

Acupuncture Urbanism

STEFAN GRUBER

Carnegie Mellon University

In times of accelerated urban transformations and limited predictability, top-down design instruments like the master-plan have become ineffective in tackling contemporary urban conditions. By contrast, this studio engages urban milieus inductively: analyzing prevailing ecologies, inscribed cultural codes and the socio-political forces at play in order to seek neuralgic points of design intervention that act as catalysts in the transformation of neighborhoods. Beyond designing buildings, the studio expands architecture students' repertoire to designing situations and events that promise to bring people together. Rather than obsessing over a final product, here design is explored as a tactical and performative tool for encouraging community engagement and supporting residents' collective right to the city.

In Spring 2018, the Collaboratory Studio at Carnegie Mellon's School of Architecture explored temporary interventions for addressing the vacant land of the Manchester neighborhood on Pittsburgh's Northside. Collaborating with the Manchester Academic Charter School, the studio studied how to open up the school to the neighborhood, and begin transforming surrounding vacant lots into a playscape and community meeting place. Weekly participatory design workshops with students from the middle school led to an overall strategy for reorganizing the parking, drop-off and pick-up situations, as well as a long-term vision for transforming vacant lots and buildings. Thus the studio was as much about designing a community engagement process as it was about realizing a full-scale micro-public space.

Meanwhile, our engagement sessions brought about an urge to render the planning and projection process tangible through immediate action. Together we built three "Roaming Porches" that serve as outdoor classrooms in the school's vicinity. During the youth workshops, the porches of existing houses in the neighborhood emerged as key elements: On the one hand, we learned that the distinct architectural features played a vital role in the rediscovery and subsequent revitalization of the neighborhood. On the other hand, we heard that they are important social spaces. By playing with familiar elements, while configuring them into something entirely new, the Roaming Porches feel contextual and yet trigger curiosity.

Rather than conceiving of the design-build projects as final products, the studio framed the porches as stepping stones for community engagement and possible alternative futures

in an ongoing transformation process. Our work with MACS was accompanied by the non-profit organization Grounded, which then took over our urban design framework and used the porches throughout the summer for further community engagement sessions and events. A partial implementation of the playscape with volunteers from the neighborhood and school is currently planned in the summer of 2019.

Overall, the studio offers an opportunity to see a very small project through from conception to realization within only 15 weeks, and combine abstract systemic thinking with very concrete and hands-on action, in short, to think globally and act locally. Likewise, the studio encourages boldness in terms of the changes students aspire to, especially when confronted with problems such as urban blight, yet humility and pragmatism in the implementation of their visions, especially when bearing the responsibility of working with a community.

ACUPUNCTURE URBANISM

A collaboration between the Manchester Academic Charter School, Grosvenor and Carnegie Mellon University's School of Architecture.

Professor Stefan Gruber, Teaching Assistant Paul Morocco Brito, and Woodshop support Jon Holmes. Students: Victor Acevedo, Rebecca Batswick, Xueya Jiang, Justine Kim, Pam Pan, Kaitlyn Smith, Jessica Svod, Serra Cirmect, Irfan Hader, Isadora Martins and Aditi Chandras Thota

In times of accelerated urban transformations and limited predictability, top-down design instruments like the masterplan have become ineffective in tackling contemporary urban conditions. By contrast, this studio engages urban millenials inductively: analyzing prevailing ecologies, inscribed cultural codes and the socio-political forces at play in order to seek strategic points of design intervention that act as catalysts in the transformation of neighborhoods. Beyond designing buildings, the studio expands architecture students' repertoire to designing situations and events that promise to bring people together. Rather than choosing over a final product, here design is repositioned as a tactical and performative tool for encouraging community engagement and supporting residents in claiming their collective right to the city.

In Spring 2018, the Collaboratory Studio at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Architecture explored temporary interventions for addressing the vacant land of the Manchester neighborhood on Pittsburgh's Northside. Collaborating with the Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS), the studio studied how to open up the school to the neighborhood, and began transforming surrounding vacant lots (with their traces of decades-long hardship) into a play-space and community meeting place. Weekly participatory design workshops with students from the middle school led to an overall strategy for reorganizing the parking, drop-off and pick-up situations, as well as a long-term vision for transforming vacant lots and buildings. Thus the studio was as much about designing a community engagement process as it was about designing and realizing a full-scale micro-public space. Working with youth and teaching students to be teachers, creates important opportunities for reflecting about the role and agency of design professionals: What expertise do architects bring to the table and what can future users and community stakeholders contribute? How genuine is the ubiquitous claim for participation and how does it challenge notions of authorship and authority? These questions are poignantly amplified when working with youth. The inductive approach of the studio teaches future architects to embrace uncertainties and challenge what Ken Koolhaas has referred to as "the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence." Beyond responding to a brief, the framing of the problem, the program, the site, concerns and desires of future users become an essential part of the design process.

Meanwhile our engagement sessions brought about an urge to render the planning and protection process tangible through immediate action. In response, together we built three "Roaming Patches" that serve as outdoor classrooms in the school's vicinity. During the youth workshops, the patches of existing houses in the neighborhood emerged as key elements. On the one hand, we learned that the distinct architectural features played a vital role in the rediscovery and subsequent revitalization of the neighborhood. On the other hand, we learned that they are important social spaces, inviting exchange among neighbors. By playing with familiar elements, while reconfiguring them into something entirely new, the Roaming Patches feel contextual and yet trigger curiosity.

Rather than conceiving of the design-build projects as final products, the studio framed the patches as stepping stones for further community engagement and testing imaginings of possible alternative futures in a long and ongoing transformation process. Our work with MACS was accompanied by the non-profit organization Grounded (formerly known as G-Teach), which then took over our urban design framework and used the patches throughout the summer for further community engagement sessions and events. Here, the mobility of the patches offered the possibility for testing certain activities on different sites. A partial implementation of the play-space with volunteers from the neighborhood and school is currently planned in the summer of 2019.

Overall, the studio offers an opportunity to see a very small project through from conception to realization within only 15 weeks, and combine abstract systems thinking with very concrete and hands-on action. In short, to think globally and act locally. Likewise, the studio encourages boldness in terms of the changes students aspire to, especially when confronted with problems such as urban blight, yet remaining humble and pragmatic in the implementation of their vision, especially when bearing the responsibility of working with a community.



Neighborhood explorations: Youth workshop in which students document urban conditions based on potentials or concerns.



Historic porches of houses on Liverpool Street in Manchester, Pittsburgh.



Enactment of neighborhood scene: Hanging out on the porch with friends.

READING THE URBAN MILIEU



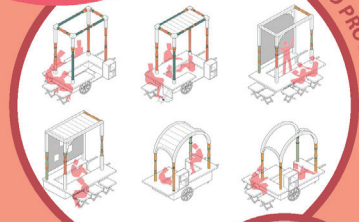
Mapping the neighborhood's history, its social, economic and ecological assets and challenges.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Youth engagement workshop developing activity scenarios for play-space through collage and drawings (above) and precedent studies (below).

DESIGN-BUILD PROCESS



Design development and fabrication process of Roaming Patches.



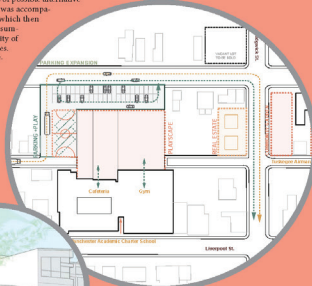
Youth engagement workshop: Sketch models of play-space (above) and learning how to use power tools (below).



Proud builders of Tuskegee model airplanes honoring Charles William Tate, a Manchester native who joined the famed Tuskegee Army, a regiment of black pilots who flew in the Army Air Forces during World War II.



Two different play-space scenarios. One based on topographic differentiation (left) and another based on modular elements (right).



Recommendations for long-term reorganization of pick-up and drop-off, parking and indoor/outdoor relations and location of community garden and play-space.



Scenario of porch roaming through the neighborhood to different vacant lots for temporary activations.



URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY



Long-term development scenario for community garden and adaptive reuse of Charles William Tate's house into a residence for the caretaker of the garden, including a community kitchen and a open air event space in the former garage.



Earth day celebration and community clean-up paired with inauguration of Roaming Patches: On Liverpool Street (above), and at Tuskegee Army community garden (below).

