The lesson of the twentieth century has been that no amount of architecture (whether in the guise of buildings or land forms can compete with the scale or dynamism of the metropolis.

R. E. Somol, “Systems Go Urbanism” CASE: Downsview Park Toronto
Support

A series of essays exploring the issues which provoked the project, situating it in a broader discourse on landscape urbanism and architectural projects on the city.
PULLING OUT THE RUG: MANHATTAN’S CARPET

Many cities were laid out using grids: but none has achieved the same intensity of both lifestyle and development; the population density or skyline associated with New York. What spurred the growth, the culture? Was it the grid? Or is the thing that sets Manhattan apart something else entirely...

In Delirious New York, Rem Koolhaas sets forth a retroactive manifesto which explains the architectural basis for the aggressive growth and self-renewal of Manhattan, where the city becomes a theater of progress. He identifies four mutations which underlie the cultural of congestion: The grid, tower, sphere, and carpet. The grid — the emblem of the city; is heralded by Koolhaas as the device which enables order to be reassembled out of the chaotic mix of individual buildings, activities, and inhabitants. Deceptively simple, the 1807 Commissioner’s Plan was a speculation, a projection into a future when the island would be remade to suit the desires of its inhabitants. The grid ruled the city, but it was the supporting cast that made the grid into the Manhattan that we know today.

The second device was the tower, a building with the capability to multiply the ground plane. The third anomaly was the globe, an exceptional fossil pulled from the ashes of Coney Island. Its spherical form was a model for creating the maximum interior volume with the minimal envelope. Together, they embodied a new paradigm for architecture: the creation of new worlds, no longer constrained by the symbolic posture applied to their facades. The tower is implicated as the end to the speculation game set forth in the grid.

Yet, for all the speculation set forth in the manifesto, the final mutant was ignored: in Vriesendorp’s accompanying Flagrant Délit, it was rendered as mere decoration:
beneath the bed, pinned down by the fabulous context which surrounded it. Central Park, labeled by Koolhaas as a synthetic Arcadian Carpet, is the grid's largest deviation. Abandoning the rules set forth by the commissioners, the Greensward was projected over undeveloped blocks, preserving forever their latent potential.

The grid made Manhattan, but the Carpet was the avant garde for the architecture that now surrounds it. Its absent presence demanded growth – creating a second, internal frontier for the island. Furthermore, it was the first test of many of the technologies of congestion: The initial design of the park included not only the reshaping of the land to preserve the natural state of the land, but also to improve movement, drainage, and even supply water to the city. Underlying a thin coating of nature lies infrastructure: pipes, conduits, subways, and underpasses devoted to the movement of material, energy, and people. Rooted into this veneer, imported trees were planted, selected not on their natural habitat but rather on their suitability and resilience to urban air. Boulders, bridges, drains, and ravines – all simulacrum aimed at creating a sublime wilderness. The park was made to generate effects, replete with sheep and resident shepherd to instill yet another intangible entity into the park experience.

Other cities have large parks – even at larger scales, but none with its central location. Its advantage lies in projection – a public amenity amidst the ruthless development of the island. In designing the park, Olmstead ascribed to the same values as the commissioners fifty years before: he was not a naturalist, his nature is brutal, an overwhelming version of the original. He was not an architect, practicing complete architectural abstinence in the Greensward Plan, eschewing the follies scattered throughout the picturesque tradition he was inspired by. There was no room for signature forms or flourishes: like the grid, his vision was totalizing, ascribing specific behavior, its implementation carried out with militaristic precision.
Aside from its aspirations to be a proper simulacrum of nature, it functioned as a social theater for the carriage-driving classes. A carriage ride became a display of status festival similar to the those staged by the lobbies of opera houses, later surpassed by the technological wonders of Radio city. Central park created a fantastic wilderness predating those of Coney Island by fifteen years. The key thing that set it apart however were that its innovations were topographic rather than mechanical: a spatial expression otherwise impossible within a single block of the grid. It was the means to achieve what the great incubators of the skyscraper could not: space in which to escape from an oversaturated lifestyle. It achieved its ends with such success that escapees from the city failed to realize the work of artifice manifest around them. It is the ultimate manifestation of the technology of the fantastic, so unbelievably perfect that it is assumed to be real. Manipulation aside, the park’s sheer lack of mass guaranteed monumentality.

The grid was an operation in speculation, in its conception creating the possibility that the island would eventually fill with architecture. The carpet however did not speculate, it assumed: its size trumped the initial area allotted for it in the commissioner’s report, to provide for the masses that would flock to it. The grid has the endless capacity to organize change, homogenizing even the most outlandish architectural ego, yet the carpet overwhelms the rules of the Grid. Its effects lie in its lack of control, on the reintroduction of the wild into the city. Yet, like any other block, the park is tied to the grid, its traverses form streets and the loop two avenues.

The carpet is the island’s moment of relief from the grid; yet its irregularity merely reinforces it. Central Park turned the grid into an icon by absconding from its principals and inciting the urbanity which it preceded. The carpet, locked in the center of the grid, is the foundation of which underlies the Manhattan we know today.
Before the industrial city, the problem of accessible nature was assuaged by the relatively small scale and density of cities. A side effect of urbanization, the project of naturalizing the city had many motives, one being the desire to reconnect with imagined roots in nature. It manifests in notions of survivalism, mimesis, and the preservation of ‘natural’ areas, the cultural tactics used to construct this new nature. In newly urbanized environments, private parks and gardens provided grounds for experimentation with novel forms and organizations – aesthetic operations with vegetables. These enclaves were separate from the larger city - yet were modeled on its logics of production and notions of architectural ordering.

When the city itself was posited as a ‘problem’ due to the side effects of industrialization, architects forgot the limits to their agency in the urban realm and began to design ideal cities, each with a distinctive ‘natural’ component: a means of escape from the ills of the industrial city. Nature was never integrated – they feared that it would be contaminated by architecture, and reciprocally contaminate its host. Originally extant in the form of (private) parks and gardens, these enclaves (often at the edge of a city) have entrenched the notion that nature is something other, the antithesis of culture.

As a series failures within the broader love story, utopias hold a special position, untarnished by the demands of reality. This history of ideal cities project the formal denouement of (designing) the ideal lifestyle. These ‘spatial utopias’ proposals for urban life followed the neat logic of a dialectic relationship between nature and culture (Harvey). This divide, combined with the modern desire for healthy urban environments translated to acts of self-loathing. These utopias were only possible by weakening architecture and the city: for the sake of nature; for the sake of efficiency; for the sake of health. Many of
these ‘ideals’ remained on paper, the architectural ambitions within relegated to the status of semi-achieved dreams. At their worst, their reproduction of existing power structures became models for oppression, apologias for sub-urbia or were co-opted and became the tools of new capital development.

The first counterexample to the industrial city came in Ebeneezer Howard’s Garden Cities of To-morrow in 1902. Howard laid out a city of seven units: six small ‘towns’ of 30,000 surrounding a central city of 50,000; each separated from the rest by a greenbelt, and connected by railroad lines. Architecture is confined to islands within a sea of nature; regulated to ensure that its cities will never develop culture; broken into small towns, the inhabitants have all the nature they desire, at the cost of art, culture, and social exchange (Goodmans).

Seeing room for improvement, Le Corbusier set forth his own counter-proposal: The radiant city. Its radiance however was reserved for the wealthy industrialists who would occupy its center, and overlook the beaux arts plan from their crystal towers. Its order relegated each mode of transportation to a different level as all functions were lifted off the ground, leaving no reason to occupy the vast green spaces that it enabled. Nature became the planar field upon which to figure buildings; the city became a mix of architectural machines for working, moving and living. It was stripped to standardized, mass-producible components of the smallest footprint (ostensibly to relieve congestion and to provide light and air) a side effect of efficient architectural self-loathing.

Unsatisfied by the garden city, other architects attempted to urbanize the landscape. Wright elaborated upon his Broadacre city from the early 1930 until nearly 1960 – part Jeffersonian agrarian, part techno-utopia, Wright attempted to solve the ills that architecture created through dispersal: buildings are sprinkled lightly across the landscape. Highway links and whirlygig landing pads enabled a fluid lifestyle of incredible
consumption in which any notion of city is scrubbed from the mind like the exhaust of its many cars by the vast green fields which separate all functions. Wright wanted to end the divide between city and countryside; the schism he proposed was the auto-mobility of the population, confining the landscape to the pictures that one flies through between fragments of urbanity.

Later, reacting to a slightly different crisis, Archizoom, realized architecture’s ultimate potential in their realization of No Stop City: city is subsumed by architecture; existence enclosed to form an endless interior. The city without architecture needs no nature; it conceptually no longer exists. Outside is confined to be the backdrop for infinite perspectives, the requisite Architectural rendering of the anti-Architectural interior. Later inverted in Branzi’s Agronica, the continuous interior is replaced with idyllic agrarianism; life is supported by a shelter-less grid of infrastructure. Soft urbanization at its finest; we can have it all, as long as it is farmable.

A call for a terminus to the endless spread of informal architecture is set forth in DOGMA’s Stop City. Blankness supported by a rhetoric indicting the fascism of late capital; forgetting that architect too can be fascists in their demand for form which, even if freeing its inhabitants from the auspices of globalization’s evils, replaces the object of the city with an architectural one. Foster figures the city at Masdar, creating evidently self-contained eco-city. Fueled by the endless consumption of oil elsewhere, all that it needs from the outside world is the endless drilling for capital required to support the city-as-speculation and a stream of desalinized ocean water to fill its oases.

Mimesis begat justification for the endeavors of the earliest architects. The rules and harmonies ‘discovered’ by the ancients constructed nature as the model for architecture. Natural justification for the artificial construction Architects today find new justifications for nature in its phenomenology; quickly rationalized as performative
qualities; bastardized in the market for sustainable imagery. Bio-mimicry reintroduced mimetic discourse as a scientific process, but quickly got lost in computer simulations and complexity, forgetting whom its mimicry was meant to serve. In any form, green™ has become capital's darling; will architecturally co-opted nature be the next to succumb to new austerity?
The ideal city can always be critiqued as a result of its autonomy from its makers; it will always show a limited set of ideals. The design of utopias reflect a singular ideal - rather than a great collection of competing agendas that actually constitute a city. This autonomy is echoed in many early parks; nature was considered to be a single, totalizing entity that served the city by offering its opposite.

This sentiment was rooted in the tradition of “picturesque” understandings and compositions of landscape. Ordering landscape through the lens of the Claude glass was an architectural technique gleaned from painting, influenced by Burke’s sensationalism, and practiced in English garden design. This means to organize landscape through the visual effects underlies a broad body of 17-19th century parks and gardens. Most notably the legacy of American park systems, to an extent greatly impacted by the work of F.L. Olmstead.

This legacy formed the basis for a disciplinary split: landscape and architecture were divorced at the beginning of the 20th century, and began to focus on the issue of the city from two very distinct approaches: the architects, attempting to embody culture, and the landscapers modifying and staging nature for the benefit of culture. Embedded in the larger nature/culture dialectic is the distinction between city and countryside – a viewpoint realized as ineffective even before ecologists re-discovered that humanity was indeed part of nature (Alberti). The ‘edge’ of the city has always been difficult to define, except for geopolitical boundaries, and is has been expanded to include its ‘food shed,’ ‘carbon footprint,’ watershed, materials sourcing, and waste landscape. Within this absurd mapping lies the city – or rather the urban condition in its most intense form. One can still
focus on the city, as built, in spatial terms but must also consider the broader logics and flows which activate the “ossified” structures of the city (De Landa). Working on the spatial aspects of urbanism is the territory of architecture; with the breaking of the city-landscape dialectic, preconceived notions of “city-ness” must subside. A strip mall is urban, a sub-urb is urban, a remote mountain preserve is urban: to what level of intensity is the question. This question has helped to form the basis of the argument for landscape urbanism, which argues that landscape is the most salient means through which to organize the continuous urban condition we now face.

Within this context, public space has developed conflicting sets of ideal conditions: urban plazas were constructed for discourse and passeggiata bourgeois urbanity, while parks and gardens were designed as “preserved” nature within the city. Political participation was integral to public space - as was the conspicuous display of status: public spaces were conceived with an ideal public in mind. A history of urban parks offer an example of the different way's that designers conceive and accommodate the demands of the public.

For all of its positive effects, as a productive place of social production and leisure, the park can also be co-opted into a tool for exclusion and maintenance of existing social hierarchies, concealing spatial transgression under the guise that the park, as preserved fragment of natural utopia. This can be seen in its use as a barrier – the so called ‘privacy strips’ which encircle suburban enclaves, disassociating swaths of housing from any potentially disagreeable infringement from outside. Or in the tradition of the squares in London – a gated component to a broader development within the city.

In American cities, the majority of public spaces are 'naturalized' – in the form of parks or even in the potted plants of privatized public spaces (Martin). The integration of nature into the city, and into architecture is a project with a long history, driven by the
demand for public space, recreation, and respite from the city. A combination of health-focused urbanisms and latent Jeffersonian agrarianism foretold that the majority of American public spaces would be planted. Both a reaction to the ills of the European city (for example the William Penn Plan for Philadelphia, and its aim to prevent fire and squalor through the regularity of a grid, allocating four squares for a component of green space in the city) and a freedom afforded by open frontiers, parks and open space were included in many American city plans (Similarly based in the practice of Utopia outlined above).

In the US, traffic engineers dominate the design of our environment. Landscape architecture dominates the design of exterior public space. Contemporary landscape architecture seeks to reconstruct ‘memory and cultural enrichment, social program and utility, and geological diversification and succession. (Corner) A focus on “legibility and resilience’ is seen to be the means in which landscape can work to create public spaces in the form of parks. (Czerniak) However, the emphasis on landscape-as-construct: both intellectual, ecological, and cultural has led to an ignorance of the programmatic confrontations produced by the urban environment. Following an ethos of ‘if you build it, they will come’ with regards to the people who will eventually inhabit their designer natures, landscape architecture foregrounds the means of landscape’s construction, ignoring the people who will carry it out and eventually inhabit the landscape. Movement through the landscape is seen as its principal usefulness.

Perhaps an unfamiliarity with this contemporary focus of landscape production was a benefit to a series of architects who became involved in the design of a series of public spaces and parks: La Villette, Expo 89’, Downsview, and Governor’s Island. Various architects have co-opting the production logic of the urban as a means to provide the organizational for its public spaces. Tschumi’s non-compositional ‘building’ overlaid different programmatic/tectonic systems to achieve urban congestion in a park. OMA’s
proposal for La Villette transposed the diagram of a skyscraper onto the site; a strategy of pure program, still untested in its goal to produce ‘horizontal congestion.’ The use of grids, both as non-hierarchical field conditions and as the means to accommodate metropolitan diversity, were applied at Expo ‘89 and in various urban projects that followed in the work of OMA. Downsview Park, represents an apotheosis of applying strategies gleaned from urbanism to the park: the isolated program and segregated pathways expunge any notion of social interaction and do produce the promised ‘low density’ lifestyle, yet it is anything but. Finally, The Governor’s Island competition entry by REX, the grid (here referencing Jefferson’s equanimity) is extruded to create a kit of parts for landscape production. This legacy of architecture operating on landscape are primarily concerned with its production in the terms of its use: while ecological performance is sometimes considered, it is less important than the strategic manipulation of activity. Architectural constructions on these parks also typically ignore the latent history and culture embodied in the site.

The distinction then, between architectural and landscape approaches to public space can then be seen to be notions of use and constituency. The different ideals: landscape as site of memory, ecology, and cultural understanding versus the site in use, offer a productive difference that can be positioned to create a public space that learns from both disciplines in its integration of natural elements into cultural production.
The issue of integrating nature into the built environment (and to a lesser extent, the built environment into the landscape) has been attempted time and time again, most recently in the discourse of landscape urbanism. This discourse posits that when dealing with landscape as an organizing principal for the urban condition, design shifts from that of picturesque composition to organizational performance; from fixed images to resilient systems, and lending coherence to increasingly complex parks with multiple constituencies and considerations (Czerniak). However informed and systemic these landscape designs are, they still accept a basic schism between park and city. The park is not the city, while related and linked to it, parks are understood as something separate that supports the city. For the most part, landscape urbanism has been concerned with peripheral urban sites, leaving the question of the possibility of nature in dense urban cores off the table.

Predating the establishment of landscape urbanism discourse (or even prompting it), a series of architectural projects on parks emphasized the role that of program plays in the public realm. These proposals were very different from those in recent discussion; they applied architectural and urban concepts to landscape design. This projection of architecture or the city onto landscape is interesting not only for its programmatic manipulation but also for the reconsideration of landscape material as inherently similar to that of architecture; albeit with different processes, schedules, and expectations.

Cities are an assemblage of systems that over time become a distinct, manufactured, system. Both social and material, the city is as much characterized by its physical structures as it is by its institutions. From manipulations of bedrock (reinforced
with piers, riddled with tunnels, and pierced by wells) to its multitude of roofs, the city is an intensification of nature. It is an ossified artifact of technological progression aimed at domesticating “nature” in all its forms. Architecture is usually confined to operate on singular objects that make up mere pixels within this landscape. Typically, to design (some call it urbanism) this landscape is impossible; it is the result of unending development carried out by independent players. However, in certain instances, the opportunity exists to operate differently: beyond a certain scale, Architecture makes its own landscape.

Architecture can foster density, while masquerade as respite from an increasingly dense city. A type that creates both only places for recreation and the curation of “nature” in the city, but also hosts diverse and necessary architectural density to both be fiscally and socially sustainable, while improving environmental performance. The traditional means to address these issues is to “plan” or “zone” an area, rather than an architecture that functions more like infrastructure, supporting other entities as a form of “positive interference” (Evans). Working on a long range of failed precedents, I believe that nature and architecture can be reintegrated by considering architecture as landscape – albeit with very special qualities provided by its artificial abilities.

How can architecture, without determining ideology expand possibilities? The city provides the ideal model for the production of human exchange: whatever its form, it accommodates the needs of its populous. The different ways that this is accomplished can be investigated and transposed to create a new system for the management of parks. Within the logics of the city there are major areas of interest for public space: flexibility and infrastructure.

Flexibility is a requisite quality of the city: nomadic lifestyles, flexible work spaces, and just-in-time production systems require it. Architecture enables this flexibility at
the scale of the building - seen in the ‘typical plan,’ but also in the rhetoric of often
overdetermined ‘free-plan’ notions of high-modern flexibility. (Koolhaas) Architectural
designs for public space have utilized several strategies to accommodate changing uses:
time management, parcelization, and isolation. Time management is a simple idea that is
difficult to manifest spatially: that different programs occupy the same space, distributed
over time as a means to increase a space’s capacity. Fragmentation is the breaking of
general program into smaller units which are then given over to short-term occupation,
creating a legible system that can indefinitely change. Isolation creates specific areas for
each program; dispersed within a larger space creating voids for unanticipated events.
These strategies produce coherent diagrams for the production of space - indeed they
can provoke urbanity. Yet, architecture is spatial practice: it should not be satisfied only
with organizational diagrams replacing design specificity.

Moving outside of buildings and operating on infrastructure is another way that
architecture is given agency with regards to impart new possibilities on public space.
There are three methods to achieve this: by adding value to existing systems, the designs
of new systems, or operating on the interchanges between different infrastructure.
Architectural infrastructure for public activities balances support with determination,
enabling new uses for typical" activities and systems through architectural manipulation.

Using the logics of the city to make public space enable it to support the
increased level of urban activity that the rest of the city contains; negotiating between
various constituencies as a means to produce the social sublime: incomprehensible
difference realized through interaction.
CITY ORGANIZATIONS
EVEN GRID, DIFFERENTIATED GRID, ENCLAVES, AXES
The city, in a time of pervasive urbanization and global exchange, faces many challenges; inbalanced energy usage, commodity scarcity, and geopolitical unrest force us to consider the values underlying our way of life. Our settlement patterns reflect how that value is manifest in the built environment. Space, viewed as a commodity, is changing: space has been devalued in terms of “exchange value” so it can be sourced broadly in an increasingly global economy; wealth is no longer tied to landed production of goods or agriculture. Space is transcended by the flows of goods, services, and people, among and between things. However, in the city, space is still defined by its “use-value” rather than exchange value; spatial value comes in the provision of services for the urban populus (Lefebvre). Cities are the exception to the devaluation of space resulting from the predominance of flows (capital, material, energy, information). While supplied by and shaped by their influence, the exchanges that take place through space (rather than in it) stabilize in the city, and are formed into material structures.

The status of public space is symptomatic of this condition. Outside of architecture, narratives can be culled from social models of public space: a relevant starting point is the idealized Greek Agora, which served as a reference for Habermas’ notion of the “public sphere.” Political exchange through rational discourse, the pursuit of leisure, and the market. His investigation and definition was of a particular male-dominated bourgeoisie regarding what is properly included/excluded in the public realm. This ‘public sphere,’ while indisputably exclusionary, was an expression of emergent democratic behavior in France at the time. Its means of exclusion were twofold: first, in its members – male, bourgeois, and with time to spare for public activity – and in its notions of what
was proper fodder for discourse, limiting the debate by excluding ‘private’ or ‘household’ matters. While exclusionary, this discourse served to expose the urbanite to different ideas, interests, and cultures, and enabled the collective understandings and agreements on which civil society is based. The important concept gleaned from this example is that public space must be a means to proliferate the creation, curation, and exchange of cultures.

Today, digital culture provides a staging ground for diverse – even obscure – sets of interest. This is a wonderful thing, enabling everyone to find a community of enthusiasts to foster any desire that they may want to explore. However, these communities operate in isolation, without direct exposure to the competing interests and ideas of others. While an individual may be involved in multiple communities and thereby reach an internal consensus with regards to the balance between competing ideologies, the communities themselves have little recourse to interact with others. Our political situation is one means to illustrate this – partisan political maneuvers and steadfast inability to compromise has the ability to bring entire nations to the brink of economic collapse. While it is essential to democracy to be in a constant state of debate, there are times that consensus – or at least a majority – must be reached between communities, or their members will suffer.

The concept of “public” must be considered distinct from the historically considered “crowd” or “mass.” There is no singular “public opinion” or body of people that can be construed to be “the public.” Rather there are many different groupings and categorizations, with different agendas, associations, and methods. Representational democracy creates limited relationships between citizen’s opinions and actual decision making: the different demands of groups are generalized, censored, and projected in a totalizing concept of “public.” Thus, architecture is usually confined to the production of determined, independent, typologically limited forms of public space – scattered
throughout the city.

The re-conceptualization of public is necessary to consider how public space might be designed today. Public space is an essential form of architectural practice. It also is one of the most complex: design must serve not only the needs of a singular client, but a changing, indefinite body. Architectural engagement in public interiors is far from failure; rather it is our social institutions that limit its scope to singular objects. There are a variety of successful public spaces focusing on single functions; the library, the post office, the station, the market, and the school. Yet, those that exist are increasingly marginalized as a result of declining investment, neo-liberal policy and changing cultural needs.

Exterior public space is possibly even more essential, devoted to movement in the form of streets, discourse in plazas, and respite in parks. Open interiors, in the form of Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) are rarely truly public, with limitations on activity and occupation. Architectural designs on both types of public space have been limited; and usually confined to creating a container for the space rather than on designing the space itself. Gross disinvestment in the public realm goes unnoticed by distracted citizens (among them architects) for whom communications technology has replaced spatial interaction.

Within architecture, the welcome cultural fragmentation loosened some of the boundaries of the discipline and resulted in a proliferation of projects for architecture. The issue du jour ranges from sustainability to social justice, from atrophying industry to the emergent informal city and alternatives to the homogenizing spatial practices of globalization – to say nothing of the fetish for purely formal investigations. Architectural ADHD is symptomatic of the multitude of cultural production ongoing today.

Different observers define new terms to describe the fragmentation of culture which has reached its apotheosis in the “cloud” structures of the internet: “otaku” (Oswalt),
radical pluralism, and the “multitude” (Hardt and Negri) all seek to describe the fracturing of preconceived notions of the public in our globalized, urbanized world. This is not necessarily a problem, as it can empower groups of individuals who would be marginalized or repressed within a generic concept of public.

Architecture must rethink how publics are considered as constituents - understanding that diverse needs must be accommodated, but also that regardless of interest or agenda, certain needs can serve as common ground. Architecture, tasked with creating specific environments to support human endeavors, must strategize permanence and change differently in order to link the common threads that exist between even the most diverse publics.
The “public sphere” is expanding to include nearly all aspects of our lives. We broadcast our statuses, upload our photos, and tune in to other people’s thoughts. Aspects of daily life are increasingly publicized through communications technology. Yet, as the public sphere extends, our public spaces are increasingly privatized.

Since the industrial revolution, the form and role of public space have been in flux, while its value (and funding) faded from our social conscious as the issues of industrialization were exported to sub-urban environments. Increasingly fragmented, the public is now composed of an evolving array of communities, interest groups, and individual actors - a product of “atomizing technologies” (Mitchell and Van Deusen) and a series of spatial practices which support this fragmentation of culture in spatial practice (Armhorst). Paralleling this fragmentation is the privatization of formerly public spaces such as the market, the library, and even the park. The need for control, security, and profit has created an agenda of privatized public space that preferences controlled, behaved, and endlessly consuming public, excluding those who cannot afford to participate or would be threatened by notions of “security” and “proper behavior.” Remnants of truly public space still exist, but are no longer the norm: a troubling thought in a time of ideological unrest, an “Age of Activism.” (Feffer) Our lack of interest in maximizing the possibility of public spaces illustrates its depressed value: this lack of attention will become unaffordable as cities densify.

Public space has been privatized through two processes. First, the obvious expropriation of public spaces by commercial entities: spurred by the fiscal burden of libraries, schools, and even parks, beleaguered municipalities can no longer afford to

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THE END
People’s Park, Berkley, Don Mitchell
“The End of Public Space”
maintain public space, and partially privatize them to subsidize their enormous upkeep. This is problematic as it moves the responsibility for (formerly) public space from falling under the control of elected representatives (of the people) to for-profit entities whose interests may conflict with that of the public. The impact of this can be minor, such as the ‘naming’ of elements in a space, or major, leading to exclusion of ‘undesirable’ behavior and activities normally fulfilled by public space.

The second, more sinister cause is the application of design strategies in public realm that effectively privatize space not only through direct exclusion, but through the limitation of possibilities. That which was previously held in common is parceled out to specific interest groups – isolating experiences and weakening the connection between public space and social interaction.

Communities, spatially defined as “neighborhoods” were once considered the basic unit of urban life. Movement through the urban environment involves navigating through a sea of unforeseen events; change is one of the underlying principals of metropolitan life. When our multiple associations with different communities no longer occur in the (private) spaces in which we live (following the traditional model of social interaction at the scale of the neighborhood), there must be new spaces to accommodate meetings, events, and activities for the diverse set of interests that exist (and continually change).

Public space is essential to the production of urbanity. When the demand for public space will only increase, privatization must be engaged architecturally by changing design practices to ensure the possibility of common use and by creating new hybrids that can fortify the few remaining bastions of public space. To continue to practice the status quo will only lead to the loss of public space to the forces of privatization.
AGENCY

Architectural agency lies in the production of space. It cannot directly operate on social interaction. However, architecture is a product of society, the physical manifestation of an ideal. The design of public space is an operation on ideology; whom has the right to use it, what activities are appropriate, and when will they pass into obsolescence. Architecture must reclaim public space as site for intervention; to do so it must construct narratives that address the underlying values, ideals, and policies that become embodied in the final spatial product.

Public space has been long defined as a place for discourse, leisure, culture, and the market. The involuntary exposure to unforeseen events is what makes the city a machine for the production of culture. Assimilation and exposure of different cultures is a specifically urban event. The value of the city is friction, and the cultural production that results from this diverse set of interactions. The city doesn’t foster communities of homogenous composition removed from the challenges and contact of urban life: the city publicizes all aspects of society. While obscured through various media (including architecture) the city (both people and built environment) is the veritable embodiment of the true values and judgements underlying society – and public space is the arena in which the interactions – contests – collisions of ideology play out in constructing that society. The “city” and the “public” are a continuous process, rather than a definite or stable entity.

There are three modes to architectural practice with regards to spatial agency. It can enforce and reproduce existing organizations, hierarchies, and orders (fig. 1); work between communities as technical mediators (fig. 2), or create infrastructures for autonomous production (fig. 3) (Findley). Like the example of the telephone, internet, or book, architecture has the ability to be a mechanism that disrupts behaviors in a beneficial way. How can architecture disrupt conceptions of public space in a positive way?
Architecture, in its origins, is a destructive force. Trees are cut down, mountains are transformed into flat lands, the earth is penetrated through the digging of holes...

Josep Luis Mateo, *Natural Metaphor*
Reference

Definitions, Precedents, Annotated Bibliography
Terms

Agency - Instrumentality; whether between multiple parties or independent of outside forces; the ability to perform (an action); the capacity to objectively initiate social change.

Architecture – is the practice of the ideal, principally concerned with the coordination of the making of structures, through the communicative medium of the drawing or diagram.

Artifice – a technical construction; the result of human intervention. Often produced with the purpose of deception.

City – a historical-material construct; fueled by agricultural surplus that condenses exchange for the mutual benefit of its makers. Once defined as an agglomeration of buildings and infrastructure, it may now be re-considered as an intricate set of spatial and informative relationships; the vast systems that support a concentration of humanity.

Community – a self-defined grouping of individuals with a common interest, a subset of the society in which they live; a unit of identification; a group of individuals acting towards a common end.

Democracy – government by the people; sovereign power resides in the people as a whole; exercised by them or their elected representatives.

Ecology – the study of relationships, and the systems which form as a result of those relationships.

Extraction – the act or process of removal (of a material or information) by mechanical means, or any process which holds this as its aim; such as farming, fishing, foraging, recycling...
Infrastructure – the myriad systems which support human life: including transportation, energy, food, even the underlying plans that help determine cities.

Landscape – an encompassing environment; land shaped by human occupation - whether through the construction of images or through the working of the earth itself. Rather than a way of seeing, landscape is a way of using this environment to meet the needs and desires of it shapers.

Nature – the sum of life and geology; commonly used to separate “that which is not of human origin or design”; that which is common to experience, expected outcome

Public – something held in common; a ‘free’ domain, a cultural construct: even as applied to nature (parks, preserves, forests)

Publicity – the quality of being public; the notice or attention given to something – making that thing publicly known, the medium through which to accomplish this end

Pluralism – cultural diversity through abandoning totalizing viewpoints of culture; yet recognizing invariable human rights, liberties, and basic needs

Urbanism – practices concerned with the history and making of the city with the goal to affect its development
Central Park - 1860 - Olmstead and Vaux
The section and manipulation of circulation is important to accomplishing the dual goal of the park. Greensward was a careful orchestration between forms of circulation and spatial effects. The downfall for the park is that it was designed with a specific end user in mind. While accommodating infrastructure and introducing natural disruption into the city, in its initial form, it failed to accommodate the changing needs of the city that grew around it.

Mt. Tabor - 1894 - Emanuel Tillman-Mische
Like Central Park, this park was designed according to notions of a picturesque and wild nature as the primary element for the park. Furthermore, it integrates working reservoirs into this landscape to support the city below. Unlike central park, the extreme sectional change (300') maintained its single-function visual effects, and exists as a fragment of the Olmstead tradition of park design.

Plan Vosin - 1925 - Le Corbusier
Faced with a self-loathing for architecture (and the city), the Plan Vosin scrapes the urban surface clean of activity, populating it with barren, endless lawns.

Parc Des Buttes de Chauxmont - 1884 - Alphand
Engineer Alphonse Alphand was tasked with reclaiming a quarry, integrating a rail line and linking the park with Haussmann's boulevards. The 'accommodation' of leftovers from the urban designs of Haussman created a system of 'non-hierarchical' organization which resulted from the layering of those leftovers. Furthermore, the topography of the park was used not to create a disconnection from the city, but rather to frame the city as one moved through the park. (Meyer)

Garden City - 1902 - Howard
The primal attempt to reconcile nature with the city; creating fragment-towns which would be small and separated. "An intellectual would rather meet a bear in the woods than live in a Garden City." (Goodman)

Broadacre City - 1931 - Wright
Part Jeffersonian agrarian, part techno-utopia, Wright attempted to solve the ills that architecture created through its dispersal. Highways and whirlygigs enabled a fluid lifestyle of incredible consumption in which any notion of city is scrubbed from the mind. Wright wanted to end the divide between city and countryside; the schism he proposed was the auto-mobility of the population, confining the landscape to the pictures that one flies through between fragments of urbanity.
Lovejoy and Keller Fountains - 1971 - Halprin
Part of a sequence of public spaces, these fountains create architectonic landscapes. They were a means to attract residents back to the downtown, linking the spaces with pedestrian pathways; a second layer of infrastructure to the grid of the city.

La Villette - 1982 - OMA, Tschumi
The two projects for La Villette used strategies of superimposition: Tschumi, the winner, architecturized the landscape, projecting layers of tectonic elements designed to create programmatic collisions. OMA worked less with form and more with program, arranging the site in a series of bands to maximize the interface between programs. The birth of the landscape urbanism discourse.

Saynatsalo - 1952 - Aalto
The town hall was situated at the edge of the settlement, and spatially encloses a portion of the landscape within architecture, to be used as an unprogrammed, outdoor room.

No Stop - 1969 - Archizoom
Architecture’s ultimate potential in their realization of No Stop City: city is subsumed by architecture; existence enclosed to form an endless interior. The city without architecture needs no nature; it conceptually no longer exists. Outside is confined to be the backdrop for infinite perspectives, the requisite architectural rendering of the anti-Architectural interior.

Freeway Park - 1976 - Halprin
While mostly a connective element, the “park” includes and expands the infrastructures on the site, spanning the interstate to re-connect areas of the downtown. The section is crucial to its function, as it wraps over, under, and around the streets of the city.

Expo ’87 - 1987 - OMA
Austerity limited the intervention to an organizational diagram; an ubiquitous grid was projected onto the site; each country participating in the exposition would be given a square on the grid to do what they wished (OMA). Circulation was indeterminate; people would be free to proliferate through the border of the site to prevent overload of the city’s traffic infrastructure. The OMA plan for the expo created an urbanism ground-zero: minimum investment, concept, and architecture.
Melun Senart - 1987 - OMA
A third attempt at "Imagining nothingness," voids were projected across the landscape in equal measure to new city. As a means to projectively intensify the areas trapped between the voids, they were filled with recreation, culture, and infrastructure: anything but the city itself.

Yokohama Forum - 1992 - OMA
The problem was creating a possibility for urbanity within an anti-architectural environment. Existing structures (market halls and accompanying parking) are co-opted into density through timing. Manipulating the function of parking to provide spaces for other events, the site is covered in 'programmatic lava.' All available space is consumed with program, with the minimum articulation of architecture as a strategy for future accommodation.

Yokohama Terminal - 1995 - FOA
The thickened urban surface of the urban ground is manipulated to coordinate the flows of goods, vehicles, passengers, and the public.

Schouwburgplein - 1996 - West 8
In this case, the context's programmatic saturation created an instance of de-programming; the 'empty' plaza is occupied only by three lighting cranes, movable elements which can be hired by the public to move and change the concentration of light. The otherwise flat surface is host to infrastructure for its occupation: lights, tent foundations, and drainage – while venting the parking area below.

La Defense - 1991 - OMA
A proposal for the continual renewal of an entire cityscape; scraping areas bare selectively to create new relationships and curate the architecture of the city.

Downsview Park Toronto - 1999 - OMA
The product of a reading of the suburban context as a 'virtue' rather than vice – positing that rather than banal homogeneity, low density can provide a 'playground' for the broader urban population to unwind. It consisted of vegetal clusters and independent path systems, each geared to a different activity or experience. The vegetal clusters, a mix of trees, water, and gardens, are accomplished with a minimum of means; an investment rather than expenditure. "Low density metropolitan life."
Downsview Park Toronto - 1999 - Field Operations
Seeding the landscape with a series of landforms to incite ecological development takes precedence over the human occupation of the park; form before program. While emergence is a useful tool to work with unpredictable circumstance, it need not be limited to the cultivation of nature; new program and experience are necessary counterpoints to fresh ecology.

Les Halles - 2003 - OMA
The belly of Paris offered the opportunity to reintroduce the section into the design of public space. The need to link the street with the parking and trains below led to the creation of buildings which were part protrusion, part incision into the city. Programmed with different programs or none at all, the architecture is a new means to connect the underground with the surface. Its attitude towards nature is linked with use.

Governors Island - 2006 - REX
Responding to the many assumptions set forth in the brief with regards to use, programming, and development, this competition entry avoids a determinate plan, instead proposing a Jeffersonian strategy for grided public spaces that could be swapped to suit the many possible outcomes of development and public use on governors island.

Olympic Sculpture Park - 2000 - Weiss/Manfredi
Linking three parcels over a railway and road, architecture took the form of a sectionally sculpted landscape-bridge, coated in a thin surface of vegetation which capped remediation, parking, and infrastructure for future artworks.

Fresh Kills - 2004 - Field Operations
The proposal lay in the reconstitution of latent elements; branding them as part set of green spaces that would change the role of Staten Island in relationship to the rest of New York City. The landfill diluted the site to a situation of "relative homogeneity" and populated it with ‘alien ecologies. To re-purpose it, ‘A ‘matrix’ of elements is then added to foster the eventual ‘colonization’ of the site: threads, mats, and islands. Succession, rather than superimposition is the strategy for the park.

Governors Island - 2006 - West 8
An attempt to create a new, fantastic idea of what a park for the 21st century could be. It manipulates the island and its shores with a series of cut and fill landforms, inventing a new use rather than attempting to systematize it.


Armhorst, Tobias, D’Oca, and Theodore, Georgeen. *Community: The American Way of Living.* Rienets et al, ed. Open City: Designing Coexistence. Amsterdam: SUN, 2010. "Communities" are the new "neighborhoods" extolled by Team X; they are the stable living environments that Americans seem to tend towards; both exclusionary yet intertwined with "other entities." Again, different opinions on acceptable forms of public and private life.


Blackmar, Elizabeth and Rosenzweig, Roy. The Park and the People: A History of Central Park. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. Social history of Central Park, pulls out the various changes and manipulations which occurred over time and the extraordinary coordination of the park's construction and management. Also details the transformation of the Public Park into a Public-Private entity.


Image Sources
- "Dust Bowl" USDA, via Wikimedia http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ef/Dust_Bowl_-_Dallas_South_Dakota_1936.jpg
- "Fragrant Delite," Madeline Vriesendorp, See Koolhaas. Delirious New York, p249
- "Downtown Athletic Club," "Globe Tower" see Koolhaas. Delirious New York, p 154, 72
- "Latting Observatory" NYPL Digital Image Gallery < http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?strucID=118798&imageID=54949&k=0&print=small>
- "Globe Tower," "Hotel Astoria" see Koolhaas. Delirious New York p 72, 149


"Resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust to change... a positive attribute both of character (of a person) and of behavior (of a material)."


Ideas about the growth and evolution of cities, as the hardened shells which serve to regulate the flows which shape them.


Population increase coupled with finite resources creates scarcity. Space, like water, air, food, and energy is a commodity; bought and sold in global markets. Faced with scarcity, lifestyle and settlement patterns will change: people will flock to cities. For all their aging buildings and infrastructure, cities require less energy and material than sub-urban areas. Density is the new dream, antidote to the woes of sub-urban. A new argument for urbanism?


The crisis of the city in postwar America created a flight from cities, spurred by a proliferation of the private automobile, new logistical systems, and de-spatialized flows of global trade.


Positive interference as a means to affect society through the enlargement of choice; minimizing friction with regards to attaining potential ends.


Feffer makes the case that we live in an age of activism - Not only do people disagree, they have become radicalized in their disagreement. Radical opinions from neoliberal conservatives and alter-global liberals clash over issues; the events of the ‘Arab Spring,’ even the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ Protests can be construed to as part of a re-radicalization of politics. Interestingly enough, public space plays a role in many of the contests, for while the organizational abilities of the internet can foster debate, and discourse over the issues, they fail to publicize arguments to the degree that acting in, or occupying public space can.


Examines the lineage of the public sphere, centered on Habermas’ concept of the Public Sphere. Essential to my understanding of publics.


General resource with regards to New York City Infrastructure, Central Park.


Site Data and Past Proposals.


Essay examining the architectural construction and conception of Nature in the case of the Metropolitan Museum and Roche/Dinkeldoo Associate’s Extension.


Value-based urbanism; making the link between lifestyle decisions and urban form. Lifestyle here in the sense of “the conditions of planning.” Both the standard of living and the technology, politics, geography and history of place which support it.


A call for design to inhabit the roof of the city; a final frontier for urbanism.

Beyond architectural considerations, the book also examines the relationship of buildings to their context in terms of transportation and energy sourcing.

Sarkis, Hashim, ed. CASE: Le Corbusier Venice Hospital. New York, Prestel, 2002

The role of collective activity in Koolhaas and Unger's work on Berlin, especially the “Berlin Voids” projects, as well as the competition entry for Melun-senart.


Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis in Mental Life." in The Urban Sociology Reader. New York: Routledge, 2005 Ch.1
Totalizing urbanism assumed/invented an urban individual, and made the city in his/her image; the city transcends individuals, and the individual must adapt to its environment.

Smithson, Allison, ed. Team X Primer. Cambridge, MIT Press 1968

The balance between picturesque composition and fear generated through the use of "wild" elements and un-managed areas in Central Park. Lineage of Unwin and Price's influence on Olmstead, and the implications for the design of central park.

Somol, R. E.  "12 Reasons to get back into shape." in Content. New York: Taschen, 2004 86-87


Swyngedouw, Erik. "Circulations and Metabolisms: (Hybrid) Natures and (Cyborg) Cities." Science as Culture, July 2004


Waldheim, Charles and Berger, Alan. "Logistics Landscape." in Landscape Journal Vol. 27 No. 2.

A call for surface to be used as a means to adopt new responses to urban demands and flexible public space.

Balkanization is the social/political fragmentation, usually given a negative connotation with regards to the geopolitics surrounding the Balkan region. The article attributes positive aspects to social fragmentation, one being strengthened, community identity and definition, as each ‘pixel’ nation constructs its identity.