

# [ Toward a New Urban Interface ]

*theories from static to situated  
how the edge between architecture and public space is being transformed by technology*

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## [ Toward a New Urban Interface ]

*how the edge between architecture and public space is being transformed by technology;  
theories from static to situated*

The recent exhibition at the Architecture League of New York has created a stir among the blogosphere and those interested in the growing networked culture. *Toward the Sentient City* manifests new interfaces with the urban realm, merging technology and situated information with an environmental agenda. The exhibition is the culmination of a series of pamphlets and initiatives set forth by the Architecture League around the theme of situated technologies.<sup>1</sup> It is the latest development in a long postmodern debate on the role of the object in the city, which I believe technology has transformed into a new relationship with the body and mind.

This exploration calls into question the architect's place in this transformation of city making. The convergence of Van Eesteren and Le Corbusier in the formation of CIAM had this extension of the architect at its core. The first three Congresses constructed an argument of the architect's crucial role in the transformation of the city, culminating the fourth congress' Contentations and the Athens Charter defining the Functional City.<sup>2</sup> The reframing of this functionalist logic in subsequent post-war conferences was opened to include social and cultural dimensions.

From this post-war point of departure, when Urban Design was set forth as a discipline, I look to introduce theories based on how the change a way of thinking about the urban/architectural edge. The first set in the 1960s and 70s includes Kevin Lynch, Aldo Rossi, and Archizoom, reframing the city as a collection of artifacts which hold either a cultural/historical or consumptive reference. With urban documenters such as Jan Gehl and William H. Whyte I believe that there was a shift in the late 1970s and through the 80s toward a greater social bias and taxonomy of the city. Through the 1980s this interface between the object and the subject is fairly static; one that holds an embedded meaning or role in the public space but is solid and can be defined by place. The integration of technology opens up new avenues and

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<sup>1</sup> Kahn, Omar, Trebor Scholz, and Mark Shepard, eds. Situated Technologies Pamphlet Series. (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2006-2009).

<sup>2</sup> Mumford, Eric. Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the Formation of a Discipline, 1937-69. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

possibilities for situated interaction. The effects were written about extensively through the 1990s and into the current decade by a series of writers from William Mitchell to Malcolm McCullough, exploring the capacities of a networked culture.

This paper's title is a doubly refracted wordplay from the exhibition title, *Toward the Sentient City*, and Le Corbusier's seminal book, *Toward a New Architecture*. I have reinserted the "a" and "new" to reference the ubiquity to which these changes are affecting our urban realm and the multiple modes in which they can perform. Roughly shaping my own thesis of the new urban interface around this integration of technology, I would categorize the current projects into three branches:

- As informational [device-centric]*
- As service-oriented [object-centric]*
- As ambient [human-centric]*

The Architecture League's exhibition touches on all of the categories to an extent, but is only the first of many drafts. Through analysis of the Situated Technologies pamphlets and the projects they sponsor I will define each of these branches in further detail and postulate on their ultimate social and cultural consequences.

### **[the city as] a Collection of Artifacts or Stuff**

The primary postwar publication dealing with a new elemental understanding of the city was Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City*. This book, published in 1960, introduced the concept of place legibility, relating to the ease with which people understand an urban space. This involved mental representations based on the actual through five categories: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Where CIAM's analysis of the city was based in larger studies of zoning and distribution, this value system is based on the human experience, giving terms in which to discuss the imageability of a place.<sup>3</sup> Where CIAM viewed from the aerial as an outsider, Lynch places us on the street entering inside our subconscious. Extending Walter Benjamin's argument on architecture to the urban realm, places are understood and appropriated in a state of distraction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lynch, Kevin. *Image of the City*. Cambridge , MA: Technology Press, 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Andy Blunden, trans. UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television, 1998. <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>>

Following Lynch in many ways was Aldo Rossi in his 1966 text- Architecture and the City. Rossi sets forth a discussion of the city toward its history and meaning, valuing the city as a construction over time.<sup>5</sup> The city becomes a collection of artifacts, a similarity that Enrique Ramirez discusses in his blog response to the Sentient City exhibition:

“Like the various visions of 21st century urbanism from the exhibit, Rossi’s elegiac vision of the city is wholly materialistic. Its various objects are skeleton keys through which we can decode a city’s spectral traces to reconstruct a reality. Rossi’s quote also provides us with a useful metaphor: his city is sentient in the sense that it has a communicative potential. If, as Rossi believes, a city wants to communicate, it is our task to close this loop.”<sup>6</sup>

Rossi’s is a view of the city as a collection of artifacts, formally being a building or how an urban space is shaped. The skeleton city is the public framework, the transportation network, and natural features that are the setting for these objects. The overall effect defines the cultural dimension and the combination of these artifacts shape a common collective memory. As Rossi explains, “the architect masters meaning, and, through it, he is able to enter into the process of society’s transformation.”<sup>7</sup>

In the quote above, Enrique also references Rossi’s approach as materialistic. An assembly of artifacts signifies a certain commodity, especially in relation to the dramatic consumerist growth of the decade. In 1969, Archizoom presented its vision of the future consumption-centric city entitled No-Stop-City. Without boundaries the city becomes a limitless field of objects, protected by a layer which produced an ideal environment, artificially lit and air-conditioned.<sup>8</sup> As the Columbia professor Kazys Varnelis states, “no longer a place, the city would become a condition.”<sup>9</sup> No-Stop-City was a theoretical amplification of the current status and part of a dialogue between multiple firms such as the Archigram and Superstudio. In this instance the edge between architecture and the public realm blurs to the point of disappearing and the notion of artifact multiplied to a commodifying degree. This is a very surface level view, but these theoretical proposals and major publications all signal new perceptions of the city. Each formulates means of engagement and understanding with a more complex and objectified city.

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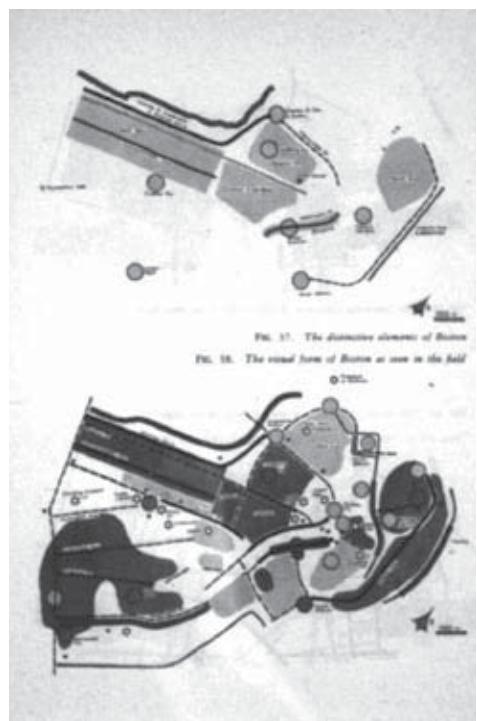
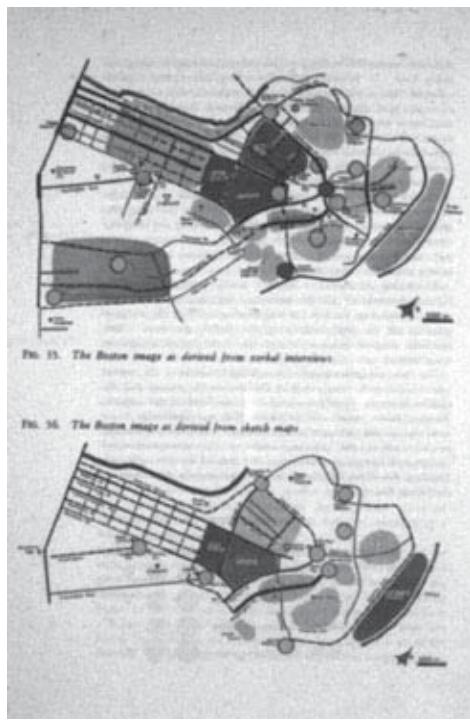
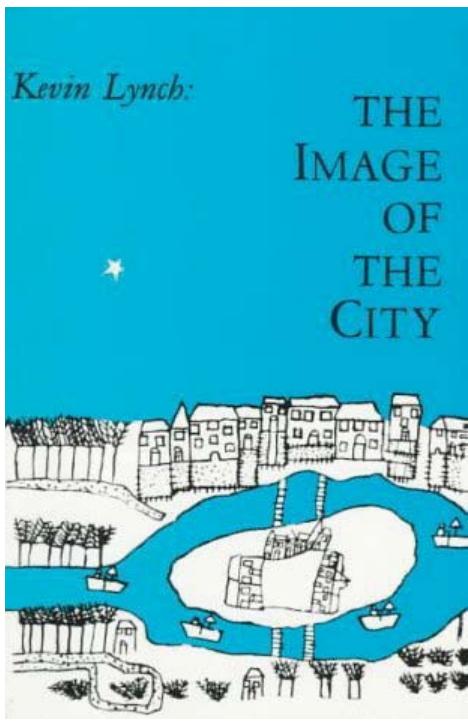
<sup>5</sup> Rossi, Aldo. The Architecture of the City. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982)

<sup>6</sup> Ramirez, Enrique Gualberto. “A Sentient City is a City.” a456. (14 Oct. 2009. 1 Dec 2009) <<http://www.aggregat456.com/2009/10/sentient-city-is-city.html>>

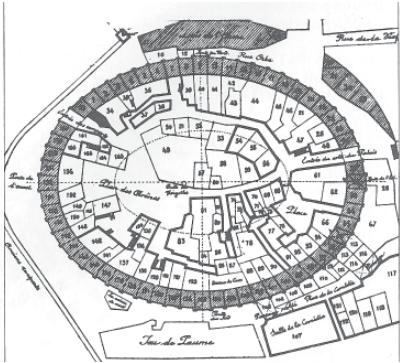
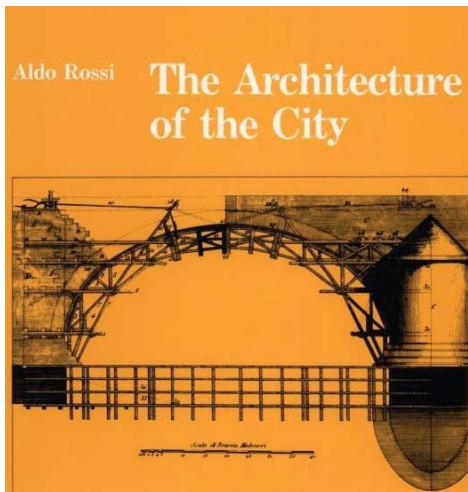
<sup>7</sup> Rossi, Aldo. A Scientific Autobiography. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981)

<sup>8</sup> Ramirez 1.

<sup>9</sup> Varnelis, Kazys. “a brief history of horizontality.” yarnelis.net. (29 May 2005. 1 Dec 2009) <<http://varnelis.net/articles/horizontality>>



Analysis of Boston  
Lynch 167.



Registry map of Nîmes, France amphitheater  
Rossi 89.



Italian Hill Town image  
Rossi 163.

### **[the city as] a Taxonomy of Social Elements**

Bringing the discussion of the city to a bottom-up investigation, to Jan Gehl and William H. Whyte the urban interface was a bench, a ledge, a windowsill, or open space framed by buildings. Their attitude toward a civic presence was supported by an entirely different means of empirical urban research.

In his seminal book, Life Between Buildings, the Danish architect and urbanist Jan Gehl tries to define the urban and body interface through specific categories and means of research. Using a very simple set of elements and relationships he investigates “the ordinary days and the multitude of outdoor activities that surround us.”<sup>10</sup> He defines both a set of activities (necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities) and their urban counterpart (access, seating spaces, and interfaces). In this static relationship of objects, he finds that “contact is greatest through no walls, short distances, low speeds, one level, and orientation toward others.”<sup>11</sup> A major part of his investigation is about sitting (primary and secondary sitting, sitting landscapes) and formally that “good cities for staying out have irregular facades and a variety of supports in their outdoor spaces.”<sup>12</sup> The interface between the building and public space should be a soft edge, defined by Gehl as having “easy access in and out, good staying areas directly in front of the houses, something to do, and something to work with directly in front of the houses.”<sup>13</sup>

William H. Whyte investigates a similar notion of the edge effect in The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. What he found was that sun, aesthetics, and the amount of open space were not the primary drivers in plaza use. What was critical was the amount of sittable space. Through time lapse photography generating sets of data, Whyte discusses sitting amounts, sitting heights, and tries to find what the best social generator is.<sup>14</sup> In searching for how to make public space more effective he uses a very conversational analysis and storytelling presentation style, mixing quantitative data and adaptive hypotheses. In a time before large quantities of data or the computing power to analyze were available, these two urban taxonomists have defined research methods and means of documentation. They both used firsthand observations and measurements to postulate the most effective urban/architectural interface.

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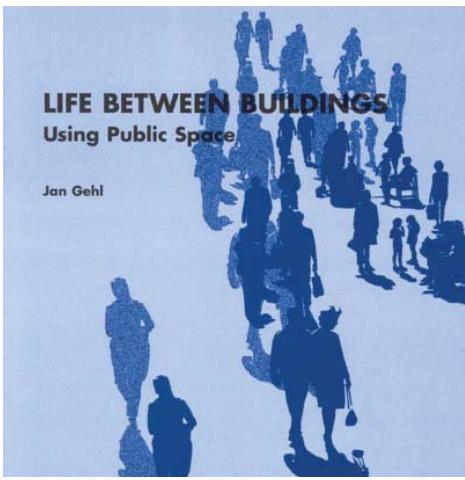
<sup>10</sup> Gehl, Jan. Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space. Trans. Jo Koch. (New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987) 7.

<sup>11</sup> Gehl 74.

<sup>12</sup> Gehl 160.

<sup>13</sup> Gehl 186.

<sup>14</sup> Whyte, William Hollingsworth. The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1980) 20.



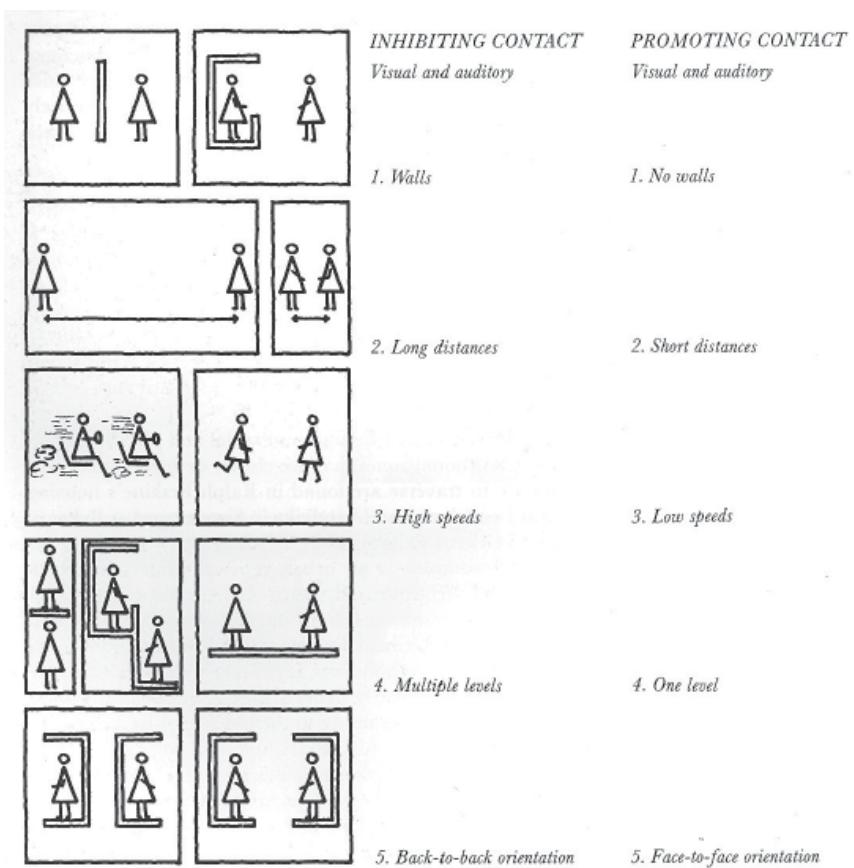
Jan Gehl

## LIFE BETWEEN BUILDINGS Using Public Space

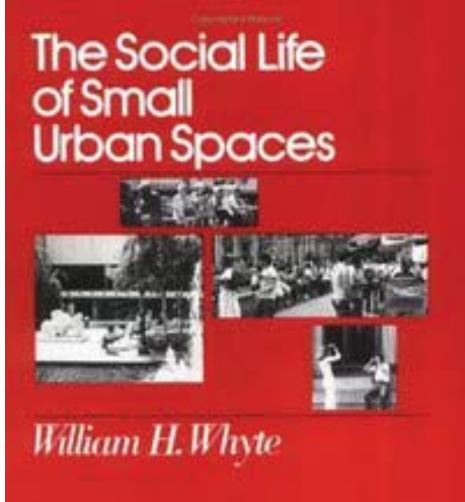
Jan Gehl

	Quality of the physical environment	
	Poor	Good
Necessary activities	●	●
Optional activities	●	●
"Resultant" activities (Social activities)	●	●

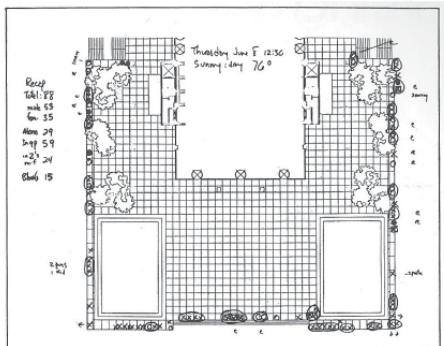
Relationship between activities and rate of occurrences. Gehl 5.



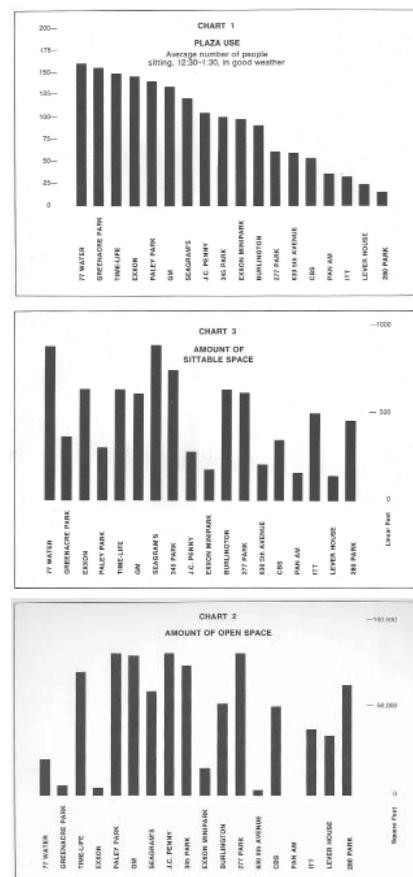
Five qualities for promoting contact.  
Gehl 12.



William H. Whyte



Typical sighting map.  
Whyte 15.



Charts of plaza use, sittable space, and open space.  
Whyte 22-23.

### **[the city as] a Network of Elements**

With the development of the computer utilized on a personal scale combined with the public emergence of the internet, a new frame of mind opens. Stephen Johnson notes the potentialities in his book on emergence, explaining how this technology has the potential for large scale changes of behavior. This new virtual network of computers creates a coordinated whole which is smarter than the sum of its parts. It is made up of simple-minded component parts, interacting in relatively simple ways. Out of this interaction a higher structure or intelligence forms, creating potential for a truly ground up urbanism. It is the next step in humanizing, anthropocentric development because of its potential to connect with the body and mind as an ambient interface.

Historically, crossovers in infrastructure produced places. Malcolm McCullough elaborates on this in his book Digital Ground, stating that “where one flow prompts, regulates, or feeds another, development occurs.”<sup>15</sup> This used to be a clearly physical transaction at a specific locale; now with a virtual infrastructure the possibilities multiply. John Thackara expands this as a call to urban planners that they “need to pay as much attention to social networks as soft infrastructure as they do now to the hard infrastructures of roads and railways.”<sup>16</sup> Christopher Alexander first argued in the 1960s that in designing on a large scale “we must look at the links, the interactions, and the patterns.”<sup>17</sup> Networks are important because they are a means of building and enriching social capital.

Thackara makes a claim for the post-spectacular city, one that moves beyond designing and building for consumption of culture on a massive scale, designing messages instead of interactions: “Our cities, from now on, will be judged by their capacity to foster collaboration, encounter, intimacy, and work.”<sup>18</sup> He references the philosopher Ivan Illich claimed back who set for the idea in 1973 that “a sustainable city, has to be a working city, a city of encounter and interaction – not a city for passive participation in

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<sup>15</sup> McCullough, Malcolm. Digital Ground : Architecture, Pervasive Computing, and Environmental Knowing. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004) 48.

<sup>16</sup> Thackara, John. In the Bubble : Designing in a Complex World. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005) 81.

<sup>17</sup> Thackara 83.

<sup>18</sup> Thackara, John. “The post-spectacular city.” Doors of Perception. (27 Sep 2003 1 Dec 2009) <[http://www.doorsofperception.com/archives/2003/09/the\\_postspectac\\_1.php](http://www.doorsofperception.com/archives/2003/09/the_postspectac_1.php)>

entertainment.”<sup>19</sup> Thus he calls for a reassessment of the information age, that this integration of technology will instead amplify interactions and redefine our connection with locale.

It seems, on first glance, that the integration of this technology would produce placeless spaces, rendering the city as a conglomerate of people wandering aimlessly through the physical realm while immersed in the virtual. In his book titled Smart Mobs, Howard Rheingold argues that we can use this technology to alleviate that possibility, adding information and communication to physical objects.<sup>20</sup> William Mitchell explores this in his most recent book, Me++, investigating the social consequences between wired and wireless networks. The implications are as expected, “by selectively loosening place-to-place contingency requirements, wired networks produced fragmentation and recombination of familiar building types and urban patterns.” On the other hand he states “where networks go wireless, they mobilize activities that had been tied to fixed locations and open up ways of reactivating urban public space.”<sup>21</sup> The urban and architectural consequences of this transformation are huge, all the way down to a fundamental re-appropriation of program. Mitchell states:

“The architecture of the twenty-first century can be far less about responding to such rigid programs and much more about creating flexible, diverse, humane habitats for electronically supported nomadic occupation. It can be an architecture not of stable routines and spatial patterns, but as Michael Batty has suggested, of continually reconfiguring clusters of spatial events characterized by their duration, intensity, volatility, and location.”<sup>22</sup>

This is a critical argument to consider as we proceed in the information age, but what does it really mean? Technology makes realizable the “non-plan” cities of Archigram, Archizoom, and Superstudio in the 1960s, but could also integrate to reveal a greater history and meaning of the artifact. The possibilities of the situated are far beyond the static, they have countless new means of relationship with the user. Considering the city as a whole, Thackara states that “wireless access to the internet increasingly renders the whole city – not just its buildings, equipment, and furniture – an interface.”<sup>23</sup> It is the question of this interface that the Situated Technologies series takes on in greater detail and actuality.

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<sup>19</sup> Thackara 76.

<sup>20</sup> Rheingold, Howard. Smart Mobs. (New York: Basic Books. 2002) xx.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, William J. Me++ The Cyborg Self and the Digital City. (Cambridge: MIT Press. 2003) 158.

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell 163.

<sup>23</sup> Thackara 83.

### **[the city as] Sentient and Situated**

Incorporating an awareness of cultural context, accrued social meanings, and the temporality of spatial experience, Situated Technologies privilege the local, context-specific, and spatially contingent dimensions of their use ... The recent fascination with building envelopes consisting of large-scale programmable urban screens or corporate lobbies outfitted with so-called interactive architecture highlights the dilemma. What opportunities lie beyond the architectural surface as confectionary spectacle or the interior vestibule as glorified automatic door opener? (ST1-4)

The idea of the Situated Technologies series was to provide a venue for discussion between disciplines that address the impact of technology on our daily lives. It was structured as a series of nine conversations between researchers, writers and other practitioners from various related fields published as online booklets. The conversation was punctuated this fall with an exhibit at the Architecture League that commissioned and exhibited a series of five projects analyzed in the next section. I have picked out relevant topics from these discussions leading up to this exhibition, exploring the point of interface and demonstrating how this is changing from static to situated.

The first is defining ambient informatics, explored primarily in the first pamphlet titled “Urban Computing and its Discontents.” The discussion is between Adam Greenfield and Mark Shepard and tries to define some of the emerging terms and trends of urban computing. Greenfield defines ambient informatics as “a state in which information is freely available at the point in space and time someone requires it, generally to support a specific decision.”<sup>24</sup> The discussion references Kevin Lynch in these terms, “that it suggests a shift from material/tangible cues (streets, squares, rivers, monuments, transportation hubs) to immaterial/ambient ones through which we form our mental maps.”<sup>25</sup> Development is definitely heading this direction, but where does this information reside? Does the visual load in the physical world continue to increase and involve some sort of feedback, or does this transform to the portable interface, subtracting rather than adding to the physical streetscape? The two extremes were referenced from a student project amplifying the Times Square experience to the signage being removed via the “clean city” law in São Paolo, Brazil. Editor Mark Shepard that “experience of the city is no longer primarily

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<sup>24</sup> Greenfield, Adam and Mark Shepard. “Urban Computing and Its Discontents.” Situated Technologies Pamphlets 1. (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2006) 10.

<sup>25</sup> Greenfield 13.



The Networked Omniscient. Evan Aleen, Matthew Worsnick. Network Architecture Lab Studio, Columbia University, GSAPP, Fall 2006, Greenfield 16.



Sao Paolo No Logo, Tony de Marco <[www.nada.com.br](http://www.nada.com.br)>  
Greenfield 18.



Desaturated City, Mark Shepard.  
Greenfield 20.

influenced by urban form but also by the various media, information, and communication technologies we interact with (and through) on a daily basis.”<sup>26</sup>

This extends to an idea of read/write urbanism, where this feedback in the interface inverts the relationship between people and their environment. Traditionally the human that was a receiver, now one becomes an agent of production.<sup>27</sup> The constraints now are issues of engagement; to what degree will people participate, or to what degree is their power limited to consumption?<sup>28</sup> This issue also references the 60s as a time in which the city was reconsidered and pushed away from the “oppressive top-down planning strategies of orthodox modernism” toward biological or cybernetic systems. Proponents of the non-plan, these alternative proposals of Archigram and Archizoom were “ways in which average citizens could play an active role in shaping the space they inhabit.”<sup>29</sup> This active feedback loop connects with Gehl and Whyte, where socially there is a bottom-up appropriation of the urban environment. Today one has a capacity for multiple modes of presence, shifting between the virtual and actual. This can be understood as a continuity or gradient today, where “notions of ‘the public’, ‘publics’, and ‘public opinion’ are formed more through cable and network news channels, internet blogs, and websites, than on the sidewalks, streets, cafes parks, or shopping arcades of the contemporary city.”<sup>30</sup> But what can this new capacity do for us?

Means of environmental engagement and involving data toward a new politics are topics taken up in the third pamphlet, ‘Suspicious Images, Latent Interfaces.’ The discussion between Benjamin Bratton and Natalie Jeremijenko talks about the recent trends which spectacularizes information. In many ways this is a translation from the spectacularization of architecture into the large quantities of data that are now largely shared. Bratton explains, “they look like interfaces, but they are not interfaces. They are diagrams or maps at best … Outside of hanging on a museum wall or being blogged about, I’m not sure

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<sup>26</sup> Greenfield 31.

<sup>27</sup> Fuller, Matthew and Usman Haque. “Urban Versioning System 1.0.” Situated Technologies Pamphlets 2. (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2007) 37.

<sup>28</sup> Greenfield 23.

<sup>29</sup> Greenfield 41.

<sup>30</sup> Greenfield 39.

what they do.”<sup>31</sup> What they are interested in is a personalization of information and that it would have a greater engagement by employment of an interface and thus, effect:

By the disclosure and display of events that assemble themselves in the production of the material public and the organization of the chains of connection between those events into diagrams, the production of the image of those connections in and of itself suggests a potential reorganization or reconfiguration of those relations themselves. By employing the visual rhetoric of the interface, these images invite a counter-deployment of the variables that they are mapping.<sup>32</sup>

### **[the city as] Categories of Interface**

This long discussion of the theories leads to the deployment of ideas in the ‘Toward a Sentient City’ exhibition this past fall. From over 150 entries, the selection panel picked five to fund and develop a year prior to exhibition. The first project that I would like to focus on is *Amphibious Architecture* by The Living (David Benjamin and Soo-in Yang) and Natalie Jeremijenko. This installation involved interactive tubes which “monitor water quality, presence of fish, and human interest in the river ecosystem … establishing a two-way interface between environments of land and water.”<sup>33</sup> Creating an interface with the environment it personalizes the data and allows for real-time information. It uses technology to make “visible the invisible, mapping a new ecology of people, marine life, buildings, and public space and sparking public interest and discussion.”<sup>34</sup> In our seminar’s discussion there was a distinct reaction to this project’s effectiveness and aesthetization. In terms of the discussion of interface, it does create a platform for discovery but does not seem to sponsor greater discussion or action. It is distinctly an installation and autonomous in many ways. Partially it is a problem because water is not central to our daily experience and partially because it does not gather or project a greater set of data collected beyond individual moments of text exchange. The conversation is exciting the first time and loses its luster, the LED’s floating on the water are a beautiful image, but form the same data smog that Bratton dismisses, occluding the meaning of the light’s intensities. The themes are engaging and goals ambitious, but to me it does not have longevity as an effective implementation of ambient information.

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<sup>31</sup> Bratton, Benjamin H. and Natalie Jeremijenko. “Suspicious Images, Latent Interfaces.” Situated Technologies Pamphlets 3. (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2008) 10.

<sup>32</sup> Bratton 40.

<sup>33</sup> Amphibious Architecture. David Benjamin, Soo-In Yang, and Natalie Jeremijenko. Environmental Health Clinic and Living Architecture Lab. 17 Sep 2009. 1 Dec 2009. <<http://www.amphibiousarchitecture.net>>

<sup>34</sup> Bleecker, Julian and Nicolas Nova. “A Synchronicity, Design Fictions for Asynchronous Urban Computing.” Situated Technologies Pamphlets 5. (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2009) 2

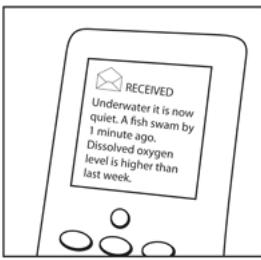
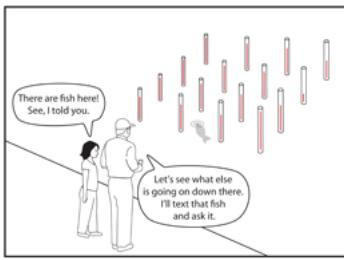
The second to focus on is Too Smart City, a proposal by Seoul architects and engineers JooYoun Park and David Jimison. The proposal embeds technology and mechanics into three common street furniture pieces, the bench, trash can, and sign. These are redesigned to manage how they are used integrating processors and interactive voices in quite a satirical manner. In the project description they state, "Too Smart City presents technological solutions to current problems in these systems, but as failures, rather than as progress: a future where everyday objects are rendered non-functional by their overly enthusiastic usage of computational intelligence."<sup>35</sup> The bench rotates to eject someone who has been using for too long, the trash can to analyze and throw back the wrong item, and the sign which gives direction to those lost. Intentionally witty, these question the role of technology in the city and as they address certain failures by expressing them. What is problematic is that they do not fully realize these prototypes and do not facilitate a larger discussion or impact.

The third to reference is Breakout! an interdisciplinary project headed by Tony Bacigalupo of New York City. The concept is to expand the realm of the workplace beyond the confines of the cube, exploring the potential of using public spaces for work activities through providing a network and tools to do so. The Breakout! session is provided with lightweight infrastructure (chairs, tables, electrical power, and wireless internet), social software, and facilitator guides. It is based in lower Manhattan and has aspirations to grow through the city and region.<sup>36</sup> The online interface is fairly basic, but was clearly not well used or appropriated over the time of the exhibition. It did not seem to engender much feedback or wide involvement and I question whether it expanded past a handful of gatherings. It is an interesting network to develop, but still seems to rely on too much physical infrastructure and work to make a singular even happen. The structure could be even lighter as a bottom-up resource, focused on providing a growing catalog of spaces that users construct and appropriate, also weather and other effects that could facilitate wide growth of these happenings. Similar to the example of SeeClickFix.com, this could be monitored by the local municipality and influence the politics of providing these infrastructures of electrical and internet access for common good.

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<sup>35</sup> Too Smart City. JooYoun Paek and David Jimison. 17 Sep 2009. 1 Dec 2009. <<http://toosmartcity.blogspot.com>>

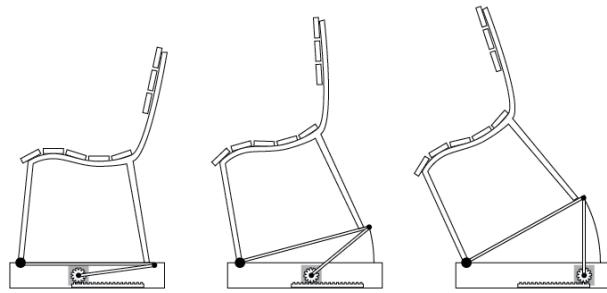
<sup>36</sup> Breakout! Escape from the Office. Tony Bacigalupo, et al. 17 Sep 2009. 1 Dec 2009. <<http://www.breakoutfestival.org>>



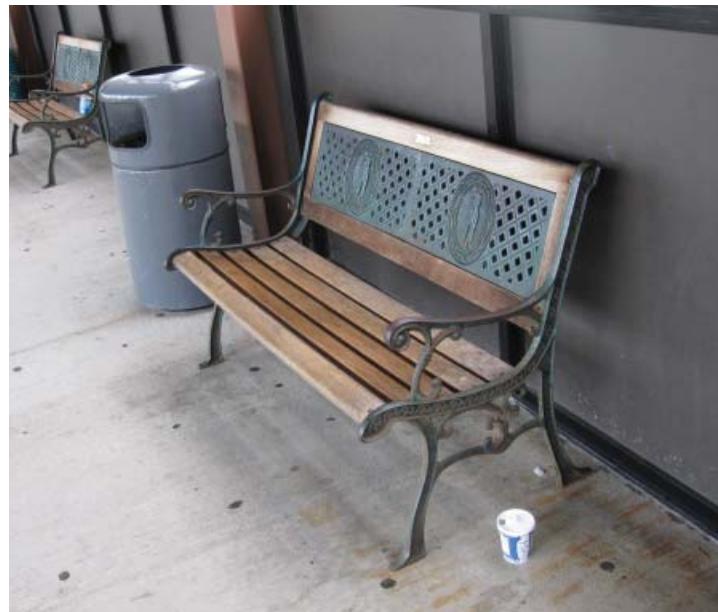
texting the fish



Amphibious Architecture  
<<http://www.amphibiousarchitecture.net>>



bench ejection apparatus



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**Eduardo\_R:** #edan\_01 @edan\_01 usa un espacio en la web para conversar usando taller [http://UrbanLabs2009.t2t.it](#)

**1 month, 8 weeks ago on Twitter**

**Gilberto\_G:** Let's do it to action by [@UrbanLabs](#) If you are interested in urban peer production, then join Breakout! [#UrbanLabs](#)

**1 month, 8 weeks ago on Twitter**

**Bartom\_E:** The breakout community future is to learn, do research and expand [#UrbanLabs](#)

**1 month, 8 weeks ago on Twitter**

**Bartom\_E:** @edan\_01 @edan\_01 pues si que vamos bien!

**1 month, 8 weeks ago on Twitter**

**Participants**

- 
- 
- 

online interface



Breakout!  
<<http://www.breakoutfestival.org>>

In terms of these three projects and a larger set of examples that I have encountered, I believe the discourse of the interface between architecture and urban space has diverged in three directions from its static counterpart. The definition is broad and categories rough, but they allow a way in which to see how technology is being embedded and what its capacities are:

### **As informational [device-centric]**

This type tries to make visible the invisible through an interface that typically is carried with the subject. Through this interface, primarily a mobile phone currently, the object is transformed – whether it is knowing a comparison of prices of the object in hand, or greater history of a place. Inherent is the need to pull out the device (which is exclusionary) and the decision to engage. Regardless, this is the major interface currently developing and as Thackara notes, “could mobile phones do for cities now what parks used to do and re-create a sense of shared space?”<sup>37</sup>

*Exhibition References:*

Amphibious Architecture <<http://www.amphibiousarchitecture.net>>  
Trash Track <<http://senseable.mit.edu/trashtrack>>

*Other Projects:*

iPhone price comparison applications (Save Benji's, Apples2Oranges)  
OTHERFUTURES (Museum of the Phantom City) <<http://phantomcity.org>>  
SeeClickFix <<http://www.seeclickfix.com/citizens>>

### **As service-oriented [object-centric]**

Traditionally the kiosk or trash can, I would define the service-oriented as an element in the city that provides a service. Historically static, there are numerous ways to appropriate with embedded technologies. This category is less bottom-up since it primarily would be sponsored by the city.

*Exhibition Reference:*

Too Smart City <<http://toosmartcity.blogspot.com>>

*Other Projects:*

Bicycle Dispenser <<http://www.bikedispenser.com>>  
BigBelly Solar trash can <<http://www.bigbellysolar.com>>

### **As ambient [human-centric]**

The final type is one that is adaptive without a physical interface on either side. It uses the capacities of the infrastructure put in place and may have an internet resource or other network which it uses as an organizer or disseminator of content.

*Exhibition Reference:*

Breakout! <<http://www.breakoutfestival.org>>

*Other Projects:*

Biomapping <<http://www.biomapping.net>>  
Citizen Science: Mobile Sensing for Community Action <<http://www.communitysensing.org>>

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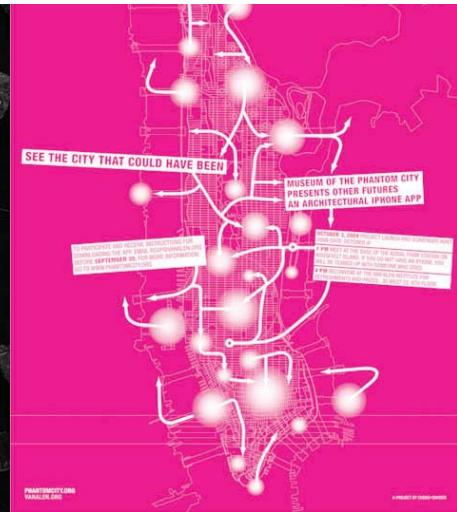
<sup>37</sup> Thackara 87.



Amphibious Architecture  
<http://www.amphibiousarchitecture.net>



Trash Track  
<http://senseable.mit.edu/trashtrack>



OTHERFUTURES (Museum of the Phantom City)  
<http://phantomcity.org>



Too Smart City  
<http://toosmartcity.blogspot.com>



BigBelly Solar trash can  
<http://www.bigbellsolar.com>



Bicycle Dispenser  
<http://www.bikedispenser.com>



Breakout!  
<http://www.breakoutfestival.org>



Biomapping  
<http://www.biomapping.net>



Citizen Science: Mobile Sensing for  
Community Action  
<http://www.communitysensing.org>

It is fortuitous that the next issue of the *Situated Technologies* pamphlets focuses on the creation of micro public-places. The aim is to use these small scale transformations to “re-animate public life in contemporary societies ... distributed in the urban body like acupuncture needles with the aim of activating public life.”<sup>38</sup> I believe the best way to achieve this activation is through a combination of strategies in each one of the categories that I have defined, so that there is a level of availability to the public as a whole and a greater effect is achieved.

It is easy to see that the capacities of the new urban interface are multiplying with the wide availability of situated technologies. I am sure the projects will soon surpass these categories, and the terminology will soon be outdated, but this helps to define the means and trajectories and trace back to their roots in the postmodern discourse. The urban interface that was once a function, then an artifact or commodity and a type to be classified now has the potential for a new relationship with the body and mind, and positively transforming our daily lives. As noted by Malcolm McCullough, the potential of this pervasive computing is that “interaction design is poised to become one of the main liberal arts of the twenty-first century.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bleeker 43.

<sup>39</sup> McCullough x.

### **[ Framing a Research Agenda ]**

My interest is how this feedback changes our conventionally static interpretation of the urban realm. This extends to architecture's link with cultural anthropology, specifically with research methods into the urban environment. I believe these transformations are very relevant to the larger idea of cultural posthumanism which adapts with the new integrations of techno-scientific knowledge.

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