The Black Spatial Imaginary in Urban Design Practice: Lessons for Creating Black-affirming Public Spaces

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Abstract

The Black Spatial Imaginary in Urban Design Practice: Lessons for Creating Black-affirming Public Spaces

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The *spatial imaginary* – as presented in this thesis – refers to an understanding of how we come to know what we know about space; and recognizes that to talk about society, politics, economics, culture, race, gender, the environment and so forth, inherently, is to talk about space. Identifying the role of the spatial imaginary in the urban design process can inform how public spaces are conceived of and produced. Dangerously, the dominance of a hegemonic *white spatial imaginary* in the United States has contributed to a public realm which has put Black belonging in public space at risk. In response, this thesis draws upon the concept of a *Black spatial imaginary* to re-evaluate the urban design process in the practice of creating Black-affirming public spaces. Focusing on public participation in the urban design process, this thesis asks, how can participatory community-driven design be used to create Black-affirming public spaces? And subsequently, what is the role of the designer in this collaboration? In doing so, the urban designer can be better equipped to practice equitable placemaking which not only supports the Black cultural experience but reinforces the democracy of the public realm.

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Preface

For as long as I can remember, I have been certain about what my Blackness means to me. However, the environment I grew up in neither understood nor supported my experience. To others, the way I expressed my identity contrasted what they had learned and come to expect from me. My Blackness is rooted in the heritage of the Pacific Coast of Colombia. I came to understand what it "*means to be Black"* through a Latin American context: one that was passed on to me by my grandmother and my father. Growing up in Canada, many – especially non-Black – people saw how I negotiated my Blackness and invalidated it. Or at least they tried to. W.E.B. Dubois says that to be Black is to navigate the world with a dual consciousness – an awareness of the self from within and from the external gaze.

I write this thesis having lived in the United States for almost two years now and for the third time in my life, I am having to re-learn and re-negotiate a new Black cultural experience. By no means am I an expert on "what it means to be Black" let alone here in the U.S. I offer myself to this work as a way to continue a journey of self development in the hope that it broadens the spectrum of Black experience just a little bit more. This project seeks to uplift the need for Black belonging in place. My surroundings have been important in how I understand and express myself. Until now, I have seen how this sense of belonging fluctuates – from Colombia, to Canada, and now in the U.S. Being a part of the African Diaspora means that there is no singular experience of Blackness. Which means that similarly, there is no singular narrative that can encompass how we relate to our environment.

As a graduate student I recognize the privilege I have with the opportunity to tell this story as far as I know it. Ultimately, I hope I am presented with conversations, opportunities, and understanding to continue working on what my Blackness looks like and to be able to help represent others in theirs.

Introduction

Urban design is a future-oriented discipline. I write future intentionally to underscore the plurality of possibility, representation, and experience that can emerge from a spatial imaginary. The spatial imaginary can be thought of as an epistemology that will ultimately serve the urban designer with a foundation for the production of space. Included in the spatial imaginary are expectations of who is represented in space, what values are reinforced in space, and the process of its production. There is a direct connection, then, between the spatial imaginary and the futures that become concretized into the built environment.

Broadly speaking, within the context of the public realm, there has been an interest by urban planners and designers alike to imbue the value of inclusivity into the creation of public space. The emergence of equitable placemaking has sought to engrain public spaces as being for “everyone” (Project for Public Spaces, 2016b, 2016a). However, this generalization becomes problematic when we recognize the misalignment between the rhetoric of public space as democratic and serving to all and the experience of being Black in public space.

I argue in this thesis that the model of spatial production that underlines a great part of urban design practice in the U.S. is one that centers whiteness in the understanding of space and place. Subsequently, all publics – the multitude of identities present in the public realm – either not represented or misrepresented by a white spatial imaginary, experience a disconnect with their environment. The consequences of this disconnect within the U.S. Black cultural experience in public space manifests itself in several ways including – but not limited to – self absence, the policing of Black bodies, loss, displacement, and erasure of Black histories from the collective memory (Gade & Mark, 2016). Maintaining a white spatial imaginary will inherently reproduce these spatial consequences into Black futures.

Often, when Blackness or race is considered in placemaking it is done so from a deficit-based approach. A deficit-based research approach identifies the ways in which a community and its places are perceived to be failing a designated standard of living (Kelley, 2011). However, Lisa Bates implores planners to reassess whether "the kinds of tools that we're using to measure and speak about Black communities are more suited to describing social death than they are to describing life" (USC Price, 2018, 5:19). A deficit-based research approach – rooted within the white spatial imaginary – inhibits the designer's ability learn and approach working in communities. As it is argued that the spatial imaginary is most significant to the problem identification and idea generating steps of the design process, inappropriate use of public participation tools fails to produce public spaces that are both affirming and culturally responsive to Black communities. When the white spatial imaginary dominates the practice of urban design then:

> Black geographies disappear – to the margins or realm of the unknowable. In short, a Black sense of place and Black geographical knowledges are both undermined by hegemonic spatial practices (of, say, segregation and neglect) and seemingly unavailable as a world view.
>
> (McKittrick & Woods, 2007 p.7)

In response, I draw upon the concept of the *Black spatial imaginary* to inform equitable placemaking practice in urban design (Bates, Towne, Jordan, & Lelliott, 2018; Lipsitz, 2007). This thesis demonstrates how the tools and mechanisms of community-driven design can be reformed to serve Black belonging in place. In doing so, this thesis asks specifically, how can participatory community-driven design be used to create Black-affirming public spaces? And subsequently, what is the role of the designer in this collaboration? Supported by a review of literature from environmental psychology, sociology, Black geographies, community design, and six semi-structured interviews with placemakers from across the U.S, this thesis investigates how a Black spatial imaginary might be better understood and operationalized for practicing urban designers. This is a paradigm shift that is not limited to Black designers nor is not limited to designing for Black publics. There is an opportunity for the urban designer to engage in truly equitable placemaking for the broader public realm when considering "seemingly unavailable… world view[s]" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007 p.7).

This thesis positions itself as an endeavour to shift the needle away from the white spatial imaginary towards *different* social and cultural experiences in urban design. For the public realm to uphold the

emerging value of equity it is intending to represent, it must support an environment of Black cultural belonging. In accessing the Black spatial imaginary, the urban designer will be better prepared to evaluate the actions they take in designing public spaces. It is important to note that this thesis does not ask what does a Black-affirming public space *look like*. Rather, it seeks to explore the way in which the spatial imaginary connects to and influences the actions taken in the urban design process. The lessons provided in this thesis contribute to a line of inquiry that urban designers can reflect upon when creating a Black-affirming public space.

Part I: The Dialectic of Place, Space and Black Identity

Representation in Public Space is Important to Democracy

It has long been acknowledged that public spaces are much more than the negative space between buildings, but rather are the sites of social life (Gehl, 2011; Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980). As the physical component of the public realm, public spaces support social, economic, cultural, and political interests. The nature to which public spaces are a shared domain makes them both open yet nuanced environments. The flexibility of public spaces to host a range of interests can create conflict among contested aims. This contestation is only evermore layered with the recognition that users of public space also vary greatly; in beliefs, values, and expectations of others.

The breadth of identities represented by people in the public realm forms a variety of *publics*, simultaneously disparate and intersecting in the way they relate to one another (Fraser, 1990). Innately, public spaces support the democracy of the public realm "for it is here that the desires and needs of individuals and groups can be *seen*, and therefore recognized, resisted, or … wiped out" (Mitchell, 2003 p.33). So, if democracy requires that individuals and groups have the opportunity – and more so the right – to be recognized and participate in society, then public spaces become the vehicle for their representation. This is a lofty aspiration. However, it is a challenge that presents the urban designer with "many practical issues with respect to the design, construction, and use of spaces and places" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983 p.81). Ultimately, the urban designer – among others – has a responsibility to create environments that allow inhabitants to foster their self and group development while still maintaining the integrity of a democratic public realm.

Defining *Blackness*

Of the varying publics and identities mentioned above, this thesis is concerned with the experience of Blackness in the city. In discussing Blackness, it is important to recognize that within the Black cultural experience there exists a spectrum of identities and intersections including, but not limited to, nationality,

gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Thus, the Black identity as it pertains to the experience of the built environment is complex.

Given the sourcing of literature and the identification of the contributing informants in the latter half of the paper, *Blackness* in this thesis refers to the Black cultural experience in the United States. Notwithstanding, the above complexities remain. The experiences of the Black American do not fit into a single narrative. However, a similar point of reference that potentially unifies Black Americans – at least for the purposes of navigating the public realm – is that of W.E.B. Dubois' double-consciousness (Brand, 2017). Dubois discusses that to be Black in the U.S.– regardless of your gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ableness etc. – is to navigate your identity though your own eyes and simultaneously through the eyes of others (Dubois, 2006 p.9). Blackness is inherently political and socially constructed and as a result there are expressions, behaviors, and ideals one may be expected to perform to *be Black* (Wright, 2004). Thus, identifying environments which represents and affirms one's understanding of their Blackness without external judgement or resistance is a challenging endeavor. Although public space is meant to be democratic to which multiple publics can access and share the same spaces – the reality for Black Americans is that public spaces have been and are often the sites of conflict (Lipsitz, 2011; Mitchell, 2003). These conflicts have rendered public spaces to become unrepresentative of the Black cultural experience.

If the urban designer – in seeking to respond to the multiple publics they serve – identifies that the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of Blackness in public space is a problem, then it is important that they recognize their position to influence change. As a predominantly future-oriented discipline, along with other placemaking professions, the task inherently is to build new futures. So, for the designer to do this appropriately they must be able to produce space both as an abstraction and as a practice. Meaning, they must be able to visualize a future of space before undergoing a process to create it. To clarify the dichotomy between abstraction and practice, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, notably distinguished between the production of "representations of space" versus "representational spaces" (Lefebvre, 1974

p.33). The former refers to the abstract conception of space to which Lefebvre attributes to the occupation of planners and bureaucrats; while the latter are embodied with symbolism over time and are defined by the lived experience of its users (McCann, 1999 p.172). In other words, the production of "[s]pace is [both] a mental *and* material construct" (Elden, 2007 p.110). Thus, the designer must first understand what makes a public space affirming to the Black cultural experience before using their tools and resources to concretize that vision. A misuse of this understanding will only reproduce public spaces as sites of conflict, dissonance, and othering for Black people. In order to ground the designer in the dialectic of space as abstraction and as practice, the discourse of *place* and *space* can serve as an appropriate starting point en-route to creating a Black-affirming public space.

The Lived Experience of Place

Undoubtedly, place and space are linked concepts and inform in one another's understanding. While often used interchangeably, the reference of each term in this thesis is purposeful. The term *space* refers to the abstract conception of the spatial dimension with particular emphasis on production (Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, Low, & Saegert, 2014 p.xx). *Place*, on the other hand, is used to refer to spaces grounded in reality in which humans have embodied with personal meaning (Gieseking et al., 2014 p.xx). While the characterization of space as abstract and place as grounded is a delineation between the two, they remain nonetheless intertwined and "form one another [in] … complex, varied, and dynamic ways (Gieseking et al., 2014 p.xx).

Place is constructed as a result of the human experience endowing space with meaning. The process of forming a meaningful relationship between humans and their environment has been referred to as *place attachment* (Altman & Low, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983). Attachment can happen as a result of a singular event, for example the location of a wedding proposal, or recurring events. In either case, previously "undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan, 1977 p.6). On a communal or cultural scale, there are also occasions in which the meaning of place transcends any individual point of view. For example, a place that is recognized for its historical or spiritual reverence, such as a religious burial site "implies that… there is a transformation of the

experience of a space or piece of land into a culturally meaningful and shared symbol" (Low & Altman, 1992 p.166). In many contexts, this shared sense of place can be important in the fostering of social cohesion, and group identity (Hester, 1990; Hummon, 1992). The significance of place attachments can be momentous or everyday, highly visible and shared or uniquely personal (table1).

Table 1

Places as public symbols	Places as fields of care
(high imageability)	(low imageability)
sacred place	park
formal garden	home, drugstore, tavern
monument	street corner, neighbourhood
monumental architecture	marketplace
public square	town
ideal city	

Source: Tuan, Yi Fu. (1979). *Space and place: Humanistic perspective.* Table 11 p.412

On the opposite end of the spectrum, place attachment does not solely encompass positive affectation, the relationship that is between person and place can occur for better, or for worse. To feel a positive sense of place is to feel as though one belongs. Conversely, a negative attachment or even detachment from a meaningful place, can cause a feeling of othering and distance. Places can become embedded with meaning because they have been lost or destroyed, one has been displaced, or there has been an experience of trauma (Fullilove, 2016; Giuliani, 2003; Hummon, 1992; Low, 1992). Thus, the interaction of person and place is a reciprocal relationship. Not only can people attach meanings to particular locations, but places can also inform human self-development and self-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983). Potentially, the more opportunities there are to create places for belonging – particularly in public space – then the increased likelihood that a community feels a sense of ownership, security, and stewardship over those spaces. Consequently, as a result of this, the practices of placemaking can contribute to the idealism of democracy in the public realm.

This thesis is concerned with deepening an understanding of a Black sense of place and Black belonging. A premise of this study is that democratic public spaces depend upon nuanced and diverse place attachments. By focusing on the dissonance of a Black sense of place in the public realm "can also have important generalizable implications for other aggrieved groups" (Lipsitz, 2011 p.13).

Blackness and the Urban Experience of Place

Place occupies an important role in the understanding of one's racial identity (Winkler, 2012). As George Lipsitz describes, "the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension" (Lipsitz, 2007 p.12). In cities, race and the built environment have been understood so closely together in history, that racial disparities are often spatial disparities, and vice versa. Exacerbated by "stereotypes and attitudes that support racial discrimination" … racial disparities has its "roots in the system of slavery upon which the nation was founded" (Rothstein, 2017 p.ix). In referring to W.E.B. Dubois's double consciousness, there is a duality that exists in which place has been important to the self-exploration of Blackness and yet it is simultaneously linked to its oppression. For example, Lance Freeman (2019) notes that "Blacks perceived the ghetto, both as a haven to be protected and as a hell to be dismantled" (Freeman, pp.7-8). As a haven, urban ghettos – or other predominantly Black living arrangements – concentrate Black institutions such as businesses and churches together fostering Black rooted place attachments. Yet at the same time, there is the recognition that segregation was used as a means to "keep blacks in their place" and distanced from whites (Anderson, 2015 p.11). A symbolic distancing that when reinforced spatially creates a perception of Blacks as "other", un-American, and needing to be confined (Gooden, 2016). While black geographic enclaves have contributed to the development and understanding of Blackness, it has come at the sacrifice of belonging to a shared public realm. Thus, Dubois' double-consciousness, as it pertains to Blackness and place, can be experienced on both an individual and collective level. It is important to note that the example Freeman provides above is not strictly a Black cultural experience but is also an inherently urban one. However, as will be explored, that line is often blurred.

Modern Urbanism and its Impact on Black Place Attachments

A current urban phenomenon at the forefront of surfacing and interrupting Black place attachments has been that of gentrification and urban displacement. Cities globally are seeing longstanding networks and economies in neighborhoods turn over due to the influx of external wealthier residents and institutions (Goetz, Lewis, Damiano, & Calhoun, 2019). Consequently, when a community becomes detached from the place(s) to which it depended on locally, it experiences loss and trauma that extends beyond the material (Fullilove, 2016; Manzo, Kleit, & Couch, 2008). Residents and communities suffering from what Fullilove (2016) calls "root shock" due to displacement can experience "increase[d] anxiety … destabilize[d] relationships, destroy[ed] social, emotional, and financial resources, and an increase[ed] risk for every kind of stress-related disease, from depression to heart attack" (Fullilove, p14). Additionally "when connections are forgotten[,] [s]uch loss is a double erasure — not just of certain people from a place but also of certain places from the neighborhood's collective memory" (Gade & Mark, 2016). Given that historically Black neighborhoods and residents often find themselves experiencing the most troubling aspects of gentrification and displacement, how does this impact Black residents understanding of place? (Badger, Bui, & Gebeloff, 2019). To illustrate, the following first-person narrative accounts represent the experiences of Seattle's Central District Black residents. Seattle was chosen given the author's familiarity and accessibility to local accounts. The stories have been retrieved from the online audio archive, *Shelf Life Community Story Project* (Shelf Life Community Story Project, n.d.)

Vivian's story refers to the "discovery" of the Central District as an up and coming place to live. Colloquially referred to as "Christopher Columbus Syndrome" an often-stereotypical characteristic of the gentrifier is to "discover" and attempt to claim established places as new (Coscarelli, 2014; ReyRoSho, 2016). The harm in this act is that it fails to recognize the institutional powers which not only set aside the Central District for Black people in the first place, but further characterized the Central District as a ghetto and undesirable neighborhood (Taylor, 1994).

> One of the biggest things **I think new residents should value is the fact that people held this space**. The Central Area, as we know, was redlined. It's the only place that African Americans could live for a very long time. And the care and love that came with the residency is evident. It's not a wasteland. It's a very well cared for community...geographically, aesthetically. That came

> from African Americans, Asians, all of the people who could only live in a certain area. **It's like because you just discovered something doesn't mean it's new.**
>
> Vivian Philips.
> *Emphasis added*

Sky's story recounts the extent to which networks weaken once relationships become spatially distanced. Seemingly, Sky extends the conception of family beyond their immediate relatives. To describe the Central District as being disbanded in the same way that one's family has, is to call attention to the larger shared experiences of place attachment.

> When I was younger, me and my parents and I think my grandma, my uncle, and then a few of my cousins lived right in the Central District…We lived in multiple places around the neighborhood, so I can tell you like six different houses that we all had that in. I could see my cousins whenever I wanted to. They would come over all the time, and we would just hang out. **I guess a lot of my extended family moved further south as house prices and stuff started to go up**, but as far as all my cousins and stuff like that, it's so hard to see them now because they live so far, and it's crazy because we all used to live in this little microcosm here. **Now everyone's just spread out, and it's just kind of like the central district was disbanded**, if you will, in a way. And that feeling was kind of sad.
>
> Sky Sawyer
> *Emphasis added*

For Lulu, the word "dissipate" encompasses the recognition that the community which made the festival what it once was, is now gone. The height of the community festival lives only the memory of those who had been around during its time. Intrinsically linked to the displacement of residents, if the keepers of memory are displaced, so too is the history and legacy. As previously mentioned, the loss associated with displacement is a double erasure of people from a place but also of certain places from the "neighborhood's collective memory" (Gade & Mark, 2016).

> A neighborhood tradition that I remember is the Black Community Festival that took place down on MLK. And it was HUGE, and it was just like where you couldn't see across the street. It was just packed, I'm talking hundreds of people, and I'm not being dramatic. **It was just...brown people everywhere. It was just family. It was just comfortable and just so fun… But that's dissipated over the years**. I went, I think it was, two years ago, and I was just like, 'Oh my god.' It was horrible. It was just horrible. It just didn't seem, well because first of all we're not here anymore. So a lot of us didn't really participate. It's just, you feel out of place now. **Whereas before it's just like, 'Wow, this is the only neighborhood that I really know.' But now it's not.**
>
> Lulu Miles
> *Emphasis added*

The stories shared here of Seattle's Central District community are reflected in the narrative of gentrifying Black neighborhoods across the country (Badger et al., 2019). The stories being told are of Black belonging – which for many, does not exist anymore. While existing sets of place relationships are being affected, people will not stop creating – or longing to create – new places. However, in cities Black communities lack the opportunities to own, control, or determine their future in space. Herein lies the problem – a "Black sense of place" or Black belonging in the city is at risk of disappearing from the public realm. However, threats to Black belonging, as they may be, are not new. As previously presented, "histories of colonialism, transatlantic slavery, and contemporary racism … are connected to practices of domination and deliberate attempts to destroy a black sense of place" (McKittrick, 2011 p.947). Thus, the current experience of Blackness in place is in part a remnant of such attempts – whether spatially enforced or otherwise. Moreover, the stories above only address a fraction of the issue as gentrification and displacement are not the only threats to Black belonging. Respectfully, to read headlines and know the names of Eric Garner, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile – among many others – further exemplifies the gravity of the issue. At its most benign, a lack of belonging in place results in dissonance. However, at it's most impactful, othering in place can make one vulnerable to scrutiny and violence (Fayyad, 2017; Misra, 2018).

The recognition of lived realities as presented above are emerging narratives in the discourse of planning and urban design (Koh, 2017; Levinson, 2016; Mock, 2015b). Moreover, city governments across the country have made commitments to race, social justice, and equity initiatives in formal programs and policy (Government Alliance on Race and Equity, 2019). While such initiatives are an important first step in accountability, there is still much that needs to be done to serve Black belonging in the city. While an urban design response to Black belonging is logical, there is also an ethical obligation to design and construct the public spaces wherein these experiences take place. The planner and designer must recognize that they cannot absolve themselves from addressing the issue of Black othering in place, as the profession is implicated in exacerbating the problem. Thus, to arrive to at a place in which the

designer is better equipped to advocate and respond to a diminishing Black sense of place, they subsequently must have an adequate understanding of the production of space.

What's space got do with it?

Just as the construction of place depends upon human-centered processes, so too does the production of space. Earlier, the production of space was presented as being both a mental and material product differentiated by Lefebvre as "representations of space" and "representational spaces" (McCann, 1999). In a more streamlined analogy, a "park is *conceived*, designed and produced through, labor, technology and institutions, but the meaning of space, and the space itself, is adapted and transformed as it is *perceived* and *lived* by social actors and groups." (Elden, 2007 p.111). Although it could be interpreted that labor, technology, and institutions to which Elden refers are faceless, they represent people and roles implicated in placemaking.

If material spaces such as parks or other public spaces can become *places* with personal and cultural meanings, then their preceding abstraction is a critical point of analysis. Could the *production* of space also contain social, political, economic and other macro-structural realities? Simply, the answer to this question is yes and it prompts a return to my discussion here of the *spatial imaginary*.

Part II: The Spatial Imaginary

The *spatial imaginary* – as presented in this thesis – refers to the understanding of how we come to know what we know about space; akin to an epistemology of space. Moreover, it also refers to the way in which space is present in the understanding of macro-structural realities. The spatial imaginary recognizes that to talk about society, politics, economics, culture, race, gender, the environment and so forth, inherently, is to talk about space. While not always explicit in the respective discourses, some scholars have intentionally centered space in their research on seemingly non-spatial academia. Foucault, Harvey, and Soja for example have made it a point to elevate space in their writings on history, politics, and capitalism. (Foucault, 1991; Harvey, 2001; Soja, 1980). Although this thesis stops short of fully engaging with all the potential intersections of space beyond that of race, introducing here the breadth of discourse aids in making clear the ubiquity of the spatial imaginary. In the placemaking process, a spatial imaginary has been present throughout history in the development of cities and its spaces.

While admittedly philosophical, the above statement can be exemplified by the following example. Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier all developed respective ideals of urbanism and the future of cities (Fishman, 1982). In responding to the macro-structural contexts of their respective times, their imagined representations of space ultimately became materially represented in the urban landscape. Arguably, these cases highlight how the manipulation of physical space was deemed necessary to impact the city in ways beyond its form. Thus, the spatial imaginary can serve the urban designer with a foundation for *how* the imagined could be made real and what values need to be prioritized.

Race has been one of the most important structural factors in the production of space in the United States. Furthermore, the hegemonic *racial* spatial imaginary that has dominated the production of space has historically centered whiteness as its default. As a result, the *white spatial imaginary* fails to recognize and much less serve publics that are “othered” in the understanding of space and place. Arguably, this has negatively impacted Black Americans in their experience of the built environment.

The White Spatial Imaginary Dominates the Production of Space

I argue in this thesis that the spatial imaginary that has most attributed to the production of space in the U.S. is one that centers whiteness. The term *whiteness* refers to normalization of the white subject to the extent that unfamiliar experiences become "othered" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a social and political construct, whiteness associates human traits and experiences that are regarded as preferable in society, with that of having white skin (Cole, 2018; Guess, 2006). Thus, whiteness does not simply refer to centering white people *per-se* but rather advancing and reproducing structures that benefit *being white* (Cole, 2018). One of the inherent privileges of whiteness is its ability to become "disguised" or embedded into the default understandings of other social constructs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012 p.174). Accordingly, "whiteness rarely speaks its [name]" in policies or plans (Lipsitz, 2006 p.1). Even spatial or geographic concepts such as scale or boundaries have been encoded with whiteness (Dwyer & Jones III, 2000 p.212). As a result, what are seemingly non-racialized concepts have contributed to the policing, containing, and surveillance of Black occupied spaces (Shabazz, 2015 p.2). Together, *whiteness* and the *spatial imaginary*, refers to the dominance of whiteness in understanding what is known about space and the subsequent praxis of that understanding.

Foremost, the white spatial imaginary is a structural issue which has dominated the spatial practices of various institutions implicated in placemaking; manifesting into anti-black planning policies such as redlining, racially restrictive covenants, and blockbusting (Lipsitz, 2011, pp.25-26). Using redlining, covenants, and blockbusting – among other mechanisms – parts of the city were made legally off-limit to Black people. Over time those neighborhoods or communities to which Black people were delegated, became predominantly Black neighborhoods. Segregation means that there is an intolerance of Black presence in proximity to white residents. As a result, the white spatial imaginary includes a perception to which "Blacks moving into white neighborhoods [as] constitutes a criminal transgression" (Lipsitz, 2011, p.27). Consequently, the legacy of this understanding continues today in which seemingly "neutral" spaces, have been claimed as white spaces or intended to prioritize whiteness (Anderson, 2015; Lockhart, 2018). Therefore, whiteness has systemically become the default "owner" of public space.

These spatial circumstances in the city are not the result of happenstance but rather were *conceived* of and *constructed* by planners, civil engineers, architects, urban policy makers, real estate brokers, and so forth. Recalling Lefebvre's dichotomy, "representations of space" refers to the understanding, communication, and abstraction of space as managed by the aforementioned professions (McCann, 1999 p.172). Therefore, explicitly or not, roles implicated in the production of space – including urban designers among others – have worked to "fix the meaning of space [to] [reflect] [the] hegemonic cultural norm" of whiteness (Tyner, 2007 p.218). Thus, as previously mentioned, the spatial normativity of whiteness influenced the segregation of neighborhoods, the creation of urban ghettos, and the location of major highways through Black neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2017; Tyner, 2007). Put clearly, within the white spatial imaginary, urban designers have helped to inscribe institutional whiteness at the subjugation of the Black "other" into the urban landscape (Lipsitz, 2011, p.37).

As whiteness has claimed ownership over theoretically neutral public space and the public realm, the white spatial imaginary is distinctively antidemocratic (Lipsitz, 2011, p.37). This further reveals itself in the culturally violent over policing and over surveillance of Black bodies in public (Shabazz, 2015). Thus, the issues of othering, distance, and violence of Blackness in public space is a problem amplified by the white spatial imaginary. This means for urban designers – among others – to address these issues, there must be a shift in the operating spatial imaginary. The resulting shift in the intellectual and conceptual framework should inform and encourage a change in action. While it is not expected to solve all these problems, a shift away from the white spatial imaginary can better equip the urban designer to challenge their persistence as experiences. The following part of this thesis explores the tools and actions taken upon by urban designers in the process of creating public spaces.

Part III: Creating Places of Belonging within Urban Design

This paper has thus far presented the loss of “Black belonging” or a “Black sense of place” in the city to be a problem that impacts not only Black communities across the country, but the democratic integrity of the public realm as a whole. Consequently, the white-centered model of spatial production implicates urban designers – among others – in the normalization of white space as the default. Thus, in failing to recognize both the history and current lived experience of Blackness in place, the noncommittal urban designer remains complicit in reproducing the consequences of the white spatial imaginary in the public realm. To counter, I layout an initiative to design and construct Black-affirming public spaces; ones that contribute toward an environment for Black belonging in the public realm.

It should be noted that the effort of creating truly Black-affirming public spaces involves the support of many actors, including its users. However, the recognition of the necessary accompanying reforms, does not absolve or minimize the necessity of urban design. Thus, in order to explore *how* the urban designer’s role may work to reconcile the problem, it first must be understood how any urban design challenges are approached.

What is the Urban Designer?

Traditionally, the urban designer generates and produces a set of ideas about “how space should be organized, what forms it should take, and what functions it should perform” (Madanipour, 2006 p.178). In “understand[ing] and then express[ing] in built form, the needs and aspirations of the client group or citizens”, the urban designer occupies a foremost position in the production of space (Moughtin et al., 1999 p.5). To reach the qualification of assuming such responsibility, the designer is a professional, and trained in a placemaking profession such as planning, architecture, landscape architecture, civil engineering or urban design. This assumes then that the designer is relatively more experienced, knowledgeable, and skilled in the production of space than other contributing actors. Finally, the designer is often contracted by a client or works for a government agency which instills them with authority and legitimacy. As a result, in the history of city development, the urban designer has occupied a vital role in

the formation of public spaces. For the purpose of this thesis, the urban designer refers to the role described above within the formalized profession of urban design. Urban design includes but is not limited to its formalized practice, informal everyday urbanism, and urban design education. In this thesis, I focus on the role of the urban designer within the formal profession as a way to represent how the generic urban design process contributes to the production of public space in the city.

Urban Design Process

The generic urban design process or urban design method follows an overarching structure similar to the following: the accumulation of information, the investigation of the problem and possible solutions, the development of one or more solutions, and the communication of the chosen solution/s to the client (Moughtin, Cuesta, Sarris, & Signoretta, 1999 p.6). For the purpose of this paper, the urban design process will be organized into the following five phases: *problem identification*, *idea generation*, *design development*, *construction/implementation*, and *evaluation*. Each step in this process has the capacity to be further refined into sub-process and actions. The urban design process follows a series of decisions that depend upon the success of the previous phase. This logic implies that a relatively successful product, derives from successful design, which begins with good information and understanding. While there are nuances in the design process, the above listed structure remains foundational.

I argue that the spatial imaginary is most closely tied to the *problem identification* and *idea generation* steps the urban design process. As part of the accumulation of information, these initial steps effectually establish the knowledge base to which the design process may build from (de la Peña et al., 2017) Once a knowledge base has been sufficiently generated, the process may move into conceptual design and then design development. In doing so, the urban designer is prepared to conceive of and produce design ideas. Often, the conception of the space is represented with spatial communication tools such as renderings, drawings, or maps. Harkening back to Lefebvre, these “representations of space” are the foundation for what will subsequently become concretized spaces Thus, the role of the spatial imaginary in the preceding steps is critical to informing the emergence of these representations of space. By accessing the spatial imaginary, the designer can maneuver among what is already known and what

needs to be known in order to develop design concepts. Importantly, by focusing on problem identification and idea generation and not the development of design concepts, it is important to note that this thesis does not ask what does a Black-affirming public space *look like*. Rather, it seeks to explore the way in which the spatial imaginary connects to and influences the actions taken in the urban design process.

Techniques for Accumulating Information through Public Participation

As I argue, the spatial imaginary is important to generating a necessary knowledge base to which design development can proceed and many sources of information exist. For example, information can be derived from the designer's training, their past experiences, or from external inspiration and support. Ultimately, as the accumulation of information must be contextual and related to the specific project, there will always exist a knowledge gap in the designer's understanding. In public space *problem identification*, this gap can include questions about site history, user needs, ecological factors, or physical constraints. Moreover, within *idea generation* this gap can include community visions, goals, and preferences for the space. Thus, for what remains unknown, the designer will utilize a "menu of techniques of public participation for incorporation into the design process" (Moughtin et al., 1999 p.5).

The notion of "participation" can take many forms but for the purpose of this thesis it is defined as the interaction of urban design practitioners with invested publics to produce projects. Other terms for this process include *engagement*, *collaboration*, or *outreach*. As a broad definition, public participation entails the input of some members of the public to "articulate community needs, concerns, visions, and expectations" (Aboelata, Ersoylu, & Cohen, 2011 p.289). The value of an effective community engagement process includes: democratic participation, representative and context specific data, improved social connections, and provides diverse perspectives towards the intended outcome (Aboelata et al., 2011 p.296). Thus, in referring to the logic inherent to the overarching urban design process, effective community engagement can lead in the design of better public spaces. While the urban designer is certainly at liberty to "develop… a menu of techniques" they will in all likeliness select from various established approaches (Moughtin et al., 1999). These approaches include community design charrettes, workshops and focus groups, questionnaires and interviews, and public meetings (table 2). As the

actionable component of *problem identification* and *idea generation*, these techniques of engagement are intended to facilitate entry and collaboration with populations that are not well-versed in the language and procedures of a design process. The following table provides a brief description for some commonly utilized engagement techniques.

Table 2

Technique	Details	Participant Involvement	Context when Appropriate
Design Charrette	Short-term (3-5 day) exercise in which designers act as facilitators of a generative idea proposing and problem-solving process. [a]	Direct	Highly motivated participants in which a lot of ideas can be generated in a relatively short period of time. [a]
Workshops and Focus Groups	Similar to a charette in that there is group interaction, however, may occur several times over the course of the process and may not ask participants to contribute to design. [a]	Direct	Helpful for collective learning and the provision of new skills and language. [a]
Questionnaires and Interviews	Designer constructs a series of questions in which participant responses are measured, categorized, and analyzed .	Indirect	Helpful to gather information about attitudes and opinions from a sample of the user population.
Public Meetings	Open-ended forum to which all views may be expressed.	Semi-direct	Informing or educating public of plans or proposals

Source: [a]Sanoff, Henry. (2000). *Community participation methods in design and planning*

Moreover, there are also methods to spatially survey the physical environment. Referred to as site analysis, strategies can include place and behavior observation, mapping, and drawing. Demographic analysis and analysis of current and archived planning documents are also common.

Over the course of the accumulation of information phase, the designer will likely utilize a combination of the above techniques. In doing so, there are several opportunities in which the designer may ask or require public participation at varying degrees. In strategically utilizing tools of engagement, the designer may be able to maximize the time and capacity participants have in producing information or solutions. In addition to the outcomes generated from public participation, the process itself can also be critical for

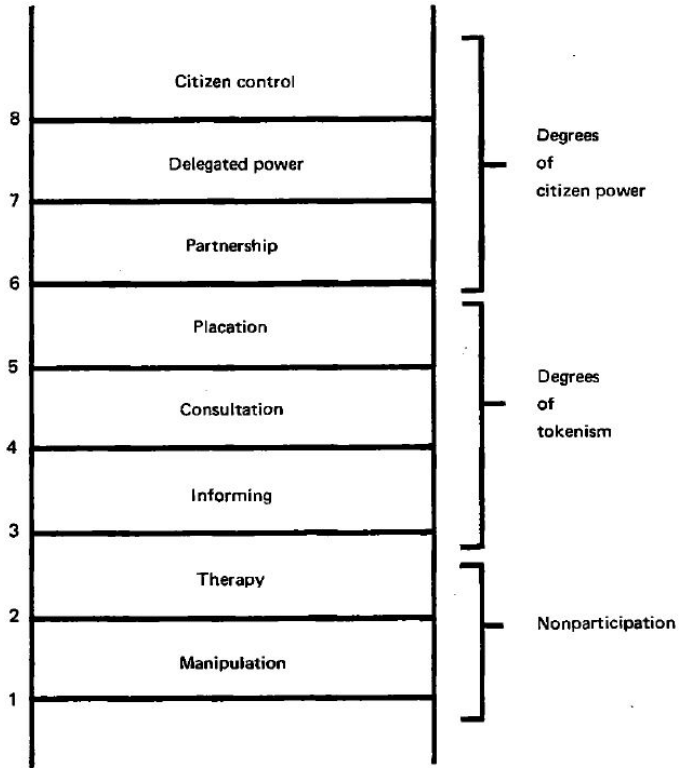
public buy-in (Sanoff, 2000). If the public feels that they have not had effective opportunities to participate, or that their efforts are not reflected in the design development, then it is likely that the project will not meet its intended outcomes. The extent to which given roles – such as designer and client or public – contribute to the quality of the outcome has much to do with the power each position holds. Inherently, there is a power imbalance in which the public, or the to-be users of the space have the least influence of the decision-making process. If this power dynamic is not managed, then receiving effective and positive engagement can become a challenge.

Power and Public Participation

Individuals and groups involved in decision making may have differing levels of interest in the project or differing levels of capacity to influence outcomes. At its least effective, as will be explored, the process of community engagement could amount to a mere performative exercise. To begin, Arnstein (1969) provides a foundational framework to better understand the impact and power dynamic of public participation.

As the “cornerstone of democracy” Arnstein recognizes that citizen participation is synonymous with citizen power (Arnstein, 1969 p.216). As participation grants community members with an opportunity to influence decision making processes then there is a “redistribution of power that enables … those either have-not citizens, presently excluded from [the design process] to be deliberately included in the future” (Arnstein, 1969 p.216) In the context of urban design, I interpret Arnstein’s reference of “have-nots” to include those publics which typically are not involved in the production of space or conversely are not well-versed in urban design. The potential for community engagement to be an empowering process is not guaranteed. Public participation exists on a spectrum ranging from non-participation and tokenism, to citizen power (figure 1).

Figure 1



Source: Arnstein, S.R. (1969). *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* Figure 2 p.217

At its least impactful public participation reinforces established hierarchies and power inequities to which publics are given a false sense of voice. For urban designers, a weakened participation process supports the belief that the designer is expert and ultimately knows best regarding the development of the space. This can happen when community engagement is perceived to be a nuisance or even an obstacle in the development of the design. Unfortunately, this view of community engagement is not uncommon in the history of architecture, urban planning, and public policy practice (Melcher, 2016).

Although Arnstein's framework provides a foundational understanding of the relationship between participation and justice it is a bit limited in reaching transformative impacts. Though the limitations of Arnstein's framework will be discussed in a later section, the following argues that the retention of power is an important element within the white spatial imaginary. As a result, the potential of the aforementioned tools to serve Black communities, becomes diluted and ineffectual within the white spatial imaginary. The following argues that this is due to the reliance of an autocratic-driven design and deficit-based approaches to research.

White Spatial Imaginary and Public Participation in Urban Design

This thesis considers the above tools as some of the more traditional methods of engagement in placemaking professions. Although not inherently discriminatory, the use of said tools in urban design public participation can fail to serve Black communities when dominated by the white spatial imaginary. As demonstrated, I argue that this is most attributed to the reinforcement of imbalanced power dynamics and the tendency for deficit-based research approaches.

Design as Expert Creates Distance with Community

As has been discussed, the white spatial imaginary normalizes values and preferences of whiteness to be the norm. Moreover, at least prior to the civil rights era, planning and design did not consider the implications of decisions made on behalf of people that exist beyond the scope of the white spatial imaginary (Wilson, 2018; Zeiger, 2018). Demonstrably, there did not exist a "formalize[d] procedure for receiving inputs from community members and to open up the discussion of alternative recommendations" until the late 60s and early 70s (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2017 p.15). Thus, it can be construed that at the intimate scale of placemaking, the tools available to urban designers have been utilized in ways such that it maintained distinctions of expert and non-expert and a preference for product over process.

It is important to recognize however that a legacy of community-minded design practice has been carried forward in the decades since the civil rights era. People such as Randy Hester *Subconscious Landscapes*, Dolores Hayden *The Power of Place*, Walter Hood *Urban Diaries*, and Jeff Hou *Transcultural Cities* for example, have all contributed to an ideological timeline that extends community design beyond the white spatial imaginary (Hayden, 1995; Hester, 1985; Hood, 1997; Hou, 2013). In doing so, they have helped to develop approaches and utilize the tools of public participation to open the conversation towards alternative and multicultural approaches to design. Yet, the contributions of these figures nonetheless represent a minority of practitioners with such a philosophy.

Even with the emergence of a multicultural placemaking ideology, often practicing design professionals do not reflect the communities they work in, furthering distancing themselves from their constituents. Statistics demonstrate that the field of architecture for example has – and continues to be – dominated by white men (Griffin & Yang, 2015). Strikingly, less than 10% of practicing architects are African American and an even finer margin of that number are Black women (Griffin & Yang, 2015 p.13). Considering that there is a lack of Black representation in the proverbial decision-making room, the power differential explains why tools such as community meetings are not the most appropriate for marginalized communities. Wilson (2018) explains that in such meetings "those who do not speak the dominant language will rarely contribute, those who have historically been ignored will not even attend" (Wilson, 2018 p.28). Evidently then, when Black people are not in the room, an understanding of Blackness in place space is consequently framed by the white spatial imaginary. As a result, the discourse tends to center around the deficits of Blackness and Black geographies.

Deficit-Based Approaches Misrepresent Blackness

The inherent challenge of design is to identify an issue and enact a process with actions that seek to remedy the persistence of harm or amplify its benefits. Given that the work of planning and urban design disciplines is so closely concerned with the human experience of the physical environment, problems, as they may be, are naturally complex and contextual. Nonetheless, it is the work of the designer to understand these complexities and the means to address them. An often-considered way to identify the challenges that need to be addressed between a given people and place is to identify what is missing or what is needed rectify the issue. This framework suggests that there are standards of quality or desired states of socio-spatial attainment (Baer, 2011 p.279). The assumption of this deficit or needs-based model is that spaces contain place-specific "markers of social distress (for example, rates of poverty, crime, unemployment)" that can inform the "design [of] an appropriate set of solutions for that particular neighborhood" (Kelley, 2011 pp.208-209).

The constant marking of Black geographies as socially distressed within the white spatial imaginary has become an identity attached to Black bodies (Anderson, 2012). Moreover, the perpetuation of this

association incites a belief that Black bodies can only come from places of social distress (Anderson, 2012). Given that marginalized Black bodies are not able to remake their own identities within the white spatial imaginary, the deficit-based approach conflates that Blackness itself is something to be fixed. Too often the rhetoric of information accumulation and the generation of a knowledge base about Black communities centers Black-deficit as opposed to celebration, life, and Black possibilities (Miller, 2018; USC Price, 2018). Thus, the white spatial imaginary has guided the use of engagement tools to maintain these patterns in the production of public spaces. If Black communities are able to have more ownership over the production of their spaces, then they may be better suited to meet needs and represent the Black cultural experience.

Equitable Placemaking and the Liberal Spatial Imaginary

From personal experience, both the academy and the profession of urban design and planning – like other placemaking professions – have become more mindful of the institutional racism that is present in the field. Prioritizing social equity and justice have become mainstays in popular urbanist discourse. A consensus is that to close gaps on racial, social, economic, and other macro-structural inequities there must be a shift away from whiteness-dominated paradigms. However, it is important to recognize that the white spatial imaginary cannot reconcile the issues it created. When liberation is the intended outcome, Lorde (1984) states that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (Lorde, p.112).

In prioritizing social equity and social justice, placemaking has an opportunity to have transformative impacts on the public realm. One way of thinking about equity is to focus on both distributive and participative justice (Shrader-Frechette, 2002). In doing so, the intention is to absolve inequalities in both the distribution of benefits and harms but also within the decision-making that distributes said impacts (Shrader-Frechette, 2002 p.24). Thus, in the context of urban design practice, equitable placemaking refers to justice centered principles, processes, and outcomes in the production of public spaces.

Equitable placemaking initiatives proposes for innovation and increased public participation at various stages of the urban design process. By decentralizing the production of public space, equitable placemaking welcomes what is considered “bottom-up” and “grassroots” approaches and is sometimes called creative placemaking. To this effect, the principles of equitable placemaking are seemingly grounded in a more liberal, multicultural, and progressive spatial imaginary. Adopting a *liberal spatial imaginary*, for short, is to recognize the flaws and dangers of the white spatial imaginary and seeks to make a commitment towards social justice. However, while this is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, I argue that placemaking that is rooted in the liberal spatial imaginary tends to ultimately fall short of achieving transformative impacts for Black communities.

The umbrella of equitable placemaking and the tactics therein are quite broad and seek to be inclusive. In many cases cities are open to – or rather do not punish – citizen-led placemaking efforts which contribute or add to the quality of the public realm. Citizen-led design interventions, often referred to as DIY or guerilla urbanism, are typically “unsanctioned, place-based direct actions that challenge the usual or regulated uses of particular urban spaces” (Douglas, 2018 p.21). Douglas notes that interventions can mirror that of “official planning and streetscape design elements” or conversely, can be more abstract, artistic, and political in nature (Douglas, 2018 pp.21-22). Tactics have been known to include the implementation of graffiti and street art, informal signage and placards, or performative demonstrations. As Douglas points out, most interventions are place-based and seek to directly respond to the experience of the given site where action is taken. In some cases, citizen-led design interventions find themselves being co-opted by government and made into regulated programs. For example, the City of Seattle is the primary organizer of the city’s PARK(ing) Day – which originally began in San Francisco as a movement to reclaim streets from vehicles (Schneider, 2017). To this effect the practice of creative placemaking enables users of space to directly intervene in public space that does not suit their needs.

Taken at face value, bottom-up, community-driven, and grassroots approaches are more inclusive and democratic in their access to placemaking. However, when returning to the definition of equity, in which both access and impacts must be considered, the flaws of equitable placemaking reveal themselves.

Liberal Spatial Imaginary and Flying too Close to the Sun

Initiatives that are meant to foster an equitable public realm still take place within contexts that do not recognize the lived experience of Blackness in place. Former Director of Planning for Washington D.C. Eric Shaw stated the following: "[i]'ve told my staff that PARK(ing) Day is really nice …. but if five black males took over a parking spot and had a barbecue and listened to music …. would they last 10 minutes?" (Hurley, 2016). Shaw's comments reflect an understanding of the lived experience of Blackness which, within the white spatial imaginary would view a predominantly Black PARK(ing) Day as worthy of a criminal offence. Shaw is not alone in such an understanding and it has been recognized that practices of DIY and creative placemaking are inherently elitist and tend disproportionately benefit whites over Blacks (Koh, 2017; Wilson, 2018). Moreover, it should be noted that the experience of Blackness in place does not only encompass the presence of Black bodies in public space. When people like Jasmine Iona Brown (figure 2) and Tatyana Fazlalizadeh (figure 3) purport that public spaces should represent and be safe for Black children and Black women, their street art has been torn down and has been defaced (Beason, 2018; Shearman, 2014).

Figure 2

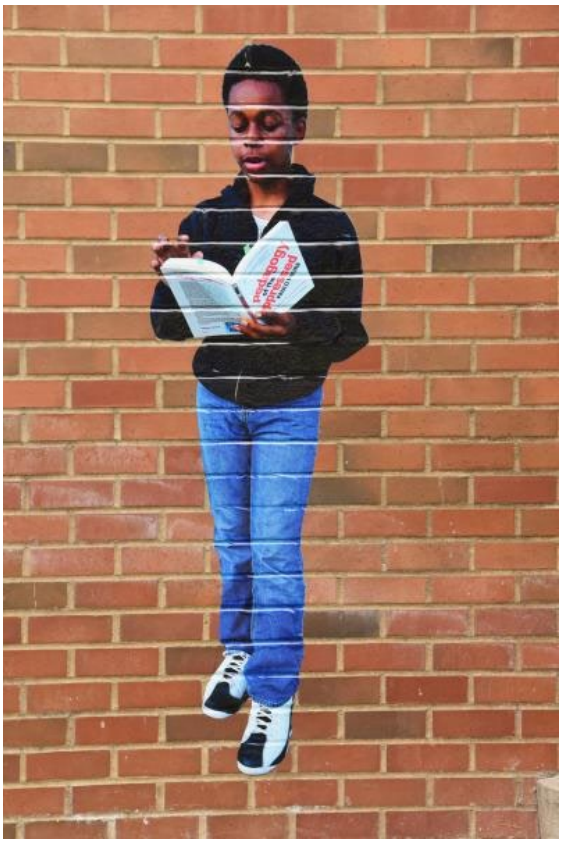


Image: Jasmine Iona Brown, "Reading Pedagogy, 2017" from the series, *Black Teen Wearing Hoodie*

Figure 3

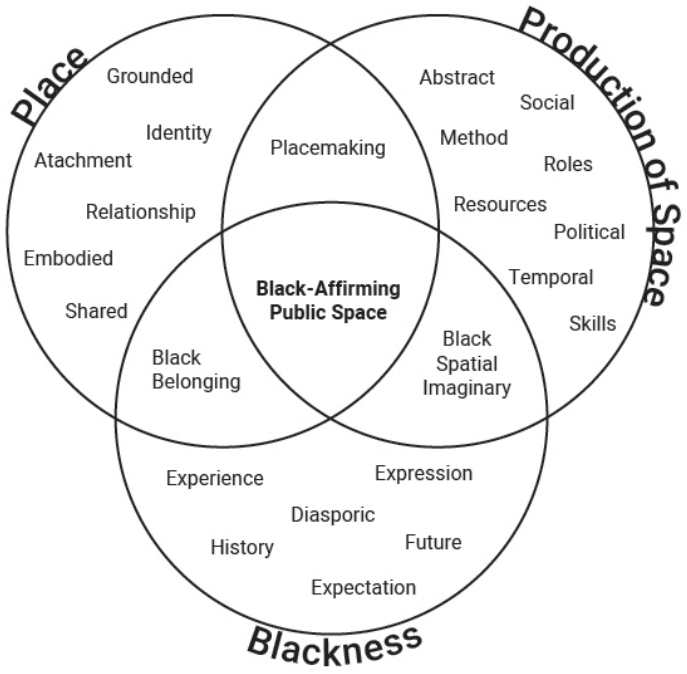
Image: Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, "Stop Telling Women to Smile"

The failure of the liberal spatial imaginary is believing it is capable of creating places for *everyone* without addressing the underlying legacy of the white spatial imaginary (Koh, 2017). Not merely a criticism of semantics, the language of using words like “for everyone” and “for all” inappropriately conflates the lived experiences of multiple publics into “a singular, liberal, public realm” (Rios, 2005 p.123). Before equitable placemaking can uphold the democracy of the public realm it intends to create, it needs to serve Black belonging. In other words “before there is a vibrant street one needs an understanding of the social dynamics on that street – the politics of belonging and dis-belonging at work in placemaking” (Bedoya, 2016). For people within the Black diaspora, belonging is not about assimilation but rather as Dubois puts it, the wish for Black Americans is to exist as Black *and* American without resistance or scrutiny (Dubois, 2006 p.9). Thus, in moving towards a transformative and liberatory practice of placemaking, a *different* range of cultural experiences need to be emphasized in urban design.

Part IV: Reconciling the Gap Through the Black Spatial Imaginary

Presented in conjunction with the understanding of Black belonging and the production of space, the *Black spatial imaginary* – as is argued – is essential to the foundation of creating Black-affirming public spaces (figure 4).

Figure 4



Source: Author

With inspiration from Lipsitz (2011) and subsequently by Bates and Towne (2018), the use of the Black spatial imaginary in this thesis also draws upon discourses of Black urbanism, Black geographies, and Black placemaking to inform an epistemology of space that is rooted in Black belonging (Bates et al., 2018; Hunter, Pattillo, Robinson, & Taylor, 2016; Lipsitz, 2011; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Zewde, 2008). The formation of a racial spatial imaginary that is rooted in Black belonging includes consideration of Black histories, Black experiences, and perceptions of Black futures as an overall worldview for placemaking. As a result, the Black spatial imaginary can become readily introduced to the discourse of urban design and the production of public spaces. Moreover, as the Black spatial imaginary is a liberatory epistemology, there is potential for its use to serve the diversity of the public realm.

The Black Spatial Imaginary Has Always Been a Liberatory Worldview

The cultivation of a Black spatial imaginary over time has been a worldview owned by Black Americans arguably through necessity (Lipsitz, 2011 p.56). As Gooden (2016) states, “liberation is a spatial praxis” and this has been a narrative present since the times of American chattel slavery (Gooden, 2016 p.21). For latter generations, the concept of freedom has always been tied to “a life where they would have the right to exercise control over space on their own behalf, where they would imagine, design, and create spaces that would respond to the needs of their lives, their communities, [and] their families” (hooks, 1995 p.147). This conceptualization reinforces the understanding that Black identity and the lived experience of space cannot be separated from one another (Lipsitz, 2007 p.12). Moreover, that the opportunity to own, steward, and remake one’s space is simultaneously an opportunity to own, steward, and remake one’s identity (Neely & Samura, 2011 p.1934). In doing so, a remaking of the environment to better express and represent oneself culturally can “build a sense of community and create new attachments to place” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006 p.338). In an environment where the persistence of othering continues to deny Blacks privileges over public space, the establishment of Black places are critical for survival (Lipsitz, 2011).

Social and political resistance to *Blackness* has constrained the use of the Black *spatial imaginary* as a conceptual framework. Unlike the white spatial imaginary which has had the privilege and power to elevate itself into a hegemonic position in academia and professional practice, the othering of Blackness has rendered the Black spatial imaginary to be relatively unknown. The Black spatial imaginary is a situated knowledge-base existing in the experiences of relatively ordinary, low-income, and working-class people (hooks, 1995). As a result, these othered, hidden, and sometimes displaced Black experiences are ignored and erased (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Thus, when “Black geographies disappear – to the margins or realm of the unknowable [then] … a Black sense of place and Black geographical knowledges are both undermined by hegemonic spatial practices… and seemingly unavailable as a world view” (McKittrick & Woods, 2007 p.7). Nonetheless, the opportunity remains to elevate these perspectives in placemaking as a means for transformative urban design practice.

The Untapped Potential of the Black Spatial Imaginary

In the early 1980s, Jean-Michel Basquiat emerged as one of the most important artists in modern art (Davis, 2010). Basquiat infused his paintings with the spirit and knowledge of Black art forms. Practices such as jazz music, West-African heritage, or his past as a graffiti artist, influenced Basquiat to reinterpret Expressionist art in a way that had not been considered or welcomed in the past (Davis, 2010). The title of this section is a reference to Basquiat's 1983 painting titled *The Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*. The title of the painting seems to imply that there are unknown place-based knowledges of genius that lie in the Black experiences of the Deep South. Similar to the work and legacy of Basquiat, the power in the Black spatial imaginary lies within the – arguably untapped – "creative practices of Black placemaking" that can "offer a framework for understanding the placemaking of other deeply disadvantaged, stigmatized, and often segregated groups" (Hunter et al., 2016 p.32).

As described above, I believe there is an everyday placemaking quality of the Black spatial imaginary that finds itself embodied in the experiences of Black people everywhere. From kids repurposing a shopping cart to make a basketball hoop, the fixture of the front stoop and porch as places for gathering, or the prominence of a Leimert Park-like arts district, the Black spatial imaginary is visible at many different scales. It is often in these places where Black sociability and expression take hold. For Hunter et al., "Black placemaking refers to the ability [of] residents to shift otherwise oppressive geographies of a city to provide sites of play, pleasure, celebration, and politics" (Hunter et al., 2016 p.34). Importantly these forms of practice center the life and joy of Blackness as opposed to the deficit-dominated white spatial imaginary (Hunter & Robinson, 2016; USC Price, 2018). The structural deficits and social inequities that are often cited in planning research become involuntarily attached to Black bodies. Because of this, communities that have been characterized as being in deficit "are also [inappropriately] deemed too destroyed or too subjugated or too poor to write, imagine, want, or have a new lease on life" (McKittrick, 2011 P.955). As a counter, the Black spatial imaginary is an emancipatory epistemology which seeks to ground new forms of practice in both "analytic and poetic ways" and enable Black residents to make their own identities and spaces (USC Price, 2018 4:25).

Given that most of the urban design spatial production in the city has come from the formalized profession, it is imperative that a representative experience of Blackness is apart of that practice. In doing so a “black sense of place, black histories, and communities are not only integral to the production of space, but also … undoubtedly put pressure on how we presently study and assess racial violence” (McKittrick, 2011 p.947).

Shifting the Needle Towards Black Placemaking Practice

This thesis presents the appropriateness of the Black spatial imaginary as an alternative to the white and liberal spatial imaginaries, for the creative placemaking practices of urban design. To apply the Black spatial imaginary, the urban designer must “extend their thinking into other epistemological worlds… [which] is a skill seldom emphasized in professional training” (Umemoto, 2001 p.17). Considering the lack of ready understanding and training, translating the Black spatial imaginary into practice is not easy. As a means to inform the praxis of a Black spatial imaginary and urban design, the following section draws from themes emerged out of six informant interviews with placemakers. The term placemakers herein refers to the fact that the informants interviewed in this study work broadly within the placemaking professions including urban planning and design, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban policy. Informants include: Donald King, FAIA, Principal Architect of Mimar Studio, Seattle, a pre-development planning and design consultancy; Rico Quirindongo, Principal Architect, DLR Group Seattle, with an expertise in community design, social sustainability and working with agencies serving the public good; Zena Howard, FAIA, Principal and Managing Director, Perkins+Will’s North Carolina Practice in Durham ; Sara Zewde, Founding Principal of Studio Zewde a design firm practicing landscape architecture, urban design, and public art; Dr. Matthew Jordan Miller, Post Doctoral Fellow at University of Pennsylvania School of Design in the Department of City and Regional Planning; and Sara Cubillos Strategic Advisor at Seattle Public Utilities and formerly of Office of Sustainability & Environment.

Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and via email. In using a semi-structured interview format, the data obtained from interviews were coded into common themes. An analysis of the interviews derived four major themes. Firstly, the pursuit of creating Black-affirming public spaces is at the heart

design practice. Secondly, the Black spatial imaginary is in the sightline of racial equity work. Thirdly, it is the responsibility of the designer to make up the intellectual deficit of Black culture. Finally, the greatest opportunity for connecting the Black spatial imaginary to urban design practice is through community-driven design. In conjunction with the literature that has been presented throughout this thesis, the analysis of the themes below presents lessons for urban design practice.

The need for Black-affirming public spaces are at the heart of urban design practice

In my conversation with Sara Zewde, she stated that the inquiry of how to create a Black-affirming public space is not a marginal question for design, but rather is at the heart of it (S. Zewde, personal communication, April 3, 2019). This sentiment was echoed by Zena Howard who acknowledged that there is a clear role and responsibility for designers to address the threat of loss of Black spaces (Z. Howard, personal communication, March 13, 2019). Moreover, the informants who, as a whole, called out that a lack of involvement regarding supporting, protecting, and/or developing Black-affirming public spaces only contributes to the continued absence or threat of these types of spaces. Rico Quirindongo acknowledged that a framework like the Black spatial imaginary – or something similar – could find itself adopted into several urban design challenges beyond race or culture (R. Quirindongo, personal communication, March 25, 2019). Thus, offering attention to understanding and addressing a single cultural experience is "pertinent to design broadly" (Zewde, 2019). Effectively, this is reflected in the concept of targeted universalism which seeks to "clarify and reveal the barriers or impediments to achieving the universal goal for different groups of people" (powell, Menedian, & Ake, 2019 p.7). I interpret that the focus of generating perspectives from publics typically not involved in the production of public space can inspire other spatial imaginaries. In doing so, not only are the needs of Black communities addressed, but the goal of a democratic public realm for everyone can be better served. Thus, the pursuit of a Black-affirming public spaces is complementary rather than supplementary to urban design practice.

The Black spatial imaginary is in the sightline of racial equity work

A shared observation among myself and the informants is that in both academic and professional circles, racial equity work is often discussed as being a choice whether or not to pursue. While of course there is a shared recognition that there was once a time in which notions of diversity and inclusion were not part of the dominant conversation, this nonetheless makes racial equity seem like a burden or an aside to the design process. Conversely, Sara Cubillos highlights the point that there are few differences in the two efforts. Each process she mentions is iterative, respond to human-centered needs, and are expected to learn from failures (S. Cubillos, personal communication, December 14, 2018). I perceive many of the hesitations and frustrations surrounding racial equity work is that its impacts – as applied to a given placemaking application – can be uncertain. However, the extent to which this might be true is not a fault of the *nature of racial equity* but rather a flaw in the design of the process. Underwhelming or mixed social equity impacts have been associated with the inability to translate "social equity goals and objectives into clearly specified objectives" and "[inappropriate] measures for assessing their achievement" (Manaugh, Badami, & El-Geneidy, 2015 p.167). While I do not believe the proverbial baby is yet being thrown out along with the bathwater, these beliefs create a language of racial equity practice as being different from generic placemaking practices. As a result, advocates find themselves having to persuade others of how and why the two not only can coexist but are different versions of the same thing.

Urban design's intellectual deficit regarding Black culture

Design practices that seek to respond to the Black identity – are often referred to as Afro-centric, such as Afro-centric architecture. However, like defining Blackness, this is difficult to refine. Dr. Matthew Miller comments that there are experiences of the Black cultural experience that do not often surface in the discussion of planning and design (M. Miller, personal communication, March 21, 2019). In addition to the diversity of identities present in the public realm, there are multiple Black publics. As a result, in attempting to produce Afro-centric architecture for example, can seemingly concretize what Zena Howard calls a *misrepresentation* of the Black cultural identity (Howard, 2019). To this same notion, Mario Gooden's 2016 book titled *Dark Space* begins with the chapter called "[t]here is no such thing as African

American Architecture" (Gooden, 2016). In reading this book, I was reminded of a comment that Donald King made during our interview. He stated that the designer is in a position where they may have an interest or requirement to represent and service Black culture, but there does not exist a "Bauhaus-like stylebook to reference" (D. King, personal communication, November 26, 2018). Moreover, King notes that there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the ways in which generations of Black Americans have appropriated, reinterpreted, and made space that may not be documented. While there is opportunity to cultivate the development and understanding of this knowledge in the profession, it is also an indication of the slow pace of academia to represent race and social justice across planning and design disciplines (Mock, 2015a). This thesis argues that such knowledge exists within the Black spatial imaginary. Sara Zewde states that ultimately this is the great intellectual deficit of design professions (Zewde, 2019). What is the designer to do when the breadth of the Black cultural experience is missing from design canon, literature, and precedents?

I argue that the place-based knowledge represented within the potential of the Black spatial imaginary are more dynamic and responsive to the fluidity of the Black cultural experience than a potential "Afro-centric stylebook" would be. However, this calls upon the practicing urban designer – like others in placemaking professions – to expand their role and their practice. It is important to contextualize that the Black spatial imaginary is a spatial epistemology which needs to be applied to the development and practice of racial equity work, placemaking, and education. By mobilizing the values and situated knowledges within the Black spatial imaginary, the urban designer can better address the above themes. Thus, this thesis argues that not only is the Black spatial imaginary incredibly appropriate for such efforts but furthermore *should* be employed by urban designers.

This brings us towards the final theme shared by almost all informants; the greatest opportunity to connect the Black spatial imaginary to an urban design practice is through participatory and collaborative design. Thus, in aggregating the culmination of information derived from the literature and informant

interviews, the following section demonstrates ways to use community-driven design to mend and uplift Black belonging and continues the conversation forward in the creation of Black-affirming public spaces.

Part V: The Black Spatial Imaginary in Urban Design Practice

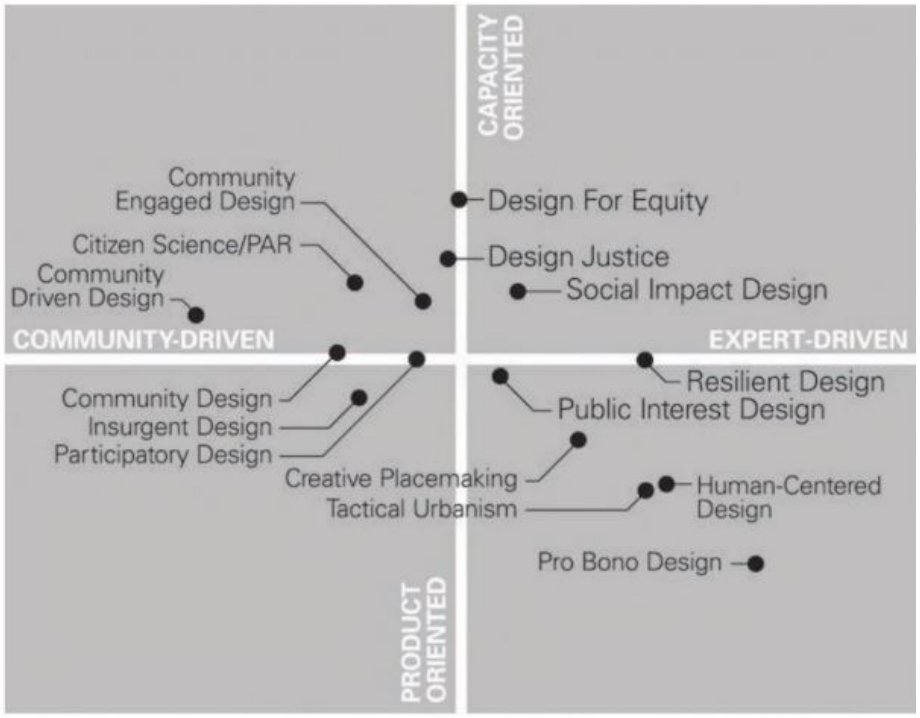
Arnstein's ladder of participation was introduced earlier to explain the foundation of power in participation. However, as has been demonstrated, the existence of this framework has not correlated with representative outcomes for Black communities in the production of space. One potential reason for this is that Arnstein's ladder does not nuance the relationship between designer and participant. Her framework implies that at any given step in the design process the most authentic community involvement must take form in absolute citizen control (Fung, 2006; Tritter & McCallum, 2006). A sticking point in the practice of community engagement is that the designers might associate collaboration as a hinderance to design development (Melcher, 2016). However, rather than positioning the relationship within the parameters of control, I argue that the relationship could be built around varying degrees of knowledge, expertise, or skills. In this way the designer does not necessarily cede control over a project but rather steps forward and back when appropriate. In response, I argue that flexible and creative methods of community-driven design are the most appropriate tools for creating Black-affirming public spaces.

Community-Driven Design

Community-driven participatory design processes are most suited to utilizing and unlocking the situated knowledges of the Black spatial imaginary. As employed in placemaking practice "community-driven processes … transcend the binary relation between professionals and users" (Hou & Rios, 2003). Thus, in challenging embedded power dynamics, community-driven participatory design is truly democratic and well suited for placemaking work (de la Peña et al., 2017). In placemaking, participatory design refers to the direct involvement of "local residents in the design and construction of community projects such as parks, gathering places, murals, and gardens" (Melcher, 2016). While seemingly straightforward, there are several justice and social minded approaches within the umbrella of community-driven design. The list includes but is not limited to: social impact design, humanitarian design, public interest-design, design

for humanity, community-engaged design, human-centered design, and participatory design (Melcher, 2016). Moreover, the practices of creative placemaking and tactical urbanism that were described earlier, also fall under this umbrella (Wilson, 2018). While the many terms around community-driven design can be overwhelming, the following matrix (figure 5) developed by Wilson (2018) is a useful organizing framework to relate each strategy to one another.

Figure 5



Source: Wilson, B.B. (2018). *Resilience for all: Striving for equity through community-driven design*. Table 2.1 p.18

Unlike Arnstein's Ladder, Wilson's matrix organizes public participation methods along two axes; the extent to which it is expert-driven or community-driven and whether the method is product or capacity oriented. This is important as many of the community engagement tools presented in this thesis can also be located on this matrix. By relating approaches to one another, one can select or adapt a given strategy to serve varying needs. The subsequent point of interest is to explore which arrangement of variables might best serve Black placemaking.

Refining Community-Driven Design to Align with the Black Spatial Imaginary

Given that the role of *designer as expert* can create distance with community members, it is reasonable concern ourselves with those methods that fall on the community-driven as opposed to expert-driven side of the spectrum. The distinction between product-oriented and capacity-oriented helps to outline the goals and priorities for engagement. In the case of product-oriented design, the aim is the physical production of space, whereas in the latter the means of production are of importance. Thus, I argue that capacity-oriented approaches better reflect the potential of the Black spatial imaginary.

When working directly with communities and clients, capacity-oriented approaches arguably situates the needs of the community within larger contexts. In other words rather than resort to environmental determinism – the cause and effect relationship of the environment on behavior – or deficit-based assumptions, capacity-oriented practices can consider the multiplicity of contributing factors (de la Peña et al., 2017; Wilson, 2018). In the case of Blackness in places such as has been presented in this thesis, contributing factors that disrupt place attachments and therefore Black belonging can include policing, surveillance, or something as complex as gentrification. By situating these contexts within the framing of the issues, the designer can reflect on the ways in which structures of "oppression, exclusion, inequity, inaccessibility… [can even be present in] the design of the smallest park" (de la Peña et al., 2017 p.2). In broadening the scope of the design issue, community members that possess situated and local knowledges are empowered in lasting ways than just the brevity of a one-time spatial production (de la Peña et al., 2017; Wilson, 2018). Thus, what potential might exist in bringing together the situated knowledges of the Black spatial imaginary with capacity-oriented community-driven participatory design? The following principles and subsequent examples provide inspiration and my response to that question.

Lessons for Practice

As a reflection of the process of developing this thesis, the following are a collection of interpreted lessons for practice. These principles are not an exhaustive list and are meant to layout a process by which the designer may consider when creating a Black-affirming public space. Additionally, this section

is accompanied by four examples of groups, projects, and principles that help inspire change and celebrate the manifestation of a Black-spatial-imaginary-grounded participatory design. I have chosen these examples to contribute towards Sara Zewde's call for new precedents and a new canon in urban design practice. I have interpreted the ways in which the examples may draw from or contribute to the Black spatial imaginary and thus help to root the practicing designer in concrete actualizations of Black placemaking work.

Lesson 1: Expand the scope of work to include the networked ways in which people live

Inspired by Barbara Brown Wilson, she states that "in vulnerable communities, community design projects must link to other essential needs" (Wilson, 2018 p.170). For example, the construction of an affordable housing project has the opportunity to also offer support for Black enterprise and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the residents that live in the development and that patronize those Black-owned businesses, should have nearby access to other spaces and services that suit their needs such as open space, opportunities to connect with nature, or health and wellness facilities. As discussed earlier, the need and design of a park could encompass and mean a lot more than just the production of an open space. For Black people and other marginalized groups there are a number of confounding factors that influence the use and perception of public space. If possible, link projects together such that Black communities may be able to develop in strategic and networked ways as opposed to piecemeal.

Lesson 2: Recognize that in placemaking, community wounds may open, and trauma may surface – how can the process be a form of reconciliation?

In my conversation with Dr. Matthew Miller we arrived at a question along the lines of *how can a space that is intended to be for all, coalesce as a space that is healing and educational for Black people?* When people who live with place-based trauma are involved in the process of spatial production, there is an opportunity for placemaking to reconcile the oppressive histories of their community. However, it is important to recognize that in seeking to arrive at "the spatializing of reparations", traditional planning and design methods often ask community members to re-open wounds by "demand[ing] answers that replicate racial violence" (Bates et al., 2018 p.255; McKittrick, 2011 p.950). Thus, even the best-

intentioned placemaking outcomes seeking to acknowledge the past can be inadvertently harmful. When discussing this in our interview, Sara Zewde asked “what if I don’t want to be memorialized, what if I want to live?” (Zewde, 2019). Utilizing community-driven participatory design approaches offers a flexibility and softness that can accommodate the production of space as an exercise in healing. While there is no guarantee that this will be the outcome, “the residents who have consistently borne the burden of these unjust land-use patterns must be given space to process collective trauma and [avail] their full rights of self-determination (Wilson, 2018 p.4).

Lesson 3: Expand and reposition the role of the designer

As previously stated, to apply the Black spatial imaginary, the urban designer must “extend their thinking into other epistemological worlds… [which] is a skill seldom emphasized in professional training” (Umemoto, 2001 p.17). In shifting the practice of placemaking to engage with the Black cultural experience as presented in lesson 2, the designer will develop a set of skills that they are not expected to already possess. In doing so, the relationship between the urban designer and community takes on new roles such *designer as ally* or *designer as invited guest* for example. In reframing an expert-driven approach to design, the community can become co-producers of knowledge, resources and skills.

Lesson 4: Unlock other spatial imaginaries with participatory design

A point made throughout this thesis is that prioritizing the Black spatial imaginary in placemaking practice is inherently democratic. However, this does not mean that a Black spatial imaginary is appropriate for all projects and needs of the public realm. In what ways can, participatory design unlock the situated knowledges and spatial imaginaries of other people who are absent, invisible, or have been excluded from spatial production? Even within the breadth of the Black cultural experience, it is important to recognize that a space that may be affirming to one person might not be affirming to another. In reforming both mental and material placemaking to include other cultural epistemologies, the designer can build a repertoire of approaches that is representative of the public realm.

Lesson 5: People can't be what they don't see – be willing to create what appears to be impossible or unlikely

Admittedly, this first part is inspired by a recent promotional video by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (The Intercept, 2019). However, the quote is repurposed to highlight the spirit of the Black spatial imaginary. In shifting away from a white spatial imaginary, the Black spatial imaginary contains the potential to create and interpret space in unimagined ways. This does not mean to throw caution to the wind but rather to consider when there are opportunities – especially on smaller scales – to run with an idea that may seem unlikely or beyond the understanding of the designer. In demonstrating the parameters of the Black spatial imaginary, not only can new precedents be created, but there is the potential to generate consensus, support, and relationships for future collaborations. Until then, the possibilities of the Black spatial imaginary will remain unexplored in formalized urban design practice. Moreover, there should be a willingness to champion and learn from success stories. On this note, the following four examples reflect the epistemology of the Black spatial imaginary in creative and inspiring ways.

Example A: Hip-Hop Architecture Camp. Michael Ford argues that Hip Hop is "modernisms post-occupancy evaluation" in which the situated knowledges of the built environment present in hip-hop lyrics provide both a response and inspiration for new spatial production. Stating that *hip hop architecture* is more of an emotional response rather than a structural response, hip hop architecture is not intended to have a recognizable style or form. Hosting his hip hop architecture camp in cities across the country, Ford provides the opportunity for students to materialize hip hop lyrics through modelling and 3-d printing (Ford, 2019).

Example B: Portland African American Leadership Forum's People's Plan. An accompanying effort in the *This is a Black Spatial Imaginary* exhibition and public art interventions led by Lisa Bates and Sharita Towne, the People's Plan as it's titled engages Black Portland residents in a variety of multi-disciplinary visioning and storytelling sessions to provide an alternative planning document that centers situated Black geographies and Black futures (USC Price, 2018). Akin to a Black-centered comprehensive plan, the

development of the plan employed participatory tools such as a kaleidoscope conversation. A Kaleidoscope conversation or “Kaleidoscope in motion” is the call and response of questions without offerings of advice or solutions (Averbuch, 2015). In engaging in a Kaleidoscope conversation, the discourse can remain in the realm of possibility to which unimagined and diverse perspectives can have a place.

Example C: Africatown Community Land Trust, Seattle, WA. The historically Black neighborhood in Seattle’s Central District is undergoing intense gentrification and disruptions to place attachments. In response, Africatown have obtained stakes in a number of development projects. Beyond the scope of the given projects the inaugural Imagine Africatown Central District Design Weekend was held in July 2018. As part of the design weekend there was an organized “design cipher” for multidisciplinary participation. A cipher or cypher is a fixture of hip hop culture in which multiple MCs, beatboxers, and dancers form together in an improvised or freestyled session. A tool also employed by Michael Ford, hip hop culture lends itself to the production of space in ways not previously explored.

Example D: BlackSpace Design Manifesto. Originally formed at the Harvard Graduate School of Design’s 2017 Black in Design Conference, BlackSpace NYC is a network of “young, Black, NYC residents, changemakers, system thinkers, learners, and lovers” (Washington, 2018). In 2019 the group published a list of 14 design principles entitled the “BlackSpace Design Manifesto.” Some of the developed principles include: Celebrate, Catalyze & Amplify Black Joy, Seek People at the Margins, and Manifest the Future.

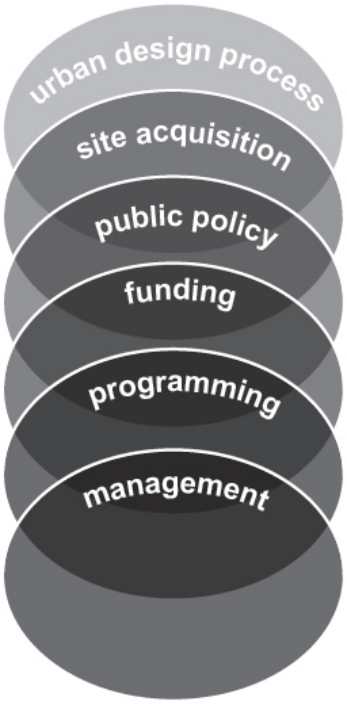
Conclusion

This thesis has provided a sequence of arguments to demonstrate the way in which a Black spatial imaginary informs the production of public spaces; and centers the Black spatial imaginary in the future of urban design practice. Arguably the plentiful presence of Black-affirming public spaces in the urban landscape is a vision of a more inclusive future. Through an exploration of literature and themes generated from semi-structured interviews, I have offered the urban designer five lessons for practice.

Demonstrably the most appropriate avenue available to produce Black-affirming public spaces is through community-driven-capacity-oriented-participatory design. In doing so, the urban designer can reposition themselves as being a co-producer of knowledge, resources and skills to materialize such spaces.

While this thesis has presented an exploration of the way in which the Black spatial imaginary influences the urban designer's role in the public participation process, the ability to materialize successful Black-affirming public spaces depends upon many additional factors. It is important that a well-conducted design process is complemented by supporting mechanisms that are rooted in a co-understanding of the Black cultural experience (figure 6). For example, site acquisition deals with the ownership and opportunities available to create new spaces, policies can write-in requirements for cultural placemaking, and management sustains the impacts of the space for future generations. If the co-production of space is limited to the urban design process then the experience of Black belonging may be short lived. For Black-affirming public spaces to contribute towards what Lisa Bates calls the "spatializing of reparations", the values of the Black spatial imaginary must be contextualized throughout each contributing realm of influence (Bates & Towne, 2017 p.255). In doing so, the Black spatial imaginary can contribute to a holistic process of reconciliation through placemaking.

Figure 6



Source: Author

Thus, a fruitful exercise of future urban design research is to employ these techniques in real workshops and meetings. In doing so, the lessons for practice may be ground-truthed and subsequently the number of available precedents may become broadened. Moreover, another valuable endeavour is to examine the community side of public participation. As this thesis is meant to serve academics, professionals and students with lessons for practice, arguably the lessons can become reformed and honed through community engagement. Involving community members from diverse backgrounds and expertise can add nuance to the use of the Black spatial imaginary in design process and practice.

While arguably the willingness to adopt non-hegemonic frameworks and practices is a challenge, the resulting reward can have transformative impacts in the public realm. Thus, by shifting the needle towards Black placemaking, geographies, and spatial imaginaries, we can begin to imagine and further concretize a future in which Black belonging and Black-affirming space is abundant in the city and its public places.

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Appendix A: Hip Hop Architecture

Michael Ford's Hip Hop Architecture Camp

> Hip Hop Architecture explores the intersection of Hip Hop culture and the built environment through three interconnected realms; media, professional practice, and academia. The goal of Hip Hop Architecture is to increase the number of underrepresented populations in the practice of architecture while simultaneously creating a new approach to architecture and design, one based on the Hip Hop's founding elements (DJ, Emcee, Graffiti and B-Boy/ B-Girl). Hip Hop Architecture is a manifestation of the widely accepted fifth element of Hip Hop, Knowledge of Self
>
> ("Hip hop architecture 101," n.d.)

The Hip Hop Architecture Camp Mixtape

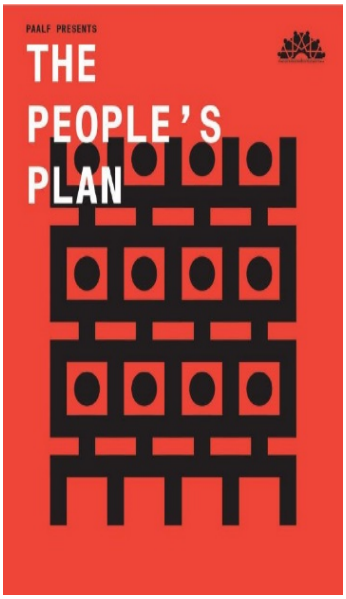
by Michael Ford, The Hip Hop Architect

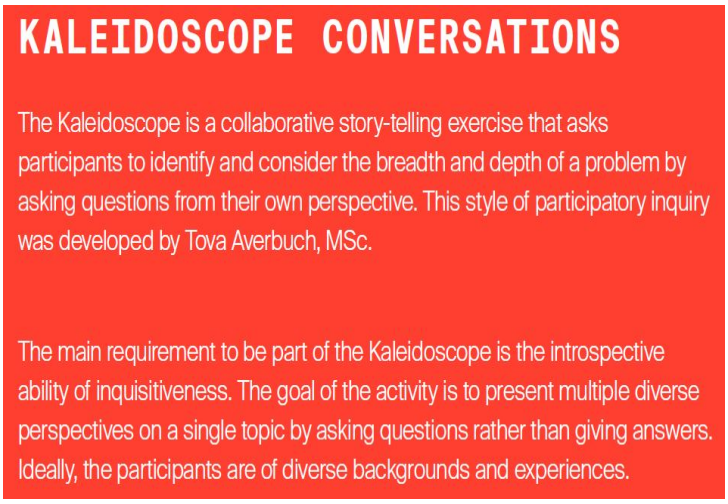
The Hip Hop Architecture Camp Mixtape was produced by Michael Ford and is composed of tracks written by participants of The Hip Hop Architecture Camp which took place in various cities throughout The United States. The Hip Hop Architecture Camp is a national initiative which uses hip hop culture as a catalyst to introduce underrepresented youth to architecture and urban planning.

Appendix B: PAALF People's Plan

Portland African American Leadership Forum: The People's Plan

> The PAALF People's Plan serves as a powerful tool for research, organizing, and implementation. By viewing the community as the drivers of change, this project empowered the Portland Black community to assert their right to actively shape the city they live in. While traditional planning engagement models often intimidate community members through complex, technical language and processes; the project's aim was to engage the community on their terms to ensure that the solutions are informed by the people they affect.
>
> (Portland African American Leadership Forum, 2017)

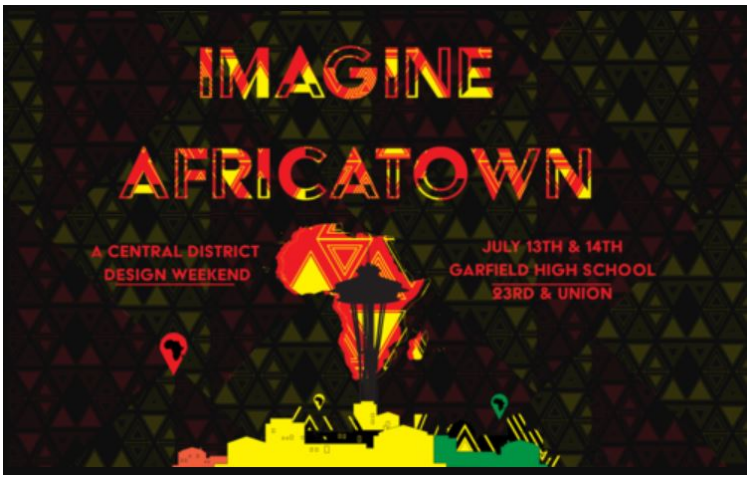




Appendix C: Imagine Africatown Central District Design Weekend

Africatown: Imagine Africatown Central District Design Weekend's Design Cipher

> The Cipher will bring together designers, planners, developers, and community members of all ages for a landmark one-day workshop where we will dream, imagine, and project the future of Africatown. At the end of the Cipher, teams will present their proposals to a broad audience--including City officials and civic leaders--generate feedback and further the conversation. The goal is rich dialogue and implementable design options for four key sites that will form the backbone for a thriving Africatown.
>
> (Africatown Community Land Trust, 2018)

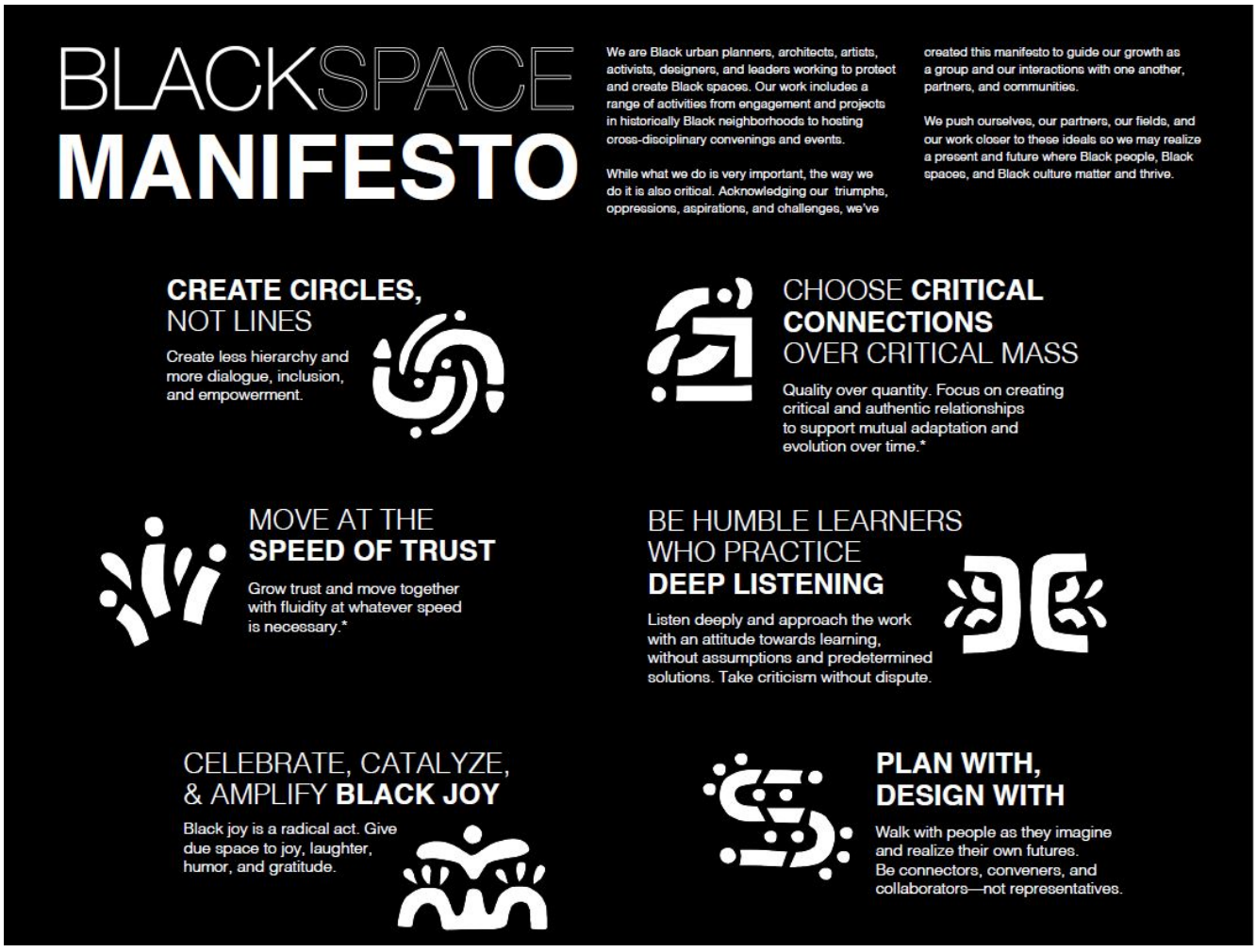


Appendix D: The BlackSpace Design Manifesto

The BlackSpace: Design Manifesto

We are Black urban planners, architects, artists, activists, and designers working to protect and create Black spaces. Our work includes a range of activities from engagement in historically Black neighborhoods, to hosting cross-disciplinary convenings and events. While what we do is very important, the way we do it is also critical. Acknowledging our past oppressions, triumphs, future aspirations, and challenges, we've created this manifesto to guide our growth as a group and our interactions with partners and communities. We push ourselves, our partners, and our work closer to these ideals so we may realize a future where Black people, Black spaces, and Black culture matter and thrive

(BlackSpace, 2019)



CENTER **LIVED EXPERIENCE**

Lived experience is an important expertise; center it so it can be a guide and touchstone of all work.

SEEK **PEOPLE AT THE MARGINS**

Acknowledge the structures that create, maintain and uphold inequity. Learn and practice new ways of intentionally making space for marginalized voices, stories, and bodies.

RECKON WITH THE PAST TO BUILD THE FUTURE

Meaningfully acknowledge the histories, injustice, innovations, and victories of spaces and places before new work begins. Reckon with the past as a means of healing, building trust, and deepening understanding of self and others.

PROTECT & STRENGTHEN CULTURE

Make visible and strengthen Black cultures and spaces to honor their sacredness and prevent their erasure. Amplify and support Black assets of all forms—from leaders, institutions, and businesses to arts, culture, and histories.

CULTIVATE WEALTH

Cultivate a wealth of time, talent, and treasure that provide the freedom to risk, fail, learn, and grow.

FOSTER **PERSONAL & COMMUNAL EVOLUTION**

Make opportunities to expand leadership and capacity.

PROMOTE EXCELLENCE

Amplify, elevate, and love Black vanguards and the variety of their challenging, creative, exceptional, and innovative work and spaces. Allow excellence to build influence that creates opportunities for present and future generations.

MANIFEST THE FUTURE

Black people, Black culture, and Black spaces exist in the future! Imagine and design the future into existence now, working inside and outside of social and political systems.

*This principle is derived from Adrienne Maree Brown's Emergent Strategy: *Shaping Change, Changing Worlds.*

We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations that inspired these principles.