

Urban heritage of the everyday: street knowledge and social identities, intersections between urban form and social life, two audiovisual case studies

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Propositions

1. Today's multiple urban participants are co-authors of tomorrow's heritage of the everyday
2. The street and its inhabitation is an urban discussion of a political, cultural and economical nature
3. Access to urban circulation and infrastructure reflects a country's understanding of freedom and justice
4. Film (audiovisual communication) can implant, record and re-imagine necessary and new knowledge in urban interventions and education

As countries become ever more urbanized and cities densely populated, so does the diversity of their inhabitants grow and bring a plethora of divergent experiences, perceptions, cultures and needs. Planned urban interventions are usually built on knowledge sets developed over time under specific conditions and assume certain norms. Those 'recognized and approved' knowledge sets quite often do not take other, more common forms of knowledge into consideration, although these might be more adequate and yet less certain, or even professionally tested. This disengagement potentially leads to misunderstanding of relevant context and results in real problems in implementation, post-factum utilisation and ultimately of design failure: those who need to use the space can actually not appropriate it for their interests and purposes: good and bad design becomes relative to the eye of the street walker.

A central aim of this investigation is the exploration of how potentially different forms of perception, understanding, and/ or different forms of knowledge around street space and its use to the city's many inhabitants can be engaged with around designed urban interventions. The study focuses on the role of audiovisual communication as 'other' form of embedding cultural knowledge in urban interventions/ education within the public realm. The proposal is to focus on public space in the form of streets as active basic urban elements that can provide spaces for public engagement in more proactive ways, satisfying different aspirations and needs.

In the attempt to create a new platform of communication for urban research through the use of audio visual tools, the argument of this paper will form part of a larger literature review, which will introduce the crossing fields of urban design, film and participation through three main sections:

- 1 *Recordings of imagination, desires and necessities*, which deals which advances in film technology, the city as stage set and data capturing in planning processes (placing audiovisual as a particular tool amongst others and its specific potential)
- 2 *Common platforms of communication for urban design/planning through audiovisual tools*, like process presentation, politics, marketing, public participation and fiction. These are related to different format of productions like animation, commercials, documentary film, short or feature film
- 3 *Street knowledges*, which will cover the theories and debate around the street as shared common denominator of a society through its planning and design, social identities and political control.

In front of this background, the paper will specifically focus on the comparison of two audiovisual productions (fiction) and establish the intersection of urban form and social life through the portrait and analysis of two streets and their multiple thresholds: *Do the Right Thing* by Spike Lee (1989), which plays in Brooklyn, New York and *Jerusalema* by Ralph Ziemann (2008), which plays in Johannesburg, South Africa. Sidewalks, windowsills, stoops, fences are being identified as common urban design elements - designed by the professional- with a new, particular and local role in "underlying social antagonisms" (Strickland, 2006) - re-interpreted by the imaginary

characters. The paper will conclude with suggesting on how to integrate the roles of the multiple ‘designers’ into a holistic design process.

The focus area of the larger research project (PhD) this paper is part of is South Africa, Johannesburg. Here the need to redress the physical imprint of the Apartheid regime, the present challenges of rapid urbanisation and the desire for ‘world class city’ status are competing claims in metropolitan interventions. South Africa still primarily employs intervention instruments drawn from traditional planning practices and from neo liberal urban design, which promote land control (Sihlongonyane, 2015) and fail to absorb the voices and imaginaries of the many. To integrate the voices and imaginaries of the urban majority into critical and appropriate planning discourses, we need a vision for how to guide the urban development of a sustainable public realm, as spaces for a “society of the collective” (Zenghelis, 2010).

Audiovisual communication and recording methods are seen as a mechanism to open up different aspirations, understandings and expressions. In so doing its potential role in embedding other knowledge into urban interventions that increase the quality of life of the many will be examined and result in possible recommendations as developing method in practice.

“If good design tells the truth, poor design tells a lie, a lie usually related . . . to the getting or abusing of power.” Robert Grudin, from: Design and Truth, 2010

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