The Future is Your Choice: Art, Urbanism, and Activism in the (Post)industrial City

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THE FUTURE
IS YOUR CHOICE:

Art, Urbanism, and Activism in the (Post)Industrial City

Nicholas Burrell
2012
The Middle Main neighborhood of Poughkeepsie is classic example of Northeast American urban blight. Storefronts which once sold various accessories and necessities lie boarded up, their glory days long past. Off of one side street, the particularly hawk-eyed driver can spot an old mill, its windows long since smashed by hooligans, its brick exterior crumbling, vines crawling up its fractures surfaces, a testament to the industrial might that the waters of the nearby Fallkill once powering. However, as bleak as this picture can appear from a cursory glance, this glance is a caricature and nothing more. The true picture of Middle Main is much more complex. Far from a sob story, Middle Main’s narrative, like that of so many other troubled American neighborhoods, is a complicated one filled with conflicting actors, all of whom are vying for agency and a better future. Community activists, gentrifiers, immigrant communities, authorities, and those would seek to subvert them, all vie for their own slice of this pie. In spite of all the vacant storefronts, a Jamaican deli buzzes with life, and across the street, La Michoacana, a Mexican sandwich shop, seems to be doing good business, its regulars fraternizing over beer, spiced nuts, and Carne Asada as they watch soccer games. Even the infamous Kennedy Fried Chicken, whose patrons must order their food through several inches of bulletproof glass, seems to be a locus of community activity, licit or otherwise.

Even in the blight itself, there are signs of hope. At the corner of Main and Rose Street stands the old brick walk-up that houses La Michoacana. The adjacent structure on the corner was demolished some time ago, exposing the building’s objectively “ugly”, windowless flank. Yet on this drab exterior, there is a burst of color. Someone has painted a mural in an attempt to turn a wound of urban decay into a sign of hope and revitalization. Superimposed over a simply painted landscape, brightly colored letters read “THE FUTURE IS YOUR CHOICE”. It may not seem like much, but this spatial intervention, performed by one individual, is constituent to a larger movement of people reclaiming this space and declaring that it is still indeed, alive. Further down the street, the smashed windows of an abandoned building have been boarded up. The boards have been painted over by a mural that reads “POUGHKEEPSIE REVITALIZATION”, portraits of the people who inhabit this place scattered between the letters.

Although planners and gentrifiers have also done their own work to reinvest in and rebrand this struggling district, it is these quotidian, pedestrian interventions that I find more compelling. The Poughkeepsie Revitalization Mural features faces from several walks of life, but nowhere to be seen is the suited-up yuppie, eager to move into a restored historic brownstone and open up a coffee shop on the corner. Through its choice of characters, the mural emphatically states “this is our space, and we are responsible for its rebirth”. Interventions such as these reveal a certain aesthetic and political agency that planners and gentrifiers will never be able to control, and that points to the significance of everyday urban actions. These two axes - those at the top and those at the bottom - on which the construction of symbols and meaning are constituted, are constantly in dialogue with one another, both informing and challenging each other at different moments in history.

Let us examine art, architecture, the symbol, and its consumption from both of these axes, and it will become apparent that although it would seem that we have reached the end of art and architecture, the activist reconstitution of the meaning of both places and things carries great potential to return meaning to form and function, and make places work for all, rather than just a few.
“Far from a sob story, Middle Main’s narrative, like that of so many other troubled American neighborhoods, is a complicated one filled with conflicting actors, all of whom are vying for agency and a better future”.
THE END OF ARCHITECTURE?
END OF
ARCHITECTURE?
just a supernova at the highest point of energy emission - before the final implosion into an unlimited gravitational mass - architecture represents the most dazzling, and for this reason almost invisible body of evidence left by technological society in its attempt to get rid of reality. This exquisite corpse - sort of dadaist, accidental recombination - succeeded the dismemberment, liofilization\(^1\) and centrifugation of culture, this singular object that we conventionally define as architecture: is the sweet scent of decomposition starting to affect it yet? Or, following the destiny of all discourses and metadiscourses of our era - art, advertising, politics, philosophy, in other words, the redundant, germless and sanitized counterfeit of social meaning and culture played and showed in controlled social areas - has it already been turned into the embalmed ghost of its own reflection?

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1: freeze-drying
Energy emission - before the final implosion into an unlimited gravitational mass - architecture represents the most dazzling, and for this reason almost invisible body of evidence left by technological society in its attempt to get rid of the dismemberment, liofilization and centrifugation of culture, this singular object that we conventionally define as architecture: is the sweet scent of decomposition starting to affect it yet? Or, following the destiny of all discourses and metadiscourses of our era - art, advertisements, the redundant, germless and sanitized counterfeit of social meaning and culture played and showed in controlled social areas - has it already been turned into the embalmed ghost of its own reflection?

- Francesco Proto
"Were the twin towers destroyed, or did they collapse?

Let us be clear about this... the architectural object was destroyed, but it was the symbolic object which was targeted and which it was intended to demolish... the effigy of the capitalist system, by the grace of terrorism, has become the world’s most beautiful building - the eighth wonder of the world!"

- Jean Baudrillard

In his piece Requiem for the Twin Towers, Jean Baudrillard posits that “the building” is the symbolic epicenter of Western society’s implosion into “the depthless metaphors of economic and information systems”. In order to understand why this is so, it is essential to first go back and examine Baudrillard’s thesis on commodity fetishism. Throughout his body of work, Baudrillard expands on Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism, exchange-value, and use-value. Fetishism, Baudrillard reminds us, emerges from an abstraction of the labor process through exchange-value. Use-value, however, is unarticulated and undeveloped in Marx’s critique of the political economy. Yet it is use-value that Baudrillard finds most compelling, and the fundamental realm in which capitalism finds its structure. In “For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign”, Baudrillard sets out to expand the theorization of use-value as he feels Marx should have done to fully understand the roots of capitalist culture. The result essentially flips Marx’s analysis on its head. This is Baudrillard’s goal: to push Marx’s analysis further in an attempt to escape the horizons of modern thought.

Just as exchange value is abstracted social labor power, Baudrillard explains that use value is abstracted social needs. These needs and “uses” are socially constructed and constitutive of the capitalist structure. In Baudrillard’s own words, “this is the process of consumption considered as a system of sign exchange value: not consumption as traditional political economy defines it... but consumption considered as the conversion of economic exchange value into sign exchange value”. The needs of the individual are constructed as such so that his desires exist in relation to objects as a part of capitalism. That one can appease their desires through symbolic objects is a fundamental shift in society.

And one that takes place exclusively within capitalism.
The thousands who stampeded into Toys R’ Us to buy a “Tickle Me Elmo” in 1996 are one example of the power of the commodity fetish of the sign. The toy, which entered the market at $28.99, was fetching as much as $1,500 within months of its release. But perhaps the best example of toys and the political economy of the sign lies in Beanie Babies. Ty Warner manipulated both simple economics, and the public’s fetishization of symbolic objects to make over $6 billion in seven years. Through it all, Warner created the image of authenticity. Warner only sold to smaller retailers to preserve this image, and the limited run of each model of Beanie Baby served not only to perpetuate the image of authenticity, but also created a certain Benjaminian “aura” around the product. A limited edition run of 1,000 Princess Diana memorial Beanie Babies thus had an incredibly high symbolic exchange value. Here was a product, that in the age of infinite reproduction was limiting itself to “merely” 1,000 copies, and an adoring public devoured it. But if there is no inherent use-value in a commemorative edition Beanie Baby, then why were the public willing to spend thousands for one? The answer lies in the political economy of the sign.

This system is very ideological. As Baudrillard explains “the system of use value involves the resorption without trace of entire ideological and historical labour process that leads subjects in the first place to think of themselves as individuals, defined by their needs and satisfaction, and so ideally to integrate themselves into the structure of commodity”. Thus needs are born with the end-goal already established: to buy goods. Thus new needs are fostered, which is inherent within capitalism.

The social construction of these use-values, more than labour, is itself repressive and reductive.

With the privilege of hindsight, Baudrillard accuses Marx of contributing to this mythology of needs. Marxist analysis has contributed “to the mythology that allows the relation of the individual to objects conceived as use values to pass for a concrete and objective-in sum-natural relation between man’s needs and the function proper of the object”\(^6\). That is, Marx naturalizes man’s needs in relation to objects. Marx’s political economy, in this sense, is sustained on the myth that humans have a natural law of needs.

**We must think beyond this.**

Consumer objects are a type of linguistic code through which our culture has increasingly come to define itself. In our consumer culture, all objects are meticulously categorized. Each categorization signifies uniqueness, or the illusion thereof. Beanie Babies are an excellent example of this. The proliferation of objects, in this semiotic system, is a medium for social order. It is as if objects create a symbolic language which organizes, categorizes, and thus limits the ways in which we perceive the world and interact with others.

The clothes we wear, the cars we drive, and often the cities we inhabit speak this language of objects. It is “the most impoverished language: full of signification and empty of meaning”, and the roots of these signs cannot be traced back to anything except industrial capitalism. Capitalism obscures and reappropriates the roots of the symbolic so that one cannot see what preceded it. The language of objects is a superficial language. It is a language which only serves to organize and mediate our needs and desires through commodities.

**There is nothing meaningful in this organization.**

*Sit. Stay. Shop. Good boy!*
How does this relate to architecture and the city? In a conversation with Baudrillard back in 2003, Jean Nouvel asked why there is no equivalent to Duchamp in the world of architecture. According to Nouvel, “there is no equivalent because there is no auto-architecture. There is no architect who could make an immediate, scandalous gesture that was accepted. Architects have tried to confront these limits - that was the starting point of postmodernity”. Venturi tried to do it, taking the simplest suburban building possible, and stating “this is the architecture we must make today”. He fully embraced the Culture of the Sign, yet failed to address it in a critical manner. The architect is unable to attain the same distance from the object as the artist.

Moreover, as important as the building itself is the experience attached to it. In her book Brandscapes, Anna Klingman makes the case that “these days, what sells is not products or services but the experience attached to a product... this trend can easily be confirmed in the realm of retailing, where consumers identify with particular stores not because of the products they sell, but because of the staged environments they offer”. According to Klingman, today’s architecture has lost the ability to appeal to anyone outside of the discipline. In order for architecture to be appreciated, it must be able to build a relevant emotional experience.

This is why themed places such as Disneyland are so successful. Americans go there to consume the image of Main Street, not to interact with the actual thing. In fact, if Poughkeepsie’s Middle Main is to be taken as an example, it is obvious that the image of Main Street is far from the reality of Main Street for much of America. Though this is not entirely a bad thing (many people genuinely like a themed place, they are happy when they are there), nevertheless it is, as Baudrillard puts it, a simulacrum, full of signification and devoid of meaning.
Yet for many planners and architects, it seems impossible to escape the simulacrum and the political economy of the sign. The roots of this conundrum can be traced back to the Bauhaus movement. Before the Bauhaus “there were, properly speaking, no objects; subsequently, and according to an irreversible logic, everything potentially participates in the category of objects and will be produced as such... to wonder where the object begins, where it leaves off in order to become a building, etc. - all this descriptive typology is fruitless”\textsuperscript{10}. The object becomes no more than a status of meaning and form. Now everything can be an object, from a spoon, to a building, to the city itself. This universal semantization turns everything in the environment into an object of function and signification. The Bauhaus saw itself as a revolution, the “crowning perfection of the industrial revolution, resolving all the contradictions that the latter had left behind it”, yet the Bauhaus is \textit{neither revolutionary nor utopian}.\textsuperscript{11}

Rather, just as industrial capitalism marked the birth of political economy, “the Bauhaus marks the theoretical extension of this field of political economy and the practical extension of the system of exchange value to the whole domain of signs, forms and objects”\textsuperscript{11}. Thus begins the point of departure for the political economy of the sign.

The sign, and the experience of modernity both serve to render our everyday experience of the city into one in which we only read our surroundings skin-deep. In a sense, the sign in conjunction with the wheels of (post)modern industrial capitalism function as a prophylactic, inhibiting us from a deeper rapport with the urban milieu. As Virginia Postrel puts it “modern architecture was once a value-laden signal - a sign of ideology. Now it’s just a style, one of many possible forms of personal aesthetic expression. ‘Form follows emotion’ has supplanted ‘form follows function’. Emotion tells you which form you find functional”\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{10} Baudrillard, 1981, p. 185
\textsuperscript{11} Baudrillard, 1981, p. 186
\textsuperscript{12} Klingman, p. 46
Take New York City as an example, and it is obvious how pervasive the political economy of the sign is in the city. While it is not true for all cases, it can be generalized that people come to New York to consume its image, not the actual city itself. They go to the top of the Empire State Building, see the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, stroll through Times Square while being inundated with advertisements, and visit the Disneyfied “brandscape” that is South Street Seaport. They take home with them the souvenirs that to many people are the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of New York City. Their experience of New York can be summed up to no more than an “I Heart NY” T-Shirt.

In her book “Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Sold Itself to the World”, Miriam Greenberg analyzes the symbolic value of New York and how it was rebranded in order to save what was then an economically-struggling city. City planners and boosters ultimately succumbed to the political economy of the sign and sold their city as such in order to save it. Neoliberal economic restructuring helped to rebrand Manhattan as a global financial capital rather than dying industrial city, and even as thousands found themselves in newfound struggles as a direct result of that restructuring. According to Greenberg, eminent domain and blight laws were used to turn still-thriving downtown industrial zones into luxury lofts. Simultaneously, public sector unions were undercut in favor of white collar, globally networked private sector industries.

The advertising firm Wells, Rich, Greene launched the “I Heart NY” campaign was launched in tandem with this neoliberal economic restructuring, and often served to obfuscate its darker realities. As Greenberg points out, “in a survey of all Wells, Rich, Greene ads from the 1980s, the dominant iconography for the New York City was now limited to the skyline and various landmarks of Manhattan, the lights of Broadway, and glamorous dining and shopping, while ads featuring Broadway performers, Big Apple pins, and other signs of solidarity with the city were abandoned”. These images served as the generic backdrop for the city’s new star attraction, which came in the form of billions of dollars in tax breaks and subsidies for real estate development, tourism, and corporate retention. The city became an object, a sign, so to speak, that stood in for the real thing in and of itself.

It is on this axis that we find the street artists, the urban activists, and the Hip-Hop B-Boys who turned a dying neighborhood into the birthplace of a cultural movement that would take the world by storm. In opposition to the planners and boosters, these oppositional figures borrowed from political economy of the sign, subverting it through ironic appropriation. A street artist who tagged a 4 5 6 train leaving the Bronx for Manhattan was certain that his message would reach audiences in Union Square and the Upper East Side, creating a jarring moment that would interrupt their daily routine in a very visually obvious way. Graffiti ran counter to the marketing that constituted the “I Heart NY campaign”, stating loudly and proudly that “we are still here, and New York is bigger than Manhattan”. As Baudrillard states, “the more everyday life is eroded and popularized, the more it becomes banal and interactive, the more it needs to be countered by objects... the more the reality (of architecture, of the subject, of everyday life, of art) is reconciled with its concept in a generality with no object, the more we need to make the initial break and see the power of illusion”\textsuperscript{14}. Thus individuals need to be seduced by an object \textit{other than their everyday behavior}.

On one axis, there are Beanie Babies, the Empire State Building and “I Heart NY” stick- ers. On the other, there are those who would seek to counter the tools of distraction by using those same tools in a subversive way. Current reality dictates that we read ourselves, others, architecture, and the city as a series of vapid signs and symbols, but this is not necessarily an entirely bad thing. These signs can be manipulated and appropriated in such a way that under- lying meaning can be revealed and thus symbolism can be reconstituted on new axes that allow for a critical re-engagement with our surroundings.

Francesco Proto states that the task of good architecture is to efface itself. Thus the aesthetic disintegration of Middle Main, read through a Badurillardian lens, becomes more important than the physical space of Middle Main itself. Like the Twin Towers, the boarded storefronts leave us the symbol of their disappearance as symbol. The twin towers, the symbol of American omnipotence, become, in their absence, the symbol of the possible disappearance of that omnipotence. Poughkeepsie was once referred to as “the Crown Jewel on the Hudson”, and the decline of its architectural symbols, both quotidian and particular, have become symbol of the possible (and in some cases already nascent) disappearance of American industrial might.
Simultaneously, symbolism is also being reconstituted on the axes of resistance that helped to reclaim the South Bronx, among other places. It is on these axes that we find the street artists who have decorated the ruins of Middle Main. Antoni Gaudi once said that Gothic architecture looked best once it had decayed a little, with vines crawling up its fractured surfaces much like those on the abandoned factories of Poughkeepsie’s Fallkill. Can we not then read Middle Main as the landscape of the American Gothic? The cracks that bear testament to the age of the place remain the same, but the vines, what constitute its patina so to speak, are different. This patina comes in the form of urban art, activism, and situationism, all tactics that help to reconstitute the meaning of the symbol. Architecture is not dead, at least not yet. Architecture, like Marx’s critique of political economy, needs to be flipped on its head, and in many ways that process is not going to occur due to the agency of planners and boosters, but due to the agency of others.
The Pop Art movement investigated advertising mechanisms. It took them to pieces, dissected them and finally reassembled them. It developed them - absorbing the sublime into the subliminal - and then returned them to the sender... the image is subjected to such strong stylization that any kind of ineffective information in terms of depth, light, and thickness - even emotion - is eliminated. The Campbell’s Soup Can must therefore not be contemplated - only recognized... [it] is a metalinguistic vortex of cultural aestheticism, according to a form of recycling process that is incapable of addressing biodegradability...
The Pop Art movement investigated advertising mechanisms. It took them to pieces, dissected them and finally reassembled them. It developed them—absorbing the sublime into the subliminal—and then returned them to the sender... the image is subjected to such strong stylization that any kind of ineffective information in terms of depth, light, and thickness—even emotion—is eliminated. The Campbell's Soup Can must therefore not be contemplated—only recognized... [it] is a metalinguistic vortex in which everything continues to work with complete indifference to its content—the proliferation of images in the watertight containers of cultural aestheticism, according to a form of recycling process that is incapable of answering for the biodegradability of the product.

- Francesco Proto
If pop art can be read as an apathetic barometer on the Spirit of the Age of the Sign, then what artistic statement stands in opposition to it? If on one axis we have Damien Hirst’s “aggressively meaningless, overpriced, and infinitely unoriginal polka dot paintings (yawn)"15, then what do we have on the other to keep us from falling asleep, so to speak? In the face of modernity and how it has informed everyday life, we have become increasingly decontextualized from the urban milieu. The French philosopher Guy Debord and his fellow Situationists do a particularly good job of illuminating how everyday interruptions of daily routine, perhaps through such basic examples as skateboarding, parkour, graffiti, and urban murals, are constituent parts in a larger movement of what they call dérive and détournement, that is working to bring us back into critical dialogue with our surroundings. Dérive, literally translated as “to drift”, is best understood as a spontaneous, unplanned journey through the city, creating a new and authentic experience of the space outside of the structures of symbolic consumption and capitalist life. Détournement, the complement of dérive, refers to any technique that turns an expression of the capitalist system against itself.

Diedrich Diederichsen makes a case for street art as an example of these concepts, describing how “taking images and signs, and presenting them differently, and to different audiences - e.g., writing (or painting) in places that were not designed for the purpose - points to thresholds between showing and withholding, communicating and concealing”16. Wall writing, and wall painting, thus have the potential to constitute acts of détournement.

15) Deitch, Jeffrey et. el, Art in the Streets, 2011, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 281

16) Deitch, Jeffrey et. el, Art in the Streets, 2011, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 281
In fact, Asger Jorn himself once stated that vandalism was at the center of human aesthetic agency. If this is so, the actor in the case of graffiti, street art, skateboarding, and parkour is a central agent in everyday space. Most importantly, this actor almost always comes from outside the world of art. Although the avant-gardes of the 1960s and 70’s “saw the emergence of categorical scenarios that made it possible to think beyond sociocultural interventions, not to mention planning, architecture, propaganda, and participatory models”¹⁷, and thus critique the symbolic function of the gallery space, their point of departure was still someone from within the world of art. For true détournement to occur, it is necessary to deconstruct what constitutes “art”. Through such practices as street art, skateboarding, and parkour, we get one step closer to doing that. If the city as a series of symbols, then we communicate with those symbols through a series of codes, embedded by everyday practice. By changing symbolic meaning and creating new codifications for space, these small urban interventions constitute part of a larger resistance to everyday modernity that has helped to re-engage us in the urban milieu.

¹⁷) Deitch et. al, 282
Brazilian Street artist Alexandre Orion utilizes a novel technique he terms “reverse graffiti” to comment on the state of everyday life in his home city of São Paulo. By removing layers of grime from the tunnels of the city, Orion creates images that; through their choice of medium (the industrial city per se, and its accumulation of “dirt” and “grime”), speak directly to the conditions of the industrial metropolis. Moreover, the soot that Orion collects from his interventions is subsequently used to create “pollution on canvas” paintings, complementing his “reverse graffiti” in a two-act play of détournement. To quote José de Souza Martins, professor of Sociology at the Universidade de São Paulo, “[Orion’s] work looks out on the living and interrogates people passing by; it quietly criticizes our omission, our comfortable acceptance of that pollution, our ‘I didn’t know about that… in the contrast between clean and dirty, he works on his creation, builds a visual discourse of citizen rights, and shouts his freedom amid the silence of the dead’”18. De Souza Martins provides further confirmation of Orion’s work as an act of détournement, when he states that “in these interventions, [Orion] criticizes what the city is doing to itself and our uncivilized contempt for the place we live in… creating instant art, revealing delicacy that is despised, appreciating that which is depreciated”19. Orion subverts the nature of the spectacle through his everyday interventions, creating expressions of modernity that challenge and engage with the structures that support it.

The dialogue between Orion and his city becomes even more compelling when one is enlightened to the current political status of public art in the city of São Paulo. In 2006, mayor Gilberto Kassab passed the Cidade Limpa (Portuguese for clean city law). The main drive of the bill was the elimination of “visual pollution”. A wide array of media fell under this category, including billboards, graffiti, and street art. As a result, much of São Paulo’s famed street art was destroyed or at least very badly damaged. In one instance, a 630-meter mural by the famed street art duo Os Gemeos was completely erased. Ironically, this occurred while their work was being showcased at the Tate Modern. In a particularly ironic moment, Orion’s cleaning intervention in the São Paulo tunnel was also determined to be “visual pollution”.

In Orion’s own words, “there was only one way to prevent me ‘cleaning’ my way, and that was for them to clean up too. And they did! The intervention had reached 160 meters when São Paulo municipality started its own cleaning operation there. However, contrary to my expectation, they did not clean the whole tunnel. What would really have prevented me continuing
would have been their removing all the soot, which was the raw material used for the work. The State’s intervention was to just remove the intervention.”

Orion returned to the same tunnel and created another mural that, after reaching 120 meters, was destroyed by a municipal team - complete with traffic department staff and police - who cleaned the entirety of the tunnel. Eventually, as a reaction to Orion’s interventions, the São Paulo municipal government cleaned every tunnel in the city.

Ultimately, the conflict between the city of São Paulo and its street art community led to a public debate on what constituted art, and on the merits of an overzealous interpretation of the law. Following this debate, the city set up a registry of street art to determine which pieces merited protection. Through his art, Alexandre Orion managed to challenge the authority of an entire city and call into question our definitions of “art”, “clean” and “pollution”, amongst other things.
The practice of “cleaning” the city of graffiti also reveals graffiti’s status as a cultural sub-
nature. According to David Gissen, subnatures “are primarily experienced as aspects of seem-
ingly subhuman conditions of contemporary urbanization and its subcultural peripheries... sub-
natures are those forms of nature deemed primitive (mud and dankness), filthy (smoke, dust, and 
exhaust), fearsome (gas or debris), or uncontrollable (weeds insects, and pigeons)”21. According to Gissen, “weeds are those plants that get in the way of the programs, agendas or 
desires that we project into spatial constructs”. It is thus logical to conclude that within the realm 
of culture, graffiti, skating, and other practices constitute cultural subnatures, with the traces of 
these practices (and the practitioners themselves), constituting a cultural version of the weed.

According Free Association Design, graffiti is “one of the most obvious and pervasive 
forms of cultural subnature, as it intentionally violates established behavioral rules”22. In the 
design firm’s home city of Portland, a no-tolerance graffiti policy was instituted, with a graffiti 
removal regime that painted over hundreds of buildings. Similar to the aftermath of mowing a 
weed-filled field, “the traces of this process revealed the city as contested terrain; the urban as a 
series of spatial events consisting of a back and forth contested exchange in surfacing and 
resurfacing”23.

The result of this unintentional patterning was documented by filmmaker Matt McCormick’s 
short film The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal, wherein McCormick sardonically compares 
the unintended artistic results to post modern minimalist art and Russian suprematism. As the 
layers of paint accumulate, the walls not only betray a narrative of conflicting agents within 
the city, but also produce unintended Rothkos, Rauschenbergs and Maleviches. The “patina” 
that was so sought after by urbanists like Camillo Sitte manifests itself through the traces left by 
the conflict between city officials and the taggers. Within this seemingly banal interaction, Guy 
Debord’s conception of the city as the locus of history becomes reaffirmed, as the additive 
elements of endless graffiti and its subsequent removal cumulatively constitute a history of the 
everyday inhabitants of the area, albeit one that many find visually unappealing.

21) Gissen, David

22) 

23)
The fact that so many find this visual history unappealing bears testimony to its status as an “other” history, one that the city, in its attempts to obscure, frames as such. Thus graffiti and other forms of urban art provide a voice for the voiceless. With the example of political murals, the history of “others”, who have often been silenced, becomes voiced through the walls of the city itself. During the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Republicans who favored unification with Ireland, and who constituted an oppressed minority within the United Kingdom began to voice their history, their identity, and their political demands on the walls of working-class Catholic ghettos. Before the 70’s, “mural painting, as with other visible forms of political defiance, would have led to severe harassment.”24 In fact, due to the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act, flying the Irish tricolor was a punishable offense. Once legalized, murals became the preferred medium for Irish Republican political speech. Often, Republican murals spoke to themes beyond the Pale, such as the Anti-Apartheid movement, the Palestinian movement, the American Indian Movement, and women’s rights. On a purely aesthetic level, the murals livened up the drab brick housing blocks of Belfast’s working class neighborhoods. As a group that had been categorized as an “other”, Irish Republican culture and heritage was, according to Bairbre de Brún, “not going to be reflected in the television, in the mass media... if we wanted to see it, to make it visible, we had to do it ourselves.”25


24) Davies, p. 157
In America, the prominent example of African American murals are but one connective element of that network. Rivaled perhaps only by the Chicano mural, the African-American mural has voiced the history of one America’s most prominent “others” and “has been a symbol of pride, dignity, endurance, and hope. It has served as an alternative vision of history as well as a major medium of social criticism and protest.”

Moreover, murals commented on the physical nature of blighted inner city black neighborhoods. Early murals provided much needed splashes of color in areas suffering from urban decay. Their presence was “a testimony to the many exposed walls and buildings in need of attention in black communities. These were harsh environments, often overcrowded yet filled with vacant lots, abandoned cars, and drab buildings in need of paint and repair. Their vibrant color brought excitement and visual stimulation to otherwise bleak, often depressed urban landscapes.”

According to Carlo McCormick, “urban art is a measure of our relationship to the urban experience, and as such we need to understand the role of the city as a muse in order to contextualize the kind of expressions it engenders.”

Just as we can look back at Mondrian’s Broadway Boogie Woogie and see the kind of modernist optimism it incites, through street art, we begin to unravel a codified language that speaks to the decline of cities in the postwar era, and to a critique of the modern everyday. Graffiti and muralism begin to be seen as a reflexive beautification project.
It is also possible to interpret the act of skateboarding as a form of situationism. Both situationist dérive and the skater subvert utilitarian urbanism, creating alternative uses for space. If psychogeographical roamings debunk our conceptions of contemporary architecture and urbanism through a theoretical awareness, than skateboarding can be seen as a counterpart on the practical level. To quote Debord, “the same history that threatens this twilight world is capable of subjecting space to a directly experienced time”\textsuperscript{29}. In the case of skateboarding, spaces that serve little spiritual function can become subject to the directly experienced act of skating. Abandoned sites become urban playgrounds, and the “critique of human geography” that Debord claimed was key to proletarian revolution becomes practically enacted. As Debord states, “individuals and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history. By virtue of the resulting mobile space of play, and by virtue of freely chosen variation in the rules of the game, the independence of places will be rediscovered without any new exclusive tie to the soil, and thus too the authentic journey will be restored to us, along with authentic life understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself”\textsuperscript{30}.

Although it would be long stretch to say that skating is the key to restoring the authentic journey alienated from us by industrial capitalism, the ethos of the act is no doubt a step in the right direction. In his film \textit{Beautiful Losers}, director Aaron Rose focused on D.I.Y culture, with a particular focus on graffiti, punk rock, hip-hop, and skateboarding. Rose saw “skateboarding as a form of illegal urban performance art; like graffiti and punk rock, skateboarding is about personal creative expression without the constraint of rules”\textsuperscript{31}. Despite its ephemeral nature, skateboarding also leaves undeniable traces. The traces left by skateboarders, through the grinding of trucks on metal, or the waxing of curbs, bear testament to their appropriation of a space.

Often, these traces can be found in proximity to highly visible “no Skateboarding” signs in front of civic buildings, whose baroque arrangements of steps, rails, and ramps are the forbidden fruit of many skaters. Intentional or not, the traces left by skateboarders embody a certain kind of code that speaks to a defiant form of self-expression. The presence of wax on a city curb bears a vocabulary immediately legible to anyone familiar with skateboarding, and encourages others to use the space for the same purpose.

\textsuperscript{29} Debord, Guy \textit{The Society of the Spectacle}, Black and Red, 1970 p. 125

\textsuperscript{30} Debord, p. 126

\textsuperscript{31} Dieetch et. al, p. 12
Although it is problematic to assume that skating on the steps of a civic building is a commendable form of urban activism, it is important to recognize that skateboarders can often turn dead spaces into loci of culture. In the case of the Nude Bowl in the exurban community of Desert Hot Springs, California, skaters turned an abandoned pool at a former nudist colony into a skate bowl. Eventually, the bowl became the locus of an entire subgenre of rock music called “Desert Rock”. Kids from around the Coachella valley would congregate at the Nude Bowl for “generator parties”, all-night concerts powered by gas generators on the edge of the bowl. Floodlights attached to the generators illuminated the Nude Bowl, allowing skaters to utilize the space as the bands played above them.

Ultimately the Nude Bowl fell victim to its own success. “What caused the death of the Nude Bowl was when promoters got involved and started doing parties there”, said one skater who now utilizes a similar pool on the Pala Indian Reservation outside of San Diego. “It was the wrong crowd and the wrong scene. They didn’t have respect for what the Nude Bowl was. It was a skater sanctuary in the desert that got snuffed by parties”. The testimony of this skater speaks directly to how a situationist intervention became subverted by the modus operandi of capital accumulation, a force that complicates and impedes most social movements.
Despite the ultimate failure of the Nude Bowl, it proved that skaters play an active role in reappropriating dead spaces and creating something monumental out of them. The skaters answered Henri Lefebvre’s question of “why wouldn’t the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?” through their creation of something particular out of what Rem Koolhaas would term “junkspace”. The skaters managed to completely subvert the semiotics of the space, as something that had previously been a symbol of suburbia’s “deadness” became a monument in its own right. In fact, when the Nude Bowl was demolished in 2000, it was deemed historically significant to the point that the nearby city of Palm Springs built an exact replica of the kidney bean-shaped swimming pool in its municipal skate park.

Through the lens of the Nude Bowl, we see skaters actively taking part in place-making and the production of culture.

A discussion of the situationist tactics of skateboarders and the traces left by them can be complemented by an investigation into another subversive form of urban play, parkour. Originating in Paris, parkour is a sport that consists of deftly maneuvering through a city in a way that planners could never have conceived of. Instead of leaving traces, those who engage in parkour are actively tracing. In fact, one who “parkours” is referred to in France as a traceur. In his essay Jump City: Parkour and the Traces, David Thomson makes the case for parkour as a form of situationism. “Parkour is not so much a manifesto as an instance of the unruly intersection between capital flow and the flow of human bodies,” says Thomson. “Instead of coinciding, they may intersect at angles of varying and appositional intensities.”

Guy Debord claims that the city is a spectacle, a physical manifestation of a hankering for democracy. In its public spaces and government buildings “it suggests a history of a dream of collective consciousness fully present to itself.”

As far as navigating Paris goes, there is a historical precedent in the character of the flaneur, made famous by Walter Benjamin’s Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, for whom “it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude.” Yet although he is situated in the heart of the city, the flaneur cannot be neatly set in artistic opposition to capital, for he is “the observer of the marketplace. His knowledge is akin to the science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers.”
The dérive, by definition, is a version of the stroll with a more explicit antagonism to capital than that evinced by the drift of the flaneur. Debord defined the dérive as “a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances”\(^\text{39}\). According to Thomson, “[Parkour] is a natural method to train the human body to move forward quickly, making use of the environment that’s around us at any given time. This movement is the art of displacement, by which one site refers and links to the next across the city”\(^\text{40}\). In short, it is an act of dérive. If we think of Parkour as an act of political act, we can draw a parallel to Slavoj Zizek’s analysis of kung fu gangs who watched Bruce Lee movies three decades ago. Zizek asks, “was it not obvious that we were dealing with a genuine working class ideology of youngsters whose only means of success was the disciplinary training of their only possession, their bodies?”\(^\text{41}\). Debord’s “mobile space of play” with all of its connotations for allowing us to rediscover the independence of places and proletarian revolution, is thus manifested in parkour. “Only those who truly see the city can truly render it. Does this not make parkour the supreme visual art form?” asks Thomson. “An obvious problem with this is that as a YouTube phenomenon, not to mention an opener for a 007 film, parkour reinscribes the old illusion of a plane referring beyond itself”\(^\text{42}\). Despite these complications, the dream of traceurs and traceusses working outside the flow of everyday life persists as an evocation of political possibility.

\(\text{39)}\) Debord, Guy
_Debord, Guy_
Definitions, Situationist International #1, 1958, Paris, 1

\(\text{40)}\) Thomson, p. 253

\(\text{41)}\) Thomson, p. 254

\(\text{42)}\) Thomson, p. 256
Moreover, parkour makes up for many of the problematic elements of skater and graffiti culture. As a movement, “parkour is insistent on being the good face of urban movement, a movement about movement, self-consciously distancing itself from skateboarding, for example, which has been more confrontational with the police.”\textsuperscript{43} Parkour theorists speak in utopian terms that keep the movement relevant within the world of activist possibility, recontextualizing the city in a way that bridges the gap created by the alienation of everyday routine.

Most movement through cities is determined by the planner’s two dimensional, top-down perspective on how the city works. Lefebvre once bemoaned how “the relationship of form to function and structure has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has become a declared relationship, produced as such more and more visible and readable... In the domain of architecture, a variety of local, regional, and national styles has given way to ‘architectural urbanism’, a universalizing system of structures and functions in supposedly rational geometric forms.”\textsuperscript{44} The traceur subverts this by approaching the city as a three dimensional object with no grid. Map makers, whose job it is to reduce the city down to nothing but a trace, function on a logic directly opposed to that of traceurs, whose map is no larger than the next jump, the next moment of dérive that lies up ahead. It is as if they have taken a page from Jorge Luis Borges and applied his life size map to reality. If we follow the logic of David Harvey, who says that money is a ‘concrete abstraction’, then “we could say that cities are ‘abstract concretions’, reference-rich agglomerations that are also capable, incidentally, keeping the rain off and providing some shelter.”\textsuperscript{45} Thus traceurs engage in their own form of psychogeography, wherein the conventional sense of mapping out the city is notably absent, substituted by a direct engagement with the immediate and the real. As Thomson says, “the symbolic order acts not so much in superimposition as a key that can deconstruct the meaning of the city. \textit{Rather, the city comes into being as a symbolic order}. It is not as if the city has been an organic formation that is later subjected to the protocols of reading, though to be sure the city has a grammar.”\textsuperscript{46} Parkour, by virtue of breaking free from the symbolic order imposed by those forces that reinforce everyday modernity, engages directly in what Debord calls “unitary urbanism”, or “the combined use of arts and techniques as a means contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.”\textsuperscript{47} \textit{It is situationist tactic par excellence.}
A TOUR OF THE MONUMENTS OF POUGHKEEPSIE
"THE LAST MONUMENT

was a sand box or a model desert. Under the dead light of the Passaic afternoon, the desert had become a map of infinite disintegration and forgetfulness. This monument of minute particles blazed under a bleakly glowing sun, and suggested the sullen dissolution of entire continents, the drying up of oceans...

every grain of sand was a dead metaphor that equalled timelessness."

- Robert Smithson
“I should now like to prove the irreversibility of eternity by using a jejeune experiment for proving entropy. Picture in your mind’s eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child, and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness, and increase of entropy.
Of course, if we filmed such an experiment we could prove the reversibility of eternity by showing the film backwards, but then sooner or later the film itself would crumble or get lost and enter the state of irreversibility. Somehow this suggests that the cinema offers an illusive or temporary escape from physical dissolution. The false immortality of the film gives the viewer the illusion of control over eternity—but “the superstars” are fading.”

- Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*
In his piece *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, Robert Smithson calls into question the nature of monumentality by elevating the city’s industrial sites into the category of the sublime. If Baudrillard insisted that the role of monumental architecture was to seduce individuals through an object other than their everyday behavior, Smithson takes this one step further, monumentalizing what he terms anti-romantic ruins in New Jersey suburbia, calling into question common assumptions about objects and forms of time.

According to Smithson, the suburbs exist without a rational past, and thus monumentality must be found in the objects that would not be conventionally considered monumental. Somewhat sardonically, Smithson describes “a kind of self-destroying postcard world of failed immortality and oppressive grandeur”\(^48\). Stumbling upon a sign that reads “YOUR HIGHWAY TAXES AT WORK” in an industrially-scarred area, Smithson states how it seemed to contain “ruins in reverse, that is - all the new construction that would eventually be built... the opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built”\(^49\). In Smithson’s eyes, suburbia has no past, just what passes for a future. Reaching Passaic center, Smithson concludes that Passiac has no center, “instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery! Or maybe an ‘outdoor sculpture show’ would pep the place up”\(^50\). Despite his somewhat sarcastic tone, and ultimately futile outlook on the passage of time and the entropy of all things, Smithson makes a compelling point about the nature of monumentality and time. It would seem that the nature of monuments is to fall (or rise) into ruin. Once again, Francesco Proto’s statement that the task of good architecture is to efface itself is brought into the conversation. The eventual disappearance of structures in part reinforces the M.O.’s of preservationists, historians, and architecturally savvy homeowners looking to invest in and restore buildings they deem historic.

\(^48\) Smithson, Robert “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” in *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p.54

\(^49\) Smithson, p.54

\(^50\) Smithson, p.55
Moreover, this process of disappearance has been further enhanced and complicated by the advent of virtual space. One example is Augmented Reality, computer-generated sensory input whereby advertisements, and experience itself are transported into a virtual space that is in semantic context with physical reality. These things disappear into the virtual realm itself. As Kazys Varnelis states, “if Castells suggested that the global economy was undergoing a massive shift to a network society, then today that very network society is maturing. Year after year, new media grow while sales of music CDs are dropping, television networks face dwindling audiences, newspapers watch their subscription numbers slide, and Hollywood fails to compel our attention with its predictable product.”51

“But what of Architecture?”, asks Varnelis. It would seem that the high-tech in the world of architecture means no more than new unprecedented form, a paradigm described by many as the “Bilbao Effect” in reference to Frank Gehry’s post-urban Guggenheim building that was erected in that city. Ironically, it is this form that is in direct opposition to the aesthetic of the products that define the Network Society. Take the iPhone for example. There is nothing particularly compelling about its form. It is this deceptive reticence that makes it compelling, because from the moment it is turned on, a brilliant high-resolution screen reveals a world of possibilities. Architects, who seem to utilize advanced software for the sole purpose of making ever more outrageous forms, are missing the point and engaging in an unsustainable model. As Varnelis points out, such a condition produces “research that has little day-to-day application and misses the point of a radically changed urban condition as much as the Soviet Union missed the PC revolution. For beyond corporeal space, we increasingly also live in Hertzian space.”52
What is Hertzian space? It is the cloud of electromagnetic radiation that surrounds us in a 24/7 sea of information. This world is as real as the physical world, existing in the same realm of electromagnetic forces that define gravity, physics, and thereby all life in the Universe. If Bilbao-style megaprojects fail to critically engage with the Network Society and Hertzian Space, then what kind of architecture or spatial interventions in general can, and thus stop the architect from becoming obsolete? Varnelis puts forth two examples which “tentatively suggest ways in which urbanism might take into account our radically changed environment”.

The first project is “SEEN-Fruits of Our Labor”, an installation by Osman and Omar Khan in front of the San Jose Museum of Art. The designers crafted an 8’ by 4’ black acrylic screen, a form that references both the monolith from 2001, A Space Odyssey and the iPhone. The Khans asked the question “What is the fruit of your labor?” to three groups integral to the local Silicon Valley economy - technology workers, undocumented service workers and outsources call center workers. The responses are displayed through a light source invisible to the naked eye, but visible to the CCD apparatuses in digital cameras and camera phones. Viewers photographed the mysterious object to find a message that was only visible in Hertzian space. By hiding the messages from plain view and having disappear into the digital realm, the Khans call into question our desire to hide our relationship to certain social and economic conditions. As previously stated, the system of use value serves to obscure the political and economic realities that go into the creation of the products we consume. With their installation, the Khans subtly expose our complicit relationship with this system, “hiding” the reality of this relationship and forcing us to critically engage with it and ask what forces, political, economic, Hertzian, or otherwise, are playing a role in our understanding of the city and of everyday life?
The second project is a proposal that Varnelis produced with Robert Sumrell, called “Windows on the World”. Inspired by a November 1980 project called “Hole in Space” that transmitted images from public spaces Los Angeles and New York to one another via live-feed, “Windows on the World proposes multiple site portals in multiple cities to create a true planetary network, based not on capital and planning but on chance encounters”\(^\text{54}\). By remixing “Hole in Space” with Guy Debord’s map of the “Naked City”, “Windows on the World” proposes a “telematic dérive”. Each portal becomes a Situationist plaque tournante, a “site where ambience dominates and the power of planners to control our lives can be disrupted”. Some portals are temporary, or even hidden. Others are difficult to access. “In a back alley in Prague”, Varnelis proposes, “is a portal to a zoo in São Paolo. From a dangerous street in the Bronx, a door opens onto the Champs-Elysees. Another portal, in Zurich, looks out onto a busy railroad yard in Rotterdam”\(^\text{55}\). Like Situationist dérive, a degree of surprise is introduced to keep the portals from going stale. Varnelis imagines people becoming addicted to “Windows on the World”, mounting adventures to seek out new portals, meeting faraway relatives via portals, and even making long-distance relationships through them. As a freely extensible network, the possibility exists for portals to be everywhere. Free from the inhibitions of advertising and capitalism, the portals would bring the virtual realm back into dialogue with the physical.
Now to begin the task of bringing all of these things together. How do the political economy of the sign, ephemerality, monumentality, and the network society inform and in many ways define the world that we live in? How can we subvert the oppressive and reductive aspects of current society that are currently embedded, in one way or another in all of these things. We have seen how urban activists have used physical tactics to reclaim spaces and re-inject meaning and activity into them, but in an increasingly virtual world, where hyperreality seems less and less like a hypothesis and more like an apotheosis, how can we integrate physical and Hertzian space? The Windows on the World project is an excellent example, but what of Middle Main?

What kind of virtual project would work in this environment?

Enter The Tour of The Monuments of Poughkeepsie: a spatial intervention both real and virtual that, like the iPhone, is deceptively simple in its form. Its preferred method of communication is that of the QR Code. Often used in advertising to link a consumer to the website of a product, QR Codes are created from abstract mosaics of light and dark pixels, and read like a bar code with one extra dimension. In the past few years they have become ubiquitous. A particularly compelling experience with QR Codes, architecture, monumentality, and temporality can be found in New York’s High Line Park. The park, realizing the monumental status of a ruined elevated train line on the West Side of Manhattan, elevated a romantic ruin into a linear landscape that plays with the sublime, high tech architectural design, and the creation of new spaces of urban play. Simultaneously, the High Line project was a boon to the city’s boosters and planners, creating a spike in the price of adjacent real estate and a subsequent construction boom along the linear park. When I walked the High Line back in September, 2011, I saw no less than three new apartment buildings with QR Code banners the size of an entire story draped on their sides. A smart phone with the ability to scan the code takes the viewer to a website advertising the real estate.

Although QR Codes in this case were used for nothing more than to peg a product, their abstract nature, and their inability to be read outside of the virtual world carries the same possibilities as Osman and Omar Khan’s “Fruits of Our Labor” monolith. They are simple to produce, and the ability to place them in any location creates the same possibility for the kind of situationist dérèive that we find in “Windows on the World”. Indeed, QR Codes are already being used for purposes other than capital accumulation, and often in ways that stand in direct
opposition to it. For the “Art in the Streets” exhibit at the MOCA in Los Angeles, the L.A. Urban Rangers handed out a series of QR Codes to patrons of the exhibit. When scanned, the codes revealed the locations of some of Los Angeles’s most famous, monumental, and in many cases subversive street art. Along with the location of the art was a small write-up explaining its history and the conflicting actors involved. Often, the pieces themselves no longer existed, having been erased by authorities or other “vandals”. This art was often located in dangerous or underutilized locations.

The QR Code, although invented as a tool of distraction for the purposes of advertising, carries the potential to be used in an act of detournement. The fact that the QR Code is immediately illegible in physical space also gives it the possibility to carry secret and subversive messages. In the past, train-hopping “hobos” created their own system of code to communicate messages that would allow them to cope with the difficulty of their lives. For instance, a square missing its top line signified a safe place to camp. A circle with two parallel arrows meant that hobos were not welcome. Hobos were able to communicate with one another, live safely and stay out of the eyes and hands of authorities who stood against them. Thus the Tour of the Monuments of Poughkeepsie views the QR Code as a postmodern version of the hobo code.
Using Smithson’s *Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* as a muse, the Tour of the Monuments of Poughkeepsie will use QR Codes similar to the way L.A. Urban Rangers used them at “Art in the Streets”. The first code, placed in several public venues both in Poughkeepsie and Vassar Campus points the potential traceur to the first spot on the tour: the abandoned factory in Middle Main on Cherry Street. A former underwear factory, it has fallen into extreme disrepair, although plans exist to refurbish it into housing in the near future. Upon reaching their destination, the urban tourist now finds another code. This code takes one to a webpage that reveals the history of the building and the forces that led to its decline. Moreover, another set of coordinates is presented to the participant, pointing to the next spot on the tour. Upon arriving at the next spot, the sculpture garden on Lower Main Street, the process is repeated, and so this pattern continues for the rest of the tour, as the tourist discovers the (post) monuments of their cities. Through the process of the tour, the monumental is revealed in the everyday, participants are enlightened to the social, economic, and political forces that control their city and their destinies, and traceurs engage in a psychogeographical roaming that debunks preconceived notions of their city.
Because of the power and speed of the internet, the tour’s initial QR code can be transported across the world, to anywhere that tickles the fancy of an inspired mind. This initial QR Code, infinitely reproducible and able to be transported across continents in a blink of an eye via Hertzian space, could be installed anywhere. In a distant imagination, a citizen of Buenos Aires scans the first code somewhere in a public space of her own city, and is directed to Poughkeepsie, NY. Inspired by the idea, she creates a tour of her own city. She emails a friend in Beijing about the idea, who forwards it to friends in Seoul, Paris, Nairobi, and Melbourne. A global network of tours is established, bringing people back into critical dialogue with their places.
It is often assumed that virtual technology is another step towards a culture of complete distraction and disassociation. Although this possibility does exist, its story is much like that of the Political Economy of the Sign. Just as subway art subverted and reappropriated that political economy, Situationist detournements and dérives into virtual/physical space can subvert and reappropriate the meaning and intent of the nascent technology that engages with those spaces. Here we find the agency of others in critical dialogue with the places they inhabit, subverting the intent of planners, boosters, and capitalists while flipping the intended purpose of their technology on its head. In doing so, we open up an entirely new realm of possibilities for the contestation of space and agency.

The future is your choice
Thank you for reading “The Future is Your Choice: Art, Urbanism, and Activism in the (Post)-Industrial City”. To begin the Tour of the Monuments of Poughkeepsie, scan the QR code on the back of this tabloid, or go to www.tourofthemonumentsofpoughkeepsie.wordpress.com and begin the tour from there. You can choose to perform the tour physically, or, by virtue of accessing the wordpress URL, access it online. Users are encouraged to provide feedback, and create their own versions or permutations of the tour for their own cities, towns, and suburbs.