

NOTES TOWARDS URBANISM (2003):

SPURSE

Our interest in rethinking urbanism is not to simply proscribe new models – but to produce spaces and events that allow people, including ourselves, to explore and experiment with these issues. What we strive to produce is not simply a memory of the project but a persistent, active echo of the spaces and events that emerge.

PROVISIONAL DEFINITIONS:

If urbanism is the rubric under which this work develops it centers around a set of linked issues (1) an ethics of things -- an ethics of the active agency of the displaced and the marginal (2) the production of the commons -- the development of the actuality of public space (3) the actuality of the local -- new forms of distributed locality (4) the question of the body (5) temporality (6) cartographies/choreographies -- not as representation but as new methodologies and strategies for engagement.

URBANISM

Current definitions of urbanism are founded upon population density, land use, and infrastructure. By this measure, Mexico City is the most urban place on planet earth. We do not seek to decry these measures, nor are we seeking some pearl of knowledge that will crystallize the urban condition as if it were a singular entity. On the contrary, urbanism is constantly building and rebuilding itself. It is a complex field situation which is in flux. Like a virus, it morphs in order to survive. It is a type of open-ended becoming. It is, as Deleuze states, an assemblage which “has neither base nor superstructure, neither deep structure nor superficial structure, it flattens all of its dimensions onto a single plane of consistency upon which reciprocal presuppositions, mutual insertions, and intersections play themselves out”. Our interest is in developing forms of action and becoming that are part of this event of urbanism such that urbanism itself becomes a tool towards new forms of subjectivity and ethics that distribute agency fully across this assemblage of our future. Thus Mexico City is, for us, a type of non-deterministic guide, an experimental territory, and a fully global space. Urbanism becomes a method of engagement that begins from the proposition ‘the world is wholly urban’.

THINGFULLNESS:

Things – somehow we have inherited a world made up of subjects and objects – the active and the passive. Things are considered to be “objects” – mute, passive, manipulatable things. “Subjects”, in contrast, are things we allow to be involved in ethics – we allow subjects to have their own agency – their own otherness – to go their own way. But things are not within this sphere – they do our bidding – this metaphysics allows an enormous violence to occur – a silencing of the active agency of the world. As well as the removal of a “self” (defined more as a dematerialized entity) from the actual flux of forces that compose it as wholly part of the world.

Now what of those things that are further marginalized? The things beneath our feet – the trash, rocks, sticks, plants, insects, and defunct products ... all waste. What is the ethical space of this world? – which is the urban world – the world recoded as human,

useful, and as used-up – thus urbanity functions on the margins and surface of ‘the used-up’. How can we begin to allow agency to become distributed across the whole field of our world – how can we begin to have an ethics that recognizes the active nature of things – of liminal things? How can we begin to recognize the space of urbanism as one in which definitions of artifice vs. nature disappear – in which all things actively – and paradoxically -- go their own way?

COMMONS:

Investigating the form of urbanism that is transversal requires an interaction with boundaries that are themselves not confined to roles of definition, exclusion, or demarcation. Boundaries are instead inflections within a vast field of common urban space. Although distinct and variegated, this urban space is nonetheless completely public. It is not public by fiat nor fixed by decree, rather it is held in a fluid suspension by the co-invention of the public (audience) that inhabit or engage the space. This type of public arises in part out of a direct encounter and willingness to be subject to the encounter rather than to a pre-existing real or remote dominating subjectivity. To expose all space as public, one can use the tools effective in navigating a transversal urban space. Through using experimental events, the hyper-concreteness of things, and non-deterministic cartographies, one can activate a public space that is not reducible to its constituent part and forces, but that produces, however ephemeral or permanent, a tangible and conceptual space cleared of dominating subjectivities.

ACTUALITY OF THE LOCAL:

So often we generalize. White Caucasian American midsize import sedan. Locality becomes treated in a similar fashion – stripped of complexity – stripped of its interweavings with other spaces and systems. Every place is specific – but this itself allows for unnecessary generalizations. To say simply that place is specific allows locality is understood on a regionalistic model of dividing space as a delimited territories – which forces one to fall back on a micro-nationalistic model. Our contention is that regionalism is a particular form of a field situation – all regions have a prespectival global embrace – all regions are part of extended systems etc. Thus there is a manner of being concrete that allows this immanent actuality of distributed forces and prespectival engagements to become visible and visibly active. Our goal then is not to celebrate or reinforce new regionalisms, but rather to actualize all things – to activate forces. Hence Mexico City is North Adams – but how? Where?

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL BODY/THE URBAN BODY:

The human body is urban and what is urban is open to the body. There is not a world outside the body. Conversely, there is a world within and across the surface of the body. If the transversal urban can be inhabited and engaged, it requires a body sufficiently supple, sensual and open as to perceive the world through a means of experimentation, devoid of the hegemony of either the mind or the body alone. The body without organs serves as a model. The body is undifferentiated; there are no independent *organizers* translating the world according to a fixed subjectivity. The surface of the body, which is

an enfolding of all subjectivities of the human organism, is continuous and fluidly active. It is this surface, thought of as a plane of immanence the rather than a skin or container that engages the world in a co-productive dance of becoming. The body as an engine of possibilities is inseparable from what is the transversal urban. (*It is the elbow that gives balance and the bare that inhabit the cold*).

TEMPORALITY:

Temporality – time is not a series of sequential moments but it is the active space of things differing – time is difference differing. Time as a qualitative change allows us to begin to conceptualize the world as relational – as an event. The immanence of the unfolding of the givenness of things always leads towards a radical newness – things have an indeterminate potential becoming). If one grants agency to the distributed phenomenon of all things then one is immersed in a responsive relational context – urbanism. Or to follow William Carlos Williams, before one can get to the status of ‘no ideas but in things’ one must position oneself within ‘no ideas but in the event’. To allow the event its own becoming – the ethics of urbanism.