

Site Lines:
An exploration of physical mapping practices

by

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Abstract

My practice is driven by the way “the Plan” is used as a stand-in for place, and by our tendency to identify with a plan at the cost of our connection with place - with its physicality, its historic context, its role within the social fabric. I reflect on my own complicity as a graphic designer in creating the kind of clean, seamless visions that are fine-tuned to appeal to a target demographic. I discuss how the designers’ extensive array of media is so successful at “holding the focus steady” (Latour 1986: 5) on the projected world, that it masks the underlying rules that enable and perpetuate that projection. The artworks engage with the theme of spatial hyper-rationalization, and speak to the inescapability of Cartesian time-space. My site-line interventions engender a brief sense of freedom and agency into an otherwise hyper-rationalized environment, and suggest a fluidity between interior/exterior space and private/public space.

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Preface

The idea of uncertain ground is fundamental to my conceptual drawing¹ approach and how I interpret “unseen” spaces - the way we spend so much of our time and energy building structures (physical, social, cognitive) to support our illusion of certainty, of the idea that our lives are under our own control, that we are “safe” because we are on “certain ground”. And yet, behind these structures, when they are deconstructed or swept away by events, we are faced with a different reality - that we have only the most minor levels of control, and no control at all over the inevitable (death); that, in fact, we are all on “uncertain ground” all the time, but choose to not see this, and see instead the illusion of certainty that we create for ourselves.

¹ For instance, Robert Morris completed his *Blind Time* (1973) drawings with his eyes shut and within limited periods of time (van Alphen 2008: 61). The drawings were always accompanied by a transcript of what can only be described as a recording of the movements involved in the drawing or the memory of a person/place/event while doing the drawing. *Pacing* (2001) is another example where Francis Alÿs traced his movements along the streets of Manhattan by counting the number of paces in each segment of his journey (Wang 2010: 33). He recorded drawings into a mathematics copybook; wherein the grid paper became the calibration mechanism between the structure of the city and the number of paces taken in each direction. More like diagrams than drawings, these practices give valuable insight to the artists’ decision-making processes.

1.0 Introduction

My MFA thesis project builds on 20 years experience working as a graphic designer, often collaborating with developers, architects, and planners in drawing up designs and architectural future-scapes that I refer to in this document as “projected worlds”.

My thesis explores the social implications of developing a relationship with the visual projection of urban space at the expense of an experience of physical place. By visual projection here, I mean all the *schematics, visualizations, banners, pictures, and graphics* that are generally used to illustrate a planned environment. I question: what are the implications when we develop a reliance on the visual projection in advance of an experience, when we become more familiar with the medium and its message than we do with the terrain itself? This body of work articulates two issues that come from my professional practice, and on which I expand in my current research project.

The first of my issues is the use of linear perspective to represent space by means of plans and projections. In this regard, space becomes a commodity to be commandeered for the purposes of drawing up parametric models and projecting virtual landscapes (concept-cities). Plans and inscriptions of any kind – though integral to the construction and visual communication of any new development – are, according to sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour, an effective means of diverting attention away from physical realities on the ground (e.g. people’s site memory or locale) and “holding the focus steady” on the projection (1986: 5).

Indeed, visualizations and projections are meant to obviate the need for the original place - to see it, to stand on it, to walk over it. But in doing so, I believe they begin to fulfill what anthropologist Margaret C. Rodman calls the “distanciated relations” that “predominate in the world today” (2003: 210-211). Distanciated relations partly account

for why localized activities no longer shape space² into place, as explained by the sociologist Anthony Giddens (qtd. in Rodman 2003: 211):

The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between “absent” others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influence quite distant from them.

The implication here is that the phantasmagoric nature of place may lead to a devaluation of the physicality of place, which is continually mobilized to conform with strategic plans and projections. Once excavated, the now-devalued urban site is again plunged into darkness by concrete and asphalt, shielded by hoarding, and eventually finished with astroturf.

On-site interpretations, as theorized by landscape architect James Corner (1999: 230), open up a conceptual space wherein I perceive the inherent latencies of urban infrastructure. Contact with the ground (e.g. earth, soil, rock, garbage) becomes an effective means for me to resolve the sense of displacement I feel within the urban block, caused firstly by developers’ growing obsession with futurity, and secondly by society’s increasing ambivalence toward the physical realities on the ground. Fundamental to developers’ obsession with futurity is the sociologist Goran Therborn’s characterization of “modernity” and its “discovery of the future as an open, *unbuilt* site never visited before, but as a place reachable and *constructable*” (qtd. in Smith 2001: 154). Architectural theorist Stan Allen attributes societal ambivalence to the age of postmodernity, where distraction becomes empty time and uninflected space. He reiterates much of the discussion that the anthropologist Marc Augé talks about in his book *Non-Places*, and argues that the urban dweller “is protectively encapsulated in the car or segregated in the

² Tim Cresswell (2004: 8), a professor of human geography, makes an important distinction between space and place by referring to space as a more abstract concept than place. He remarks that spaces are closer to geometry, being composed mostly of areas and volumes, while places have space between them. The philosopher and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (qtd. in Cresswell 2004: 8) suggests that if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause. Place is a portion of space wherein we stop and invest meaning and become attached to it in some way (e.g. by naming it).

mall, the residential enclave, or the airport – all of the “non-places” – receiving mediated information on a proliferating series of screens” (Allen 2011: 38 and Augé 1995: 96).

In fact societal ambivalence towards one’s urban fabric is a key component of dystopian modernity, and integral to the fictional but plausible worlds in novels such as *Concrete Island* (1973) and *High-Rise* (1975), both written by JG Ballard. The novelist and psychogeographer Will Self gives an insightful analysis of Ballard’s writing in *Concrete Island*, saying:

By concentrating not on the motorway system itself but on an abandoned triangle of land in between the fly-overs, Ballard inverts the entire conception of how our rulers wish us to regard urban fabric. We should regard it as a futuristic projection, that is divorced from a physical reality and that is aspirational. (Bristol Festival of Ideas, Dec 2011 - *JG Ballard: Cities, Suburbs & Edgelands*)

The second issue, connected to the first, concerns the way in which the futuristic projection of place serves to separate us from that place and its social setting. As Self points out, urban fabric “has become a school of architecture in its own right called Parametrics which derives from CAD/CAM design techniques and takes the form of giant billboards with pictures of idealized urban plazas and esplanades with characters that are created in advance of the building” (Bristol Festival of Ideas, Dec 2011).

Nic Clear, architect and teacher at the Bartlett School of Architecture, is critical of these bright shiny futures. He bemoans the fact that contemporary architecture resists an explicitly social agenda, and instead is “driven by idealist and formalist agendas... facilitated by the shape-making potential of new computer-based design tools” (Ballardian Architecture symposium held at the Royal Academy of Arts, May 2010 - *J.G. Ballard is an Enemy of the Architectural Profession*). This accords with my own experience as a design consultant: having proposed design solutions based on architectural projections and developer plans, I had already recognized the issue identified by Clear - namely, that architecture has replaced a *vision* of the future with an *image* of the future.

The implicit separation between the design profession and the social setting is addressed by design educator and practitioner Neal Haslem, who argues that it is becoming increasingly important that communication design should be recognized as a social act (2009: 20). He explains that graphic design, in particular, continues to see itself as a discipline where visual experiments can be realized at a grand scale without accepting accountability for the consequences or implications of that work (Haslem 2009: 21).

Similarly with communication design, writer and broadcaster Paul Barker noted in *New Society* (2000: 13) that urban planning was “remarkably unmonitored” in terms of what it set out to do and what it achieved. Barker referred to Melvin Webber’s description of planning as “the only branch of knowledge purporting to be some kind of science which regards a plan as being *fulfilled* when it is merely *completed*; there’s seldom any sort of check on whether the plan actually does what it was meant to do” (2000: 13).

My practice responds to the growing enthusiasm among designers and planners for presenting perfected visions of cityscapes that show a clean, seamless, technologized image of the future. I attempt to contest this approach by devising interventions that repurpose and re-territorialize specific sites in order to invert such perfected visions, and overturn the intentions they represent.

This body of work is principally concerned with the ease with which existing shapes and formations are overwritten when an urban site is repurposed. I use mapping activities - fields, extracts, and plottings - to explore, and often to reject or undermine, the accepted definition of space. I lay down new lines and suggest new potentials, a process of re-territorialization that is often at odds with “The Plan”. The practice satisfies a strong impulse to examine and record the routine conventions of place, especially sites undergoing development or awaiting permissions, often abandoned or hidden from view behind a wall of billboards and public access restrictions.

It is important to remember that, though the visual has been given primary importance in how we represent place, it is only one of several senses and should not override personal lived experience. As a graphic designer, the studio was the space in which I worked, but as an artist, developing this body of work about physical mapping practices, I am deliberately moving beyond the four walls and repositioning my physical and psychological relationship to place.



Fig. 1. © RTE News, *Dublin: Cranes were a popular sight in the capital's skyline during the building boom, 2011*

1.1 Background Context

I come from a country that once lived and loved a Golden Age known as the *Celtic Tiger*, a term that describes Ireland's economy during a period of rapid economic and infrastructural development between 1995 and 2007. Ireland was characterized as a "Rags to Riches" success story by many financial commentators, who also described the country as one of the most developed economies in the world. During this period, our

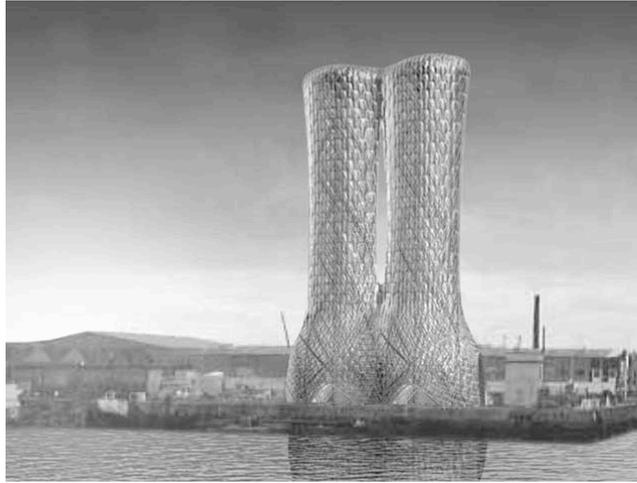


Fig. 2. © Emergence and Design Group, *U2 Dublin Landmark Tower*, 2003

future looked brighter than it had ever been before. Consumer confidence was at an all-time high, credit lines were flowing, and conversations often drifted to topics such as buying a bigger home, buying a holiday home, buying a second home for rental income, and “interest-only” mortgages. Indeed Dublin’s skyline, which was once defined by the Dublin Mountains, the Four Courts, and the Ha’penny Bridge was now crowded out by construction cranes (Fig. 1.) parked along the banks of the River Liffey. The elliptical shell of Spencer Dock’s conference centre, the Watchtower, the U2 Tower (Fig. 2. and Fig. 3.) and many other condominiums would soon dominate the skyline, and Dublin would be recognized as a “skyscraper city”. But the crash came in 2008, and the fate of many of these renowned developments is now in the hands of the International Monetary Fund. The cranes still stand and Dublin’s skyline now looks emptier than ever, filled with hulking skeletons that once promised a skyscraper city.



Fig. 3. © Matthias Karch, *Parametric of U2 Dublin Landmark Tower*, 2003



Fig. 4. © Simon Bates, *Ghost estate in Rosslare, Ireland*, 2011

1.2 Objectives and Questions

My practice responds to the issue of projecting an unsustainable futuristic cityscape by setting out to achieve a number of objectives. First, my practice reflects on the growing dichotomy between projected worlds and physical realities by addressing the separation between design studio and physical context, and between designer and fieldworker. Design anthropologist Tim Plowman likens the contemporary practices of designers to earlier “armchair anthropologists”, where planning and design often rely on second-hand accounts of the lives of intended audiences without any direct engagement or physical interaction with the site (2003: 32).³ I attempt to overcome this potential pitfall by mobilizing my studio practice to become a site-specific thinking and making process.

To this end, I examine the tensions between physical boundaries (space as it is experienced) and virtual boundaries (space as it is projected or represented) by exercising the site’s physical properties to contest existing contours and patterns. I want to understand what happens when designers rely on visual technologies rather than having a direct engagement with the site.

Another project objective is to explore my experience of “infrastructural” striations in the city: those systematic, almost algorithmic pathways that inscribe the surface of urban space (e.g. streets, malls, parking lots). Such pathways prescribe, for instance, that the streets are biased towards the movement of cars, not people, or that the shopping malls are biased towards the movement of shoppers, not wanderers. Within this context, striations (Bonta and Protevi 2004: 154) refer to how space is “first gridded and delineated, then occupied, by the drawing of rigid lines that compartmentalize reality into segments, all controlled to a greater or lesser extent through a nested hierarchy of centers.”

³ Please note that the word *place* may also appear in the text as *space* or *site*, referring to the size and extent of the fieldwork. In addition, the word *site* can incorporate a diverse range of spaces such as field, burrow, sandy cove, car park, room, or wall.

To this end I devise interventions that seek to repurpose and reterritorialize place, and question the boundaries that constitute the socio-economic rules of engagement which define that place. By doing this, I seek to provoke an awareness of other, unseen - but no less real - striations that also contribute to shaping the cityscape. In this respect, the practice is a contemporary response to the Situationist mandate (Vienne 2002: 39), implementing one particular context onto another and thereby dismantling the totalizing perspectives assigned to urban infrastructure by planners and cartographers (Gray 2003: 226). A new-found freedom resides beneath these perspectives, allowing us to consider how plausible it is to think that places you don't go in the real world are metaphors for places you don't go in the mind.

My work essentially asks the following questions:

- What do designers miss when they rely on visual technologies as opposed to going outside to instigate conversations and questions, and engage in a forum with those who live and work on the site? Can the application of a phenomenological framework (where the designer instigates interventions beyond the segregated studio environment) counter the designers' over-reliance on ocular-centric technologies?
- Mapping traditionally conveys a stable relation between physical territory and occupation of that space. However my mapping interventions and visualizations contest any notion of stability. I ask: how *real* are the virtual boundaries, and how *unreal* are the physical ones?
- How does an engagement with striations at an infrastructural level provoke my own awareness of "invisible" striations – such as the flows and forces of capital?
- What new-found creative freedoms might reside in the "uncertain ground" that emerges when totalizing perspectives are dismantled, and where might they lead?

1.3 Rationale

My research advances a phenomenological framework for “designerly ways of responding” as an addendum to “designerly ways of knowing”, a structuralist-based framework developed by Nigel Cross (1982). His book *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (1982) traces the development of a research interest in articulating and understanding the nature of design cognition, and the concept that designers (whether architects, planners, product designers, etc.) have and use particular “designerly” ways of knowing and thinking. Cross remarks (2001: 54):

What designers especially know about is the artificial world – the human-made world of artifacts. What they especially know how to do is the proposing of additions to and changes to the artificial world. Their knowledge, skills, and values lie in the techniques of the artificial.

As a practicing professional who has advocated “designerly” ways of knowing, thinking, and acting, both within academic and real-world scenarios, I feel somewhat underwhelmed by the experience as well as the discourse that surrounds “design thinking research” (Cross 2001: 54) and its tentative grasp of “reflective practice”. Like the architect Christopher Alexander, who disassociated himself from the field and the rationalist outcomes of design science in the 1970s, I feel just as aggrieved with the artificial world generated through “designerly” ways of knowing and would have to say “forget it, forget the whole thing” (Cross 2001: 50). For this reason, my art-design practice devises *designerly ways of responding* through a phenomenological framework – geared towards disrupting the perception that design is exclusively about appropriating visual form to an artificial world – that employs embodied practices as a means of conjecture and innovation within the realm of physical mapping and visual language.

The issue also arises as to whether the underlying intention within my art-design practice is to somehow diminish my graphic design practice, by essentially turning away from one discipline to go towards another. I am already quietly aware of this ongoing struggle between searching for my own personal language while challenging the

cultural predominance of the visual over all other senses. Be that as it may, the background to my methodological framework prompts me towards speculation that's not dissimilar to territory explored by Marshall McLuhan (1964: 1-378) in such matters as visual language. McLuhan theorized about how media could be understood as technological extensions to man's senses. He gave great insight into the technological extensions of ocular-centric media such as the printing press, the computer, and television, and the ways in which they influence how we conceptualize reality and how we negotiate space.

Moreover, my art-design practice is informed, not diminished, by a healthy critique of the ocular-centric media and tools which are prevalent to design and planning disciplines. Architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa laments the fact that "the technological extensions of the senses have until now reinforced the primacy of vision" (2005: 36), and my practice grows out of widespread concern about the increasing dependency designers have on such tools.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Decoupling the *Albertian Window* and pursuing haptic vision

The 17th century invention of the Cartesian system (René Descartes) made it possible to visually represent the 3D world on a 2D surface. It was by virtue of the Cartesian system that the rationalization of sight came to be the dominant perspective within Western philosophy. The rationalization of sight then led to the *deanthropomorphization* of vision (Jay 1994: 62), according to art historian and critic Svetlana Alpers, when the German astronomer Johannes Kepler described the mechanics of vision in purely passive terms, calling it “a dead eye” (qtd. in Jay 1994: 62).

This primarily visual system has become ubiquitous in design, and has raised vision and put it on a pedestal, above and beyond the other senses. As technology has developed and become part of a designer’s toolbox, this Cartesian focus has been taken up by the technological tools and just carried forward, and again, the visual has remained the primary sense that designers continue to rely on.

In an article called “Eating the Image”, written for *Design Issues*, graphic designer Frances C. Butler describes a research model devised by Karl Popper and J.J. Gibson which examined the process of perception and cognition and found that humans perceived by noting differences. Despite the model stressing all levels of sensory perception, she is disappointed that designers continue to “elevate visual stimulation to primacy” (Butler 1984: 35).

To the same degree that Cartesian optics led to a sense of detachment from the world, and from the thingness of things, contemporary designers’ over-reliance on visualizing technologies continues to separate them from the subject they want to examine. When designers focus on vision so exclusively, through their methodologies and technologies, they create in a sense an *Albertian Window*. They’re like Alberti - who

placed his window frame and his grid, and placed his subject beyond it, and really didn't focus so much on the subject but focused on the structure, the grid.

Butler (1984: 35) is also critical of the way in which graphic designers: “devise abstract logos, patterned surfaces, and abstruse gestural symbolism and play about with variations on the geometries of the grid”, while the audience looks to this – the media is its only really public imagery – for information on the components of personal identity and social life (35). As a principal compendium of public imagery, she argues that graphic design should “show the visible traces of heightened sensory awareness, with attention given to the real body, real social space, real touch, [and] gesture” (1984: 39).

According to landscape architect James Corner, to plot is to ‘draw out’ new and latent relationships that can be seen amongst the various extracts within the field (1999: 230). Richard Long has mastered the art of plotting a latent line, for example, by walking from the highest summit to the lowest summit in sequential order (Corner 1999: 230). I will discuss later how such practices reorient our sensory perception in favour of *haptic vision*, also referred to as the whole hand-eye-movement system by psychologist J.J. Gibson (Paterson 2007: 85). In the book *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, Mark Paterson draws a distinction between optic and haptic forms of perception, comparing haptic vision to the way in which ancient art worked in a shallow space, the space of relief, and emphasized the tactile connection of the parts (2007: 84). Most importantly, these practices destabilize the Cartesian privilege of vision, pull vision back down off its pedestal, undermine the Modernist metaphor which relates modes of seeing to modes of knowing, and re-evaluate the importance of touch and tactility in order to make sense of one's environment, “experience and understanding of the world” (Pallasmaa 2005:10).

2.2 Questioning the politics of public space through itinerant practices

While numerous critiques of “ocularcentrism” (Jay 1994: 3) have been put forward by phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and visual culture historians such as Martin Jay and Juhani Pallasmaa, there is no certainty that the contentious issue is filtering down to the rank-and-file designers, other than what they may read in Guy Debord’s (1967) critique of the society of the spectacle, or Marshall McLuhan’s (1962) critique of our brand-new world of “all-at-onceness”. More uncertain still is whether this phenomenological argument makes any difference to the methodologies and technologies fostered within design practice.

I would argue that application of the phenomenological critique cannot be adequately evaluated unless the designer comes out from behind the tools which are responsible for the remediation⁴ of visual media (e.g. digital screens remediated analog print) and which reinforce the ocularcentric world we live in.

The notion of “uncertain ground”, which I referred to in the preface, is fundamental to my approach when drawing out new and latent relationships within a site. As a graphic designer I worked in the studio context, which provided structure, safety, and order - in other words, all the illusions of certainty. For my present art practice, I purposefully dispense with the structure and containment of my studio and I go outside and work in the open field, as it were. Unlike the commercial brief, which obligates the designer towards a creative process with preconceived outcomes, *wandering* is enlisted here as a way to devise a brief for a *citizen action* which investigates sites that exhibit a certain anonymity and enclosure to them - like a place trapped within the dead time of space. To this end I seek out peripheries, neglected edges of otherwise familiar urban spaces.

⁴ The theory of mediation proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin who argue that new visual media pay homage to, rival, and refashion such earlier media as perspective painting. They call this process of refashioning *remediation* e.g. photography remediated painting, the digital screen remediated print.

Tate curator Tanya Barson imagines that such impulses are what makes drawing travel off the page and into the environment itself (2011). These impulses are not dissimilar to those which prompted the group of artists whose work was featured in *The Peripatetic School: itinerant drawing practices from Latin America*, an exhibition curated by Barson. 'Peripatetic' is derived from the ancient Greek term for 'of walking' or 'given to walking about'. It is used to mean itinerant, wandering, meandering, or walking. The peripatetic practice is key to the itinerary of most of these artists who journey out of the studio into the neighbourhood, the city or territory, in a manner that evokes the Situationist perambulation.

Indeed, they follow in the footsteps of the situationists, who as far back as 1957 were equally concerned about the politics of public space. What they resisted most was the alienation felt within ocular-centric worlds, a social affliction they attributed to mainstream modernism and its reverence for functionalism and mass production (Sadler 1998: 6). The situationists believed that common man's sense of individual agency had deteriorated ever since architects and planners took up the Corbusian concept of the functional "machine for living in". Rather than liberating the common man, it was interring him as a component of functionalist society (Sadler 1998: 7). Urban space had been organized with such fanatical Cartesian zeal that the individual had become all but subsumed by the rationalist grid.

One could conceivably argue that, since that time, the functionalist society has lapsed into the surveillance society, and common man's agency has evolved into little more than a projection upon a screen. More importantly, the continual regression of man's agency is exemplified in the failure of utopian Modernist developmentalism, and continues to serve as an underpinning concern within the work of *The Peripatetic School* (2011), as well as within my own practice.

The work manifests an obsession with maps and cartographies and, like the situationists, often seeks to question their rationalist purpose. The work is less about

drawing than about a mapping behaviour: entering into a sort of choreography with Cartesian space and apprehending the marks of latent forces already residing there, e.g. parking lot patterns, excavation strategies.

De Certeau talks specifically about New York, characterizing it as a city that has never learned the art of growing old, where yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, are continually inventing themselves from hour to hour (1984: 91). Continual upheaval is inherent to a planned city such as Toronto, and I feel this leads to circumstances where development sites often stand out for their *unremarkability*. As Margaret Rodman (2003: 212) points out, "space is socially constructed". In the city, our social construction of the site sees it as a blank placeholder. In a sense, we construct around it, considering what it used to be or what it will be. This leads sites to be regarded as non-places, undergoing change or zoned for further redevelopment. Memory cannot dwell here. Any residual memories are in the process of being demolished, decontaminated, hauled away, and substituted for visions of the future.

One of the unintended consequences of urban planning and redevelopment, according to the geographer Edward C. Relph (1976: 65), is the sense of permanence denied to the city dweller. Relph complains about the placelessness (1981: 141) of modern landscapes and the inauthentic sense of place, and judges it – rather harshly I think – to be "stereotyped, artificial, dishonest, [and] planned by others" (Hudson 1979: 172). He feels so strongly about the issue of placelessness that "to develop a strong sense of place in the precisely planned" contours of an urban development is, he says, "rather like falling in love with a mannequin in a store window" (1981: 170).

This body of work critiques what happens when "sense of belonging" is no longer a place recollected in memory of past experience, but rather an *image of place* projected onto billboards and wallsapes; it explores the notion that no-one has a legacy to belonging, except to what they can afford in terms of their social demographic.

2.3 Ballardian influence

This body of work is influenced by the inner and outer fictional spaces found within *Ballardian architecture* (a term to describe the concrete structures found in *Concrete Island* (1973) and *High-Rise* (1975) written by JG Ballard) as a way to interpret and draw comparisons to the urban situation in Toronto, a city whose outer space is increasingly mediated by virtualized landscapes and projected developments.

The work itself responds to the anxiety felt around these kinds of hyper-rational systems and structures, by occupying their spaces in a manner for which they are not designed or intended to be occupied. The particular strain of urban semiotics cultivated within my work is very much inspired by the arguments and deliberations put forward by the philosopher John Gray and the architect Nic Clear, who both presented papers at a recent symposium called *Ballardian Architecture: Inner and Outer Space*, hosted by London's Royal Academy of Arts.

I have already referred to Clear's ideas in the introduction. Gray explored the themes of latent and manifest content of spaces and buildings as they appear in Ballard's writing - what they appear or claim to be and how they actually work (Royal Academy of Arts, 2010). Ballard demonstrated an early understanding of the need for continuous growth within capitalism and how it tends to break down if it's not growing. According to Gray, Ballard recognized that the system addresses this with a kind of built-in strategy, a way of stimulating the desire and mobilizing the fantasies of the consumer, urging him to return again and again to make purchases that are increasingly perceived as experiences, particularly as novel experiences.

The Ballardian worldview serves as a point of inquiry, proposing a city whose outer space becomes a site of continuous projection, continually remediated and redeveloped. The Ballardian concept of inner and outer space is most useful in understanding how "infrastructural" striations in the city can superimpose "invisible" striations in the city - such as the flows and forces of capital.

2.4 Everyday practices shape our sense of place, not prescriptive visual language

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984: 93) writes that “the ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below’, below the threshold at which visibility begins.” So mapping out a sense of place is derived – far below the threshold of branded developments and media campaigns – by walking the city and following the thick and thins of its urban ‘text’ (de Certeau 1984: 93). Indeed, everyday practices such as drawing, writing, hiding, finding, and locating things can help map out one’s sense of place. Essentially, de Certeau makes a distinction between the sense of place derived from representations, and that derived by practicing one’s own environment. He goes on to say: “space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (1984: 117).

Similarly, sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (Betsky 2002: 12) makes the distinction between representation and experience of place, and contrasts “representations of space” and “representational spaces”. The former are imposed on us by the dominant culture, while the latter are comprised of spatialized practices that remain personal and hidden.

However, both Lefebvre’s and de Certeau’s rationale does not explain why an inauthentic “sense of place” which is pre-planned, pre-packaged and anticipated – and projected through maps, surveys, floor-plans, on billboards and wall-scapes – is an increasingly effective business model for convincing buyers to become part of a future development, especially when the present sense of place is deemed unimportant, even unhelpful. De Certeau does address this point in relation to the map, and explains that the function of visual projection is to make *invisible* the operation that made it possible. In general, he thinks of maps and visualizations as fixations that “constitute procedures for forgetting” (de Certeau 1984: 97).

One could argue, for instance, that the presentation centre (where homes and condominiums are often sold in advance of building) constitutes a model procedure for *forgetting* by drawing together the site inventory, site plan, aerial photographs, optional floor-plans, and visualizations. Indeed, the developer's extensive array of presentable, readable, and combinable "paperwork" is what Bruno Latour calls "holding the focus steady", whereby the developer is "the one [most] able to muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies", in this case, via plans and projections (1986: 5). Crucially, Latour adds, "paperwork" is what allows us to stop looking at nature and look instead at prints and flat inscriptions. He remarks that what is forgotten is this simple drift from watching confusing 3-dimensional objects to inspecting 2-dimensional images, which have been made less confusing (1986: 15).

These flat inscriptions reiterate what Latour calls the "deflation strategy", a term describing how diagrams, lists, engineering drawings, files, and so on, may be used to explain almost everything or almost nothing (1986: 4). Isolated from the realities on the ground, the drawbacks become apparent, according to Latour, when people can argue with one another using paper, signs, prints, and diagrams (1986: 3). In fact, planning authorities are a prime example of a political institution which is heavily reliant on the "deflation strategy" as a means of instituting a host of by-laws, building-codes, density guidelines, zoning regulations, and planning procedures (Relph 1981: 94).

"Hyperplanning" is the term given to these bureaucratic controls and efficiencies, and they effect not only the way spaces and buildings look, but their dimensions and proportions as well (Relph 1981: 96). "Hyperplanning" has come in for much criticism in relation to how it advocates spatial uniformity by authorizing minimum units and measures. The architect Peter Blake (qtd. in Relph 1981: 95) writes scathingly about the dangers of "making certain that all men are created equal" by specifying "the size and shape of the typical American master bedroom (in which all Americans are thus created

equal)” and by specifying “the size and shape of the typical family room (in which all American tots crawl around equal)”.

This body of work explores how the political economy of space – which is governed and shaped by municipal regulations on the one hand, and developers’ projections of concept cities on the other – can be used as a terrain for challenging the traditional freedoms of space. These freedoms are often thought to reside in the streets, parks, and sidewalks of Toronto. However, Mariana Valverde (2009: 163-181), from the University of Toronto, wrote an article called “Laws of the Street” in which she documented an inventory of all the legal mechanisms that converged on a single streetcorner, the intersection of Bloor and Saint George streets in Toronto. Valverde’s study showed that, far from being a space of freedom, the street may in fact be a space that is overdetermined by municipal regulation to the extent that it has already foreclosed many kinds of encounters such as “social, recreational or community events” (City of Toronto Council website). She goes on to elaborate on the *silent workings* (Valverde 2009: 165) of planning regulations and procedures which any person/group making an application must comply with in order to obtain permission to hold any kind of civil or social engagement (such as a public demonstration or recreational event). Several kinds of permit (road closing permit, parade permit) must be obtained from different municipal departments, in addition to the payment of permit fees and the cost of liability insurance (Valverde 2009: 174).

Plans and projections are by their very nature forward-looking, promising how a place will or should be practiced, *not* how it is practiced: how a parking lot will be parked in, how a gated community will be lived in, how a shopping mall will be shopped in. The practices are generally the only ones warranted and I take a great interest in how movement patterns are corralled through infrastructure, plans, and signage. Indeed, the overly-prescriptive intent of plans and information graphics is what provoked renowned graphic designer Paula Scher to write that “All maps lie” (2011).

2.5 Urban intervention: the essential bolt-on to a designer's integrity

Many designers already tackle the issue of social narrative, engaging with and treating it as a rich resource for developing *designerly ways of responding* to problems with understanding and using space. This includes the problems of placelessness and unsustainable futuristic cityscapes that I discuss in this document. They explore the role that design interventions can play "on the ground" in provoking people to respond to the planned environment around them. Their interventions seek to incorporate themselves into the planned environment, and to draw attention to themselves by their deliberate out-of-the-ordinary placement.

I will address the practices of two artist-designers in particular: Sean Martindale and Michael Rakowitz. Their work demonstrates how urban interventions add critical integrity to design and planning criteria by enabling designers and planners to create a space for conversations to take place, particularly in relation to pro-actively finding out what kind of environment people need. Their work also shows how it is possible to overcome designers' reliance on projected worlds which are afforded by their dependency on ocular-centric media.

Sean Martindale is a prolific interdisciplinary artist and designer – and previous graduate of OCAD University – whose interventions encourage people to reinterpret their urban surroundings (2011). Martindale's interventions, primarily sculptural, engage people in their own environments, showing them that they do not have to accept the status quo and that things can change. At a recent lecture entitled "Playful Interventions: Engaging our urban environments", held at the University of Toronto, Martindale described how his projects create a "space for conversations to take place" (2011).



Fig. 5. © Sean Martindale, *TENT: Life-like Living*, 2010

One relevant example of Martindale's work - a streetscape intervention that turned illegal condo ads into tents (Fig. 5.) - was featured recently in Canada's urban landscape magazine, *Spacing* (Yim 2010). Martindale was concerned about the ethical nature of the higher-end lifestyle depicted in condo advertising campaigns (banners, A-Frame signs, posters) which were often placed on the threshold of lower income areas. He decided to remove the illegal advertising materials and manufacture them into tents. Though not inhabiting the tents himself, the citizen-action component of his interventions succeeded in provoking the question "who shapes your community?" Exploring the insights that can be gained through interventionist art and design is one of the more important elements of Martindale's particular strain of citizen action.

Michael Rakowitz admits to being an artist, but not a designer or architect. Many of his interventions, however, propose prototypes that have social and ethical implications for environmental design and urban planning. *PARAsite* (Fig. 6.) shelters are one of Rakowitz's best known examples of socially-engaged design (Rakowitz: 2), where he consults with a local group who have perhaps the least to gain from a permanent urban structure but the most to gain in terms of its mobility, interior warmth, and urban aspect.

The *PARAsite* prototype started out as black trash bags and contact cement, but through Rakowitz's conversations and exchanges with homeless people - in particular a man named Michael from New York - the prototype developed into an inflatable structure. Initially he was asked by one of the group: "So... you're an architect?" to which he replied: "No! No, I'm an artist." (Rakowitz: 2). It is significant that, according to Rakowitz, the architect was perceived by the group as part of the problem, and someone who actually perpetuates their life on the street.



Fig. 6. © Michael Rakowitz, *George L.'s parasITE shelter*, 1998

3.0 Research Methodology

There are three distinct metaphors at work within my practice and each speaks to a particular perspective or a particular way of thinking about and working through a research issue. The three perspectives are (1) thinking in a *medium*, (2) thinking in a *language*, and (3) thinking in a *context* (Sullivan 2005: 129).

- (1) “Digging” is a metaphor for how I think in a *medium*: opening up the site and extracting information in order to apprehend and comprehend inventories as well as patterns, layers, and boundary marks.
- (2) “Surveying” is a metaphor for how I think in a *language*: my fieldwork approach is partly inspired by the mapped constructions of place by artist Paul Klee, who once prefaced one of his Bauhaus lectures by saying “if I were a surveyor or map-maker....” (qtd. in Aichele 2002: 89). In setting aside the conventions of Renaissance perspective and cartographic abstraction, Klee developed his own hybrid version of a spatial map, as can be seen in *View of the Severely Threatened City of Pinz* 1915 (Aichele 2002: 96). Surveying can also refer to archaeological activity such as digging and drawing – a process called “getting your eye in” – in order to recognize contexts and perceive “a narrative of what went on” (Wickstead 2008: 6).
- (3) Moving beyond the four walls to cultivate an outdoor studio is in a sense like “breaking free” and exemplifies how I am thinking in a *context*. As a metaphor, this speaks to the methodologies that I use.

The site becomes a laboratory for action research. Immersion in the site stimulates a reflective process that deepens my understanding of the gulf between the map and the reality. I use iterative methods as a prompt to reach deeper levels of interpretation. Although this is an area I’m still developing, it allows me to bypass the “visual default” and have a more direct, even primitive, experience at the site.

3.1 Methods

Iterative and itinerant methods:

Peripatetic walking, psycho-geography, and psycho-geology are all rather extravagant terms that describe the same practice: walking. In some shape or form, they all originate from Guy Debord's *Dérive* - an unplanned journey through a landscape, usually urban, where an individual travels where the subtle aesthetic contours of the surrounding architecture and geography subconsciously direct them with the ultimate goal of encountering an entirely new and authentic experience.

My own peripatetic engagement with landscapes, whether rural or urban, is an iterative process and often configured using a range of criteria, for example: (1) making left-hand turns only; (2) following the hand-written instructions on a found map; (3) throwing away and the next day attempting to retrieve fragments of a map in a parking lot. I introduce these sorts of algorithmic criteria and spontaneous gestures, firstly as a means of undermining the rationalist purpose of maps and systems of navigation, and secondly, in deference to Debord's instructions to invent "strategies for exploring cities... just about anything that takes pedestrians off their predictable paths and jolts them into a new awareness of the urban landscape" (Debord 1958).

I recently employed an ethnographic (Wasson 2000: 377) variation of this method during my arts residency (2011) on Fogo Island, Newfoundland, and it proved to be an effective means of creating informal conversation with members of the community. I found these quick chats were a wonderfully multi-layered way of charting the un-mappable aspects of a place and its social connections. I integrated the drawings I took from the physical environment with the conversations I had with local people about how they navigate their place, their community, and their heritage. In some cases I used physical remnants from these conversations (their notes, sketches, hand-drawn maps) within the interpretive process itself.

Archaeological and primitive methods:

In my career as a graphic designer I dealt primarily through the client-led process, as opposed to the discovery-led process which is much more speculative. Indeed, part of the reason I joined an interdisciplinary program was to reclaim a discovery-led process that values speculation, much in the same way Lisa Grocott discusses in *Design Research: Methods and Perspectives* (2003: 83).

I began to look at materials and objects found on-site that could improvise as drawing media or tools. Examples included drawing onto cloth with lichen found on shore alvar (media) and using a nearby sharpened fragment of dolomite to cut the cloth down (tool). I also engaged with a disparate range of crafts and techniques, integrating tactile means of drawing out a site, such as submerging, burying, sweeping, digging. These iterations opened up the haptic component of diagrammatic drawing and became a key tactic in my subversion of the visual.

From there, I became much more invested in the qualities of the site, particularly geologic formations and sites which were undergoing excavation or development. The activities within these sites began to shape my practice and I engaged with aspects of archaeological fieldwork, such as combining the techniques of digging and drawing as a metaphor for excavating histories or generating narratives (Wickstead 2008: 6). I adopted the stance of archaeologist as a way to search for and retrieve a more personal repertoire of diagrammatic and sometimes primitive practices which pulled me in closer to the physical context (Wickstead 2008: 44) as opposed to the remote context that I had experienced as a graphic designer.

Renegotiating site lines: inverting the perceived function of a space

I began to scout out and work with land formations - natural and man-made - such as depressions, burrows, and dirt piles. Invariably, these were sites in the process of

being excavated and regraded as their topographies were adjusted to suit the plan (Hirmer 2012: 18).

Indeed, “The Plan” is a key motif within my practice because of its capacity to call into action and mobilize the forces that reshape the landscape. I began to examine the ways in which plans in general constitute a hierarchy of laws and practices to be followed - not just within the urban environment, but also within smaller spaces such as parking lots, conference spaces, lobbies, etc. - and how these might be subverted.

For example, the plan is what constitutes the utility, and in so doing defines the economic space of a parking lot. Each 8'x15' parking space earns a fixed income over the period of a year. The parking spaces are configured using a painted gridline, which both confirms and denies the range of activities performed by that space. Until such time as the fixed income lags below what could be earned by, for example, a condominium, the gridline continues to impose the organizing principle of a parking lot on that space.

In a Toronto car park that actually was about to be redeveloped for condominiums, I took the floor plan of the smallest condo and laid it down over an equivalent area - five car parking spaces. Throughout the day, I spent time in the “condo”, sitting, reading, imagining. Once I had come to understand how “The Plan” imposes its hierarchy on how the space is used, I realized I was free to renegotiate the site lines that were already there.

Using construction and surveying materials to create contested spaces:

Construction and surveying materials are commonly used to mark out foundations for a building and to fence off and make temporary boundaries within a site. They are also used to embed survey information - such as the grade - on a site. Although such materials may seem superficial, they actually provide important information to those working on the site. To me, they represent a disturbing aesthetic: temporary markers that are precursors to the permanent structures to come.

I am drawn to use these types of materials - flagging tape, chalk lines, stake flags - to stake out temporary contested spaces in areas such as construction sites, car parks, and public streets. These spaces trespass upon existing boundaries, such as road markings, and cause a slight confusion and tension in passers-by, who often express concerns about what they represent.

When I use these materials, I feel I'm inverting the prescribed uses of space: taking advantage of an unwanted piece of furniture, for example, to constitute my own temporary "indoor space" on a public street.

Art-practice-as-research:

The most difficult but rewarding learning experience of my interdisciplinary practice has been, firstly, the redefinition of the studio method and, secondly, recognizing the discrepancies between design-based and art-based reflexive methodologies.

The studio is defined as "a unique place for problem finding and problem solving, media exploration, and giving form to ideas of personal and social relevance" (Sullivan 2005: 81). Not unusual for a design studio one would think, except for the fact that my studio repertoire now comprises nomadic practices and, in its newfound homelessness, examines and temporarily responds to the hard-lined economics which govern different kinds of space (public vs. private, commercial vs. civic, car vs. pedestrian). Essentially, this could be described as a post-studio, acting "as a site of inquiry that is not bounded by walls" (Sullivan 2005: 81), and one that goes beyond what conceptual artist Daniel Buren calls: "all the frames, envelopes, and limits... which enclose and constitute the work of art" (1979: 51, Hoffmann 2007). What is not readily apparent within my practice, however, is the unexplored potential of the post-studio "as a place of inquiry and as a site for sustained research that has the potential to yield significant knowledge" (Sullivan 2005: 80). For example, what does the post-studio mean

for designer-artists like me, whose creative production is based on ideas and process, and for whom the notion of the permanency of the artwork is often redundant?

Self-reflection can yield critical insights, for example, the degree to which my design-based solutions often have a negative impact on the original intent of my drawing and mapping activity. I found that drawing methods and design methods were continuously coming into conflict with one another and it soon became apparent that some of my design iterations were cutting short the performativity of line, even negating it, and thereby flattening out the information to resemble a more complete dataset. I began to recognize how my design frameworks were imposing reductions, and sometimes impossible transformations, to the extent that the original information became obscured and convoluted.

4.0 Practice Research

4.1 Case Study 1

PROJECT TITLE: 720 SQ. FT. OF PARKING LOT



Fig. 7. Surface parking lot situated near Richmond and Duncan Streets, 2011.

Background to the case study:

This case study examines an intervention carried out in a Richmond Street parking lot (Fig. 7.), prior to its conversion into a condominium development at Richmond and Duncan Streets, Toronto (Appendix B). I was already documenting the algorithmic patterns within the parking lot when I found out from the parking attendant that the lot was due to close for the construction phase. I decided to take advantage of the remaining days that the lot would be open to try to imagine what it would be like to live there rather than to park there.

The parking grid was already organized in such a modular way that it made it fairly easy to configure and aggregate the spaces to the size and scale of a condominium. I planned to simply buy whatever number of spaces I could afford that day – \$130 – but in this case it would be like paying an incremental mortgage fee on a condo. I measured out the area of the parking spots to see whether it approximated an average-sized condo. Then I set about drawing out the floor-plan which came closest in size and layout to the 5 car spaces I bought for the day. Using “blaze orange” duck tape and traffic cones, I stepped out the floor-plan of suite 1D-Z (1-bedroom condo, located on floors 3-6, as shown in a brochure provided by the developer, Aspen Ridge) onto the asphalt.

I wanted to buy the car spaces for the day in order to produce an artwork which conveyed the approximate amount of space allotted to one condominium. Using a car parking space as a standard measure of a floor-plan allows a comparison to be made between the amount of taxes received from a year’s parking charges and property taxes from a condominium. This human-scale intervention plays with commercial conventions common to both the car parking space and the condominium. The transaction itself is intended to amount to a bad imitation of the condo-buying experience where, in effect, the individual agrees to rent the particular amount of asphalt for the term of a mortgage. Although unfurnished and owned for 1 day only, the artwork is a mock-demonstration of an Aspen Ridge condo and an attempt to destabilize their promise to maximize the “usable space for today’s living routines”.

The site where the work is found and the way in which that particular site contributes to meaning:

This particular site is one of the few remaining surface parking lots within the City of Toronto. Surface parking lots are becoming increasingly rare and – according to the soon-to-be unemployed parking attendant who I talked to – are being subsumed by more powerful commercial interests, which are fully supported by the federal and provincial drive for increased revenue from property taxes. For all intents and purposes,

parking lots such as this one serve as rather pathetic placeholders until a higher utility-value can be found.

I spent quite a lot of time roaming about Toronto's less remarkable locales, freely and cheekily instantiating floor-plans of a home (e.g. on a rooftop parking lot, on a public sidewalk, up against a storefront) and playing with context and scale. Although condominiums are built from solid and highly impregnable materials, my citizen actions attest to the notion that urban landscape is a highly unstable and dynamic commodity. The most memorable part of the exercise - for me - is the moment when I gather up all the tape and dispose of it in the nearest trash can. The transitory quality of the intervention mirrors a similar "transitoriness" that I see in the urban landscape.

The audience that the work speaks to and the language of the address:

The work speaks through the intervention of citizen action and addresses the issue of how economic spaces, together with movement patterns, are constituted through the plan. The audience is engaged through their own understanding and familiarity with private space vs. public space, or how an interior space compares to a parking space.

The relationship established between the viewer and the work:

In the video sketch, the viewer is confronted with a rather compromised stand-off between cars and condos. The intervention itself proposes a rather uncomfortable intimacy between the two. A parked car is not something one would normally integrate into a living-room, and yet the parking space becomes a most unlikely unit of measure for comparing the growth in new homes (and property taxes) to the disappearance of surface parking. The unlikely relationship between car and condo becomes more acute when one considers that higher parking fees are being attributed to the disappearance of surface parking lots. According to a CBC news report (July 19, 2010), concerned councillors such as Adam Vaughan are finding it difficult to convince condominium developers to replace surface parking spots with underground spots.

The intervention itself starts out as a confusion in terms between myself and the parking attendant: I want to pay for the spaces and leave them empty for the day, but the parking attendant says they need to have cars in them; that the spaces cannot be left empty. He later amends this rule on condition that he can choose which spaces I take, which is fine with me, as long as they are all together.

The blazing orange floor-plan matches that used in signs which warn of temporary conditions such as road work, zones, and detours. The orange traffic cones simply amplify the urban semiotics already used within the parking lot. Such traffic cones are often used in the parking lot to indicate spaces that are already reserved, or to warn drivers to use caution in a particular area.

The floor-plan intervention is scaled and positioned in terms of its relationship to the parking spaces. As the morning progresses, the spaces start to fill up until the vehicles seem to surround my area (five empty spaces). Adjacent vehicles form a perimeter on the north, east, and west sides of the imaginary condo, while the imaginary balcony takes advantage of the south side. The video describes in pragmatic terms the relationship between a condo layout and five car parking spaces. But the drawings themselves convey a very anti-professional attitude towards the floor-plan - as if to enforce a distinction between what the plan appears to be (i.e. customized to that specific site) and what the plan can do: it can be projected anywhere, onto anything.

Moreover, the viewer is put into the position of “Doubting Thomas”. The intervention consists of stepping-out an actual scale floor-plan at the very site where the condo will be built, but the distraction of the surrounding vehicles and the amateurish lines make it difficult not to doubt the authenticity of this plan. This intervention stands in sharp contrast to the inherent flawlessness of the developer’s floor plan and, for that matter, all other visual support material, such as elevations, projections, and panoramic views. Projecting a makeshift floor-plan onto the dirty asphalt breaks all the rules of the

Albertian Window, bringing our focus back to the here and now rather than through to a projected world.

The intention of the artist with respect to the work's effect or impact:

As an artwork, the intervention opens up a ground-level experiment for thinking about the affordances of urban space. My work is less a statement about formal planning than it is about the mechanisms and technologies enlisted by “The Plan” to constitute and choreograph space. Firstly, situating a typical floor-plan within the context of parked cars may look irrational, but it captures the unsettling sense of anxiety I feel towards the hyper-rationalization fostered within the design and planning process. Secondly, by flopping a temporary floor-plan down on the asphalt, I am contesting any presumption about the concreteness of the urban landscape.

4.1.1 Case Study 1 Findings

Embedding an interior floor-plan onto the painted gridlines of the soon-to-be converted parking lot was insufficient by itself for drawing attention to the totalizing perspectives built into design technologies. I felt that I had to start talking about the underlying rationale for these totalizing perspectives. I found the best way of letting the audience “into my head” was to record my voice as I talked and walked around the city. The audio reportage turned out to be an effective tool for conveying my sense of how the economic and political criteria impact the scale and measure of personal space.

The intervention was originally brought about by my desire to insert a spontaneous gesture as a jolt away from the predictable patterns which constituted the parking lot. The spontaneous gesture took the form of a raw comparison between two kinds of personal space: the car and the condo. The comparison seemed to re-invoke the Corbusian concept of the functional “machine for living in”, not just in terms of an analytical comparison, but in terms of physically enacting the floor-plan to a predefined scale and measure.

“I can think of more interesting places to photograph in Toronto” said a cyclist who saw me taking photos of a parking spot. An astute observation, but is it necessarily accurate? The parking spot is both unremarkable and vacant in its expression. It is the urban equivalent to the cupboard under the stairs. Yet in a recent article, urban designer and landscape architect Eran Ben-Joseph (2012) commented on the parking lot’s overlooked social dimension, suggesting it is a hub where people interact, a place where cars and pedestrians coexist, and a public space that’s ripe for transformation.

I find it all the more ironic when a developer converts a parking lot and its significance suddenly switches to that of a landmark. “The Plan” mobilizes all histories and all visual futures to give provenance to the new landmark and make it the most attractive and photogenic place in the city. The humble parking spot is a deceptively lucrative commodity: both unremarkable and transformational in its potential.

4.2 Case Study 2

PROJECT TITLE: OPEN HOUSE INTERVENTIONS



Fig. 8. Concrete island situated near Dundas Street and Coxwell Avenue, 2012.

Background to the case study:

I am currently documenting for a sketch which I call “Open House” (Appendix A). The sketch started out as a series of A-Frame signs I stationed on a concrete island, located at the intersection of Dundas Street and Coxwell Avenue, Toronto (Fig. 8.). Unlike the four corners of the intersection, the island itself could never become a destination. It is what Michel de Certeau (1984: 97) would call a “no-when”, featureless and cut off from everything and everybody. Aside from the usual open house signs that congregated there every weekend, it was a fairly unremarkable spot.

The A-Frame signs marked out directions to furnishings that once had a home, but that were now sitting by the side of a curb, e.g. a used chair, a used mattress etc. This sketch was later dropped in favour of just considering whether the outdoor context could

be inspected from an indoor context; “in the open” so to speak. Subsequent sketches inverted the entire open house concept by attempting to commodify outdoor situations where indoor objects lingered, and thereby blurring the distinction between private and public space. This particular case study looks at one intervention involving a discarded mattress.

The site where the work is found and the way in which that particular site contributes to meaning:

I regularly come across various pieces of furniture on my travels throughout the city. The sidewalk where the furniture is left waiting also plays a determining factor in what sites get documented. Whether it is a busy street corner or a main arterial route, the sidewalk serves as a site where I draw out the hypothetical outline of a room around the furniture. For example, I position the floor-plan of a bedroom according to where a mattress is left waiting at the intersection of Dundas Street and Ontario Street. Nothing about the site is changed or re-positioned. In some cases the floor-plan drifts out onto the street, so traffic ends up driving into the space.

“Open House” involves on-street interventions which allow me to construct hypothetical places around otherwise innocuous pieces of home furnishings. The floor-plan is instrumental because it allows me to fictitiously insert the furniture back into a once-familiar interior. Although this piece of post-consumer waste sits by the curb, it is temporarily projected back into the original space-time. The abandoned mattress covered in this case study is just one example in a series of “rooms” that I am currently documenting as part of “Open House”.

The audience that the work speaks to and the language of the address:

There are two types of audience associated with this work: passers-by who come across the on-street intervention and give a response, and viewers who see the follow-up documentation. Quite a few people (shop owners, carpenter, a passer-by) were interested

in knowing what was going-on and what had just happened that the bed was being cordoned off. Some thought that a crime may have been committed and that I was perhaps checking the scene. One man even stood guard while I worked. He was quite concerned about another man who was nearby and acting a little strangely, and I think he wanted to let him know he was keeping an eye on him. In the end, the work became as much about their reception and reaction to the lines as it was about my enacting them on the street.

As soon as an item of post-consumer waste (e.g. someone's mattress) is cordoned off with a colour-coded line, it is perceived as something to do with regulatory issues. This perception is drawn from passers-by as well as people working and living nearby. The carpenter working in the nearby house is curious about the irregular positioning of the yellow line, particularly because it cordons off a chunk of sidewalk where he has just left a mattress and a bookshelf. The two corner shop owners ask me whether something has happened on the street, thinking that the municipal authorities are gathering some kind of evidence. The carpenter let me take a photograph from the 2nd floor of the house he and his mates were working on. He told me that the house, together with the one next door, had been totally renovated and would be finished as luxury residential homes.

The relationship established between the viewer and the work:

Traditionally, the sidewalk has always been perceived as a space of freedom, and these interventions set out to engage with that perception. I am informed here by Mariana Valverde's (2009: 163) study of the intersection at Bloor and St. George Streets in Toronto which shows the sidewalk to be a space that is overdetermined by municipal regulations - what she describes as a complicated assemblage of asphalt, painted lines, traffic lights, permissions, permits, and prohibited activities. My interventions deploy the visual language found in planning and official road marking to set down and establish temporary zones and conditions. The passer-by is accidentally brought into the work in

terms of his/her right to public access when using the city's streets and sidewalks.

Harmless as the artist's intent may be – to enclose a worthless piece of furniture within a floor-plan – the colour-coded outline is still perceived as some sort of official business.

The social context based on what else is going on about the theme of the work, in the media, in the city:

“Dundas-Sherbourne poised for a surprising rebirth” (Doolittle 2011). That's the latest headline from the Toronto Star that disputes all the negative press given to this particular intersection, including the fact that it ranked “first in virtually every category of violent crime, based on sheer volume and crime per square kilometre” (Doolittle 2009).

Property values are at an all-time low in this particular area so developers are taking advantage of the potential investment opportunity (as well as the City of Toronto's Section 37 which permits extra height and density ratios) and staking out luxury condominiums. The Toronto Star argues that the advantages of living downtown, close to everything, and not having to make the early morning rush hour, is worth more to the upwardly-mobile professional than putting up with a few pan-handlers. The scale and speed of the transition is so remarkable that Roger Keil, director of The City Institute at York University, is concerned about the heightened pressure this kind of investment means for an already vulnerable community (Doolittle 2011).

Even advocates of the 'Non-Plan' who endorsed the teachings of the renowned economist John Kenneth Galbraith said that the economies of all advanced countries must be planned. But they also complained that the most rigorously planned cities were nearly always the least democratic (Barker et al. qtd. in Hughes and Sadler 2000: 14). Paul Barker et al. argued that the word 'planning' itself was misused (qtd. in Hughes and Sadler 2000: 20) and drew a comparison between those who benefited and those who were squeezed out as a direct impact of planning. For example, the Haussmann Plan, which set out to rebuild Paris, benefited the tourist, but led to the demolition of many homes to make way for the boulevards and squares (Barker et al. qtd. in Hughes and

Sadler 2000: 14). To prove how little the “misuse” of planning had changed, they also discussed the implications of urban renewal programmes in terms of the developers who benefited and the families who were uprooted and displaced.

The intention of the artist with respect to the work’s effect or impact:

Tim Ingold (2007: 87) argues that the plan pre-exists its enactment ‘on the ground’; however my interventions invert this convention and ask what happens when the plan leaves the page and goes out into the environment by itself. My body of work attempts to dismantle the totalizing perspectives assigned to urban infrastructure by planners and cartographers, by enacting mapping activity on the site: stepping out the dimensions of a conceptual room; walking around this room; staking out its corners; orienting the room around the positions of “found” furniture.

My obsession with tailoring and charting the latencies within space matches that of municipal authorities and developers who are equally obsessive about futurity, planning-out, and projecting space. The work is a statement about anti-planning (‘Non-Plan’), and deliberately borrows fragments of public space in order to improvise an alternative space. These interventions do not negotiate with place as if it were an inanimate setting, ready to be adjusted according to an AutoCAD plan displayed on a designer’s screen. Rather, they activate chance encounters that are found on the sidewalks and then assemble them into an “Open House” collection of Toronto’s neighbourhoods.

Specific intentions of the project:

The work sets out to provoke the argument that a “sense of place” is one which is socially enacted, rather than acquired on the basis of a visit to a luxurious presentation centre, followed by a purchase agreement. As discussed, visualization technologies have advanced to the extent that they can now import, overlap, tween, juxtapose, montage – essentially stage – a sense of space, using images that respond to a particular person’s needs, values, and demographic profile. The work is critical of the way in which such

technologies are used to project an inauthentic “sense of place” – sometimes packaged under the heading of “sense of community” – in order to distract the consumer and benefit the developer. This distraction can be especially effective where the projected plan involves the redevelopment of neighbourhoods plagued by violent crime, drugs, or other social ills. The development site – the real place – becomes, in effect, a rather pathetic “placeholder”, a setting for an imagined place that will eventually, at some point far ahead into the future, come into being.

The work also takes a contrary position to the traditional freedoms attributed to public space by inviting us to critique the ever-expanding array of visual cues that control how spaces should be performed. These visual cues are bound up with branding, infrastructure, and regulatory signs which are all designed around different user scenarios, often generated very early on in the planning stages of urban development and municipal planning projects. My intention is to stake out makeshift floor-plans on public property in order to cultivate a playfulness around unwanted furniture. The rationale for suddenly swooping in on a piece of furniture and tailoring a personal space around it is to draw our attention to the monopolizing tactics innate to “The Plan”. Based on findings from my previous case study, I believe that very little of the scale and proportion granted to the typical floor-plan is determined by personal need and ambition. There are much more influential criteria, such as height-to-density ratios, development incentives, and re-zoning initiatives which can ultimately impact the floor-plan. My floor-plan intervention sets out to blur the borders between public and private space, and asks how much about the scale and measurement of personal space is really about the dynamic between economic criteria and political incentives.

In some cases the site lines and imaginary interiors deliberately cross the boundaries between street and sidewalk, juxtapose themselves at odd angles upon the public property, and trespass official road markings. The positioning of the site lines is such that pedestrians are forced to step over or around them, while traffic must move

through them. The interaction invites both the drivers and the walkers to ask questions about the way their space is planned.

4.2.1 Case Study 2 Findings

The interventions unexpectedly sparked off odd conversations and puzzled reactions, sometimes as a direct result of the confusion caused between the official boundaries and self-made boundaries. I feel these ad-hoc floor-plans were open to public scrutiny in the way that they were enacted within the social realm, and this contrasts sharply to how conventional plans go through official channels and are seldom ever checked afterwards against what they were meant to do (Barker et al. qtd. in Hughes and Sadler 2000: 13). All together, the different narratives generated an impression of place which one would not get from looking at a plan or schematic. It raises the question about what social narratives can do to improve – the ethnographic component of – human-centred environmental design approaches, to express a more authentic sense of place that master plans and data-driven models do not.

Beyond the intervention itself, I noted that the verbal narrative - the experience of spontaneous conversations with people who were curious or inquisitive about what I was doing - did not attach easily to the visual documentation I took away from the project. It was only later, as I examined the photographs and reflected on the experience, that I realized the importance of this unanticipated element: *that it was the other half of the picture.*

This led me to consider how the “master plan” always proposes its own self-contained grand narrative, and suggested some important distinctions between social narratives and user scenarios. As we have seen, social narratives are derived from the people currently living, working, and playing in a community. Such narratives represent the social currency that designers and developers would ideally like to tap into when they attempt to communicate a sense of community to a prospective buyer. The user scenario

is the mechanism they often employ to do this. A user scenario is a description of a person's interaction with a building derived from data gathered about customer profiles, often visualized as an avatar appearing within a projected world. Its primary characteristic is that it is representative of the target audience for which a new development is built.

Unlike social narratives, which rely on in-depth ethnographic research, user scenarios rely on what architect Nic Clear (Royal Academy of Arts, 2010) refers to as “statistical and data-driven models” in order to harness the “shape-making potential of new computer-based design tools”. For example, Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, responsible for community planning and development, uses a 3D visualization portal to convey how the planning system takes shape “on the ground” in response to different user scenarios. In the “welcome” screen, the Ministry notes that the scenarios “are hypothetical and do not represent any specific community” (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing).

My conclusion is that the user scenario, as a tool, stands in the way of the designer, architect, or planner engaging with information “on the ground”. While designers continue to rely on the commercial, numbers-based perspective of a customer profile, they are precluded from accessing the genuine social narrative. Specifically, these findings reiterate the earlier arguments put forward by Tim Plowman as to why social narratives are considered to be outside the scope of the “armchair anthropologists”, that is, the planners and designers who continue to rely on second-hand accounts of the lives of intended audiences (2003: 32).

5.0 Closing Discussion

I have shown how my practice is essentially driven by and responsive to two issues: the way the Plan or projection is used as a stand-in for place, and the tendency to identify with a plan and lose a sense of connection with place - with its physicality, its historic context, its role within the social fabric. As a designer I have, in the past, been complicit in creating the kind of clean, seamless visions that are fine-tuned to appeal to a target demographic. However, my work as an artist takes a deliberately contrary position that seeks to challenge and invert this approach. I deliberately move away from the “projected” world and immerse myself in the “real”. I find myself disenchanted by the artificiality and disconnectedness of the designed vision. At the same time, I’m drawn by the sense that there is a vital knowledge to be found in the fieldworker’s hands-on engagement with the site. My projects and interventions bring otherwise-invisible boundaries into sharp relief so that they can be questioned, along with the socio-economic rules that define them.

In taking this approach, I am aware of a tension, a dissonance, between my previous work as a designer and my current direction as an artist. I find that it is often at the point where these two “forces” seem at odds with one another that I gain my insights: the ocular versus the haptic; the safety and order of the design studio versus the “uncertain ground” and the as-yet-unexplored potential of the post-studio; the Plan versus the unplanned. The fact that my work concerns itself so explicitly with raising my own sensory awareness suggests that I am in the early stages of a journey. It is as if I am preparing myself for some next steps where such awareness will play a crucial role. Whatever they may be, these next steps will not be the clearly-marked stages of a designerly plan, so much as the results of following personal obsessions - with mapping, space, cartographies - and seeing where they lead. More importantly, my artistic explorations give substance to a critique of environmental design approaches. For instance, I consider what it means to go outside and treat a unit of physical space as if it

were a printed page: re-editing the urban environment with new site lines, photographing it, reassembling it, and thereby returning it to the graphic space of a plan.

It is perhaps ironic that my improvisation with the site line contributes significantly to a body of work that tries to invert the way the Plan reconfigures space. My work suggests that, in fact, the designer's extensive array of presentable, readable, and combinable media, in service to the Plan, is so successful at "holding the focus steady" (Latour 1986: 5) on the projected world that it totally masks the underlying rules that enable and perpetuate it. The Plan manages to conceal the values and measures that it institutes so as to extract maximum profit from a unit of space. The gains from reconfiguring space in accordance with the Plan are dispersed among a range of political and commercial institutions in a way that is neither obvious, nor intended to be obvious. For instance, the price point of a parking spot is an important economic indicator for the construction and development industry. Within this body of work, the underperforming parking spot stands out as a key visual motif to the construction chaos that grips Toronto's urban transformation.

The body of work engages with the theme of spatial hyper-rationalization, and speaks to the inescapability of Cartesian time-space. Most importantly, my interventions try to engender a sense of freedom and agency within hyper-rationalized environments and suggest a fluidity between interior/exterior space and private/public space.

My practice inevitably raises questions in relation to environmental design and urban planning, each of which represents a potential direction for future exploration and research. For instance, is there a hidden cost when the Plan ignores the narratives that give social meaning to a place? In particular, what are the long-term social implications when designers cherry-pick only those narratives that project a sense of place, albeit appealing but contrived? What design opportunities are lost when plans move through official channels with minimal public scrutiny? What is the tipping point between the Plan as a vehicle to meet society's needs and the Plan as a mechanism to realize

development incentives and zoning initiatives? How does the Plan mobilize public perception so as to transform rundown wastelands into lucrative commodities ripe for development? Finally, is it possible to imagine the Plan fulfilling a different role: helping us to build the kind of city where we would want to live?

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Appendix A: Thesis Show Documentation



Fig. 9. *Open House Interventions*, 2012.



Fig. 10. *Open House Interventions*, 2012.

Open House Interventions
24"(h) x 36"(w) x 2 Chromira Matte
prints mounted on 3mm Dibond and
face-mounted on 1/8" Clear Acrylic.



Fig. 11. *810 sq.ft.* and *574 sq.ft.*, 2012.



810 sq.ft. and 574 sq.ft.
24"(h) x 24"(w) x 2 Chromira Matte
prints mounted on 3mm Dibond,
Milled, Routed and Folded.

Fig. 12. *810 sq.ft.* and *574 sq.ft.*, 2012.

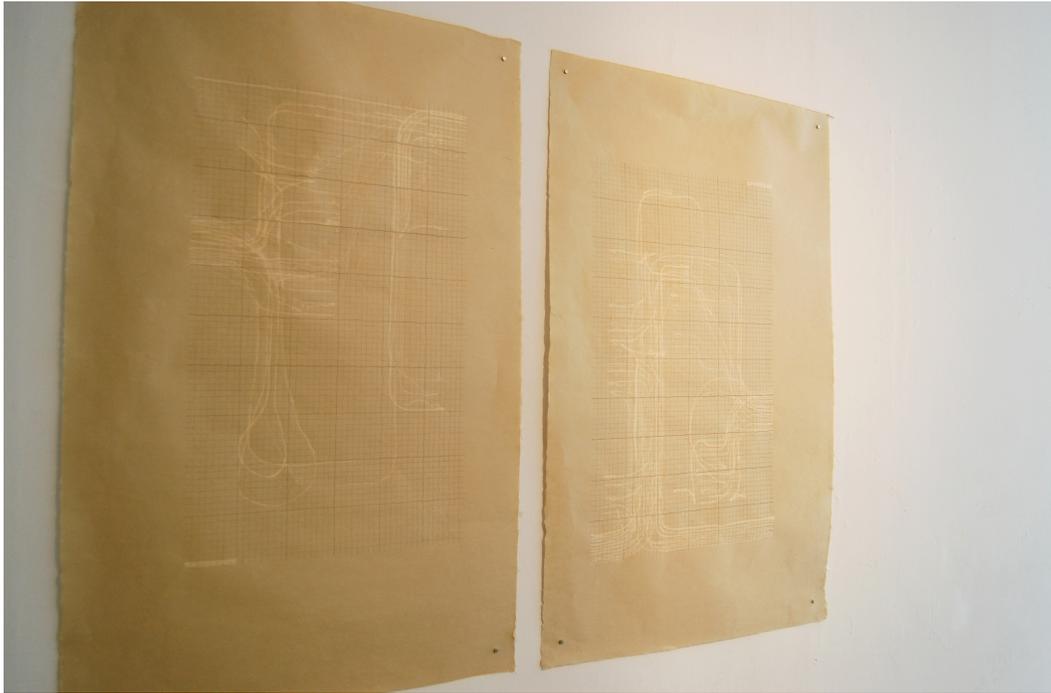


Fig. 13. *Parking Patterns at Richmond St. W. Parking Lot, 6am-8am February 5th, 2012.*



2 Hours of Parking Patterns at Richmond Street West Parking Lot, February 5th 2012, 6am-8am
38"(h) x 25"(w) x 2 Graphite and bleach on handmade Japanese paper (Moriki Kozo).



Fig. 14. *Brick Map*, 2012.



Fig. 15. *Brick Map* photographed through gallery window, 2012.

Brick Map

21"(h) x 36"(w) x 32 assorted bricks excavated and retrieved from Toronto's development sites following demolition of previous structures. See sites at:

www.panoramio.com/group/82724

Appendix B: Thesis Show Documentation Quicktime

The following accompanying material is available upon request from the Ontario College of Art & Design Library: Quicktime video file of the “Sitelines” interventions carried out at the following parking lots. The file name of this video file is “composite.mov.”

- 640 x 480 pixels 1’57”. Quicktime movie. 720 sq.ft. Richmond St. W. & Duncan St.
- 640 x 480 pixels 2’31”. Quicktime movie. 625 sq.ft. Richmond St. E. & Victoria St.
- 640 x 480 pixels 2’33”. Quicktime movie. 625 sq.ft. Gerrard Square Shopping Centre

Anyone requesting the material may view it in the OCAD Library or pay to have it copied for personal use.