

Metapolis

PROJECT 2

microurbanbiology

breif for an open project

Micro-urbanism

*"I take my desires for reality because
I believe in the reality of my desires"*
- Anonymous graffiti, Paris [1968](#)



2.1

Micro Archeology

It is rare that we are allowed to inspect the urban fabric in such detail, to spend time looking at ground that is usually brushed over, eyes averted, trafficked but not seen.

For the first part of this project, each group of three should select a site no more than 20'x20'x20' somewhere in downtown Berkeley. The site we would like you to consider is what might be referred to as an in-between space, an interstitial space, leftover space, or what Marc Auge calls non-place. We are interested in the shadow or parallel city, an urban life that is "*Sous les pavés*" to use the situationist expression¹.

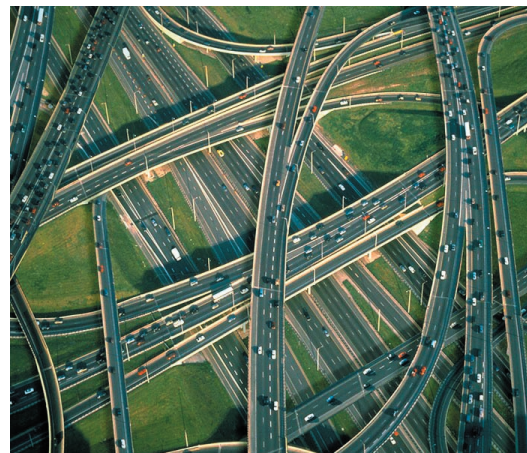
Before we introduce a program to the brief (next week) this week is a week to focus exclusively and intently on investigating, documenting and analyzing your chosen site. In a period of 24-48hrs you are required to do the following things at the site of your choice.

- Capture 5 minutes of video 3 times within a 24 hr period from a fixed location
- Photo document in orthographic projection every surface of your site
- Photograph one surface in close up detail and create a tiled (8.5x11") print of the surface at 1:1 in the studio of not less than 6'x6'
- Use forensic photography (include scale, orientation) to record not less than 10 unexpected objects or things
- Use forensic photography to record not less than 10 traces of time, wear and use that were unplanned
- Hold one 30 sec audio or video interview with a person or passerby regarding the site. Have they ever noticed this site? Do they walk / ride past this site everyday? etc
- Measure and draw your site in plan, section and elevation at a scale of 1/4", include a location plan
- Using gis or zillow or other offsite information systems, look at the nature of the site in non-physical terms.
- Take one measuring device of your own choosing and record/measure that metric on site and add to your site drawing. Suggestions include, Geiger counter, sound levels, light meters, wireless signals, etc.

In your documentation consider including information that is relevant to an extensive understanding of the space, its orientation, its proximity to landmarks or directional markers, its dimensions and proportions, its infrastructure, its history, its cultural heritage, its broken added or adjusted sections (ie new concrete, building repairs or additions etc) its biology, any relationship to external systems (ie place of manufacture of street furniture, manhole covers, lights, garden varieties etc).

The goal of this first part of this exercise to see more in a 20' cube of urban territory than you would normally notice, to see its implicit and explicit relationships to other urban territories and commercial systems or systems of governance, land title, deed trust, ownership, etc. The goal is to uncover the richness of this site, by simply looking closely, documenting, and analyzing. From these recordings you will be able to determine where steps need to be taken to uncover the other side of this locations life.

Principally, your role this week is to observe, record and become intimate with the site you have chosen, noticing every nook and cranny as a possibility for future action. **You will present all your documentation in class next week.**



URBAN BIOLOGY

brief for an open project

2.2 Urban Biology



By now you have a very clear picture of your site. It is well documented, and precisely described in physical, behaviors and temporal dimensions. The slate is now open for your intervention.

Using the details of the analysis of your site as a starting point, we are interested in developing both a position from which to consider the city, and a contemporary framework to guide the way in which we work on it.

1. Right to the city

Through a consideration of and response to the text “Right to the city”, by Henri Lefebvre, (our reading for this week) how might we consider the issue of civic participation? More precisely how do you respond to his proposition for a *Political Program of Urban Reform* (p155) as an opportunity to consider situating alternative models for civic participation in an urban space. Consider also the following statements of Lefebvre;

“...sociological thought seeks an understanding and reconstitution of the integrative capacities of the urban as well as the conditions of practical participation.” P153

“Urban strategy resting on the science of the city needs a social support and political forces to be effective. It cannot act on its own.” p154

“One could even assert that the maximum of utopiamism could unite with the optimum of realism.” P157

Using the above as a provocation, construct a response (affirm, negate, debate, critique etc) that allows you to develop a “programmatic” position capitalizing on the potentials of an authentic “urban”, not as a found empty condition, but as the generative and constitutive environmental expression of the civic person. In this light, what is missing? What kind of environment would/could direct attention to the possibilities of the urban in a material way? We think civic participation does not have to be politically loaded, in order to effectively communicate and explore a position on the city. What do you think? Without taking on city hall or requiring a PhD in political science or philosophy, but from a design point of view we are still able to ask, what is to be done?

Through developing a position on the urban with your partner, design an environmental interface for “non-standard” users.



To do this, we would like you to consider *the biological* not as a metaphor, but as a method for designing a system or material strategy that allows for the exploration of your position and ideas about program or object. Design through the lens of a biology that is capable of growth, flexibility, adaptability and importantly, *aesthetic beauty and wonderment*.

You should consider carefully the design of this environment for both users of technology, and users that own or carry no technology, yet have the same civic participatory and information needs as others. Your interface should respond to your detailed analysis of an existing surface as a starting point, developing from there into a fully 4d environmental strategy. How might oil stained pavements and graffitied walls be transformed into an opportunity to interact with the city? What exactly are you interacting with? Can we conceive of an urban definition that exceeds that of city hall and the public library? For more on this consider also De Certeau's reading for next week.

Some parameters;

- Consider the context broadly, but do not exceed the physical limits of your 20'x20'x20' site
- Design for the now, ie no future materials, only existing technologies.
- Design for rapid deployment and prototype development
- Strategize your proposed environment/biology through time. How does sprout, grow, mature, get pruned and shaped by other environmental issues such as seasons, die and compost? Define your time frame? Can seasons be more than those of nature as we understand it, what about tax season, skateboard season, rush hour and so on.
- When I don't own a computer, what good is a wireless connection? Design should offer something although perhaps not the same thing, for non-technically equipped or trained persons. While we are interested specifically in technology that provides a new means of civic engagement, how can we understand a range of experiences that accommodate people with and without technology? How different, can they/ should they be? Can we think of this in terms not as technology providing an upgrade for a physical experience, but perhaps the other way around? What are other positions? How many ways can I experience the site through your intervention?

Your proposal should ultimately encompass a range of responses, from delight, joy and "wonderment", to the infomatic possibilities of social exchange, commentary and critique that exceed the need for new wireless access points and the internet. How can you see this as an opportunity to recalibrate our ideas of what the urban might be or might encompass? Despite designing potentially for a highly specific user group, above all your proposal should be a place, perhaps strange and new, that we would all like to visit.

¹ Beneath the paving stones - the beach!" - *Sous les pavés, la plage!* - Anonymous graffiti, Paris 1968"