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**POP-UP JUSTICE? REFLECTING ON
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE TEMPORARY CITY**

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Pop-up justice? Reflecting on relationships in the temporary city

Amelia Thorpe, Timothy Moore and Lee Stickells*

Abstract Temporary urban interventions are increasingly visible in contemporary cities. They take diverse forms – from community gardens to pop-up cinemas, from outdoor art installations to mobile libraries – and have been given many labels – from “guerrilla” to “everyday”, “tactical” to “DIY”. A burgeoning and largely celebratory literature has highlighted ways in which these transient practices propose alternative lifestyles, reoccupy urban space with new uses, and reinvent daily life from the bottom up in the pursuit of more just and sustainable cities. This chapter moves beyond the simple celebration (or, in some cases, dismissal) that has characterised much of that literature. With communicative or collaborative approaches now dominating both planning theory and practice, the potential for temporary urban interventions to move from “guerrilla” to mainstream is increasingly apparent – and present. Within this climate there is a need to critically consider the contributions that temporary urban interventions make to processes of spatial production. Focusing on various iterations of temporary urban intervention, this chapter centres on identifying the questions necessary for such consideration. Drawing on relational theory, we explore the relationships involved in temporary urban interventions and, from these, the way in which various practices might connect to questions of justice and sustainability in the city.

Keywords: Temporary use, DIY urbanism, justice, social change, relational theory, right to the city.

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Tactics and interventions

On September 20, 2013, along a windy, cold and dead-end street in the Southbank arts precinct, at the edge of Melbourne's Central Business District, it took just a few hours for a band of volunteers to create an instantly funky park. They used a few milk crates, fold-out deck chairs, rolls of artificial turf, plants potted in PVC tubing, a plastic sandpit and some entourage in the form of people and street games. The temporary social space was initiated with volunteers for placemaking consultancy Co-Design Studio as part of *PARK(ing) Day*. After a day out on the artificial grass sharing ideas with passers-by and workshop participants about what they would like if the street was closed to traffic – which included more seats, cafes, markets, festivals, urban greening, a stage, artistic interventions and no cars – the volunteers shut down the pop-up park and went home. All of this happened seventy metres from a linear park buffered by residential towers (that leads to 70 hectares of public gardens) and one-hundred-and-fifty-metres from a temporary arts space partly funded by the state government. The event was open to anyone, though one could book in advance for a group workshop. Despite the 'informal' aesthetic created for the temporary encounter, Co-Design consultant Helen Rowe remarked in an interview that "it was quite hard to engage with people who lived in the immediate vicinity" (Rowe, 2015).

The fleeting park in Melbourne was one of many events held around the world on *PARK(ing) Day*. It may be understood as part of a wealth of practices – now increasingly prominent worldwide – that develop imaginative and practical counter-proposals to existing dynamics of spatial production.¹ While temporary urban interventions are often discussed as a group, this masks the very different aims, modes and histories between and within these various practices. Some have very long traditions (urban gardening, for example), others are relatively new (such as parkour), some are mobile (critical mass, for example), others are site-specific (various Occupy events, for example). Some seek primarily to highlight issues, others are more focused on the material enacting of alternatives. Some work with property owners (the Toronto committee for public space's fence removal program, for example), others ignore or redefine notions of ownership (such as guerrilla gardening). Some directly contravene regulatory frameworks (as in many cases of graffiti), others operate – perhaps quite creatively – within the rules (such as *PARK(ing) Day*). Some directly address economic and distributive justice issues (such as fallen.fruit.org), others are more playful (yarn-

¹ The kinds of grassroots urbanism discussed here could be traced historically, at least to the 1960s/1970s social movements and resistance to modernist planning and design of cities and in many instances well before then. Historical study is beyond scope of this chapter.

bombing and guerrilla knitting, for example). These binaries themselves conceal the significant diversity within these practices. *PARK(ing) Day* itself encompasses a vast and diverse set of actors and activities – from anarchist students to multinational corporations, from makeshift meeting places to highly designed environments, undertaken once or repeated over many years, attracting political support and police prohibition, evolving into larger and more permanent events, or disappearing altogether.

Temporary urban interventions have generated numerous labels, conferences, exhibitions and symposia, and a rapidly growing literature focused on urban “informality”, unintended uses of public space, the exploration of alternative modes of spatial production and the right to the city (Bloom et al., 2004; Lees, 2004; Watson, 2006; Franck and Stevens, 2007; Borasi et al., 2008; Chase et al., 2008; Schwarz et al., 2009; Hou, 2010; Oswald et al., 2013; Begg and Stickells, 2011; Beekmans and Boer, 2014; Lydon, 2015). This grassroots creativity is often framed as a response to the corporate-driven urban development that intensifies the commercialisation, surveillance and policing of public urban space, and pushes cities towards entrepreneurial global competitiveness.

At their best, interventionist practices propose alternative lifestyles, reoccupy urban space with new uses, and reinvent daily life from the bottom up in the pursuit of more just cities. But positive outcomes are far from guaranteed. These practices risk underpinning real estate-driven strategies for urban regeneration; they have also been subject to co-option for smaller-scale commercial purposes. Claire Colomb’s extended study of Berlin (Colomb, 2011; Colomb, 2012; Novy and Colomb, 2013), for example, recounts how temporary urban practices are mobilised by local government in the marketing of a city to attract new development. The temporary placement of art and culture (with all of its creativity) in a neighbourhood can also increase land prices through decreased property vacancies (Shaw, 2014). Another tension lies in the way that these practices can potentially feed degeneration rather than regeneration. The success of such projects can sometimes encourage major landholders and government to avoid responsibility for making more comprehensive forms of community investment (Davis, 2007; Neeraj Metha, 2012; Rosler and Squibb, 2013). The availability of facilities such as community gardens may be seen as a distraction from the need for more essential (and expensive) social services such as housing, schools and child care. At their worst, informal urban practices have been mobilised in the service of exclusion and displacement. As Deslandes (2013) notes, many of the sites in which temporary urban interventions are deployed were far from ‘empty’.

The complex entwinement of temporary urban interventions and urban regeneration is palpable on vacant land in London at 100 Union Street, where over several summers, several short-term projects - including an orchard, medicinal garden, bar and lido - have been installed (Ferguson, 2014). The various facilities take on the language of public building typologies, but do so on private property. These were interim measures on the site while the property owners, Lake Estates, waited for planning permission for a future office building. Each project was constructed with a constellation of actors. For example, the creation of the 2010 'urban orchard' included contributions from The Architecture Foundation, Bankside Open Spaces Trust, Project ARKs, Wayward Plant Registry and over 150 volunteers. Lake Estates claim that the temporary projects assist in exploring the site. The temporary bar, said the developer, "highlighted the relationship the site, and the arches to the rear, can have with the street and to the city and to understand how they can be exploited as part of the public realm. This feedback has allowed us to adjust our original plans and we are now looking at incorporating this into the final office development" (Killing Architects, 2014, p. 33).

The question of who benefits from a project like 100 Union Street is complicated. Landscape architect Heather Ring from Wayward highlights the importance of a temporary project like the urban orchard for "creating a space where people come together" (Openvizor, 2011). Yet others have questioned whether the project might in fact "conceal the social relations of power under the guise of volunteer labor, creative knowledge and the injunction to enjoy." (Urban Controversies, 2015). As Tonkiss (2014) reflects, temporary urban interventions can "serve as a thin PR exercise and provide planning alibis for the speculative developments that follow" (Ibid, p. 167).

Justice in the city

Beyond the widespread celebration and dismissal of such projects and practices, there is a growing body of literature that seeks a more productive evaluation of these diverse activities. This chapter adds to this critical appraisal by asking two questions: how can these practices be separated, and how can they be linked? We offer partial answers to both. The first question focuses on how to evaluate individual projects by attending to their particularities. Can some sort of taxonomy be developed to identify which aspects of these practices are indeed positive, and which are more problematic?

In seeking to determine what might be 'positive' or 'problematic', our emphasis is on justice. We take a pluralist approach to justice and our analysis is informed particularly by efforts to move beyond Rawlsian concerns with procedures for equitable distribution. In contrast to this, we build on a recognition that inequality and injustice result not merely from poor distributive mechanisms, but also and significantly from a failure to recognise different needs and values (Fraser, 1996; Young, 1990, 2006). The modernist ideal of rational, expert-led planning must thus give way to more inclusive, participatory city-making processes. Justice requires not the melting away of group differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for those differences (Amin, 2012; Fincher & Iveson, 2008; Sandercock, 2003). Accordingly, democratic and inclusive participation is important not merely as means to achieve more equitable distribution, but as a substantive goal in itself. We recognise also that justice must encompass consideration of future generations and the 'more than human' world (Schlosberg, 2009, 2002; Whatmore, 2006). Sustainability is thus an important question in evaluations of justice.

The second question assists evaluating the collective impacts of these practices on the production of more just cities by identifying the components of projects that may be transposed beyond the particular. As Mimi Zeiger and Kurt Iveson have each argued, assessing the impact of temporary urban practices – and particularly, whether they do indeed further a more just urban politics – cannot be a matter of simply evaluating individual projects. Rather, such an evaluation must also consider whether a bigger picture is emerging, and what is its nature. Iveson (2013) argues that building a politics to connect the practices is a matter not only of *appropriation* of the particular space in question, but also of *political subjectivization*. This second point is important, Iveson argues, because there is no guarantee that these spatial experiments will produce wider change. What is crucial is thus that practitioners make themselves “parties to a disagreement over the forms of authority that produce urban space”(Ibid, p. 942).

Such analysis raises many questions. Iveson echoes David Harvey's (2012) point that small activities, even when aggregated, are not enough to achieve more just cities. Yet Unger (2004) critiques such Marxist reasoning, particularly the purported need to choose between “reformist tinkering” and all-out revolution (Ibid, p. 211). Unger argues that even partial substitution of beliefs and institutions could in fact effect significant changes in social ordering and hierarchies (Unger, op cit, pp. 64–5). While reconciling that debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, we raise it because we see value in both claims, and wish to highlight the importance of returning to the question rather than fixing definitive measures. However, we see the distinction between the individual and the collective as fuzzy, the line

between large and small scale change as permeable, the separation between the local and the regional, and even the global, as artificial. For us, the key question in considering both how to separate temporary practices and how to group them centres on relationships over time.

We agree that there is much to be said for “reformist tinkering”, and recognise the limitations of focusing on large-scale, revolutionary legal and institutional change (Fung, 2003). We agree also that analysis of connections, and recognition of the various ‘parties’ involved in the process of making cities, is crucial. We are thus posing two questions because we see these two issues as connected.

Across disciplines, relational theory has become increasingly influential (Nedelsky, 1990; Massey, 2005; Nedelsky, 2013). This recognises that identities are forged in and through relations of power, trust, obligation, as well as through absence, hiatus, exclusion. Any notion of identity – of individuals, communities, cities, particular urban interventions – must thus be understood in a relational way, as permeable and dynamic, shaping and shaped by experience in the world. A growing number of scholars are developing relational theory to emphasise the way in which cities shape, and are also shaped by, social relationships about which we cannot be neutral (Singer, 2000; Massey, 2004; Cooper, 2007; Alexander et al., 2008; Davies, 2012; Blomley, 2013; Keenan, 2014). Since urban places - and the planning, property and other laws through which their production and inhabitation are regulated - routinely structure relationships, there is a need to focus on the kinds of relationships we want to foster, and how different physical and regulatory structures will best contribute to those.

Our analysis emphasises not only long-term or formal relationships, but also fleeting ones. As the literature on encounter emphasises, fleeting interactions are often important to questions of justice in cities (Amin, 2002; Fincher & Iveson, 2008). For temporary urban interventions, the notion of encounter thus points to the need to examine the more transient relationships involved. Do these projects encourage hybridity and experimentation? Do they create spaces for banal transgressions, convivial encounters, dialogue across difference?

In post-earthquake Christchurch, New Zealand, fleeting individual and anonymous acts collectively made a large impression. During the major task of rebuilding the city, in which over seventy percent of city buildings have been demolished, more than 150,000 fluorescent orange traffic cones have lined the city streets, directing traffic around hazards, demolition sites and uneven roads. Their ubiquity has made the cones a symbol of the post-earthquake

city. A year after the disaster, artist Henry Sunderland asked people to place a flower in traffic cones in order to remember lives lost and those transformed by the earthquake (Bowring and Swaffield, 2013). Flowers bloom out of the orange cones annually on February 22 since 2012, and the ritual has spread beyond Christchurch in recent years to other parts of New Zealand as well as Australia, England, Singapore and Mexico (Bennett, Boidi and Boles, 2013). The anonymous act is morphing as the annual commemoration of the disaster spreads. At the Auckland Museum in 2014, flowered cones were placed at the entrance of the building; in the same year, 185 traffic cones were placed outside Auckland's Pitt Street Methodist church to symbolise the number of people who died in the quake. While the remembrance is becoming institutionalised, it mutates as it crosses cultures, communities and campaigners.

<Insert Figure 10.1 [Christchurch 01.jpg] and Figure 10.2 [Christchurch 02.jpg] about here>

Attending to the particular

Relational theory and encounter are central in framing our inquiry into how temporary urban interventions may be separated or distinguished. As we move on to address these questions in the context of specific examples, we emphasise the preliminary and *partial* nature of the answers provided here. Significant empirical work would be necessary to provide meaningful answers; our main aim in this chapter is to identify the questions that would guide future research.

To answer this first question, then, involves two parts. First, what are the relationships by which particular temporary urban interventions are constituted? Who is involved in their conception, construction and operation? Temporary urban interventions are sometimes described as a way to democratise the production of the built environment, enabling those whose voices have been overlooked to play a role in shaping their cities (Klanten and Hübner, 2010; Oswalt et al., 2013; Ramirez-Lovering et al., 2008). Yet the practice of temporary urbanism is often less open than it might at first seem. To act in the urban environment, particularly in ways that challenge existing conditions, often requires a level of political and economic security and stability that precludes the engagement of many people. Recent immigrants, particularly those with uncertain residence status, are much less likely to get involved (Dagenais-Lespérance, 2015). Participants from minority groups may also suffer greater penalties if they do participate: to play with the status quo and get away with it is a privilege (Lydon, 2014).

The degree to which temporary urban practices arise out of local communities is significant, given the tendency to valorise the local in discussions of such practices. This is exemplified by Rosler's (2013) dismissal of urban interventionist practices that do not recognise the long term, intense commitment required for "community immersion". Particularly in the context of interventions led by visiting artists, Rosler laments the way in which such projects may render invisible the longer term work of existing local communities. Yet Doreen Massey's caution against the romanticising of the local is also pertinent: a high public profile, a commercial model, a relationship of distance rather than propinquity – none of these features *necessarily* precludes progress toward justice. Evaluation of temporary urban interventions – and of alternative urbanism more broadly – requires a thoughtful and continued questioning of the relationships that produce such practices, and of the broader relationships of which they form part.

The second part of this first question about specificity requires an examination of the relationships that these practices themselves enact. Who is involved in the consumption of the temporary practice? How do they interact? Which relationships are performed into – or out of - being? Questions of privilege and accessibility are important also in the way in which temporary urban interventions are used. Even if their creation might tend to be dominated by the relatively privileged, temporary urban interventions may still provide more equitable distribution of and access to resources, or (perhaps otherwise unavailable) opportunities for play, encounter with strangers, and dialogue across difference.

A playful relationship between private companies and the public was the key to an action to create debate on the many potholes in the roads of Panama City. In order to draw attention to poor road infrastructure, Telemetro Reporta, a daily current affairs tv show, in collaboration with advertising agency P4 Ogilvy and Mather, has created El Hueco Twitero (the tweeting pothole). When a vehicle drives over a puck-like device planted in a pothole, a witty twitter message is directed via RF transmitters at Panama's Ministry of Public Works, such as "Fix me! I'm endangering lives!" and "Hit me baby one more time. OK no, just avoid me." There are some longer tweets too: "@mopdePanama, I'm tired of being blamed every time a car crash happens when drivers try to keep away from me. REPAIR THE STREETS!!! #DecentRoads" (P4 Ogilvy, 2015). This entertaining way to complain about poor urban infrastructure mimics the in-real-life tactic of overloading bureaucracy with complaints and petitions in the hope that it respond to the demands.

The tweeting potholes, which are moved randomly throughout the city every few days in order to broaden their impact, draw together diverse actors. The temporary intervention is conceived by commercial media companies who then construct and operate the event in tandem with drivers who trigger twitter. The intervention relies upon the amplification of the event through traditional and social media channels, which is then consumed by the public along with government twitter account operators. While El Hueco Twitero draws significant media chatter about the condition of roads, there is minimal direct and physical interaction between local government or citizens and the initial protagonists. Within this particular operation, we could conclude that relationships are asymmetric and short-lived. Yet one might also examine whether these fleeting interactions open up possibilities for more lasting shifts in the ways in which citizens, corporations and the city are – or are not – connected?

More materially, an operation constructed by media and advertising professionals could also have ramifications for road users who might otherwise have been unable to influence relevant government departments. Whilst a fleeting, humorous (almost flippant) intervention, El Hueco Twitero also bore the possibility for challenging or entrenching the city's existing spatial relationships. Which roads were chosen? Where? Who would benefit most from their improvement?

<Insert Figures 10.3 – 10.6 [TweetingPothole01.jpg, TweetingPothole02.jpg, TweetingPothole03.jpg, TweetingPothole04.jpg] about here>

Attending to the collective

In evaluating the impact of temporary urban interventions in the development of just cities, the second question asks: How can temporary urban interventions be linked? What is their collective import, their status (or success) as a movement, their impact in achieving more just and sustainable cities? This is the more temporally and spatially expansive question, focusing on the myriad relationships that these practices reveal, create, challenge or entrench.

One minor act, the creation of a book-exchange the size of a mailbox that was a tribute to a schoolteacher in 2009, has grown into a movement with 32,000 little book libraries now located worldwide (Aldrich, 2015). Individually, some little libraries contribute to stronger local relationships among neighbours, building literacy through providing reading material and encouraging cultures of sharing within the community. However, one might ask whether their collective presence could also have less desirable consequences: reducing the stock available to second hand book stores and charity shops, or devaluing and perhaps providing support for the downsizing of institutional libraries (Mattern, 2012).

<Insert Figure 10.7 – 10.11 [Little library Montreal Sep 2015.jpg, Little library Sydney 2015.jpg, Little library QueenVicMarket 2015.jpg, Little library Melbourne Central.jpg, Little library Perth.jpg] about here>

Evaluation of impacts must, as Massey (2004) argues, recognise the importance of relationships between spaces. As cities around the world have endeavoured to increase their 'competitiveness' by attracting and raising the profile of creative practitioners (Florida, 2012), temporary urban interventions have frequently been employed as part of those efforts. As such they have been critiqued for triggering processes of gentrification and displacement by increasing property values, feeding into exclusionary processes of place-marketing and competition between urban areas, and further marginalising those people and places with less 'cultural capital' (Andres, 2013; Deslandes, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013). In this context, ostensibly 'positive' local practices might have other 'negative' impacts when considered on a wider scale.

Perhaps the most common trope invoked in discussions of temporary urbanism, the right to the city, suggests two ways to approach the question of collective impact. Following Henri Lefebvre's famously open-ended exposition in 1968 (Lefebvre, 1996) – the right to the city

has since been interpreted as both a claim for inclusion² and a call for revolution.³ If temporary urban interventions do indeed contribute to greater justice and sustainability in cities, we might ask whether they do so by broadening or improving existing frameworks for the production of urban space, or by a more radical critique and/or reconceptualisation of those frameworks. Again, as with the distinction between reformist tinkering and revolutionary reform, the line between the two approaches is far from clear. An important question is thus whether, and to what degree, temporary urban interventions challenge existing legal and/or power structures. More critically, why do they do so? Seeking permission from the owner, council, state government or some other authority might be useful in situations where illegality or criminality could distract from the real questions at issue. For “Keep Australia Colourful” Day, an event celebrating the often-controversial practice of street art, ensuring that the murals painted were legal was seen as important to build the alliances necessary for more democratic transformation of urban spaces in the longer term (Iveson, 2010).

However, working within established frameworks may also have the effect of reinforcing them, particularly through activities where existing power relationships are performed (Blomley, 2013; Gibson-Graham, 2008), such as seeking permits and approvals. More cynically, less subversive interventions may also provide greater opportunities for co-option by commercial interests. Coca Cola’s “Roll-out Happiness” truck, for example, provided pop-up parks with a clear marketing focus (Beekmans and Boer, 2014, p. 230). Rather than focusing on whether or to what degree temporary urban interventions challenge existing legal structures, a focus on the particular relationships involved allows for more nuanced examination of the issues.

Legal frameworks, and particularly legal frameworks relating to the use of land, have in many instances changed – and arguably been improved – as a result of illegal behaviour (Peñalver and Katyal, 2007). In the case of little free libraries, some of the projects have challenged planning regulations around temporary structures in several US jurisdictions. In

² The right to the city has been incorporated by international and non-government organisations in policy and legislative proposals such as the World Charter on the Right to the City, and even in legislation by a number of states (Brazil, Ottawa, France). These approaches typically enumerate a range of rights as constituting the over-arching right to the city, largely by adopting pre-existing rights from other human rights instruments (such as rights to housing). (Mayer, 2009, p. 369)

³For example, Mark Purcell has argued that the right to the city is a radical claim that enfranchises city-dwellers with respect to *all* decisions that produce urban space, thus extending participation beyond citizens and beyond just those decisions involving state action. (Purcell, 2002)

Shreveport, Louisiana, the placement of books as acts of civil disobedience encouraged reform in a review of the municipal zoning code (Burris, 2015).

The direct challenge to property frameworks through squatting was an important catalyst in the campaign to save Govanhill Baths in Glasgow, Scotland. After serving the local community since 1917, the bathhouse in Govanhill was closed by Glasgow City Council in 2001. A public campaign to reopen the pools developed almost immediately, including activists occupying the building for 140 days in 2001 (Paddison and Joanne Sharp, 2007) until the police forced them out. The local community has continued to campaign for the reopening of the facilities under the auspices of Govanhill Baths Community Trust. In the interim period it had co-ordinated several temporary projects within the space - art installations, a skate-park, theatre performances, music gigs - which temporarily reimagined the site. After years of campaigning, the building was reopened as a community hub in 2012, and is now being revitalised in three stages, which includes recommissioning the swimming pools.

<Insert Figure 10.12 [Govanhill_Baths,_Glasgow_24.JPG] about here>

Conclusion

On the pages of a glossy magazine, a blog or instagram, various temporary urban interventions can easily be conflated. What we have addressed in this chapter is the need to look more closely, beyond their form, at the relations that constitute and are constituted by these practices. More specifically, we have sought to reckon with both the particular and collective opportunities and dilemmas they invoke as interventions that are oriented towards questions of justice in the city.

Our focus has been on identifying the questions necessary for a critical consideration of temporary urban interventions. Two questions were posed as especially pertinent. First, how can these practices be assessed individually – how can their particularities be comprehended and evaluated? Second, how can alternative practices be assessed collectively – how can we identify their broader, collective contributions to developing more just and sustainable cities? For us, the crucial issue in addressing both of these questions centres on relationships, through which we can consider the way in which these practices might contribute to efforts to increase spatial justice. As we move beyond the brief examples

sketched above, a thicker examination of various temporary urban interventions may in turn reveal ways in which this two-part analytical framework could be refined.

Reflecting on our preliminary analysis, the extent to which temporary urban interventions and practices should be insurrectionary or subversive remains open. Smaller scale approaches – “reformist tinkering” – may harbour more potential to embed temporary urban interventions into broader struggles for justice in the city. More cynically, however, they may also provide greater opportunities for co-option by commercial interests. In seeking to examine temporary urban interventions and their impacts, it is important to recognise the limitations of focusing on linear, large-scale, revolutionary legal and institutional change that may result from their proliferation. Change – and progress toward justice in the city – can be evolutionary rather than revolutionary and become evident long after the temporary project has ceased, as transitions occur through the accumulation of many casual interactions at different scales. Change can stem from an experimental outlier, and it can also fail to result from an action that in other instances has produced positive outcomes. As temporary urban interventions are increasingly adopted in cities worldwide, ongoing attention to relationships – both the particular and the collective, the proximate and the distant – must be emphasised.

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