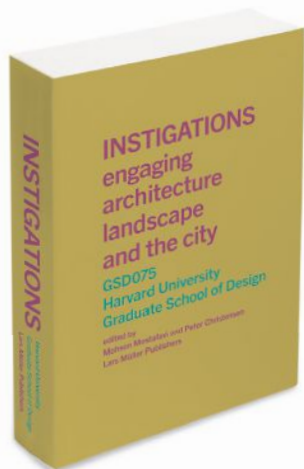
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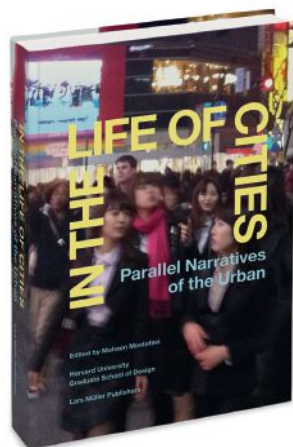
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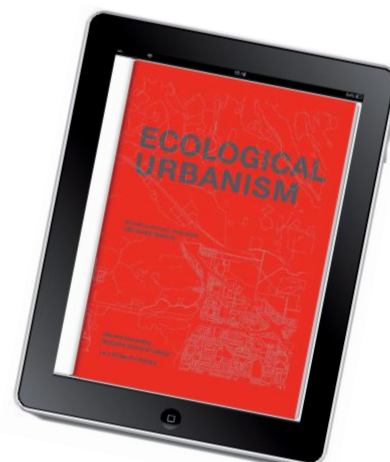
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Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



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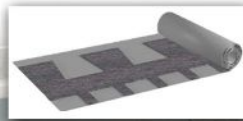


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The city is man's most consistent and, on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in after his heart's desire. But if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in remaking the city man has remade himself. »Robert Park, *On Social Control and Collective Behavior* (1967)

Spontaneous Interventions

institutes White House Victory Garden for fresh produce. CIAM's Athens Charter codifies rationalist land use

principles. **1944** G.I. Bill passes, allows 2.4 million WWII veterans to secure home mortgages. **1945**

Prologue by Michael Sorkin » In *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, Peter Linebaugh describes the act of “commoning,” the way in which nominally public space is rendered a real commons, as a creation of “people expressing a form of life to support their autonomy and subsistence needs ... taking one’s life into one’s own hands, and not waiting for crumbs to drop from the King’s table.” He argues that this key moment in the history of democracy must be understood not as *noblesse oblige* but as the expression of a vital right by those who would enjoy and exercise it. » *Spontaneous Interventions* is a record of 124 remakings of the city, each of which is a deliberate commoning, a grassroots intervention in our shared urban realm to rapidly render physical some form of a collective desire for a better life. These projects are efforts to remake ourselves by remaking the city, to assert the importance of equity, convenience, and pleasure in everyday life by addressing areas that the “system” has neglected, misunderstood, or undermined. This exhibition is a celebration not simply of the power of local initiative and creativity but an argument for the importance of inductive processes in a field dominated by the

top-down, by big power, and by frozen formulas. » Our century is an urban one: Earlier this year it was announced that the majority of the Chinese population is now living in cities, reflecting the level of urbanization of the planet as a whole. In face of this exponential and accelerating expansion of the urban realm, it often seems that the tractability of the urban environment is doomed, that we are increasingly condemned to live in the blighted forms of life embodied in slums or in the dreary and deadening uniformities of the monadic identities of the multinational lifestyle, that the system itself is beyond challenge. The power of the work assembled here is in its assertion that the project of the city is an ongoing one—never to be finished—and that the forms of both resistance and fantasy are still wide open to those who care about the fate of our commons. Although the sites may be in cities across the United States, the example of their energy, humility, practicality, and possibility offer a tonic example for people around the world who are working to invent the common ground of our freedom and urbanity. » From these green sprouts of spontaneity, a forest of liberation grows.



Mass transit ridership in U.S. peaks, declines steadily thereafter. Case Study House program commissions inexpensive architect-designed model homes. **1947** Levittown suburban

by Jason Roberts » **STOP PLANNING, START ACTING** When I was asked to write an article on the “guerrilla urbanism” movement, I hesitated because I’m neither a writer nor an urban planner. In 2010, we gathered a group of friends and created an art project called Better Block, in which we decided to create our dream neighborhood block in days, using very little money. We never envisioned the project becoming a national movement and being part of a larger trend of citizen-led efforts to rapidly transform blighted communities around the world. Prior to this, I had toured with a rock band, helped revive a historic movie

theater, and returned a streetcar system to an underserved community (long story). My partner in crime, Andrew Howard, was a planner, but left the planning world when he realized that little of what he created was being built and much of his energy was being put into drawing pretty pictures of mixed-use developments that were largely a ruse for private developers to get public funds to add value to their land acquisitions. On a European vacation, I fell in love with city blocks filled with old and young people, street music, flower shops, cafés, old buildings, and small marketplaces. When I returned to Dallas, I drove around my neighborhood and saw boarded-up and vacant buildings, wide streets, small sidewalks, and little streetlife. I commented to a friend, “Why can’t we have blocks that look like the ones throughout Europe?” He scoffed, “Let’s be honest, Dallas will never be Paris.” » That night, I began looking into what was holding my neighborhood back. I found a series of ordinances that prohibited or heavily taxed things that foster amazing urban blocks. From restrictive zoning rules, parking minimums, exorbitant fees on café seating, landscaping, and more, I learned that the ability to have a great block like those I had seen abroad was largely forbidden. » The idea to rapidly transform my neighborhood was an outcropping of the street art movement being led by Shepard Fairey and Banksy, rather than a Jane Jacobs–inspired urban planning effort. The ingredients of our project were the opposite







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proxy

San Francisco

2010–2015

A placeholder for more permanent development, proxy is a temporary two-block project that creates an ever-changing experience in a neighborhood in transition. Leasing empty lots from the city (formerly occupied by an elevated freeway), San Francisco architect Douglas Burnham has engineered a thriving destination with pop-up food stands, art installations, a beer garden, an area for food trucks, and event and retail spaces. Smartly revamped shipping containers compose **an open framework that embraces the potential of impermanence**, encouraging the rotation of new businesses and happenings. With plans for outdoor films and a farmers' market, proxy has become the focal point of its community and an inspiration to cities across the U.S. looking to maximize the potential of latent real estate.

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	11
	Problem – stalled development sites
	Solution – curate temporary uses

communities on East Coast offer alternative to cramped city living. Illinois uses eminent domain to seize property and transfer use to developers at greatly reduced value. “Urban renewal”

of those found in traditional planning: work cheaply and quickly, use temporary products, break rules, and focus on action over dialogue. The goal was simple: build our dream block in 24 hours using anything at our disposal. Artists were key, borrowing was imperative, and the potential of going to jail was likely. A group of friends and I met at night in a theater-prop warehouse and began laying out a vision for the block. Paint and clean buildings; create bike lanes; set up outdoor cafés and fruit stands; string lights across the street; convert vacant buildings to art galleries, flower shops, kids' art studios, and coffee houses; and, lastly, print out the ordinances we were going to break and hang them in every window. On a Friday night in April, we began transforming the block, and by Saturday morning the street was unveiled. » For years we had been told that Dallas didn't have the culture to embrace a walkable, urban environment, that it's too hot, people are too accustomed to driving, and no one would come. What we saw that day challenged everything we'd been told. People walked to the street, sat outside, drank coffee, and read newspapers. Flowers hung from window sills, old men played chess, children made art in former auto shops, teens pedaled in freshly painted bike lanes, residents began volunteering in our pop-up shops, and musicians appeared unexpectedly with open guitar cases and performed on street corners. The street came roaring back to life. In 24 hours and

with less than \$1,000, we built our dream block and disproved the skeptics. Most notably, we learned that a vision is fruitless without action. » The hands-on movement seen unfolding around the world is a response to the pent-up demand of those who are tired of waiting for governments, consultants, or other so-called experts to create the kind of communities we crave. Better Blocks, PARK(ing) Days, yarnbombings, guerrilla gardening, pop-up businesses, and depaving efforts are byproducts of a more social and connected community that refuses to accept the idea that “We can't be like Paris.”

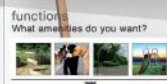
Jason Roberts is the co-founder of the Better Block project, taking blighted blocks with vacant properties and rapidly converting them into temporary walkable districts with pop-up businesses, bike lanes, café seating, and landscaping. In 2011, the American Society of Landscape Architects bestowed a National Honor Award to Team Better Block, heralding its project as “a 21st-century version of what the Chicago World's Fair did in 1893.”

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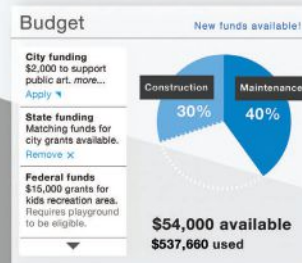


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process in Detroit begins, with goal of shoring up downtown property values by removing dilapidated housing, expanding civic infrastructure, constructing new highways. **1947** Henri Lefebvre

by Margaret Crawford » **URBAN INTERVENTIONS AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY**
Spontaneous Interventions presents merely a small sampling of the informal, improvisational urban projects that are proliferating around the world today, a number that is expanding almost exponentially. These activities represent a movement where thousands of artists, activists, architects acting outside of the profession, and many different kinds of citizens are imagining and trying to create a more humane, just, and creative city. Responding to the excitement and energy they create, observers have attempted to conceptualize the larger

implications of these projects. » Along with the proliferation of these acts of spontaneous urbanism come abundant theoretical readings. Unfortunately, many scholars and activists have imposed preexisting frameworks on these initiatives, falling back on a vocabulary of 20th century ideas rather than trying to understand what is innovative and unique about them. These conceptual misunderstandings—with actions evaluated according to tired categories, such as progressive or conservative and public or private, which have been predetermined to be good or bad—restrict a promising arena of political possibilities. Thus, offering alternative concepts that can accommodate and encourage these activities without prematurely judging them is more than an academic question—it can help shape these activities' creative potential going forward. » One important concept is rights, perhaps most commonly discussed with reference to Henri Lefebvre's idea of "the right to the city." Some critical scholars see these "rights" only as a response to the evident "wrongs" of capitalism, deriding everything from urban nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activist groups to individual DIY practices as ineffective political practices because they do not constitute a unified and coherent approach powerful enough to oppose global capitalism. » Lefebvre's concept is far more emancipatory. He saw the city as composed of two interdependent and equal elements, one consisting of the material







67 Nicholas de Monchaux

Local Code: Real Estates

San Francisco and elsewhere since 2010

When artist Gordon Matta-Clark created *Fake Estates* in New York in the early 1970s, he spent three years combing through public records to identify 15 fallow, forgotten city-owned lots. Using GIS mapping, architect Nicholas de Monchaux identified over 1,500 vacant public lots in San Francisco in a matter of months. In the U.C. Berkeley professor's eyes, when considered together, these residual, unmaintained spaces are a vast untapped resource. Using parametric design to optimize thermal and hydrological performance, he proposes a landscape design for each parcel, resulting in a **network of urban greenways that will enhance the city's ecology and benefit citizens' health**. He has extended the research to other cities, creating a database of neglected sites that could be recuperated to create robust infrastructures that could mend ecological and social circumstances.

Courtesy Nicholas de Monchaux

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
	varies
	ongoing
	varies
	Problem – need for robust and resilient urban infrastructure to support communities
	Solution – repurpose underutilized public land as green infrastructure, relieving the burden on existing infrastructure and building sustainable communities




publishes *Critique of Everyday Life*. **1949** Federal Housing Act allocates \$12.7 billion to nearly 1,000 cities across the next 25 years for slum clearance and urban redevelopment projects.

reality, the other consisting of a social reality. In specific situations, the interaction of these two elements can produce unexpected and paradoxical outcomes. This idea then highlights complexity, ambiguity, and contingency as key conditions for urban politics. And Lefebvre identified these rights from the urban subjects themselves, emphasizing human subjectivity and agency. For him, rights to the city are never predetermined but are always produced by particular groups with specific demands shaped by their circumstances. This open-ended concept acknowledges the political possibilities of a multiplicity of urban imaginaries, representations, and interventions. It empowers artists, architects, cultural activists, and ordinary citizens to become key players by inventing new practices, strategies, and tactics to claim their rights to their city and to freely project alternative possibilities for urban life. » What kinds of principles can put these rights into action? Looking at the selections in this year's U.S. Pavilion, we can start to identify urban counter-dynamics that suggest what some of these principles might be. Rather than reacting against capitalist imperatives, they respond to opportunities; as much as solving problems, they offer possibilities. This short list of principles is only a starting point for an extensive catalog of ideas. Collectively, these ideas produce a very different view of capitalism, not as the all-powerful machine that Marxist theorists describe, but more like a

tattered fabric, with many openings that can be occupied by practices that are not so much anticapitalist as they are noncapitalist. » The first opening is defamiliarization, the modernist cultural practice of "making strange." Applied to the urban environment, unlikely insertions or juxtapositions of uses can unsettle our existing perceptions of urban life and space, opening up new possibilities and invigorating the idea of what a city can be. After seeing what is a normally car-filled street instead packed with Critical Mass bicyclists or with parking spaces transformed into mini-parks on PARK(ing) Day, the city will never look the same. » Refamiliarization then inverts defamiliarization, by making urban spaces more familiar, more domestic, and more like an interior. Inserting private activities and qualities into the public realm encourages people to sit, eat, and converse in unlikely places. This can dramatically alter urban situations, making what were harsh places feel more like home. In addition, refamiliarization, by colliding two realities that are usually opposed, can itself be a form of defamiliarization. » Spatial actions can also reconfigure economic processes. Hijacking or borrowing urban spaces for unintended uses, substituting use value for exchange value, can temporarily remove land from its market context and question its status as a commodity. We have seen the appearance of multiple alternative economies: recycling, bartering, gift exchange, methods of redistributing and remaking goods, information-sharing,

Candy Chang/Civic Center I Wish This Was New Orleans and anywhere since 2010

Vacant storefronts are an urban mainstay. But while passersby may dream of what they wish would fill the void, rarely do they get any say in the matter. Combining street art and city planning, I Wish This Was is an interactive public art project that invites residents to voice their ideas about improving the neighborhood. Trained in architecture, graphic design, and urban planning, Candy Chang posts grids of blank stickers on vacant buildings so that residents can write their thoughts about future use, providing a **fun, low-barrier tool to spark civic engagement** and a way to showcase the city's collective imagination. The project was launched in New Orleans, but stickers are available online and have been appearing in cities around the world.

	information, community, economy, pleasure
	150 – 500 stickers, 20 permanent markers and poster putty
	4 weeks – posting stickers, documenting responses, adding stickers, posting responses online
	1
	Problem – disengaged public with unmet needs
	Solution – stickers for sharing desires on vacant storefronts

Civic Center/Courtesy Candy Chang

1954 Berman v. Parker upholds eminent domain. **1955** Citizens protest San Francisco Trafficways Plan, inspiring similar revolts to halt freeway construction in U.S. cities. Rosa Parks

and experiences based on generosity, usefulness, and pure play. » Finally, a new politics of collaboration underlies many of these efforts, and it is not based on preconstituted subjects or roles. Instead, the new politics involves particular groups and individuals emerging in response to highly specific circumstances, and it takes innumerable forms, ranging from crowdsourcing to intimate personal encounters. » Lefebvre proposed building “experimental utopias”—imaginings given concrete form—as the first step in acquiring rights to the city. Doing exactly that are the projects featured in *Spontaneous Interventions*, all of which are grounded in actual cities yet are expansive in their reimagining of urban life. The projects’ divergent goals, varied methods, and multifarious participants should be seen as strengths rather than weaknesses. They are openings towards a new urban politics, still to be discovered.

Margaret Crawford is a professor at the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research focuses on the evolution, uses, and meanings of urban space. She is also known for her work on “everyday urbanism,” a concept that encourages the close investigation of the specifics of daily life as the basis for urban theory and design.







by Nato Thompson » **SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART IS A MESS WORTH MAKING** If there is confusion regarding what constitutes art in the emerging realm of socially engaged art, that is understandable. As not only artists, but architects, city planners, grassroots organizers, environmentalists, graphic designers, and many others grab at the numerous tool sets made available through the arts, we find ourselves in a jumbled realm where the descriptions of what things are seem to be turned around. As many artists in contemporary art have begun to turn their attention toward that thing we call the social, we find that, as a matter of necessity,

QR_Hobo_Codes

Pittsburgh and anywhere
since 2011

The informal code that vagabonds developed in the 19th century to offer warnings and help each other cope with the uncertainties of nomadic life inspired the QR_Hobo_Codes project by Free Art and Technology (F.A.T.) Lab, a Pittsburgh-based research network devoted to enriching the public domain through the development of creative technologies and media. F.A.T. Lab created 100 QR codes (freely downloadable lasercut-ready stencils) to provide advice and warnings to modern-day digital nomads. Codes include “vegans beware,” “hidden cameras,” and “those aren’t women.” QR_Hobo_Codes is one in a suite of what F.A.T. calls its “homebrew infoviz graffiti tools for locative and situated information display.”

Courtesy F.A.T. Lab

	information, accessibility, community
	20
	4 days
	2
	Problem – need for urban guidance
	Solution – covert advice and warnings for modern-day digital nomads

defies segregation in Montgomery, Ala. **1956** Federal-Aid Highway Act authorizes construction of 5,000 miles of urban freeways and 41,000 miles of interstate freeways. **1958** Mies

they must borrow equally from disciplines in order to make their work more effective. » Let's take an example. The artist Rick Lowe has made an intricate piece that is instructive in demonstrating the complexity we are talking about here. His work, located in Houston's Third Ward, is called Project Row Houses. It is a series of shotgun row houses that he purchased in a low-income, predominately African-American neighborhood. Over the course of 15 years, Lowe has slowly developed an artist residency and resource program that has inspired the neighborhood to converse with visiting artists, and vice versa. Project Row House then, in essence, is a long-term, socially engaged artwork that works across city agencies to provide much-needed cultural resources from the bottom up. At the same time, it conflates many traditional ideas of what constitutes an art practice because of its (at times) utilitarian nature, its entanglement with economics, and its hands-on approach to issues of poverty and race that are a central part of the American story. (Project Row Houses is an important progenitor of two more-recent projects featured in *Spontaneous Interventions*: Power House by Design 99 in Detroit and 1415 by Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation in St. Louis.) » This is the kind of artwork that makes cynics roll their eyes, because they feel that it limits what is often described as “the autonomy of art.” Referencing the pioneering beliefs of skeptics such as Theodor Adorno,

they often voice a concern that this kind of work is neither good politics nor good art. Such critiques should be expected, for socially engaged artwork certainly does defy one of art's most longstanding principles: uselessness. » But let's not assume that we know what art is. Whether or not we agree with this mode of working—a mode we could summarize as people working with culture in the realm of the social—you should understand that this kind of engagement is a growing, global phenomenon. Putting their heads in the sand will not save the critics from the inevitable tide of cultural producers who are frustrated with art's impotence and who are eager to make a tangible change in the world. What scares these artists more than art losing its supposed autonomy is the possibility that the world will keep going the way it is. » This is muddy territory. Escaping the rules of formalism, social works must encounter the complicated terrain of people—in all of their complexity. From language to sociology, from pedagogy to urban planning, the skill sets needed for this way of working are vast, while rigor is understandably lacking. What are the criteria for a successful socially engaged artwork? Who is the work for? What does it do? Are aesthetics even a consideration? » Instead of trying to lump all of this work into one large pile, it might be helpful to see the works as more of a range of affinities of methods. In grabbing skill sets from numerous disciplines, what truly binds socially engaged



van der Rohe's Seagram Building, with its urban plaza, becomes model for skyscrapers. **1959** Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum completed. First formal academic program in

artwork together is more of an ecology of affinities that spreads out like a web. Some works might be more poetic and focus on intimate personal encounters. Some works thrive in the public sphere. Some works attempt to tackle policy and thus encounter the limitations and compromises that come from interacting with government. Some works are participatory; some are not. There is a wide array of methods as the realm of the social and the cultural continues to encompass a preponderance of what we consider our everyday life. » The mistake is to think of this as a trend. This is not a trend. It is more a reflection of the evolving nature of making meaning in the built environment. Even more than making art, artists want to make meaning. In order to do that, radically new methods are being produced that push across the social and into the sphere of lived existence. This is not simply the work of artists, but also the work of marketers, politicians, and communications industries all of whom are eager to gain our attention. In the war for meaning, people from every discipline have something at stake in finding the right way to reach and produce the civic.

Nato Thompson is a curator at the New York-based public arts institution Creative Time. His most recent exhibition was *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. Previously, at MASS MoCA, he curated *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere* (2004).

by Michael Sorkin » **OCCUPYING WALL STREET**

The choice of Zuccotti Park for the occupation of Wall Street was a canny one. Compact dimensions assured that the threshold for a critical mass was tractably scaled. The location in the belly of the beast was apposite for a spectacle of equality encamped on the field of insane privilege. A site across the street from ground zero, which was rapidly being developed as a zone of constricted speech and wanton surveillance, it made a crucial point about free assembly. And the anomaly of the park's strange, if increasingly typical, public-private "partnership" was paradoxically enabling. Zuccotti was legally







Team Better Block

Better Block

Dallas and elsewhere since 2010

What makes some city streets thrive, while mere blocks away, others flounder? Activists Jason Roberts and Andrew Howard in Dallas wanted some answers, so in 2010, they transformed a blighted street for 24 hours—adding bike lanes, sidewalk cafés, food stalls, and other amenities. A Better Block was born. These “living charrettes” demonstrate that obsolete zoning or commerce restrictions often pose obstacles to such things as outdoor seating or music, and they **encourage communities to actively participate in the shaping of their own neighborhoods**. City officials are now recognizing Better Block as a useful tool for showing potential economic development. In the past two years, 32 Better Blocks have been realized across the U.S. by the original team (commissioned by some city agencies) and by independent community groups.

Courtesy Jason Roberts

	accessibility, community, economy
	2,500
	60 days – 30 research and outreach, 20 logistics and publicity, 8 space preparation, 2 installation
	20
	Problem – dreary blocks
	Solution – community-led overhaul of public streets

urban design, at Harvard University. **1961** Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* critiques modernist planning and advocates preservation of dense, mixed-use neighborhoods.

in a state of exception from the time, place, and manner of restrictions typical of municipal parks, which permitted it to be occupied around the clock. » As has been widely observed, the spatial organization of the occupation was itself a model of urbanism, balancing communal and individual desires under a regime of extreme neighborliness. The encampment was zoned with its alimentary, educational, sanitary, consultative, recreational, and media districts, its avenues of passage, and its sleeping and resting areas. It confronted issues of citizenship and crime, evolved styles of cooperation and cohabitation that were singular and precise, and devised fresh forms of communication and governance. The nature of its bounding membrane and relations to its friendly and hostile periphery were subject to both spontaneity and institutionalization. » And the occupation powerfully evoked another form of urbanism, the “informal” settlements that are home to more than a quarter of the world’s population and the most extreme manifestation of inequality at the urban scale. The encampment at Zuccotti Park reproduced, albeit in theatric and ephemeral style, many qualities of these despairing but often intensely organized places, illustrating struggles focused on property and legality, lack of essential services, impossible levels of overcrowding, the need for local economic organization based on scarcity of jobs and resources, tense relations with the authorities, and a gamut of the social and physical

architectures of threatening impermanence. » Whatever its broader agendas and affinities—and notwithstanding the critique of the fluid specifics of its political demands—it is clear that the occupations of 2011 and the movements of the Arab Spring, the Indignados, and the others that they inspired were part of a long history, not simply of remonstrances at urban scale, but of events enabled by the special political character of urban space. The idea that a social manifestation might not simply take place in a city but might actually *create* a city is an ordinary vector for mass gathering, and there is a special power that flows from occupying the city as we know it with another city, the city as we’d like it to be. This practice has a history of millennia, revealed in festival days, the ordered response to epidemics, as well as in the evanescent redistributions of power and privilege of political uprisings. All hail the Paris Commune! » Although the idea of utopia is, in too many ways, discredited, the spirit of Occupy lies precisely in this creation of intentional communities. My earliest experience with occupation was based on the re-inhabitation of buildings and the conversion of their purpose. I spent many weeks in the 1960s hunkered down in various academic administration buildings (and, later, squatting in abandoned houses) in the name of opposition to warfare and rapacity. The medium was crucial and the power of the action sprang both from expropriation and invention, from the



1963 Ada Louise Huxtable named architecture critic at *The New York Times*, first full-time critic at major newspaper. **1964** Urban Mass Transportation Act funds buses, subways,

demonstration of strength and from the demonstration of alternative styles of cooperation. Strategically, temporary communities do tend to be infused with special meanings. Whether in the form of a military bivouac in the field, the Bonus Army or Resurrection City on the National Mall, refugee camps around the world that result from disasters, Burning Man, or Woodstock, these ephemeral assemblies are particularly purposive and they force inhabitant and observer alike to think about communities that do not embrace the ideas of business as usual. Whether consecrated to pleasure, survival, or protest, these communities share an idea of scale, and one can distinguish the virtual urbanities from smaller communalisms that simply elaborate the familial. » This combination of occupation and proposition also undergirds what has come to be the salient theoretical underpinning of these urban actions, the idea of the “right to the city,” articulated by Henri Lefebvre in 1968 but embedded in the work of community organizers, communards, and revolutionaries for a century before. Lefebvre understood the concept both as an assertion of a series of conventional rights—of assembly, of access, of movement—but also, and crucially, as the right to imagine the kind of city that might emerge in full consonance with fresh-born desire. The Occupy movement—and all its contemporary predicates—springs from this double valence and asserts, by its presentness in urban spaces that







are programmed for relaxation rather than for insubordination, and by the inventive and equitable models of community the people practice there, that the possibility of another kind of city—another kind of society—is immanent in their gathering. » The emergence of fresh styles of assembly and communication (human microphones and pizzas delivered on credit cards from supporters on the other side of the globe) reinforces the idea that the occupation is both an act of protest and a cooperative effort of imagination. The dismissal of the movement due to the “incoherence” of its demands misses the point as well as the power of the occupation. Of course, there is an overarching demand for equity, a claim against the crazy, widening income gaps of the developed world, and a more general cry for justice. But the main force of the movement springs precisely from its defense of desire, its claims that a good city must emerge that right now exceeds anyone’s capacity to completely imagine it. To propose some exacting singularity, some “pragmatic” tinkering at the margins, would be to sap the real power of the movement’s message: Justice is the certainty, but a social poetics constantly contested and renewed must define the real city and its practices. Provocation is not enough: the *system* must change.

Michael Sorkin is an architect, critic, and member of the curatorial team of *Spontaneous Interventions*. For full bio, see page 12.

Parklets

San Francisco and elsewhere
since 2005

San Francisco's streets and rights-of-way make up fully 25 percent of the city's land—more than the area of the city's parks combined. This fact motivated design studio Rebar to create a **micro-park that occupied a metered parking spot** in downtown San Francisco one afternoon in 2005. Seven years later, PARK(ing) Day (September 21) is observed in 162 cities in 35 countries. Interestingly, the idea has made institutional inroads: In 2010, New York City, which has already converted several miles of roadway into microplazas, began issuing Pop-up Café licenses, allowing businesses to extend outdoor seating into adjacent parking spots during the summer months. And in 2011, San Francisco began issuing Parklet Permits to residents and businesses alike, as part of its Pavements to Parks program.

	accessibility, community, sustainability, pleasure
	varies
	varies
	countless citizens
	Problem – more public space for parking than for parks
	Solution – landscape and seating in parking spots

elevated rail lines. **1965** Department of Housing and Urban Development established. Housing and Urban Development Act provides \$2.9 billion for urban renewal projects. **1966** National

by Gordon Douglas » **GUERRILLA BIKE LANES AND OTHER ACTS OF CIVIC IMPROVEMENT THROUGH CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE**

Early one morning in July 2008, a group of friends gathered on the Fletcher Drive Bridge near the Atwater neighborhood of Los Angeles. In workers' vests and hard-hats, protected by orange cones and barriers made of sawhorses, and wielding brooms, stencils, and a professional lane-stripping device, they went to work amidst the early-morning traffic over the L.A. River. In less than an hour, and for a few hundred dollars in materials, they painted a new bicycle lane. The plan's originators were moved by

a desperate lack of safe cycling routes across the bridges between the city's downtown and its East and Northeast sides, and had been inspired by similar do-it-yourself streetscaping actions in Toronto. They had studied old city bike plans, researched official regulations and design standards, and practiced their lane-stripping skills in a K-Mart parking lot. They even put up two professional road signs denoting the new lane, with small letters at the bottom of each attributing the work not to the DOT, but to "DIY." » Actions such as these—unauthorized, highly local, largely anonymous, simple, impermanent, and often far from slick—may seem rather insignificant when considered individually, or in comparison with the broad strokes of formal planning and public infrastructure. And yet they are bold contributions to the very fabric of the city and quintessential elements of the phenomenon of spontaneous interventions which we are celebrating at the U.S. Pavilion. » While guerrilla bike lanes have found great popularity among cycling activists, the small-scale, do-it-yourself approach can be seen addressing issues throughout the built environment: a New Yorker removes corporate advertisements from bus stops and phone booths and replaces them with artwork; community members in Portland, Ore., "reclaim" their intersection with decoration, crosswalks, and streetscaping; a woman in New Orleans jack-hammers into the asphalt to plant saplings; a few friends in Pittsburgh plant



Historic Preservation Act aims to protect national heritage. **1968** Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated. Riots break out in 125 cities across U.S. Henri Lefebvre publishes *The Right to the City*

and tend a road median near their homes. » These interventions are small, locally motivated, and focused from the start on specific problems, problems that the people behind the projects see as needing to be fixed. As such, the actions may be one-off events: a square curb softened with cement, a handful of seeds strewn in a vacant lot, “sharrows” (a symbol depicting a bike and two chevrons) stenciled on a half-mile of boulevard. As with the guerrilla bike lane painters, these creators often remain anonymous, too, wanting their actions to speak for themselves. Certainly, some must appreciate the modicum of acclaim that their actions sometimes receive in the press, but they rarely parlay the efforts into wider recognition or financial gain. Others say that the best design interventions are those that don’t stand out at all, which allows them simply to be used and appreciated by the public they are intended for without drawing attention from authorities. » Despite their small size, these interventions make an impact. In taking design actions into their own hands, citizens not only directly affect the change they want to see but may inspire others to do the same, fostering the possibility of a ground-up, crowd-constructed city. Even if these interventions are removed by authorities, they suggest the sort of city that residents actually want to see, something that authorities occasionally even recognize. » In L.A., the Fletcher Drive Bridge bike lane didn’t last long. Though cyclists had been using the bridge

regardless, and observers of the new lane reported cars and cyclists safely respecting it, the city worried it was unsafe and removed it in a matter of days. That same year, however, someone signposted a long stretch of 4th Street popular among cyclists as a “bicycle boulevard.” And in late 2009, other Angelenos stenciled bicycle sharrows in the city’s Highland Park neighborhood. A few months later, hundreds of community members worked overnight to wheatpaste thousands of “Pass with Care/Pase con Cuidado” signs at intersections across the city. » And today? The city’s plans and street marking formally acknowledge 4th Street as a major artery in an expanding cycling network. The Department of Transportation began laying official sharrows and better signage on L.A. streets in 2010. As for improving cycling access across the Los Angeles River, only one of the city’s 14 bridges has been identified for painted, on-street bike lanes. Guess which one it is?

Gordon Douglas is a writer and researcher whose work centers on issues of local cultural identity and people’s interactions with the built environment. He is a member of the curatorial team of *Spontaneous Interventions*. For full bio, see page 12.

Futurefarmers





Soil Kitchen

Philadelphia

2011

Soil Kitchen was a temporary windmill-powered architectural intervention that breathed new life into a formerly abandoned building within the postindustrial landscape of Philadelphia. For one week, the multi-use space offered visitors free soup while they waited for soil samples from their yards to be tested for contaminants. Located across the street from the Don Quixote monument in Philadelphia, the project paid homage to Cervantes with its rooftop windmill, but rather than an “adversarial giant” as in the novel, the windmill here was a symbol of self-reliance. Soil Kitchen tested over 350 soil samples, gave out 300 bowls of soup daily, distributed a Philadelphia Brownfields Map, and conducted **workshops on soil remediation, urban agriculture, composting,** wind turbine construction, and offered cooking lessons.

Courtesy Futurefarmers

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
\$	40,000
	4 months
	50
	Problem – contaminated urban soil
+	Solution – raise awareness through community testing facility

articulating popular demand for “transformed and renewed access to urban life.” **1970** President Richard Nixon forms Environmental Protection Agency. **1971** Congress creates Amtrak

by Richard Ingersoll » **GREEN FOR A DAY: TRANSITORY PASTORALISM IN AMERICA**

In the wake of the global financial crisis, urban farming seems like one of the few options left for struggling urbanites. You will probably lose your job any minute and then start falling through the cracks. Repossession awaits like an undercurrent tugging at one’s sense of destiny. Banks have failed, politics has failed, the grapes of wrath have been brought out of storage. But the ground is still there, and if one starts digging, seeding, and watering, then plants will grow. Despite all of humanity’s faults and follies, nature always takes its revenge,

continuing her cycles. While Occupy Wall Street shook up the capitalist miscreants for a brief season and then faded, urban farming has begun to occupy American streets, vacant lots, and rooftops as an incredibly optimistic threat to the system. » A garden normally takes time, several years, before it acquires an identity. But when you’re desperate, you just start throwing seeds and hope you will still be there to watch them grow. Looking carefully at the many urban agriculture projects on display in the U.S. Pavilion at the 13th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, one notices a theme of transitory gardening, some on the flatbeds of trucks, others in the cracks of pavements, some the result of guerrilla gardeners’ seed bombs. Fritz Haeg, author of *Edible Estates*, has been coaching Middle Americans over the past few years on how to transform their wasteful front lawns into productive orchards. He resembles a latter-day Johnny Appleseed, and many others have followed similar paths. Do all of these idealistic greeners adhere to an ecological agenda? Will their interest in farming last longer than a season? Is growing food their real objective? Frequently the answer to these questions is “no.” Urban farming often proves less cost-efficient than going to the supermarket. Many an heirloom tomato, grown by an eager civic agriculturalist, has been coaxed along with synthetic fertilizers.



to assume operation of intercity rail service from private railroad companies. **1972** Demolition of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis marks conceptual end of modernist housing and urban planning.

And the enthusiasm for hoeing and watering is sometimes just a trend that not all participants desire to continue. » But even so, why not try? Every act of planting is remedial, both on social and environmental levels. An online urban farm registry that allows farmers in San Francisco to negotiate some neighborly swapping of kumquats for tomatoes, or an organization that gathers fallen fruit and other unharvested urban edibles to distribute to food banks in Los Angeles, or a market on wheels that brings organically grown produce to Chicago's low-income neighborhoods where fresh vegetables are rare are all initiatives that restore faith in the great social project that once was part of a national ethic—even though they seem destined to last only as long as the enthusiasm of their volunteers. American civic agriculture might appear frivolous to Cubans, who have created *organopónico* gardens amidst their public housing projects due to economic necessity, or to the urban farmers in the slums of Nairobi, who make money from vegetables grown in gunnysacks. » Leberecht Migge, the “Green Spartacus” of Weimar Germany, who attempted to install vegetable gardens in all public housing blocks, would have scoffed at the lack of structure in the American efforts. For the moment, it appears green for a day, as ephemeral as graffiti. One longs for the delirious commitment of Adam Purple's “Garden of Eden,” created

on a vacant lot in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1973 (and demolished by mayoral order in 1985). Still, the more that people get involved in urban farming, the more they will seek associations, establish rules, create an aesthetic, and, whether for either necessity or pleasure, reshape the city's landscape into a more productive and ecologically aware place.







Richard Ingersoll is a professor of architecture and urbanism at Syracuse University in Florence and an advocate of agrivicism, the social application of urban agriculture. He is a former editor of *Design Book Review* and author of the forth-coming *Architectures of the World: A Cross-Cultural History of the Built Environment* (2012), *Sprawltown: Looking for the City on its Edges* (2006), and other publications.

Fresh Moves Mobile Market

Chicago
since 2010

Courtesy Architecture for Humanity Chicago

Fresh Moves Mobile Market is a single-aisle grocery store located in an unlikely venue: a retrofitted Chicago Transit Authority bus, which was purchased from the city for \$1. Architecture for Humanity Chicago partnered with local nonprofit Food Desert Action to design the bus, which brings **fresh produce to the 500,000 Chicago residents living in neighborhoods that are classified as food deserts**. Fresh Moves's website lists its hourly schedule, and the mobile market not only sells produce but also offers classes on cooking and nutrition. The organizers are documenting the impact of Fresh Moves to support the possibility of scaling-up the operation in Chicago or replicating it in other cities.

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
	\$ 30,000
	2 weeks
	40
	Problem – lack of access to fresh produce
	Solution – mobile grocery store in retrofitted bus

1973 Guerrilla gardening emerges in New York vacant lots. 1977 Community Reinvestment Act prevents banks from “redlining,” or refusing to make loans for properties in low-income

by Mimi Zeiger » **HOW-TO: THE POWER OF DIY INSTRUCTIONS** In late January 2011, as Egyptian protesters filled Tahrir Square in Cairo, the activist website IndyMedia.com published exemplary pages from *How to Protest Intelligently*. Available as a PDF ready to print, the 26-page illustrated pamphlet, published in Arabic and English, clearly spelled out the Egyptian people's demands and the actions and supplies needed to resist state forces. » In keeping with a do-it-yourself ethos, which positions the exchange of knowledge as a means of empowerment, the pamphlet listed simple details and tactical actions. For example,

under the section “Necessary Clothing and Accessories,” it lists “Sweatshirt or leather jacket with a hood. This helps shield your face from tear gas.” The point is mundane, but effective. The aggregation of logistical details under a “how-to” header is a powerful step in turning small-scale actions into change at a local, regional, national, and even global scale. » As cities decline due to recessionary belt-tightening, and public space comes under scrutiny in the wake of Occupy Wall Street protests, contemporary how-to manuals are important tools to instigate urban change. Today's documents are readily available at websites, on blogs, and as PDFs ready for printing. For example, the steps and materials required to participate in PARK(ing) Day, the project developed by San Francisco-based Rebar, are neatly compiled in a booklet available online. Similarly, the project People Make Parks (the brainchild of the Hester Street Collaborative and Partnerships for Parks) developed an interactive website to educate New Yorkers on the design and redesign of parks in the city. A rich resource, the site lists eight steps that turn the public into advocates for the public realm, including the why, when, and how of obtaining funding from local officials. In-depth details, such as how to create a questionnaire to poll neighbors on their hopes and visions for a new park, promotes agency among local citizens. It makes the design and construction process transparent,



neighborhoods. **1980** William H. Whyte publishes *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Congress creates Superfund to clean up hazardous waste sites across U.S. **1982** Michael

accessible, and participatory. » Access to knowledge and awareness of municipal processes are critical to incremental and interventionist change in the built environment. In 2006, the Center For Urban Pedagogy began publishing educational broadsheets in a series called Making Policy Public, which paired a graphic designer with an advocacy organization to produce a poster that visually conveys an arcane piece of public policy. Using a double-sided single sheet, every publication unfolds from an 8-by-11-inch pamphlet to a 32-by-22-inch poster. The policy issues covered range from municipal rules and regulations for street vendors—as illustrated in Candy Chang's *Vendor Power!*, created in collaboration with the nonprofit Street Vendor Project (a part of the Urban Justice Center)—to affordable housing—as framed in *Predatory Equity: The Survival Guide*, a collaboration between Tenants & Neighbors, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, and graphic designer Glen Cummings of MTWTF. » Cheap production, rapid distribution, and nothing less than the belief in the transformative potential of print have led to today's DIY publications. Stewart Brand's late-1960s ecologically minded *Whole Earth Catalog* and William Powell's 1971 instructional protest against the Vietnam War, *The Anarchist Cookbook*, understood the need for political and social movements to come with a specific skill set. With the deftness of a home-economics teacher, Powell presented recipes

for manufacturing Molotov cocktails and other explosives. Both publications were modeled (with a decisive amount of *détournement*) on the homemaking manuals and garage-tinkering magazines, such as *Popular Mechanics*, that defined and shaped the postwar American landscape. At the root of all of these instructional documents, new and old, domestic and revolutionary, is a commitment to open-source knowledge. As such, the how-to pamphlet, PDF, or website proves an instrumental tool used by an active public as they evolve cities from sites of bureaucratic opacity to sites of civic engagement.

Mimi Zeiger is a writer, editor, and contributing editor to ARCHITECT. She is also a member of the curatorial team of *Spontaneous Interventions*. Her full bio appears on page 14.

Rockwell Group

Imagination Playground

New York City and elsewhere since 2009

When architect David Rockwell, AIA, started spending time in playgrounds with his young children, he was disturbed by the lack of imagination and variation in the way kids interact with standardized playground equipment. He spent five years developing the Imagination Playground, seeking private–public partnerships to see it realized. Inspired by Froebel blocks and adventure playgrounds, the Imagination Playground features a wide range of elements that allows children to create their own environments and their own course of play. Since the first Imagination Playground opened in Manhattan (with the support of several city agencies), Rockwell has developed a more portable, scalable version—packed into a cart or box—that can quickly **transform small, unused spaces into dynamic playgrounds**. It has been deployed in hundreds of locations worldwide, including Haiti and Bangladesh.

	accessibility, community, pleasure
	0 for design + 5,000 for cart version + 7 million for land and construction
	8 months
	5-8 research and design
	Problem – need for engaging play spaces for children around the globe
	Solution – mobile, accessible, engaging playground

Graves' Portland Building completed, first major example of postmodern architecture. **1989** Congress establishes National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing. **1990**

by Mark Shepard » **NOTES ON MINOR URBANISM** Consider the contemporary form of urban mobility known as *parkour*. Practitioners of *parkour*, known as *traceurs*, appropriate the space of the city as a platform for exercising gymnastic skill. The city becomes an obstacle course through which one moves from point A to point B as quickly as possible. Understood not as a competitive sport but as a form of physical and mental training, *parkour* helps one develop a spatial awareness of specific affordances of urban structures and the ability to overcome mental and physical obstacles with speed and efficiency. In the *traceur*, we see refracted

a lineage of alternative ways of moving through the city. From Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* to the Situationists' *dériviste*, these urban actors perform the city in ways that not so much reflect it (as representation) but enact it (through transduction). Though their movement, we can read a city and the possibilities that it offers as well as the socio-spatial relations found there. In this context, *parkour* becomes a form of urban hacking, a way of appropriating architecture and its attendant fittings for purposes neither sanctioned nor anticipated by the original design. Architecture becomes an obstacle that must be overcome as quickly and efficiently as possible, albeit with poise and grace. » Now consider the spatial topology described in *The Catalogue* (2004), a video by British artist Chris Oakley, which shows a shopping mall somewhere in the north of England from the point of view of a surveillance system. We soon see that the system is doing more than just watching. Shoppers are tagged, tracked, and monitored as they go about their routines. Transaction histories are mined, personal inventories are matched against products for sale, and recommendations are made. Prescriptions for eyeglasses are facilitated through the retrieval of a recent eye exam report. The purchase and consumption of food and beverage items at a conveyor sushi bar is matched against a person's medical records and a health prognosis is made based on what he or she is eating. (Fortunately for the subjects



Americans With Disabilities Act mandates standards for accessibility. First DIY skatepark, Burnside, in Portland, Ore. 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act promotes

in the video, the U.K. provides national healthcare. One can only speculate what would happen in the U.S., where this information would be shared with an insurance company.) While this video is a simulation, the technologies depicted are readily available today, and one can imagine such systems becoming standard in shopping-center design and management in the near future. » Combining these two ideas, the practice of “minor urbanism” involves transposing the practice of *parkour* to the space illustrated by *The Catalogue*. As with minor literature, minor urbanism involves speaking in a major language from a minor position. Contrary to major architecture and urban planning approaches that dominate contemporary urban development, minor urbanism examines local, networked, and distributed approaches to shaping the experience of the city and the choices we make there. As computing leaves the desktop and spills out into the world around us, technology increasingly becomes entangled with everyday urban life. » From crowdsourced, geo-located data sets of popular locations in the city produced through social media apps such as Foursquare; to advertising displays on bus shelters that determine your age and gender using vision systems in order to customize the products presented; to contactless payment systems for paying tolls on bridges and tunnels, such as E-ZPass, that store mobility patterns in remote databases which are also accessible by law-enforcement agencies:

These systems are designed and programmed to remember, correlate, and anticipate our movements, transactions, and desires. » What happens when *parkour* becomes a conceptual vehicle by which not the material city, but this immaterial, information-driven city is appropriated as a performative platform for alternative mobilities? What new urban actor might emerge? How might he or she develop a spatial awareness of the affordances that are available in these systems and infrastructures and their entanglements with everyday life? How might he or she subsequently recircuit, reconfigure, and redirect the flows of people, goods, and data in these hybrid environments?

Mark Shepard is an artist and researcher, trained as an architect, who investigates entanglements of mobile and pervasive media, and communication and information technologies with architecture and urbanism. He is an associate professor in both the architecture and media study departments at the University of Buffalo. His project, *Serendipitor*, a part of the larger *Sentient City Survival Kit*, is featured in *Spontaneous Interventions*.

Depave







Depave

Portland, Ore.

since 2007

When Depave founder Arif Khan tore down his garage in 2005 and replaced it with a grove of fruit trees, he realized the same action could be applied on a much larger scale. Three years later, Depave's first parking lot transformation was complete: Khan and 147 volunteers transformed an underutilized asphalt lot into the Fargo Forest Garden, a community garden. The nonprofit mobilizes workers to remove impervious paving for anyone who asks; past depavings have included school playgrounds, businesses' parking lots, and residents' driveways, amounting to 100,000 square feet of asphalt that is no longer contributing to the negative effects of polluted stormwater runoff. Depave also helps in the process of replacing these spaces with native-plant gardens.

Courtesy Depave

	information, community, sustainability, pleasure
	70,000 annual budget
	5-8 days per project
	4-6 organizers + dozens of volunteers
	Problem – impervious surfaces that exacerbate watershed pollution
	Solution – green spaces to intercept runoff and promote community

bicycling and walking. Saskia Sassen publishes *The Global City*. Joel Garreau publishes *Edge City*. 1992 HOPE VI program redevelops dilapidated public housing properties as dense, low-rise,







by Brendan Crain » **BETWEEN THE NET AND THE STREET** Whether they call their actions tactical, DIY, guerrilla, insurgent, or something more esoteric, the people now camping out in parking spaces and popping-up art installations in vacant storefronts are part of a long tradition that predates any of these terms. But if the idea behind the current bout of urban design actions isn't new, what's making it feel so novel? Certainly, the global financial meltdown and attendant public revulsion toward—and mass protest against—the excesses of modern capitalism have influenced the recent spike in activity. But some of the

touchstones of the movement emerged years ago. » If there is one recent development pervasive enough to mold the minds across this uprising of design-savvy, politically minded young rabble, it is the rise of social media. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have had a profound impact on how ideas spread, and it's no coincidence that this torrent of tactical urban actions has begun to present something resembling a united aesthetic front. Today's urban adaptations are not merely practical, one-off responses to the challenges and needs of their particular sites; in a hyper-connected world, they are often seen by their instigators as an inevitable outcome of the larger shift to the urban age, a time when the majority of the world's population is urban. » Reading Bruce Sterling's "An Essay on the New Aesthetic," which details the rise of an even more decidedly net-fueled design movement, it's hard not to see the titular trend as an analog to the more socially minded one chronicled in *Spontaneous Interventions*. "The New Aesthetic," Sterling writes, "is 'collectively intelligent.' It's diffuse, crowdsourcery, and made of many small pieces loosely joined. ... The New Aesthetic is constructive. Most New Aesthetic icons carry a subtext about getting excited and making something similar. The New Aesthetic doesn't look, act, or feel postmodern. It's not deconstructively analytical of a bourgeois order that's been dead quite a while now. It's built by and for working

47 Anonymous Guerrilla Bike Lanes

International since 2007

Bicycling has only recently become a serious planning consideration, and the vast majority of America's city streets remain intimidating places for cyclists, despite their growing numbers. With city planners moving slowly to adapt, **cycling advocates are taking matters into their own hands, painting bike lanes, share-the-lane "sharrows,"** and other signage, often under cover of night. Many guerrilla bike lane painters point to Toronto's Urban Repair Squad as the pioneers of the practice, but some of the most voracious adherents can be found in Los Angeles, including an anonymous group of activists working under the aegis of the "Department of D.I.Y." Do-it-yourselfers have also installed bike route signs, "pass with care" posters, and have "softened" unfriendly square curbs with blobs of concrete.

	accessibility, community, sustainability, pleasure
	200 – tools and materials
	a few early morning hours
	3 or more
	Problem – lack of bicycle-friendly streets
	Solution – painted bike lanes, sharrows, and signage

Gordon Douglas

mixed-income communities. Critical Mass cyclist movement starts in San Francisco. Los Angeles race riots leave 50 dead. **1993** Congress for the New Urbanism established, promotes higher

creatives.” » As with the New Aesthetic, the guerrilla, DIY urbanism movement is made up of many small, constructive actions that—through their simplicity, and often through avid promotion by their creators as well—entice other people to make something similar. Its practitioners are highly networked, and they know the value of a pair of eyeballs. Looking again at the increasingly identifiable aesthetic of these interventions, it's easy to see how the focus on "shareability" plays out. In creating urban projects that are likely to go viral, contemporary interventionists have unwittingly become agents of digital manipulation of the physical city. Put another way, the same logic driving the creation of YouTube rants and LOLcats is now driving urban revitalization schemes. » But that might not be as terrifying as it sounds. Optimistic scholars of the Internet such as Clay Shirky argue that, while the "participatory culture" online has created plenty of inane memes (LOLcats not least among them), the upshot is that you have more people flexing their creative muscles. Ultimately, the argument goes, individuals get bored with creating poorly spelled captions for weird pictures of Fluffy and graduate to more meritorious pursuits. So while the memes of the movement right now are stickers and joke signs and farms in odd places, they could very well act as gateway activities that lead to a more robust, dynamic civic life. » As any community organizing expert worth their salt will tell

you, using digital tools should always be part of a larger engagement strategy that includes actual face-to-face interaction. Perhaps the best way to understand the current crop of spontaneous—lighter, quicker, cheaper—interventions, then, is as a transition point somewhere between the Net and the street. During the opening panel of the Tactical Urbanism Salon held in New York in October 2011, Chiara Camponeschi, author of the website *The Enabling City*, argued this point quite eloquently, noting that "the value is in creating these 'aha' moments; [the real engagement] comes during a conversation following the action. ... Actions can frame things in positive terms, and help people understand that their own creativity matters." » And it does. If today's interventionists believe nothing else, they believe that.







Brendan Crain spends his days working at the intersection of urbanism, digital media, and social storytelling. In all of his work, his primary goal is to make cities more enjoyable, accessible, and engaging for people. His writing has appeared in various publications, including *Dwell*, *Next American City*, and *MAS Context*. He is also a member of the curatorial team of *Spontaneous Interventions*.

Greenaid Seedbomb Vending Machine

Los Angeles
since 2010

Made from a mixture of clay, compost, and seeds, seed bombs can be tossed anonymously into derelict urban sites to green the city. Los Angeles design firm COMMONstudio created the coin-operated Greenaid dispensary to make guerrilla gardening more accessible. Marketing the machines to businesses to rent or to own, the designers have installed more than 150 since 2010, each equipped with a mix of native seeds. The seed bombs are hand-rolled by workers contracted through Chrysalis, an L.A. nonprofit that helps homeless and low-income residents earn a living wage and work towards self-sufficiency. The vending machines **invite people to become casual activists, taking part in the incremental beautification of their environments**—using only the loose coins in their pocket.

Morris Malakoff Photography/
Courtesy COMMONstudio (right)

	information, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
	1,000 initial investment – 75 month to rent, 400 to own, seedbomb refills 25¢ each
	n/a
	2
	Problem – not enough greenery
	Solution – guerrilla gardening made easy

density, mixed-use, transit-oriented, walkable communities. James Howard Kunstler publishes *The Geography of Nowhere*. 1994 National Homeownership Strategy Plan makes home mortgages

by Tom Angotti » **THE GENTRIFICATION DILEMMA** *Spontaneous Interventions* spotlights dozens of well-meaning urban actions by individuals trying to solve problems in their neighborhoods. But are the “improvements” they propose welcome by others in the community? Do they really solve problems or just conceal them? And do they benefit the few while they neglect the many? » Many spontaneous actions intended as local improvements raise questions about gentrification. Not only are their creators often, apparently, gentrifiers, but the contributions themselves may bring

unwelcome changes to a neighborhood’s character. Other similar actions—whether by conscientious new arrivals or advocates of social justice—explicitly engage the gentrification issue. They can bring much-needed attention to a process of neighborhood transformation that is usually ignored. But is this good enough? Government doesn’t define, recognize, or deal with gentrification, and it’s time to bring it into the light of day. But how? » First, let’s be clear what gentrification is *not*. Gentrification is not the same as change in neighborhoods. Change occurs all the time and in every neighborhood: People move in and out, buildings fall into disrepair and undergo renovation, and businesses come and go. Gentrification is not improvement of housing, public space, and the physical improvement of the environment. That can and does happen without gentrification. Gentrification is not the arrival of “different” people—although that is often a part of it. The seeming homogeneity of some communities often conceal differences that exist underneath the surface—broad individual and social differences, which can be masked by narrow ethnic and religious mores. » So what is gentrification? Gentrification is when neighborhoods change in ways that force many longtime residents and businesses to move out because land prices and rents have skyrocketed overnight. “Different” people arrive in large numbers,



more widely accessible. U.S. Department of Transportation sets goals to double number of trips made on foot and bicycle, improve safety. California's Silicon Valley becomes world-famous

and the big difference is that these newcomers are much wealthier and more powerful (they may or may not have a different skin color or ethnicity). With them comes the money to improve housing and the physical environment, often creating improvements that the past residents fought hard for but could not afford to do or lacked the political power to secure. Gentrification means wiping out the social history of an existing community or turning that history into a hip, marketable cliché. With gentrification, the people who are displaced disappear into the vast metropolis; governments and our leading institutions care not what happens to them or where they go, while significant public resources are provided to help make life better for the gentrifiers. » To some extent, this *Spontaneous Interventions* exhibition honors gentrifiers by giving them a prominent place at the prestigious Biennale. Missing from the stage are the local residents and businesses who, over decades and with little fanfare, improve their communities through many brilliant and creative actions. Their many gradual, small steps have to be analyzed and understood for their role in shaping the urban environment and creating livable cities. » This is also why it's so important to bring gentrification into the light and consider not only the people and things that come with it but also all that is lost because of it. As a first step, we need to talk about it, argue about it, and laugh and

cry about it. Then we can move towards doing something about it. » Everyone living in a neighborhood facing gentrification—newcomers and long-time residents alike—needs to seek common ground and use that to struggle to improve the community in a way that doesn't force people out. They have to learn to use established tools, including land trusts, rent regulations, and measures to stop speculators. They have to learn how to improve the environment without forcing residents and businesses to move. They need to develop their own plans, gaining increasing control over land and expanding local democracy by including people of all economic and social strata. » Those concerned newcomers who call attention to gentrification through creative actions need to do it in a way that reaches out to and embraces the community's endangered people and institutions. Most neighborhoods that are tagged as "gentrified" are actually "gentrifying," and too often those who are still hanging on become invisible to the newcomers. Gentrifiers need to open their eyes and mouths, and soon their hearts will open too. They may have personally done nothing to create the conditions leading to gentrification. They may have simply been looking for affordable housing in a livable environment and recognized the importance of a diverse neighborhood. The danger comes from hunkering down with the other gentrifiers, thus becoming complicit in the

3 Rebuild Foundation





1415

St. Louis, Mo.

2012

Courtesy Rebuild Foundation

When artist Theaster Gates—founder of the Rebuild Foundation—led a series of classes asking students from Most Holy Trinity Catholic School and Academy to describe a healthy community, he could have stopped there. Instead, an inspired parishioner donated a dilapidated multifamily building that Gates and an army of volunteers (including students from Washington University’s CityStudioSTL) transformed into an **arts center, which provides cultural programming that the neighborhood lacks**. Volunteers re-clad one wall of the house in reclaimed hardie board, made a community theater/performance space by replacing a wall with a garage door, and established a community advisory committee to help with programming. The transformed structure now houses arts classes, workshops, and artist residencies.

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
\$	100,000
	540 days
	60
	Problem – doubt that culture can empower communities
+	Solution – dynamic arts and culture space

incubator for technology startups, inspiring other cities to create “innovation corridors.” Walt Disney Co. develops Celebration, Fla., according to New Urbanist principles. **1995** After bombing

process of transforming the neighborhood into a homogeneous, unwelcome, placeless enclave. » We need models of planning and development that involve community improvement without displacement. Gentrification is not placemaking but place-taking. It destroys our collective memory of places, contributing to the global homogenization and commodification of everything. Bring it into the light of day and it could melt away in the sunshine.

Tom Angotti is a professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, and director of Hunter’s Center for Community Planning and Development. His most recent book is *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (2008) and his forthcoming book is *The New Century of the Metropolis: Enclave Development and Urban Orientalism*.



of Oklahoma City federal building, President Bill Clinton creates Interagency Security Committee to develop security standards for federal facilities. **1996** Evan McKenzie's *Privatopia* studies

by Liane Lefavre » **TOP-DOWN MEETS BOT-TOM-UP** The playgrounds that Aldo van Eyck designed between 1947 and the mid-1960s in Amsterdam are famously beloved—not only because they were designed by van Eyck but because they were initiated by the people of Amsterdam and made possible by the civil servants of the city's Public Works Department under the enlightened directorship of the great Dutch urbanists Cornelius van Eesteren and Jacoba Mulder. What began as the harmonious participatory relationship between the people and the civil servants of the city and ended up as official planning

policy is what gives these recreation areas a unique place not only in the history of playgrounds but also in the history of social democratic government and welfare state politics. » Spontaneity played a big role. How the post-World War II Amsterdam playgrounds came about has become legendary. Mulder was on her way to work one day and noticed that the children in her neighborhood had to play in the dirt in the square in front of her apartment. The first thing she did at the office was to demand that van Eesteren plan a playground there. Aldo van Eyck was a young employee and was given the task of designing it. Once the playground was completed, a neighbor saw the playground and sent a letter to van Eesteren requesting a playground on her street. And so forth and so forth for the first few hundred. Before van Eyck was done he had designed all the play furniture and laid out nearly 1,000 playgrounds himself. » But without a responsible municipal government this would have been impossible. Ingeniously, it transformed terrible circumstances into opportunities. The job, which the municipality set for itself at first, was to find small, unused, derelict lots, many of which had been occupied by Jewish homes and ransacked during wartime. On these demolished foundations, playgrounds were built as cheaply as possible. Eventually the ad-hoc participatory process was made into policy by van Eesteren when new postwar towns outside of

BK Farmyards







BK Farmyards

New York

since 2009

Courtesy BK Farmyards

BK Farmyards is a large decentralized urban farming network based in Brooklyn, N.Y. Since its founding, the coalition of experienced urban farmers—working under the tagline, “You have the land. We grow the produce”—has been flooded with requests from people with spare land, ranging from private small-lot owners to a public school principal with a full free acre to an old municipal airport. Today, BK manages several acres of land and **brings healthy food directly to residents of Central Brooklyn, where many lack affordable, fresh food options** and suffer from health issues related to high poverty rates. BK offers a subscription service for eggs, flowers, and vegetables, as well as farm training for adults and a youth program, creating employment opportunities for locals.

	information, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
	250,000 per year
	4 months per 1 acre of farmland
	5-40
	Problem – urban food deserts
	Solution – decentralized urban agriculture

housing developments governed by community or homeowners associations, the fastest growing form of housing in the world. **1997** Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao opens, cities worldwide

Amsterdam were built to accommodate young families. It is in these new towns that more playgrounds were built than anywhere else in Holland. In order to get one, people had to send a request to the Public Works Department. Imagine if every city in the world operated this way? » This ad-hoc process that became policy was carried out according to what I call the PIP principle—participatory, interstitial, and polycentric. Taken as a whole, the Amsterdam playgrounds may be seen as a tightly woven net of public places, knitting the city into a unitary urban fabric and creating a citywide feeling of community. » Is the PIP principle still relevant to cities today? I believe so. I hope that the urban interventions featured in *Spontaneous Interventions* have an enduring impact. They stand a good chance to do so if they invite the participation of the residents who are affected by the action, take full advantage of overlooked spatial opportunities, and are conceived not so much as stand-alone projects and one-offs but as a part of a larger network of public-space enhancements distributed throughout a city. Only a municipal government can carry this out. Good design is important but good government even more so. » Interventions like these have helped immensely to make Amsterdam the humane city it is today. But the playgrounds make up an infinitesimal part of a larger social democratic urban planning policy, involving access

to good public transportation, good schools, good hospitals, good drinking water, and good policing. Without these things, playgrounds become quick fixes, band-aids on bigger problems and perhaps little more than tax-deductible public relations opportunities for a one-percenter philanthropist. » These sorts of interventions are easily translatable to cities all over the world. I have taken PIP-driven playgrounds to Rotterdam and Vienna, as well as to cities in China and Brazil. One project, for the orphaned children in the earthquake-devastated Chinese city of Dujiangyuan in Sichuan Province, was chosen to be part of the Shanghai Biennale in 2010. There seems to be no limit to the number of wonderful ideas emanating from the ground up, but the big question remains: How are they being received from the top down?

Liane Lefaivre is professor and chair of history and theory of architecture, University of Applied Art, Vienna, and research associate at the Technical University of Delft. She is the author of *Architecture of Regionalism in an Age of Globalization: Peaks and Valleys of the Flat World* (2011) and *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalised World* (2003), both with Alex Tzonis, as well as *Ground-up City: Play as a Design Tool* (2008). She is also a playground activist.



aspire to similar cultural rejuvenation projects. **1998** U.S. Green Building Council introduces LEED rating system. **1999** Los Angeles homeless file class-action lawsuit against downtown-

by Douglas Burnham » **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY PROXY** In 2010, amid the severe economic downturn, San Francisco's Mayor's Office requested proposals for temporary uses on city-owned vacant lots as a way to spur economic development within a neighborhood marred by a 10-block-long linear void created when the earthquake-damaged Central Freeway was removed. In an early discussion with city officials, I remember thinking, "OK, they're asking for free design work *and* we have to fund the implementation. ... What can possibly come from that?" Not only would we need to put forward a







compelling idea, but we would also have to realize it financially, as undercapitalized young architects in the middle of a recession. » Yet we bit, motivated by the possibilities of transforming underimagined territory. We hypothesized compelling temporary uses, sought out prospective vendors, developed design strategies that utilized low-cost, easily deployable modules, and built coalitions with neighborhood groups, local business owners, and city officials. Within nine months our first vendor, who uses liquid nitrogen to make ice cream and until then had operated out of a red Radio Flyer wagon, opened for business on a formerly derelict parking lot. » In many ways, our efforts were driven by sheer will and risk-taking. Banks weren't loaning money, so we took out a six-figure personal loan from a supportive client to fund the site's required infrastructure. Inventing as we went, we used our skills as architects to rethink the rules of development. We phased the project, rolling out successive elements (ice cream and coffee vendors, an arts institution, a beer garden, bike rentals, and, currently, retail components) as each became feasible, over the course of our five-year lease. Each phase has its own business model and each model has to grapple with the cold reality of an ever-diminishing timeline for recouping improvement costs for ourselves and our vendors. » We named our project "proxy" because it is intended

NY Street Advertising Takeover

New York City

2009

Advertising dominates the urban realm, plastered over billboards, building walls, street furniture, and automobiles. Tired of this visual and mental pollution—and indignant that much of street advertising is illegal—Jordan Seiler, founder of PublicAdCampaign, organized the New York Street Advertising Takeover. After three months of preparation, for one day Seiler and a team of 20 set out with military precision to hundreds of locations, where they whitewashed 20,000 square feet of illegal advertising. Over one hundred artists, activists, and residents then claimed this liberated space with their own artistic or personal sentiments. As a result, the city took action against the most offensive illegal advertiser. Seiler hopes for **an urban citizenry that shares in the curation of the public environment.**

	information, community, pleasure
	\$ 2,500 – not including legal fees incurred
	89 days preparation + 1 day execution
	120, approximately
	Problem – corporatization of public space
	Solution – citizen reclamation of the visual public realm

area Business Improvement Districts for harassment by private security guards. **2000** Zipcar car-sharing program launched in Cambridge, Mass. **2001** September 11 terrorist attacks.

to be a placeholder for a more permanent development. Like other spontaneous interventions, proxy adopts an implementation model of lighter, faster, cheaper—but it also builds value and transforms the neighborhood by changing the perception of place and creating compelling content where there was none before. The project shows how incremental, place-based change can encourage entrepreneurial activity and community participation—despite economic obstacles—by establishing a framework to promote local micro-enterprises. This model lowers the economic barriers to entry, making it possible for new small businesses to participate in these temporary uses and demonstrating that goals for economic and cultural development need not be mutually exclusive, but together can be powerful catalysts for urban revitalization. » As we look ahead, we see continued economic uncertainty across the globe. Spontaneous interventions offer cities a strategy for remaining not only economically viable, but relevant—able to adapt to the rapid changes advanced by contemporary culture. To be successful, however, certain conditions must be met. There must be developers who support creative initiatives that enhance the cultural and economic value of place; arts, urban advocacy, and placemaking philanthropic groups who align their efforts to promote the cultural benefits that these interventions create; and economic

development measures that offer incentives for temporary uses of underutilized spaces. These experiments also require designers, developers, philanthropists, and city agencies who operate beyond a bottom-line mode of thinking and consider the creation of places of quality and diversity within the city as a higher calling. This ethic of flexible urbanism extends beyond the deployment of vendors in mobile containers to urge thinking about the city as a vibrant, living construct that is constantly in the process of becoming.

Douglas Burnham is principal and founder of envelope A+D, a San Francisco Bay Area architecture and design firm whose work reconceptualizes modes of living and building in ways that advance new models of public and private space. Proxy, featured in *Spontaneous Interventions*, was awarded Best Building in 2012 by the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco for its strategy of activating underutilized spaces in the city.

69 Center for Urban Pedagogy
Making Policy Public



While the effects of public policies can be widespread, the discussion and understanding of these policies are usually not. The Center for Urban Pedagogy's (CUP) Making Policy Public series aims to make information on policy truly public—accessible, meaningful, and shared. Four times per year, CUP pairs communication designers with advocacy organizations to translate complex policy issues into easy-to-grasp visuals that are then widely distributed within the community to those most affected by the policy. Previous posters include *Predatory Equity: The Survival Guide*, which arms tenants and landowners with the tools to avoid foreclosure; *I Got Arrested! Now What?*, which educates those caught in the juvenile justice system; and *Vendor Power!*, which helps street vendors defend themselves against needless fines.

	information, accessibility, community
	15,000 per project
	8 months per project
	6-8 per project
	Problem – lack of understanding about public policy
	Solution – accessible visual teaching tools

Candy Chang/Courtesy Center for Urban Pedagogy

A GUIDE TO STREET VENDING IN NEW YORK CITY

Green roof installed on Chicago City Hall, inaugurating city's Urban Heat Island Initiative. 2002 Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* identifies knowledge workers as economic

by John Cary » **FROM SPONTANEOUS TO STRATEGIC: THE RISE OF PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN** For years, a rare breed of projects—designed for the public good—has earned acclaim and even a minute amount of actual criticism in design publications worldwide. Think bus shelters, community gardens, mobile clinics, street art, and the like. Many such projects are featured in this exhibition, or would have qualified to be included in it, since they intervene in social systems, often spontaneously. » This was absolutely the case with ScrapHouse, a temporary demonstration house made entirely of garbage,







designed in 2005 by Public Architecture, the nonprofit where I used to work. The house was built in front of San Francisco City Hall in conjunction with World Environment Day. » To be generous, it was a stunt, and the process was challenging. As I traveled throughout the United States, speaking about ScrapHouse in the months following its short-lived existence, I often introduced the project in apologetic terms. This was a house that no one would ever sleep in, set in a city where hundreds or thousands of homeless people sleep on the street or in shelters each night. » My guilt was thus running high when I visited a class of Auburn University students at the Rural Studio in Newbern, Ala. Here were these kids, designing and building real homes for real people in need, often with materials subpar to those we had sourced easily for ScrapHouse. » But a fascinating, unforgettable thing happened when I spoke to these students, which opened my eyes to a totally different aspect of the project. They had routinely been told by visitors to the Rural Studio that they should cherish their projects because they'd never have the chance to do that kind of work again. Yet here we had created an urban project that at least resembled the aesthetic of many Rural Studio homes of the time—a beautiful collage of otherwise disparate materials. It turns out that our temporary intervention had made a lasting impression on those students, on the estimated 10,000

HabitatMap AirCasting

Online
since 2010

AirCasting is a platform for recording, visualizing, mapping, and sharing environmental data using smartphone technology. Aimed at enhancing the impact of community voices on building greener cities, users can measure sound, temperature, humidity, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide with their mobile devices, and share their data with a worldwide community via the AirCasting CrowdMap, with the goal of **creating a set of “actionable data.”** According to its creators, HabitatMap, a New York nonprofit devoted to environmental health justice, “Much of what happens in our immediate environment passes without note, despite the positive contribution that recording and crowdsourcing these moments may have on our understanding of our health and the health of our communities.”

Courtesy HabitatMap

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
	ongoing
	ongoing
	10+
	Problem – lack of awareness about air pollution
	Solution – visualize air pollution and make data available to wider public

drivers of post-industrial U.S. cities. London introduces congestion pricing. Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* ties fast food to the malling of the American landscape, nation's obesity epidemic,

people who visited it, and on me, after all those years. » Fast forward to 2012, and ScrapHouse itself may be largely forgotten, but what we have instead is something far greater: a rapidly evolving field of public interest design. It's a field and practice that has moved from spontaneous, temporary, and makeshift projects, to lasting interventions of all scales, across the U.S. and around the world. » We've seen the rise of game-changing nonprofit design organizations, such as IDEO.org and MASS Design Group—both employing human-centered design to improve public services, environments, and lives. Meanwhile, we have mainstream firms—such as Cannon Design, Pentagram, and Perkins+Will—who are strategically integrating pro-bono design at unprecedented levels. This collective work, and the field of public interest design in general, are premised on a conviction that everyone deserves good design and that every human being needs good design in order to live their lives as best as they can. » We may continue to see a trickle of fantastic public interest design projects, but addressing the bigger social challenges of our time will require breaking from the usual way that designers have long worked: serving the needs of private individuals, as a doctor would a single patient. Instead, we need to start considering the needs of entire populations, especially those who can't afford to pay. » If I had one wish for this show

of spontaneous interventions, it would be to look back in a few years and see it as a prelude to a comparably high-profile showing of even more deliberate, permanent interventions that address the real needs of real people in need. Designers must pursue these larger, more systemic public interest design projects at a scale and a pace never seen before—at a scale and pace that the world needs and deserves. If we're going to achieve this, today's designers will need to be far more entrepreneurial and will need to think far more systemically than designers ever have had to before. More than any one building or space, this is the great design challenge of our time.

John Cary is the founder and editor of PublicInterestDesign.org, a fellow of the American Academy in Rome, and the editor of *The Power of Pro Bono: 40 Stories about Design for the Public Good by Architects and Their Clients*. He previously served as the director of San Francisco-based Public Architecture, building the organization into a leading advocate for pro bono design.



and cultural imperialism abroad. **2003** First flash mob, at Macy's department store in New York. **2004** *Shrinking Cities* exhibition in Berlin documents decline of cities due to job and

by David van der Leer » **TOWARDS DECISIVENESS**

This is the only country which gives you the opportunity to be so brutally naïve: things, faces, skies, and deserts are expected to be simply what they are. This is the land of the "just as is." ... America is neither dream nor reality. It is hyperreality. It is a hyperreality because it is a utopia which has behaved from the beginning as though it were already achieved. Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams too.

—Jean Baudrillard, *America* (1988)

Can a country simultaneously celebrate the “just as is” and the “stuff of dreams”? Jean Baudrillard—a short-term visitor hoping to use the vast country of the United States as a mirror that would help him better reflect on his native Europe—struggled with this question, recording the slightly contradictory ideas you see on the left on the same page in his book *America*. » When we started working on *Spontaneous Interventions*, I began to reflect on my own attitude toward this country. As a recently arrived European, I was initially shocked, like many of my compatriots, at the cold imprint of American cities. There is a gray, hard quality to so many of America's urban landscapes. Most of these cities lack the sort of exemplary contemporary architecture that can elevate the spirit, and, just as often, they lack the kind of ample public space that calms the mind. In my first months here, American cities struck me as being indecisive and devoid of bold actions. I wondered if the people here realized that if they did not make decisions, others would make them on their behalf? » Then, as we started collecting examples of the urban interventions you see in this issue, and will see more of at the U.S. Pavilion in Venice, I wondered how they might compare to similar citizen-initiated urban improvement projects in Europe. At first glance, there is a strong resemblance: Most are small-scale projects that highlight issues of transportation, ecology, and social

93 Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative






Pop Up City

Cleveland, Ohio

since 2007

Courtesy Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative

Since 2007, the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative of Kent State University has run Pop Up City, a program that brings vacant urban space to life through fleeting interventions. Cleveland has lost half of its population since the 1950s, and much of its urban fabric is unused and deteriorating. Pop Up City aims to spotlight some of Cleveland's spectacular but underutilized properties, while demonstrating that **vacancy can be an opportunity and an adventure, not just a liability**. Past interventions have included an ice sculpture park on the banks of the Cuyahoga River; a roller-disco on a vacant floor of an old industrial building; and an inflatable music venue on top of a parking garage, demonstrating possible alternative programming for structures that are used only during certain hours of the day.

	information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, pleasure
\$	900-113,000
	varies
	5-20
	Problem – vacant places in a shrinking city
	Solution – short-lived interventions that create renewed vitality

population loss, with most extreme cases located in industrial belts of U.S., Germany, Italy, and the U.K. Japanese clothier Commes des Garçons pioneers temporary, pop-up stores. 2005

justice. As a European-in-denial, I am groomed to be what Baudrillard describes as “a fanatic of aesthetics and meaning, of culture, of flavor and seduction.” That’s why, initially, I did not find many of them compelling. To be blunt: Many of them seemed easy, unpolished, one-liners compared to many of their European counterparts, which tend to be elegant, abstract, and part of a multilayered narrative. (There are, of course, exceptions on both sides of the Atlantic.) So what makes these projects worthy to be a part of something as elaborate as this exhibition? » With healthy exceptions (Jeanne van Heeswijk and Bik van der Pol, to name a couple), many European urban interventions are part of a slightly tired, overly critical discourse that takes place in art institutions and academia and is largely impenetrable to outsiders. Many of these European projects manage to receive funding from municipalities or institutions, or the designers aspire self-consciously for their projects to be included in exhibitions, which are also subsidized by government money. Although often highly participatory in ambition, I wonder if they really connect to the everyday life of cities. » The American projects, on the other hand, are bracing in their honesty: They are often rough, unpolished, and sometimes wild. Many are made by young and passionate urbanites who are not part of any formal art or architecture discourse, and do not aspire to join one. (This being said, many of our featured interventionists

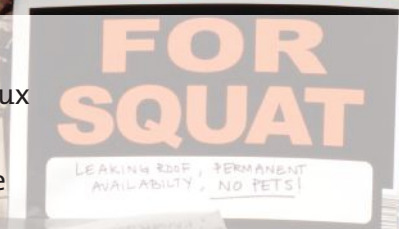
are as well-versed in Guy Debord as they are in the latest national transportation policy). Overwhelmingly, however, many of our featured artists simply strive to improve their neighborhoods, and, in so doing, they make a strong critique of American city planning, urban policies, and, most importantly, the ways in which Americans operate in urban space. Their projects amplify a renewed decisiveness from ordinary individuals who feel as though they can—and will—change their cities. » It is my hope that these creative thinkers and urban activists will help shape the urban landscapes of the future—not only through small-scale interventions or institutionalized creative projects, but by being invited by the gatekeepers of city halls and developers’ offices, and at federal policy desks, to inspire a rethinking of what the American city can be at its grandest scale. What does it mean if we let these seemingly radical ideas take center stage? American urbanites—and their cities—can become decisive as they find a balance between a confident state of “just as is” and a reality of dreams.

Co-curator of *Spontaneous Interventions*, **David van der Leer** is curator of the BMW Guggenheim Lab and assistant curator of architecture and urban studies at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. (His full biography appears on page 10.)

Public Media Institute For Squat/Reuben Kincaid Realty

Chicago and anywhere
since 2010

Reuben Kincaid Realty invites people to “Be Your Own Agent!” Describing itself as a “certified Rehousing Consultancy,” the faux real estate website features listings of abandoned or recently foreclosed-upon properties available for squat. A project of the nonprofit Public Media Institute (PMI), the listings are often crowdsourced, with entries mimicking brokers’ enthusiasm (“stunning two-bedroom townhouse, skyline views; owner recently evicted,” or “Perfect location! Abandoned church ready for occupation or weekend parties!”). PMI installs “For Squat” signs on available properties, and encourages people to download the sign and join their **campaign to fight for the basic human right to shelter**. A foil to the satire is the website’s links to articles and organizations that address the homeless crisis.



	information, accessibility, community, sustainability
	500 – sign production
	3 weeks – organize and print signs
	2
	Problem – abundant foreclosures and homeless population
	Solution – publicize buildings available for squat

Philadelphia restores streetcar that was replaced by buses in the 1960s. Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans, nearly 2,000 people die. **2006** Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's*

by Mimi Zeiger » **GET LOCAL** If there's a common question to be answered by the dozens of projects collected in *Spontaneous Interventions*, it might be: “What is the role of a local project in a global age?” The individual projects represented—pop-up parks, community agriculture, ad-hoc street furniture, guerrilla bike lanes—are not necessarily overt as they position themselves against the effects of global capital. However, taken as a group, these interventions run counter to the unchecked boom-and-bust development of what David Harvey and others critically describe as the neoliberal city. Small-scale

and socially engaged, spontaneous interventions use design to enrich public space and foster civic life at a time when the disparity between daily life and the governmental and corporate mechanisms shaping cities is at an all-time high. » Over the last decade, and especially during the slow recovery from the 2008 financial crisis, interventionist and tactical practice organically emerged as a global phenomenon. Design actions led by artists, architects, urban planners, and community organizers cropped up across Europe, South America, and Africa. These interventions, like those in the United States, are wholly determined by local conditions and defy the top-down strategies of traditional master planning. Consider the series of acupunctural projects proposed by Venezuelan NGO Caracas Think Tank for the city's informal settlements and a 2010 series of playful and educational interventions installed around a soccer stadium in Mafikeng, South Africa. Although they vary in whom they serve and why, both projects are specific to a place. » If we look closely at these two examples, we find that the conceptual instigators and financing come from outside academic and governmental institutions, a situation not uncommon in developing countries. For another example, the much-lauded, rainbow-colored Favela Painting project in the Santa Maria slum of Rio de Janeiro positively impacts the local condition. Brazilian youths receive training and a paycheck during the month-long project, but the

Dave Winslow & Loring Sagan

Linden Living Alley

San Francisco

2010

Courtesy Linden Living Alley

Amid the urban hubbub, Linden Living Alley provides a safe, low-speed area where pedestrians, bikes, and cars can coexist with greenery and social space. The re-envisioned thoroughway realizes the potential of San Francisco's small streets and alleys, a challenge given the city's strict standards of segregation between roadways and sidewalks. It is a modern "shared space" street—examples of which date back to the 1970s but have virtually disappeared due to accessibility requirements of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Architect Dave Winslow, AIA, and designer Loring Sagan (whose studio Build Inc. is located on Linden Alley) worked for years with the city and disability advocates to develop a design that preserves accessibility while fulfilling the vision of a truly shared space.

	accessibility, community, sustainability, pleasure
	\$ 275,000 – construction
	5 years – organization and design + 2 weeks for construction
	2, plus consultants
	Problem – strict divide between roadways and sidewalks
	Solution – shared pedestrian, bike, and car zone

Dilemma follows food chains, promotes urban farming. **2007** Subprime mortgage industry implodes. I-35W Mississippi River bridge collapses, killing 13. American Society of Civil Engineers

ideas and funding come from nearly 6,000 miles away. The project is the brainchild of Dutch artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn, who developed the idea while filming a documentary about informal settlements for MTV, and their backing comes from the Amsterdam-based Firmeza Foundation. » At times, the critique that's leveled at these kinds of projects is that they represent a kind of "parachute-in" approach that offers press and praise for the do-gooders without accounting for long-term impact. To be fair, in Europe—and especially in France, Germany, and the Netherlands—artistic interventionist practice draws on a history of support for arts and culture funding. In 2009, for instance, Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum underwrote *The Cook, the Farmer, His Wife and Their Neighbor*, which is a community garden and kitchen in an Amsterdam suburb by Slovene artist/architect Marjetica Potrc and design collective Wilde Westen. » In South America, where the sheer scale of need due to poverty, crime, and slums often outweighs the limits of tactical practice, architecture and infrastructure projects are implemented from the top down. When *New York Times* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman visited Medellín, Colombia, he reported on "a cadre of young architects being aggressively nurtured and promoted, and a commitment by local businesses to improve social welfare that begins with the city's biggest business: its state-owned utilities company, E.P.M." » And

it's in this relationship between maker, user, and funder where the U.S. strain of interventionist practice veers from many of the international models. Individuals and small teams created the bulk of the works represented in *Spontaneous Interventions* to benefit their own communities. Because of the limited scope of these projects, but not due to any lack of ambition, funding comes in small-to-medium allotments from personal resources, nonprofit grants, and microfunding sites such as Kickstarter. Matt Tomasulo's Walk Raleigh project—an act of guerrilla wayfinding that consists of 27 unsanctioned street signs installed around Raleigh, N.C.—was created for \$275 dollars in supplies. Support from the community led the City Council to approve the project as a pilot education program. » In many ways, these projects capture a decidedly American can-do drive to make things better, starting in your own backyard. This is as true for BroLab's portable commuter benches installed along the Q39 and B57 MTA bus routes in Long Island City, N.Y., as it is of Urban Operations Parkman Triangle, in Los Angeles, which is a small slice of urban landscape that sits a few doors down from its designer's office. » These efforts fly in the face of NIMBY attitudes that spring up in boom times. Small-scale interventions reaffirm the local, the practical, and the hands-on. They return to an older pioneering spirit, once about setting off to the West and now about rejuvenating the territory outside our front doors.

interventions

1 Jackson Heights Green Alliance
78th Street Play Street



2 596 Acres



3 Rebuild Foundation
1415



4 Sensemakers
Air Quality Egg

5 HabitatMap
AirCasting



6 David Benjamin and
Natalie Jeremijenko
Amphibious Architecture



7 Austin Urban Solutions &
Rosner Studio
Aquaponics Container System



8 Ed Woodham
Art in Odd Places

9 AFHny Studio
ARTfarm



10 Jason Eppink and Posterchild
Astoria Scum River Bridge



estimates

160,570 U.S. bridges (one-quarter of nation's bridges) are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. 2008



11 Various
Bartering and Sharing Networks



12 Ants of the Prairie
Bat Cloud

13 BroLab
Bench Press



14 Team Better Block
Better Block



15 BK Farmyards



16 Brooklyn Night Bazaar

17 Rebar
Bubbleware



18 Various
Building Projections



19 LA Department of DIY
Bunchy Carter Park



20 Institute for Urban Design
By the City/For the City

AFFORDABILITY

NATURAL METAL

University of Arizona - Tucson, AZ
Architect: NAC/Architecture



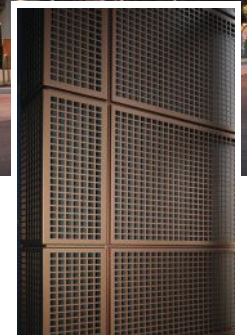
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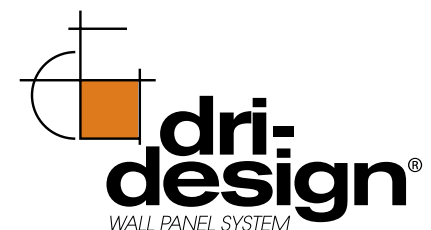
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DoTank
Chair-bombing

25
Resource Center
City Farm



26
Normal Projects
City Sensing: Signal Space



27
Come Out and Play
Come Out and Play Festival



28
Shared Spaces Landscape
Architecture & 'Hood Builders
Community Living Room Project

29
Manuel Ávila
Crown Heights Participatory
Urbanism



30
MAS Studio
Cut. Join. Play.



31
Public Architecture
Day Labor Station



32
Depave

33
Eduardo Cachucho
Dérive App



34
Object Orange
Detroit, Demolition, Disneyland



35
Make It Right Foundation
Eco-Playground

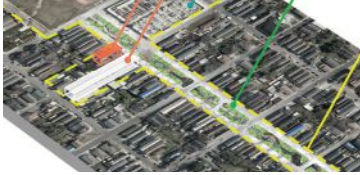


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Fritz Haeg
Edible Estates

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WORKac
Edible Schoolyard New York City



38
Green Bronx Machine
Edible Wall



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Lang Architecture
Faubourg St. Roch Project




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youarethecity
Field Guide to Phytoremediation

41
Public Media Institute
For Squat/Reuben Kincaid Realty



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Architecture for Humanity Chicago
Fresh Moves Mobile Produce Market





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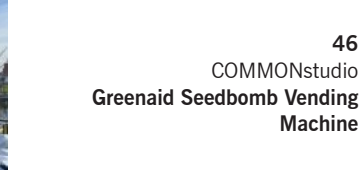
43
Various
Ghost Bikes



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GOOD
GOOD Ideas for Cities



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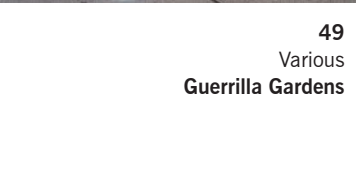
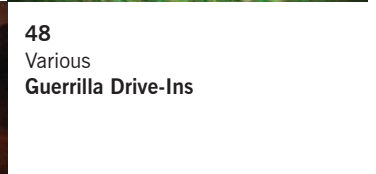
48
Various
Guerrilla Drive-Ins



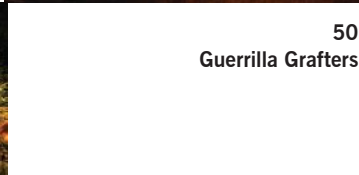
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Anonymous
Guerrilla Bike Lanes



50
Guerrilla Grafters



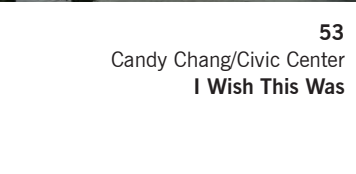
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Guerrilla Gardens



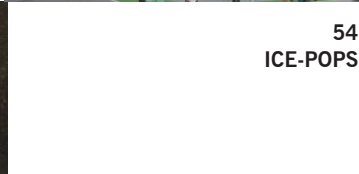
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SLO Architecture
Harvest Dome



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Rob Walker and Ellen Susan
Hypothetical Development
Organization



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Candy Chang/Civic Center
I Wish This Was



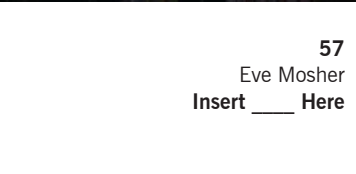
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ICE-POPS



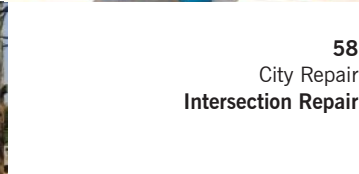
55
Urbano Activo
Iluminación



56
Rockwell Group
Imagination Playground



57
Eve Mosher
Insert ____ Here



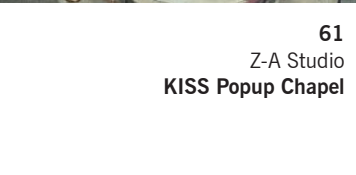
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City Repair
Intersection Repair



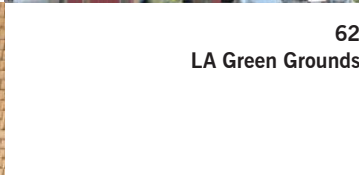
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Ari Kletzky
Islands of LA



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Kingshighway Vigilante Transitions
Kingshighway Skatepark



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Z-A Studio
KISS Popup Chapel



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LA Green Grounds



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Ghana ThinkTank
Legal Waiting Zone



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Interboro Partners
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Evan Gant and Alex Tee
LightLane



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Dave Winslow and Loring Sagan
Linden Living Alley

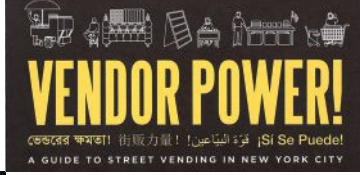


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Nicholas de Monchaux
Local Code: Real Estates



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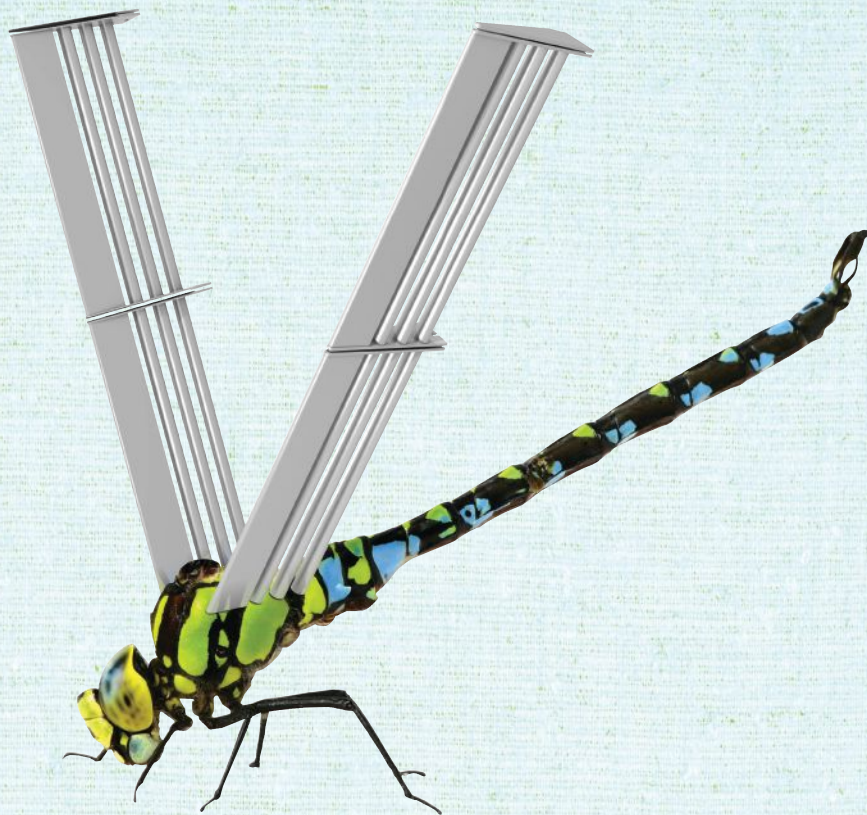
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CMG Landscape Architecture
Parkmobiles

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Baltimore Development Cooperative
Participation Park



86
Hester Street Collaborative & Partnerships for Parks
People Make Parks





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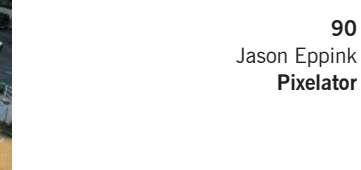
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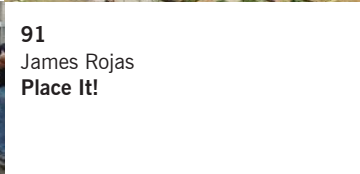
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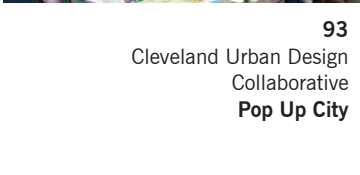
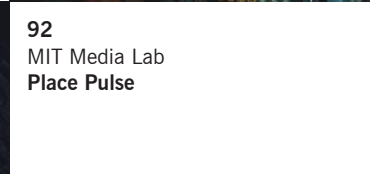
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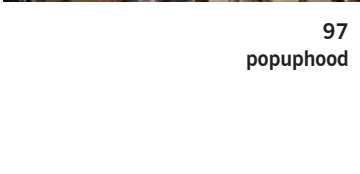
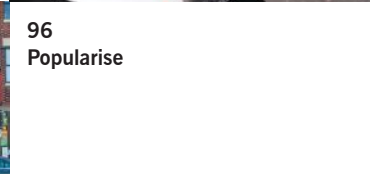
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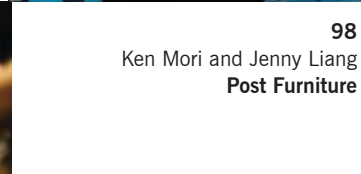
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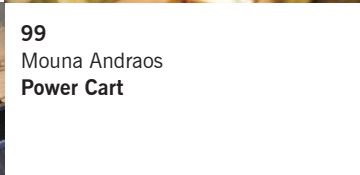
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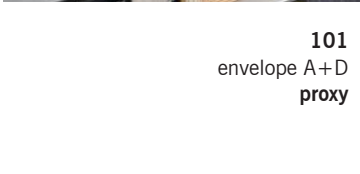
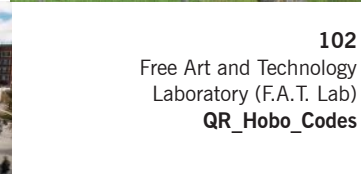
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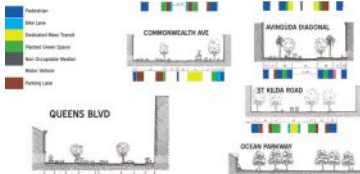
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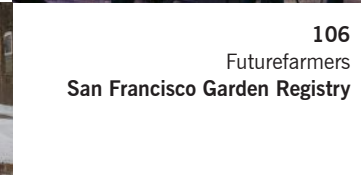
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smoke detector
battery, Zone 3.



"I'll replace
the battery
first thing
tomorrow
morning."



Afternoon
Sunlight
Detected:
Lower
blinds.



"That's my
cue. Time for
my coffee
break."



"Plenty of
sun out to
generate
power."



Energy Status:
Solar power
generation
activated.



Greywater
Storage: 63%
capacity.



"Class, let's get
ready to water
the roof-top
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unoccupied.
Reduce
lighting.



"It's a nice day
out. We're
heading to
the park."



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remotely on
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Design That Moves You
Skipping Only Zones



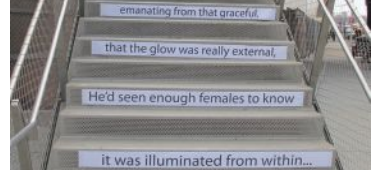
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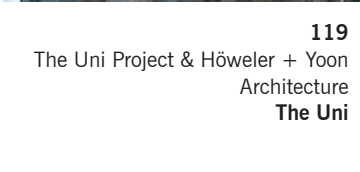
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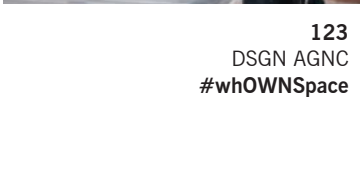
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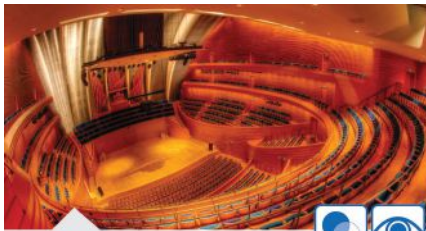
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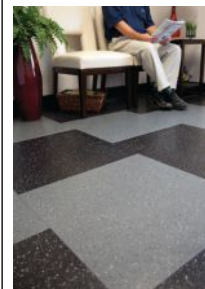
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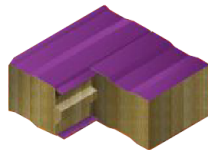


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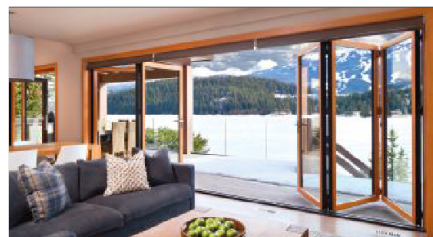
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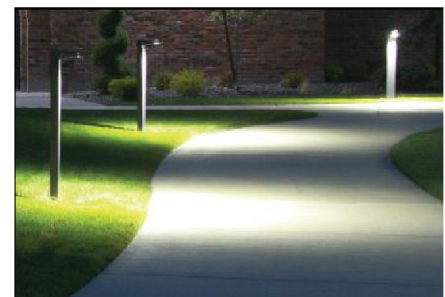
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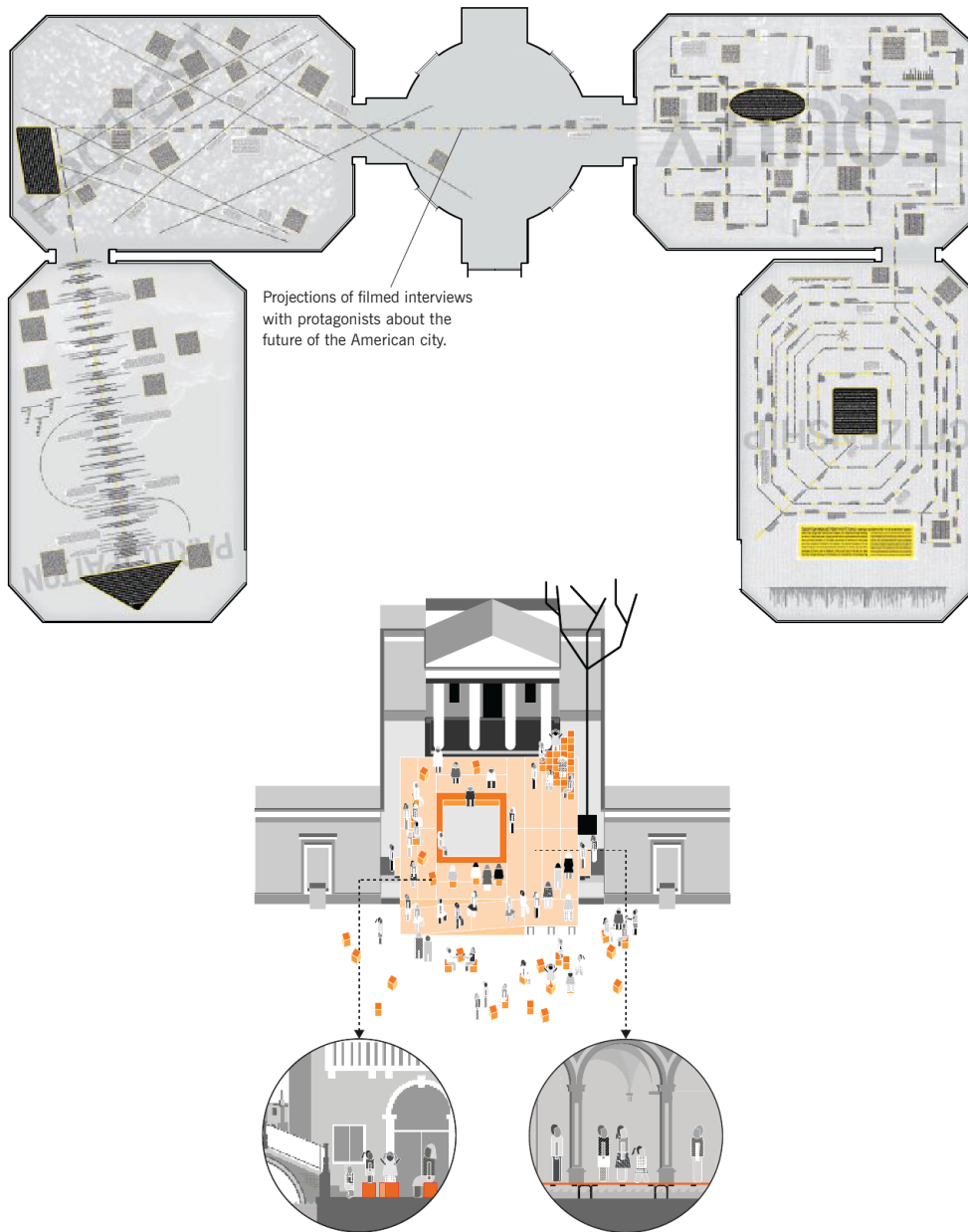
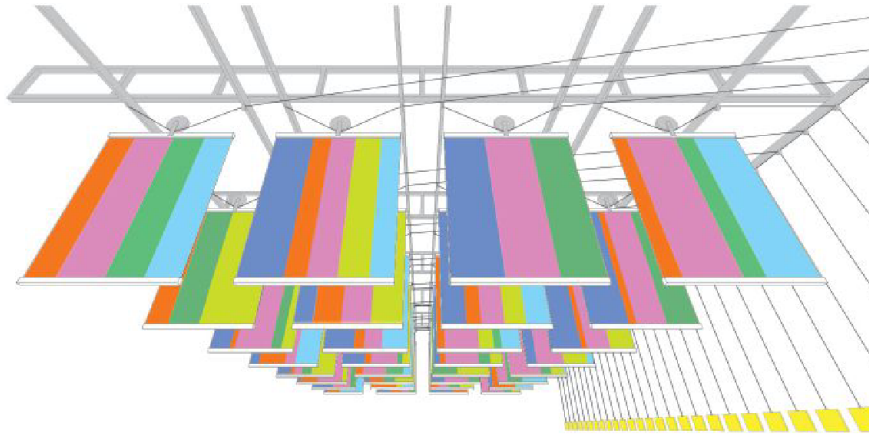
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Projections of filmed interviews with protagonists about the future of the American city.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

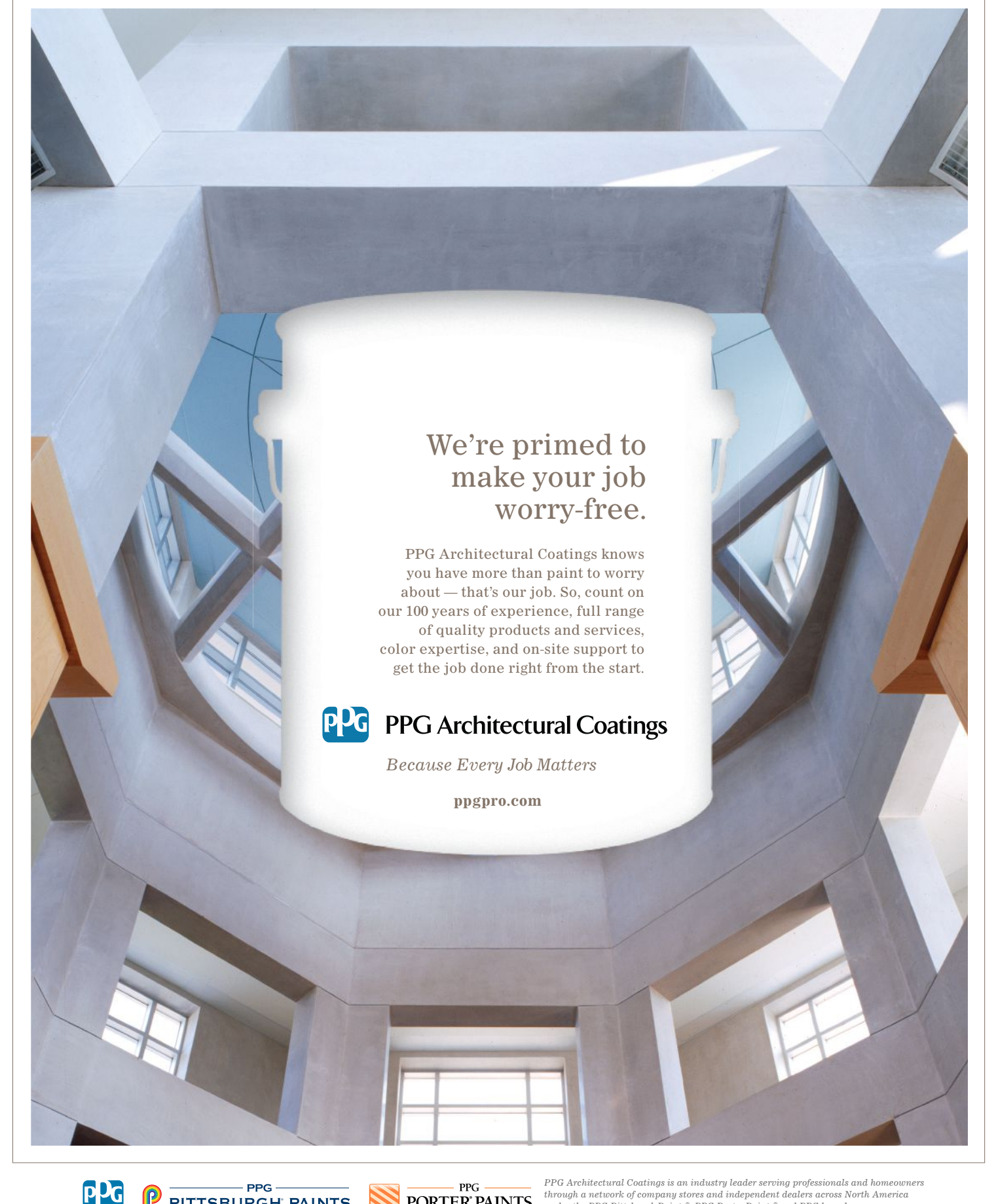
FREECCELL and M-A-D

To create an engaging installation of an archive, Freecell devised a system of banners suspended from an open scaffold—evoking the notion of city flags, which provide a sense of belonging and civic pride. When pulled down for closer reading, the banners trigger the movement of counterweights which are each inscribed with interventionist tactics.

M-A-D assigned a semantic bar code to each project, which is described on the banner's flip side. Wending across the floor is a timeline that narrates the history of city-making and points out key precedents in urban activism. The bold floor graphic serves as a counterpoint to the urban aspirations hanging above.

COURTYARD INTERBORO

Interboro borrowed standard-issue items from the city of Venice—the emergency sidewalks, called *passerelle*, used to navigate the city's *acqua alta*, or high waters—to compose an “outdoor living room” that will host a series of programs scheduled to take place during the three-month Biennale. Dubbed *Commonplace*, the courtyard can be set up for lectures, socializing, and play. After the exhibition, its components will be given back to the city.



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