SYDNEY —
WE
NEED
TO TALK!

SYDNEY — WE NEED TO TALK!

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The people who have written Sydney - We Need To Talk! have been meeting together every week in the Madsen Building at the University of Sydney to talk about our ongoing research. We're geographers, planners, political scientists and sociologists. We're academic staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students. And as the first birthday of our collective approached, this booklet seemed like a good idea, both as a way of sharing some of the ideas we've been discussing beyond the four walls of the seminar room, and to extend our collective practice from talking together to writing together, to see what new ideas this might generate.

Our little urban crew is a Sydney thing. And right now, we all feel, "Sydney - We Need to Talk!" So what does that mean and why does it matter?

Sydney is hectic...

First, we're talking about Sydney. The little space where we meet every week - the Madsen building at the University of Sydney - is on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, land that was never ceded and that always will be Aboriginal. The colonial process of dispossession and displacement that has been ongoing here for over two centuries is now being intensified through the marketisation and de-politicisation of urban governance.

Sydney's pretty hectic right now. The building in which we meet is surrounded by construction work on two sides, as the university capitalises on its valuable inner city property. And in every direction, our immediate neighbours are also experiencing dramatic change. In Redfern-Waterloo to our South and East, in Glebe and Millers Point to our North, in Newtown and St. Peters to our South and West, thousands of residents are being displaced in large-scale public housing sell-offs, freeway construction, and less dramatic but no less significant processes of gentrification. Beyond our immediate locality, house prices are rising, public buildings and infrastructures are being privatised at an alarming rate, an apartment construction boom continues apace, and agricultural land on the fringe is being swallowed up by new master-planned estates. Planning decisions are being taken out of the hands of elected officials and put in the hands of new authorities designed to entrench the influence of 'experts' and private developers.

These urbanisation processes are not simply matters of detached intellectual curiosity for us. We live here too. Our practice of getting together every week is shaped by the city in which we live. Our meetings have to fit in with the casual work that is a requirement for students trying to live and study in Sydney, with commuting patterns and caring arrangements that have emerged to make life possible while working and paying the rent or the mortgage. We even lost one crewer to the more affordable city further south. He reports of beach walks with his dog.

We know it's an easy cliche, but these urbanisation processes are of course contested. Several of us are engaged in efforts to understand and reshape the ongoing production of our city. Citizens are working together, more and less successfully, trying to build power and enact our right to the city. This work of imagining and organising a more just and sustainable Sydney is much more difficult than the work of critique. It takes a lot of effort, and it takes many different forms - from informal appropriations of space to more institutionalised efforts to contest specific developments and suggest new directions. We're not dispassionate observers of these efforts.

Reclaiming collective thinking: From urban lab to urban crew

Second, we're talking *from* Sydney. As you'll see, different folks in our crew are also doing work in Jakarta, Barcelona, Baltimore, Hong Kong, Moscow, London, Los Angeles, and beyond. But Sydney insinuates itself into this work, not only in the ways described above, but also as its institutional home.

Our intellectual homebase is a University, with all of its constraints and opportunities. Urban laboratories have popped up in Universities around the world. Intellectual spaces - physical, online, institutional - that appropriate the language and practices of the natural sciences. The idea of an urban lab claims resources for those who study the city: a literal office with computers, perhaps a library or special software; financial resources for research and scholarship; and intellectual and institutional space to concentrate urban thinkers and thinking. This concentration of space, resources, and ideas decodes urban thinking to the world of scientific practice, perhaps creating legitimacy for the social study of cities, and certainly creating legibility for University administrators. If we have a lab, we might also publish in *Nature or Science*, get multi-million dollar research grants, link with industry partners, and do positivist research so valued and valuable in our modern institutions. Also, and importantly, an urban laboratory positions cities as sites of experiment, open to researchers, their proposals and interventions. Although some have proposed that experimenting with new modes of governing is essential for inviting more socially and ecologically just relations in urban environments, experimentation has always been a colonial practice that has exploited marginalised populations for imperial science.

This is not the kind of urban thinking that our urban crew seeks to practice. Instead, once a week, we want to reclaim intellectual and physical space for collective listening, thinking, and talking. Each week, we prioritise hearing, engaging with, and responding to diverse scholarship about this city or from this city. And we relish this space, intellectually and politically, amidst workload models and demands that do not always reward thinking deeply and collectively. The urban crew also offers opportunities to decenter hierarchies of knowledge production - where undergraduate, postgraduate, junior and senior scholars are generators of ideas, refiners of thinking, and advisors of where (and how) next. In case you forget, this collective always reminds: for whom do you research and what will you do with the privileges afforded to you as a scholar?

We each have slightly different ideas about the essays that follow. For some, the essential component is transforming academic production into accessible writings that are responsible to their constituents. For others, an opportunity to make connections across sites, or across themes within sites. For others still, a reflection on a year spent caring about cities and Sydney, even when Sydney seems not to care about us - collective therapy for despondent urbanists. But, the point is for the point to remain open.

Consistent across the essays is Sydney. Each essay is written here, and draws from research and experiences in the city. But, each essay also goes somewhere else: Sydney meets - 'Sydney X' - another city. The motivation for bringing the melodies and rhythms of different spaces together is to stimulate ideas and writing, the idea being that we'll learn new things and ways of producing by writing relationally. We're operationalising the challenge to situate our knowledge and knowledge practices. It's not so much about comparison, as it is about dialogue and collective creativity. A bit like a good blend of two tracks on a mixtape, we hope this brings out elements of our individual work that weren't obvious to us or anyone else before.

DREAM
OF LIVING
DIFFERENT
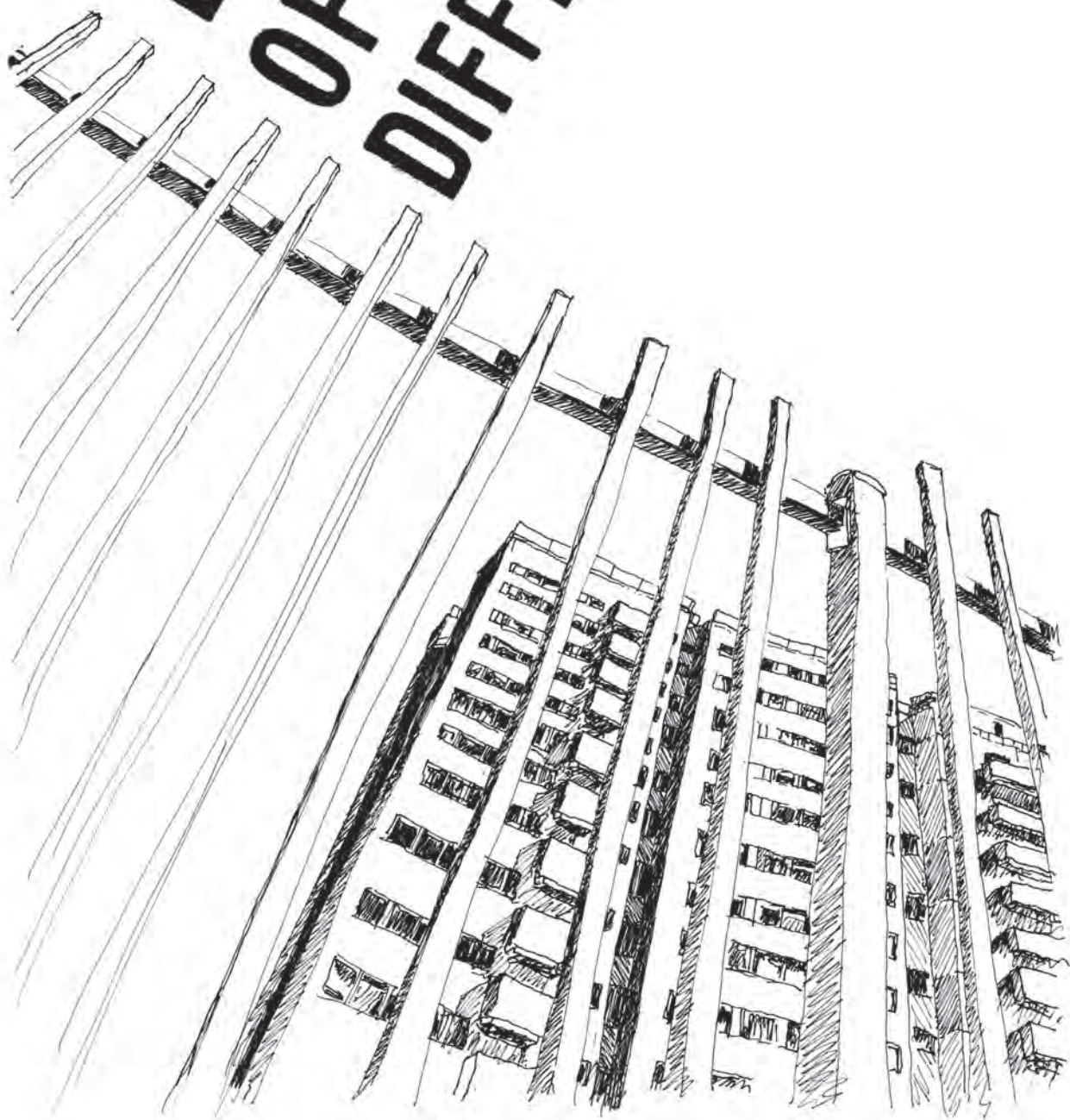
DISPOSESSIONS

Sydney
X
Jakarta

Cranes and scaffolding on the skylines of Sydney and Jakarta hint at the rapacious development underway in both of these cities. But these material signifiers belie the human injustices perpetrated at the ground level: displacement, dispossession and domicide in the spectacular demolition of entire neighbourhoods as well as in quieter everyday evictions and exclusions.

In Sydney, the crisis of affordable housing is acknowledged across the ideological spectrum, and yet the homes of thousands of public housing residents are to be demolished so their neighbourhoods can accommodate middle class homeowners and property investors. In Sydney, developer's profits are protected whilst tenant's rights are severely restricted. In Sydney, squatters who make for themselves an affordable home in rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods are violently evicted by riot police. And in Sydney, hundreds of homes are compulsorily acquired at below market rate for the sake of a largely redundant – and privatised – motorway.

5500 kilometres away in Jakarta, informal urban 'villages' or kampung – some centuries old – are being eradicated from the city. In Jakarta, a city completely devoid of investment in affordable housing, the homes of the 'urban majority' are acquired for below-market rates or they are simply evicted. In their place, exclusive zones of consumption and luxury emerge. Elsewhere in Jakarta, kampung dwellers bear the brunt of intensifying sea level rise, land subsidence, and environmental degradation caused by unchecked urbanisation and development. With bitter irony, communities are demolished for the sake of internationally-funded (and speculated on) climate and flood mitigation projects and green spaces. And in Jakarta, the pursuit of sustainability, 'global city'-ness and 'best practice' housing policy means breaking down the deeply-rooted support networks and communal living practices of kampung.

Of course, gentrification and dispossession are not new to Sydney and Jakarta; both have long and rich histories of these injustices. Neither are they unique. Our experiences of working closely with the residents of communities in these two cities leads us to write here of domicide -- the destruction of home that occurs globally but in variegated and vernacular ways. Some people are displaced while others may be relocated or rehoused, perhaps even in the same or a neighbouring area. Yet the homes they have made for themselves cannot be replaced.

Jakarta

Jakarta is often dubbed the 'project city', and the leapfrog development of exclusive zones of the wealthy and powerful has become increasingly familiar. Recently this fragmentation of urban space has come in the form of infrastructure mega-projects, luxury residential developments, and interventions mitigating flooding and climate change. These projects open up new opportunities for capital accumulation and for political and economic elites seeking to establish Jakarta as a 'global city' whilst neglecting the city's poor and working class who are largely left to fend for (and defend) themselves. This, of course, has its roots in colonial practices that established unequal access to infrastructure and services divided on race and class lines, practices which have been recreated and reinforced in various iterations throughout Indonesia's history.

In the in-between, left-over and left-behind sites – along riverbanks and railroads, under bridges and tollways – the vernacular settlements that house Jakarta's 'urban majority' get built. These settlements vary in security of tenure, building quality and socio-economic status, but much like the rural kampung (villages) their name invokes, they are places where kinship and ethnic groups are brought together, where gotong royong (mutual aid) is facilitated, where arisans (non-bank savings groups) and food sharing is established,

and where medical and funeral costs can be collectively fundraised. Some may argue this is largely a means to an end -- a response to the collective consumption problems that plague the city. However, these acts also represent an urban form and way of life that exists beyond capitalist social relations, acts that emphasise social care and simply kebersamaan ('togetherness'). Kampung residents build shared green spaces and spaces of food production, an escape from the traffic-clogged and polluted concrete jungle around them. As one kampung resident expressed to one of us, 'kampung is our way of life... with our gotong royong, our togetherness, our concern for each other... not individual, behind closed doors, not knowing your neighbours'.

In Jakarta's North, however, coastal communities reliant on the fishing and maritime industries have faced mass eviction in the name of flood and climate mitigation. Many of these sites are located in what are considered 'strategic' zones in the Jakarta Metropolitan Plan: zones designated for tourism and 'heritage' preservation, a gateway to the land reclamation for luxury real estate and commercial development in the Jakarta Bay. Still in the North, but a few kilometres away, the red-light district of Kalijodo was evicted effectively overnight, with state officials denouncing the community of 3000 residents on morality grounds to make way for a skate park. Along Jakarta's Ciliwung River, which stretches from North to South, kampung built along the riverbanks are being demolished to make way for a US$190 million 'Urgent Flood Mitigation' project, to which the World Bank is contributing $140 million. In the South, the proliferation of luxury real estate has opened opportunities for some kampung residents to capitalise on the increased value of their land, albeit at a significantly lower rate than market value. Many of these residents have been subject to coercion and intimidation. Those without formal title, and renters, have been displaced and their livelihoods made more precarious through the eventual disappearance of their kampung.

Fig.1.1
A becak (pedicab) sits amongst the rubble in Kampung Aquarium, a site of resistance in Jakarta's north. Over 300 families were forcibly evicted in April 2016, but several hundred people remained or returned, rebuilding temporary shelters in protest. In the background are apartment towers for wealthier residents in the area. August 2017

DISPOSSESSIONS: SYDNEY X JAKARTA

Descriptions of dispossession often paint the picture of a universalised capitalism eventually swallowing up all that is left on Earth (and beyond?). But, Jakarta's kampung resist and persist. Many have moved back to their demolished kampung sites, making claims of and to the city and negotiating better outcomes with the incumbent gubernatorial team. This is not new -- the city's poor and working class have historically been at the heart of movements for urban social justice. They have taken to the streets in mass demonstrations and engaged in everyday acts of 'quiet encroachment' by returning and rebuilding at the next opportunity. But this resistance is not without its problems: the fragile anti-eviction alliance that brought together the left and right has since shattered, further fragmenting the movement and its vision(s); the difficulty of maintaining everyday life post-eviction has seen many withdraw or grow tired from active involvement in it.

Sydney

As in Jakarta, displacement and dispossession are integral to the production of urban space in Sydney. Narratives of progress, new economic and political compulsions, and undemocratic legal mechanisms are used time and again to legitimize the destruction of homes, neighbourhoods, ecologies and ways of life. Redevelopment, infrastructure projects and gentrification are biting off larger and larger chunks of our city. But hidden in the seemingly consistent push for the neoliberal redevelopment of public housing and the physical displacement of public housing communities is a more subtle shift in urban governance. The harsh physical displacement of residents across the city is becoming less politically palatable in Sydney. On one inner city estate, where land values are high, the state is leaving public housing residents in place but replacing almost every facet of their neighbourhood life.

There is a long history to public housing 'renewal' that traces back to the state government's Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) of the mid 1990s. On estates such as Riverwood in Sydney's southwest, maintenance and urban design solutions were deployed to remedy the rundown build environment and residents remained in place, at least initially. The NIP showed that public housing renewal could be achieved without the physical displacement of public housing tenants, but the program was at odds with the prevailing neoliberal logic that would soon take charge of the public housing development agenda.

By the early 2000s, public housing 'renewal' had been rethought, and the right of residents to remain in place was detached from the dwelling maintenance and urban improvement. The redevelopment of the Minto estate in the South West in the mid-2000s is emblematic of this shift, with the state seeking to secure a financial return on what they saw as latent land values on estates. Under this model of urban renewal many of the public housing tenants were moved away from the suburb, and thus physically displaced.

By centering the realization of latent land values as the objective of state-led renewal the state positions the residents of public housing across Sydney as unwelcome guests in their own homes and communities -- they are a barrier to realising these values if they remain in place. From Minto to Bonnyrigg in the West and Southwest, to Ivanhoe in the North and Waterloo in the inner-city, public housing redevelopments have fractured the connection between people, place, community and home.

We are told that the revenue from the sale of public housing will allow so many more units to be built elsewhere – somewhere cheaper to build, cheaper to maintain – and where social housing is being replaced, it is a placeholder tenure class for tenants who are pressured to find housing through the private market. For what person, moved from their home to an utterly unfamiliar neighbourhood, would this be consolation? And what of the NSW government's multi-billion dollar budget surplus?

The story is echoed across the city. The financial benefits leveraged through the conversion of public housing estates to public-private mixed use estates are prioritised at the expense of the wellbeing of residents: homes are assets and lives are a secondary concern.

For some residents, there is forced displacement, with all its deleterious consequences. In the case of Millers Point, it is brazen privatisation and a complete loss of all public dwellings. The NSW State government is selling harbourside properties in Millers Point and the Rocks, evicting about 600 public housing tenants and potentially earning hundreds of millions of dollars in sales proceeds. In Minto's redevelopment in the city's southwest, there has been a 75% loss of public dwellings. In both cases, relationships to neighbours and services are lost, place-based communities and support networks are broken up, as though these are easy to replace.

For some residents, while they are allowed to remain in place during a redevelopment, almost every aspect of their social world is replaced in the process of redevelopment, including their rent, their neighbours, their cost of living, their home, their social networks, and more.

Fig.1.2
Art & activism: the #WeLiveHere2017
welivehere2017.com.au project illuminates and celebrates Waterloo in the face of redevelopment. Image: Clare Lewis and Nic Walker, 2017

The redevelopment of the Waterloo Estate -- the largest public housing estate in Australia -- has been justified under a 'social mix' or mixed tenure model: over 2000 homes are slated for demolition in phases, spanning a 15-20 year period and the estate is to be revamped into 30% social housing, 70% private. But, as residents repeatedly say, they already have a social mix: Waterloo is extraordinarily diverse, in terms of ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, and religion. And, given the widespread gentrification of the surrounding neighbourhood -- helped along by the periodic selling-off of individual public housing on the edge of the estate -- it is also a place of diverse incomes and classes.

Unlike in some other redeveloped estates in Sydney's south west, residents of Waterloo have been promised a 'right of return' after a 'temporary' relocation. Nonetheless, a history of displacement across the city has fuelled mistrust, bitterness and anxiety. Moving back to an estate where the social fabric has been undone and where you live in fear of the judgement of middle class residents is still a form of displacement. And, what of the lives lived in limbo when future relocation is imminent?

In neighbouring Redfern, Aboriginal tenants were evicted from an area of enormous political significance: the birthplace of Australia's Black Power movement, the site of one of the first urban land rights claims and the home to numerous Aboriginal services. Redfern was considered the last frontier of gentrification in inner-Sydney. Was. This is racialized gentrification. And maybe gentrification is too tame a word? This is more like banishment.

So-called financial viability has been weaponised by the state government to legitimise dispossession from housing. But, it remains unclear what the economic justifications are for Sydney's major contemporary transport story, the WestConnex Highway. This $16.8 billion road project has been tearing up homes, communities and the natural environment across the city. Private homes have been acquired coercively and the previous owners offered below market value rates for their houses. When we spoke to Mel, whose home on Campbell Street was eaten up by WestConnex, she spoke of a life interrupted and relationships destroyed. She had to move out of Sydney as did some of her neighbours. Buying into the same part of the city where property prices have shot through the roof is difficult with the money offered under NSW's "just terms" acquisition law. What has been lost, cannot be recreated. In place of homes, neighbours and parkland there will be cars, smoke stacks and tolls.

DEGREES

**Sydney
X
Jakarta**

Climate change changes cities – but in which ways and on whose terms? Environmental interventions in Sydney and Jakarta reveal the exclusionary politics at play in efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change through urban redevelopment.

Is green good? Is it good for cities, and for their citizens?

Over the last two decades of climate diplomacy and research, the city has emerged as the major policy and political site. So the reasoning goes, cities are important concentrations: major concentrations of greenhouse gases, concentrations of intersecting vulnerabilities, and concentrations of climate protagonists as their residents grow and grow in number. Taking climate actions in cities can also overcome the woeful inaction in the international and national arenas. And, the city can supposedly do this without the burdens of nation-states and global bureaucracies - the city, and the mayor, embody the flexibility and entrepreneurialism of late neoliberalism.

In a number of ways, this logic is deeply flawed. It glosses over the limits of cities and the urban scale to reduce carbon emissions and provide adaptive responses. This reasoning also highlights actions in city halls rather than on the streets. It also ignores that, despite incredible investment in networking events for climate-aware global cities, in platforms for sharing best practices, and in marketing material, glossy pamphlets and snappy videos... these actions have had very little effect on mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Most importantly, although the idea of cities and city-networks as climate paragons recognises that climate impacts happen in cities and to their citizens, it fails to recognise the way climate action reworks the urban fabric and the urbanisation process. In other words, climate and environmental action in cities is not merely environmental or climatological, it is deeply political, it is bound up in processes of accumulation and speculation, it invites new justifications for dispossession and displacement, and it creates new forms and sites of social inequality. Climate change changes cities; the question remains, in which ways and on whose terms?

In cities around the world, ecological remediation and greening projects have had negative socio-spatial effects. Variously termed ecological, green, environmental, or even carbon gentrification, state sponsored urban redevelopment projects have masqueraded as environmentally necessary and restorative, but have displaced marginalised peoples in the process, either through rising rents, or through eviction. This is one way that climate change changes cities; but this is no way to address climate change. As a process and event that has collective effects - even as these are accentuated in and for particularly vulnerable sites and peoples - and works through all facets of what might constitute our collective good life, climate change also opens opportunities for in-common claims that aren't only environmental, but that are social, economic, and political.

Consider urban climate interventions in Sydney X Jakarta:

Vignette 1: Barangaroo

One form of response to climate change in cities is sustainable urban development - developments that present themselves as environmentally sustainable, both to policy makers and to prospective buyers. In Sydney, the Barangaroo redevelopment attempts to improve the environmental conditions of its immediate area and the city's whole ecological footprint. It has been transformed from a contaminated space, surrounded by public housing in the nearby Millers Point, into an area with 'great' environmental amenity.

This transformation has been achieved through the usage of carbon-friendly materials during construction, implementing solar panels and a stormwater treatment plant, and planting over 75,000 plants. At the same time, the eviction of 600 public housing tenants in Millers Point was announced, echoing processes of eviction and redevelopment throughout the city, but with a green tinge. Barangaroo, and similar developments, are praised for their seemingly win-win impact: they improve environmental amenity and contribute to the local economy. Despite this, there are also potential negative social and political impacts. Barangaroo's sheer size - it is over 15 hectares consisting of green space and retail, commercial and residential buildings - will undeniably impact these domains, despite masquerading behind the positive changes to the environment it will make.

The development had the impact of raising property and rental prices in the surrounding areas. For instance, rent in the suburb of Barangaroo has increased from $85 per week in the public-housing streets pre-development to $1,200 per week after Barangaroo's first residences became occupied. Suburbs surrounding the development have also experienced beyond average Sydney rises in rent, with The Rocks and Millers Point seeing 50 per cent rises over the five years of the development. The increasing potential profitability of selling these properties has been realised by the state government through the sale of the 214 public properties and eviction of their 600 tenants (see Figure 3.1). Consequently, the most disadvantaged residents who lived in public or private housing surrounding the development have been displaced through evictions and rising property prices.

Fig.2.1
A house in Millers Point expressing concern over the evictions taking place in August, 2017

A number of Barangaroo's projects dissolve into exclusionary processes that result in social inequality. At the Barangaroo Reserve, six hectares of parkland to Barangaroo's north, regulation will discourage many from actively interacting and participating in its space. There, conducting or participating in any activity that causes a nuisance to another person or interferes with the amenity of the public domain is an offense worthy of being fined or removed from the public space, all enforced by private security as well as public police. Likewise, the retail and commercial spaces within the site's buildings are catered towards professionals and the wealthy, not to those on low or average incomes. This illustrates that these sustainable urban developments are not a win-win for all, but rather can exclude many from their environmental benefits.

Likewise, the economic gains made by development are likely to fall mainly to private entities or those already advantaged, rather than the wider community. For instance, Lend Lease Recycled Water, a company owned by the developer Lend Lease, owns the electricity generated and water recycled on-site. This is then sold onto the businesses occupying the site - notably, these resources hardly ever leave the site's boundaries, drawing into question the extent to which those beyond will see any benefits. Lend Lease Recycled Water stands to gain economically from this implementation, as there is no competition for the buying of their generated resources. That is, all of the energy generated and water recycled will be sold directly to the site under contractual agreement, with Sydney Water and Ausgrid contributing the remainder. Moreover, these forms of localised water and electricity generation for the wealthy work against the existing social and spatial subsidies embedded in service provision. In other words, when redevelopments for the rich become self-sufficient, the costs of maintaining common infrastructure is concentrated among those unable to provide for themselves via the installation of solar panels and rainwater tanks in their homes or ecological enclaves.

Vignette 2: North Jakarta

Jakarta is often characterised as a site awaiting climate change catastrophe. This threat is crystallised in the North, which is projected as needing the intervention of large infrastructure projects to protect from flooding and other environmental events. The Great Garuda Seawall Project (GGSW) is the most prominent example.

This project couples urban mega-development on newly created reclaimed islands with flood mitigation to save sinking Jakarta from sea-level rise. But, as green city-making projects are imagined and rolled-out by policy makers, they clash with current residents' livelihood practices and desires for their city. The GGSW project, along with other urban resilience-framed interventions to flooding, are used to justify the destruction of fishing livelihoods and the forced displacement of kampung residents from their coastal settlements.

These large infrastructure interventions do not act upon the city freely. Instead, the interventions are reworked and resisted by residents. Residents are not passive agents, watching on as urban redevelopment, land speculation, and (supposedly) anti-flooding infrastructure continues apace. Residents, primarily from traditional fishing communities and coastal communities, have formed new connections and networks across North Jakarta to resist land reclamation (see Figure 3.2). Through NGOs, such as Urban Poor Consortium and Urban Poor Network Jakarta, and community-based affiliations, kampung residents mobilised and protested against land reclamation activities in the North of Jakarta.

Fig.2.2
Anti-reclamation posters in Kampung Kerang Ijo communal space in July 2017. Text translates as: 'Fishing Group Kerang Hijao (Ijo), Fisherman in harmony reject Jakarta Bay reclamation'

Furthermore, residents used these networks to reposition their place in city-making in Jakarta. Although residents described themselves as 'small people' and 'ordinary people', they also lay claim to the the urban majority. As described by residents in informal settle-ments in Jakarta, they see themselves as 'the wheels of economy' in Jakarta. Kampung residents assert their opposition to urban environmental redevelopments by mobilising with existing political networks. By working with these NGOs, kampung residents were able to broker a contract against eviction in 2016. This contract provided that the new Governors (Anies Baswedan and Sandiago Uno) would stop both kampung eviction and land reclamation in exchange for political capital in the 2017 gubernatorial elections. While there are differences and divisions between kampung in North Jakarta, they mobilise based on a shared identity to resist and deflect these mega infrastructure interventions. In other words, through social networks and grassroots activities - through connections - kampung residents seek to reposition urban environmental politics in the contested fabric of the city.

In Sydney and Jakarta, climate change - and the promise of ameliorating its effects - disguises urban redevelopment that overwhelmingly benefits the urban elite at the expense of the disadvantaged. In these cases, climate projects compound urban inequalities. And it's not entirely clear that these projects are successfully mitigating, or adapting to, climate changes either. But, it is in the recovering authoritarian state with a history of actively repressing protest, where sustained collective action has demanded better climate futures. These claims centre on producing urban environments, goods and services in order to sustain diversity, liveliness, and commoning in cities.

DEMOCRATISATION

Sydney
X
Hong Kong
X
Baltimore
X
Barcelona

In discussions about the state of democracy, cities feature as both spaces of despair and spaces of democratic excess. There's no shortage of writing about 'post-political cities' and the 'crisis of participation' that tells stories about different kinds of democratic deficits in everyday urban life. At the same time, there's been plenty of excitement about the occasional but repeated eruptions of democratic politics in the recent wave of occupations associated with the Arab Spring, Occupy and beyond. But what kinds of urban politics exist in between these two poles?

Several of us are grappling with the prospects and practices of democratisation in our research, not to mention in our lives as political actors and activists. This piece offers some snapshots from the field, looking into the everyday struggles of people trying to democratise their cities in Sydney, Hong Kong, Baltimore and Barcelona.

Rebuilding civil society in Sydney: the Sydney Alliance

Maybe you've had that feeling of dread that you don't know your own city? For one of us (Amanda), that feeling was triggered while living in New York and being peppered with questions like "how many people are Christian in Sydney and which denominations are biggest? How many are not white?", and not knowing the answers. I also remember the gratitude I felt that years later, after I had begun forming the Sydney Alliance, that organising my city helped teach me deep truths about the city in which I lived.

Sydney is a divided city, by geography, class, race. Those in the North don't go to the West and the inner city residents often just hang out there rather than move around. But that was not me during my time at the Sydney Alliance. I grew up in the North and lived in the Inner West but I spent most of my time in the West, in places like Blacktown and Bankstown and everywhere in between. I was a nomad learning about the place that was my home.

The Sydney Alliance is a broad based coalition of religious organisations, unions and community organisations that uses community organising to make the city better for everyone. Its goal is to create bridges across the city, between communities, issues and identities as a way of rebuilding civil society.

When I think of democracy, the first thing I think of is the rich practice of building a strong civil society. The practices of participatory democracy, something akin to the Greek *polis* but filled with more women and slaves.

The Alliance practiced a participatory democracy that I haven't previously seen in Sydney. We had the Catholic Archdiocese and the Construction Union, the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Cancer Council, the Muslim Women's Association and Settlement Services International all connected together. We sometimes had the heads of these organisations talking honestly and sometimes brutally about what made relationships between them difficult. At other times we would have dozens, hundreds or thousands of people gathered together in meaningful relationship. We trained over 3000 people in our 2 day trainings and 500 at our 6 day trainings in my nine years at the Alliance. These were people sharing small spaces with each other - learning about each other and developing as leaders.

The Alliance created a promise of democratisation and democratic practice that is new, even through it was built on the old traditions of community organising. Community organising first emerged over 75 years ago in Chicago USA and includes tools like relational meetings (in which individual participants share the experiences and hopes that drive their political engagement, as a means to building effective solidarity across difference) and the organising cycle (a framework for thinking about the relationship between problems and issues, building power, taking action, and reflection). These tools offer a tangible means for achieving lofty concepts like solidarity, power, and intersectionality.

The Sydney Alliance was good. But it wasn't great. Not great enough. It wasn't what I wanted it to be - an explosion of participatory democracy that then reshaped how representative democracy worked. This gap stayed with me. I kept feeling that I only

knew how to keep doing the same thing at the Sydney Alliance, but the Alliance needed something different if it was going to be stronger or better. That is why I now research city organising strategies. I hope praxis, a rich dialectic between theory and action, can help us better understand what it might take to democratise the city, transforming representative democracy through new forms of participatory democracy.

Two years into a postdoc on city-based organising strategies I am hopeful about the possibilities that urban alliances offer for democracy. I have found that urban alliances are present in many of the worlds cities and that they exist in a wide variety of forms. Our team has mapped over 90 urban alliances - they exist on every continent, across the Global North and South. We have learnt that "community organising" alliances are present across the US, Canada, Hong Kong, Germany and the UK - and in each place have similarities (a similar training program, similar tools like relational meetings) but across these cities they also differ greatly around whether they work up from the neighbourhoods or are build from across the city (or the state, or nation). Then in places like Moscow, Tel Aviv, Cape Town, Jakarta and Rio we have found different kinds of city formations - people working in networks acting to shape the city in the interests in citizens, but using different kinds of political practices to achieve it. In Moscow and Jakarta digital tools play a critical role in connecting diffuse groups and networks. In Cape Town a diverse city-base movement is being built through a single organisation called "Reclaim the City" with a more focused issue agenda around housing. Yet in their context fighting for housing is actually a fight for desegregation as well as being a fight for access to jobs and decent transport. That said, their issue focus provides lessons for those in the community organising tradition who hold out the importance of a multi-issue agenda. Similarly, some of the relational tools used by community organising may have utility in the Cape Town space.

In each place, in different forms, I found activists struggling with the weakness of their democracy. In Moscow, it was a dysfunctional formal democracy, for those in Cape Town it was about making real the 1994 promise of democracy. Across the Global North leaders argued about the substantive nature of representative democracy and the need for a participatory democratic practice to fill the gap. Indeed in each space activists had concluded that city-based participatory practice was a recipe to rebuild and enliven the hope of democracy.

Like when I began my organising journey, going outside of the city of Sydney has provided me with new ideas about how to change this place. It's inspiring to see how radically diverse contexts and inventive political strategies from all across the world can provide lessons and insight for how we might change where we live.

From a cramped office somewhere high up in a building in Mong Kok, Daniel Lam and his community organising team in Hong Kong Citizens are working on developing their own brand of urban politics and democracy. Hong Kong Citizens is part of the same network of urban alliances as the Sydney Alliance. One of us (Kurt) first met them in 2015 through those connections. When I last met them towards the end of 2016, their situation was fraught - and it has only become more tense in the year that's passed.

Democratic yearnings in Hong Kong

In 2014, three streets in Hong Kong - one (Nathan Road) in Mong Kok not far from the HK Citizens office, two across the harbour in the more up-market neighbourhoods of Admiralty outside the Legislative Council building and Causeway Bay - were occupied by protesting citizens for 79 days before finally being moved on by police.The core claim of the occupiers was for genuine universal suffrage in the election of the Hong Kong Chief Executive. The 'offer' of an election of the Chief Executive from a list of candidates approved by Beijing was obviously deeply unsatisfactory to a wide range of interests.Those occupations came to be known as the Umbrella movement for the umbrellas that were used against tear gas. They exhibit important commonalities with the occupations of the 'long 2011' elsewhere in the world. Bodies gathered, occupied, made space public in the face of repression from authorities content with demonstration but less content with occupation. In their occupation, they made use of social media platforms and mobile media technologies to coordinate, document and mediate their actions before a local and global public.

And in organising their occupation, they enacted new forms of self-organisation: in

Fig.3.1
Sydney Alliance
founding assembly
on 15 September 2011
at Sydney Town Hall
Photo: Sydney Alliance

the provision, preparation and even growing of food, in teach-ins and study centres, and in caring for one another in the moments of violent conflict as well as in the moments of quiet persistence.

In Hong Kong, as in other cities like Barcelona that have experienced these intense moments of urban occupation, the question of how to continue to democratise everyday urban life and build a city for 'the people' has attracted a range of answers - not all of them successful, not all of them progressive.

Some folks, particularly those concerned about the perceived distance between the democracy claims of the occupiers and the everyday lives of working poor of the city, channelled their energies into community organising work among those communities. Hong Kong Citizens sits in this space, working to bring together long-established civil society and 'self-help' organisations with some of the younger emerging community organising initiatives in working class neighbourhoods like Sham Shui Po. The longing for democracy is applied to everyday urban life, applied to issues like open space and services for the elderly, rather than the 'China situation'. It's hard work - especially in a highly polarised political context, where mistrust between 'pan-democrats' and 'pro-China' folks runs deep.

Others sought to build on the energies of the Umbrella movement through insurgent forms of electoral politics. Activists like Nathan Law, Lau Siu-lai and Eddie Chu sought election in the Legislative Council elections of 2016, and used their election campaigns as a platform to build a constituency that has mobilised around a range of issues, staging impromptu protests and interventions in an effort to keep the bold spirit of democratic contention alive. The crack-downs on these individuals and events has intensified: several were ejected from the LegCo, and face charges which carry long prison sentences if they're found guilty.

Yet others have gone in an altogether different, and more troubling direction. Critical sentiment directed to the imposition of rule from China has been directed into a quasi-nationalist insurgency - 'Hong Kong for Hong Kongers' is the slogan, and the targets of their increasingly aggressive actions are the growing numbers of visitors and residents from mainland China. The janus face of 'the people' as a political concept is starkly revealed here - where populism is not so much about 'the people' as a figure for democratic inclusion but instead as a figure for racialised exclusion.

Where is this all headed? There's been an intensity to the discussions I've had with Daniel and others in Hong Kong about these matters that is both inspiring and intimidating in equal measure. The fate of urban democracy in this city is a fraught one indeed, and the stakes for those engaged in struggles for the city's democratic future are high.

The question of whether alliances be made effectively across civil society in pursuit of democracy -- between those pursuing community-based and parliamentary strategies, between those in the old civil society organisations and the young who are creating new ones -- remains tantalisingly open.

Contesting austerity in Baltimore

Some of the same challenging obstacles and tensions over strategy face those engaged in urban politics a world away in Baltimore.

Under Baltimore's perma-austerity, citizens, neighbourhood associations and community groups have long had to get on with trying to meet their own needs, despite or instead of city government. The city is home to a multitude of everyday-making (and coping) activities.

The city also has a long history of advocacy and activism, augmented by new social movements, centred around injustice in the form of institutionalised racist violence and economic marginalisation. The need for and possibility of more authentically inclusive city governance was glimpsed after the Baltimore uprising of April 2015, acknowledged as an outcry against the city's inequities.

But three years on, any impetus for social justice already seems to be diminishing. The goals and fixes prescribed for the city remain largely the same.

In Baltimore, a city government increasingly starved of money has long prioritised relationships with those promising economic growth, such as the city's major 'ed and med' anchor institutions like Johns Hopkins University, and the sportswear corporation Under Armour, anchoring the latest waterfront megaproject which is benefiting from the biggest financing package in the city's history. The primary governance goal is to de-concentrate poverty (dispersal), while attracting and retaining people to live in the city (gentrification). A 'triage' investment system prioritises neighbourhoods with development potential. The most deprived neighbourhoods, usually with majority African American populations, are 'written off' economically and 'contained' through repression. Participatory mechanisms for grassroots organisations and citizens have been scarce and tokenistic.

Tensions between 'old' and 'new' forms of organising are clear. Post-uprising the city's longstanding community organising coalition undertook a listening project and convened meetings, in contrast to the direct advocacy pursued by newer activist organisations seeking policing and criminal justice reform at the city and state levels. The coalition also played a significant role in negotiating the community benefits agreement for the waterfront megaproject, gaining small wins to improve 'the deal'. But such pragmatic alignment with the priorities currently being pursued in the city stands in stark contrast to the "independent black institution building... for communities to actually have the power" sought by new activist groups, which advocate 'community wealth-building' as a "parallel structure, a parallel narrative... [a] vision of community empowerment from the grassroots up, as opposed to seeing black folks as appendages of a neoliberal wave."

Of particular note when thinking about democratising the city is the need to repoliticise the city with more fundamental debates about the priorities being pursued. At a workshop in Baltimore, there was much discussion about the values driving political choices, and who is getting to make these choices. Citizens and civil society were not only not 'at the table', but as a workshop attendee pointed out, "we don't even know where the table is."

When talking about (the city and Maryland State) government's latest urban redevelopment initiative targeted at the city's deprived African American neighbourhoods, another explained the "Governor is saying "this is how we are going to save y'all"... he didn't talk to us." Those in the room expressed helplessness about what the mechanisms would be to create change, but wanted to be able to have the conversation – about values, and whether there can be a movement towards sharing the same set of values. The thirst for participatory governance was clear. What are the pathways?

Fig.3.2
An advertising hoarding at North Ave and Charles St, Baltimore – appropriated to warn of the systemic injustices represented by the death of a young African American man, Freddie Gray, as a result of injuries sustained whilst in police custody.
April 2015

Meanwhile, in Barcelona

In Barcelona, the same kinds of pressures and problems are generating radically different responses. Over there, new pathways to a radically democratic urbanism are being built.

The property boom still dominates the headlines and common are cries of rental extortion over 'cervecas' on the terrace (schooners at the pub). Development notices hang over abandoned buildings, yet Barcelona's squatting movement, like ours in Sydney, has seen better days. Their state government is similarly in the pocket of the big boys who own the cranes. Between Barcelona, Baltimore, Hong Kong and Sydney, bankers, politicians and developers stroll easily. They cleave at the fabric of our cities to make their path. Yet it is what 'we' as citizens - who take seriously a title that weds us to the fate of our particular homes - do that makes the difference. In Barcelona, the strength of their response to this violence is to be found in where they look too to defend and rebuild their city. They look to themselves and their neighbours.

Barcelona is a city of citizen self-organisation. It has been this way for generations. Ebbing and flowing with the tides of the city, new formations often converge at moments of 'crisis'. There has been no shortage of these lately. Most recently, the many and varied expressions of political practice have grounded themselves in the reclamation of physical space. They have been creating squatted social centers, serving the city and re-energising the struggle. Often, it is a piece of land that the old system has forgotten that provides the inspiration. A bank left derelict after the financial crisis or an industrial lot that didn't quite make the to do list of the 90s public development boom.

They do not wait for lengthy council approval processes to claim a slice of the city on the virtue of charitable status or apply for grants or do business plans. Instead, they do first, and ask for permission later. The occupiers don the walls with notices of yoga classes, language classes, I.T. help, food banks, clothing swaps, libraries, help with navigating mortgage contracts and solidarity against the abuse of rental rights. All for free, all on donated time. Or more accurately, on a different time, for different reasons.

These ceded spaces are not the purview of inner city hipsters. They are the coalescence of energies from across the city, given physical embodiment in bricks and mortar. Activists of all stripes increasingly understand the need for spaces that can transcend the necessary limitations of campaigns and policies. Spaces to imagine and actualise a shared, yet never fully articulated, dream of living differently. The intersectionality of their social identity and political praxis is not simply a nice touch, it is their life blood. They exist on the edge of permanency and their tentative hold on it can only come from their ability to articulate a new, truly transversal understanding of the city and who it exists to serve. Just as often, pockets of the city are re-politicised only to be destroyed by a court order and the men in blue who come to invoke it. Democratic energies which have crystalised dissipate and we are moved to despair. They succeed, only when they can rally a community around them which extends far beyond those who call the space home.

In an era of dwindling welfare state capacity, alternative constellations of socialising and redistributing value within a community can be key to legitimising new, non capitalist social relations. On what grounds do we claim the right to a city that looks different? In Barcelona, the tools to organise value relations are being rethought and rewoven within a non hierarchical fabric, beyond the certainties of contracts and currency. At the heart of their citizen initiatives is a commitment to bringing everybody along for the ride.

This commitment often results in an uncomfortable degree of complexity within groups of people practicing this new politics. Yet it has uniquely positioned citizen initiatives to shape the wider processes of their city. Remaining engaged in the conversation across a broad network whilst building an alternative on the ground has allowed the form and content of these social centers to feed back into the narrative. They are a porous conduit for the acts of repolitisisation which are flowing around the city. As each piece of the city is reclaimed for its people the possibility of reclaiming the most unlikely of spaces, the halls of city government, is being realised. In 2015, the majority of Barcelona's citizens elected a former squatter to represent them. In 2017, many of these tentatively held social spaces have been legitimised by the government for the role they play in the community. The city council is being stacked with former activists and meetings are beginning to look and sound more and more like those being held in squatted banks. The city is transforming itself.

Sydney has its own vanguard. Sydney University is smack bang in the middle of it. The Broadway squats were down the road and on King St there was an experiment in creating an occupied social center in an old balloon factory. We have community gardens every-where and community energy projects putting solar on local businesses. We reclaim the streets by periodically dancing down their centers and repurposing public space for something actually public. Tucked away in the Marrickville/ St Peters industrial estates are warehouses full of artists that use all manner of service and resource socialisation amongst themselves to survive and feed back into the community.

This is just to speak of a small pocket. A weird and wonderful world of Sydney-siders experimenting in new ways of collectively living together are hidden across the city. But often when 'we', the academics, the city planners, the NGO leaders, the local politicians, and citizens themselves look to re-politicise our city this is not where we turn to imagine an alternative or expend our political energies. Yet this is the scale at which we first learn to be political - and democratic. Any attempt to turn that kind of politics into a power capable of transforming our city must start from here. If we can learn anything from Barcelona, maybe it is to refocus our attention on the new life that is already growing, in the cracks of the city that the developers have not yet reached.

Fig.3.3
The Xorte del Xino community garden in El Raval.
On the wall in the background the iconic 'I love Barcelona' image goes to war with a tree root that has risen up to defend itself.
El Raval barrio.
June 2017

FILL THE GAP

DEEP
EXCAVATION!!

The urban underground – it's not only a metaphor for the places where urban cultures are made, it's also an actual, vital and contested dimension of our urban environments and experience. Looking across the making and remaking of underground infrastructures and environments in Sydney, Mexico and Phoenix, we see an urban techno-politics in play that warrants more attention in our thinking about cities.

As urban thinkers in the university, we interact with vertical dimensions in multiple ways. We all climb up stairs to reach our meeting room; many of us may take the train, via subterranean routes, to travel to campus, or we may drive through the tunnels under the city on our daily commute. Other, less noticeable, vertical engagements occur as we enjoy, practice, and perform many other activities. We are dependent on the utilities that exist underground in the form of water pipes, sewage drains, and cables providing (frustratingly slow) internet connections. We rely on antenna towers perched on high places and satellites in space orbiting the planet. Our daily lives are realised through volumetric spatialities: our lives play out in horizontal and vertical dimensions, all while depending on services whose infrastructure is hidden beneath our feet or above our heads. Many of these dimensions largely go unrecognised.

The up and the out – the vertical and the horizontal – of cities is relatively regulated and monitored. Above ground is where we live and feel. What lies beneath – the vertical down – is enigmatic. We dream of outer space, but rarely do we even think about the subterranean world. The urban underground is about soils, creatures, water, roots, seeds, pipes, waste, and injected chemicals. We tend to feel out-of-place in this dimension, even afraid of it. We forget about our connectivity with it and our dependence on it. To write of dimensions is not to fragment place and space in layers, but to talk about relationships between the multiple dimensions that construct, create, and re-invent these spaces. The underground is not empty, but a space full of critical infrastructures formative of the urban experience. In turn, the deep is mediated by -- produced by - technologies and legal regimes that have made subterranean spaces legible for human consumption.

Dimensions of Sydney

Sydney is in the midst of a "tunnelling boom" with three mega tunnels under construction, all related to transport. This includes *Sydney Metro Northwest*, a rail project, that will result in 30.5 kilometres of new tunnels, 8 new railway stations and 4,000 commuter car parking spaces. *NorthConnex* is a nine-kilometre road tunnel linking two major motorways (the M1 and the M2) in the north-west of Sydney. The project, when completed, will be the longest road tunnel project in Australia. *WestConnex*, the most controversial of these projects, is a series of tunnel extensions and linkage projects (between the M4 and M5 motorways), which will result in around 16 kilometres of new tunnels under the inner-west of the city. Tunnel boring machines are currently chewing up Sydney's underground, creating, for better or worse, new modes of urban connectivity – whether by public rail or by private car.

This tunnelling, however, leaks to the surface in a number of different ways. Houses are acquired and demolished to make-way for tunnel exits and entrances. Subterranean soils and rocks – called spoil when removed from their underground homes – are extracted to make space. Most of the spoil ends up creating new surfaces, or filling empty holes created by a different type of underground interaction: mining. These projects don't just create new space, they eliminate other space. Smog-stacks designed to simulate friendly, familiar buildings need to be constructed. A discursive battle is underway as the *WestConnex* project tries to site "ventilation facilities," and opponents resist, labelling them "pollution stacks." Tunnelling initiatives are massive urban projects, which cost billions of dollars and will fundamentally reshape Sydney's transport futures.

Yet, as with the material invisibility of the underground, how these projects have been conceived, priced, planned, and governed is politically invisible.

Sydney, maybe if we talk more about the underground - more light can be shone upon the urban developments that will transform this dimension of our city and our lives.

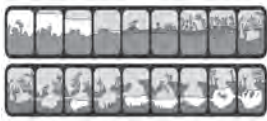## Dimensions of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico

Underlying Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is one of the world's more extensive flooded cave systems. Humans and non-humans can enter this aquifer via thousands of sinkholes (known locally as cenotes). The cenotes have been identified by the Maya for thousands of years to be the entrances to the Xibalba, a mythological underworld. The Xibalba is a space filled with meaning, water and underwater creatures. Since the 1980s the land of the Maya has been transformed into a resort paradise, the Cancun-Riviera Maya corridor. This includes the city of Playa del Carmen, once the fastest growing urban centre in the world.

Fig.4.1
A socio-geological history of the Yucatan Peninsula's underground. Diagram by Ana Ramos Maurer and author

But what does this mean for the Xibalba, for the world below? This is a pertinent question in the context of high demand for water resources, disposal of wastewater, and elevated volumes of built infrastructure on top of fragile soils. Indeed, surface urbanisation is transforming the subterranean aquifer, as one hydrologist noted after testing the ground-water: "We are seeing things that are wrong, cocaine in the Tulum water system. How can you explain that? And it is not only cocaine, all the pharmaceutics drugs… the turtles are under birth control and the coral reef is taking *Viagra*… this can't be good." In Quintana Roo, surface territory has been owned, traded, and rented in the context of the booming tourism market. But, who owns, controls, and is responsible for the underground is less clear. This is a critical problem, as the future prosperity of the surface in the region is contingent on a healthy (watery) subterranean. Urban and environmental governance in the region needs to shift downward, paying more attention to the third dimension.

Dimensions of Phoenix

Phoenix, Arizona is a desert city. It is also, as the popular show *King of the Hill* put it, "a monument to man's arrogance." It is a city of black asphalt that traps and radiates heat, causing the city to be (even more) unbearably hot for much of the year. Yet, Phoenix is also a regional business hub; its CBD is filled with tall towers, a convention centre, and office workers. It's easy not to notice all of this commercial activity because the street level is mostly empty, except for rush hours when cars disappear into or emerge out of basement parking lots under the office buildings. In a city built for private cars, these multiple levels of subterranean structures are necessary for the CBD to operate. However, there is another giant underground facility beneath the CBD that is perhaps even more important. But most people are unaware of its existence, even as they rely on and interact with it daily.

Consider this question: In a place where average temperatures are in the 40s during the summer, how do these buildings of metal, concrete, and glass not become blazing, stifling, sweaty towers? The answer lies behind an unassuming steel door in an alley and down a few flights of stairs. The *district cooling* centre is a surprisingly large, industrial facility multiple levels under the street. It is filled with large coloured pipes, a bevy of powerful engines, and a control room with a bay of screens displaying data and camera feeds to an engineer monitoring the complex system's status. The centre's purpose is to cool the large buildings in the CBD to a comfortable temperature for all the people packed into them. The way it does that cooling is unexpected and impressive. In the facility is a tank that holds millions of litres of water. At night, when energy prices are their lowest, the water is chilled to near freezing temperatures. Then, during the day, that cold water is pumped through a system of pipes that snake up, around, and down the buildings in the CBD. It's not a stretch to see the anatomical metaphor: The water is the lifeblood that circulates through the pipes, cooling the interior and regulating the climate, while the underground centre is the beating heart. Phoenix operates because its different dimensions work together. Unearthing the district cooling centre and thinking about it in relation to other undergrounds in other cities, like the tunnels in Sydney, helps us pull out common themes for analysing the oft-overlooked third dimension.

DIMENSIONS: SYDNEY X MEXICO X PHOENIX

We reflect on three themes now: invisibility, technology, and the production of space.

Invisible in Many Ways

Fig.4.2
Phoenix district cooling centre, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. May 2009

The underground is invisible in obvious ways. People live, for the most part, on the surface. We cannot peer through the solid stone and dirt beneath our feet. What's under us is blocked by matter. This literal lack of seeing causes a different, deeper invisibility – one that blinds our mind's eye. When we spend all day walking on the ground, working above the ground, the underground rarely enters our thoughts. All the spaces and systems that exist vertically – not up, but down - are invisible from a lack of attention. As long as the ground is firm beneath our feet, what's under it can be thick or thin, solid or spacious; it's all the same. But we can't blame anybody for not noticing (or even caring) about the third dimension. The underground is also invisible by design. Tunnels, pipes, wires, sewers, facilities, caverns, bunkers, are hidden from all but those who maintain and operate these systems. People are not meant to go down there. Portals to this other world are camouflaged: the nondescript entrances in a back alley, the trap doors under a rug, the elevator button behind a panel. They are also securitized: the metal manhole cover with a special lock, the tunnel entrance with a guard, the stringent safety standards and restrictive regulations. With all these invisibilities blocking our way, it's no wonder our view of the city is two-dimensional.

Technology All the Way Down

The underground is thoroughly technological. It is built by heavy machinery like excavators that dig into the surface and boring machines that tunnel under the surface. It is the graveyard of heavy machinery that is abandoned in the holes they made, sealed in by a concrete tomb because bringing them to the surface is too expensive and difficult. But the builders of the future also become archaeologists who unearth subterranean layers of forgotten technology. The underground is home to industrial sites like the cooling facility in Phoenix and transportation arteries like *WestConnex* in Sydney. It is the medium in which networks - of electrons and atoms, copper wires and lead pipes, water and gas - are installed and flow through. It is dug up and filled back in with denser, harder forms of Earth, which are the foundation for heavier, higher dimensions. Without firmly planting themselves deep into the ground, skyscrapers cannot reach the clouds. The underground is more than technological: it is a technology, a spatial system. Le Corbusier, the architect of high modernism, said, "A house is a machine for living in." Perhaps the underground is a machine for living on. It is a platform for the operations of cities, the construction of buildings, the transportation of matter/energy, the lives of people.

Producing the Underground

Underground spaces exist independently of humans – they have been in the making for millions of years. Undergrounds are actively changing, transforming, and reshaping themselves. Undergrounds are not static, they are not empty, they are not only human. When it comes to urban undergrounds, it is easy (and common) to believe that humans create space out of no-space. As if undergrounds are either empty voids to be filled with useful things or containers of stuff that need to be removed to accommodate human activities. When constructing an underground cooling system or a tunnel, 'something' needs to be removed to create that space. What previously occupied it is considered waste and spoil. Undergrounds are disposable, removable, and replaceable. Compounding this belief is that the subterranean has been claimed as the space of technical triumphs – the creation of something from nothing – rather than one produced by natural processes and social planning.

All cities are firmly planted on *terra* – Cloud City doesn't exist, yet – and as we build across the surface, we also build down into the ground and up into the sky. By employing spatial technologies, cities produce and use different dimensions for, what are often, very similar reasons. They might have different legal framings and planning policies, but they still need to pour foundations and install infrastructure. At the same time, as our three examples show, cities also construct and rely on dimensional space in their own ways and for their own purposes – it's our job to uncover these common and contextual dimensions of urban reality.

people DO NOT
just move on quietly

DISPOSESSION
Art & activism: the #WeLiveHere2017 welivehere2017.com.au project illuminates and celebrates Waterloo in the face of redevelopment
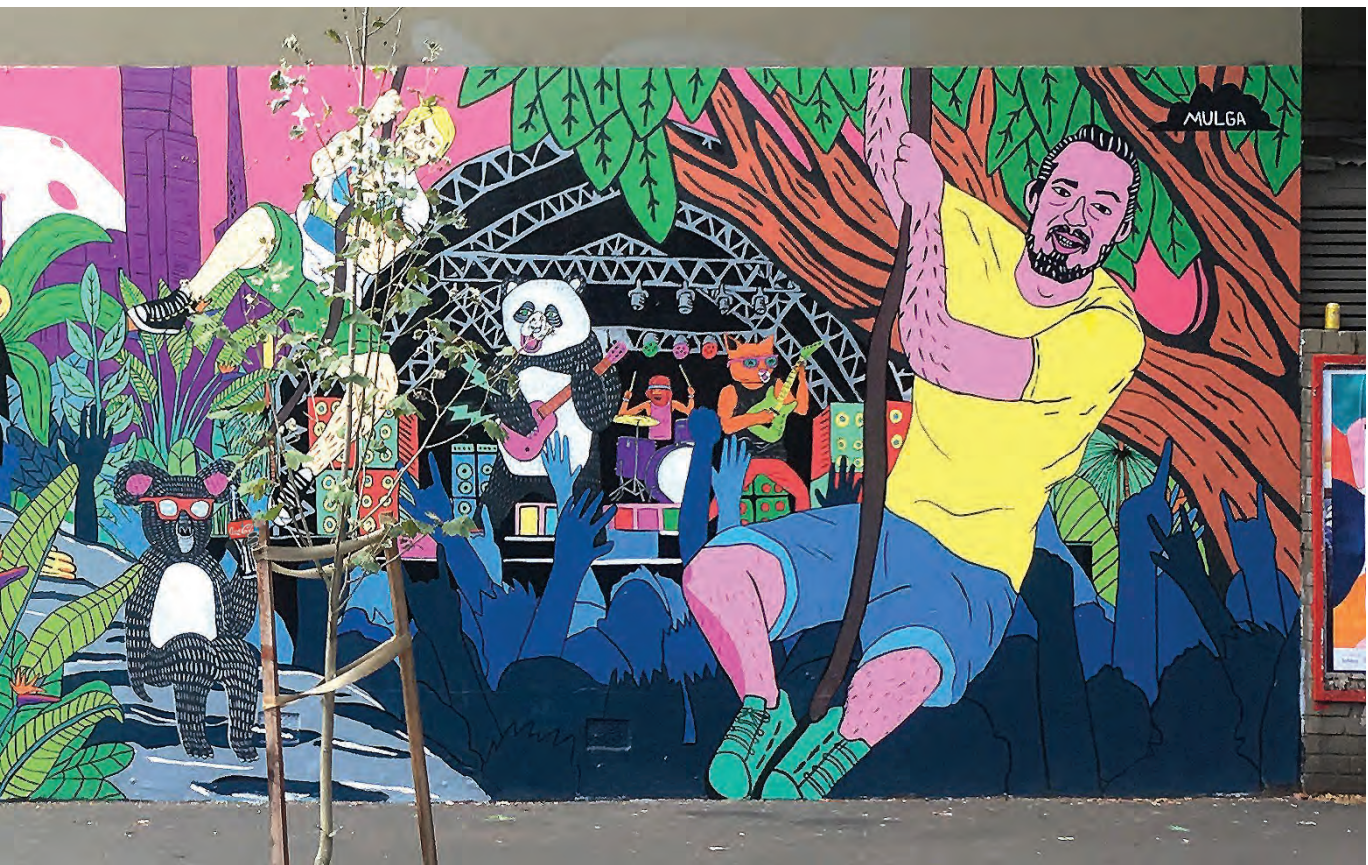Image: Clare Lewis and Nic Walker, 2017

DEMOCRATISATION
Sydney Alliance founding assembly at Sydney Town Hall. Image: Sydney Alliance. September 2011

DECOMMODIFICATION
Foveaux Street, Surry Hills, end terrace advertising (top), mural (below) after Mini Graff intervention. November 2017

DEGREES
Anti-reclamation posters in Kampung Kerang Ijo communal space in July 2017.
Text translates as: 'Fishing Group Kerang Hijao (Ijo), Fisherman in harmony reject Jakarta Bay reclamation'

DOMAINS
Premier seats. November 2017

LIFE LIVED IN LIMBO

Sharing
in
Sydney

Fig.5.1
Share housing:
economic
and
social value.
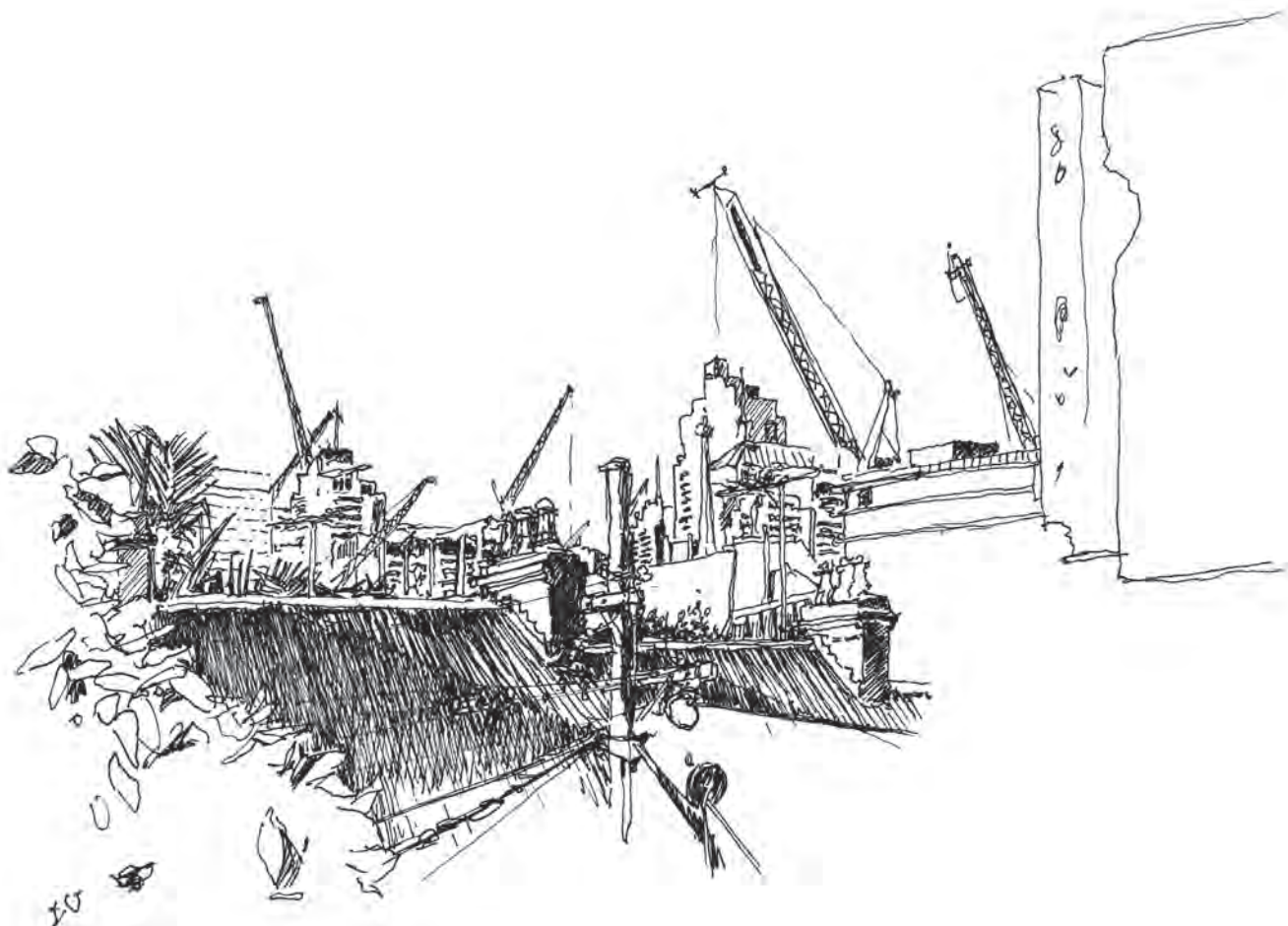
City scholars have a long held fascination with home. But, these accounts have been occupied with home as the owner-occupied single-family dwelling. Indeed, the ideal imaginary of home is usually heterosexual, nuclear, and suburban. Here, we destabilize this notion of home as discrete, nuclear and bounded. Home extends beyond immediate kin to broader social networks and beyond the private spaces of household walls to the public. And the focus on narrow understandings of home overshadows the sociality and practicality of shared and public spaces. We draw upon housing and homemaking practices in Sydney and beyond to illustrate the distributed nature of home.

The single-family dwelling has an ideological stronghold in many Western countries. But, it is becoming increasingly unsustainable socially, economically and environmentally. Despite this, the owner-occupied, heterosexual, nuclear family home, remains resilient and aspirational. Historically, moments of challenge to the single family dwelling were driven by social and environmental concerns. This includes feminist arguments that single family dwellings are obstacles to forwarding the position of women and subsequent efforts to develop cooperative housing that afforded the socialisation of domestic work. Consequently, feminist urbanists argued that shared dwellings – materialised in various forms such as housing cooperatives, communes, and the kibbutz – could overcome issues of isolation and the unnecessary consumption and waste from single household dwellings.

Share housing also challenges general assumptions about home and household formation. Share houses are generally, although not always, formed with less intentionally political motives than the types of shared accommodation discussed above. It has traditionally been discussed as a transitional phase in an individual's housing career, and primarily driven by economic pressures and the need to develop social networks outside of the family home. Increasingly, the sharehouse is no longer the bastion of student housing and '*He-died-with-a-falafel-in-his-hand*' stories. Sharing is becoming a long-term housing solution for a widening demographic. In Sydney, this is mostly driven by affordability, and a desire to develop social networks.

But what does this say about the experience and meaning of home in contemporary Sydney? Bringing it back to the feminist approaches to sharing housing as a challenge to the single family dwelling, can the current trend to share housing that is driven by affordability also recuperate feminist collective and environmental visions? Data collected from an online survey and interviews on share housing in Sydney, showed that while some share houses see their residences as a necessary and temporary way of living, some are actively reframing the way they see home and the value of owning a home. Many mentioned that the idea of owning their own home was so unattainable that they no longer valued it as a life goal. Instead they prioritised their lifestyle: the greater opportunity to travel, greater mobility and greater flexibility for where and how they wanted to live. Others framed sharing as a broader approach to living – sharing makes better use of resources and is more responsible, socially, economically and environmentally. And for many, it offered liberation from cultural and gendered expectations of home.

Here, then, is a version of home that challenges the normative idea of home as owner-occupied, nuclear family dwelling. Share housers actively challenge this idea of home either consciously or in their lived practice in their day-to-day lives. For many, home is increasingly being comprised of non-familial relations with broad social and generational networks. This has significant social, economic, and environmental value which challenges us to think beyond the walls of the idealised version of home.

Sharing in Jakarta

In Jakarta's kampung, notions of kinship and family extend well beyond nuclear definitions of family. This is often encapsulated by the term, *keluarga besar* (big family). *Kampung* residents have often lived in the same neighbourhood group for several decades. For one local level leader in north Jakarta's Kampung Akuarium, this was described as feeling they 'were the mother to everyone in the *kampung*, even the ones that were all grown up'. In *kampung*, home is not only a privately closed off-space. Pocketed in between each of the houses are communal spaces, such as community gardens, a mosque and *balai-balai* (wooden benches) for food preparation, chatter and special occasions where the kampung come together to celebrate weddings and religious holidays.

The connection to place in Kampung Akuarium is not only to home and these extended kinship structures of care. Being close to the sea is a strong emotion: many have childhood memories of growing up near the sea in Jakarta. For some in the *kampung*, who work as traditional fisherman or in fish processing, rights to the city mean a right to a coastal city. After violent eviction events of April 2016, the 'compensation' of being moved 14 kilometres to flats away from the sea is unconscionable. The dismantling and destruction of *kampung* is not only a threat to each individual home, but the way of life of a *kampung* more broadly. The idea of being moved to more compartmentalized flats is seen to be a destruction of the home, of freedoms in using the home for informal economic practices and the maintenance of the *keluarga besar*.

However, this conception of home-as-*kampung* and home-as-*keluarga* besar stands in stark contrast to the 'civilising' ambitions of Jakarta's elite, especially those who sit in the state housing agency. To these bureaucrats, a modern, formal and 'civilised' home must evoke so-called 'best practice' approaches in Singapore and the US - (nuclear) family life is to be contained within four-walled apartments. But this also comes with a separation of home and work, and a break up of the *keluarga besar*: the eviction of *kampung* residents en masse has seen many separated from their kinship networks and sources of income in relocations to towering apartment blocks on the outskirts of the city. The apartments' small size (30sqm) and rigid design makes it impossible for multi-generational families to live together. Strict tenancy conditions also prohibit income-generating activities to take place within the apartment. This has in many ways increased the burden on women in particular, whose productive activities are often closely tied with the home. With one half of the household no longer able to produce an income and disconnected from support networks that are drawn upon for food or child care, the lives and livelihoods of Jakarta's poor and working class are made more precarious. In attempting to reproduce what they consider a 'successful' model of housing and aspiring to Western-style living standards, policymakers are actually exacerbating poverty and the great challenges already facing Jakarta's 'urban majority'.

So, while the home is often considered part of the sacred, 'private' domain, we can clearly see that it is inseparable from processes that take place in the 'public sphere'. Decisions made by government authorities, exchanges between nation states and the circulations of global capital and ideas all impact and shape what goes on in the home. State policies and practices affect the very intimate spaces of our lives. Jakarta's poor and working class households recognise this, and are mobilising conceptions of home in their resistance. Women *kampung* residents - many of whom have emerged as activists and leaders throughout this period - are injecting the 'home' and the 'private' into the 'public' through their engagements with print, television and social media. By giving voice to the physical, emotional, psychological and financial damage evictions incur, these women are forcing observers to look them in the eye and question their humanity: evictions affect more than just buildings, more than 'those illegal squatters' - they affect homes and the lives lived in them.

Home therefore is a complex socio-political assemblage which responds to and subverts market pressures and governance. In Australia, housing affordability pressures are disrupting our normative view of home as an owner-occupied discrete locus of heterosexual and nuclear family units. As housing affordability declines, we see a correlating increase in share housing as an affordable tenure. But beyond economics, share housing also offers the opportunity to develop social networks and community. So we may ask, can the benefits of share housing, shift our aspirations for home?

However, the opposite is occuring in Jakarta. The aspirations of political and economic elite for a 'modern', global city is eroding the communal living arrangements of the kampung, where residents draw on kinship networks and proximity in response to an increasingly expensive and inequitable city. While many of these networks have been disrupted and have led to the increased precarity of *kampung* residents' lives, some residents are drawing on new media technologies to extend and maintain their networks; and new bonds of solidarity are being formed in re-settlement.

In both cases, home emerges as a site which is continually made and remade, defined and redefined, and aspirations can shift accordingly. This gives cause for optimism. Despite being dislocated by both market and political forces, the process of making and redefining home gives agency to those who have been displaced and challenges normative assumptions of home.

Fig.5.2
Prizes for the best 'ideal home' design in a collaborative art project with residents at Kampung Aquarium and Japanese artist Jun Kitazawa. August 2017

MARKETING PITCHES & BROKEN PROMISES

DIGITALISATION

Sydney
X
Anywhere

So-called "smart" technologies have become a pervasive, powerful presence in society. That is, the data-driven, networked, algorithmic systems that have creeped into nearly all spaces of life. The impacts of smart systems can be felt at various scales, in sites ranging from the "smart home" to the "smart city." Without question the proliferation of these digital information technologies will affect—and already is affecting—our relationships to homes and cities. However, it is also increasingly evident that we know little about how the smart home/city is it actualised and materialised as a real thing in places.

The smart home/city is difficult to get a hold of. It's nebulous and ambiguous, concrete and intangible, monolithic and multivalent. It's not a coherent framework or plan – contradictions are inescapable. And it's crowded by powerful interests like corporations, consultants, and city leaders. All of this only adds further urgency to the need to critically analyse how smartness is manifesting across different scales and spaces. How, then, do we pin down the smart home or city? This question provides the opportunity to reflect on different methods we have used to study smartness in homes and cities globally, from Sydney to Dublin or Anywhere.

Analysing words

Some very powerful, multinational organizations are behind many of the values, goals, and models that dominate what smart means. One way these organizations spread their preferred ideas of smart is by creating and controlling the discourse around the smart home or city. This is done by producing and propagating materials such as marketing brochures, white papers, technical reports, policy briefs, opinion essays, and so on. These ready-made materials spread their message to anybody who is looking for a vision to latch onto, a solution to a problem, or just a new movement to be part of. Discourses, then, are a fruitful place to look to understand the who, what, why, and how of smart homes/cities.

For instance, we have conducted a discourse analysis of IBM and Cisco—the two corporate leaders of smart urbanism—which involved closely reading, thematically coding, and holistically analysing the discursive material these companies have generated about smart cities. While this meant pouring over thousands of pages of business, marketing, technical, and consulting documents, it's a way to gain a high level of familiarity with what organizations are doing, what they say they will do, and why they are doing it. When done critically, discourse analysis can also help uncover the ideologies and interests that reside beneath the surface and between the lines of corporate and governmental documents. Indeed, any discourse analysis must also be an interpretative exercise, or else you risk taking their marketing at face value and reifying their corporate visions of smart homes or cities. If interpretation is about making sense of some confused or contradictory phenomena then the smart home and city are in need of some serious interpretation.

Filling out forms

Surveys and questionnaires are effective methods to conduct initial and broad data collection exercise, identify themes, and help researchers understand where they should direct more detailed questions. This kind of sampling is crucial for studying a widespread phenomenon like the smart home or city. People experience it differently and have different views on it. By collating data from many people, surveys allow for that difference to shine through, while also revealing commonalities within and across groups.

For example, we have recently used surveys to establish the trends across a wide demographic on the adoption of technology for accessing and experiencing the home. Some of the findings of that survey are discussed in the article on Domesticity in this booklet. Surveys have the added advantage of acting as recruiting tools for more in depthinterviews, if survey respondents indicate their willingness.

Talking to people

Interviews are a popular form of data collection which allows researchers to gain more detailed insights into their chosen topic and sometimes unexpected side tracks they had not considered. This is the beauty of interviews – if the interviewer is flexible, listens, and responds to the interviewee, they open the opportunity to take you on a journey within and beyond your interests and may challenge your assumptions. Interviews generally build on the broader questions of surveys or questionnaires and seek more detail in responses to gain a more in-depth understanding. Such interviews are complementary to other methods. For example, while a valid approach in their own right, interviews are often employed in ethnographic research. They can shed light on trends detected in quantitative data, and from other qualitative methods. In this sense, it is an especially effective tool in a researcher's arsenal.

Fig.6.1
Branded "smart"
trash bin
in Centenary
Square
Parramatta.
November 2017

We have interviewed local governments on their strategies and approaches to smart cities. While the scholarship on smart cities is often divided between advocating the value of smart cities or alternatively critiquing them for their techno-centric views and corporate interests, our interviews with key stakeholders revealed a much more complex understanding of the actually existing smart city. These stakeholders are pragmatic about possible 'smart solutions.' They have a high degree of political savvy and are not just pawns of corporations. Studies of the smart home or city must be based on a good understanding of the people and processes involved, rather than rely on caricatures. And that means actually talking to those people and getting into those processes.

Doing it all

Translated as 'writing of people,' ethnography is a cornerstone method for in-depth inquiry into people, practices, and relationships. Unlike an interview or survey, ethnography is not a single event, it is more of a process that involves sustained embedded engagement with a people and their culture over a period of time. By being in the field, observing, practicing participant observation, conducting interviews, and developing relationships with informants, ethnography enables the researcher an in-depth and detailed look at the culture in which they are embedded and allows them to analyse differences between what people report they do and what they actually do. Ethnographic fieldwork can be so useful and informative, in large part, because of how intensive of a process it can be. The tricky part of an ethnography is that, beyond access to the people and sites of study, it requires taking a double stance of identifying with participants and building relationships with them, while also maintaining enough distance to apply a critical lens. Like discourse analysis, ethnography must also involve interpretation. Ethnography is not just an exercise in observation – importantly it is a meaning making exercise, where meaning is made through analysis.

We have applied ethnographic approaches in our efforts to understand smart cities and smart homes. For example, in Dublin, one of us (Sophia) embedded herself within hackathon cultures to understand how the city and citizens united under the banner of 'smart' to create technological interventions into city issues. This included a rather unsuccessful attempt on Sophia's part to become an adept coder. Seeking greater insight into the dynamics of citizen coding groups, their ability to build community and tackle urban issues, she became a regular meet-up participant. She was throwing herself into participant observation and in doing so decided she should learn to code. Supported by the central organiser and the other participants, she made her way excruciatingly slowly through online modules while observing the artistry of the others' coding practice in awe and admiration. The co-ordinator repeatedly said that anyone could learn how to code. This, we believe, was an observation based on people she had helped prior to Sophia! Week after week, Sophia's attempts to master Python demonstrated a mixture of eagerness and ineptitude.

Although, she and her colleague gained rich insight into the coding culture and its interconnections with the smart city, their coding talents leave much to be desired. But this is one of the great things about ethnography – you may never be considered one of the culture or subculture you are studying (although sometimes you eventually find yourself as bona fide member), but you always come away with detailed insights, relationships and experiences from which you make meaning.
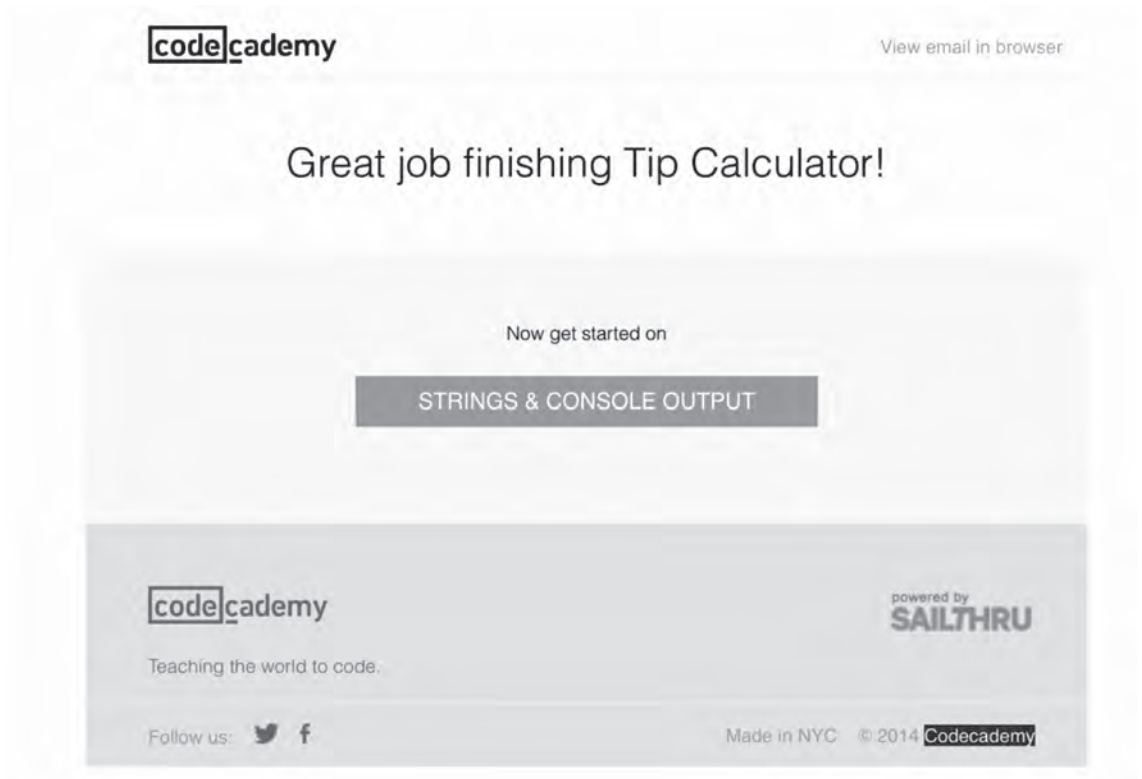

Fig.6.2
A rare coding win!
Together these methods provide a multi-pronged strategy for critically probing smart cities and smart homes. The heterogeneity of subjects like "smart X"—scattered across many spaces and scales, obscured by marketing pitches and empty promises, crowded by global corporations and local governments—demands a mixed methods approach. By applying any combination of these methods to digital initiatives, we can better understand how "smart" materialises and what it means for those who encounter it. Importantly, it can shed light on the actually existing smart city/home and, from this, we can analyse, critique, evaluate, and inform better "smart" futures.

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO TAKE YOUR CITY BACK!

From global corporations to guerilla marketers, advertising is colonising our public spaces, with all sorts of harmful effects for their publicness. Why is this happening, and what are we going to do about it? Taking down some of those ads would be a start. Here are some field notes from the global battle to reclaim public spaces from advertising in Sydney and New York....

While advertising dollars have been deserting other 'old media' like newspapers and magazines, the oldest media – our streets – have had a bit of a resurgence. As the outdoor media execs like to boast, outdoor is the only ad medium that people can't switch off.

The recent growth of outdoor advertising has been accompanied by its mutation. Global outdoor media giants like Clear Channel and JC Decaux co-exist with countless local upstarts and guerilla advertisers who are figuring out new ways to turn the surfaces of our public spaces into advertising space. Two developments are particularly troubling.

"Advertising began outdoors": advertising and public space

First, increasingly outdoor advertising is not only found on surfaces like walls and billboards. Advertising is insinuating itself into the very infrastructures that support everyday urban life. This is occurring thanks to the growth of public-private partnerships between urban authorities and outdoor media companies to provide infrastructure like bus shelters, benches, newsstands, public toilets, cycle racks, phone booths, and more. Through these partnerships, outdoor media companies install and maintain urban infrastructure in return for the right to 'monetise' that infrastructure by incorporating lucrative ad space into its design, then selling that space to advertisers.

Second, while the global corporates have been busy locking up urban infrastructure as commercial ad space, in many cities there has also been a massive growth in advertising that is in direct violation of laws restricting the location and size of advertisements. Sometimes this illegal advertising is installed by large corporate media companies. Sometimes it's installed by more 'guerilla' operators who specialize in street ad campaigns. The illegal or semi-legal poster campaigns they offer are embraced by advertisers who want to attach some street cred to their products, as well as by advertisers who seek a cheap and quick ad hit on a particular demographic.

So what?

Well, we ought to be concerned about what all this outdoor advertising is doing to our heads. We're subject to incessant and inescapable invocations to consumption as the pathway to a better life.

We should also be concerned with what outdoor advertising is doing to our cities. Not only is there a battle going on for our 'eyeballs' in the so-called 'attention economy', there's also a battle going on for our public spaces. As the surfaces of our outdoor environment are locked up by corporations, access to our urban media environment becomes dependent on capacity to pay, reducing the democratic potential of our public spaces as sites for free expression and communication. Spaces that could be used for non-commercial communications, like art, community notices, political organising, and notices seeking help finding lost cats, are now appropriated and dominated by commercial communications.

And, when public authorities hand over control of infrastructure provision and maintenance to global private outdoor media companies, this inevitably contributes to spatial inequality. Some parts of our cities are more 'lucrative' than others for the outdoor media companies – they can charge more money for their ad spaces in some locations than others.

If infrastructure provision depends on ad revenue for its existence and maintenance, this is a recipe for the kind of city in which folks in some neighbourhoods find themselves standing in the rain waiting for a bus, because some outdoor media company has decided they can't make a profit on a bus stop in that location.

But it's not all one way traffic. As the influence of outdoor media companies has grown, a new generation of outdoor media artists and activists have embraced and extended the work of billboard bandits and culture jammers from the past. This work is vital in both drawing attention to the pernicious commodification of public space, and showing us how we can resist – and organize against – those changes.

"Let's liberate some adspace": stories from New York

With the mutation and intensification of outdoor advertising, there's an urgent need for those of us who care about the democratic promise of our public spaces to fight back.

For over a decade now, Jordan Seiler has been a leading figure in the fight back against outdoor advertising, in the United States and globally. One of us (Kurt) first met Jordan in person at a conference on The Right to the City at the City University of New York Graduate Center in 2009. After a day of academic presentations about the politics of public space in contemporary cities, on the second day of the conference the organizers invited a range of activists to talk about their work. Jordan was one of the speakers.

After taking a few minutes to talk through the politics of his artistic practice on the streets, Jordan pulled a drill out of his bag, and invited participants downstairs onto Fifth Ave to help him remove an ad and install one of his artworks. And so, a bunch of academics and students who are comfortable debating the finer points of urban social justice in seminar rooms found themselves nervously standing around in broad daylight on one of the most iconic streets on the planet. We tried not to block pedestrian traffic while Jordan taught us about the finer points of anti-vandalism drill bits and phone booth design, and deftly liberated an ad space for one of his works.

For some theorists of democracy, politics is not just a matter of asking for the rights we want, it is a matter of acting as though we already have them. Jordan, it seems to us, is creating a 'city within the city' that is lodged into our branded cities where advertising is running rampant.

In Jordan's city, we have the right to use our public spaces for non-commercial expression. Jordan enacts this non-existent right in a couple of ways. As you can see (figures 7.1 and 7.5), he hacks into the advertising infrastructure, removing ads and installing his artworks. And, in Jordan's city, there's no shame in this, no need to hide. He enacts the right to do this - by doing it publicly – which is to say, he documents his work and talks about it in public, refusing to accept the notion that what he is doing is wrong.

Fig.7.1
Jordan Seiler
Underground:
London, England
2016

Jordan is also trying to show us that we can all live in his city, if we want to. He has worked tirelessly to support the efforts of his fellow anti-advertisers by promoting their work alongside his own. He has helped to organise collective, and very public, ad takeovers in New York and well beyond. He has helped to develop digital ad-takeovers, with an augmented reality app that can replace ads with commissioned art. He can even hook you up with a key to one of those advertising-funded bus stops or phone booths – which serves as a kind of key to his city, the one where that infrastructure is ours, not theirs.

In November 2016, Jordan was one of the co-organisers of a global ad takeover, to coincide with No Ad Day. Here in Sydney, we did our bit, liberating a bunch of ads from their infrastructure, contributing pictures of our work to the organisers. That year, hundreds of ads were removed across dozens of cities in that coordinated effort.

DECOMMODIFICATION: SYDNEY X NEW YORK

But while the global outdoor media companies are obvious targets in such efforts, the blurring of the line between street art and advertising is making everyday street politics more complicated on the ground in our town.

Is that an ad? The politics of the street in Sydney

Oddly enough, just few days before No Ad Day, a Coca-Cola advertisement based on artwork by MULGA appeared on the legendary ROACH / NUMSKULL end terrace on Foveaux Street, Surry Hills. This end terrace wall used to be a graffiti/street art wall. Rumor has it the wall was 'loaned' to Apparition Media for one month – that was over a year ago. They've been illegally painting ads on it ever since.

We call this situation The Great End Terrace Takeover. Time for us to take it back. Enter Mini Graff. The first part of Mini's response was the installation of life-sized Letraset Ladies, with speech bubbles enquiring "Where are we going, Mini?" answer – "To take our wall back, bro". These were placed in spots around the city where commercial agencies had taken spots or 'spot-jocked' her. Spot-jocking draws the attention of Council cleaning contractors to street art, and speeds up its removal.

The second part involved that Coca-Cola mural. Painted on the Thursday, days before No Ad Day, by Saturday morning she had the idea that to make it a no-ad day mural. She could remove the company branding. It was in 3 locations on the mural – all areas with the coke red. So, on Saturday morning she by-passed her usual sleep-in and leisurely breakfast and went straight to Parkers. She picked up the best quality coke-red acrylic she could find – something with heavy pigment coverage. She had the intention of putting on a fluoro vest and painting over it during the day on Sunday. She had a plan. But, as the best laid plans go, it didn't work out that way.

That Saturday night she babysat for some friends, and they took full advantage of their freedom & didn't get home until 3.30am. She was exhausted. But racing home on a scooter in the cool spring night, she felt awake and alive as she passed that End Terrace. There it was – glistening under the soft streetlights. A few drunk or high folks were around, a couple making out in the park. "Fuck it," she thought, "I'm up and up for it". She raced home, grabbed the equipment, changed her clothes. The top-notch Matisse Structure acrylic paint, brushes, a piece of cardboard for a palate, a bottle filled with water for washout. Wig, glasses and paste-up jacket (old habits die hard).

Fig.7.2
Numskull, ROACH on end terrace, Foveaux Street Sydney. August 2016

There's something about the city this time of night, or, morning. A few birds are just starting to stir. A few people still around. Just enough going on. Mini likes a few people around when she works. She walks up to the wall in confidence. All feels good. She finds a spot in the bushes to store her 'kit' and gets to it. The paint is thick but not quite thick enough to cover in one coat – darn it! She paints over each of the logos, crosses the street and sits on a door stoop, on her phone, as if waiting for a friend. She was really waiting for paint to dry. Then she hits the wall again...then again. After three coats, it wasn't perfect but she'd been there long enough. Packed up her kit and that was that.

You know the best thing about all this? A few days later she found a really slick promo clip about the advertising work and there it was in all its glory – an ad sans advertising. A mural, not an advertisement.

A few days later, it was time for the main event – the official No Ad Day activities. The idea, as Mini and Kurt understood it, was to remove ads from the city. So, that's what we spent a chunk of the night doing.

After some warm-up removals in a couple of quieter areas, we figured we had our system down and were ready to take out the big one – 3 highly visible ads in front of Sydney Uni. Kurt was nervous.. A few people were waiting for buses. The next bus was due in 3 minutes. So we wait. It's on time. A couple of people get on, but not everyone. "Let's wait until the next bus," says Kurt. Mini doesn't want to wait. We'd been there too long already. But she agrees. We wait. More people turn up, waiting for buses. All the city bus numbers have gone by and we haven't hopped on one. This is dodge. Mini starts to feel anxious: "we've gotta do this". Kurt's still not feeling it. We wait longer. Two guys appear across the road – they look shady. Turns out they're private security guards. Has the perfect moment passed for us to do this? The folks that were around us before wouldn't have cared – they might have even celebrated the removal of the ads. You could tell – they were cool – you kinda get an intuition about these things. Mini hassles, calls Kurt "chicken shit". After all this time, she thought he would have her confidence that the community would look after us and that you just need to do it. Finally. We do it. That night did provide a sense of relief, but it was short lived. Within three days, the ads were all back in place. Was it possible to push against this?

A few days later, Mini took a trip to New Zealand to have some time out with her mum. You could imagine her shock when on the first day she went down to the local Foursquare to get the milk: a hand painted Coke mural on the side of the shop. Couldn't believe it. When she asked the owner about it, the owner was super proud to have paid some local artist to paint a mural on the side of the their building. But it wasn't a mural – it was advertising!

Fig.7.3
Mini Graff paste-up
Cleveland Street
Sydney.
October 2017

Fig.7.4
Empty bus shelters on City Road - in front of the University of Sydney. November 2016

When visiting Los Angeles in April 2017 Mini was struck by the global advertising monster once again. An alcohol company mural had been painted on an Apparition Media spot on Cleveland Street, Chippendale, 3 days before she left Sydney. Illegal advertising is hard enough to stomach, but blatant alcohol advertising? Next level. Bring back BUGA-UP. On her first day in Los Angeles, she was confronted with exactly the same mural, on the side of a liquor store on Sunset Blvd, West Hollywood.

DECOMMODIFICATION: SYDNEY X NEW YORK

Concluding thoughts

Living in Jordan's city isn't easy. Taking over ads and doing so publicly and collectively is risky work. The forces acting to try to shut our cities down in the name of commercial advertising are powerful. But we shouldn't underestimate our own power to make the cities we want. And we have more allies than we may think. In fact, growing interest in the work of ad-hackers signals that many of us have no particular love for advertising. And those of us living in the public city are just as likely to be encouraged and supported on the street as we go about our work by residents of the branded city, as we are to be shut down.

Fig.7.5
Jordan Seiler, *Carry On:* London England, 2016

So, consider this little piece not just as a documentation of this work, but as a kind of tourist guide to another city – a city where the democratic potential of public space for non-commercial expression rules over the global and guerilla advertising companies. Like all good tourist guides, it kinda makes you want to go there yourself. And the great thing is, you don't have to fly. Find some comrades, get yourselves organised, hit the streets of your town … and you're already there.
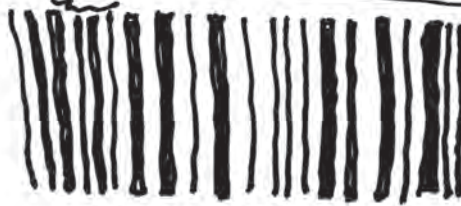
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It's only temporary…

The Sydney Shuffle

The monetisation of public spaces through their temporary enclosure for commercial events is becoming naturalised in Sydney. Is this privatisation of public space ok because it's only temporary? We think not! The push back against privately-owned public spaces in London shows what's possible for those of us concerned with enclosures in Sydney…

Walking to campus from Redfern station a few months ago, a couple of us were stopped in our tracks by a swarm of workers in high-vis vests toting a Citibank sign into a gate that restricted access to a greenspace where we read on sunny days. Most of the benches in the park, it would seem, were being cordoned into a corporate 'outdoor cinema' for the summer. As a concession, a few benches remained just outside the fence, giving the punter a clear view of the space lost… if only temporarily. In the context of public space being sold off to private developers in London, we began to wonder if the temporary closure of public space wasn't just another kind of privatisation of public space, since the closure of this space, for profit, inevitably excludes some citizens. Both the assertion of power to corden the space and the decision to exclude (non-paying) citizens seems to us fundamentally undemocratic, in much the same way selling off the space permanently to private forces is. Both decisions harbour serious consequences. And both stem not from malicious intent on the part of councils but a desperation to make up for shortfalls due to budget cuts. Which raises, for us, two crucial questions. First, how can we, as urban scholars, research and raise awareness about these issues and second, what might be done to turn back the tide?

All over Sydney, and especially when the weather warms up, we lose access to public spaces for temporary events. In November 2017, a controversy erupted when former prime minister Paul Keating confronted the Australian band *Midnight Oil* over their concert in the Domain, which left a large part of the space fenced off for 16 days with two-metre high spike-topped fencing. Given that tickets were going for $82-160, Keating suggested that the band was, "squatting and profiting from Sydney's central piece of public land".

Between them, Midnight Oil singer Peter Garrett and the Botanic Gardens Trust offered three responses to Keating's concerns: that the money is going to a good cause; that they didn't fence the whole Domain; and the closure was only temporary. Garrett went on to quip that Keating's complaint was the product of musical snobbery, rather than politics.
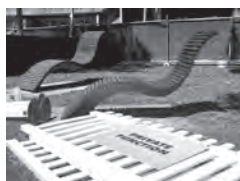
We like us some Midnight Oil. But we share some of Keating's concerns that such responses are pretty flimsy justifications. Looked at in isolation, perhaps an individual instance of temporary enclosure doesn't seem all that significant. But when such enclosures are happening more often in more places, and when the length of 'temporary' enclosures is getting longer, something significant is happening to our public spaces.

Fig.8.1
Enclosure
November 2017

Large chunks of iconic public spaces like the Botanic Gardens, the Domain, and Centennial Park are increasingly fenced off for temporary commercial events of varying durations - sometimes for just a single day or a weekend, sometimes for several weeks. The Botanic Gardens has become home to Moonlight Cinema and Moonlight Opera at different times of the year, with prime foreshore fenced off and access restricted to ticketed customers for weeks at a time.

Centennial Park hosts similar commercial events that involve the temporary fencing of significant areas, and has also started to rent out space for exclusive corporate events. In February 2017, a 2.4ha area was fenced off and reserved for a private function held by tech giant Atlassian. Every time a concern is raised, the same three justifications re-appear - the enclosure is lucrative, partial, and temporary, so there's nothing to worry about.

This trend is also beginning to take hold in less iconic, more suburban parks. A 2017 application to fence off a significant area of Camperdown Memorial Park for a commercial burger festival (yep!!) met with concerted opposition from Newtown residents. The organisers eventually retreated, but only as far as another park in nearby Marrickville where their event was eventually staged.

Often the first we see or hear of these enclosures is when the fences are going up. Just as often, they then evaporate before we have time to lodge a protest. This is guerilla privatisation, firing sniper shots and dispersing, but in the process making clear the fact that our public space is no longer wholly public. As a result, we stop ourselves from going to public space, or doing certain things in it, because we feel, subconsciously or otherwise, that on some level corporations have more of a 'right' to the space than we do as public taxpayers. The psychological effects of this sort of self-policing were written about by Michel Foucault when he suggested that we ourselves assume responsibility for the constraints of power and become the principle of our own subjection. In other words, being disempowered, even if only temporarily, encourages us to reproduce our own disempowerment.

We are left to assume that the councils, the companies, the bands and performers, are doing this 'for the public good'. But given 'we' as a people didn't decide to invite this on our space, we must ask 'public good for whom?' Because as much as we might enjoy, and can afford, a *Midnight Oil* concert, what of our neighbors who cannot and who also now cannot play in the park with their kids for free? And if this was really all about the public good, wouldn't we have a right to know a little more about how decisions to grant these temporary enclosures are made, or how much revenue is raised? Asked about the above-mentioned Atlassian private function, a spokesperson for the Centennial Parklands Trust refused to tell the *Sydney Morning Herald how much they charged*, citing 'commercial in confidence'.

Fig.8.2
Found in the park.
November 2017

Fig.8.3
Book your tickets now or lose your green.
July 2015

London Land Grabs

In London, we see a different, more blatant kind of privatisation in action -- but we can also take inspiration from recent interventions that are contesting such trends. Like many other cities, London's public domain is being reshaped by the creation of privately owned public spaces ('POPS'). These legal niceties transform open-air squares, gardens and parks into spaces that look public but are not: they are owned and/or managed by private entities. And as a result, the rights of the citizens using them -- our rights to the city itself -- are curtailed, since private whims rather than the law of the land may then shape the rules of engagement.

Although this issue might be academic while we're eating our lunch on a private park bench, the consequences of multiplying and expanding POPS affects everything from our personal psyche to our ability to protest.

All of this is important because public space is more than the empty space between buildings. It's also the space where we slow down and relax, the space where we meet friends and family, and the space where we can be sure - whoever we might be -- that we have a place. Cities are filled with buildings that will deny you entry, but public space is where we should all feel welcome, regardless of our differences. Public spaces are crucial sanctuaries of equality. In short, public spaces are material monuments to our right to the city.

And so, to defend those rights, in 2015 a group of people (including Brad) formed the London Space Academy (LSA) which went after pseudo-public spaces via three prongs. The LSA collected information about ownership and finances, we undertook direct action to gain media exposure, and then ramped up political pressure. We contacted the landowners of more than 50 major pseudo-public spaces in London, ranging from financial giant JP Morgan (owner of Bishops Square in Spitalfields) to the Tokyo-based Mitsubishi Estate (owner of Paternoster Square in the City of London) and the Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Company (owner of the open space around the ExCeL centre). We asked them what regulations people passing through their land were subject to, and where members of the public could view those regulations. All but two of the landowners declined to answer. We also asked all local authorities in London for details of privately owned public spaces in their borough, via the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act; most councils rejected the request, saying they either didn't have the resources to respond or didn't have the data at all! So, we just got the information ourselves by crowdsourcing data and testing the limits of various spaces around the city as part of what we called 'space probes'.

With that in hand, we needed direct action to raise awareness. And so, on a drippy winter morning last year, in Potters Fields Park next to City Hall, a hundred-strong group amassed to undertake 'Space Probe Alpha' – a mass trespass onto the property of *More London*.

A few yards from us, thousands of methodically interlaced Irish blue limestone paving stones marked the socio-political boundary where the public space of the council-owned park transformed into privately owned pseudo-public space.

Fig.8.4
The largest POPS in London, patrolled by police impersonators. February 2016

Fig.8.5
Siân Berry, 2016 Green Party Candidate for Mayor of London and Trespasser.
Image: Elliott Franks

We converged on The Scoop, a private outdoor arena in view of Tower Bridge, proclaimed it a public agora, and held an unsanctioned two-hour event featuring speeches about the importance of public space. It was, by all measures, a resounding success and we learned that the private security of More London had very little leverage to enforce their extralegal rules.

Regardless of recent political shifts, we have learned over the past 20 years that we cannot and should not expect a ramping-down of the privatisation and securitisation of public space in our city.

More research and journalism can highlight what is being lost, and where, and more on-the-ground action similar to Space Probe Alpha raises awareness on the issue and renders transparent the fallacy of this 'security theatre.'

With the information in hand, we needed media exposure with solid infographics. While that may sound petty, people respond to stories that are clearly articulated. If we want to be scholars that change the world in addition to studying it, we need to use more-than-textual methods. In partnership with Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL), the city's environmental records centre, we produced a comprehensive map of pseudo-public spaces in the capital and made the underlying dataset publicly available.

In response to our informations raising campaigns and direct action, the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, vowed to publish new guidelines on how these spaces – some of the city's most prominent squares and plazas – are governed. So despite all of the despair in the UK and more broadly, things are never hopeless. As Donna Haraway writes, it is ever so crucial, that we do not give up in despair but instead 'stay with the trouble'.

Sydney
←→
London

Turning back to our 'trouble' in Sydney's parks, we propose that a three-pronged approach is needed to tackle temporary enclosure before it becomes more serious than it already is. We need to gather data about how much temporary space is being closed off, where, when and for how long. Next, we need to undertake direct action in those spaces to raise awareness of the issue. Finally, we need to make clear data and images, and press from the direct action, to create more press, until the pressure on politicians becomes unbearable, and they respond. If this can be done in London, the belly of the neoliberal beast, it can be done in Sydney, where sensibilities still veer toward the social.

We want to make clear that monetization is the problem, not the use of this space. Using space is sharing space, and the programming of temporary events can actually help to boost their use and accessibility. Free events in the Domain and Hyde Park over summer are a case in point, and have become Sydney institutions for that reason. In Newtown, the same people who opposed the commercial burger festival were happy for the park to be fenced off for the Newtown Festival once a year - an event whose gold coin donation for entry goes to the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre.

But when temporary enclosures are commercial in nature, then we start to see the calculatory logic of profit and loss enter the management of public spaces. This has the obvious immediate effect of restricting access to those spaces to those with the means to pay for entry. But more broadly, and more perniciously, it reflects the increasing dependence of public park authorities on commercial revenue for their survival. Here, temporary enclosures are a manifestation of a deeper threat to the democratic ownership and control of public space -- the re-casting of non-profit-making public spaces as financial liabilities rather than communal assets.

It's our job not only to seek further information that might allow us to document the extent of temporary enclosures, but to make the case for a public realm that does not have to justify its existence in purely financial terms.

EXTRA READING

DISPOSSESSIONS / Sydney X Jakarta
Tolak Gusuran! Repertoires of resistance to forced eviction in Jakarta, Indonesia
https://diaryofacitykid13.wordpress.com/2018/08/17/tolak-gusuran-repertoires-of-resistance-to-forced-eviction-in-jakarta-indonesia/

We Live Here: How do residents feel about public housing redevelopment?
http://theconversation.com/we-live-here-how-do-residents-feel-about-public-housing-redevelopment-83422

Imploding activism: challenges and possibilities of housing scholar-activism
http://www.radicalhousingjournal.org/home

DEGREES / Sydney X Jakarta
North Jakarta: Kampung livelihood responses to infringing infrastructures
http://www.situatedupe.net/north-jakarta-kampung-livelihood-responses-to-infringing-infrastructures/

Globalizing urban resilience
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02723638.2018.1446870

DEMOCRATISATION / Sydney X Hong Kong X Baltimore X Barcelona
The austerity governance of Baltimore's neighbourhoods: 'The conversation may have changed but the systems aren't changing'
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07352166.2018.1478226

In the 'Fearless City', Barcelona residents take charge
https://theconversation.com/in-the-fearless-city-barcelona-residents-take-charge-84057

Protesting in Putin's Russia
https://changemakerspodcast.org/episode-6-protesting-putins-russia/

Recovering the politics of the city: From the 'post-political city' to a 'method of equality' for critical urban geography
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0309132514535284

DIMENSIONS / Sydney X Mexico X Phoenix
Picturing urban subterranean: Embodied aesthetics of London's sewers
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0308518X16652396

Unearthing the subterranean Anthropocene
https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/area.12369

DOMESTICITY / Sydney X Jakarta
'Generation share': digitalized geographies of shared housing
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649365.2018.1466355

DIGITALISATION / Sydney X Anywhere
Crafting code: Gender, coding and spatial hybridity in the events of Pyladies Dublin
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2797168

Google wants to run cities without being elected. Don't let it.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/24/google-alphabet-sidewalk-labs-toronto

Your Credit Score is Not Sufficient to Enter This Location': The Risks of the 'Smart City'
https://www.redpepper.org.uk/how-to-overcome-digital-oppression-in-smart-cities/

DECOMMODIFICATION / Sydney X New York
Wendy Murray on political posters and unleashing collective power in Fresh Blood
https://artguide.com.au/wendy-murray-on-political-posters-and-unleashing-collective-power-in-fresh-blood

Reframing Graffiti and Street Art in the City of Sydney
http://apo.org.au/system/files/113451/apo-nid113451-447926.pdf

Cities within the city: Do-it-yourself urbanism and the right to the city
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-2427.12053

DOMAINS / Sydney X London
These squares are our squares: be angry about the privatisation of public space
https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/25/squares-angry-privatisation-public-space

Temporary Public Space Closures
https://fbiradio.com/podcast/down-to-earth/

Propositions for more just urban public spaces
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13604813.2015.1128679

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