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In "The Right to the City" Henri Lefebvre states that urban praxis requires "places of simultaneity and encounters" that make room for the fluid, shifting relationships of everyday life and social interaction (Lefebvfre 1996). Designers cannot create these relationships; they come from the people who actually inhabit the city. Designers can, however, "clear the way" and "give birth to the possible" by creating opportunities for praxis to occur. This paper discusses how contemporary design activism realizes Lefebvre's "right to the city" through techniques rooted in historical participatory design. It presents examples from the work of Aldo Van Eyck and Lucien Kroll and builds on these with the work of the contemporary activist designers Teddy Cruz and Urban Think Tank. These designers approach design as a facilitator of social interactions that can be shaped to meet the needs of diverse users and generate new types of social and economic relationships. Designed as systems rather than objects, their projects are open-ended and flexible while remaining functional and they make use of the informal systems already operating in their communities. These projects not only serve needs through spatial infrastructure but also create opportunities for urban praxis by operating as social infrastructure.

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ABSTRACT

In "The Right to the City" Henri Lefebvre states that urban praxis requires "places of simultaneity and encounters" that make room for the fluid, shifting relationships of everyday life and social interaction (Lefebvfre 1996). Designers cannot create these relationships; they come from the people who actually inhabit the city. Designers can, however, "clear the way" and "give birth to the possible" by creating opportunities for praxis to occur. This paper discusses how contemporary design activism realizes Lefebvre's "right to the city" through techniques rooted in historical participatory design. It presents examples from the work of Aldo Van Eyck and Lucien Kroll and builds on these with the work of the contemporary activist designers Teddy Cruz and Urban Think Tank. These designers approach design as a facilitator of social interactions that can be shaped to meet the needs of diverse users and generate new types of social and economic relationships. Designed as systems rather than objects, their projects are open-ended and flexible while remaining functional and they make use of the informal systems already operating in their communities. These projects not only serve needs through spatial infrastructure but also create opportunities for urban praxis by operating as social infrastructure.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

In his seminal work "The Right to the City," Henri Lefebvre critiques contemporary urban society and the spaces it produces as lacking in "places of simultaneity and encounter" that make room for the fluid, shifting relationships of everyday life and social interaction. For Lefebvre, people have become cogs in the wheels of capitalist production and the city needs to establish new ways for all people to have a voice in shaping their environments. Participation in decision-making regarding the space of the city and the ability to appropriate this space are critical components to achieving the right to the city. Written in 1968, Lefebvre's essay speaks from the perspective of

1960s' civil rights and student protests, the rise of participatory design practices, and combat against hegemonic urban renewal. It also speaks to contemporary issues of increased urbanization, informal economic and spatial systems, globalization, and the growing gap between rich and poor. Contemporary activist designers address these issues, often using them to generate strategies that achieve the right to the city, through techniques rooted in the participatory design practices of the 1960s and 70s that also expand on these in terms of both participation and appropriation to create social infrastructures that provide access to the "right to the city" for the most disempowered and voiceless (Lefebvre 1996).

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Lefebvre begins "The Right to the City" by explaining that human beings cannot be satisfied only by working for wages to earn money to purchase things within the "so-called society of consumption" but also have "social" or "anthropological" needs that include play, creativity, sport, learning, gathering, and experiencing (Lefebvre 1996). Our cities need to have not only places for specific types of planned activities like work and leisure but also places where social needs can be satisfied in unplanned and spontaneous ways, places where all inhabitants can shape their relationships with others and with their environment. This is particularly relevant today as globalization moves governance increasingly toward decisions based

on economic competition and transference of policy-making to non-state entities like trade organizations and multi-national corporations. At the same time, increasing numbers of urban inhabitants not only lack economic decision-making power but are also disenfranchised and without voice (Purcell 2002).

For Lefebvre, there are two "propositions" that must be considered in order to achieve the right to the city. These two ideas form the basis for much of what has historically constituted participatory activist design work as well as its more contemporary practice. These propositions furthermore have the potential to constitute a basis for a re-enfranchisement of a broader range of inhabitants of contemporary cities by expanding both access to spatial strategies and opportunities to use them. The first of these is "a political programme of urban reform" that allows all inhabitants, not just legal citizens, of a city to take part in the decision-making that shapes its spatial and social conditions. While not specific as to how this system should be structured, Lefebvre is clear that while based in reality it should not be "defined by the framework and the possibilities of prevailing society or subjugated to a 'realism.'" In other words, this system needs to be structured so as to enable the enactment of visionary strategies and policies that go beyond pragmatics while still being realizable (Lefebvre 1996).

Lefebvre's second "proposition" requires experimentation with "models and spatial forms and urban times" that come from testing theoretical ideas against real conditions. Above

all, spatial conditions need to be developed that can allow for the appropriation of space and the exercise of imagination in ways that allow the city's inhabitants to experience the freedoms and releases of full and creative everyday life. The places to begin this work are the "holes and chasms" that exist between the planned and formal structures of dominant society. Places like empty lots between buildings, land adjacent to infrastructure, and informal slums provide these opportunities because, since they do not represent the main interests of the system in power, they are overlooked as valueless and thus provide an opportunity for the study and development of new, more inclusive production of space (Lefebvre 1996). These are in fact the places that design activism, both historical and contemporary, has primarily engaged.

PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES

In her seminal article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Sherry Arnstein discusses how ordinary people can be structurally brought into the process of shaping their spatial environment to various degrees. For Arnstein as well as design practitioners advocating a participatory process, the participation of people in the design process is tied to the redistribution of power, allowing those who are "presently excluded from the political and economic processes" to gain access to "the benefits of affluent society." This reflects Lefebvre's Marxist dialectics that rely heavily on the redistribution of economic power, including the production of fixed assets such as buildings, to

achieve the right to the city. However, Arnstein also goes on to say that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless," drawing attention to the need for not only decision-making participation but also the ability to appropriate and use space as desired (Arnstein 1969).

Advocacy planning as a participatory process arose in the 1960s in response to a range of situations that suppressed the rights of the powerless. Removal of minorities and destruction of communities to create urban renewal housing and infrastructure projects, for example, was a strong driver of this movement in the United States. Architects and planners began to work with affected communities to initially block urban renewal through protests and later shape it, at least in theory, by including community representatives in decision-making bodies, conducting participatory design charrettes, and requiring project approval by community groups. These practices have since become institutionalized, however, and they often serve special interests at the expense of others and become more of an informational rather than a truly participatory process (Hester 1999). As a result, these processes have diminished in terms of the degree of decision-making power they provide for communities, rendering neutral the first requirement for Lefebvre's right to the city. In addition, while advocacy planning has certainly given citizens a sense of involvement in the initial ideas about shaping space, it frequently does not allow for the actual appropriation of space that is

critical to achieving this right. In other words, people need to not only be able to make decisions about what space will be but they also need to have the opportunity to use spaces as they see fit, to have spaces that facilitate interaction, creativity, and exchange.

While much participatory design focused on mechanisms for including community members in the decision-making process leading to the creation of urban projects, the designers Aldo Van Eyck and Lucien Kroll addressed the design and physical creation of urban space from infrastructural, systemic points of view that suggest a broader idea of participatory practice and provide strong precedents for contemporary activist practice. Van Eyck's Amsterdam Playgrounds and Kroll's Student Housing in Woluwe-Saint Lambert serve as example of these practices.

THE AMSTERDAM PLAYGROUNDS

The Amsterdam Playgrounds, designed by Aldo Van Eyck between 1947 and 1978, are over 700 spaces throughout the city designed as children's play areas on leftover spaces such as road medians, irregular spaces between buildings, and empty lots where WWII deportees' houses once stood. While initially part of the functionalist post-World War II movement for rational city re-building that was proposed for Amsterdam, Van Eyck evolved through the playground projects into an advocate of participatory, infrastructural urbanism. While now largely abandoned or

destroyed as a result of poor maintenance and neglect, the playgrounds formed an urban network that wove throughout the fabric of the city without imposing a formal order on it. The irregularity of the spaces and the elements that occupy them embrace the "chaotic" and "kaleidoscopic" nature of the city while also subtly commemorating the losses experienced through deportation of ordinary people by the Nazis (Van Eyck 1999).

Van Eyck's designs also employed strategies that facilitated the appropriation of the spaces by users, including not only children playing on the equipment but also parents gathering while their children played and the elderly, coming to sit in the open spaces for relaxation. Van Eyck positioned the playground elements using a relational strategy rather than a compositional hierarchy. For example, the Djikstraat Playground from 1954 uses a zig-zag paving strategy to organize the space into relatively equal triangular areas. Play equipment including a sand pit and jungle gym are then placed so that each has a zone within the space, sometimes overlapping the paving and sometimes within its spaces. As a result, each piece of equipment has an equal weight in the space and the areas in between offer opportunities for rest and conversation as well as movement. The diagram of his 1950 Zahnhof playground likewise shows how the circular sandpit is placed off-center with zones for other equipment and activities placed in equally-space zones. The sandpit thus acts as a focal point but does not create hierarchy, allowing the other

equipment and spontaneous, un-programmed activities to co-exist on equal footing.

Van Eyck is very clear in discussing the playgrounds that they are intended not as compositional exercises but as places for encounter and the experience of urban life by people of all ages. His design techniques facilitate this and are based in techniques of observation of human behavior rather than direct user feedback. They created "points where the seeds of community were sewn, where the city was not to be viewed or consumed but experienced" (Strauven 1998). His approach was about designing a network or system of urban spaces that were based on already-existing gaps in the urban fabric and as such could integrate into existing networks without disruption, providing opportunities for encounter and interaction as well as play and creativity. The people of Amsterdam were thus able to appropriate leftover spaces in the city, incorporating them into their daily lives, and using them not only as playgrounds but also as spaces for meeting, sharing, and remembering so as to reclaim their right to the city.

THE WOLUWÉ-SAINT LAMBERT STUDENT HOUSING

The work of Belgian architect Lucien Kroll is activist on many levels; he observes and documents existing patterns of use, involves users and inhabitants in every stage of design and construction, incorporates building trades into the design process, and has developed construction systems to facilitate the kind of flexibility that this type of practice requires. Throughout his work, he strives to use modern industrial systems in ways that promote diversity and craft by involving the user. The most comprehensive example of these systems is undoubtedly the living and social quarters for medical students at Woluwé-Saint Lambert in Brussels, Belgium.

Brought in at the request of students in 1969 following protests in response to the university's stark modernist designs for dormitories, Kroll worked with the students in both formal and informal settings to develop the program for the building complex. Diversity and flexibility are the governing rules of the design, creating opportunities for different types of people to interact in a variety of spaces. For example, rather than separating single students from families with children, different types of living spaces occur next to each other. Outdoor spaces occur at multiple scales ranging from gardens between buildings to small exterior balconies. Services including shops, a nursery school, and the Alma subway station are also incorporated into the residential buildings, allowing for a mix of activities and mix between students and community residents operating businesses and traveling to central Brussels.

The construction system for the project developed from discussions with students about their needs and desires into a flexible column and slab system that allows for irregularly spaced structural elements in addition to flexible, user-controlled

non-structural components (Kroll 1987).[1] As in Van Eyck's playgrounds, the design is not about the finished building as object or even the formal logic of the building but rather "relationships between people in a space that suits them - that is architecture" (Kroll 1984).

In discussing his approach to housing design in the essay "Anarchitecture," Kroll practically quotes Lefebvre when he describes the predominant system of "maternal authority" as one the maintains the "industrial division of labor" and creates an atmosphere of apathy that lacks spontaneity and creativity. He furthermore describes architecture as "an instrument that can encourage or block human behaviors," giving it instrumental capacity to achieve not only individual freedom but also the more collective right to the city. Rather than creating a design based on pre-determined uses of space, for Kroll the architect's role is to set "only key centers of activity" based on discussions with users and then allow the rest of the design to evolve over time. Kroll thus sees his work as an architect as focused on establishing the framework for networks that can foster appropriation and independent decision-making by the public rather than as a maker of finished objects with pre-determined configurations. His process not only involves users directly in decision-making during all phases of design and construction, satisfying Lefebvre's first

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[1] Kroll's system is a variation on the SAR Module developed by N.J. Habraken as director of the Stichting Architectural Research that separates a regularized "support" system from an irregular, user-controlled "infill" system. Kroll felt that the 20+10 centimeter SAR module did not provide enough flexibility and developed a system based on multiples of 10 cm.

requirement for the right to the city, but also does this in a way that facilitates the on-going appropriation and changing use of space, meeting Lefebvre's second requirement as well.

CONTEMPORARY ACTIVIST DESIGN PRACTICE

Both Kroll and Van Eyck offer models of early types of activist practice because they are primarily concerned with defining the spatial needs of users and inhabitants and developing systems that allow these people to define spatially how their needs are satisfied. Rather than beginning with a pre-conceived solution, they facilitate the articulation of community needs as well as broader visions of urban life of which specific building projects are only one component. Bryan Bell, the founder of Design Corps, describes design activists as those who "help to define problems and locate opportunities where design has the potential to change the lives of individual people and communities" (Bell 2010). While traditional designers are essentially form-givers who come late and leave early in the building process, activist designers are involved in interacting with users, conducting research, evaluating post-occupancy results, and other activities that extend both before and after the form-making part of design and construction. The designer's activities in these "pre-form" and "post-form" stages are highly relational in that they focus on user/user and user/context interactions. The activist design project is thus not simply about configuring a space but rather about generating strategies that can improve or reshape social relationships through space.

Building on the work of architects like Kroll and Van Eyck, many contemporary activist practitioners have taken on the challenge of creating spatial conditions that move beyond the hegemonic forces of modernist capitalism to create places for multiple voices, meanings, and forms that exist simultaneously within the built environment. This work frequently moves away from building design in isolation and broadens client relationships to include proactive partnerships with community organizations and leaders at both ends of the social ladder. These practices approach design systemically, articulating issues and their incremental solutions within a broader visionary framework. They also often do not design the final built products themselves but instead leave these up to local constituents who can adapt their systems to fit specific local conditions.

San Diego-based Teddy Cruz, for example, engages in "territorial projects whose main focus is not the object of architecture, but the subversion of the information imprinted artificially on the land, the alteration of the boundaries and limits established by the institutions of official development" (Cruz 2004). In working with the non-profit Casa Familiar in San Ysidro, California, Cruz begins by understanding the relationships that have developed over time between the city's formal zoning regulations and the "practices of encroachment" of the local immigrant community. Based on separation of units and clear distinction of ownership and use, the zoning regulations attempt to maintain Modernist separation of uses, uniformity of building elements, and a visible relationship between property ownership and occupation. Residents, many of whom have immigrated by nearby Mexico, nevertheless incorporate small commercial operations into their residences, build non-conforming additions on their properties, and share dwelling units across multiple individuals and groups. The Affordable Housing Overlay Zone (AHOZ) micropolicy developed by Cruz with Casa Familiar uses local agencies like Casa Familiar as mediating agencies between residents and the municipality, facilitating a shift from density defined as "units per acre" to density defined as "social exchanges per acre" that contribute to the economic and social vitality of the community through it spatial configuration. Cruz's project for San Ysidro is thus not a specific building design per se but rather a policy change that would alter the zoning in order to allow residents to more easily transform their residences as needed and to create new projects with varying densities and uses (Cruz 2007). The project begins with the relationship between informal practices and formal zoning, leading to a system that strategically facilitates the informal practices and gives them legitimacy, thus also giving legitimacy to their practitioners.

By partnering with groups like Casa Familiar, Cruz enables the participation of the local immigrant community in shaping its spatial environment. The partnership gives voice not only to those who lack power but also to those who may be afraid to participate in a more direct way because of legal status. Casa Familiar thus acts as their voice in

both design and civic processes, facilitating not only spatial but also policy change and shifting the object of design from buildings to policies and processes that will allow residents to shape the environment to meet their needs. This in turn makes it possible for residents to appropriate the spaces of their homes, streets, yards, and garages and in so doing achieve the right to the city.

The Caracas-based practice Urban Think Tank, consisting of partners Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner, defines itself as "fostering a collaborative, multidisciplinary research community" in order to understand the built environment of the city from a multi-disciplinary perspective, particularly the "urgent problems of 'real life' in the barrios" that design practice and education continue to overlook (Brillembourg 2005). Their work involves research, mapping, community meetings, and construction and operates at a range of scales from the region to the object. In the project Growing House, Growing City, for example, they begin with the need for water and sanitation in the *barrios* of Caracas. By beginning with the issue rather than a defined design object, they are able to identify a range of interconnected issues including not only providing water and sanitation but also soil stabilization, food production through composting, and increased economic freedom by reducing water costs. As a result, the actual building project is a network of bathing and toilet units with water collection and storage that are located on sites determined by the area's watershed in combination with open land. Rather than a

centralized infrastructure, the project is a dispersed system with control of individual units distributed throughout the community. Each unit is built by local trades-people and decorated by community residents. In addition to the services they provide, the units also foster pride and a sense of ownership by community members in that they each uniquely respond to their specific locations (Brillembourg 2005). As with Teddy Cruz, Urban Think Tank's design work is as much about created a system in response to community needs that has multiple components to its implementation, thus creating multiple points for community interface and ownership. The project began through a need identified by the community, developed according to their ideas, and was implemented incrementally through their direct participation. They thus achieve both the decision-making and the appropriation components necessary for Lefebvre's right to the city.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary designers such as Teddy Cruz and Urban Think Tank are actively engaged in systemic practices that include partnerships with non-traditional clients, on-going relationships with communities and their residents, and design work that focuses on incremental systems rather than objects. Their work builds upon the open-ended and non-hierarchical practices of designers like Aldo Van Eyck and Lucien Kroll that include compositional, programmatic, tectonic, and implementation strategies. Most importantly they

build upon this work by expanding the idea of the "design project" to include not only buildings or spaces but also policies and codes that take issues as starting points and do not necessarily lead to buildings as end points. This way of working allows designers to engage relevant issues such as poverty, water quality, and global warming at multiple scales while also creating strategies for addressing these issues that are not only hegemonic top-down laws but also bottom-up participatory processes that can change for different temporal and spatial conditions. By working this way, these activist practitioners allow people to participate not only in reviews of design products but also in determining what design issues will be addressed and how they will be incorporated into existing practices. This in turn facilitates the appropriation of the spaces produced because they are produced using the material, spatial, and social languages of the users for whom they are intended. This work thus provides access to the right to the city on multiple levels and provides new ways for design to re-establish its relevance in shaping the contemporary socio-economic as well as spatial environment.

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