

Lightning in the Night: Transgression in Urban Design

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Abstract

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Inspired primarily by the writings of Henri Lefebvre, this thesis is rooted in the argument that capitalist society inherently produces inequality. Further, the State, and urban planning as an extension of the State, serves to reproduce capitalism and in turn its inequalities are also reproduced. Lefebvre analyzes capitalist society and its reproduction via an interpretation of Marxism that emphasizes space. He argues that space is produced and that every society (re)produces and requires its own space. In response to capitalism, Lefebvre calls for the production of a society where the majority of individuals self-manage all aspects of life, and thus eventually dissolve the State and take control from the bourgeoisie (the dominant class of capitalism). Given this context I will argue the need for a radical approach to urban design as opposed to traditional, “State sanctioned” urban design methods, which I will critique using the work of Lefebvre and David Harvey. Specifically, I aim to explore the potential of adapting Michelle Foucault’s concept of transgression to describe urban design actions that experiment in producing spaces that cross the “limits” of capitalism and the State - embodying Lefebvre’s call for a new society. To this end I will lay out a working definition of transgressive urban design and examine three case studies of the tactic being used to address specific contemporary social issues: housing, gentrification, and control of public space. In order to better understand the application of transgressive urban design I will review each case study individually and then reflect on common themes that emerge from all three being considered as a sample of possible strategies in moving towards Lefebvre’s proposed society. To conclude, I will offer my personal comments on the project and the potential for transgressive urban design.

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Fig. 1 Downtown, Seattle. Personal photograph by author. 2015.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

Many argue capitalist society has used urban design and planning as a tool to perpetuate itself through the repression, co-optation and exclusion of concepts and peoples that are disagreeable to its continuance. Urban design interventions have recently emphasized “community participation”, “sustainability”, “equity” and other buzzwords that appeal to the desire for a more just system, but these claims often act only as thin veils with which the inherent injustices of capitalism have been crudely concealed from the public eye. Affordable housing projects becoming synonymous with displacement, community action is co-opted or negated through institutional action, public cooperation masquerading as public involvement - the issues are challenging and numerous. If a socially just city is to be the goal of urban design, then more radical approaches must be considered.

Our urban space has largely been appropriated to feed back into the continuation of capitalism, and while we may not (and perhaps shouldn't) have the template for a step-by-step production of a comprehensive alternative urban fabric, we are capable of taking advantage of opportunities to design spaces that can directly counter capitalist processes, in turn offering a glimpse at a more socially just city. The purpose here is to start a conversation, within the context of Henri Lefebvre's call for a society of self-managing individuals, about how urban design interventions can practically undermine the current mode of production. More specifically, I am approaching this project as an exploration of the potential for urban design interventions to produce anti-capitalist space by transgressing the perceived limits of the State and capitalism as described by Henri Lefebvre.

Admittedly, radical thinking is at times plagued by an inability to move beyond abstract exercises. In an attempt to make this project a catalyst for action rather than just a conversation behind academic doors, the purpose of this material is also to be thorough, action-oriented, and as accessible as possible without diluting the concepts presented.

AUDIENCE

In line with the purpose of making this project accessible, the thesis will be geared towards a wide audience, including: academics within planning and related fields, practicing professionals, and any other parties who simply have an interest in urban design and/or radical theory.

Many of the people that I believe will be involved in acting on the ideas presented here are likely to not be professionals or academics in the urban design field. In line with Lefebvre's view of the dissolution of the State, coupled with David Harvey's critique of urban planning, transgressive actions are meant to counter institutional power and in turn generally cannot be practiced within a professional context. Though, professionals could certainly take action outside their professional role (as we will see in the case of Outdoor Living Rooms in West Oakland). Conversely, users/inhabitants with intimate knowledge of the opportunity spaces of their neighborhoods are the parties that are best positioned to take action. Hence, while required to meet the academic standards of my degree, I hope this thesis remains accessible enough to provide an organized exploration of transgression that is relatable and actionable for readers from all backgrounds.

OVERVIEW

This thesis is organized into two parts with the purpose of breaking the project into a digestible sequence of concepts. Each part consists of chapters of variable levels of focus (and a corresponding variation of lengths). Part I focuses on providing a foundation for an exploration of transgressive urban design, including a look at the production of space, descriptions of capitalism, the state and urban planning, as well as an overview of Lefebvre's vision for a new society. Part II will focus on transgressive urban design as a concept, case studies to further explore this concept, and conclusions. These parts are organized into chapters as follows:

Part I:

The Production of Space

This chapter will feature the spatialization of Marxism by Lefebvre in an attempt to counter thought that reduces analysis of society to class struggle (as with some versions of Marxism) or to economics (as capitalism attempts). Starting with a description of space as produced I will also cover Lefebvre's concept of the spatial triad.

Capitalism, the State and Urban Planning

Building from the spatial foundation of the previous chapter, a characterization of the capitalist mode of production and its abstract space, as well as how the State fits into the reproduction of capitalism, will be provided in this chapter. Further, in this chapter I will narrow the focus to urban planning and design. I will present the theoretical argument for how the professional field of urban planning has served capitalism, in turn revealing why it cannot be utilized in its traditional role as a means to producing Lefebvre's vision for society.

Lefebvre's Call for a New Society

This section will outline Lefebvre's vision for a society based on *autogestion* (a concept of self-management), which entails the dissolution of the State and the toppling of bourgeoisie control via the self-organization of inhabitants in a mass mobilization to produce a new space. I will also explain Lefebvre's argument for this society being an open ended project, with rights being defined by struggle and the "right to the city" being a central focus. The information presented here and in the previous chapters will set the stage for transgression as a possible method of undermining capitalism.

Part II:

Transgressive Urban Design

In this portion of the thesis I will provide a conceptual definition and examination of the concept of transgression based on the writing of Michelle Foucault. Adapting this definition to urban design and the production of anti-capitalist space, I will present a more specific working definition of transgression and explain how transgression builds on Lefebvre's concept of differential space.

Transgression Case Studies

To gain a better understanding of what successful transgressive urban design looks like I will examine case studies of specific urban design issues within capitalism that embody the core characteristics of capitalist society (exchange value, hegemony of one class and private property).

The three issues chosen are privatization of public space, housing, and gentrification. These issues were chosen due to their contemporary relevance and the fact that they are typically addressed through

institutional urban planning and design actions. Each issue is coupled with a specific case of a transgressive urban design action that points towards potential progress in transitioning away from capitalism.

By its definition, transgression defies metaphorical as well as physical boundaries and in turn resists confinement to a set of static evaluative criteria - as such in reviewing these case studies I will not set forth a step-by-step guide in how to replicate the positive aspects of the interventions. Instead, I will provide a review of each case and how it fits into transgressing the limits of capitalism and the State.

Conclusion: Enacting Transgression

Just as Lefebvre and others have built upon Marxist foundations, we must continue to experiment and work with the ideas presented by the thinkers that I draw on for this project. This thesis is a personal attempt to humbly address the ideas inspired by Lefebvre and will only be successful in so far as it is able to inspire further thought and action (even if it is through the rejection of the ideas presented here). To this end the conclusion will establish common themes among the case studies and will acknowledge the shortcomings of this thesis while also looking forward to how transgression and radical design can be applied further.

PART I

THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

CAPITALISM, THE STATE AND URBAN PLANNING

LEFEBVRE'S CALL FOR A NEW SOCIETY

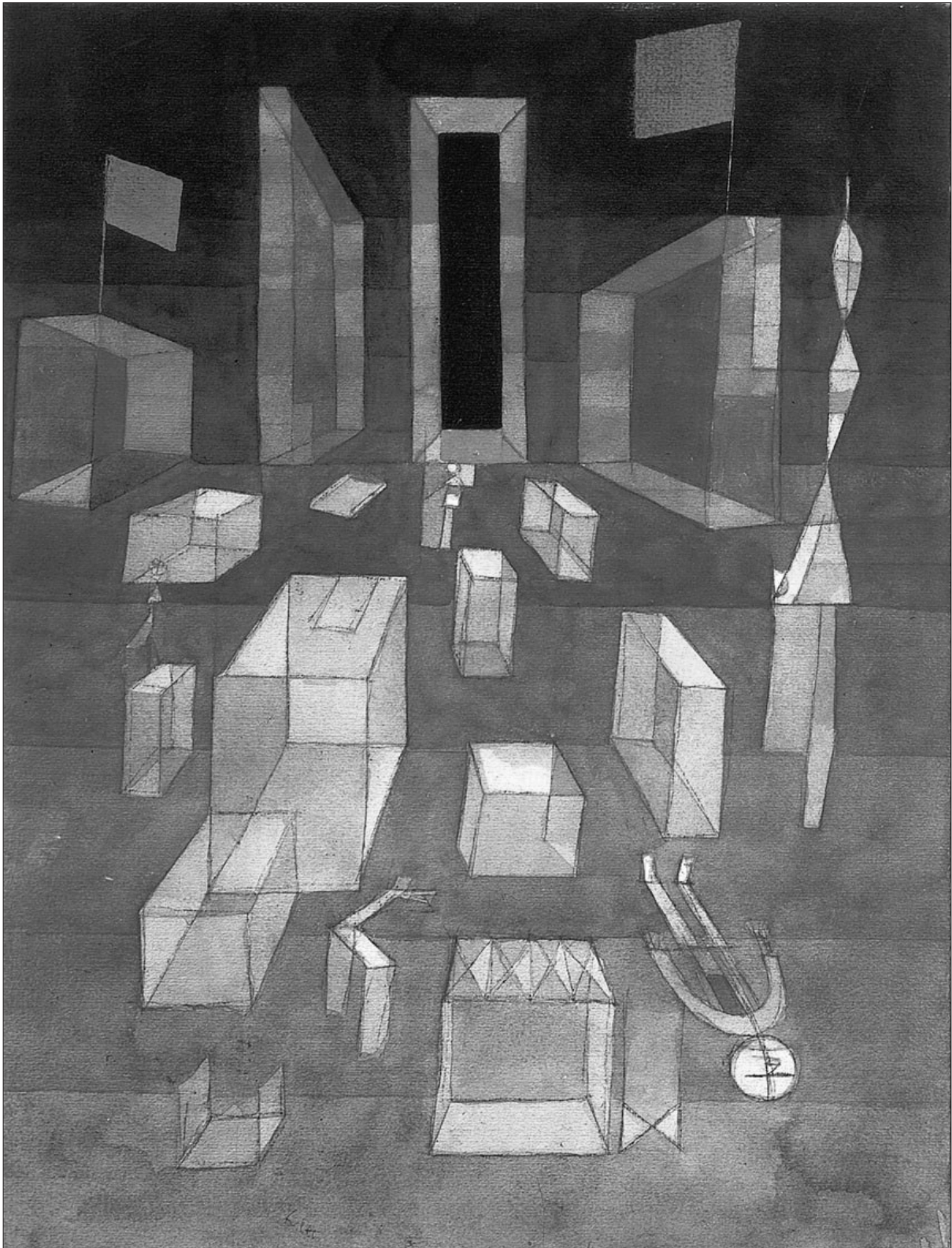


Fig. 2 Paul Klee, *Nichtkomponiertes im Raum* (*Uncomposed in Space*), 1929, as seen on the cover of the Blackwell translation of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, 1991. Edited by author.

THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

OVERVIEW

In *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre builds on Marxism by shifting towards an emphasis on the spatial in considering modes of production, the causal efficacy of the forces and relations of production, and how the transition from one mode of production to another occurs. For this project I will not go into an understanding of Marxist thought, rather I will focus on Lefebvre's interpretation on space and how it relates to society.

Lefebvre's hypothesis is that any activity developed over time produces a space and can only attain a concrete existence within that space (The Production of Space 46). In line with these conclusions, he claims that every mode of production, including capitalism, produces (and reproduces) its own space, that social space is socially produced (The Production of Space 31). Further, the shift from one mode to another requires a new space, a space resulting from the contradictions in the social relations of production, which cannot fail to be expressed in space and revolutionize it (The Production of Space 46).

By setting forth a unified theory of space Lefebvre aims to not just provide a means of interpreting space, but also a means of producing it. More specifically, with a unified theory of space Lefebvre is hoping to counter reductionist thought - to analyze society and particularly the city as complex wholes instead of an interpretation of them (and life in general) through a limited singular lens such as economics or class struggle. Utilizing this more holistic approach Lefebvre analyzes capitalism and its space and puts forth his vision for a new society.

SPACE AS CONTAINER VERSUS SPACE AS PRODUCED

According to Lefebvre, space is not a pre-existing neutral void or a naturally empty “container” waiting to be occupied. Viewing space as a container suggests that it is indifferent and separate to its content, that any thing can be placed in any set of places in the container. In turn separation is extended to the contents and their components - everything becomes fragmented and the risk of reducing thinking to the simple empirical counting of things arises. (The Production of Space 170)

Instead of assuming a pre-existent space, Lefebvre contends that space is produced, that any activity over time, including modes of production, produces a space and can only exist concretely within that space (The Production of Space 115). In opposition to the container metaphor, Lefebvre considers space (and its production) using the living body and its ability for action. He states that the body is spatial, that it produces itself in space and produces that space. While producing itself (and its space) by drawing on the nourishment or energies of space it is also enabled or constricted by the laws of that space. To help further illustrate what he means by this we can look to Lefebvre’s comments on nature. In this case the laws of space are also the laws of nature. A spider (a living body) produces and occupies a space: the space of its web, its stratagems and its needs. The spider’s body, its secretory glands and legs, the things to which it attaches its web, the silk that makes up its web, its prey, and so on are all interrelated and governed by the laws of nature.¹ (The Production of Space 170-174)

With this understanding of space Lefebvre argues that cities cannot be simply viewed as collections of people and things in space (physical space) or by simply examining the texts on the knowledge of space (mental space) - that there needs to be a unified theory of space that incorporates physical, mental and social space with which to more holistically understand modes of production and how transitions between modes are produced. (The Production of Space 11, 31)

¹ Lefebvre notes that knowledge plays a different role here than it does in a social space. While the spider is able to produce and navigate space, its knowledge of space is not comparable to human knowledge and our use of verbal abstractions.

THE SPATIAL TRIAD

In setting out towards a unified theory of space Lefebvre identifies a triad of “moments” that view space as perceived, conceived and lived. Respectively these are spatial practice, representations of space and representational space and serve to guide Lefebvre’s unification of the physical, mental and social spaces.

Spatial practice is the space reproduced in everyday life or daily reality - this is space as perceived, or the physical/*real* space that is generated and used by humans on a day-to-day basis. Spatial practice, both produces social space and requires it as a precondition (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 38). In other words the physical space of cities, such as their networks of roads, both influence how space is used and symbolized (producing social space) and is also modified by its use and how meaning is invested in it (produced by social space). This process of producing social space is slow, ensuring continuity and cohesion over time. In turn this guarantees levels of competence and performance in terms of how space is used and how people relate to it. (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33)



Fig. 3 Spatial Practice. Digital collage by author. 2015

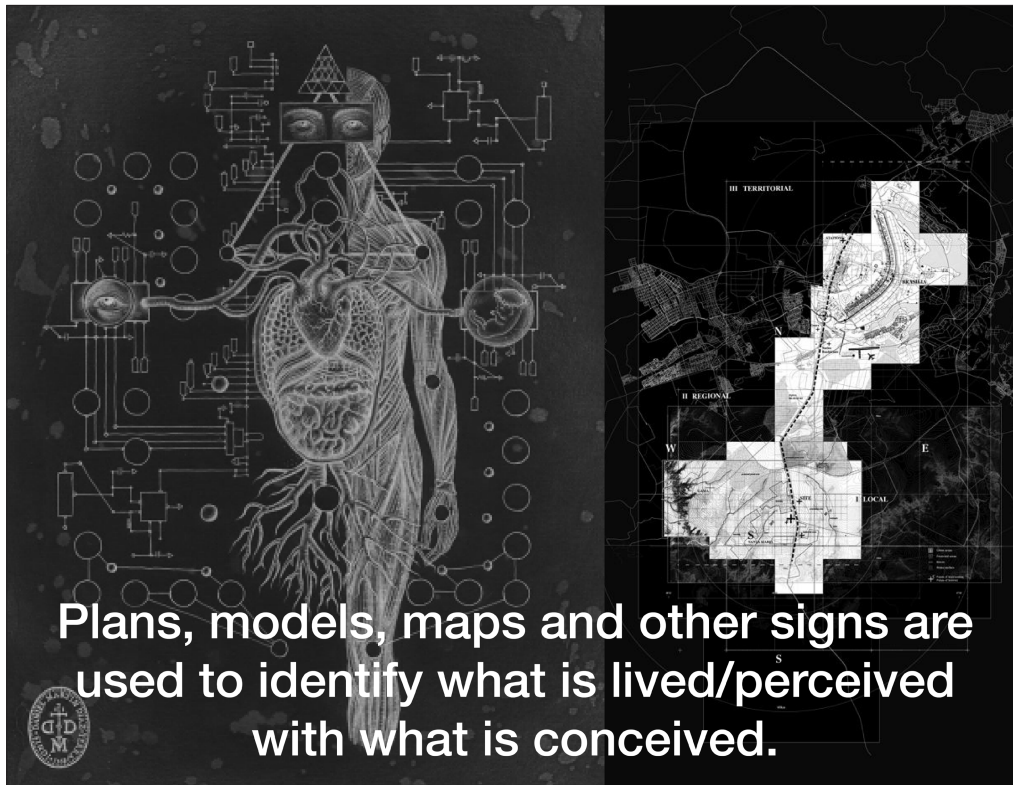


Fig. 4 Representations of Space. Digital collage by author. 2015

Representations of space is space conceptualized or imagined - it is mental space. This is the dominant space in any mode of production, tending towards a system of verbal signs that are intellectually worked out (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 38-39). Representations of space are tied to the relations of production and to the order that those relations impose. In turn they are related to knowledge and “accepted” relations. (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33) This is the space of urban planners, scientists, etc. Plans, models, maps and other signs are used to identify what is lived/perceived with what is conceived (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 38-39). Their intervention occurs by way of construction (architecture) - not in the sense of a particular structure but as a project of shaping physical space as a texture of physical representations (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 42).

Lefebvre again returns to the consideration of the body, in this case as a means of understanding representations of space. Considering the body, representations derive from accumulated scientific knowledge as disseminated with a mixture of ideology. These representations are from the knowledge of anatomy, sickness and its cures, and of the body’s relationship with nature and its surroundings. (*The Production of Space* 39-40) These representations have a dominant relationship with the physical body and the body as lived through their determination of methods such as surgery, the use of medicine, etc.

Turning to Stuart Elden and his book *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, we can understand the role of

representations of space more clearly in the context of the city. He explains that Lefebvre does not see the architectural plan as innocently remaining in the mental realm. The abstraction of space is translated on the ground to the bulldozer that realizes these plans - bringing the architect's abstract understanding of space to the physical realm. (189)

Representational spaces, as the third member of the triad, embody complex symbolisms (including coded and not coded) linked to the clandestine and repressed side of social life and art². In other words, representational space is social space - space as directly lived through spatial images and symbols. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of physical objects. This is the space of inhabitants, users, and descriptive artists. Representational spaces are dominated, tending toward systems of non-verbal symbols and signs, and as such are passively experienced. (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33,38-39)

Again turning to Elden we can gain a better understanding of what Lefebvre is getting at. He describes Lefebvre's representational space as space which is produced and modified over time and through its use invested with symbolism and meaning. It is thus space as both real and imagined. (Understanding Henri Lefebvre 190)

While these three are distinguishable from each other, they are not separated from each other (again, Lefebvre is aiming towards a unification of the physical, mental and social). Being a triad, rather than a dualism, Lefebvre argues that spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces avoid the boiling down of their relations to the oppositions or antagonisms present in dualism - allowing the "subject", or member of a given social group, to move between each of these spaces without confusion. (*The Production of Space* 39) In other words these three are distinguishable but are integrated with and influence each other, as seen with the relationship between spatial practice producing while also presupposing social space.

IMPLICATIONS

How does Lefebvre apply his understanding of space? In short, Lefebvre is giving us a framework for understanding society and how the physical, mental and social interact to shape our cities and daily lives. This understanding is applied in analyzing the space of capitalism and in creating a vision of a new society being shaped through the production of a new space. In the next chapter I will examine Lefebvre's description of capitalist space and the State before turning to his call for a new society.

2 This is art as pure description



Fig. 5 Representational Space. Digital collage by author. 2015



Fig. 6 Capitalism, The United States, and Urban Planning. Digital collage by author. 2015

CAPITALISM, THE STATE AND URBAN PLANNING

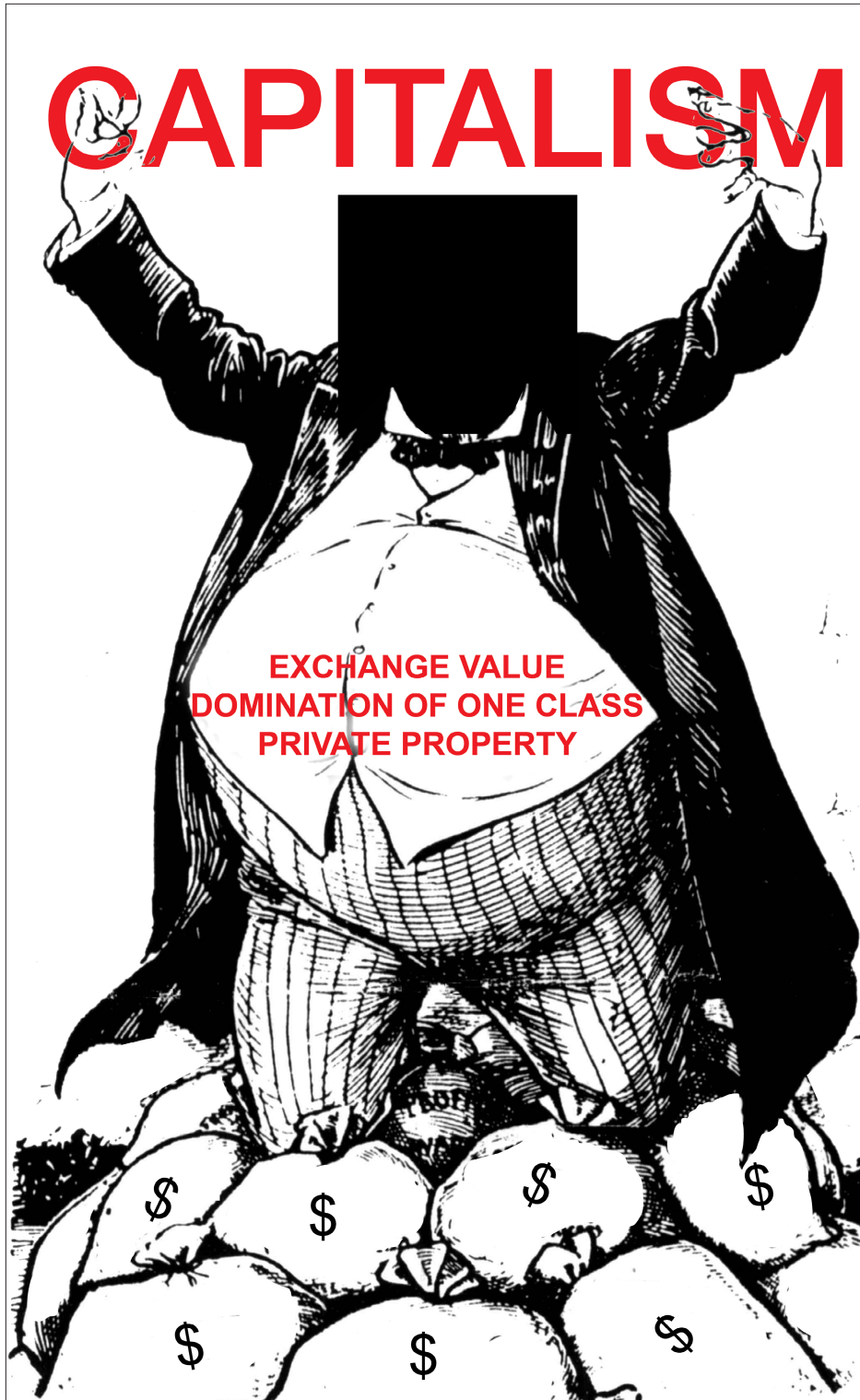


Fig. 7 Capitalism. Digital collage by author. 2015

OVERVIEW

Lefebvre argues that capitalism is not, as some may suggest, a finished and closed system of commercial exchange (The Production of Space 10). It is a mode of production requiring and producing a space. This space is abstract space. In this chapter I will describe abstract space - focusing on the dominance of the bourgeoisie class, the universal application of exchange value, and the role of private property. These will establish the “limits of capitalism” with which I will later examine the role of transgressive urban design as a means to breaking these limits in favor of new ones within the context of Lefebvre’s arguments for a new society.

This chapter will also provide an overview of the role of the State in capitalism - focusing on its dependence on violence and how this forges a relationship with supporting the bourgeoisie’s control over the means of production and capital. The State exercises its influence via violence and this is justified at the local level by laws. As such the limits of the State are its laws and its ability to exert police power. Again, these will be examined through the lens of transgression and the production of space towards Lefebvre’s vision.

CAPITALISM’S LIMITS

Capitalism’s dominant feature, bound up with the functioning of money, with the various markets (labor, commodity, land, knowledge, and capital markets) and with social relations of production but distinct in its dominance, is the hegemony of the bourgeoisie class. This dominance is not merely a crude form of influence - it is exercised over society as a whole, including culture and knowledge. (Lefebvre, The Production of Space 10) Here Lefebvre is refining the idea of a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie as put forth by Marx, where the bourgeoisie maintain control over the means of production - tools, raw materials, and (in capitalism) investments (The Production of Space 348). Lefebvre pushes this control beyond simple influence or repressive violence to include a more total control, including a dominant role in the production of space (The Production of Space 10).

Capitalism and bourgeoisie control is based in abstract space. Though it is not homogeneous in itself, abstract space aims for homogeneity: the primary facet being the homogeneity of a universal

endowment of exchange value. As Lefebvre states: “if one were to try and enumerate the “properties” of abstract space, one would first have to consider it as a medium of *exchange*.. tending to absorb *use*” (The Production of Space 307). Exchange value once endowed upon something (land, apartments, an idea, etc.) commodifies it, absorbing the value associated with its use, making it comparable to other commodities. In this process exchange value is expressed in money - allowing for the interchangeability of everything that has been commodified. Simply put, everything can be bought and sold. Formerly this “commodity world”, as Lefebvre describes it, encompassed only goods and things produced in space and their circulation and flow. Now it governs space as a whole. Aiming for comparability, space under exchange value has been “produced and reproduced as reproducible” and homogeneity has been extended to space itself (The Production of Space 336-7, emphasis in text). Through this expansion of exchange value capital extends its control - and the bourgeoisie, who have concentrated control over capital, in turn are more secure in their dominance over the other classes.

Private property is essential to bourgeoisie control (and the hegemony of capitalism) simply in that the control over the means of production is maintained through ownership (Purcell, Possible Worlds 145). Looking at this in more depth, private property is a “right”³ that is law-bound and with which commodities are given boundaries (think of in the case of land: property lines) and thus made concrete and exchangeable.

In the case of the city, which will be revisited in further detail later, private property divides the city into isolated segments under a hegemonic system. This allows them to be segregated for specific uses and separates users from each other, storing them in sterilized spaces that prevent encounters. Thus the production of space in the city is controlled by property owners. (Purcell, Possible Worlds 149)

While this examination of the dominance of the bourgeoisie, exchange value and private property certainly does not give a comprehensive description of capitalism, it highlights primary facets which we can consider as the “limits” of capitalism. Outside of these limits capitalism no longer functions, a possibility that opens the door to alternative societies such as the one Lefebvre calls for and that I will later discuss in its respective chapter.

According to Lefebvre, the State has come to play a key role in maintaining and managing capitalism’s growth at all spatial scales and thus a critique of capitalism is incomplete without a critique and opposition to the State as well. (Lefebvre, State, Space, World 17)

³ This is not a God-given right , but a right established through struggle. (Possible Worlds) This will be described further in the out in the chapter on Lefebvre’s call for a new society where I will discuss his concept of rights and the right to the city.

THE STATE

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre describes the State as a framework that ensures the interests of the bourgeoisie are imposed on society. He explains that the State was founded in violence, a violence of class struggle that is the expression of an economically dominant class (the bourgeoisie). Since the State must call on material resources to enact violence, it is dependent on the bourgeoisie which control the means of production. In turn, its violence requires a goal that satisfies the interests of the dominant class. Its primary goal and reason for developing is the accumulation of capital by the bourgeoisie, which at its core requires violence. Another is unification of its citizens under a social practice that reinforces the ruling class's hegemony. This is rationalized as being for "the common good" and enacted via legislation and influence over knowledge and culture. (279-81) David Harvey describes this role more succinctly saying that the basic role of the State is to contain civil strife, manage systemic crisis, and create the conditions for accumulation and balanced growth. (On Planning)

Returning to the concept of violence, Lefebvre contends that the State now holds a monopoly over (rationalized) violence. By claiming its sovereignty the State justifies its acts and, while not being independent of them, rises above classes and relations of production in solely holding the "right" to resolve any conflicts via violence. (The Production of Space 280)

As the connections mentioned above between economy and state power have developed and strengthened over time, the State as described by Lefebvre has taken on a new form in the twentieth century. He describes the State now as more appropriately being considered the State mode of production. In taking charge of growth (via violence) any economic failures are now attributed to the State. The State continues to rise above society and penetrate daily life and behavior, embedding itself and capitalist relations into them. Further, no state can escape the tendency to develop towards the State mode of production. Lefebvre goes so far as to say there is no "good state". (State, Space, World 129-130)

Given the importance of the State (mode of production) it is unavoidable that any society that aims to supplant capitalism must also dissolve the State. Lefebvre calls for just this - as will be discussed later.

A CRITIQUE OF URBAN PLANNING

With the focus of this thesis being on the application of the ideas presented so far to urban planning, and more specifically to urban design, it is important to address the role of the professional field of urban planning in the reproduction of capitalism and why it is not a suitable medium through which to pursue a new society. In turn, I will define urban planning and design, then examine the role of the professional as a tool of the capitalist state and capitalist society in general. This examination will rely on the work of David Harvey as well as Lefebvre.

The content of this section does not adequately reflect the depth that this topic could be addressed, but it is meant, with brevity in mind, to establish the core of an argument against traditional urban design methods and in turn justify the examination of a radical alternative.

DEFINING URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

First let me specify the terms urban planning and urban design. Urban planning in its professional form is an interdisciplinary field that is involved in every aspect of shaping the contemporary city. Lefebvre expands the interpretation of what is meant by this, stating that urban planning is involved in the production of “everything” - including air, light, and land (he goes on to say that this production is the alienation of humans from nature and that nature is only reproduced in a few signs and symbols) (The Production of Space 329). Again reverting back to its professional designation, it can be established that urban planning encapsulates a range of specializations from transportation planning to environmental planning. Among these is urban design, which is concerned with the physical design of urban spaces as well as the policy that restricts how those spaces are constructed. Thus, “urban planning” should be understood to include urban design.

STATE SPONSORED URBAN DESIGN

Urban planning has been crucial to states’ ability to dictate the structure of modern cities. When acting entirely within the confines of regulations set forth by local and national government entities urban design is by default “State sponsored”. The issue here is that by acting within these confines the production of space has been manipulated by State interests, and in turn capitalist interests. As described in the

previous section, the State's basic functions are to manage systemic crises, create conditions necessary for balanced growth and accumulation, and contain civil strife (Harvey, On Planning). As an extension of the State these functions are also found in urban planning and can be boiled down further to protecting property rights and ensuring self-preservation via increasing the tax base.

THE FALLACY OF PARTICIPATION

As argued by David Harvey in his essay *On Planning the Ideology of Planning*, urban planning processes meet the functions of the State via the repression, co-optation and integration of actions/peoples that would otherwise threaten the reproduction of capitalism (229). Repression is conducted through police power, for the urban planner this takes the form of regulations on the shaping of the built environment. Co-optation is dealt with politically or financially as groups are enticed to back off their positions in favor of the government's plan. Finally, integration is an attempt to harmonize warring factions *within* society - bringing groups together by folding their conflicts into the capitalist structure in a way that avoids real resolution. These actions are typically conducted under the guise of participation which Harvey describes as the encouragement of "dissidents" to go through certain channels and adhere to certain procedures within which the planner lies in wait at some point along the way where they can manage whatever conflict is of concern using their "intricate understanding of the world" (229). Kirsteen Paton offers a more direct, although less poetic, damning perspective on "participation", which she describes in the local level democracy as simply a means to render state action more acceptable by meeting and managing any spontaneous expressions of mass conflict in their infancy (Paton, *Gentrification* 29). This is not in line with Lefebvre's concept of active participation in the production of urban space. Lefebvre calls for a pervasive activation and mobilization of inhabitants within which members of society experience an awakening and produce urban space without the interference of the State. They come into consciousness of themselves as users/inhabitants embedded in a web of social connections and as dependent on and stewards of "the urban". (Purcell, *Possible Worlds* 149) Lefebvre's call for such an activation is addressed more fully in the next chapter but it is already fair to ask: in such an awakening what role could there be for professional urban planning? As an extension of the State it will wither away along with the State. As such, an alternative approach to urban design is needed.



Fig. 8 Autogestion Producing The Urban. Digital collage by author. 2015

LEFEBVRE'S CALL FOR A NEW SOCIETY

OVERVIEW

In reaction to capitalism and the State Lefebvre calls for a new society where the users of space are no longer dominated by the bourgeoisie through abstract space. This proposal is not for a closed or complete system - Lefebvre is calling for an open ended project based on the active participation of users who continuously engage in the struggle to define their rights collectively. In line with Marx's early work, Lefebvre argues that this struggle necessarily involves the withering away of the State. In order to better understand what this means I will briefly examine Lefebvre's concept of rights, the right to autogestion and the right to the city. This section will primarily rely on Mark Purcell's *Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City*.

STRUGGLE, RIGHTS AND A NEW SOCIETY

Purcell explains that for Lefebvre rights are not natural or God-given, instead they are the outcome of political struggle - the struggle of collective claims made by active citizens. Due to this relationship with struggle, rights are not static - they are always subject to further struggle. By setting forth his concept of rights Lefebvre is not attempting to define a closed set of rights - he is attempting to initiate a struggle for rights that would transition society away from capitalism and the State. (Possible Worlds 146-7) This lends itself to Lefebvre's view of a new society as an open project rather than a complete/closed system. Of Lefebvre's rights I will focus on the rights of autogestion and the right to the city in order to shed light on how Lefebvre sees urban space being shaped in this new society.

AUTOGESTION AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Of Lefebvre's rights, that of autogestion is one of particular importance in understanding how the State's power will be dissolved. Autogestion can be roughly translated as self-management. It originally referred to the workers in a factory who take control of the means of production and manage production themselves - radically attacking bourgeoisie control. This management of production was carried out by workers councils that could either be made up of the entire workforce of the factory or through a representative structure with elected delegates facing fixed terms on a rotating basis, with possibility of being recalled at any time. Lefebvre (and others) generalized this concept to mean the self-management of all aspects of life. This process is meant to be strengthened over time, with people awakening to an understanding of their conditions of existence, realizing their power and self-managing their affairs. As more and more aspects of life are brought under self-management the State withers away. (Purcell, Possible Worlds 147-8)

While autogestion for Lefebvre involves general self-management, the focus for Lefebvre is on collective control over the production of urban space by its users. This collective action in shaping the urban is another right - the right to the city. Again turning to Purcell, we can see that while Lefebvre refers to the city in describing this right he is not referring to the city as we know it today.

The contemporary city is the capitalist city - a reduction of the urban world to its economic elements. As capitalist this city seeks to make everything a marketable commodity and as such property

rights dominate all other rights. Urban space is divided into individually owned spaces and an individual owner of a space, for instance a plot of land, can generally control it without considering the role that the space plays in the everyday life of surrounding inhabitants. (Purcell, Possible Worlds 148-9) While there may be limitations set forth by the State, these limitations are not reached through autogestion and, as was described in the previous chapter, the State interest is in preserving capitalism and in turn property rights.

As opposed to the capitalist city, Lefebvre sees the right to the city as a struggle in reintegrating space into the network of social connections. Instead of daily life being based in exchange value and accumulation, Lefebvre sees this struggle as producing a city (more accurately, what Lefebvre refers to as “the urban”) where use value and the needs of inhabitants are prominent. Inhabitants in this space come together and deliberate about the meaning and future of the city, awakening to their existence in and dependence on a web of social connections. These interactions are not only enjoyable, they are desired and struggled for by the inhabitants of the urban. In describing these aspects of Lefebvre’s call for a new society, Purcell highlights that autogestion and the right to the city are not two “adjacent” rights but that, while autogestion has a broader context, the two imply each other. (Purcell, Possible Worlds 149-150)

Using Lefebvre’s view of autogestion, the urban and the city, we can see that the capitalist city, while supporting the dominance of the bourgeoisie class, the application of exchange value, and private property, also contains the seeds for the destruction of capitalism - and is in fact already producing the beginnings of an alternative to capitalism (as we will see in the case studies chapter in Part II)

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PART II

**TRANSGRESSIVE
URBAN DESIGN**

**TRANSGRESSION
CASE STUDIES**

**CONCLUSION: ENACTING
TRANSGRESSION**



Fig. 9 Raised fist symbol over Seattle skyline. Digital collage by author. 2015

TRANSGRESSIVE URBAN DESIGN

TRANSGRESSION

According to the Merriam-Webster definition, transgression is to go beyond a boundary or limit, to sin, to violate a command or law (Merriam-Webster). This definition speaks to the dual meaning of transgression as a concept. It can be applied both to the literal (spatial), such as the act of climbing over a fence, or to the abstract (cultural) in the sense of sinning or breaking the law. In the context of this thesis both meanings are utilized and extrapolated to describe a specific type of anti-capitalist activity.

Championed by Bataille and later Foucault, the cultural concept transgression contends that behavior is not dictated by God or spiritual morality, but instead limited by personal responses to moral imperatives that stem from within the individual. This self-imposition of limits means that every rule carries with it the desire to transgress that rule. (Jenks, *Transgression* 21) Transgression then is not related to the limit as open is to closed, that is to say: they are not in pure opposition to each other. They depend on each other for existence. A limit could not exist if it absolutely could not be transgressed - it is given meaning by the desire to cross over it. Otherwise what need would there be for a limit? Reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if the limit it crossed was simply an illusion. Transgression requires an object (physically in the sense of crossing over something, or in the case of a social limit, formidable in its restriction of action or thought). Both concepts are given meaning only in the moment that they interact. This dependence leads to a spiraling relationship of violent interactions in which the limit is brought to the brink of disappearance and transgression is unleashed (Foucault, *A Preface to Transgression* 33-5). In Michel Foucault's words: "their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation.." (*A Preface to Transgression* 35).

As has been discussed during the early portions of this thesis, society tends to exclude and marginalize what it finds disagreeable in order to reproduce itself. While behavioral limits are self-imposed, these societal pressures shape the taboos that police our experiences - creating normative limits that render the individual social. The spiraling relationship of transgression and limits means that these limits carry an unintentional contradiction in that while aiming to unify, consolidate and homogenize people and their behavior, they also generate the desire to extend or go beyond the margins of acceptable action. In some ways this benefits society by preventing stagnation through the affirmation of new limits that are not

disruptive to its core. (Jenks, Transgression 21) In other words, transgression is not the same as disorder, it does not aim for the destruction of society in general via its limits - its reaffirmation of limits can ensure the stability of a particular society by allowing it to adapt to new needs. Alternatively this also means that a transgression that results in a new margin that resists a society's attempts to adapt to it could sow the seeds for a transition to a new society. This is where we find potential in undermining the reign of capitalism.

TRANSGRESSION + URBAN DESIGN

This thesis is specifically interested in the application of the ideas of Lefebvre and transgression to urban design. While urban design can be identified (as in the section critiquing urban planning) as a specialized field within professional urban planning, this is not how the term will be applied in a transgressive context. If we break it down into its two components ("urban" and "design") a better understanding can be gained. "Urban" is somewhat simple in that we are dealing with cities and their physical space(s). "Design" may be more complicated. It connotes a level of skill and a certain creative process. While both skill and creativity are certainly needed for design this does not limit design to a professional context. Design is a verb meaning to create, fashion, execute or construct according to plan. (Merriam-Webster) When we rejoin the two terms into "urban design" it is safe to say that we are talking about any action that deals with urban physical space and its design (or production).

TRANSGRESSION AND LEFEBVRE

In order to apply transgression towards Lefebvre's call for a society of mobilized users that produce and manage the urban, I will use transgressive urban design to only refer to those transgressive actions that cross the boundaries of capitalism laid out earlier (dominance of the bourgeoisie, exchange value and private property) and/or the limits of state power (laws). By necessity this lens will also narrow what is meant by urban design - this is urban design as carried out by grassroots movements that practice autogestion.

The question may rightfully be asked here what transgression adds to Lefebvre's discussion of space and the right to the city. Lefebvre's open project hinges on struggle: the struggle for rights - the struggle for autogestion and the struggle for the right to the city. As Purcell noted in his description of these rights, Lefebvre sees the interactions between users as being enjoyable and that these interactions will be sought out and desired (Possible Worlds 149-50). Transgression offers a way to help explain *why* these struggles are desired. I would suggest that the term "struggle" suggests that there are limits attempting to be breached - first the limits of state and capitalism are struggled against in attempting to claim the rights to

autogestion and the city, and then within the “urban” the struggle to overcome the limits of collective action. These limits may be the limits established by collective decision that later prove no longer suitable for that society, or possibly these are the limits of coming to a collective agreement in the first place. In all these cases the role of desire comes into play - since these limits are not created by a divine law but instead are self-imposed as described earlier in this chapter, we *inherently* desire to transgress them.

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre speaks of desire but suggests that it is only partly relevant to his theory on space. He describes desire as preceding needs and going beyond them, giving movement and life to what would otherwise be stagnant process of needs recurring and growing in number until they die of saturation (393-395). Transgression brings desire and its resulting movement to the forefront, not just preventing the stagnation of needs but extrapolating this thought to describe how society itself avoids stagnation. Thus we have a more defined reason for why the struggle of transitioning to a new society and maintaining that society would take place.

APPLYING TRANSGRESSIVE URBAN DESIGN

This narrowing of the definition of transgression, while making the application of the term practical in the context of this thesis, risks the adoption of a reductionist perspective. Transgressive urban design is being approached here as a specific strategy within a much larger context and should not be considered as an absolute answer for revolution from capitalism. It is an experiment, a lens through which to account more fully for the desire to struggle in the realm of urban design towards Lefebvre’s vision, but it is certainly not complete.

In the following section I will attempt to more clearly define what types of action I am describing here by discussing three social issues of society and how transgressive urban design actions are attempting to solve them.

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Fig. 10 Collage of Case Study Images. Digital collage by author. 2015

Top Image of collage: Taksim Square, original by Mstyslav Chernov

Middle Images: Outdoor Living Rooms, originals by Steve Rasmussen-Cancian

Bottom Image: Rote Flora, original from antifa-uelzen.org

TRANSGRESSION CASE STUDIES

HOUSING | SQUATTING + ROTE FLORA

ISSUE: Housing | TACTIC: Squatting | CASE: Rote Flora - Hamburg, Germany



Fig. 10 Rote Flora (original photo from antifa-uelzen.org, edited by author)

SUMMARY

The issue of housing has implications beyond the basic right to shelter. Urban housing allows the resident access to daily life in the city and in turn the opportunity to produce urban space. Further, housing within capitalism (and construction in general) has been instrumental in increasing profit accumulation and reinforces cycles of exchange value and speculation. The 2008 Financial Crisis made evident that the negative impacts of housing are disproportionately placed on the lower classes - perpetuating the domination by the bourgeoisie. Squatting, the occupation or take over of buildings and houses without the permission of the owner and with the purpose of making use of them, offers a potential transgressive urban design tactic that can hinder the capitalist control over housing and also provide spaces for actions reverberating beyond the housing issue.

In 1989 Rote Flora officially became a squatted building in the Sternschanze district of Hamburg, Germany. The building, built in 1888, went through various phases of operation and vacancy - starting as a theater and at one pointing hosting a hardware store. The threat of demolition to the building couple with gentrification in the neighborhood led to demonstrations and the eventual squatting of the building. Since then Rote Flora has been active not only in maintaining its role as non-capitalist housing but in supporting anti-capitalist and anti-government movements. Despite numerous threats of eviction Rote Flora remains in the hands of Squatters today.

HOUSING + SQUATTING

The Right to Housing

The right to housing is integral to the right to the city and the production of space as described by Henri Lefebvre. Housing is not just a form of shelter, it is a means of control over urban space at the micro-level that reflects and influences space at the medium and macro-levels (macro-level being the realm of large scale projects such as regional and global planning). Access to housing in the city means access to the daily practice of urban space and is essential to empowering members of society to shape that space. Lefebvre warns against a reductionist view at all levels of interpreting the city, and as such the home is not viewed as just a shelter - its water, gas, electric, internet, radio and television connections make it a complex nexus of conduits. The occupants of a house perceive, receive and manipulate the energies that the house consumes. But housing under capitalism has been disguised and abstracted along with social space - the user cannot recognize themselves in it. (The Production of Space 93) This raises not only a concern over the right to housing but to what form that housing should take.

Housing, Exchange Value, and Inequality

Housing is widely acknowledged as a right ⁴, but rather than being produced for use it has been brought under the universal application of exchange value. In this realm it has served to prop up profits, as construction in general involves higher than average profit returns. (Lefebvre, The Production of Space 336) Housing is particularly relevant as a contemporary social issue given the recent financial crisis which, with its origins in sub-prime mortgages and the housing bubble, revealed the inequalities inherent in such a system as the fallout and subsequent recovery saw disproportionate impacts between classes that furthered existing disparities. For instance, a study by the Pew Research Center showed that between 2009 and 2011 the wealthiest 7 percent of Americans saw a 28 percent increase in net worth per household while the lower 93 percent of American households saw a decrease of 4 percent in their net worth. Net worth in this study refers to the sum of all assets for a household, such as car, home, stocks, and other financial holdings, minus the sum of all debts. Further, the wealthiest 7 percent of households increased their share of aggregate household wealth from 56 percent in 2009 to 63 percent in 2011. In other words, the wealthiest 7 percent of households owned 63 percent of the American “wealth pie” in 2011 (that’s 9 times the percentage these households would own in a scenario of equal distribution of wealth). These disparities are in part due to less affluent populations typically having their wealth more concentrated in the

4 Housing is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

value of their home - giving housing not only importance as a right to shelter but also as a financial liability (within capitalism) for the lower classes. (Richard Fry and Taylor, *An Uneven Recovery* 1-3)

Even in more stable times, speculation in the housing market is an issue. It is a consequence of the dominance of exchange value over land and housing - with the commodification of land parcels and housing structures emphasizing profit as priority rather than use. Speculation entails the dis-investment and neglect of housing in order to reap larger profits later, leading to gentrification and displacement (Aka Jr., *Gentrification and Socioeconomic Impacts* 4). Inequality is again reproduced as low-income peoples are forced out of the city and/or into less desirable areas with inadequate and neglected housing - where the cycle continues.

The Need for Transgressive Action

While homes and other buildings are left vacant, awaiting the opportune moment for a profitable exchange, homeless peoples are left to find shelter in the streets. Those who are fortunate enough to have shelter generally live in spaces produced to reinforce the relations of capitalism and have limited influence over how housing space is produced. This calls for transgressive action that can pave the way for universal access to housing and the city - that can experiment in autogestion and use residential space as a means to progress towards a new society. Squatting has emerged as one such transgressive urban design tactic that can be effective towards such ends.

Squatting

Squatting, the occupation or take over of buildings and houses without the permission of the owner and with the purpose of making use of them, has a long lasting history - potentially most notable in Europe. As noted by Miguel Martínez López and Claudio Cattaneo in their article *Squatting as an Alternative to Capitalism*, the actions of squatters can appear to the casual observer as an immediate reaction to certain needs such as shelter, and in many cases this is at least true at the outset. Given the lack of affordable and decent housing, the stock of vacant buildings and the practices of real-estate speculation, squatting serves as a direct response to these failures of capitalism and the State. Need-based squatting, or squatting (almost) exclusively for the purpose of satisfying the need for housing, is an example of this response that while alternative to typical methods of obtaining housing is not transgressive in the context of this thesis. These squatters consider the squat as a temporary lodging situation where they can aim for more permanent and legal conditions. (*Squatting as an Alternative to Capitalism* 3-4) However, “political” squats address the need of housing and can also serve as an example of transgressive urban design.

Political Squats

Squatting can also be “political”, being undertaken with the intention to remain illegal and, in the cases we are interested in, in opposition to capitalism. These squats are not driven by profit, strive for the de-commodification of the space by removing it from the circulation of speculation and exchange, and promote use value by serving housing and social needs. These actions directly undermine at a local level the capitalist limits of private property, exchange value, and the domination of the bourgeoisie.

In serving social needs some of these squats are also used as “Social Centres”. These spaces not only serve housing needs but also provide space for meetings, alternative exchange of goods, and social interactions without the pressure of using money. (Martinez Lopez and Cattaneo, *Squatting as an Alternative to Capitalism* 4-5) In this way they produce space that is organized with horizontal relations between users rather than hierarchical ones. Further they promote this type of organization by involving the surrounding community. As such, they experiment in autogestion as described by Lefebvre, transgressing at a small scale the boundaries of capitalism and the State.

Given these attributes we can see how these actions are transgressive and how a movement towards squatting would create a serious challenge to capitalism. To clarify this further I will examine the specific case of Rote Flora.

ROTE FLORA - NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS

In 1888 the “Concerthaus Flora”, now known as Rote Flora, was built as a music theater in the Sternschanze district of Hamburg, Germany. One of the few theaters to not be damaged during World War II, Flora operated until 1943 when it was closed. (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 69) The building was renovated in 1949 and operated as a cinema during the 50’s, seating 800 people (Rote Flora, *Openbuildings*). The building was bought by Hamburg City in 1964, finding new life as a hardware shop. Eventually the local government stopped investments and tenants abandoned the building as it fell into decay (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 69).

In the late 1980’s the run-down Flora would become a point of contention as urban development initiatives began restructuring the neighborhood and the city as a whole. As part of the restructuring the local government and several private investors started planning a multi-million construction project to rejuvenate the theater in 1987. The project envisioned a transformation of the theater into a seven-floor

concert hall that could accommodate up to 2000 visitors. The hope was to ensure Hamburg's position as an internationally renowned center for high-culture events. The buildings history and convenient inner-city location with promising infrastructure was pivotal in the investors' decision, a decision with no meaningful involvement of the local residents. (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 69) The inhabitants of the area were thus kept from participating in the shaping of the city's space not only in the form that Lefebvre intends but even by contemporary democratic standards.

The plans for Rote Flora's conversion and the lack of public involvement in the city initiatives were met with massive protest (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 69-70). In April of 1988 the building was partially demolished but the protests went on and the involvement of militant groups led to the need for police protection. The investors were deterred from further development by violence and negative media attention. The remaining portion of Flora remained vacant until August of 1989, when the government unexpectedly offered groups involved in the protest a lease of the building. Rote Flora was officially opened on September 23, 1989. The government's grace wouldn't last long - On November 1st of that same year the lease was declared obsolete and Rote Flora was deemed a squatted building. (Rote Flora, *Openbuildings*) The squatters would take on autonomy as their cause, beginning a long trend of conflicts with the government as they refused to sign any contract or agreement that threatened their status as an autonomous center. (Jacobin) An experiment in autogestion had begun and Rote Flora was removed from the exchange cycle, establishing a space to be used for housing and as a center for organizing against the State.

Rote Flora in Action

The Rote Flora thus became a hindrance to the gentrification of Sternschanze and to local government activity in general - being active in demonstrations and serving as an important logistical and social support network for many left-wing groups. (Wilde, *We're All Staying*) By extending its purpose beyond providing a source of housing outside the capitalist systems of exchange and speculation, Rote Flora became influential in both the spatial and political character of the neighborhood. Both its presence and the potential eviction became risks for the local government as massive riots were proven as a legitimate possibility if the squatters were evicted (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 73). This strengthened its position in conflicts with the government, helping ensure that it would remain as a productive autonomous center where users made decisions on how its space is shaped instead of deferring to the State or the bourgeoisie.

Persistent Transgression in the Face of Persistent Threats

Back in 2001 the local government sold Rote Flora to the entrepreneur Klausmartin Kretschmer. This move was not economic. It was political in that the Hamburg authorities were attempting to hand off some of the risk associated with the squat. Kretschmer claimed that no changes would be made at Rote Flora, helping ease tensions for some time. As land value in the area increased this tension would arise again. Kretschmer hinted at a possible sale during an interview with local newspaper *Abendblatt* in 2009, well aware of the massive profit to be made and the possibility of ensuing violence. The private ownership that was once viewed as a means to “pacify” the area was now threatening to cause a violent outbreak. (Naegler, *Gentrification and Resistance* 72-3) Towards the end of 2013 the tension came to a head as precise development plans for Rote Flora led to somewhere between 7,000-10,000 protesters taking to the streets with a rallying cry of “the city belongs to everyone.” (RT, 2013)

The demonstration saving Rote Flora in 2013 was coupled with its continued activity in challenging government and capitalist power. Rote Flora helped organize a solidarity movement to prevent the exportation of roughly 300 West African refugees from Germany - A prime example of how Rote Flora has been successful in its persistent activist campaigns. The refugees had arrived in Hamburg in early 2013, following a perilous journey from Libya via a crossing of the Mediterranean to land on the Italian island of Lampedusa – the name the group would subsequently adopt for themselves. The Lampedusa refugees had hoped to receive refugee status from the German state but, in line with EU guidelines, the German authorities refused to provide them any accommodations. Instead the State adopted a policy of intimidation and in response Rote Flora hosted a general assembly (a non-hierarchical method of group discussion) of roughly 500 participants to discuss how to deal with the police checks, culminating in a demonstration of hundreds of people and an ultimatum of their own: end the police checks in the next few days or the movement would escalate its tactics. The group delivered on their promise, assembling over a thousand protesters in front of Rote Flora and marching through Hamburg’s Schanzenviertel without a permit. The move was provocative for a state that prefers orderly political assemblies and would ripple into demonstrations that continue (for instance, the cause was taken up as part of the May 1st, 2015 marches in Hamburg) to fend off the State’s tactics in expelling the Lampedusa refugees. (Wilde, *We’re All Staying*; David, *St. Pauli*) Through these actions Rote Flora has served as a catalyst for horizontal decision making and has challenged the State’s authority by preventing the expulsion of the refugees through the transgression of its laws pertaining to protests.

Review

Rote Flora, in its long stand as an autonomous squat, has obviously taken transgression beyond the simple illegal trespassing of the Flora building. The squatters have appropriated the space for a form of housing that escapes the cycle of exchange and speculation inherent to capitalism and serve as an example for how to maintain long-term effectiveness in squats. Further, the anti-capitalist influence extends beyond the housing issue due to the use of the squat as a logistical center and spatial focus for a broad activist social network and in turn giving users more control over the city. This activity has reinforced the ability of the squatters to maintain the space and fend off potential eviction actions by the government and private interests.

While the success of Rote Flora is inspiring, the location of the squat in Hamburg, a city with an established history of demonstrations as a meaningful method of political discourse can't be ignored. Many squats with similar ambitions have not (and will not) have a supportive activist community. This should be considered in attempts to have similar success in other cities.

In considering the broader application of the methods here it should also be noted that one successful squat, no matter how long it prevails, will not upend capitalist society. As such it is important that, while keeping in mind that every case is different, the internal and external factors be further investigated (a practice beyond the scope of this project) to provide precedents that can be adapted to other squatting opportunities. Still, cases such as Rote Flora show that there is a desire to actively participate, in the sense that Lefebvre calls for, in the shaping of urban space and more specifically in the addressing of the housing issue (of course other issues such as gentrification were also playing a part).

PRIVATIZATION OF SPACE | OCCUPATION + GEZI PARK

ISSUE: Privatization of Space | **TACTIC:** Occupation | **CASE:** Gezi Park - Istanbul, Turkey



Fig. 11 Taksim Square - June 7, 2013 (Original photo by Mstyslav Chernov, edited by author)

SUMMARY

On May 30th 2013, police violently cleared a small group of activists that had occupied Gezi Park, igniting a nation-wide protest movement in Turkey. The anti-hierarchical organization of the diverse group of protesters that converged in the urban space, and their appropriation and management of that space represented a potent form of transgressive urban design. The desires of the people involved varied greatly, and to claim that anti-capitalist motivations were fundamental than others would be reductionists, but the occupation proves to be a testing ground for autogestion and the production of urban space that counters the hegemony of capitalism.

These characteristics and their relation to transgression are evident in other occupation movements as well. This case was chosen specifically in that it pertains to the privatization of public space. Gezi Park was slated for demolition to make way for a commercial center as part of a larger redevelopment project and in turn would have marked a movement towards greater capitalist control over urban space. The privatization (in this sense we are referring to commercialization rather than the “private” space of solitude that Lefebvre speaks of in *Production of Space*) of public urban space reinforces primary facets of capitalism in the form of private property and exchange value, and sharpens the relations of capitalist production and the representations of those relations. As such, while the activists were eventually unable to hold the park,

they were able to disrupt this process by halting the redevelopment of the area.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACE + OCCUPATION

While “public” space is very much under the (police) control of the capitalist state rather than that of the inhabitant, and in turn already the territory of capitalism, the loss of public space to privatization is a reason for concern in that it marks a development of greater capitalist control over these spaces.

Private Property, State Control and Limits

Private property, as discussed previously, is an essential facet of capitalism, a basic necessity for domination by the bourgeoisie, and is in contradiction to the social character of the production forces. Privatization expands the realm of private property. It is complimented by state control (and receives the backing of the State police and legal power) and sharpens the limits of capitalism on the user. For instance, the landmark decision *Lloyd Corp v. Tanner* (1972) by the United States Supreme Court found that the right to free speech only extends to activity on public not private property (Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods* 2). Fully backed by the State, this allows for commercial entities to suppress public activity that may be in opposition to their interest. Naturally this forbidden activity could include any attempt to occupy a space, distribute literature, or otherwise organize. The State already maintained control of this space through its own superstructural limits on activity and now, through a partnership with private entities has doubly constrained the inhabitants of these spaces.

Privatization + Exchange Value

The privatization of space also indicates an expansion in the territory of exchange value. Public space through privatization further commodifies land, subjecting it to yet greater division and exchange. Privatized places that are commercialized are also claiming more space for everyday consumption - the consumption of commodities by members of society. Thus contributing to the dialectic of an abundance of industrial products accompanied by new “scarcities”. (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 329)

An Opportunity

The homogenization of space as privately owned, as space where speech and other activities are more directly limited to those approved by commercial interests, as space of exchange is a strengthening of the relations of capitalism as well as the representations of those relations. This is a movement towards

more direct capital control over the urban architecture (in the sense of a project embedded in spatial context as described by Lefebvre), rather than towards user production of space. Opportunities for struggle to produce a space in opposition to capitalism are thus more strictly limited by the representations of social relations produced in this context. Simply put, the privatization of space is a strengthening of capitalist limits of exchange value, private property and bourgeoisie dominance that were discussed previously. This offers a focal point for transgressive urban design actions to breach capitalist limits. One such transgressive method is that of occupation.

Occupation Protests

Occupation protests in public spaces, characterized by dense gatherings for extended periods of time, offer a viable method for members of society to organize, shape space, and influence politics. This is most notable in recent history by the Arab Spring (a wave of protests in the Arab region that proved revolutionary in many countries⁵) and the protest movements it helped inspire.

The 2011 uprising in Tahrir Square in Cairo and the movements in Tunisia that inspired it sparked a global protest movement with significant impacts on contemporary politics. The Arab Spring as it was coined, along with protests such as those in Puerta del Sol in Madrid and Syntagma Square in Athens set the stage for the Occupy Wall Street protests and the ensuing Occupy movement.

The Occupy movement in particular has emphasized a horizontal organization - aiming for a radically autonomous, anti-hierarchical, and highly participatory form of democracy that is reminiscent of autogestion. This is relevant to this thesis in that these movements, through this horizontality, appropriated urban space to their causes (although to what effect it is hard to say). Of course, movements such as these, while embodying some of the concepts presented here, are composed of peoples with a diverse set of interests and perspectives - ones that may not align, or may only align subconsciously, with this thesis.

The occupation of Gezi Park in Turkey is more relevant here than the other movements just mentioned in that it prevented the privatization and commercialization of a public space. Hence, the rest of this case study will focus on the occupation of Gezi and how it relates to transgressive urban design and the privatization of urban public space. Again, as in the first case study, there are a multitude of desires/ motivations behind the actions that took place and that continue to take place in Turkey - but in the time that Gezi was occupied it was a space that transgressed the boundaries of capitalism and the State, embodying the type of action that Lefebvre calls for.

5 For example: Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen saw governments overthrown.

GEZI PARK – NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS

The Occupation of Gezi Park

On May 27 of 2013 approximately seventy protesters, comprised of members of Taksim Solidarity and the Taksim Gezi Park Protection and Beautification Association as well as some unaffiliated individuals, successfully prevented the demolition of Gezi Park. (Cassano, The Right to the City) The park was slated to be replaced by a replica 19th Century Ottoman barracks that would include a shopping center and mosque. (Amnesty, Gezi Park Protests 5-6) Then the activists intervened - erecting two large tents in the park, playing instruments and informing passerby of their cause. (Cassano, The Right to the City) The protest was not simply to prevent the destruction of a public space, it was also to contest the opaque decision process that led to the plans for the project as part of a wider redevelopment project and more generally a state unwilling to consider opposing opinion. (Amnesty, Gezi Park Protests 6) This process was representative of the disconnect between users and the “public” space - a disconnect of state control and one that was potentially going to be exacerbated by privatization.

On May 28th a coalition of Right to the City associations presented a petition to Istanbul’s Council to Protect Culture Heritage in an effort to convince the council to protect the park, appealing to the institutions of the State to hear their desires. At 1:30 that day bulldozers returned to the park. Protesters again resisted and the police used tear gas to clear the park. One activist was able to climb a tree and further delay the demolition. Demolition was eventually begun before Sirri Süreyya Önder, the Istanbul deputy of the pro-Kurdish rights Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), and Gülseren Onanç, a member of the secularist opposition Republican People’s Party, blockaded bulldozers, stopping demolition. Protesters returned, calling for a protest at 7pm that night and then sleeping in the park again. (Cassano, The Right to the City)

The third day saw a few hundred people come out for protests in the park, creating a festival-like atmosphere with films and concerts. Seedlings were planted in the park throughout the day as a token of resistance and 150 people spent the night in the park.

At five in the morning of May 30th protesters awoke to burning tents and a barrage of tear gas as Turkish police attempted to clear the park. The harsh tactics were successful and demolition again resumed until 7:50am, when Önder again blockaded bulldozers with his own body. News of the early-morning raid spread on social media and several hundred people accumulated in the park to stay the night. (Cassano,

The Right to the City)

The following day saw another raid. Armed with a ban on media, the police pursued similar tactics as the day before but in a more brutal fashion. Violence escalated as protesters clashed with the police, resulting in what onlookers described as an intentional attack by the police on a freelance journalist. The police fired on Ahmet Şık with a tear gas canister from a distance about ten yards, striking Şık in the head and hospitalizing him. Others, including Onanç, were also injured by tear gas canisters. (Cassano, The Right to the City) Water cannons, plastic bullets, and just plain beatings of protesters were reported. (Amnesty, Gezi Park Protests 6) The protest suddenly erupted into one of the biggest mobilizations in recent Turkish history as the cause was expanded to include not only the privatization of Gezi Park but also state oppression and violence more generally.

This pattern spiraled across Turkey as even solitary protesters standing silently were met with violence. The government maintained a hardline rhetoric throughout. (Amnesty, Gezi Park Protests 6)

Ultimately, the protesters would be cleared out of Gezi Park. On June 15th police were finally successful in their duties to the State. Subsequent smaller scale protests have occurred in Taksim Square but none have gained the momentum of those leading up to the mid-June ousting. (“Timeline of Gezi Protests”) The country-wide protests would eventually lose steam later in the year.

Horizontal Organization of the Protests

While development of the Gezi Park did not occur, the space is still in the grips of the State - on the one year anniversary of the deadly protests 25,000 police surrounded and blockaded Taksim Square, continuing the State’s policy of preventing any further protests in the area. (“Turkish Police”) The clearance of Gezi Park and this more recent showing of state strength points to just how difficult the effort to appropriate and produce space can be in the face of very real opposition from those in power. It also shows that the State recognizes just how potent occupation movements can be in challenging its power (a power in service of capitalism).

The effectiveness of the protesters in organizing themselves in a mostly anti-hierarchically manner was a direct indicator of this potency. The protests in Gezi Park were not the work of a single political party or group - despite government claims that the opposition Republican’s Party (CHP) was entirely behind the protests (Purcell, “Seeking Democracy”). The occupation included large groups with a diversity of interests

including leftist, nationalists, feminists, anarchists, religious and secular groups, students, bankers and others (Letsch, "Gezi Park"). And yet, the protests took place mostly without union or party leadership (although the presence of representatives such as Onanç and Önder was noted). In fact the actions of the activists, such as singing to drown out a speech made by the leader of the CHP, point to a resistance to leadership in favor of a more horizontal, non-hierarchical organization. (Purcell, "Seeking Democracy")

The protesters were not just successful in organizing themselves in the sense of mostly fending off government raids, they were able to organize spatially to function as a community - maintaining clean and ordered places once they were able to successfully seize and hold a space. For instance, there were wide reports of protesters cleaning the streets once they gained control of them (Purcell, "Seeking Democracy"). In Gezi Park the organization of space was complex with different interest groups self organizing and working together to create shelters, a library, an infirmary, a community garden and even a veterinary clinic (Kimmelman, "Istanbul's Heart").

Review

The actions of the occupiers of Gezi Park, while motivated by a noted diversity in interests, embody the concept of transgressive urban design. The protesters repeatedly broke down the physical barriers erected by the State to restrict their access to space, and organized themselves in a struggle for autogestion and the ability to produce and manage urban space. While the desire towards a non-capitalist society may not have been shared by all involved (and may not have been more fundamental than any other motivations involved), the actions taken prove to be a testing ground for such a society. (Purcell, "Seeking Democracy")

More specifically this case relates to the resistance against the privatization of public space. In reviewing the case it became clear that the struggle had evolved to be primarily an anti-state motivated movement. While diminishing its relevance to privatization in some sense, it showed that occupation can prevent the privatization of space even when it is not successfully continued. The demolition of Gezi Park for commercial use, and in turn the propagation of space for exchange, was averted; and while capitalist (via the State) control is still in effect, it can be argued that this control has not been strengthened. Further, the exploration of autogestion that took place during the occupation showed that Gezi Park could be truly public - that privatization in the sense of commercialization is not the only alternative to state-owned public space. This expansion of the cause can also be shown to indicate that a transgressive action with a seemingly simple desire can cause an awareness of the broader issues of capitalism and the State and in turn a movement closer to Lefebvre's call for a mass awakening can occur.

GENTRIFICATION | GRASSROOTS ACTION + OUTDOOR LIVING ROOMS

ISSUE: Gentrification | **TACTIC:** Grassroots Action | **CASE:** Outdoor Living Rooms - West Oakland



Fig. 12 Photos by Steve Rasmussen-Cancian (ReStreets.org, edited by author)

SUMMARY

Outdoor Living Rooms is a West Oakland project started by Steve Rasmussen-Cancian in 2002 as an effort to improve living conditions in the neighborhood without setting the stage for gentrification. Rasmussen-Cancian helped organize residents in building and illegally installing permanent furniture along sidewalks, formalizing the community's established culture of gathering outside. The project successfully and cheaply resulted in residents congregating in the living room spaces, voluntarily keeping areas clean, adopting benches, and pushing out drug related activities - all the while utilizing the gentrifiers' fear of urban culture and minorities to discourage developers from white-washing the area.

This project was chosen as an illustration of transgression in urban design due to its transgression of the limits of city code, effective translation to other neighborhood spaces and empowerment of minority groups to challenge the socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. This intervention takes a more reserved approach than the other case studies and has more subtle anti-capitalist impacts that are low in risk. By organizing residents the project established a precedent for future organizing to get things

done without, and perhaps in spite of, institutional (capitalism supporting) influences. In exposing the racial and social biases of gentrifying populations, Outdoor Living Rooms also set the stage for dialogue about the socio-economic tensions of society. A frank and productive conversation in this vein is naturally anti-capitalist in that a conclusion in favor of equity can only be translated to actual equity through the transition to a non-capitalist mode of production. The effectiveness of this exposure is shown in the methods of Outdoor Living Rooms being replicated elsewhere. More directly, the project undermines capitalist reproduction by combating gentrification - a process that encourages the exchange-valuation of land and further strengthens the dominant classes.

The examination of this case study will begin with a background on gentrification, its role in supporting the reproduction of capitalism, as well as an examination of the relationship between urban design professionals and gentrification. This will be followed by a more detailed look at how the project unfolded and its strengths and weaknesses as a transgressive urban design project.

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification – Working Definition

Gentrification, coined by the Marxist sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964, was deliberately used by Glass as a tongue in cheek term to describe the displacement of working-class residents in inner London by the “urban gentry”, an intentionally ironic reference to traditional English rural class structure. The term, with its obvious class connotations, was met with some unease - leading to alternative labels such as the “back-to-the-city movement” and “neighborhood revitalization” (Lees, Gentrification 4).

While gentrification still carries a taste of the critical connotations of its origins, the hesitation to recognize class struggle as part of the process (along with dense academic debate on how to define gentrification and imagery of hip, “creative” gentrified neighborhoods) has diluted the effect of the term. The conversation on gentrification has devolved to the point that asking “is gentrification a bad thing?” is taken seriously. (Slater, “Critical Perspectives”)

I will attempt to avoid the trap of delving too deep into the quagmire that the debate on gentrification can be, but it is important to reclaim the term as a critical one in order to more concretely portray the relationship between the gentrification of neighborhoods and the perpetuation of socio-economic inequality, racial inequality and capitalism. Towards that end I will take a look at the process of gentrification so as to establish a working definition for this project.

Gentrification is a social as well as an economic process. In one form or another, gentrification has been taking place well before Glass coined the term. There have been multiple stages of gentrification that can be characterized by the respective role of the State and distinguished from each other by interim global recessions (Lees, Gentrification 174-179). For brevity, our definition of gentrification will be limited to its most fundamental definition and how it relates to the State and capitalism.

With this in mind, gentrification can be defined as an influx of affluent (typically white) populations into a working-class (typically minority) community. This transition results in the displacement of current residents and/or the social restructuring of the neighborhood in a way that erases its culture. It is important to note the term “process” in the first sentence of this paragraph - gentrification typically takes place in stages, with the beginning stages being a subtle influx of “pioneer” gentrifiers (with little displacement taking place) that appropriate the space for a later more overt gentrification that displaces the current population on a large scale.

Gentrification may seem to be mostly driven by private parties, but the role of the State in gentrification should not be neglected. Government entities often spur and aid the gentrification process through investment (whether capital or in the form of amenities catering to affluent interest groups), by “cleaning up” the area through abuse of police powers, or through direct partnership with corporate powers as in cases of “redevelopment”. The State can also be effective in preventing gentrification, though not transgressively due to its role in perpetuating capitalism as described earlier in this paper and the specification that by transgressive urban design I am implying the transgression of the State itself. This potential of the State to prevent gentrification will be addressed in an urban design context in the Professional Urban Designers and Gentrification section of this chapter.

Gentrification and Capitalism

Gentrification’s relationship with capitalism is not a negligible one. The “yuppie” is often villanized as the cause of gentrification rather than a symptom of it. While individual choice can’t be ignored, the economic forces of capitalism are the true culprit.

Capitalism’s dependence on the universality of exchange value is one such force. In the case of gentrification the pursuit of profit from the exchange of homes and land leads to the intentional neglect of inner-city neighborhoods by powerful interest groups who continue this neglect until they are able to reap significant profits from investment (Aka Jr., Gentrification and Socioeconomic Impacts 4). Neil Smith’s

rent gap theory helps explain this cycle of neglect and investment in neighborhoods. The rent gap is the difference in property values in depressed areas before renovations and after renovations. When this gap is small it benefits the owner to let the property to fall into disrepair (“Building Blocks”). When this gap is large enough, such as the case when a low-income area begins to see high demand for housing from gentrifying groups, investors will pump capital into the area until it is no longer profitable, effectively pricing lower income households out of the area (Aka Jr., Gentrification and Socioeconomic Impacts 4). That rising demand is due to a combination of factors including the urban planning policy, technological and architectural innovations, and the perceived cultural value of the community (“Building Blocks”). Once an owner capitalizes on the rent gap, further renovation or construction is hindered by reduced returns (Aka Jr., Gentrification and Socioeconomic Impacts 4). Again the area is neglected and profit is invested in new opportunities elsewhere, and so the cycle begins anew.

The domination of the capitalist elite over the lower classes is also reflected in the gentrification process. The very fact that low-income neighborhoods are unable to resist this process is indicative of the economic and political inequality between the residents, the gentrifiers, and the elite. More concisely, in the words of Tom Slater, an English geographer, gentrification is “the neighborhood expression of class inequality” (“Building Blocks”). Displacement via gentrification is not only a result of inequality, it compounds these issues. The neighborhood improvements such as better schooling, less crime, and more public amenities, that are so often touted as indicators of gentrification’s social benefit only benefit those who are able to continue living in the area. Those who are displaced are pushed to less desirable and more affordable spaces which lack the benefits just mentioned and are likely further from the city’s economic center - making economic mobility more difficult.

Due to the relationship described here, combating gentrification offers an opportunity to oppose the perpetuation of capitalist society by reducing (or at least preventing the exacerbation of) class inequality and disrupting the flow of profit from the speculation of land exchange value. The connections between gentrification and capitalism often appear indirect, in part due to the conversation surrounding the issue lacking a more critical tone. On the other hand, opposition to gentrification visibly benefits local working-class neighborhood residents by protecting them from the disruptive effects displacement, making it a more palatable front for moderates and reformists to work on. This translates to more opportunities for professionals to be involved in anti-capitalist activities that are more subtle and low-risk but have the potential to develop into more radical movements, as will be discussed in the following section.

Professional Urban Designers and Gentrification

While the role of urban designers has been more generally discussed, for our purposes it is necessary to specifically examine the part of urban design and planning professionals in gentrification. Broadly, these professionals are particularly influential in how urban structure takes form - where and how transportation improvements, open space preservation, up-zoning and other influences on land value are implemented is the domain of the urban planner. This domain is primarily maintained by the State-employed planners with varying levels of partnership with powerful private entities and the urban design and planning professionals they employ. Residents of low-income communities generally have little sway in the development of policy or in how specific public projects are carried out, even if the process champions community involvement. The susceptibility of traditional urban design methods to powerful capitalist groups and the drive for cities to accumulate capital in the form of larger tax bases lead to inaction or straightforward support of gentrification on the part of professionals. This can be seen in the inability of professionals to solve the gentrification issue in any meaningful manner. More specifically, it can be seen in cases such as the gentrification of Mission District, San Francisco's oldest neighborhood (originally home to the Ohlone indigenous peoples before subjugation by the Spanish). Historically, the Mission has been a neighborhood for immigrants to get a foothold in the Bay Area. More recently, Mission District has been home to a strong Latino community (the 2000 Census showed approximately 65 percent of the neighborhood as Hispanic) but the tech boom in the Bay Area has drastically changed the neighborhood. The majority of the population is now white, the median rent has risen 60 percent in just under four years (December 2010 - September 2014), and no-fault evictions doubled between 2009 and 2013. The State is not idle in these cases. For example, California's passing of the Ellis Act has aided landlords seeking to evict tenants in neighborhoods such as Mission District, opening the door for new, wealthier tenants that can afford raised rents. (Garofoli and Said, "The Mission") Further, government employed planners, as mentioned, are actively involved in determining local regulations (or lack thereof) that allow or encourage gentrification to take place in the neighborhood. Still, the private professional is not without blame - the physical production of gentrifying spaces is generally carried out by private architecture, urban design and other built environment professionals.

With its record of service to capitalist interests it is hard to imagine how the professional field can be a positive influence in the challenge of gentrification. However, there is some room for professionals in combating gentrification. For instance, State planning can provide policy-based protections against displacement in the form of prohibitive rules on gentrifying development in at-risk neighborhoods, reformed fair housing rules, etc. Government support of grassroots/non-profit community organizations that empower low-income and minority residents is a more indirect method of involvement. However, as noted in earlier in

this thesis, a revolution from capitalism precludes the dissolution of the State, and transgressive actions aim toward that end. As such the State may be able to combat gentrification, but it cannot carry out transgressive urban design. Private professionals on other hand can act individually or through grassroots groups to work with community members and organize opposition to gentrifying forces outside of the State's influence. This can result in transgressive urban design, as in the case study of Outdoor Living Rooms that follows.

OUTDOOR LIVING ROOMS – NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS

Outdoor Living Rooms:

Steve Rasmussen-Cancian, a California based landscape architect came up with a cheap and effective method of preserving the integrity of low-income neighborhoods while discouraging developers from pouncing on the communities and pushing gentrification and displacement: furnish sidewalks with permanent benches, sitting boxes and planters so that residents can claim their right to public space and its production while repelling those who would displace them. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

While studying landscape architecture at University of California, Berkeley, Rasmussen-Cancian sought opportunities to get involved in participatory community projects. On a school break in his hometown of Los Angeles Rasmussen-Cancian approached friends from his days working with community organizers about launching a tree-planting and sidewalk improvement project in the neighborhoods he had worked in earlier. They're response was to question whether such a project would really benefit the residents of these neighborhoods since it would improve the curb appeal of the adjacent properties and essentially equate to "rolling out the carpet for gentrification". He took this question back to Berkeley but found less support than expected in the design community. Many felt that the problem of gentrification was unsolvable, or at least beyond the scope of their field. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

Rasmussen-Cancian rejected the conventional perspective of some of his peers, arguing for socially conscience designers that accept responsibility and some sense of control over their designs. He was intrigued by the nearby community of West Oakland, a community of old Victorian style homes that had yet to be gentrified despite its architectural appeal, views of downtown Oakland, ocean breezes and all around attractive weather, as well as access to the last BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit - a heavy-rail and subway public transportation system that connects San Francisco with East Bay and the suburbs of northern San Mateo County) station before a twelve-minute subway ride to San Francisco's financial center. Rasmussen-Cancian argues that as predominantly African-American neighborhood the area was spared from gentrification due to the racism of potential gentrifiers. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

The community is predominantly African-American (accounting for 66 percent of West Oakland residents in 2000) and has a notable history - being the birth place of the Black Panthers and home to one of the headquarters for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first labor organization led by African-Americans to receive recognition by the American Federation of Labor (United States, "West Oakland" 1; Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms"). A study of gentrification in Chicago conducted by Jackelyn Hwang and Robert J Sampson support Rasmussen-Cancian's racial argument. Hwang and Sampson found that gentrification did not take place in neighborhoods where African-American residents made up more than 40 percent of the population. Further, the study found that gentrifiers' perceptions of disorder (defined as social and physical incivilities such as drinking in public, selling/using drugs, unruly teenagers, litter, graffiti and vacant housing) are racially skewed, with African-American neighborhoods being perceived as the most disorderly. Gentrifying populations are generally unwilling to move into an area that they perceive as disorderly, in part explaining the resistance of some minority communities to displacement. On the other hand, actual observed disorder was found to be insignificant in predicting gentrification, further lending weight to the argument that gentrification is racially influenced and that West Oakland was spared accordingly.⁶ (Divergent Pathways)

Rasmussen-Cancian saw this relationship between racism and gentrification as a weak point that could be exploited to improve neighborhoods while avoiding displacement of current residents. He also saw that people were creating informal sidewalk living rooms in West Oakland by pulling chairs out onto the sidewalk, flipping over milk cartons, setting up a card table and using the street as a social center. Rasmussen-Cancian teamed up with William "Big Will" Horace and George Paul Wolf, who had spent three years running a street-based community garden group called the West Oakland Greening Project. His idea was to formalize local ownership of the street (and the neighborhood as a whole) to make it evident that this was not just an attractive set of buildings ripe for a profitable turnover, but an actual community of people. Horace as a found objects artist and an effective volunteer organizer was the perfect match for getting the project up an running. The group welcomed anyone, even recently arrived residents, who wanted to stay and preserve the neighborhood's character. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

The design idea was simple: replicate the feeling of the living room on the sidewalk. A bench flanked on either side by planter boxes served as a couch and end tables. Ottomans were represented by mobile sitting boxes. Three or four step stoops that sat up against walls or fences offered further seating. The project while popular in the community did not go without resistance. West Oakland city code prohibits the locating of anything "functional" on a sidewalk or in the space between the sidewalk and the curb. This

⁶ While racism provides the motivation for gentrification and obviously poses problems for producing a society of individuals acting collectively as equals, its solution was beyond Rasmussen-Cancian and is beyond this thesis. Of course, the hope is for an end to racism but I will only deal here with the implications that it has (via gentrification) in terms of the State and capitalism.

included food gardens, trees or any sitting arrangements. Rasmussen-Cancian and the rest of the group made the decision to move forward without submitting a permit request that they knew would be denied, accepting the risk that furniture would be lost to confiscation in the process.



Fig. 13 Outdoor Living Rooms: Before (left) and after (right)
Photos by Steve Rasmussen-Cancian (ReStreets.org, edited by author)

By going out on Fridays and building benches the group quickly gained momentum recruiting people who saw what they were up to. Often these day-projects would end in an impromptu party in a new community living room. Soon the effects of the project were evident: people adopted benches, kept the areas clean, watered vegetation, drove away drug related activity and simply took ownership of the spaces. Other residents soon began asking the Greening Project to build Outdoor Living Rooms on their corners. However, not everyone was entirely welcoming to the project. One corner landlord complained that he wasn't able to rent his apartments located across the street from a popular sidewalk living room. The city supported the landlord, confiscating the furniture. Still, this was evidence that the project was working - that it had transgressively (through the defiance of the State legal limits and through active participation) halted

the exchange value cycle in at least one instance and that gentrification was being opposed. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

The effects of the living rooms were not limited to West Oakland. ARTScorpsLA, a local community, arts and environmental organization wanted to expand the idea to the entire Latino Temple-Beaudry neighborhood. Much of the area had been torn down for a high school that was never realized and the community was under intense gentrification pressure. Using the same guerrilla approach seen in West Oakland, ARTScorpsLA built sidewalk living rooms and gave the areas a pronounced Latino aesthetic by painting murals of cacti and religious icons that ran across walls and benches down to the sidewalk. The Fifth Street Living Room, a project that Rasmussen-Cancian partnered on with Stephanie Taylor, the Central City Neighborhood Partners (CCNP), and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, was the first case of a nonprofit using the land directly in front of its building to temper the influences of gentrification and produce functional community space. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

This rippled into two other initiatives: CCNP's Positive Places Project and the Teen LEAD Project. The Positive Places project, inspired by 1,000 surveys from bus riders complaining that bus stops were inadequate and often marked only with a sign, worked with four other community organizations to build sidewalk living rooms at bus stops. The first site was the sidewalk in front of the Justice for Janitors office where there is a major bus stop serving a transit dependent population at the center of the Pico-Union neighborhood, a predominately Latino community. Justice for Janitors unfortunately sold their building to a condo developer but the community has responded with plans to build a living room that expands the entire block - effectively claiming the space and the neighborhood. For the Teen LEAD Project, CCNP worked with teenagers from the downtown Los Angeles YMCA. The group toured neighborhoods in the area and used demographic data to identify where gentrification was beginning to gain a foothold. The teens then made group decisions on where to build sidewalk living rooms in order to fight back. While many of the teens were no strangers to the effects of gentrification, some being displaced themselves, the project served as a way to organize the group and show that action could be taken. Transgression may not have been part of that conversation but again we can see glimpses of autogestion in response to a social issue. (Hammett, "Sidewalk Living Rooms")

Implications

These outdoor living room interventions, while in no need of a professional urban designer are very much within the realm of urban design. The spaces they create are public (used and generated by

the inhabitants of the neighborhood), can integrate with broader transportation networks and alter the streetscape. Of course Rasmussen-Cancian was professionally trained but his role here was as a catalyst - an initial organizer who aided in establishing projects with active participation by users in the production of spaces. This points to the role of the “professional” as a skilled and informed user rather than as a dominant figure who guides users to co-operate with state and capitalist interests. In turn, Rasmussen-Cancian showed through his actions in West Oakland that the expected role of the professional itself can be transgressed.

While the participants in these projects may not have taken on a radical political stance or consciously be acting towards a new mode of production, Outdoor Living Rooms fulfills the objective of transgressive urban design to cross the limits of capitalism. As shown in the section on gentrification, the links between the gentrifying forces and the operation of capitalism are concrete, and while racism was not prevented, it was turned on its head to oppose gentrification. More specifically, the efforts here to halt gentrification translate to transgression in their preventing the further exchange of living space in some instances. Also, the inequalities between classes were not furthered in the sense of this particular community being displaced and as such the inhabitants maintained some control over the neighborhood and are able to enjoy the positive impacts of this project on that space (cleaner sidewalks, less crime, etc.) The State was transgressed as the groups involved broke the law by installing these living rooms without permits. Additionally, autogestion was explored as users organized horizontally and took the matter of gentrification into their own hands.

In sum, the educational component of these projects, their grassroots organizational methods and the illegal activity involved are successful in exposing the character of gentrification and how it and other flaws of capitalism can be resisted without, and at times in spite of, professional or institutional intervention.

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Fig. 14 People walking in an Alley. Downtown, Seattle. Personal photograph by author. 2015.

**CONCLUSION:
ENACTING
TRANSGRESSION**

COMMON THEMES

Based on the transgressive case studies and the theoretical basis established earlier in this project, a few themes can be identified in the application of transgressive urban design:

RISK

All transgressive activities entail some risk on the part of the activist. This can take the form of legal risk (probably the most likely given the illegal nature of these actions), physical, monetary, social, etc. Activities such as those in West Oakland are low risk in that there is some risk of having installments confiscated and some low legal risk. On the other end of the spectrum the actions in Gezi Park and Rote Flora posed grave risks to those involved. Squatters risk legal action and, in the case of violent evictions or in the process of taking other squatter related actions, physical harm. Gezi Park saw many of the activists arrested, injured and in some cases killed. The risks inherent to transgression should not be overlooked.

EXPOSURE

All of these case studies benefited from exposure. This took place through traditional media, social media and word of mouth. Exposing the ideas and practices of transgression reinforce their impacts, in the case of squatting in Rote Flora this led to the squat gaining popularity in the community and in turn leverage to use against the State. For Outdoor Living Rooms exposure meant that the community could get involved and claim the project as their own. Not only does this exposure have interior value it is crucial in experimenting further. No single intervention will be successful in revolutionizing society by itself – it requires a restructuring of the totality. As such it is important that successful methods gain exposure so that the positive aspects of the project can be applied elsewhere and pushed further.

SCALE

Related to exposure is the theme of scale. The interventions examined here all began as relatively small scale projects but had larger scale implications: Outdoor Living Rooms began at the scale of a single living room before scaling up to the neighborhood level where it eventually spurred similar projects, Rote Flora began at the scale of a single building but was able to act an organizational space for protests and other activities that took place at the neighborhood and city scales, and the occupation of Gezi Park started within the confines of the park before eventually erupting into a nation-wide movement. This indicates that

transgressive urban design actions have the potential to develop greater influence over time and possibly successfully challenge state power and the hegemony of capitalism.

It should be noted that both the Rote Flora and the Gezi Park occupation involved not only a scaling up but also a scaling out in the sense of a multitude of motivations being pursued other than the ones initially addressed. At first glance it appears that this is related to the social context of the interventions. For instance, the occupation of Gezi Park took place in Turkey, where anti-state sentiment for a variety of reasons other than privatization was already present - making it a much more potent catalyst for further diversified action as opposed to Outdoor Living Rooms where conflict with the State was more of an undercurrent and action was more focused, and relatively tame in comparison. This scaling out can also be linked to the make-up of the groups involved. Outdoor Living Rooms involved relatively cohesive groups of neighbors that were consistent in their motivations from the beginning, while the other two interventions involved more diverse groups of people.

DESIRE

Desire was explained as having a prominent role in transgressive urban design in that it is what drives the transgression of limits. The diversity of desires, or motivations, involved in these cases is noteworthy as discussed in the last theme. What is also interesting is that for the most part these interventions took place without an anti-capitalist desire being prominently expressed (Rote Flora being the exception). While embodying the ideas of transgressive urban design by transgressing the limits of capitalism, the inhabitants involved were not always aware of the implications of their actions in the sense of creating a new space. As such we may conclude that these interventions are still in their infancy when compared to a society of awakened users that are actively and *intentionally* interacting to claim their rights to autogestion and the city as described by Lefebvre.

COMMON THEMES CONSIDERED

There is plenty of overlap between these themes, and considering them together offers a few thoughts. The case studies examined are relatively small in scale and generally lack an intentional pursuit of a society based on autogestion. Perhaps this is necessary - with transgressive urban design potentially being most effective when it initially involves the engagement of citizens at small scales and bringing diverse desires together in actions that challenge the status quo of a particular issue while not requiring a consensus on a broader production of space. Not to say that there is not a need for higher risk, more intentional activities such as those at Rote Flora - it suggests to me that an awakening towards Lefebvre's proposed

society is a process that requires both, but that smaller and lower risk actions are more accessible to the general public. Transgressive actions such as Rote Flora spearhead a movement towards autogestion with a more direct production of an alternative space, while those such as Outdoor Living Rooms inject elements of a potential new society into the daily lives of more moderate communities - slowly and more safely challenging the status quo, bringing more and more users closer to an awakening of autogestion. In other words, there is not an either/or approach to transgressive urban design with larger, more risk prone actions being the only method. Rather, the differences between actions indicate various stages in a broader trend of Lefebvre's ideas being realized, with autogestion being attempted and honed according to the abilities and circumstances of each community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In developing this thesis I realized the depth of the theory involved in gaining an understanding of capitalism as a mode of production as well as the role of the State and urban design as its extension. The writers that inspired me to take on this thesis spent their careers focusing on these subjects, while I have just begun an exploration of them. This process of research and writing essentially provided a crash course in radical theory and at times verged on spiraling into a black hole of frantic academic exercise. Putting this in perspective, I don't see this work as a closed case. My focus from the beginning has been to write something that could inspire action, and at the very least it will inspire action on my own behalf - to gain a better understanding of the ideas presented here and to develop them further. Of course, I hope action is inspired in others as well.

I believe that successfully reaching social equality is rooted in a deep understanding of how space and social relationships are shaped in general as well as how capitalism and the State shape our current space. So I do not regret the academic nature of this project. That being said, the actions presented here as transgressive urban design are likely not being done with a copy of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* in hand. They are being implemented in the daily lives of people with diverse backgrounds and motivations - all struggling to gain some semblance of control over their urban space and overcome the forces that restrict their ability to meet their needs and desires. To me this suggests that experimentation is crucial to transition to a more just society, that while Lefebvre attempts to point us in the right direction with his written work, action in daily life may prove the best learning tool for most people. In sum, a willingness to take risks and transgress - to break the social and physical limits that hinder our pursuit of equality - is needed. Even if the action is as temporary as a flash of lightning in the night, we will have for a moment revealed an alternative reality and provided a basis of hope to move forward with.

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