

STAGING URBAN
LANDSCAPES
THE ACTIVATION AND
CURATION OF FLEXIBLE
PUBLIC SPACES

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B. CANNON IVERS
**STAGING URBAN
LANDSCAPES**
THE ACTIVATION AND
CURATION OF FLEXIBLE
PUBLIC SPACES

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FOREWORD

CHARLES WALDHEIM

This publication and the phenomena it describes are timely returns to topics of regularly recurring interest in the design disciplines. The essays and insights, cases and conditions described here offer a contemporary reading of the relations between urban occasions and their containers. Ivers's long-standing commitment to the topic, the various forms of evidence presented here and the impressive array of co-conspirators that he assembles are testament enough to the significance of the topic for discourse and practices in the urban arts today.

In certain respects, this research project is a welcome rejoinder to the decades-long debates on the relationship of the shape of the city to the experience of the urban. For a generation of architects/urbanists steeped in the failures of modernist planning, such activity or event represented a significant and fecund alternative to the stylistic baggage and cultural regression of postmodern or neo-conservative urban projects. Among these, many urbanists educated in Europe became interested in the US city as a model of urban activity organised across a thin horizontal vegetal plane. For these urbanists (Reyner Banham, Kenneth Frampton, Rem Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi, Lars Lerup and Alex Wall), the density of activity or event and the proximity of bodies in urban space came to stand for urbanity itself, in lieu of the containers of that activity. This position allowed a generation (or more) of European

urbanists to propose propinquity and potential as more significant indicators of urbanity rather than the superficially stylised neo-traditional forms associated with postmodern urban form.

In the discourse and practices of the urban arts in the 1980s and 90s on both sides of the Atlantic, programme or event came to stand as primary referents of the urban project. This tendency lent momentum to renewed interest in landscape as a medium of urban configuration and to infrastructure as an irrigator of urban potential. These tendencies were also a more-or-less direct repudiation of the two other dominant conceptions of urban programme or event in the post-war era: programming of urban institutions on the one hand and the sociology of human behaviour in urban spaces on the other. Beginning with the mathematical modelling emerging from World War II and manifesting through the post-war reconstruction of European cities, architectural programming became a dominant paradigm for the development of urban design in the 1950s. Through the optimisation of adjacencies and efficiencies associated with flexibility, temporal change, and computational modelling, architectural programming came to define an approach to the design of the city from the 1940s through the 1960s. In contrast to that state-supported, institutionally based and ideologically charged approach to city-making, an alternative practice of urban sociology developed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This work was more often

based in urban planning or its adjacent fields in the social sciences or policy and was associated with empirical observation of individual and collective human behaviour in urban space. It would be hard to overstate the historical import of the work of Jane Jacobs or William H. Whyte in this regard.

This approach to the design of urban spaces tended to focus on the perceived failures of modernist planning to address the so-called 'human scale', as well as questions of comfort, safety and security. These two paradigms of urban space-making—programming and the sociology of urban behaviour—were both enormously productive in terms of disciplinary formation as well as projective practices. Both had tremendous success in reproducing themselves as discourses and practices, with myriad built examples of each around the world in the second half of the 20th century. Unfortunately, these two divergent paradigms tended to reinforce disciplinary and professional divisions between architecture and urban design, reflecting design culture versus landscape architecture and urban planning understood as empirical social or natural sciences.

In response to this disjunction of realms, and the resulting incoherence of the design disciplines' response to the question of the shape of the city, the discourse and practices of landscape urbanism emerged in the past two decades. Taking up the critical conceptual and curatorial approach to activity and event used by the European urbanists of the 1980s cited above, landscape urbanism proposed an unlikely alliance of design culture and the curation of urban event. These tendencies are evident in contemporary urban projects and practices internationally, and might be summarised in three complex and potentially contradictory conditions informing urban projects today. These impulses are evident across the essays and case studies assembled here, and they collectively contribute to the beginnings of a new discourse, and new practices of contemporary urban curation.

First, much of the past quarter century of urban programming, and many of the examples arrayed here, have to do with the occupation of sites left vacant in the wake of economic restructuring. Most recently this has to do with the ongoing shift in the sites of industrial production and the vacancy of formerly industrial sites associated with advanced capital. In contemporary practice, these sites are often irrigated with new potential through the installation of new urban infrastructure. These sites are transformed through programming and event, in advance of their urban restructuring. Often these event spaces are temporary, provisional occupation through event and spectacle, as the first wave of a larger, more comprehensive architectural restructuring enabling the new economy through urban form. Projects such as Schouwburgplein (Theatre Square in Rotterdam (p. 254–257) and Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam are indicative of these tendencies.

Second, contemporary practices of programmed urbanity are often exploiting the abandonment or relative under-utilisation of transportation infrastructure. These are sites that were the result of functionally optimised single-function civil engineering projects for mobility that came to be under-utilised

relative to the economic and cultural potential of the urban sites they occupied. Projects such as Paris Plage or the High Line in New York along with dozens of other contemporary comparables are illustrative of this tendency. A corollary contemporary trend can be found in the reoccupation of space underneath still functioning elevated transportation infrastructure. This trend is evident in projects such as the Underline in Miami and the Bentway in Toronto.

Third, the tendency toward the programming of urban space in contemporary practice also reveals the increasing hegemony of neo-liberal economic models imposed on the shape of the city. This tendency is associated with every available urban space being programmed or filled with event. These projects such as the redevelopment of the Southbank in London or the recent plan for Governors Island in New York harbour tend toward an implicit understanding of urban space as essentially transactional. This characterisation of urban life as formed through a series of economic relations in exchange for occupation has been enabled through a host of practices associated with privately owned public space, restrictions on behaviour and speech in the public realm, and the increasing surveillance state of the contemporary urban realm. They have also been underpinned by another equally significant transformation in which private philanthropic models of stewardship and maintenance (conservancies, friends' groups, merchants' associations) replace the historic role of the public sector and policy in managing the urban realm. Taken together, these tendencies indicate a coherent, if potentially contradictory, not to say problematic future for curating citizenship in the neo-liberal urban landscape. This suggests that our contemporary tendencies might continue in the near future. If so, we might expect contemporary design culture's menu of oft-repeated urban tropes such as the generic culture 'shed', the urban viewing 'platform' the programmed urban 'surface' and linear park-like 'lines', to continue to shape the contemporary public realm in cities around the world.

PREFACE

B. CANNON IVERS

Since 2007, more people reside in cities than in rural areas, requiring urban open spaces to work hard to accommodate a multitude of uses and cultural demands. The increased pressure on public spaces and a population that is increasing exponentially demand that our squares, streets and parks are renewed and refreshed as a cultural overlay to the urban infrastructure; programmed and changed as an ephemeral stage of human encounter and provocation. The dynamism of urban spaces in cities like London, New York, Barcelona, Paris, Chicago, Montreal, Boston and Copenhagen demonstrates a richness of programmability, which becomes the lynchpin of public life and a catalyst for community cohesion. Subsequently, new energy is consistently breathed into these spaces to stave off the quiet social decay of static monotony or, put simply, space without change.

This also encompasses meanwhile uses, where derelict buildings and under-utilised spaces are charged with the energy of community gatherings and visionary art installations that rely on the interaction of the users. Although these spaces act as placeholders for more permanent urban interventions, for a period of months or years such spaces can serve as places of gathering and platforms for social exchange, performance and communal interaction. It is no longer enough to create a space that looks beautiful yet remains static. More often than not, it is the overlay and activation that transforms

a space, impacts adjacent communities and establishes a well-used and appreciated patch of public realm. The space is enlivened, an energetic atmosphere is created, which in turn attracts more people and the pattern continues.

The sense of 'renew and refresh' that programmed spaces provide can come from borrowed infrastructure, such as the opening and closing of Tower Bridge in London, incidental public exchanges such as the Book Fair under Waterloo Bridge in London or through commerce, such as selling plants in lower Manhattan, that dramatically changes the character of the street once business begins. Water has become indispensable, facilitating a calendar of events, while also activating a space on a day-to-day basis. The simple idea that a shallow film of water can be drained away to provide a performance space or accommodate a community event is enabling cities around the world to establish an active and programmable stage. It is a sign of the times. Other instances of the power of programme are seen in the more deliberate activation of space through theatre, dance, performance and the transformation of a space by changing its use—importing sand, adding turf or interactive public art. The simple alteration to the character of a space can have a profound impact on the way people behave in it, as seen in London's Trafalgar Square in 2007 when the square was covered in turf and people began to behave as if this central civic square was a park.

The flexibility of space, how the design can accommodate a myriad of events, cultural celebrations and incidental artistic expression, is now featuring on the agenda of more and more client briefs in the public and private sector. Designers are framing proposals and competition entries around an annual calendar of events and a vision of how a proposed design can accommodate change through overlays. Infrastructures to accommodate these overlays are also being integrated into constructed projects, signalling the ambition to make these temporary events a regular and calculated aspect of the life of the space. This is exemplified in Rotterdam's Binnenrotte Square by West 8, which provided market stall anchor points and collapsible/folding traffic kerbs.

This new-found focus on spatial performance rather than static aesthetics can generate revenue through performance and installation, which can be utilised to maintain the space, while acting as a mechanism for place-making through activation and the stirring of that great human condition: curiosity. This approach to public space design is a relatively new prerogative that public space designers must incorporate into the design process in an imaginative and compelling way. The challenge is not to fall victim to the banality of 'less is more' in the public canvas of our cities, favouring the capacity to hold large events while neglecting the everyday use of the space. This is a condition that plagues large civic and market squares such as Boston's City Hall Plaza and Binnenrotte Square in Rotterdam, both of which have been the subject of recent design efforts to address the issue. These spaces look empty and devoid of activity, lacking a sense of purpose, attraction or the provision of comfort on any given day. Perhaps then, the most important aspect of the public spaces of our time is not the fixity of designed configuration, but rather the capacity of the space to be flexible and programmable in order to accommodate an increasingly diverse citizenship as the catalyst for spatial activation. This is a delicate balance to achieve and requires careful consideration and masterful execution through collaboration between clients, designers, event specialists and the creative team that will curate and manage the space once it is on the ground. The most successful case studies involve all of these disciplines imbricated in a bipartisan, non-territorial way.

Staging Urban Landscapes explores the mechanics of the programmed space to understand how the space is managed, how many events take place annually and what the variety of overlaid objects is in some of the most successfully activated spaces. The intent of the case studies is to establish what makes a flexible space successful without being an insipid, uninspiring space, devoid of atmosphere when absent of programmed activity. These are the questions the research explores, drawing on successful case studies in London, Boston, Cambridge, Montreal, Vancouver, Zurich, Berlin, Melbourne, Sydney, Rotterdam, Paris, Córdoba, Philadelphia and New York. The culmination of this research features insight from clients, design teams and management teams responsible for the design, implementation and management of these case studies in order to understand how the activation of these

spaces began with the client brief and continued through the design process. Each case study uses drawings and diagrams to explore the design of a space, its component parts, spatial configuration, scale and inbuilt 'plug and play' infrastructure that enables a space to accommodate a multitude of uses. The intent of the drawings and diagrams is to explore the relationship between permanence and temporality to ascertain how the space operates on a daily basis and accommodates large gatherings and events.

This aspect of spatial design is quickly becoming the catalyst for spatial design within design professions, evolving from the 'landscape as art' movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s pioneered by Peter Walker, Martha Schwartz and, to some degree, George Hargreaves. This is not to say that these visionary designers were not considering flexibility and various user groups in the creation of space, but I argue that use was subservient to aesthetics and the artistic arrangement of the designs during this period. Hargreaves' signature sculpted landform work is largely inclusive of programme as seen at Discovery Green in Houston and stated by Anita Berrizbeitia: 'Hargreaves composes with program, rather than merely making room for it in a plan.' Based on the research for this book, I postulate that the mid 1990s saw a shift in the consideration of flexibility and programme in design. Work by West 8 at Schouwburgplein (see p. 254–257) in Rotterdam and discursive essays in James Corner's *Recovering Landscape*, particularly the text by Alex Wall, signalled a move away from fixity towards flexibility. Stan Allen was also exploring indeterminacy in *Points + Lines*. Approaches in contemporary design to accommodate flexibility continue to evolve and designers of the age are required to be autodidactic when it comes to acquiring the skills and knowledge to craft programmable spaces that are innovative and have longevity in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Staging Urban Landscapes is a practical, research- and precedent-driven design tool to serve design teams in their pursuit of mastering the execution of staging public spaces. Additionally, it is my hope that the content of the book will help those writing design and competition briefs, as well as the talented teams that are enlivening spaces behind the scenes through curated events, community engagement and artistic overlays.

THE RISE OF FLEXIBLE SPACE

B. CANNON IVERS

Since early civilisation, urban spaces have been designed both as a utilitarian space of function and routine and as places of leisure and spectacle as described by R. E. Wycherley's study of the Agora.¹ Historically, the necessities of life—food and commodities, exchange of goods and commerce and chance encounter—were the agents in the activation of civic squares and public open spaces as illustrated in the diagram by Jan Gehl on p. 82.² However, the invention and proliferation of the car in the middle of the 20th century and the subsequent car-centric planning and decision-making rendered the day-to-day activation of public spaces less of an existential urban phenomenon.³

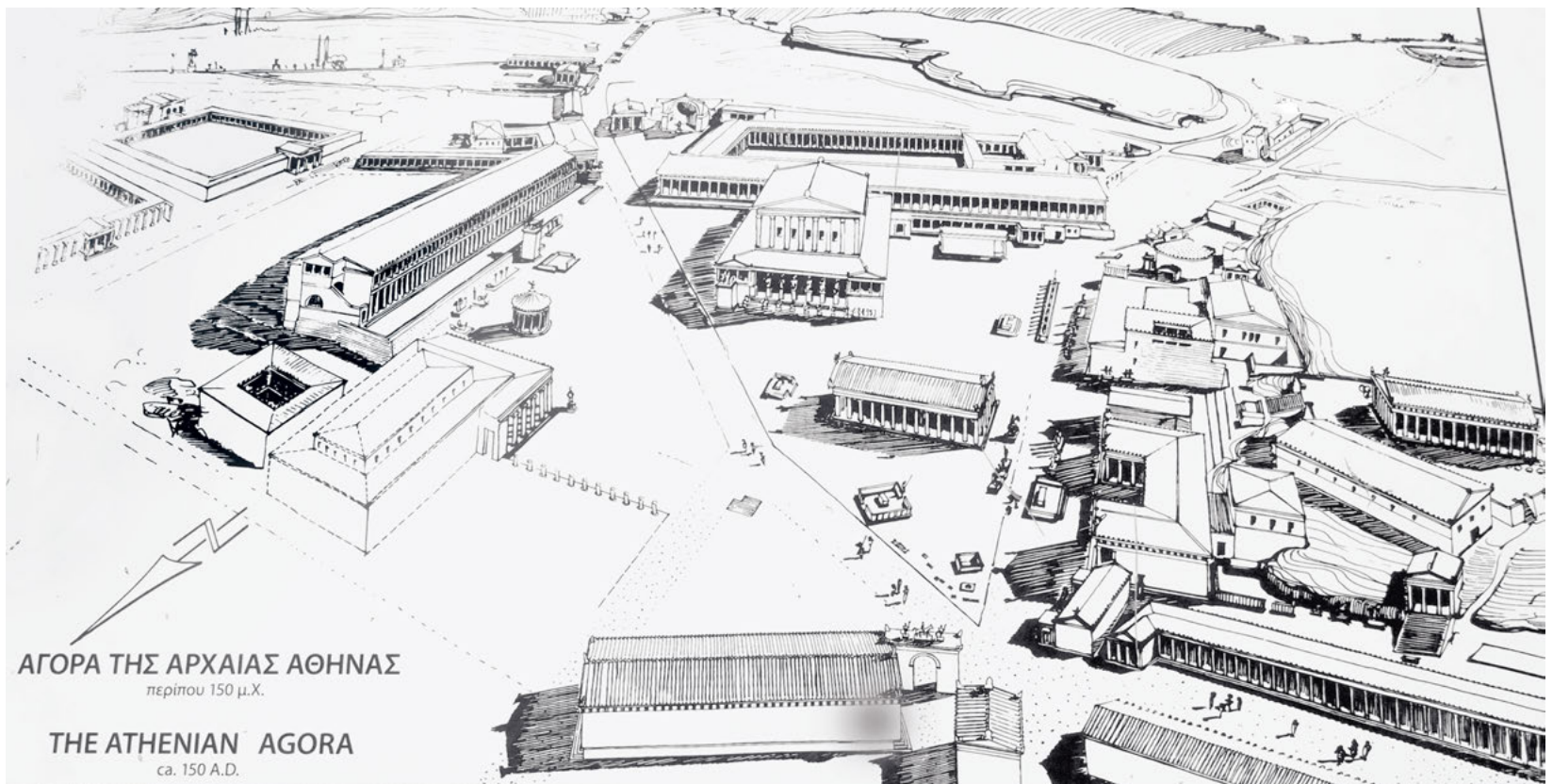
This shift in city-making, in many ways signalled the decline of vibrant city spaces. In response to this, the period from 1960 to 1980 saw the emergence of the Public Life Studies school of thinking, spearheaded by Jane Jacobs, Jan Gehl and William H. Whyte and later by Fred Kent of Projects for Public Spaces.⁴ Concurrently, Kevin Lynch was immersed in the 'study of perceptions of the urban environment and urban form' from an experiential, anthropocentric point of view. His approach to understanding cities at the human scale continues to influence the design of urban spaces today.⁵

During this period, the celebrated landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, inspired by the dance choreography of his wife Anna Halprin, developed 'ecoscores' and 'motation' as methods

for documenting and designing for movement and animation in public space. Ecoscores register the flow of natural processes, such as the flow of a river as it coursed through a landscape, where 'motation'—movement notations—drew inspiration from traditional music scores as a way of representing movement through time and space diagrammatically. Halprin devised 'motation' as an alternative form of spatial representation because he felt that the traditional plans, elevations and sections were too static.

In stark contrast to the 'top-down' planning construct of the time, Public Life Studies promoted a 'bottom-up' type of spatial analysis. This approach resulted in a process of city-making and an understanding of public space activation that was based largely on first-hand observation of public behaviour and sociology at the human scale. The approach established a new set of ground rules for regaining a pedestrian-focused scaffold to urban planning and place-making.⁶ Subsequently, through observation and documentation, valuable insight into human behaviour and patterns of occupation in public spaces began to influence the coding and design of public spaces.⁷

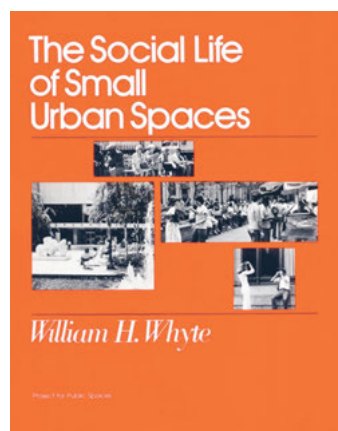
William H. Whyte's seminal study *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* defined a new method of notation that emulated musical scores or choreographed dance sequences as a method of registering time and spatial relationships (see p. 11).



The Agora served as the centre of social and political life in Ancient Greece. Public spaces were activated in response to the necessities of daily life.

Painting by Giuseppe Zocchi, showing designed flexibility of Piazza Del Campo.

The Palio at Piazza del Campo in Siena is a famous event that takes place annually, transforming the space into a spectator arena.



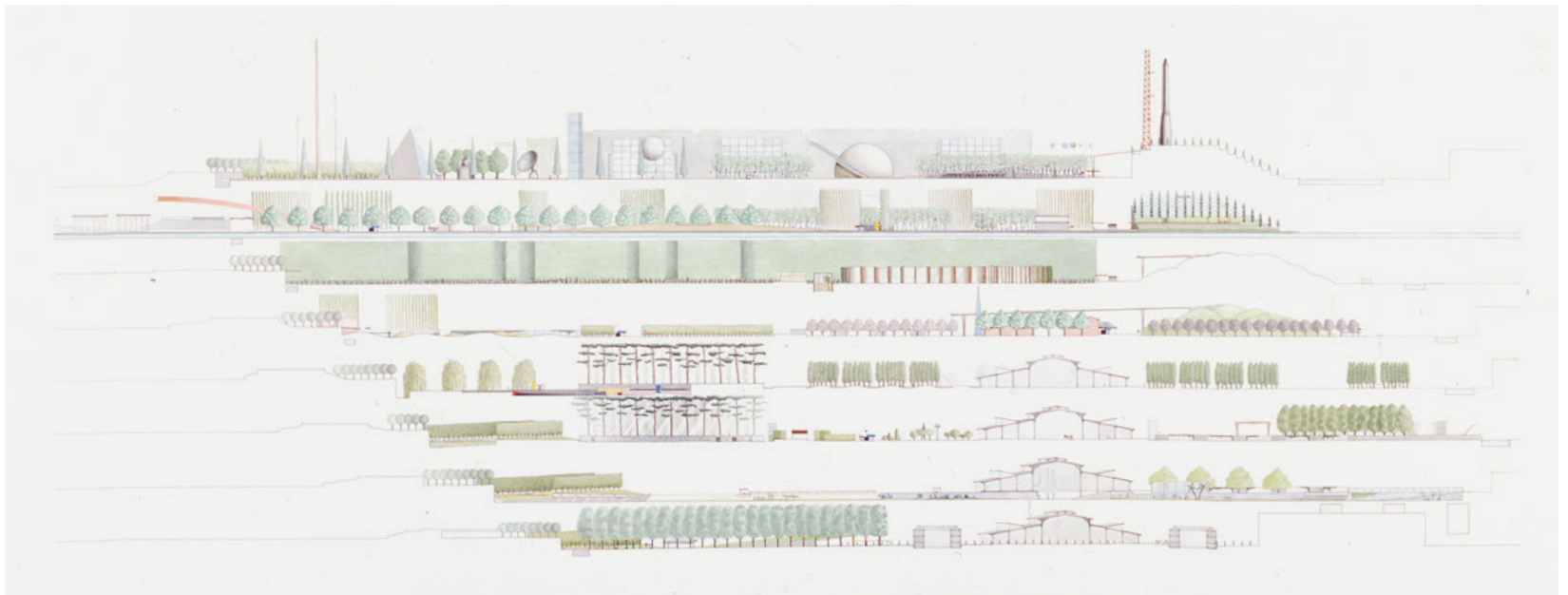
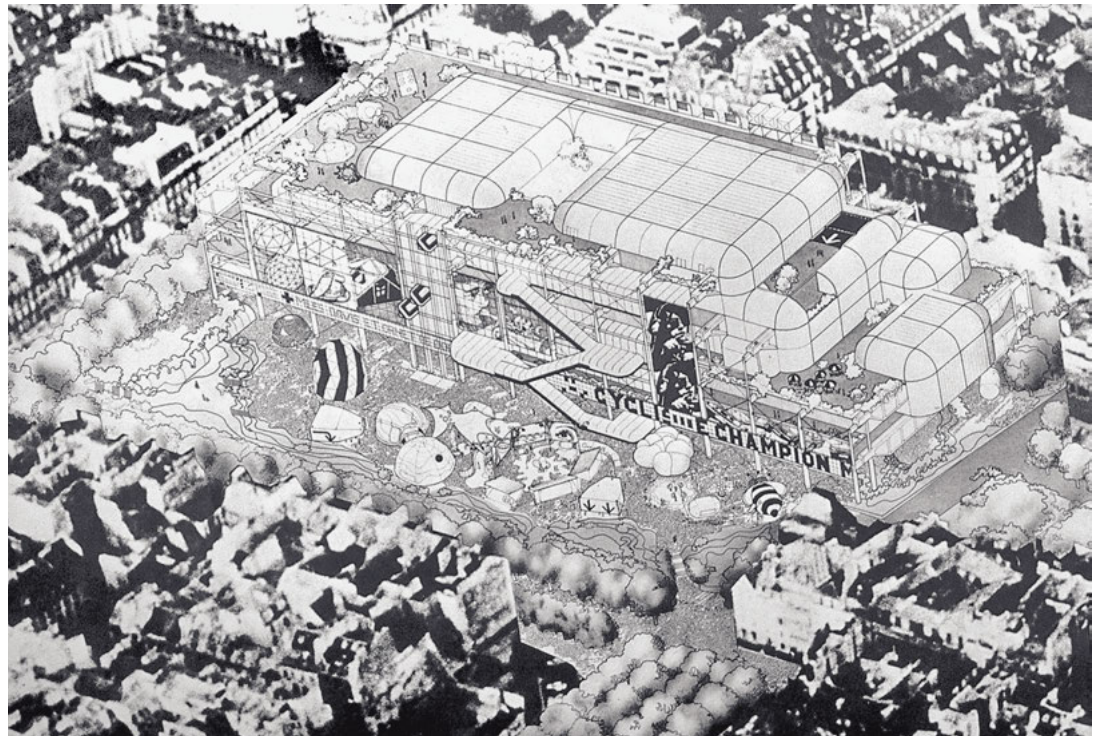
The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, originally published in 1980 by the Conservation Foundation.

In response to a new building code in Manhattan that required developers to provide public space, new spaces were created that were devoid of people or any vestige of activity.

This rise of 'dead spaces' prompted Whyte to study Seagram's Plaza, in order to extract the aspects of spatial design that made certain spaces attract people and what, therefore, could be introduced to enliven other spaces throughout the city. More importantly, Whyte elucidated the power of activation in public spaces through mechanisms such as travelling food offerings, flexible moveable seating, street performances, incidental encounter and set events. It was this revelatory moment, rooted in commonsense observation, that repositioned the mechanics and operational aspects of a space as important factors in the design development and planning of the urban landscape.⁸

The influence of Whyte's work and the subsequent activation of public space was evidenced by the emergence of a multitude of outdoor spaces, in New York particularly, that embraced the mechanisms mentioned above. In the early

The radical idea to give over half of the site at the Centre Pompidou to an open-ended flexible space inspired a new direction for the design of public spaces. It challenged designers to balance the permanence of public space with the ephemerality of public life.



However, during this period two notable architecture competitions put programme and activation at the centre of the design response—the Centre Pompidou and Parc de la Villette in Paris. The competition for the Centre Pompidou was won by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano in 1977. Their proposal was groundbreaking because it set aside half of the total space designated for the building, with the other half ‘following a radical design strategy, devoted to the creation of a public space—the piazza or ‘parvis’.¹⁰ The ‘parvis’ is now a prime space in Paris, ‘[e]njoyed by Parisians, tourists, picnickers, buskers and those who simply enjoy watching the world go by in one of the most popular public spaces in a city already famous for its gardens, parks and street culture’.¹¹

Similarly, Parc de la Villette foregrounded programme and activity as driving forces for the design proposal. Bernard Tschumi designed the park after emerging as the victor of a design competition in 1982. Tschumi ‘envisioned Parc de la Villette as a place of culture where natural and artificial [man-made] are forced together into a state of constant reconfiguration and discovery’.¹²

Although Rem Koolhaas and his practice OMA did not win the Parc de la Villette competition, their narrative and approach to illustrating programme is still often referenced as a key moment in the emergence of activation and programmability as threads of design and visual representation. OMA’s proposal suggested a ‘method that—combining programmatic

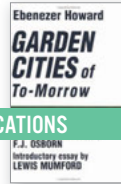
Before public life studies became an academic field

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940



PRIMARY PUBLICATIONS

Camillo Sitte
Der Städtebau
nach seinen
künstlerischen
Grundsätzen
(1889)



Ebenezer Howard
Garden Cities of To-Morrow
(1902)



Le Corbusier
Vers une architecture
(1923)



CIAM
La charte d'Athènes
(1933)

DEVELOPMENT OF CITY LIFE FROM 1880 TO 2005



Jan Gehl's diagram illustrates how the invention and proliferation of the car diminished the incidental activation of public life that occurs through the daily routines of ordinary life.

CAR INVASION

RESEARCH AND PLANNING A RENAISSANCE OF CITY SPACE

- pedestrian promenades
- city life and activities
- bicycle renaissance
- pacifying traffic

	The first public life studies				Public life studies as a strategic tool	Public life studies become mainstream	
1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	

Jane Jacobs
Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961)

Aldo Rossi
L'architettura della città (1966)

Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour and Denise Scott Brown
Learning from Las Vegas (1972)

Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau
S,M,L,XL (1995)

Richard Florida
The Rise of the Creative Class (2002)

Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic
The Endless City (2008)

William H. Whyte
The Exploding Metropolis (1958)

Kevin Lynch
The Image of the City (1960)

Gordon Cullen
Townscape (1961)

Edward T. Hall
The Silent Language (1959)

Oscar Newman
Defensible Space (1972)

red. Michael Sorkin
Variations on a Theme Park (1992)

Barcelona
Den generøbre by (exhibition 1999)

red. Goldsmith, Elizabeth and Goldbard.
What We See. Advancing the Observations of Jane Jacobs (2010)

Erving Goffman
Behavior in Public Places (1963)

Edward T. Hall
The Hidden Dimension (1966)

Robert Sommer
Personal Space (1969)

Jane Jacobs
The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961)

Jan Gehl
Life between buildings (1971)

William H. Whyte
The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces (1980)

Clare C. Marcus and Carolyn Francis
People Places (1990)

Peter Bosselmann
Representation of Places (1998)

Urbanism on Track
(2008)

Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein
A Pattern Language (1977)

Donald Appleyard
Livable Streets (1980)

Allan Jacobs
Looking at Cities (1985)

Allan Jacobs
Great Streets (1995)

PPS
How to Turn a Place Around (2000)

Jan Gehl
Cities for People (2010)

instability with architectural specificity—will eventually generate a park'.¹³

Koolhaas continues: 'La Villette could be more radical by suppressing the three-dimensional aspect almost completely and proposing pure program instead, unfettered by any containment.'¹⁴ The 49 hectares of land were previously occupied by a 19th-century slaughterhouse, which created many logistical hurdles, issues of site reclamation and questions about how to modernise the services on the site. Site issues were exacerbated by a lengthy list of programmatic requirements from the client, with no clear indication of how and when the various elements of the programme would emerge. OMA, therefore, approached the problem not as a design exercise in style or expression but rather as an organisational strategy. As stated by Alex Wall in his essay 'Programming the Urban Surface':

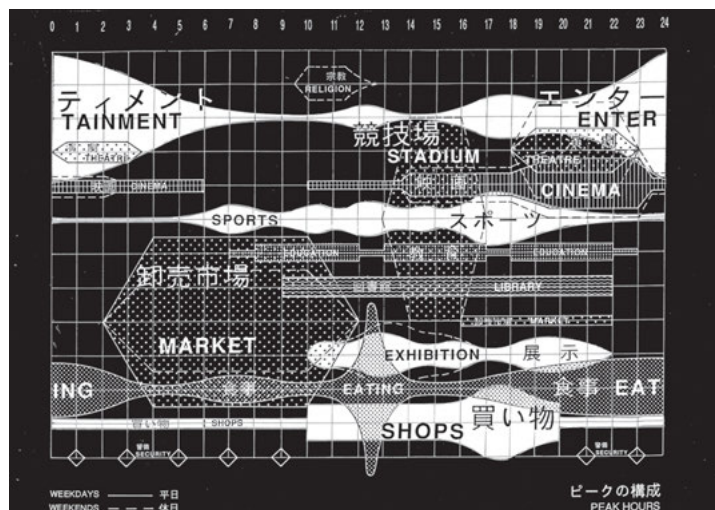
The surface had to be equipped and staged in such a way as to both anticipate and accommodate any number of changing demands and programs. OMA responded with the superposition of four strategic layers for organising different parts of the program: the 'east-west strips' of vary-

ing synthetic and natural surfaces, the 'confetti grid' of large and small service points and kiosks, the various 'circulation paths' and the 'large objects', such as the linear and round forest.¹⁵

OMA described their project as a 'landscape of social instruments'. Wall continues:

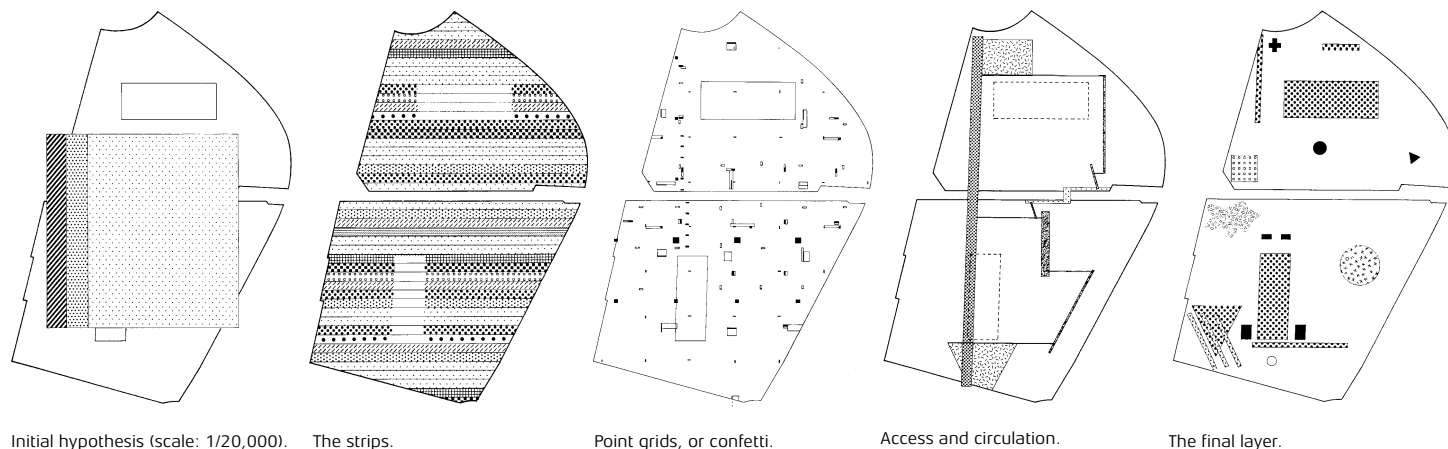
The action of sliding one thing over another allowed for quantitative changes without the loss of organizational structures. This framework of flexible congestion, whose character and efficacy lies in its capacity to adapt to change, set a significant precedent in later formulations of urbanism.¹⁶

Following the la Villette competition, OMA continued to explore programmability as a device for design. For the Yokohama Port competition, OMA proposed a 'continuous and formless project which engulfs the site like a kind of programmatic lava.' Their proposal introduced a spectrum of events to complement the operational hours of the existing market facilities to create a '24-hour peak, composed of a mosaic of heterogeneous 21st century life'.¹⁷



Yokohama Masterplan, OMA, 1991.

OMA described the Parc de la Villette proposal as 'Nature—whether the thematic/ discovery gardens, or "real" nature—will also be treated as program. Blocks or screens of trees and the various gardens will act like different planes of a stage set: they will convey the illusion of different landscapes, of depth, without offering, in passing, the substance.' (Text by OMA)



In 1996 the Dutch landscape firm West 8 completed Schouwburgplein (see p. 254–257) in the heart of Rotterdam. The project, described as a ‘city stage’, showed a deliberate determination to provide an open area for activation through a calendar of events and programmatic activity. Adriaan Geuze, the founder of West 8, was exploring the notion of the void in the city in his publication *Colonizing the Void*, which was published in 1996. In 2000, Geuze wrote a text for the book *Artificial Landscape* titled ‘Accelerating Darwin’. Paradoxically, considering that title, ‘Accelerating Darwin’ evolved from a similar text titled ‘Moving Beyond Darwin’ that Geuze had written for the book *Modern Park Design* in 1993. In this text he proclaims that

[c]ontemporary life [in cities] is a continuous escape, it is a series of illusions, possibilities and experiences, and we are living in a kind of multicultural rainforest. The contemporary city, the new city we are living in, creates its own escape. In this age there is no need to make a new environment that is adapted to man, because man can assimilate into environment. We as landscape architects should provide them with the tools for their behaviour. We are going to give them the equipment to make a beautiful life and I even think there is a need to provoke people, that mankind can work creatively better than he has done. We need to create surrealistic environments, we should provide anarchic environment and even subversive cities and green areas.¹⁸

Geuze then describes Schouwburgplein as

quite empty and there is little to do there. Most of the time there are even no people. But it can also be nice when it is empty. Sometimes there are many things to do and there are thousands of people. This change in the way it is used is the character of the square.¹⁹

Marking what was to become a seminal, pivotal point within the profession, Geuze states that ‘it was not important to complete it [the square] from the very first moment. The idea was that the square could evolve as it went along, because it could be developed by many different artists.’²⁰ This, I believe, sparked a new focus on the role of landscape architects to provide spaces of change, activated through public participation on an unfinished stage.

Additionally, this scheme demonstrated the potential for animated objects in the landscape by introducing 35-metre-tall cranes—originally coin-operated by users of the space but now on a timer—to slowly, mechanically reconfigure. The languid repositioning of the cranes, stirred into action through user participation, provides movement and change when the space is not activated by an event. The fountains also provide a choreography of varying heights in response to the outside temperature, reaching the maximum height when the temperature reaches 30 °C. According to Geuze: ‘Just like the squirrels, the water is playing with and provoking the users of the square.’ The open ‘stage’ area is flanked by long linear bench-

es positioned for maximum sun exposure and to provide seating for people-watching and a degree of anonymity. The stage hosts civic events, artistic exhibitions and community gatherings and provides a cultural hub for Rotterdam.

Writing in *The Artificial Landscape*, Geuze more specifically addresses the zeitgeist of the contemporary city dweller or ‘nomad’. He identifies the effects of what I refer to as the age of instant gratification and short attention spans. He notes that in light of technological advances,

[P]eople discover their freedom and choose their sub-cultures, appropriate their own environment. Mass culture and the media generate a collective voyage of discovery. Instead of a tiny elite, the entire urban population takes part. City dwellers are constantly changing their surroundings, as commuters, recreationists, holiday-makers. Speed and time have replaced the traditional idea of space. Movement connects the fragments in space in constantly changing configurations. City dwellers yearn for meaningful experiments that go beyond the development of new park fashions, for experiments that lead to a new genre of public space. Interventions in public space, or rather, in the public landscape, should no longer be focused on generating greenery. The real challenge is to create space and structures for city dwellers to colonize in their turn. The economy and the efficient functioning of the city are based on an optimal layout of functions and a first-rate infrastructure. The euphoria of mass culture is the product of the accessibility and interchangeability of the different cultures, which is what gives urban life the proverbial combinatorial freedom of the video clip. This freedom is paradoxical, however. The price that is paid for it is the fully programmed public space. Contemporary public space reflects the organization and the bureaucracy of the city. Its efficiency, which is attuned to the collective, has a debilitating effect on the individual. The pre-programmed space is one-dimensional. Human beings are demoted to the status of road users, recreationists, or shoppers. This pusillanimous one-dimensionality ignores the intelligence of the inquiring urbanite. This demands a reaction, an ultimate manifesto; the call for an uprising of street furniture, for anarchistic street signage and for surrealistic and subversive public spaces. Not in order to shock, but to elicit creativity. The new public spaces must expose preconceived behavior and discretion, must provide and disorient the users. New public space will manipulate users in such a way that they become aware of their behaviour there and then and are no longer able to relapse into mechanical, pre-programmed behaviour. This space transforms anonymity into exhibitionism, spectators into actors. What matters is not the design, or the beauty of the dimensions, materials, and colors, but the sensation of a detached culture, that which the inner-city dweller creates.²¹

This set the tone for the design of Schouwburgplein and inspired a sense of ‘agoraphobia’.

The square's decor and furnishings, which ultimately determine the mood, are not fixed but arise from specific scenarios: the position of the hydraulic lighting masts can be manipulated by children to perform a mechanical ballet. The pressure of the fountains is linked to the outdoor temperature; there is a mobile green decor of season potted plants courtesy of forklift truck; ... there is a plug-in system for specific events. The space and the experience of the space are a conscious step, a choice. The square should be more than a podium and lend itself to flexible use; the square provokes the city dweller and demands an active attitude. It gives the city dwellers back their fantasy and identity.²²

In 1996 Stan Allen's entry for a 'Logistical Activities Zone' in Barcelona pushed the concept of programme and deployed the use of scores, diagrams and maps to communicate the project temporarily beyond the static traditional representation of plans, sections and models. According to Allen, '[t]he role of the notational schemas collected here is not to set limits but to imagine multiple program scenarios and to chart their interaction. These notations do not so much map an exact correspondence between architecture and activity as articulate a degree of play between form and event, a loose fit of organisation and programme.'²³ In essence, the ambition of the project was to establish a framework or 'field condition' that had enough architectural specificity to lend some structure to the project, but was programmatically indeterminate so as to allow the future of the site to develop and evolve organically beyond the confines of the masterplan. Allen created a 'user manual' with a series of guiding principles. Point six is particularly germane to the line of enquiry here. Under the heading of 'Anticipation: changing life of the site in time', he lists: event scaffold, passive programmes, active, and pro-

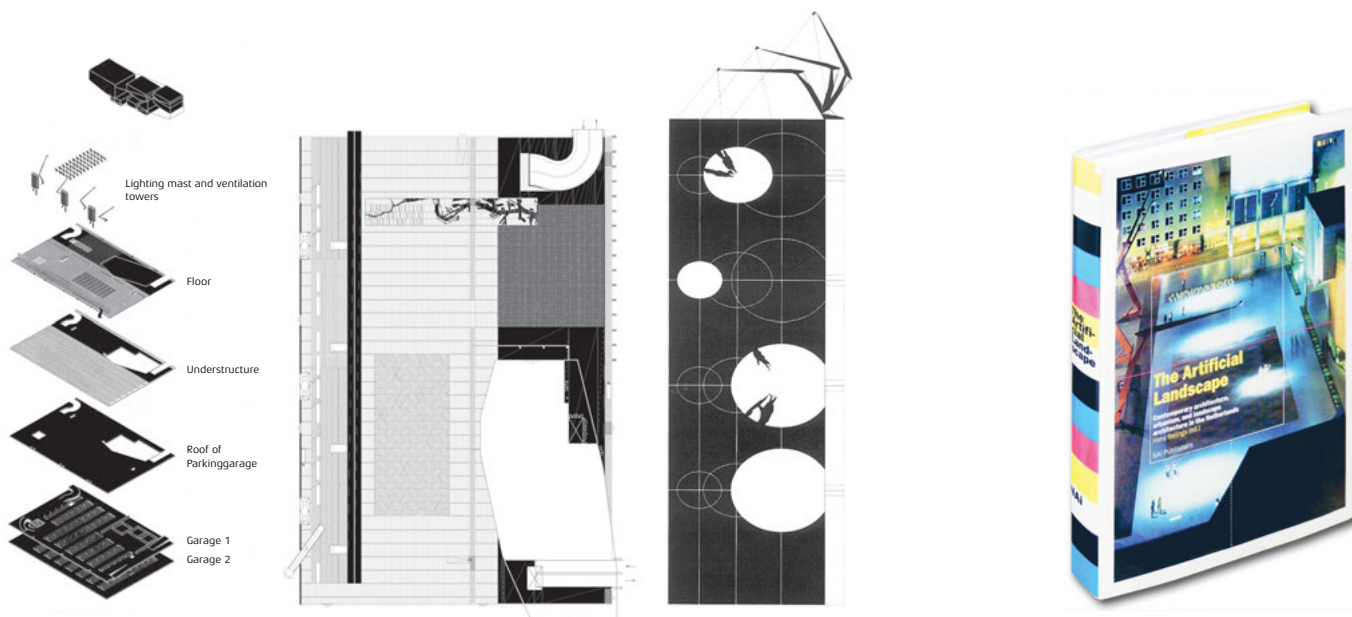
gramme scores. Each of these descriptive categories could be used to describe the practice of programmatic activation that is being deployed in contemporary spatial design within an urban context.²⁴

Comparing this approach to that of West 8's Schouwburgplein, a clear new paradigm of spatial design was emerging that privileged overlay, indeterminacy and future expansion over spatial fixity. Both projects aimed to provide a clear and legible structure that would provide design specificity but would not limit or dictate the way in which the site could be activated with programme, events and unknown functions. Stan Allen puts it this way:

Infrastructures are flexible and anticipatory. They work with time and are open to change. By specifying what must be fixed and what is subject to change, they can be precise and indeterminate at the same time. They work through management and cultivation, changing slowly to adjust to shifting conditions. They do not progress towards a predetermined state (as with masterplanning strategies), but are always evolving within a loose envelope of constraints.²⁵

In 1999 Alex Wall, writing in *Recovering Landscapes*, speaks to the emerging zeitgeist of spatial programmability. He notes: 'Here, the term landscape no longer refers to prospects of pastoral innocence but rather invokes the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organizes not only objects and spaces but also the dynamic processes and events that move through them.' Here is a call to arms for designers to revisit their approaches to urban place-making, to concern themselves once again

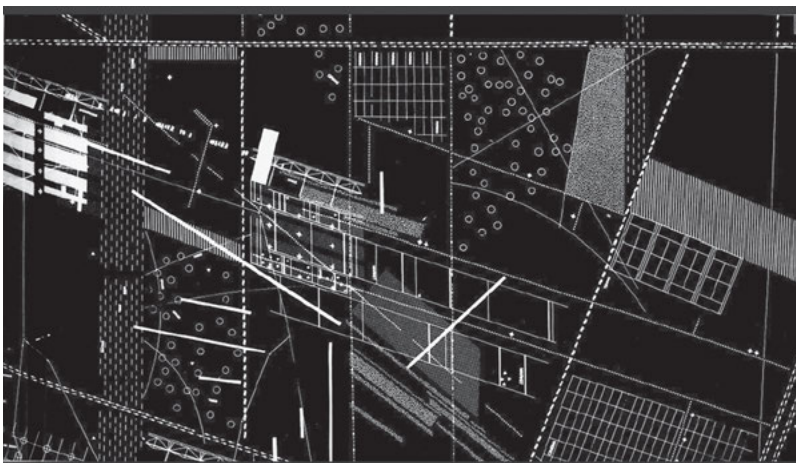
with the provision of flexible, multifunctional surfaces as a means to revitalize the profession. The grafting of new



instruments and equipment onto strategically staged surfaces allows for a transformation of the ground plane into a living, connective tissue between increasingly disparate fragments and unforeseen programs.²⁶

While the discipline of landscape architecture was pivoting away from aesthetic fixity as the primary driver for design and moving towards the emergence of spatial programmability, Fred Kent and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) was continuing to develop a method for bottom-up, community-generated place-making. The work of PPS continues to transform often forgotten and nondescript spaces. There are instances where PPS works alongside the landscape architect to activate the spaces designed and arranged by the landscape architect. This can result in an interesting tension between the landscape architect as spatial designer and PPS as the spatial programmer, raising questions about what is the appropriate amount of additional overlay furniture and activation devices. The Harvard Plaza (see p. 74–85) is one such case study that included a team of landscape architects from Stoss and a team from PPS. Some argue the space is over-programmed, others revel in the variety and quantity of additional overlays. PPS's 'lighter, cheaper, quicker' approach to community-led place-making has a following around the world. The 'Tactical Urbanism' approach, led by Mike Lydon, is also making a meaningful contribution to the transformation of spaces at a local community level. What this work tells us is that a creative spark can pick up momentum and become a fundamentally important space for building community cohesion, kindling conversation and bringing people together around shared commonalities.

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- 5 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1960.
- 6 William Hollingsworth Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Municipal Art Society of New York, Life Project Street and Cinema Ltd Direct: Santa Monica, CA 2005.
- 7 Ibid.
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- 9 Marc Treib, *Modern Landscape Architecture: A critical review*, MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1993
- 10 <http://www.rpbw.com/project/3/centre-georges-pompidou>. Accessed in 2016.
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- 14 <http://www.oma.eu/projects/1982/parc-de-la-villette/>. Accessed in 2016.
- 15 James Corner, *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press: New York 1999, p. 237.
- 16 Ibid., p. 238.
- 17 <http://www.oma.eu/projects/1992/yokohama-masterplan>. Accessed in 2016.
- 18 Adriaan Geuze, 'Moving Beyond Darwin', in Martin Knuijt, Hans Ophuis and Peter van Saane (eds.), *Modern Park Design*, Thoth Uitgeverij: Amsterdam 1993, p. 255–56.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Adriaan Geuze, 'Accelerating Darwin', in: Hans Ibelings (ed.), *The Artificial Landscape: Contemporary Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape Architecture in the Netherlands*, NAI Publishers: Rotterdam 2000, p. 256.
- 21 Ibid., p. 256
- 22 Ibid., p. 256.
- 23 Stan Allen, *Points+Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City*, Princeton Architectural Press: New York 1999, p. 73.
- 24 Ibid., p. 88
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., p. 233.

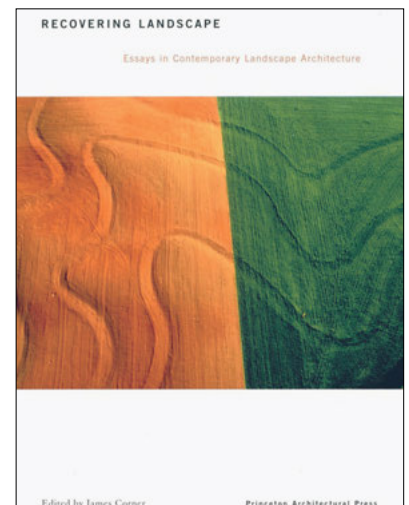


Conceptual design for Schouwburgplein by West 8.

Cover of *The Artificial Landscape* by Hans Ibelings, published in 2000 by the Netherlands Architecture Institute.

Stan Allen, in *Points+Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City*, published in 1999.

Cover of *Recovering Landscapes*, published in 1999 by Princeton Architectural Press.



THE CULTURE OF CHANGE: A PERSONAL READING

B. CANNON IVERS

The genesis of this book can be traced back to 2003 when I moved to London from a small rural town in Colorado with a population of 1652. My closest neighbour was a mile away and our house backed on to National Forest. I had no appreciation of the value of public space or even what function public space fulfilled. I studied landscape architecture in the late 1990s and early 2000s at Colorado State University at a time when Peter Walker, Martha Schwartz, George Hargreaves, Kathryn Gustafson and others of that generation were the paragons of the profession. Looking back at this period of enquiry, it certainly felt that our education was driven by aesthetics and form—what a space looked like rather than its usability. People were included in collages largely for a sense of scale and maybe to show how a bench might be used. The precedent projects we were scanning from leading publications often used photographs without people, reinforcing the point that the profession at the time was preoccupied with composition, arrangement and the artful aesthetics of space. Bagel gardens, gold toads, intersecting geometries, mirrored domes and sculpted landforms adorned the covers of many landscape publications.

I arrived in London not knowing anyone, which prompted me to explore the city. I was commuting to work by bike, noticing that a number of simply designed spaces were changed regularly through events, performances and installations and

I began to document these spaces. With each return visit, I would endeavour to stand in the same place and frame the scene as I had previously done. Over time, as the photographs multiplied, a powerful matrix of images began to crystallise for me both the importance and the value of public space. Equally, I realised the necessity for designers to create spaces to accommodate these overlay events and think about time in the design process and the democratic life of the space. It is also worth noting that I arrived in London as the creative engine of the city was whirring into life in preparation for hosting the 2012 Olympic Games. Since my arrival in 2003 most of the contemporary public spaces have been completed, likely influenced by the lead-up to the Olympic Games, and have performed an important role of hosting events, performances, installations and other methods for activating spaces, suggesting that London was enjoying a public space renaissance.

These are some of the capital's exemplar spaces completed since 2003:

- More London, Townshend Landscape Architects 2003 (see p. 230–233);
- Trafalgar Square Pedestrianisation, Foster + Partners 2003 (see p. 198–203);
- Duke of York Square, Elizabeth Banks/Robert Myers 2003;
- Princess Diana Memorial Fountain, Gustafson Porter 2004;

- Victoria and Albert Courtyard, Kim Wilkie 2005 (see p. 138–143);
- Southbank Centre Square 2007 (see p. 204–207) and Riverside Square 2005, GROSS.MAX.;
- Potters Fields Park, GROSS.MAX. 2007 (see p. 108–121);
- Windrush Square, Brixton, GROSS.MAX. 2010;
- Exhibition Road, Dixon Jones Architects 2011;
- Jubilee Gardens, West 8 2012;
- Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, LDA Design. Hargreaves 2012 and Southpark Hub, James Corner Field Operations 2014;
- Granary Square (King's Cross), Townshend Landscape Architects 2012 (see p. 86–93);
- Leicester Square, Burns and Nice 2012;
- Lewis Cubitt Square (King's Cross), Olin Partnership 2015;
- One St Pancras, Townshend Landscape Architects 2016.

Somerset House (see p. 240–243) and the Royal Academy are two projects that were completed in the early 2000s. I reference them here because they were two of the first projects in

London that used water to enliven the space on a day-to-day basis, and which could be turned off to host events and receive installations. In many ways, these spaces were harbingers of the role of public space in contemporary London and how water could facilitate this new wave of flexible use and began the movement of bringing the inside out.

Witnessing firsthand how these spaces are being received by a city that is enjoying a rebirth of quality public space, and the experimentation taking place within them, is the engine behind this book. Through the process of capturing these spaces of change, I began to dial into some of the larger forces at play in and around the spaces. I will explore these further using London as the main reference point although they are universally applicable around the world. Primarily, it is access to open space that is of critical importance. In London, and in other global cities, the proximity of open space is often more important than scale. What appears to be a relatively unremarkable space, inconsequential in scale, is in fact hugely valued communal space for residents and the workforce that revolves around it. At lunchtime on a sunny afternoon a small



Crabtree Fields in London is a small public open space off Mortimer Street in central London. This quiet pocket park offers respite from the energy of the city. These images illustrate the popularity of this space during lunch hours. Like many urban open spaces, it is not the scale of green space but proximity that is most important.

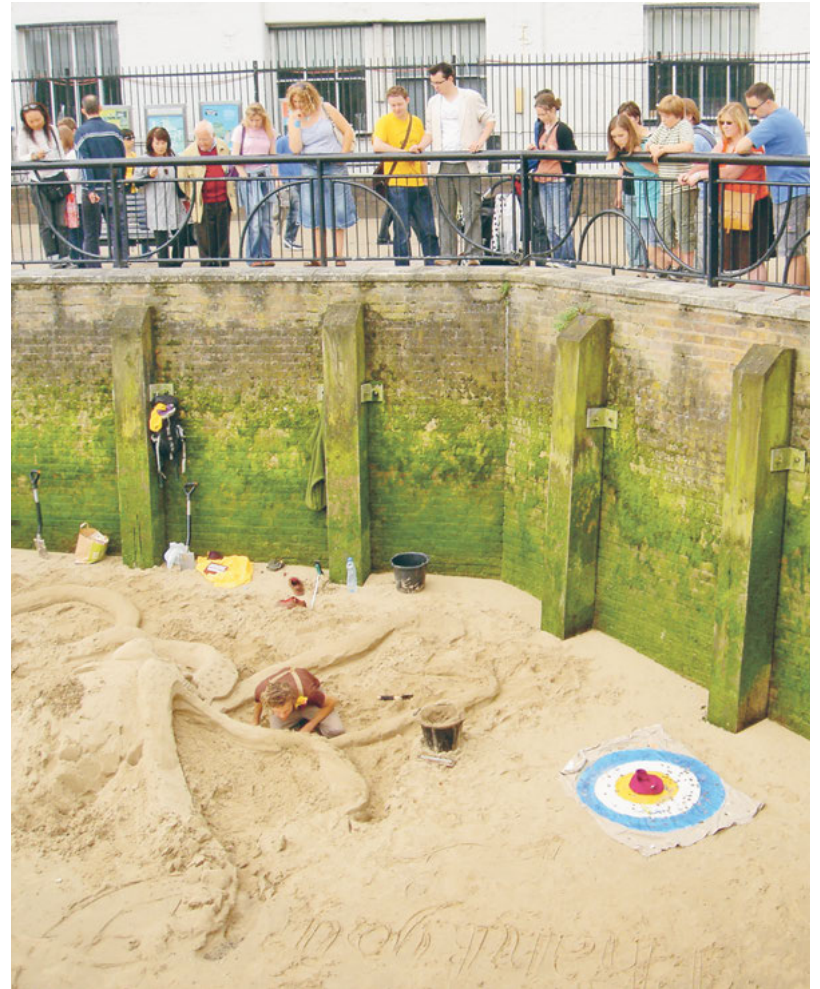


Thousands of visitors await the daily Old Faithful eruption at Yellowstone National Park. While the event lasts no more than 45 seconds to 1.5 minutes, the sense of anticipation in the lead-up to the eruption adds to the spectacle of the event.

patch of grass is filled to capacity by workers escaping the office for an hour. The other larger forces at play deal more with sociology and psychology.

While my initial reading of the city hinged on the spaces, the events and the spatial organisation, I also began to observe human behaviour and the factors in play in public spaces. The first is curiosity. London's Southbank is a living laboratory for human interaction, efforts in place-making, environmental psychology, sociology and artistic expression. The Southbank has found its stride in the last 15 years, establishing itself as one of the prime destinations in London. Observing how people behave, and my own behaviour when walking along the river there, reveals that people are drawn to areas where other people are gathering. As William H. Whyte patently observed, people do attract other people. If a small crowd is gathered looking over a railing, it is difficult not to drift over to observe the scene for yourself. It may be the case that what people are looking at is not particularly interesting, but it holds people's attention long enough to attract other people and builds a critical mass of curious drifters.

The second phenomenon is anticipation. We see this most vividly at the Old Faithful geyser at Yellowstone National Park where thousands of people gather in eager expectation for a show that lasts no more than a few minutes. But there are lessons here for the activation of public space and the importance of proactively tapping into that irresistible human condition.



London's Southbank is a living laboratory of creative expression and performance. Crowds of people form organically to watch street performers and a sand artist that transforms the littoral zone of the River Thames during low tide.



Trafalgar Square is one of the main civic squares in central London. For two days in late spring the square was transformed into a lawn with rolls of turf, completely changing the way people used the space and illustrating the social agency of temporary landscape interventions. Even putters and golf balls were provided for people to use.

A temporary restaurant, complete with live music, changed the nature of Sloane Square from a place of movement to a space for lingering.



Lastly, it is about the psychology of the temporary. There is something meaningful about an event or an experience that is ephemeral. Knowing that it cannot be visited or experienced again prompts us to engage with a space—or a moment in the life of that space—in a way that we may not otherwise. In 2007 Trafalgar Square was turfed with rolls of pre-prepared lawn. Soft underfoot and comfortable to sit on, the function of the space was transformed from a place of idle photography and drifting tourists to one of lingering, socialising and even playing mini-golf. This simple change of surface and the psychology of the temporary made this great civic space feel and behave like a London square, one that lasted for only a couple of days. At Sloane Square in southwest London, a hard-paved square that for all intents and purposes is a roundabout, was converted into an al fresco dining experience. Black-tie waiters and live music gave the air of sophistication and luxury and the whole scene became a means of activation in its own right. People stopped, took pictures and commented on the

set-up and the atmosphere. This is what William H. Whyte called 'triangulation'. Its presence was fleeting but it was an experience that cannot immediately be repeated. The artificial greening of spaces also has an interesting influence on people's behaviour. At Watch This Space (see p. 94–101), a simple carpet of artificial grass is laid out each summer to 'soften' the small square outside the National Theatre on the Southbank in London. Despite the artificial tactility of the grass, people still gather and congregate as if it were a lawn in a way that they would not if it was a hard-paved plaza.

Again referencing Whyte's triangulation theory, or the notion of incidental encounter, public spaces become platforms for bringing people together in a way that they may not naturally interact. While public spaces accommodate formal, pre-planned events, the spontaneous bottom-up community gatherings hold equal weight and demonstrate the necessity of free, unrestricted access to public open spaces and the fostering of spontaneity. Often through the natural rhythms of city

At Watch This Space at the National Theatre Square on the Southbank of London's River Thames, the simple introduction of artificial grass encourages people to sit in the space, which they wouldn't naturally do when the space is hard paving.



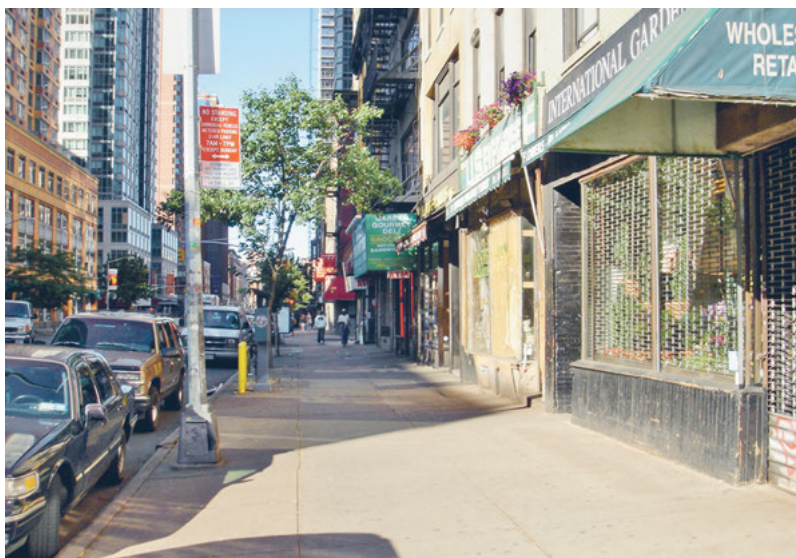


Infrastructure is also a form of spatial activation. When Tower Bridge is in operation to allow ships to pass along the River Thames, people pause for the infrastructural performance, a type of borrowed activation.

life, spaces are activated by commerce or the selling of plants as evidenced in the images below in Manhattan, where a sidewalk is transformed into a temporary garden. The spectacle of infrastructure, as seen in the opening of Tower Bridge, which prompts people to pause and take in the show before going about their busy lives or seeing the next best thing on their tourist itineraries is a form of borrowed activation. There are also those great initiatives that started as an idea and grew into something lasting and meaningful, such as the Book Fair beneath Waterloo Bridge in London, which transformed an otherwise uninspiring underpass into something of a destination that has been in place ever since.

Over the past 15 years a number of methods and devices have emerged that enable a space to have the flexibility to

accommodate a multitude of events across varying scales, yet still have a sense of comfort and animation on a day-to-day basis when there are only a few people in the space. This is the greatest dilemma for contemporary public realm designers—how to create a space large enough and open enough to host markets, ice-skating rinks and concerts, yet not feel empty and windswept when no arranged activity or programmed event is taking place. This conundrum has plagued spaces such as City Hall Plaza in Boston, for which there have been multiple design competitions to give the space a sense of purpose, a human-scale attractiveness and character so that people could use it on a daily basis rather than only serving the city and community during large gatherings, concerts, protests or festivals. As I have postulated previously, the design



The quotidian sale of goods is also a form of spatial activation and transformation as seen on this street in Lower Manhattan where plants on show for sale transform the street.



The recurring event of the Book Fair under Waterloo Bridge in London turns a basic underpass into a cultural destination. Providing simple infrastructure such as the book storage sheds seen in the image below enables cultural gems like this to become established and to flourish over time.





Fountains provide daily activation for the Royal Academy courtyard, which can also be turned off to accommodate annual large-scale art installations.

Chris Wilkinson's *Landscape to Portrait* installation with the fountains turned off.

Acqua alta is the phenomenon that happens in Venice when water surges up through the drains in Piazza San Marco. This inspired the design of the Bordeaux Water Mirror (see p. 29), which has had a powerful influence on the flexible design of public spaces with the use of fountains and a thin film of water.



for flexibility is a new driver in the design of public spaces over the past 20 years. The design profession has made significant strides in devising novel approaches to satisfy the need for flexibility in public spaces and simultaneously establish comfortable spaces that can be used daily.

The interactivity of water has had a profound impact on the design of flexible spaces. I have referenced Somerset House (see p. 240–243) and the courtyard at the Royal Academy in London as examples where pop-jet fountains have been used to bring white noise, animation and playfulness into a space for daily use. The proactive decision to be able to turn off the fountains and convert the space into a plaza as an extended exhibition space has made a meaningful contribution to the design trajectory. However, it is the French Miroir d'Eau (water mirror) movement that has instigated a new paradigm in the use of water in public spaces. The water mirror movement found its genesis in Venice's misfortune: the fact that Venice is sinking at a rate of 2 mm per year.¹ *Aqua alta* or high water is a term that describes the annual flooding event that happens when high tides and strong sirocco winds converge on the Venetian lagoon. Piazza San Marco, Venice's main public square, sits just above sea level and each winter floods as water rises through the drains in the square. The result is dramatic, albeit inconvenient and disconcerting for Venetians. St Mark's Basilica reflects brilliantly on the surface of the water, something I like to refer to as the '4th dimension' that describes the added visual experience of a space and the injection of reflective movement and light. People interact with the water and the piazza in a new way and the edge condition becomes that much more important.

Inspired by this annual transmogrification of Piazza San Marco, the fountain designers at Jean Max Llorca (JML) in Barcelona, in collaboration with the late landscape architect Michel Corajoud, created the first water mirror in Bordeaux. Completed in 2006, Bordeaux's water mirror is the largest in the world. It simultaneously achieves the important combination of spectacle and physical experience, reflecting the dramatic Place de la Bourse, yet encouraging people to interact with the shallow 20 mm surface of water. People capture the reflectivity of the grand adjacent architecture in the water in a photo (spectacle) and recount stories and memories of playing in the fountain (physical experience). Subsequently, Miroir d'Eau projects have been implemented by JML in Nantes, Nice, Marseilles, Paris and Lyon.

In the US, Kathryn Gustafson utilised the water mirror at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, (2007), enabling the film of water to be drained away for large events to take place in the courtyard. At the King's Cross development in London, Townshend Landscape Architects with Fountain Workshop have created four water mirrors at Granary Square (2012) (see p. 86–93), each of which can be drained away individually to respond to various scales of events. Laurie Olin continues this approach at King's Cross at Lewis Cubitt Square (2015) (see p. 86–93). In Copenhagen, SLA created dramatic circular pools at the Crystal building (2010) and Kim Wilkie transformed the central courtyard of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London

(2005), creating his own version of the water mirror concept (see p. 138–143). At Bradford City Park, Gillespies with Fountain Workshop (see p. 102–107), have realised the vision initially put forward by the late architect Will Alsop to flood the main public space in Bradford. The water mirror has moved beyond the idea of the pop-up fountain because of the reflective drama it brings to a space, as well as the various ways in which visitors can interact with the water and the in-built flexibility the water provides.

The proliferation of competitions to design temporary spaces and structures has also been considerable in the past 15 years. Inspired by more established temporary installations such as the Serpentine Pavilion (see p. 160–167) and MoMA PS1 (see p. 150–159), and fuelled by the economic crisis in 2008 and the lack of expenditure in permanent spaces, these festivals of ephemerality are making significant contributions to the activation of public spaces. Annual installation, as a place-making typology, heightens the sense of anticipation and for a short period of time creates a must-see destination. Commissioned annually, the Serpentine Pavilion has established itself as one of London's greatest architectural and design events.



Le Miroir d'Eau at Bordeaux. The fountain provides multiple atmospheres including mist that people are instantly drawn to.

A thin film of water entices people to interact with it, while also creating a compelling composition with the surrounding skyline reflecting on the surface.

This is not only because of the architecture it creates, but also because of the life within the pavilion it generates—that is, the culture of the place through performances, discussions and debates, symposiums and attraction around food and drink. These surges of creative ingenuity that emerge through temporary installations spread around the globe, inspiring a new temporary urbanism that will continue to shape the way our cities perform. It is important to note the influence garden festivals have had on popular culture such as at Grand-Métis and Chaumont, as well as annual gatherings such as Burning Man. Below is a list of a number of ephemeral installations:

- MoMA PS1, Brooklyn, started in 1998, and subsequently at MAXXI, started in 2011, Rome (see p. 150–159);
- Fourth Plinth, started in 1999, London (see p. 198–203);
- Serpentine Pavilion, started in 2000, London (see p. 160–167);
- (Park)ing Day, started in 2005, San Francisco;
- Times Square Valentine Heart Design, started in 2009, New York;

- Warming Huts, started in 2009, Winnipeg;
- Robson Redux, started in 2011, Vancouver (see p. 168–179);
- Du Musée Avenue, started in 2012, Montreal (see p. 244–247);
- Future of Shade, started in 2013;
- Flatiron Triangle, started in 2014, New York;
- MPavilion Australia, started in 2014, Melbourne;
- Dulwich Picture Gallery Pavilion, started in 2017, London;
- Serpentine Pavilion, Beijing in 2018.

Installations and temporary exhibitions have also emerged recently as a method to enliven public space. In 2008 artist Luke Jerram realised *Play Me I'm Yours* in which 30 pianos were installed on streets, in public squares and parks, train stations and markets. Like a creative blank canvas, the pianos were there for any member of the public to play and engage with. The pianos were in place for three weeks, after which time they were donated to local schools and community groups. In London, some of these temporary installations and events



Winnipeg Warming Huts competition by Patkau Architects.

LOT's Flatiron Sky-Line design for the third annual Flatiron Public Plaza Holiday Design Competition.

MPavilion in Melbourne designed by AL_A.

The inaugural Dulwich Picture Gallery Pavilion by IF_DO Architects titled 'After Image'.

Collective-LOK's Heart of Hearts in Times Square.

One of the many PARK(ing) Day installations that now take place globally each year.



have had a lasting legacy on the design of public space, or what ‘social infrastructure’ might be included. In 2010, Ping(!) London placed 100 ping pong tables throughout the city’s main landmarks to encourage people to enjoy the sport. It was a watershed moment and now table-tennis tables feature as permanent elements in many contemporary designed spaces as a way of drawing people into a space and giving them a specific activity to engage in. More recently, Lateral Office designed a public art piece for La Place des Festivals in Montreal called *Impulse* (see p. 192–197). The adult-sized, interactive and lit see-saw has since been installed at Harvard Yard and in London as part of the second Lumiere London lighting festival across the city, signalling perhaps a new typology of itinerant, participatory installations.

Other examples of overlay activities that have become ubiquitous are winter ice-skating rinks, certainly made popular in London by Somerset House (see p. 240–243) in 2000 and arguably most famously at Rockefeller Plaza in New York. Ice rinks are now a staple winter overlay event and a driver for the flexible design of public spaces, exemplified most recently by the novel Maggie Daley Park Ice Ribbon by Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates in Chicago. Bryant Park in New York (see p. 234–239) ushered in the popularity of the outdoor cinema, and entrepreneurs have turned summer pop-up cinemas into a business, travelling from park to public space, pulling people into these spaces when they may otherwise not have revisited a place. The proliferation of travelling food trucks has also become a go-to overlay and a method for generating footfall and establishing a critical mass. Finally, the humble shipping container is being utilised as a device to create a semi-permanent meanwhile use while longer-term, multi-phased developments are financed and built. In London, Pop-Brixton, Elephant and Castle and Croydon’s Box Park are but a few examples of this meanwhile-use typology, which creates a sense of place, underpinned by local businesses that give the place an authenticity that appeals to the current preference for smaller, boutique shops over large chainstores.

In-built infrastructure that facilitates a set programme is also an important consideration for the design of flexible public space. Binnenrotte Square by West 8 in Rotterdam was completed in 1996 and included permanent fixings to anchor market stalls and horizontal cylindrical barriers to prevent parking. These hinged elements can be folded into the ground to allow access for setting up the market, which is an elegant solution to a very utilitarian design challenge. Binnenrotte Square hosts a market twice weekly, drawing up to 70,000 people. However, it also reflects the challenge of designing for set events and how to make the space interesting, attractive and usable on the days that events such as the market are not taking place. In this regard, Binnenrotte Square has recently been redesigned by OKRA landscape architects, who aspire to create a more hospitable and usable space on a day-to-day basis by introducing more tree planting, herbaceous gardens and lawn areas. The green spaces are designed to be flexible, to accommodate events, performances and installations on the days when the market is not operating.



Play Me I’m Yours in Times Square in New York City.

Impulse designed by Lateral Office, was originally installed at La Place des Festivals in Montreal. The installation now travels and is shown here at the historic Harvard Yard.



The Plaza at Harvard University (see p. 74–85) by Stoss also introduced fixed infrastructure to support a known programme. In this case, the space must accommodate a large tent/marquee twice a year during the student initiation and graduation. Anchor points for the tent are designed into the paving design, which determines the maximum size of the tent. Smaller tents can be arranged within the field of anchor points to enable the space to serve a range of events of varying scales. The Plaza, like many of the case studies in this book, has incorporated potable water and power which were included early on in the design of the space. This overcomes the challenge of threading cables through the public spaces during events, or having to rely on generators. However, this is still not a foregone conclusion and many spaces fall victim to lack of planning at the design development stage and the space suffers as a result.

With the popularity of flexible spaces, designers, spatial planners and event specialists must continue to innovate to maintain momentum and evolve the public space offering. A number of exemplary projects have emerged that illuminate the exciting potential for the future of flexible design in public space. Reconfigured space is the shifting of fixed objects to allow flexibility, or the movement of stationary objects—both