How to Begin a Critical Look at Tactical Urbanism

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In reaction to large scaled strategies that serve the city's economic bottom line, but not individual residents, more decentralized and informal methods of city building have emerged at the turn of the 21st century. These informal city design initiatives seek to combat urban stagnation through the collaborative action of local stakeholders who are affected by such circumstances and seek to reverse or alter them. In the past decade, these actions often fall under the moniker of Tactical Urbanism. In the same manner that open-source software code is available to anyone who wishes to contribute, alter or customize a program, tactical urbanism begins with the initiative of public participants rather than from officially sanctioned protocols. Current literature focuses on methods and case studies for the implementation of the "informal" city; but there is scant study of the efficacy of these practices for neighborhoods seeking more permanent outcomes. What happens after the project is done (and perhaps gone)? This study seeks to begin to address that issue by using a MOMA exhibition on the topic to frame the discussion.

INTRODUCTION

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Current literature focuses on methods and case studies for the implementation of the "informal" city; but there is scant study

of the efficacy of these practices for neighborhoods seeking more permanent outcomes. What happens after the project is done (and perhaps gone)? More than a decade has passed since Tactical Urbanism's emergence in 2005; now is the time for a critical evaluation of the work.

This study seeks to begin to address that issue by: (1) describing the historical and contemporary context from which tactical urbanism emerged in the United States; (2) use a MOMA exhibition on the topic to frame the assessment; (3) propose an alternate course of study using new case studies and Hugh Sockett's levels of trust; and (4) raise questions about the role of tactical urbanism as a codified professional practice in the making of place in the twenty-first century.

URBAN DESIGN IN THE 20TH CENTURY

At the start of the twentieth century in the United States, urban design, under the aegis of the City Beautiful movement, focused its efforts on the city's aesthetics and infrastructure. Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago (1909) memorialized his rallying cry "make no little plans" as it undertook to provide a monumental core framework for Chicago. The graphics of the Plan revealed his interest: the drawings focused their detail and energy on significant landmarks, whether boulevards or civic buildings. The rest of the city, where people spend most of their time living and working, was rendered in poche, disappearing into a subtly muted background. In fact, in the case of the Burnham-influenced McMillan Commission Plan for Washington D.C. (1901), the drawings cropped out the extent of the city, focusing solely on the monumental core. It was the federal and symbolic city they were designing: an urban monument to democracy. Left out of the drawings was the metropolitan city: the District of Columbia as a lived experience.

During most of the 20th century, growth and change in North American cities were managed by orthodox models of top down decision-making and administration. In the post-World War II environment, concerned by the modernist-influenced tabula rasa approach to urban renewal, urban design scholars and architects, such as Colin Rowe, Fred Koetter, Léon Krier and Rob Krier, argued for a form-driven methodology that would shape the city into a sequence of public forms and spaces that were distinct and memorable when set in contrast to the private realm.1 Conventions such as figure/ground, developed from Giambattista Nolli's La Pianta Grande di Roma (1748), were used to render the legibility of the public space as a figure

in the ground, and the interconnectedness of this space with the streets.2 Such conventions became the architect's criteria of well-conceived public space. This plan-based approach, while representing a radical rethinking of city design during the1960s-70s American renewal- cum-destruction period, has now become a part of the canon. Its ubiquity among urban design firms no longer represents a hypothesis or theoretical speculation about the use of normative types and the figure/ground, but has been codified into contemporary practice and amplified by such phrases and practices as design guidelines, urban and architectural regulations and pattern books.3

Despite the conviction of both New and Post Urbanism in their formally-driven design methodologies, these conventional and bureaucratic urban design and planning frameworks have been less effective in addressing and managing vacancy and diminished vibrancy without resulting in the gentrification of neighborhoods.4 In other words, top down professional design and planning practices may have been good for the revitalization of the institution of the city, but they have not been good for the (often poor and minority) residents pushed out of their neighborhoods under the call for "livability" and "revitalization." In reaction to large-scaled strategies (in the context of increasing privatization, globalization, digitalization and commercialization of urban space) that serve the city's economic bottom line, but not individual residents, more decentralized and informal methods of city building have emerged at the turn of the 21st century. These informal city design initiatives also seek to combat urban stagnation but to do so through the collaborative action of local stakeholders who are affected by such circumstances and seek to reverse or alter them. Tactical urbanism is a form of this type of informal, grass-roots design and planning intervention; but, what laid the groundwork for it to thrive during the twenty-first century?

TACTICAL URBANISM TAKES COMMAND

The July 2013 edition of Architect magazine featured an article entitled "Newest Urbanism." In their word play on what design praxis might succeed the popular, late twentieth-century New Urbanism movement in the United States, Architect introduced to the uninitiated the concept of tactical urbanism. Their narrative rooted the contemporary origins of tactical urbanism in 2005, with the transformation of a parking space into a small park in San Francisco by the firm Rebar. Defining tactical urbanism as "temporary, cheap, and usually grassroots interventions – including so-called guerrilla gardens, pop-up parks, food carts, and 'open streets' projects – that are designed to improve city life on a block-by-block, street-by-street basis," the article claims that it took this approach to shaping the city less than a decade to mainstream into the practices of U.S. cities and firms alike.5 While Architect used the term 'tactical urbanism' to characterize this effort (borrowing it from the Street Plans Collaborative and their guidebook Tactical Urbanism 2: Short-Term Action, Long Term Change), other terms abound: participatory urbanism, open-source urbanism, pop-up urbanism, minor urbanism, guerrilla urbanism, city repair, or DIY urbanism.6 The elision of these terms and their definitions does contain overlap, but they are not exact synonyms. This

paper will focus specifically on tactical urbanism and its rapid emergence and dissemination.

Tactical urbanism is a method of instigating change in cities that is the anti-thesis offered by formalized design and planning strategies. It has been referred to as "open-sourced." In the same manner that open-source software code is available to anyone who wishes to contribute, alter or customize a program, tactical urbanism begins with the initiative of public participants rather than from officially sanctioned protocols. It offers local solutions for local planning challenges and is often low risk with the potential for high reward.

Thus, what distinguishes tactical urbanism in the United States in the early twenty-first century from other community-based/public interest design practices are the socio-economic and technological contexts that have fostered its current surge: the economic recession of 2008, the emergence of accessible, portable, digital technology, and the advent of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in the early 2000s. The economic downturn abruptly interrupted big development projects, both public and private. The disappearance of these large-scale projects left communities with a bevy of vacant and abandoned properties, which was further compounded by the demise of smaller businesses caught in the wake of the big money disaster. This made it easier for insurgent intervention to take hold for two main reasons: projects with a small budget could make an impact now that big money was no longer available to overwhelm them, and municipalities were more forgiving of the unsanctioned because these undertakings filled a void of inaction and/or displaced, negative, crime-related activities.

While the economy took a precipitous downturn after 2008, the increase in the proliferation of social media orientated platforms, and the ubiquity of portable devices on which to access them, meant it was easier to mobilize people and resources. As quickly as one can tweet, one can gather people and resources for action. Facebook was founded in 2004, Twitter in 2006. San Francisco's first renewed interest in turning parking spaces into parks began in 2005 and reached global proportions in less than a decade. These are not coincidences.

This is the foundation for the twenty-first century version of participatory urbanism—a.k.a tactical urbanism—, has demonstrated a potential to mobilize quickly and disseminates its actions digitally for easy replication (as seen in the Occupy Movement).7 The Occupy Movement created physical civic infrastructures (temporarily permanent) entirely generated by the participants. What arose across the United States was "complex, open-source, user-generated urban infrastructure, where creative participation, collaboration, generosity and self-reliance are privileged over the more traditional urban imperatives of commerce and efficiency."8 But can Occupy as a form of tactical urbanism offer a method for bridging the gap between the ephemerality of some participatory urbanism and the desire for permanent change in the city? And can these bottom-up approaches ultimately situate everyday people as equal authors in the design of the built environment, alongside

architects, landscape architects, planners and preserva-tionists? And for those in professional practice, can tactical urbanism modes become an additional significant methodology for design praxis?

EVALUATING TACTICAL URBANISM

Current tactical urbanism literature—initiated and led by Michael Lyndon and Tony Garcia of Street Plans Collective—has focused on definitions of tactical urbanism and how-to case study guides.9 These have proliferated digitally as well as in traditional publications.10 In other words, the current literature shows us how to spot it and then how to replicate it. One might imagination in a convention trajectory, then, that the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) exhibition and catalogue "Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities" is a defining moment in not only the establishment, but also the critical analysis of tactical urbanism,—much in the same way that's MOMA's International Style exhibition and catalogue of 1932 heralded and catalyzed a new design praxis in the United States: International Style Modernism.

MOMA's "Uneven Growth" ran from November 2014 to May 2015, with the self-stated mission to "challenge current assumptions about the relationships between formal and informal, bottom-up and town-down urban development, and to address potential changes in the roles architects and urban designers might assume vis-à-vis the increasing inequality of current urban development."11 The exhibition was organized around design interventions in six global cities (Hong Kong, Istanbul, Lagos, Mumbai, New York, and Rio de Janeiro), wherein the curators brought together six interdis-ciplinary teams to examine new architectural possibilities for these urban places.12 The tactical urbanism work was first presented at a workshop and conference in Vienna, Austria on 14 June 2014, before being curated and published to the public in the Fall of 2014.

Like tactical urbanism itself, the curatorial process followed a different methodological from conventional practice. Instead of search for examples of the work already performed, the curators commissioned the teams for tactical urbanism proposals for the six locales. As noted by Pedro Gadanho, Curator of the exhibition from MOMA's Department of Architecture and Design on MOMA's digital blog post:

[...] this curatorial project is of particular interest as an endeavor to be addressed "in the making" by post. The web platform allows for immediate reflection on the various stages of the project and provides extraordinary opportunities to explore parallel takes on the exhibition's urgent topics, namely, increasing urbanization around the globe and the impact on our societies of the ensuing rise in inequality. As local practitioners and international research teams enter into collaboration to challenge assumptions [...] post will serve as a platform where you can check on the progress of the ideas being proposed, enter into discussions prompted by guest critics, and join the "guided tours" offered by the exhibition's participants to cities being examined in the exhibition.13

In addition to the officially commissioned work, "Uneven Growth" also created a website wherein others could post their tactical urbanism work and/or comment on the MOMA or crowd-sourced postings.14

In order to assess this MOMA produced and curated work—assumed to be exemplar of tactical urbanism given the stature of the institution—the following methods were used: (1) defining tactical urbanism using the definition proffered by the leaders of the field, Lydon and Garcia;15 (2) establishing a spreadsheet of all of the MOMA commissioned and self-posted work and marking which of the 5 elements, if any, of the tactical urbanism operational definitions it fell under; (3) establish-ing a spreadsheet of which projects were deemed "tactical urbanism" based on the definitions and which were not; (4) establishing a spreadsheet for the collection of data of the projects meeting the definition of tactical urbanism regarding the timelines, cost, relative permanence, funding, official sanction, urban theme of the work, etc.; and, (5) using all spread-sheets to determine the "best" examples of tactical urbanism based on definitions and ability to gather data. Following this phase, a set of questions were developed with the quest of interviewing the team's responsibility for the "best" tactical urbanism examples for additional background and assessment. Simultaneously, interviews were also performed with Pedro Gadanho ("Uneven Growth" curator") and, then, MOMA Chief Curator, Barry Bergdoll.

This assessment methodology yielded the following results: (1) it was clear that the 6 commissioned teams were not operating under the definition of tactical urbanism established by Lydon and Garcia; and, (2) while the crowd-sourced postings were uneven in content, they produced more projects that could be considered tactical urbanism by the aforementioned operational definition. The key factor separating the two groups of work is the issue by whom and with whom is the tactical urbanism project being instigated. Ultimately the MOMA teams were collaborations between design professionals and did not seek to co-produce a paradigm within which both profession-als and residents are seen as experts (with their own sets of knowledges). The ultimate problematic for the crowd-sourced projects on the MOMA site (and in general digital searches—performed following the disappointing results—, as well as in the conventionally published case studied books) is the lack of data on impacts and outcomes. How can one know if the temporary can effect longer-term changes in the way people make place and take ownership over the design of the public realm when it is difficult to establish the efficacy of the praxis? Gadanho himself noted in an interview that the international collabo-rations were difficult because the groups were composed by Gandaho and MOMA and were "forced partnerships"16 rather than being driven by existing social capital and relationships on the ground.17 Bergdoll took an even more critical stance toward tactical urbanism itself, noting

I have to admit that I'm not a huge fan of tactical urbanisms. I think that at its best it comes up with wonderful tools that create a new kind of connection between planners and designers and citizens but at its worst I find it actually sort of 're-nigs'

on the capacity of, I don't want to say top down, but on a sort of more anti-expertise. It sometimes seems like some of the things are more like gadgets that aren't really transformative so sometimes it feels like the total collapse of the belief of the capacity of planning [and design] to improve urban situations and even to improve democratic situations [...]"18

But are Bergdoll's criticisms valid based on the practice of tactical urbanism or lack of assessment of the praxis. Are they biased based on the MOMA produced work or do they refer to a broad knowledge and survey of tactical urbanism itself?

In moving forward, this project will start gathering published self-stated tactical urbanism work and perform two assessments first: (1) does it meet the Lydon and Garcia definition; and, (2) if it hits a sufficient number of their criteria for tactical urbanism, then the work will be assessed based on the co-production produced. The co-production assessment will be based Hugh Socket's levels of trust definitions to further categorize the work. This will be done as a means for helping design and planning professionals to achieve clarity and transparency in the roles and methods in achieving a more effective tactical urbanism project. What are Socket's definitions, and why might they provide useful?

ARCHITECTURE & PARTICIPATORY RELATIONSHIPS

As aforementioned, participatory design is not a new phenomenon in the discipline of architecture, but, perhaps what it has lacked until its strong reemergence in the 21st century is a critical eye toward both processes and products of architecturally based community partnerships. On its surface it has seemed like a way to allow young professionals (and students) to gain real world making experiences while also providing assistance to underserved communities and populations. But as Anna Goodman notes, while "praised for promoting social responsibility, the practice has also been criticized for aestheticizing poverty."19 She also asserts that architecture needs to move beyond whether a project "does good" or "works" based on the delivered architectural product to addressing more structural assessments of "how does it work" and "what work does it do" in terms of social-cultural networks and needs, not just physical and/or aesthetic ones. This shift is one that can help to destabilize the traditional role of architect as expert. As Kenny Cupers exhorts, "An analysis of the social project of architecture today can no longer remain within the realms of intent, form, or representation but needs to tie these to consequence and affect."20

How do we assess the efficacy of these community-based projects burgeoning in the discipline? Using Hugh Sockett's philosophical analysis of levels of trust within professional–community partnerships provide a frame with which critical questions regarding community-based architectural might provide a useful tool for being self-aware and making transparent the partnership needs in order for tactical urbanism to become a meaningful design praxis paradigm. Sockett describes the four types of partnerships as: Service, Exchange, Cooperative, and Systemic and Transformative. This categorization allows both the professional and the community partner to understand how to construct an effective partnership by making transparent differing resources, expertise, power, and/or agendas. The usefulness of Sockett's establishment of categorization of relationships is, in fact, for transparency, self-awareness, and hopefully thoughtful consideration of the desired outcomes for both parties and their relative capacities to achieve those outcomes.

A Service relationship under Sockett's schema is one in which the professional offers support (either volunteer or through paid contract) for a community institution's existing functions or programs. Simple examples might be volunteering for a neighborhood's street beautification effort (that was scheduled and organized by the neighborhood organization); or interns being paid (through a nonprofit) to help students learn about design thinking.

In Exchange partnerships, both the professional and the community organization "exchange resources for their mutual benefit" in order to achieve a mutually determined outcome (Sockett, 1998, p. 77). One example could be the professional providing training for community leaders in best practices for whatever topic or skills are the focus of their mission—e.g. how to run a charrette.

Cooperative relationships involve shared responsibilities between the professional and community organizations. Within this schema, a project is usually clearly defined and does not continue beyond its specific circumscription. A feasibility study by the design group to be implemented by the community organization (at their behest) is one example of such a relationship.

The final category of Systemic and Transformative partnerships not only involves comprehensive shared responsibilities (e.g. planning, decision-making, funding, operations, evaluations) for the activities, but also includes the transformation of both parties in the relationship. This often leads to a revision of the relationship's desired activities and can be cyclical and longer term.

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CONCLUSION

As design professionals attempt to realize their theoretical objectives through constructing physical structures as well as sociocultural dialogues, the following questions remain critical to the mainstreaming of co-production partnerships aimed at introducing tactical urbanism as a meaning design praxis paradigm.

- How can architecture as cultural practice challenge architectural products to generate a design process about people, not about things?

- How do we honor inequalities in the design of the built environment?

- How can we increase deep participation that honors the values of a people and place in order to avoid engaging in architectural colonialism or aestheticizing poverty?

- How do we make social aims an inseparable part of the economics of architecture, emphasizing co-production, making transparent gaps in architectural productions, and making evident who is framing a process or product through clear demarcation of the partisan nature of authorship?

- How can professional–community relationships facilitate architecture as something other than a bastion of patrimony, or a commercially consumed object?

The other critical aspect that architecture–community relationships within a tactical urbanism praxis is an interrogation of: how spaces construct a particular worldview for ourselves; how the discipline of architecture has passed on that worldview; and how the profession has embedded that worldview within the built environment, and helped thus to promote and determine patterns of consumption, exclusion, and environmental impact. Thus, when the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum followed up the Design for the Other 90% exhibit and publication with Design with the Other 90%: Cities, the shift from designing for underserved communities to designing with underscores a change in the emphasis of the approach of designers toward a more inclusive process. A process that recognizes differing beliefs underlying decision- making and values all participants as experts. The issue of agency is at the heart of 21st century architectural praxis. Who should decide what to make, and how, where, and for whom it is made? Can emphasizing architecture–community relationships become a guiding methodology where today's wicked problems (poverty, displacement, access to water and infrastructure, empowering women and girls, etc.) enter into public discourse by using architecture as a means to generate new discussions with people at the margins as principal discussants?

Participatory design initiatives (like tactical urbanism) manifest collaborative city-building values through the engagement and empowerment of local-area stakeholders in the process of urban change. Such initiatives bring together local stakeholders—represented by community organizations, the creative community, small business start-ups, hobbyists, cottage industries as well as the owners of the vacant properties—for a shared purpose. Together these participants seek to enhance or stabilize the vibrancy of a neighborhood commercial corridor, while simultaneously creating opportunities for the incubation of experimental startup enterprises. Purposes served by tactical urbanism that are commonly asserted by its proponents include: (1) increasing the diversity of people participating in the planning process; (2) creating opportunities for new directions and for challenging the status quo; (3) attracting interest (and people) to a site; (4) creating employment opportunities; and, (5) providing incubator space for new entrepreneurs. Whether these assertions can be verified and codified in order to promote the efficacy of these practices for neighborhoods seeking more permanent outcomes remains to be seen.

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8.   A broader discussion of participatory urbanism (tactical urbanism is a subset of this) and the occupy movement can be found in Wortham-Galvin (Autumn 2013), Ibid.

9.   Starting with their Attributes of Tactical Urbanism (2011), Lydon and Garcia have published 10 guides and 1 book to date.

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15. The 5 characteristics of tactical urbanism that were taken from Lydon and Garcia's work were: (1) deliberate, phase approach to instigating change; (2) offering of local ideas for local challenges; (3) short-term commitment and realistic expectations; (4) low risk with possibility of high reward; and, (5) development of social capital between citizens and building of organizational capacity between public and private.

16. The most rigorous sourcing of that material can be found in municipal studies of parklets, which look primarily at economic impacts of parklets. Philadelphia and Chicago offer two examples. See Sarah Goodyear, "Why Some Parklets Work Better Than Others," City Lab, March 11, 2015. https://www.citylab. com/design/2015/03/why-some-parklets-work-better-than-others/387406/ [accessed 15 January 2015] and Camille Fink, "Chicago Parklet Designed to be Flexible and Cost Effective," Planetizen, November 12, 2018, https://www. planetizen.com/news/2018/11/101489-chicago-parklet-designed-be-flexible-and-cost-effective [accessed 1 December 2018].

17. Peter Gadanho interview with Taylor Schenker (Clemson graduate student in Resilient Urban Design), 15 December 2018.

18. Barry Bergdoll interview with Taylor Schenker (Clemson graduate student in Resilient Urban Design), 1 December 2018.

19. Anna Goodman, Citizen architects: ethics, education and the construction of a profession, 1933-2013 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California: Berkeley, p. 15).

20. Kenny Cupers, "Where is the social project?" Journal of Architectural Education, 68(1), p.6.