Capturing Urban Change: Contrasts, Lapses, and Contradictions in the Urban Landscape

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Abstract

Is it possible to capture and analyze urban change by observing the urban landscape? If so, how does that look? We argue that there are "material clues" that pinpoint the *process* of urban change. The research, conducted in the summer of 2014 across New York City, entailed walking visits to neighborhoods which the researchers had no prior knowledge (South Bronx), limited knowledge (Flushing Meadows) and substantial knowledge (Williamsburg) that urban change was happening. Through photographs and field notes taken during our field trips, along with our interpretation of Don Mitchell's (2008) reading the landscape axioms, we argue that the process of change is perceptible in the urban landscape through

contrasts, *lapses*, and *contradictions*. We contend that our observational techniques can only reveal *part* of the process of urban change, but that this initial methodological approach could help us raise the following questions: what are the forces fostering urban change? For whom is the urban landscape changing? And for whom is urban change (in)visible? We suggest that these questions could be answered by methods that move beyond observation. Here, however, we are concerned with what observation can reveal.

Introduction

> I realized early on that the neighborhood was on the brink of change.
> Store owner in Williamsburg, Brooklyn since the 1990s
> (Zukin, 2009, 19)

One afternoon, while walking by the Ditmas Park neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, one of us stumbled upon a mural to the side of the co-op food store on Cortelyou Avenue that succinctly captured urban change. The mural (Image 1)[1] portrays from left to right the Ditmas Park neighborhood in the late nineteenth century with its characteristic street car, moving on into the twentieth century when a predominantly white middle-class population occupied the neighborhood, only to be partially replaced by a mix of African American, West Indian, and South Asian populations

Image 1: Representation of urban change in the Ditmas Park neighborhood (Brooklyn).

After sharing and contemplating this image of urban change with the co-authors, we began to ask ourselves whether it was possible to capture urban change through other material and symbolic forms in the urban landscape. More specifically, we began to wonder whether students of the city, without necessarily having previous knowledge of the history of a particular place, could identify urban

[1] All images included in the article were taken by the authors during the summer of 2014.

change. This research asks: is it possible to capture and analyze urban change by observing the urban landscape? If so, what does it look like? As we argue through this article, there are "material clues" that point to the process of urban change. We will identify some of these "clues" in order to demonstrate that urban change is evident in the landscape through *contrasts, lapses* and *contradictions*. For instance, the contrast of the old with the new, the lapse between fast and slow movements, and contradictory uses of urban space will be some of the clues that we will be uncovering and analyzing in the pages ahead. Ultimately, this paper intends to motivate teachers and students alike to refine their abilities to critically see the "image of the city" (Lynch, 1960). The data gathered during this initial reading of urban change in the landscape should form the basis for asking further research questions that other methods beyond observation should help answer.

The next section discusses our methodological approach. We then explore "urban change" in the urban political economy scholarship in the third section. Steps for reading the urban landscape through a political economy and social justice approach are discussed in the fourth section. The fifth section details the observable "clues" of urban change with the New York City landscape as our background. In the conclusion we detail what our landscape reading practices help accomplish and suggest three emergent research questions from this initial reading: what are the forces fostering urban change? For whom is the urban landscape changing? And, relatedly, for whom is urban change (in)visible and why?

Methodology

The objective of this research is to identify change in the urban landscape. The project was conducted in three different locations in New York City (South Bronx, Williamsburg, and Flushing Meadows) between June 11 and July 24 of 2014. The project was based on extensive one-day explorations in each location. We called these explorations engaged flâneurism, after the figure of the flâneur – an urban explorer of the modern city that experienced the city as a spectator, strolling through its endless street networks, markets, and parks, while getting lost amidst the crowds (Baudelaire, 1995; Benjamin, 1986; see also D'Souza and McDonough, 2008). Unlike the flâneur, we tried not to be distant observers and our intention was to be active participants of city life. Throughout our visits to the city we were continuously reminded of Kevin Lynch's (1960, v) observation that "the urban landscape, among its many roles, is something to be seen, to be remembered, and to delight on" and Bondi et al.'s (2005, 8) reminder that "it is important also to attend to – and denaturalize – emotional geographies of connection, pleasure, desire, love and attachment." We not only walked through the city, took notes and photographs, consumed food, socialized with other urban dwellers, and experienced city spaces and its amenities, we also attended to our emotions to help us capture urban change. For instance, after the end of the first day of exploration in the South Bronx we began to question our urban experience, as the following field note expresses (11 June, 2014):

> Something unique happened while walking. Every time we entered a new street or changed neighborhoods a different *feeling* took over us. We are unable to articulate precisely what makes a neighborhood change. What exactly shapes our experience of change?

Cognizant not only of our feelings and emotions but also of our own identities, we were able to navigate the city with relative ease. As three "white" Puerto Rican males from middle-class backgrounds we gained access to certain spaces of the city that other gendered, racialized, and classed subjects would experience differently. For example, at the conclusion of our second day of exploration in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (17 July, 2014) we visited the Caribbean Sports Bar on Grand Street. This is a place owned by long-time Brooklyn resident and native Puerto Rican Toñita. Located between a new movie theater, new apartment buildings, and trendy bars in what is a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, Toñita's bar seemed "out of place and time". Originally opened more than four decades ago as a social club, Toñita has resisted the forces of urban change – she has been offered more than $9 million for the location to no avail – by maintaining it as an important social space for the Hispanic community. Upon entering the bar, we were greeted like family with $3.00 *Cuba Libres* and free home-made food (in comparison, the same drink at a nearby "hip" bar was $8.00 with no free food available). We spoke at length with Toñita in Spanish along with the other Hispanic males that were present at the bar. We learned as much about gentrification and urban change in Williamsburg during our time at the Caribbean Sports Bar as the past five hours we spent walking the streets of the neighborhood. Certainly, our Puerto Rican, gendered, and class backgrounds gave us unique access to this world.

At other times, our social position created tensions with city dwellers. As we walked past a community garden in the South Bronx community of Hunts Point and took photos of a hand-written sign that read "Barretto Point Park SS BX [sic], Indigenous People's Council Hunts Point. It's My Park," neighbors looked at us with suspicion. As we passed a middle-aged woman sitting in the corner with her tiny dog she mumbled to us "mind your own business". By all means we looked as clear outsiders, with our fancy phones, our use of academic jargon, and note taking practices.

As males walking the city, we knew that we could easily play the role of the flâneur, a role and experience that has almost always been denied to women in the modern and contemporary urban landscapes. As Wolff (2008, 21) has noted, "the role of flâneuse remained impossible [during nineteenth century Paris] despite the expansion of women's public activities, and despite the newer activities of shopping and cinema-going. For central to the definition of the flâneur are both the aimlessness of the strolling, and the reflectiveness of the gaze." Our unique male identity enabled us to "aimlessly" explore and to "reflectively" gaze the city. The methods of going about capturing urban change will certainly change with our positions within "grids of difference" (Pratt, 1998; for a feminist urban geography

see Bondi and Rose, 2003; Wright, 2010). For the purposes of this research, therefore, we took advantage of our dominant identities to help us capture urban change through engaged flâneurism – the practice of strolling and exploring not only as distant spectators but active participants of city life and all that entails (viewing, analyzing, consuming, communicating, feeling and experiencing). In other words, engaged flâneurism demands an emotional and embodied engagement with the city along with observational and reflective practices; a position that allowed us to better capture the process of urban change in the landscape.

Researched locations were selected on the basis of levels of knowledge we had of urban change. Since the objective of the research is to be able to identify the process of urban change in the landscape without having previous knowledge of it, we tried to compare the different levels of knowledge of urban change against each other. The first location was the South Bronx because none of us had prior knowledge of whether this area was undergoing a process of urban change. We called this first urban experience *speculative flâneurism* because we could only speculate that urban change was actually taking place there. In the first location we tried not to access the internet through our smartphones or other devices so not to cloud our experience of urban change in the area. In the South Bronx, we did not trace a route of where we were going to be walking, rather we decided to walk aimlessly and have the landscape and our experience of it dictate where to go.

The second urban experience in Williamsburg, Brooklyn we termed *informed flâneurism* because we had knowledge that urban change was actually taking place there. We knew that this neighborhood had been highly gentrified both through scholarship on it and our personal experience in the last decade (see Curran, 2004; 2007; Newman and Wyly, 2006; Zukin et al., 2009). We used technology and the internet to mediate our exploration of the city. Before exploring the neighborhood, we traced the route we were going to walk in order to help us identify the process of urban change.

Finally, our exploration of Flushing Meadows in Queens was termed *mediated flâneurism* because we mediated our lack of knowledge of the neighborhood with interactive material such as maps, internet research, and other forms of information that we referenced before and during our exploration. Just like in the South Bronx, we did not have knowledge of urban change in Queens, but unlike the South Bronx we compensated that lack of knowledge with interactive information. We did this in order to emulate, to a certain extent, the urban experience of many people these days that, through their mobile technology, can access the internet at the encounter of an object of interest, an unknown landscape, or to further know the past history of a location. For instance, at Corona Park we hashtag the location (#coronapark) and scrolled through the more than 4,000 photos taken by previous visitors to the area on Instagram. What we saw and *how* we saw the landscape at the park was mediated by an interactive public. This enabled us to partially identify what "people" see and how they see it, and thus our analysis of urban change took into consideration this virtual public.

At the end of each visit, we each transcribed our notes into a shared document that also included our photos and videos. We maintained regular discussions to reflect on what we had seen and what it meant in relation to urban change. The process of note taking was extremely important for us to understand the process of urban change. When writing field notes we (individually) referred to the photos in each spot to help us recreate our experiences and emotions of the city. Smartphones, for instance, automatically georeferenced photos, so it was extremely helpful when looking at a photo and knowing the exact location where it was taken. This gave us an added perspective of the places we explored on foot in relation to their geographic location. Students of the city can further use this technology more creatively as they embark on similar urban explorations. Nevertheless, extensive note taking (no more than three days after each day of exploration) gave us a rich set of qualitative data which along with the photographs and videos represented the bulk of the information used to analyze and capture urban change.

The images reproduced throughout the article also constitute a unique set of data that partly reveals and explains the process of urban change. The images represent our "perceptions" of the landscape – how we viewed and what we saw – based on the complex interrelationship of our positionality, our analytical framework (see section on Urban Change), our unique life experiences, and our "reading" of the landscape (Schlottmann and Miggelbrink, 2009). Our discussions of the theoretical and methodological approaches must also be understood as the parameters of our "visuality" or "scopic regime", that is "to the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed" (Rose, 2007, 2). In that sense, the contrasts, lapses, and contradictions that future urban explorers identify will always be culturally, analytically, and perceptively informed. It is crucial, therefore, that students and urban explorers always document their unique positioning vis-à-vis the landscape since explanations of urban change will vary with shifting perceptive fields. Nevertheless, we suggest that the visual material "momentarily freez[es] spacetime," which allows us to ask "questions on what type of economic development is actually taking place, exploring at the same time *which* constellations of forces are energizing this" (Jones, 2009, 501; emphasis in original). It is to these set of questions that we now turn.

Urban Change

One of the central themes in urban studies is change in the city. In particular, urban geographers, sociologists and anthropologists have tirelessly documented the transformations of cities in the advanced economies of the West from their industrial past into their postindustrial present (Bourgois, 1995; Smith, 1996; Wacquant, 2008). In an effort to capture that change in the urban landscape, social scientists have primarily relied on ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, archival research and quantitative data analysis over long periods of time. This research draws on that tradition but departs from those research projects

in that we are in pursuit of urban change in the immediacy – that is, we only spent one day in each location to help us capture urban change.

For this research we were informed by recent investigations in urban political economy to understand urban change. According to this body of work, the urban landscape under capitalism is designed to facilitate the accumulation and circulation of capital. We saw this while walking through the streets of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. The endless network of roads and rail tracks that represent the infrastructural backbone of the city is meant to facilitate the movement of workers from their places of residence to their work and to the market (Image 3). Similarly, the ATM machines located at street level, a prominent feature in gentrified Williamsburg, are an important site of cash withdrawal that enables customers to more easily spend their living wage in the market and for owners of property and the means of production to recuperate part of the capital they spent on wages (Image 4). Seen through a political economic lens, the urban landscape was designed to facilitate the rapid movement of goods, people, and capital.

Image 2: Roads facilitate the movement of goods and people across the landscape (Queens)

Image 3: Street ATMs facilitate and accelerate the flow of cash in the city (Brooklyn)

Moreover, the process of circulation and accumulation of capital in and through the city engenders a perpetual transformation of the urban landscape. Urban geographer David Harvey identified a contradiction inherent to the capitalist city whereby the need to accumulate capital must destroy past investment in the built environment in order to construct new and more efficient infrastructure that will facilitate the circulation of capital. "Capitalism is," according to Harvey (1989, 89) "perpetually revolutionizing itself and always teetering on that knife-edge of preserving its own values and traditions and necessarily destroying them to open up fresh room for accumulation." In that sense, transformations of the capitalist city are best captured through Martin Jones' (2009) conceptualization of "phase space." Drawing upon, but departing from, relational geographies (Callon and Law, 2004; Dainton, 2001; Thrfit, 2004) Jones developed the concept of "phase space" in order to better analyze the apparent tension between the fluidity and fixity that constitutes spaces. As Jones (2009, 496) suggests, the "thinking space relationally approach…lacks a widely applicable and observable material basis" because space is viewed as always becoming through discursive, sensory and imaginative interventions that make socio-spatial reality possible. We argue, instead, that there is a space-time materiality that is perceptible and observable. "Phase space," does just that. It draws attention to

> processual and practical outcomes of strategic initiatives undertaken by a wide range of forces produced…through a mutually transformative evolution of *inherited spatial structures and emergent spatial strategies* within an actively differentiated,

continually evolving grid of institutions, territories and regulatory activities (Jones, 2009, 498; emphasis in original).

A walk through the city's landscape made this process evident to us every time we encountered a "work in progress" sign with a list of developers, architects, and banks involved in the financing and production of new urban spaces (Image 5). These are all "strategic initiatives" that respond to local, regional, and global economic, political and social forces that through particular institutional, territorial and regulatory assemblages shape the built environment. Because phase space takes into consideration "inherited spatial structures and emergent spatial strategies," we must understand space as containing "not just what happens but what might happen under different circumstances" (Cohen and Stewart, 1994, 200 quoted in Jones, 2009, 499). Thus, from a political economy perspective and phase space approach, the built environment "must be seen as simultaneously dependent and conditioning, outcome and mechanism of the dynamics of investment, production and consumption" (Knox, 1993, 3).

And yet, the built environment "must be treated *as part* of the totality of urban change" (Knox, 1993, 3; emphasis added) for the other part is constituted by the complex and wide range of forces that made the urban built environment possible (institutional, political, economic, cultural, and social forces and strategies). The urban landscape, then, can only reveal *part* of a broader set of socio-spatial processes that historical, archival, and a diverse set of methodological approaches could help explain. At present, we are only interested in the "observable material basis" of urban change in the landscape.

Image 4: Work in Progress sites are a familiar sight of New York City. Signs provide useful information about those actors responsible for producing the city's built environment (Queens).

Before sharing our experiences and observations of urban change in New York, we want to first discuss strategies for reading landscapes. To aid us identify the "material clues" that help reveal the process of urban change in the landscape we relied on the work of Pierce Lewis (1979) and Don Mitchell (2008) and the axioms they developed for reading the landscape, a topic we explore in the next section.

Reading the Landscape

For Pierce Lewis (1979, 12), the cultural landscape is "nearly everything that we can see when we go outdoors." Reading that "outdoor" world, however, requires a set of guidelines, which Lewis termed "axioms," to helped interpret it. Lewis relied on "careful observation and inductive reasoning" as his primary method for reading the landscape (Mitchell, 2008, 29). We used a similar technique, of careful observation and inductive reasoning, as we weaved through the messy and ordinary landscapes of New York City. At a most basic level, Lewis axioms are extremely helpful because they provide guidelines to anyone interested in making sense of the world "outside" their window (for a review, see Mitchell, 2008).

Wandering through the streets of South Bronx, Williamsburg and Flushing Meadows we were continually conscious of the fact that every building, sidewalk, green lawn, broken car, trash can, street sign, and store could be a "material clue", not necessarily to the "culture" of the place (as Lewis would put it), but to the process of urban change. Similarly, we took into consideration the historical, geographic (primarily through georeferenced photos), and physical context of the locations we visited to make sense of urban change. As Lewis, we intently observed the urban landscape and inductively tried to make sense of it. Nevertheless, Lewis' axioms are ill-suited to help us grasp the complexity of the capitalist urban landscape and the restless process of urban change that shapes its visual form.[2] We therefore took notice of Don Mitchell's "new axioms for reading the landscape" to aid us identify the "material clues" of urban change.

Mitchell's axioms pay particular attention to political economy and social justice. He begins by suggesting that "the landscape is produced," just like the "work in progress" signs we saw above (Mitchell, 2008, 34; Image 6). The landscape is not just an expression of "culture," he says, but as the second axiom clearly stresses, it is "functional." "In capitalist societies," the most important function of landscapes "is either to directly realize value (make money), or to establish the conditions under which value can be realized" (Mitchell, 2008, 35). The roads, the subway, the ATM machines, and even the abandoned buildings that

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[2] Mitchell (2008, 31) correctly pointed out that Lewis' landscape reading was heavily influenced by Carl Sauer's morphology tradition which stated that the landscape was an "expression of the local culture that made it," and thus "change in the landscape was attributed to the introduction of a new, 'alien' culture […] or the local adoption of some diffusing trait."

lay vacant such as the old Domino Sugar Factory in Williamsburg have a past, current, or future function to play for the capitalist economy (Image 7). Mitchell (2008, 38) reminds us in the third axiom that "no landscape is local." Thus the Bank of China that served the predominantly Chinese population in Flushing Meadows or the junk yard in South Bronx that collected goods to be shipped to West Africa by the company Kuwait Loading, indicate the ways that the landscapes we saw were all differentially connected to multiple scales of investment, production, and consumption beyond the local context only (Image 8).

Image 5: Landscapes are produced, and often financial institutions such as JP Morgan lie at the heart of that production (South Bronx)

Image 6: Industrial spaces in the Port Morris neighborhood in South Bronx are being repurposed for residential functions

Image 7: The city's landscapes are part of larger networks of trade, investment, production and consumption that shape its visual form (South Bronx)

Fourth, Mitchell argues that "to understand landscape historically requires careful analysis of the dialectic of change and stability, and the *contradictions* to which this dialectic gives rise" (Mitchell, 2008, 42; emphasis added). As we will see below, throughout our explorations we were looking for contrasts, lapses, and contradictions between change and stasis in the landscape. Fifth, "landscape is power." A city trashcan chained to a lamppost near the Bronx County Hall of Justice reminded us that landscapes are expressions of power between competing groups (potential trashcan burglars and city officials), but also that the very landscape can shape "individual and social behavior, practices and processes," thus the chain itself prompted us to keep a closer eye to our possessions to avoid "losing" them (Mitchell, 2008, 43; Image 9). Finally, Mitchell (2008, 45) suggests that "landscape is the spatial form that social justice takes." As he put it, "to take students – to take *ourselves* – on a transect of the urban landscape," could possibly "say something about American culture and its changes, but it says even more about the nature of American justice and how we use space – distance as well as design – to separate ourselves from the poverty that our wealth so efficiently produces" (emphasis in original; Image 10).

Image 8: Landscapes often convey power relations and have the ability to modify our behaviors (South Bronx)

Image 9: Havemeyer Park, a "pop-up" park that emerged out of community struggles before private capital converts the old Domino Sugar Factory, in the background, into luxury condos (Williamsburg)

As we ventured through the streets of the South Bronx, Williamsburg, and Flushing Meadows we wanted to understand how political economic and social justice relations had fostered urban change in the landscape. We thus saw landscapes as products that play particular functions within a capitalist society that has increasingly relied on space as a strategy of accumulation (Lefebvre, 1991). We also took into consideration the multiple scales and historical transformations that might have contributed to the production of those landscapes. Finally, as we walked the streets we were cognizant of the varied power relations that shaped the landscapes and how the landscapes shaped us in particular ways. Taking Don Mitchell's axioms for reading the landscape as a starting point, we added another set of features that might help us "read" urban change in the landscape. Change, we argue, can be discerned in the landscape through contrasts, lapses and contradictions.

Contrasts, Lapses and Contradictions

We maintain that urban change can be discerned in the landscape, without having previous knowledge of it, by paying particular attention to the "material clues" of contrasts, lapses and contradictions. We will explain each "clue" individually and guide the reader through our field notes and observations to help visualize these pointers of urban change in the landscape. We start with contrasts.
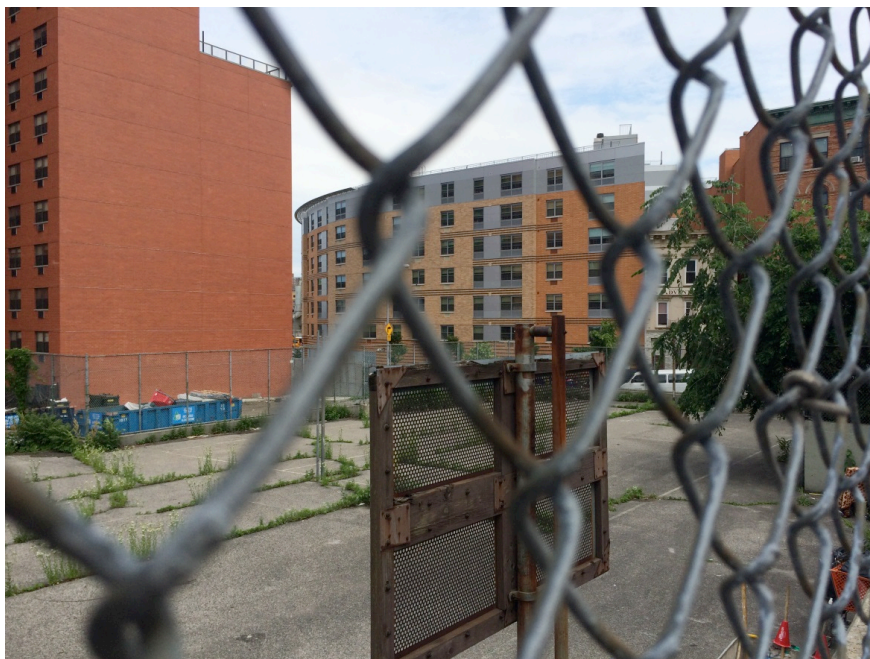
Contrasts

Image 10: Contrasting landscapes can be the first signs of urban change. The new building in the background contrasts with the abandoned basketball court (South Bronx)

When looking at a landscape we often encounter contrasting features next to each other. For instance, the juxtaposition of an old and a new building, of an abandoned and a renovated lot, or the contrasting functions between an industrial warehouse next to a coffee shop can signal the *process* of change in the landscape. To capture contrasts in the landscape, we cite our field notes of our visit to the South Bronx on 11 June, 2014. Not knowing much about the South Bronx, we decided to meet at Yankee Stadium to start our urban exploration. Upon meeting, we walked past the new stadium and onto the location of the old Yankee Stadium, now converted into multiple baseball fields and a track and field that was being used by kids from a nearby school. This is what we saw through the pictures we took.

> From the track and field we were able to capture a panoramic view of the Bronx. The contrast of old and new was evident from this vantage point as you could see the newness and vastness of the baseball stadium in the nearest plane with the decaying apartment complexes in the background. Without looking at a map, we decided to walk away from   the [Harlem] river and onto the area where we had spotted the contrasting landscape.

At this point of our research we knew very little how this project would look, but we knew that we were in search of contrasting features in the landscape as one

possible clue for identifying urban change. Because urban change can take many forms, we had decided to look for signs of gentrification as evidence for urban change (Zukin, 2009). Therefore, in the South Bronx, an area that is still very ethnically and racially mixed, with a large number of working class and low-middle class housing stock, along with numerous high-rise public housing complexes visible from a distance, we suspected that perhaps this area could be the next "frontier" for the consuming classes of Manhattan (Smith, 1996). Therefore, we were on the look-out for coffee shops, bars, restaurants, or any other function that might point to a transition to a service- and entertainment-oriented landscape catered to young and middle-class populations.

However, upon walking in the direction of the decaying buildings identified earlier, all we saw for the next four hours were neighborhoods that looked rather similar with humble dwellings housing Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, West Africans and African Americans. We encountered not a single bar along the way and only spotted corner stores that provided services and goods to the most dominant group in that neighborhood. At the end of the day, after feeling tired, hungry, cranky and somehow defeated, we saw a fixed-gear bike tied to a post that dramatically contrasted with the surrounding landscape of old cars, run-down warehouses, and uneven sidewalks. The fixed-gear bike was a "material clue" that suggested that perhaps there is a "hip" community in the area, that in fact a process of gentrification might be taking place after all. We tried to follow that clue and kept walking back near the river area where "we walked down on Jackson Avenue, parallel to Southern Boulevard, and suddenly found the first signs of gentrification…we saw a gym called The Bronx Box: Crossfit SoBro – the short term to the 'new' gentrified neighborhood of Southern Bronx." (11 June, 2014) As we moved on, "SoBro" kept popping up in every corner along with coffee shops, bars and restaurants. Functions that we could not witness in other parts of the Bronx suddenly became dominant in this area of "SoBro". The contrasting forms and functions of the landscape became the primary clues for us to identify urban change.

Having identified numerous spaces for exercise[3], leisure and entertainment along Williamsburg in Brooklyn, we noticed that in a fully gentrified neighborhood, or "super-gentrified" neighborhood as Loretta Lees (2003) coined such places, the landscape is dominated by elements of the "new," those same elements that were so elusive to us in the South Bronx. If everything is "new," we

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[3] During that summer and throughout our next explorations of the urban landscape we noticed that one key sign of urban change was the amount and type of spaces dedicated for the body and exercising it. Whether it was a Crossfit gym and Pilates or yoga classes being advertised in Williamsburg, the arrival of the middle classes into a neighborhood tends to be accompanied with new functions for the body. This is an observation that an informant of Mariana Valverde's research in a gentrifying Toronto neighborhood also made. As he noted "now we see white people in running outfits going out and running on Saturday mornings. We never go out running" (Valverde, 2012, Chapter 5). Thus, contrasting bodily functions can also constitute a clue of urban change.

asked ourselves, how could students of the city identify change? Suddenly, however, we had a revealing moment during our walk of the neighborhood at the encounter of an auto repair shop. Here are our field notes for that moment (July 17, 2014):

> Walking along this prefabricated landscape produced by private capital, we saw an auto repair shop. We were drawn to it by the tunes of Salsa that came from their radio. The shop represented a disruption from the new buildings that characterized the previous blocks. It was at this moment that we realized that at Williamsburg (a fully gentrified neighborhood) what we must be looking for is not signs of gentrification, but signs of the old. Unlike our journey into South Bronx, where it seemed that gentrification was slowly gaining ground yet the old still dominated the landscape, in Williamsburg the few signs of the old are the "material clues" that signal that this neighborhood has undergone a massive process of urban change.

As we moved past this area we started seeing those signs of the "old" Williamsburg more prominently in the landscape such as "Iglesia Pentecostal" and "Polonia," a social club, which indicated the presence of the Polish and Hispanic communities that once dominated the area. We suggest that contrasting forms and functions constitute one of the most evident signs that landscapes are undergoing a process of urban change. However, we also made notice of other tropes that could pinpoint the process of urban change in the landscape. We now turn to lapses in the landscape.

Image 11: Auto repair shop next to a long row of luxury condos that extend to the East River waterfront (Williamsburg)

Lapses

Lapses also refer to contrasts, not just of *spatial* forms and functions, but of *temporalities*. With lapses what we are looking for is changes in times and rhythms. In other words, lapses indicate the passage of time (Image 13) and the pace with which the city moves. Field notes from 11 June, 2014 point to our observations on these contrasting movements that are at times juxtaposed in the city.

> Crossing the bridge of highway 278 felt like crossing a boundary without guards. From the bridge it was easily perceptible the high flow of trucks, cars, school buses, and other motorists heading in and out of the city. This landscape contrasts drastically with the previous street where people and life seemed in a standstill epitomized by the presence of three "corner boys" standing in front of a market and a fenced park occupied by urban debris.

The neighborhood behind the bridge seemed stuck in time, with decaying common areas and slow-paced bodily movements that contrasted with the fast-paced movements of vehicles and trucks that accelerated the flow of goods, capital, and people in and out of the city.

Image 12: Lapsed landscapes can indicate the temporality of investment and disinvestment (Williamsburg)

Lapsed landscapes suggest that "landscape is just not flow," as the highway clearly indicates, "but also stasis, a repository of a great deal of inertia, a storehouse of values that can only be destroyed at great human and economic cost" (Mitchell, 2008, 41-42). That the neighborhood behind the highway seems "inert" and static speaks not to the "culture" of the people living there, but to the uneven movement of capital across the urban landscape (see Berman, 1982 on how the highway destroyed entire neighborhoods on the Bronx).

Image 13: The form investments in the landscape take, such as the big box chain-store to the left, can discourage the "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs, 1961)

We further noted during our explorations that the material form that capital investments acquire can significantly impact the flow and rhythms of the city (or the lack of these, of course). Upon arriving at our meeting point in Flushing Meadows in the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and Main Street, where the 7th line of the subway ends (and begins) and the bus depot is located, we were met with a sea of people and traffic that at first sight appeared to go in every direction (Image 14). To capture the rapid movement that characterized this intersection we followed Rebecca Solnit's (2000, 140) advice that "you have to stand still to witness the movement of populations, economics, cities," thus we stayed at the corner of the sidewalk to contemplate the lapses of the landscape. We stood at the center of Queen's Chinatown, evident by the numerous small shops on the south sidewalk (to our right side) selling live seafood, candy, and a great variety of fruits not generally available in big-chain grocery stores. The north sidewalk (to our left) was almost

entirely occupied by a big-enclosed-box structure that housed the pharmacy Duane Reade. The nature of capital investment and the architectural form each acquired impacted the particular rhythms of that intersection. As we observed on 24 July, 2014

> The flow and volume of sidewalk traffic could not be more contrasting. The sidewalk to the left seems empty, boring, and even dead. It is as if people avoid it as much as possible. On the other hand, the right sidewalk is packed with people from all directions, enticed by the produce and goods on display right on the sidewalk. The big-box store seems like an urban aberration, whereas the small-store sidewalk invites you to enjoy the city.

We want students of the city to move beyond aesthetic considerations of architectural forms and consider instead its rhythmic effects on city movements and the temporal lapses of capital investment and disinvestment that these infrastructures represent. Contrasting rhythms and temporalities can be important clues into shifting patterns of capital accumulation that foster urban change and decline.

Contradictions

The landscape is full of contradictions and these can be important clues for identifying the process of urban change. Urban change can be seen, for instance, through the contradictory uses of space, contradictory histories, and contradictory struggles of social justice that shape urban landscapes. One of the most contradictory urban landscapes we encountered was Corona Park in Flushing Meadows, Queens. This area of Queens is home to the New York Mets Stadium Citifield, the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, and the remnants of two World's Fairs in 1939/1940 and 1964/1965. In fact, Corona Park, a dumping site at the time, was created in the 1930s by then New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses to host the World's Fair. The second World's Fair, organized by Moses as well, was heavily influenced by the U.S.A's industrial and technological prowess characteristic of the postwar period. The Fair was an ideal place to showcase American corporations' innovations and competitiveness.

Image 14: Playing under the geopolitical symbol that once was the Unisphere (Queens)

At the center of the U.S. pavilion during the Fair was the Unisphere, a big stainless steel representation of the Earth designed to convey the message of "Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe" (Cotter and Young, 2004, 23). Upon entering the park one is astonished by the modernist architecture which privileges the straight line. Standing right in front of the Pool of Industry and looking straight through two empty, rectangular fountains along Dwight Eisenhower Promenade to the left and Herbert Hoover Promenade to the right, we could see the Unisphere in the nearest plane and the Queen's Museum in the background. The Unisphere itself is located in the middle of a circular fountain which remained off that day. The empty fountains, however, were the basis for the contradictory uses of this space. As we noted on 24 July, 2014

> The most impressive thing about this site is the lack of rules around it. Because the pools are empty it is possible to walk in them. This allowed us to walk right beneath the globe, where we were able to see the world from pole to pole. Youngsters were playing around the world. Two kids played soccer, one standing in the "west" and the other in the "east" as they kicked the ball literally around the world.

> Another kid skateboarded around the "pool," while younger kids jumped from one water engine to the other. This site was a "beauty" because it showed us how a space could be appropriated and used for purposes not originally intended. What used to be a major display of the US industrial and technological dominance, was now being used for "play."

Our experience of Corona-Flushing Meadows and the Unisphere, where we witnessed the contradictory uses of space, revealed to us how the functions of space *change* over time. A key geopolitical site in the 1960s, the Unisphere and Corona Park more generally has become a major public park for the diverse communities that now reside nearby. Moreover, this also revealed that urban change is as much about the prerogatives of capitalist accumulation as it is about the manifold piece-meal appropriations users make of the landscape.

Finally, the last example we want to present depicts the contradictions that we encountered at the old site of the Domino Sugar Factory in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The Domino Sugar Factory is located along the East River and near the Williamsburg Bridge. It is an impressive structure, reminiscent of New York's industrial past evident by the sheer size of it and the smokestacks that are still visible from a distance. The factory witnessed a bitter 20-month labor strike that culminated in 2000 when the 284 factory workers finally reached a deal with management. Four years later, however, the refinery closed operations after 148 years in business (Greenhouse, 2001). After a $1.4 billion development plan for the factory with the Community Preservation Corporation fell through in 2012, when the latter defaulted on its loans, the Two Trees Management Company bought the site with the intention of converting it into a "Xanadu of parks, tech offices, shops, and – controversially – sleek apartment towers rising as high as 600 feet" (Sherman, 2014). At the time of research, the site was fenced off with an 8-feet high wooden wall that stretched along the entire factory. When compared with the luxurious buildings, apartments, cafes, and restaurants that keep popping up in nearby streets, the Domino Sugar Factory epitomizes the three tropes of urban change (contrasts, lapses and contradictions). It is the contradictory struggles of social justice that the site brings about that we wish to discuss.

As we observed during our exploration of the site on 17 July, 2014, diverse communities are laying claims of representation on the site in contradiction with the purported changes that will inevitably strike the landscape.

> The wall that separates the construction site from the street has in fact been taken over by   artists and community organizations that temporarily express their particular views and aesthetic preferences–a Puerto Rican community organization was in-site painting the left side of the wall with symbols of the Puerto Rican community. These temporary expressions contribute to the inevitable change that will perhaps displace this community in the

> future. Behind the wall we found rubble and a destroyed infrastructure that was in the midst of change. The ugliness of destruction is disguised with the beauty of creativity–local communities become agents of their own displacement.

The wooden wall has become a temporary site of collective representation. Moreover, across the street, and in the former parking lot of the factory, a "pop-up" park suddenly emerged out of the community's struggle for a common space (Image 10). These expressions of social justice in the landscape, however, will soon be erased with the inevitable development of the site to cater the high-end consumer market that now predominates in Williamsburg. Forgotten in that future and transformed landscape will be the striking workers of the 2000s, the temporary artistic expressions of the Puerto Rican community, the pop-up park, and the lives of the thousands of workers that once sold their labor to refine sugar.

Image 15: Behind the wooden wall, the rubles of the industrial past still stand. Soon all this will be erased (Williamsburg)

Conclusion

Is it possible, we asked in this paper, to capture and analyze urban change by observing the urban landscape? We concluded that it is possible to capture urban change by particularly paying attention to contrasts, lapses and contradictions in the landscape. By employing the techniques of engaged flâneurism, which entailed extensive one-day visits to the South Bronx, Williamsburg (Brooklyn) and Flushing Meadows (Queens) along with intensive

field notes and visual materials of the landscapes explored, we were able to capture *part* of the process of urban change. For this "observable material basis" does not provide us with clear answers about the complex social forces that make landscapes possible. As Mitchell (2008, 32) puts it, understanding a landscape "requires careful observation" but it also "requires a lot more." Our objective in this article, however, is to emphasize that "careful observation" of the urban landscape represents an important initial set of data that must necessarily prompt a series of questions that will "require a lot more" than observation to answer them.

Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to encourage instructors and future students of the city to implement similar techniques in the classroom or on their own as a means to raise further research questions. These latter research questions should wrestle with "conventional academic means" (Lewis, 1979, 19), ranging from qualitative, quantitative, and/or mapping approaches that might help them explain the *rest* of the process of urban change over longer periods of time. We maintain that every student enrolled in a critical urban studies course should be able to critically observe the transformations cities are undergoing and to question those changes. For observing, identifying, and capturing urban change precedes the study and analysis of the "relationships between economic behavior, the politics of representation and identity, state power geometries, and the sedimentation of these practices in spacetime" (Jones, 2009, 501). Capturing urban change in the landscape, in short, is the first step toward imagining "what a more just landscape might *be*" (Mitchell, 2008, 33; emphasis in original).

Finally, in an urban studies classroom with students who might not have prior knowledge of urban transformations in the last three or four decades, however, the teaching of the practice of "careful observation" can be a valuable lesson to begin to understand the complex networks of investment, production, and consumption that shape the "image of the city" (Lynch, 1960). After observing contrasts, lapses and contradictions in the landscape, instructors and students of the city should further their critical analysis of urban areas by asking: what are the forces fostering urban change? For whom is the urban landscape changing? And, relatedly, for whom is urban change (in)visible and why? Answering these questions requires consideration of the "strategic initiatives" that together produce contrasts, lapses, and contradictions in the landscape.

Acknowledgements

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