CITIZEN SPACES
Experiments in Reclaiming the Right to the City
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Abstract

The physical and economic growth of large cities under late capitalism has been driven by the profit motives of the elite class of financiers, developers, and global scale wealth. This urbanization under capitalism can often eclipse broad and systemic efforts to consider the quality of life of all citizens. The rapid physical transformation of cities for profit can lead to increased lack of affordability, displacement of marginalized people, eradication of historically vibrant cultural zones and privatization of public space. The increased consumerism caused by capital-driven urban development can result in pacification of potentially revolutionary communities, cultivating an individualistic rather than collective culture. Citizen participation in action that transforms public space for community benefit can help re-establish these lost social bonds and promote collective empowerment.

The “right to the city,” is a concept introduced by French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre in 1968, in response to the condition of urbanization under capitalism and its compromising effect on citizens’ rights. Drawing on Lefebvre, contemporary anthropologist David Harvey defines the right to the city as “a common rather than an individual right... [that] inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization” (23). My thesis research aligns with Harvey’s definition of the right to the city and provides examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism that contribute to collective empowerment through the creation or transformation of urban public space.

In addition to the condition of urbanization under capitalism, my thesis responds to contemporary academic research in political science. Participedia is an international academic collaboration researching public participation. This project fosters connections and community between activists, practitioners and scholars around the world and has developed an open source crowdsourcing platform allowing contributors to publish information about cases, methods and organizations in this field of study. I propose to 1) raise awareness in the Participedia community about grassroots participation and art and design activism through documentation on the platform, and 2) experiment with the production of visual media expanding the ways in which projects are represented on Participedia, encouraging citizens to get involved in public participation initiatives and potentially benefiting community groups.

My thesis addresses this research question: How do initiatives of grassroots participation and art and design activism help citizens reclaim their right to the city and promote localized collective empowerment? To explore this inquiry at the community level, I launched experimental projects in four cities. I undertook exploratory research to get a broad sense of currently active grassroots participation and art and design activism initiatives before reaching out to selected community groups to collaborate.
with on experimental projects, outlined in detailed case studies. Through this work, I explored the reclamation of privatized space for public use in Madrid, Spain; increased neighbourhood safety in Kingston, Jamaica; protection of urban green space in Montreal, and the trend of temporary interventions, or “placemaking,” in Vancouver. As a final experiment, I initiated a public space activation called the Vancouver Bubble, exercising my own right to the city, transforming an underused site into a “citizen space” by creating opportunities for participation, dialogue and youth engagement within a temporary intervention of design activism.

An outcome of my practice-based research includes the ongoing development of a methodology for collaborative media-based storytelling, through which I engaged with community groups to craft and share stories from their individual unique perspectives. I used 360° film technology to document and reflect on the site-specific nature of the initiatives explored. Production of visual media may also benefit community groups by encouraging more everyday citizens to get involved via channels such as Participedia.xyz.

Finally, I propose four axes of participation to address the commonalities and distinctions between the sites of grassroots participation and art and design activism I explored in my thesis: 1) threatened versus safe tenancy, referring to site-specificity, 2) top-down versus grassroots initiatives, referring to the perspective of the organizers, 3) intervention versus site transformation, referring to action and duration, and 4) oppressed versus empowered communities, referring to outcomes and impact. The axes help to outline the characteristics of these site-specific urban contexts and provide a framework for understanding initiatives affecting the use of urban public space in ways that can contribute to the empowerment of citizens by promoting the right to the city. I also illustrate how understanding the way these aspects operate within their varied contexts lays the groundwork for future work in creating citizen spaces that reclaim the right to the city.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis responds to the condition of urbanization under capitalism and highlights issues that can arise when growth of cities is driven by the accumulation of profit for an elite class rather than with consideration of quality of life of all citizens. I outline relevant theory and examples responding to this condition within three themes: 1) public space and the right to the city, 2) grassroots participation, and 3) art and design activism that supports the creation of “citizen spaces.” I define citizen spaces as intentional, sometimes temporary transformations of public spaces into sites of participation benefiting communities. Citizen spaces can be created through grassroots participation as well as art and design activism, empowering participants by allowing them to exercise their right to the city.

This research also responds to a design opportunity within the Participedia project, an academic research community collaborating to better understand and document global examples of public participation in governance. The project includes an online platform (Participedia.xyz) allowing anyone to document and edit cases, methods and organizations in this field of study. As an activist having participated in protest movements such as Occupy Vancouver, I am motivated to increase the number of cases documenting citizen-initiated (as opposed to formal or government-initiated) participatory action. As a designer, I also see the potential of arts-based creative actions and visual media to foster increased participation by members of the wider public. My work engages with grassroots community groups to produce visual media which may encourage more everyday citizens to get involved in public participation initiatives via channels such as Participedia.xyz.

The methodology and practice section includes detailed case studies outlining a series of experimental projects I undertook in four cities. This practiced-based research informed the ongoing development of a methodology for collaborative media-based storytelling. In each case study, I examine the site-specific context of the city then describe the project, including my process of research, engagement and documentation. I outline the results, followed by specific observations of each experiment. Through this process I document real world examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism through hands-on fieldwork in Madrid, Kingston (Jamaica), Montreal and Vancouver. This research culminated in a self-initiated urban-scale project in downtown Vancouver, which I discuss in relation to the projects I studied in the first phase.

In the analysis section, I propose a series of comparative axes through which case examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism can be examined: 1) threatened versus safe tenancy, referring to site-specificity, 2) top-down versus grassroots initiatives, referring to the perspective of the organizers, 3) intervention versus transformation, refer-
ring to action and duration, and 4) oppressed versus empowered communities, referring to outcomes. By looking at the affordances and challenges of various aspects of participation in varied contexts, the analysis lays the groundwork for future experiments in creating citizen spaces and reclaiming the right to the city. Finally, the conclusion will summarize my research findings, outline future considerations for my own design practice and challenge grassroots organizers, other art and design activists and even ordinary citizens to explore this space by launching their own experiments in reclaiming the right to the city.

2.0 CONTEXT AND THEORY

In the context section, I define and situate this thesis within the condition of urbanization under capitalism. I also explain how my work contributes to the Participedia project. In the theory section, I address three themes within this context: 1) public space and the right to the city, 2) grassroots participation and 3) art and design activism to create citizen spaces. I provide definitions of key terms and articulate how cited examples respond to the condition of urbanization under capitalism and can empower communities by helping citizens reclaim their right to the city and create citizen spaces.

2.1 Context

2.1.1 Urbanization Under Capitalism

*I define urbanization under capitalism as the condition that exists when the physical and economic growth of cities is driven by the accumulation of profit for an elite class, rather than consideration for the quality of life of all citizens.*

According to French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, urbanization under capitalism, or the “urban problematic,” results when large amounts of capital surplus are invested in urban infrastructure as part of a master plan designed to create more opportunities for commerce (70). While this condition has many implications, I focus on the specific issues of individual pacification and lack of community empowerment. I also explore the potential of community-engaged action leading to the transformation of public space in response to these issues.

The economic motivation to promote consumerism through urbanization creates more opportunity to absorb capital surplus and continue the cycle of growth. In David Harvey’s 2008 article *The Right to the City*, he explains that cities throughout history have been transformed through the state-driven process of urbanization to meet a capitalist agenda.
For example, he discusses the implications of a redesign of Paris in the 1850s by infamous urban planner Georges-Eugene Haussmann, who, to solve the unemployment problem, convinced creditors to fund a massive infrastructural development of the city (25). As Paris grew, a new way of life emerged that centered around consumerism, luxury and leisure for the elite, while the working class were pushed out of the newly unaffordable urban core (26). Unfortunately, global society didn’t learn from this mistake, and Harvey notes the nearly identical story of urban planner Robert Moses who essentially duplicated Haussmann’s plan in New York City in the 1940s with aggressive modernist designs that favored the automobile and took no notice of historic, affordable, and typically vibrant neighbourhoods and public spaces being demolished (27-28).

Because urbanization has caused many cities to become too expensive for traditional residents to live in, a suburban counter-culture emerged (also largely debt-financed), along with the belief that each individual is entitled to a certain quality of life, bolstered by consumer products (Harvey 26). Parallel to rapid urban development, a perceived need for capital-acquired comforts has emerged. Harvey attributes this “pacification” to a consumerism that provides the necessary distraction for economic—rather than human-centered—urban development (Harvey 31). Additionally, these processes “changed the focus of community action towards the defense of property values and individualized identities,” and, to the benefit of capitalists who continue to propagate these trends, “debt-encumbered homeowners… [are] less likely to go on strike” (27).

Pacification has cultivated a more individualistic society that is much less likely to rise up in protest of the capitalist system. Even in Paris in 1868, it took a severe economic crash, followed by a war to trigger the uprising of the Paris Commune, “one of the greatest revolutionary episodes in capitalist urban history” (Harvey 26). Communities which are less pacified, such as those which cannot financially afford the distractions of consumerism, may be more motivated to resist the type of urbanization negatively affecting them. Urbanization driven by economics rather than human beings tends to compound affordability issues and privilege the use of public space toward citizens of affluent social classes.

Citizens can be empowered to participate in new articulations of communities and create transformations of the urban environment that are not tied to capitalism. This thesis includes examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism that raise awareness about and offer alternatives to capitalist-driven and state-supported pacification and the resulting culture of individualism, often through collaborative re-imagining of urban public space. These examples will illustrate not only a transformation of public space for community use, but also a shift in the expectations we can have for ourselves and one another in the communities where we live.
2.1.2 Participedia: Documenting Public Participation

I define public participation as any form of citizen engagement in governance.

In addition to the condition of urbanization under capitalism, this thesis responds to contemporary academic research in political science. Participedia, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, is an international academic collaboration researching public participation. This project fosters connections and community between activists, practitioners and scholars around the world and has developed an open source crowd-sourcing application allowing contributors to publish information about cases, methods and organizations in this field of study.

As a team member of Participedia since 2011, now collaborating on the redesign of Participedia.xyz to better meet the needs of the global community of political scientists and practitioners, I have a unique perspective on the process of documenting public participation around the world. For example, the web application and data model were originally designed to meet the rigorous academic needs of political scientists, with a focus on quantitative data and in-depth written documentation. Feedback from team members practicing in the global south informed the design team the data model seemed weighted to a North American and European context, an issue that has been addressed through a detailed overhaul of the data model. Additionally, there exists a focus on formal or government-organized participatory processes, such as Participatory Budgeting and Citizens Assemblies, while fewer examples of grassroots movements or art-based engagement are documented on Participedia. Finally, due to the academic nature of the project and its primary users (political scientists) less emphasis has been placed on collecting visual media as compared to the written narrative and meta-data of typical Participedia articles.

Through this thesis, I propose to a) raise awareness in the Participedia community about grassroots participation and art and design activism through documentation on the platform, and b) experiment with the production of visual media to expand the ways in which projects are represented on Participedia, encourage citizens to get involved in public participation initiatives and potentially benefit community groups.

2.2 Themes

2.2.1 Public Space and The Right to the City

I define public space as any site where citizens can convene and take ownership of its activation.
I define the right to the city as the collective power or empowerment of communities to manifest positive change within the built, infrastructural, and social environments around them.

Le droit à la ville, or The Right to the city, is an influential book by Henri Lefebvre. Beginning his prolific career in the 1930s, Lefebvre wrote extensively on themes of “time, space, the city and everyday life” (Kofman and Lebas 3-5). His first major urban writing was The Right to the city, and its title has since become a well-known phrase in urban discourse, passing into common usage (Kofman and Lebas 6). Drawing on the work of Lefebvre, as discussed above, David Harvey defines the right to the city in his 2008 seminal text The Right to the City:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization. (23)

This thesis aligns with Harvey’s definition of the right to the city particularly because of its reference to the power of the collective (communities) to overcome the challenges of the urban context, including individual pacification and lack of community empowerment. It reinforces the opportunity for individuals to come together and take action to change the city by transforming public space for community use. Through participation, all individuals have the potential to change themselves by becoming a part of a community; building new connections, learning about new ideas from one another and potentially influencing downstream positive change. From this perspective, collective power (empowerment) can be described as the harnessed potential of communities to make change through participatory action reshaping the urban environment and thereby interrupting and shifting the process of urbanization.

The right to the city depends on the ability of citizens to gather in public urban spaces. Privatization and surveillance threaten the production and preservation of those spaces necessary for collective empowerment. Harvey observes the impact of urbanization under capitalism on the physical form and spaces of our cities, “which increasingly consist of fortified fragments, gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance” (32). Currently, privatization of public property is a common phenomenon in cities with skyrocketing land values, while surveillance is ubiquitous and largely uncontested by the majority of urban dwellers. This leads to the use of “public” space being privileged toward private, state or corporate interests.

The following sections include examples of public participation that can be interpreted as manifesting collective power, promoting or taking back
the right to the city by transforming public space. I argue that grassroots participation and art and design activism can counteract the culture of individualism and pacification that is prevalent in the contemporary urban context through this transformative process.

2.2.2 Grassroots Participation

*I define grassroots participation as community engaged action not initiated by the government or any formal institution, but self-initiated by citizens.*

As seen in the following examples of grassroots participation, communities most affected by issues arising from urbanization under capitalism (such as the destruction of neighbourhood character or eradication of local cultural practices to make way for industry and commerce), can be strongly motivated to collaborate in order to change these circumstances. Counter to the “top-down” approach of governments and planners who initiate processes of urbanization for economic gain, grassroots participation comes from the “bottom-up,” and is initiated by citizens in order to make change. Community groups motivated by a common goal often initiate positive change, transforming the city and creating new social networks in the process.

A historic North American example of grassroots participation in direct response to capital driven urbanization can be seen in the work of journalist and activist Jane Jacobs, author of the influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961. In it, Jacobs provides a detailed critique of what she calls ‘orthodox’ or traditional city planning. For example, according to Jacobs the traditional decentralized planning approach of “Garden Cities” was flawed because it would limit the growth of cities and instead promote the landscaped, suburban style of towns, popularizing the notion that, “The street is a bad environment for humans; houses should be turned away from it and faced inwards, toward sheltered greens” (20). She likewise defies Le Corbusier’s proposed modernist towers and freeway systems designed to “keep pedestrians off the streets and in the parks” (23). Jacobs instead argues that thriving cities with dense populations of real communities, including busy and bustling streets provide safe and symbiotic community spaces (33). When populations are encouraged to isolate themselves, like in the planning strategies that Jacobs describes, streets become more dangerous and a true sense of community is lost.

Jacobs later became known for rallying her community to protest the aggressive redevelopment of their historic New York City neighbourhood by city planner Robert Moses (Harvey 28). Jacobs could see what Moses could not: the inherent value of a vibrant community streetscape. Moses had plans for expressways and large, Bauhaus-inspired housing complexes.
From the perspective of architectural drawings and financial models, his plan made theoretical economic sense. But Jacobs’ view was from the street level; she knew her neighbours, she walked the avenues and squares threatened by this planned redevelopment, and she knew how important these public spaces were to her community. This is what gave Jacobs’ movement power. Harnessing the shared interest of her community in preserving these public spaces, she was able to defeat Moses’ plans through collectively organized public protests, petitions and other participatory community actions (Citizen Jane: Battle for the City).

The negative impact of urbanization can also be seen in the global south as traditionally hyper-local communities are infiltrated by industry and commerce. Like Jacobs, anthropologist Lisa Peattie highlights the importance of meeting members of a community where they are at and building trust in order to advocate for their needs. She authored *The View from the Barrio* in 1968, detailing her fieldwork experience living in a small Venezuelan community while mediating an urban planning process. The developers responsible for a proposed steel mill saw the accompanying dam, housing and social services as “improvements” that would be embraced as a benefit to the local community, without considering their impact (Peattie 10-11). At first, Peattie was thought by the locals to be part of this development enterprise, but by living among them with her family and having personal conversations with the residents, she slowly gained their trust (12). Peattie described the potential impact an influx of commercial elites could have on this community’s culture. She recognized the inevitable environmental impact of this new “developed sector,” bound to increase consumerism by exposing the “traditional sector” to a new desire for imported luxury products, and potentially destroying the existing economy of locally produced goods and agriculture (Peattie 131-133). She encouraged planners to consider their impact from the perspective of the community and became a vehicle for this process during her time in Venezuela. Peattie
describes her work as, “an attempt to look at large scale social processes from the bottom, working out from a single small case… [or] ethnography of urbanization and economic development” (2).

Contemporary examples of site-specific grassroots participation can be seen in European cities like Madrid, Spain, where it is common for community groups to appropriate privatized or underused urban spaces for public use. “Campo de Cebada” is a citizen-run space in the La Latina neighbourhood, collectively repurposed following the economic crisis of 2008. That year, municipal plans to have a local public swimming pool rebuilt by private developers fell through, and a 5,500 square meter vacant lot was left in its place. In 2009, a temporary art installation took place on the site, inspiring community residents to collaborate with local artists and activists to transform the space permanently for their use. Part of this process included negotiation with the city to legally gain access to the site, and through extensive community meetings they were able to achieve this goal. Campo de Cebada is an active community space today, hosting events, art installations, sports games, a community garden and more, governed by an open general assembly of participants (Bravo). When organized action is initiated by a community group united by a common goal, the right to the city can be achieved through the transformation of public space for community use.

In British Columbia, indigenous-led initiatives of grassroots participation are often related to land rights. The growth of major cities in this province is fuelled by natural resources, such as hydroelectricity, natural gas and oil, harvested from or needing to be transported through traditional First Nations land. Today, BC Hydro’s Site C Dam project threatens both the Treaty No. 8 rights of the West Moberly First Nations as well as the environment (Bakker). The project will require the Peace River in Fort St. John BC to be flooded, destroying the natural habitat of many animals, while at the same time forcing nearby farmers to evacuate (About Site C). First Nations leaders have initiated grassroots participatory actions to raise awareness and build community resistance to the Site C project (Site C). A network of organizations and grassroots initiatives emerged with mandates to support indigenous-led action, including Fight C and Paddle for the Peace. Fight C organizes protests throughout the lower mainland, and...
supports the annual Paddle for the Peace, which brings activists on boats to the Peace River for a peaceful protest on the water at the Site C project site. While efforts to stop Site C have been able to stall it by initiating re-evaluations and consultation processes, the project has been approved to continue construction. When a project like Site C is supported strongly by the state and corporate interests, not even the illegal infringement of rights is enough to stop it, although grassroots efforts continue today.

2.2.3 Art and Design Activism to Create Citizen Spaces

I define art and design activism as cultural production that relates to unstable conditions, contested spaces or the motivation for positive social change.

I define citizen spaces as intentional, sometimes temporary transformation of public spaces into sites of participation, dialogue or exchange that can be created through grassroots participation art and design activism.

My thesis research lies at the intersection of the three distinct histories of art, design and media activism. The last century was one of shifting perspectives in society which translated into tenets of activism within each of these practices. Ecological perspectives were broadened as awareness increased about the Earth's finite resources. Social movements and uprisings raised social awareness and opposition to societal conditions such as racism and sexism, along with class and military conflicts associated with global capitalism. The fields of design, media and art have all generated a variety of projects in critical response to these societal issues, and my research focuses primarily on participatory and site-specific examples from art history and contemporary art. It is also worth noting that tactics and approaches from these three distinct fields are often effectively interwoven by practitioners to create multidisciplinary and collaborative activist works.

The practice of design activism includes the development of prototypical ideas, spaces, objects and publications of protest as well as progressive design solutions that offer alternatives to the status quo. American architect Buckminster Fuller was an early advocate of environmental sustainability. His focus on resource efficiency translated into a variety of projects, including his prototypical 1927 Dymaxion House, derived from the principles of 'dynamic' and 'maximum' that shaped his work (Faud-Luke 41). The Dymaxion House took on several forms, produced as a resource efficient kit suitable for any site (Sieden 132). Influenced by Buckminster Fuller, Ant Farm was a collective of design activists from mixed professional backgrounds established in 1968 in San Francisco. This group launched projects bridging architecture, design, art and media using a number of formats ranging from videos to installations with the intention to critique the North American culture of mass media and consumerism.
While Ant Farm was formed by architects, their work took place not only outside of the institutional setting, but also outside of the norms of traditional architectural practice. For example, Ant Farm’s Inflatables series created spaces of engagement using non-traditional architectural design strategies, experimenting with “Do It Yourself,” participatory spaces made of simple materials like plastic and tape. These spaces and corresponding user manual called the Inflato cookbook allowed participants to take control of their own environments (Ant Farm).

Fig. 3 Dymaxion House as installed in Henry Ford Museum. *Dymaxion House*. Buckminster Fuller. 1927. (Public domain image, no copyright)

Fig. 4 Spread from DIY inflatable zine. *Inflato cookbook*. Ant Farm. 1971. Print.
The documentary filmmaking approach of media activism is used to critique or raise awareness about important societal issues of concern. The Critical Art Ensemble describes themselves as a multidisciplinary group of practitioners from various media-based backgrounds that focuses “on the exploration of the intersections between art, critical theory, technology, and political activism” (Critical Art Ensemble). Among their various media works that exist in combination with published writings, the Marching Plague project calls attention to the pointlessness of germ warfare by recreating an attempt of the British Army to spread Bubonic Plague by boat which wasted millions of pounds on inconclusive tests attempting to inoculate a raft of guinea pigs. The artist group filmed the experiment, preceding the documentary of the work with a history of failed attempts at germ warfare. The timely release of the film in 2006 responded to the fear mongering of the Bush administration in the United States following a series of Anthrax attacks, which increased the germ warfare budget from millions to billions, feeding the capitalist war machine (Critical Art Ensemble).

360 film and VR technology are now being employed in the activist space, using the realism of the immersive space to provoke empathy in viewers about serious subject matter. For example, Australian artist and filmmaker Lynette Wallworth produced a short VR film called Collisions to allow viewers to experience the Outback nuclear testing of the 1950s and 60s alongside an indigenous elder who experienced its negative impacts such as displacement and exposure to radiation first hand. Using storytelling and experimental VR graphics, viewers become part of this true story themselves, potentially experiencing more of an emotional connection to it than traditional film would allow. Wallworth stated, “People remember this film as something that has happened directly to them, rather than something that they saw.... The power of this experience resting in your unconscious is pervasive” (Watts).

Fig. 5 Photo of Nyari Morgan, indigenous elder featured in the 360 film. Collisions. Writ. / Dir. Lynette Wallworth. 2016. Photo Credit: Piers Mussared. (Press image, no copyright)
Citizen spaces represent a current trend in contemporary art, finding a balance between prescribed and open-ended engagement with works of art and promoting new social experiences and opportunities for dialogue for participants. Claire Bishop, in her introduction to the book Participation, states that one of the most frequently cited motivations for participation in art since the 1960s is, “the desire to create an active subject, empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation” (12). Bishop describes these types of works as having an, “emphasis on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience” (10). In the context of an uncertain future where either capitalist power or another, more hopeful system may prevail, Grant Kester’s book The One and The Many discusses a new paradigm in contemporary art: a collaborative, generative and discursive tendency called “dialogical practice” (Kester 114-115).

Referring to the current global political climate, he states, “It is this sense of possibility, and imminent threat, that animates the remarkable profusion of contemporary art practice concerned with collective action and civic engagement” (Kester 7). Dialogical practice is also mindfully un-intentional, as the artist creates opportunities for “the collaborative Other,” being either co-producers or eventual participants, to contribute to shaping the outcomes of the work (Kester 115).

A review of participatory art in the last few decades reveals that initiatives of art and design activism can have the effect of contributing to collective empowerment by engaging communities in processes of transforming urban public space for their own benefit, fostering dialog and developing new social constellations. The following examples outline strategies for creative and collaborative engagement and the creation of citizen spaces that can lead to collective empowerment of participants.

Interactions among participants play an important role in the meaning, purpose and impact that an art and design activism project can have. This designing for human relations is illustrated by the work of German performance artist and political activist Joseph Beuys. His 1972 project Büro der Organisation für Direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum) placed emphasis on the provocation of participant interactions within an office space installation during the 100-day Documenta 5 exhibition in Kassel, Germany (Beuys and Schwarze 120). A duplicate of Beuys’ Dusseldorf office, this fabricated site became a hub for discussion of social reform issues among Documenta visitors (Beuys and Schwarze 124). In the context of the high art world, Beuys created an accessible avenue for participants to discuss issues ranging from education to race relations (Bucknell). The piece culminated in Beuys’ Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie (Boxing Match for Direct Democracy), a boxing match performance that represented the debates taking place within the office in a fun and physical way. (Bucknell).
Beuys describes his artistic practice as “social sculpture,” and argues this form of art should be central to revolutionary aims, including “dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system” (Beuys 125). Beuys’ creation of a citizen space for facilitated, yet open-ended political dialogue presents the possibility that participation can lead in the best case to fostering social change. This notion is taken up by many artists who use participatory strategies to provoke discussion about unjust conditions.

Art and design activism can intentionally subvert state and corporate-driven development processes to transform urban public space for community use. In 1994, Park Fiction launched in response to a proposed waterfront office building development that would further gentrify the area surrounding a traditionally revolutionary squatters community within Hamburg, Germany’s increasingly bourgeois urban core (Kester 202). Artist Christoph Schäfer and his team engaged with local residents to facilitate a fictional, gameified development consultation process in parallel to that of the state, outfitting a shipping container with activities where participants could co-create ideas for the waterfront space (Kester 203). Resulting negotiations empowered the community with funding and legal access to the site, which was constructed in 2005 according to participants vision (Park Fiction). Despite potentially being considered “in bed with bureaucracy,” according to Kester, “Their work proceeded by working in the space between overt activism and formal state protocols” (205).
Technology can play a role in art and design activism, offering new ways of mediating interactions and sharing content. New technology in projects can be well received, sparking interest through novelty, however its use can sometimes be accompanied by challenges of accessibility. Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko is known to make use of technology as an interface for participatory works and overcomes accessibility challenges by technically supporting participants throughout the process. He also engages participants in the design process so they may contribute to the definition of project outcomes and feel more ownership of the work. His 1992-96 series, *Alien Staff*, invited participants to share their immigration stories with a public audience in a way that was mediated by technology within a sculptural artifact: A physical staff with a video screen that played the recorded stories (Wodiczko 104). Following a process of collaborative video production, the work was given back to the storyteller who then became the “actor” in a public art piece, without having to speak. The *Alien Staff* artifact became the storyteller’s voice, showing their video on a small screen while they spent time in public space. Any viewer could come close to the actor and experience the stories alongside them, mediated by the video technology (Wodiczko 105). A participant actor explained her relationship with the *Alien Staff* saying, “We travel together. It’s a kind of purification on my part. It’s a concretization of suffering and tears, a way of embodying them differently” (Wodiczko 114). A participatory work mediated by technology can empower participants to share their stories in a way that makes them feel comfortable.
Technology can also offer a format for the artist to become part of the work, which can make it more personal and potentially connect with a wider audience. For example, filmmaker Agnes Varda uses video technology to interact with participants in her documentary process. For Varda, the making of the 2000 documentary *The Gleaners and I*, allowed her to directly engage with the subjects of her interviews and become a part of the narrative herself, including personal, experimental shots of herself. The storytelling process was a very personal one. Interviewees shared intimate details of their livelihoods which included foraging for food and supplies to survive. Varda displayed great empathy in listening to these stories, and her presence and participation along with the subjects added depth to the film. Additionally, the film itself became a tool to raise awareness about gleaning for survival, calling attention to issues of inequality faced by society (*The Gleaners and I*).
A work of art and design activism can engage local groups by taking site-specificity and community aesthetics into consideration. Matthew Mazzotta’s project *Open House* is an example of using participant engagement to collaboratively define a work of art and design activism within a local community. Without knowing what the final outcome would be, Mazzotta held community discussions in the city of York, Alabama. He discovered through dialogue sessions with residents beginning in 2011, as well as with direct observation during his time there, that the city was deteriorating, with abandoned structures falling into disrepair and a distinct lack of community amenities (Mazzotta 248). The process of engagement, in combination with consideration of a local architectural aesthetic, informed the eventual work of art: A kinetic sculpture of a house that transforms into an open theatre and event space (Mazzotta 248). A year after the engagement process began, the piece was constructed on a disused property with materials from an existing structure transforming it into a defacto public space directly meeting community needs (Mazzotta 248). Mazzotta’s process allowed the citizens’ voices to be heard and helped them see their contribution to the work.

In addition to participatory tactics, the intentionality of site, subject, material and scale matter to a work of art and design activism and help shape its narrative. Ken Lum’s *Vancouver Especially* is a miniature replica of a “Vancouver Special” – a common single-family home typology that is now financially unattainable for many. Lum recreated the brick and stucco facade in small scale at 271 Union Street in Vancouver, illustrating what his $45,000 project budget would buy in the 2015 real estate market (Lederman). The
piece comments on housing affordability in Vancouver in general, and the Union Street site also speaks to the transformation of the Chinatown neighbourhood due to gentrification. *Vancouver Especially* reclaims public space with a sculptural icon, serving as a nexus of conversation around urban development and housing issues affecting Vancouver residents.

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions: Crowd around Vancouver Especially by Ken Lum.](Image removed due to copyright restrictions: Crowd around Vancouver Especially by Ken Lum.)

Fig. 11 Crowd around *Vancouver Especially* by Ken Lum. “*Vancouver Especially*’ art installation by Ken Lum on Union Street.” *SkyscraperPage*. Feb 22, 2015. Web. 14 Feb. 2018. Photo.

Participation can take many forms in art and design activism. Artists and designers can choose to engage audiences in the design process, giving communities ownership over the outcomes and responding to a site in ways meaningful to participants. Technology can be used as a tool to connect with audiences and collaboratively produce output like video storytelling, which can take on a life of its own. Dialogue can be facilitated, and sometimes a work can intentionally subvert state and corporate power.

In the theory section, we looked at historic and present-day implications of urbanization under capitalism. This condition has led to a need for collective empowerment of communities through participation to reshape the urban context to better meet their needs and prevent development processes from infringing on their right to the city. As seen in the cited examples, grassroots participation and art and design activism provide avenues and strategies for this type of community engaged action leading to collective empowerment. These strategies inform the next section of this thesis, which outlines my design process. Through practice, I develop a methodology using experimental media production as the primary channel for engagement with community groups, in addition to prototyping a public activation to create a citizen space.
3.0 METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE

The methodology and practice section includes case studies on my experimental projects, outlining the development of a methodology for collaborative storytelling using 360° filmmaking. The projects took place in Madrid, Kingston, Montreal and Vancouver, featuring currently active, site-specific examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism, including a self-initiated project called the Vancouver Bubble.

3.1 Case Studies: Experimental Projects

In Madrid, Kingston, Montreal and Vancouver, I undertook exploratory research to gain a broad sense of ongoing grassroots participation and art and design activism initiatives. This research included referring to Participedia.xyz and other channels such as social media, reaching out to new and existing contacts and reading news articles. In Madrid, Kingston and Montreal, I reached out to selected community groups, connecting with organizers and participants personally and spending time getting to know the initiatives. In some cases, I proposed to collaborate on experimental projects, including 360° films. In Vancouver I took a different approach, initiating a site-specific urban intervention while reflecting on and documenting my own experience as project lead. For each case study, I provide site-specific context, then describe the project, including my process of research, engagement and documentation. Finally, I outline tangible results, including creative output, followed by observations about the process.

3.1.1 Madrid - Democracy Stories

Context

Occupation of public space and institutional infrastructure by disenfranchised and politically motivated community groups is common in Madrid, Spain. Following the economic crisis of 2008, banks hold power over defaulted mortgages, and residential evictions occur almost daily. Not even real estate developers have escaped the impact of the economic crash, leaving large structures abandoned while lots once slated for future redevelopment stand vacant.

In response to this condition, organizations like PAH Madrid provide free legal support to those affected by residential evictions. Volunteers—often victims of evictions themselves—stand together in defence of their neighbours who are experiencing forceful evictions, and support groups are organized to help survivors heal from the trauma they have experienced (PAH Madrid). Meanwhile, occupied institutional spaces are transformed into “social centers” where groups of activists mobilize supporters and protest the status quo (Moor and Smart 8), and vacant lots take on new life as community run event spaces (Bravo).
Many other examples of citizen initiatives exist in Madrid, as illustrated by the Los Madriles project, which consists of both a resource website and print-based map (Los Madriles). The Los Madriles map locates and describes a number of citizen-initiatives but differs from Participedia because it is not intended as an academic tool. It was created specifically to empower community groups, raise awareness about their actions and recruit participation.

**Experimental Project**

In the fall of 2016, I represented Participedia and facilitated a design team as part of a two-week, hackathon-style workshop at Medialab Prado in Madrid called Collective Intelligence for Democracy. I initially anchored my team’s process in the context of the right to housing and proposed to design and implement a series of temporary “actions” inspired by art and design activism. The term action in this context refers to a process of rapid making, experimenting and reflecting. To lay the groundwork for participatory action design, I relied on the “double diamond” design process which includes four phases: discover, define, develop and deliver. As illustrated in Fig. 10, the discover phase is divergent, consisting of exploratory research and collecting of knowledge and ideas. The define phase is convergent, narrowing the findings from the discover phase into a research question. Develop diverges again to ideate on the research question, followed by a final convergence in the deliver phase, when one or a few ideas are proposed. I overlaid a process of actions and reflections within this process.

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 12** Slide from opening presentation at Medialab Prado, with credit to the Vancouver Design Nerds who commonly use the “Double Diamond” design as part of their “Nerd Jam” process. Carson, Jesi. 2016. Graphic.

Using the Los Madriles map as a guide during the discovery phase, part of our process included walking tours and drop-in visits to selected initiative sites. Medialab organizers helped us by connecting us with participants.
and organizers of initiatives who were willing to meet with us and share their stories. We visited Campo de Cebada, La Tabacalera, Esta Es Una Plaza and Mercado San Fernando, all of which are collaboratively-run citizen initiatives involving the occupation of disused property and public space.

The site-specificity and engaging aesthetic of the initiatives inspired audio and visual media documentation, and the team developed a strategy for collaborative multimedia storytelling, engaging organizers and participants in the process. As we moved through the develop and deliver phases of the design process, our actions became visits to sites, with each team member being assigned a media-based documentary role. We collected an archive of traditional and 360° video footage, photographs, panoramas and audio recordings of participant stories in both Spanish and English.

![Collaborative documentary storytelling roles for each team member, shown with Los Madriles map. Carson, Jesi. Madrid, Spain. 2016. Photo.](image)

The collection of visually and emotionally inspiring content struck us as an opportunity to enrich the content on Participedia.xyz and potentially benefit community initiatives by providing them with media content that could be used to promote their own work or recruit participants. We documented these case studies on Participedia.xyz, and also proposed a design for a new way to visualize Participedia data that placed emphasis on media contributions and participant stories.
Results
We called our project “Democracy Stories” and developed a prototype website (http://madrid.surge.sh/) that visualizes Participedia data in a new way and invites users to add layers of media content to existing content on Participedia.xyz.

My team also produced a shared folder of digital media that can be used in the future to publish the stories we documented, possibly using Participedia as a platform for this shared knowledge.

The process of documentation of citizen initiatives in Madrid led to the development of a collaborative methodology of media storytelling that I simplified and took forward to Jamaica, Montreal and Vancouver.

**Observations**

Reflection was critical to my experience in Madrid and helped uncover opportunities and challenges with the work. Daily check-in meetings helped the team work cohesively together. After one such meeting, the team elected to move away from a focus on housing and instead look at initiatives in public space. For more sensitive topics like housing, we would rather promote community-created content (with permission) rather than coming in as outsiders with cameras, which could make participants feel uncomfortable or, worse, put them at risk.

The collaborative nature of the storytelling methodology my team developed can help promote the work of citizen initiatives by allowing stories to be told from participants perspectives, in their own voices. Rather than academic documentation, these stories become a vehicle for initiatives with potential benefits by recruiting participants or raising awareness about their work. Participedia could consider this as a potential goal or motivation for contributors.

Site-specific cases of grassroots citizen participation in public space lend themselves well to visual documentation. These initiatives can also take on a visual aesthetic that represents the creativity of the community, such as handmade urban furniture, large scale paintings and other community-led designs. The rich and immersive quality of 360° film, a medium I was introduced to during this project, has the potential to share this special aesthetic quality with viewers in a way traditional film cannot. Viewers can control what they see, and linger on elements they are drawn to, offering an empowered viewing experience rather than a prescribed narrative. I elected to document the following experimental projects using 360° film based on this insight.

3.1.2 Jamaica - Life Yard

**Context**

Over the last three decades, there has been a general increase in murder rates in Jamaica, with Kingston having the highest rate (Gray 3). Many factors have likely contributed to this context, including urbanization and its consequent shrinking of the agricultural industry, as well as growth of the illicit drug trade leading to an increased use of guns and recruitment of
lower income youth as “foot soldiers” (Gray 6-7). Currently, some neighbourhoods in Kingston, primarily where lower income residents live, are prone to violence and crime. A major concern for locals is the effect this environment has on youth development. In response, organizations like Manifesto Jamaica offer opportunities for youth to participate in activities engaging them mentally and physically, such as parkour competitions. Others include the Institute for Social Leadership, offering homework space for youth as well as workshops on communication without anger, and Paint Jamaica, a collective of artists revitalizing neighbourhoods to create safer spaces.

Life Yard is an organization created by local residents in response to a violent urban context, where it was common to see men walking with guns in the middle of the day, within one block of a local elementary school. Founders converted the backyard of a family home into a farm which not only contributes to localized food security but provides a safe space for children and youth to spend time, participate in workshops and learn about growing food. They also collaborated with local art initiative Paint Jamaica to transform the neighbourhood surrounding the farm and school with colourful murals. According to community members, this visual and physical transformation and increased youth engagement has had a profound impact on neighbourhood safety in the area surrounding the Life Yard site.

![Fig. 15 Instagram photos of Life Yard and Fleet Street. Carson, Jesi. Kingston, Jamaica. 2017. Photo.](image)

**Experimental Project**

I traveled to Jamaica in February 2017 with the intention of producing a 360° documentary film with the founders of Life Yard. My actions evolved throughout the process to include trust building, adapting to cultural norms and sensitivities, checking my own privilege and developing a toolkit of flexible strategies for engagement.

Prior to visiting Jamaica, I took workshops and sought mentorship to acquire the technical skills required to produce a 360° film. Informed by
the process that I undertook in Madrid, I assembled a mobile, one-person 360° filmmaking gear kit (backpack, tripod, Zoom audio recorder, Samsung Gear 360° camera, Canon digital camera, laptop, memory cards and external drives). I developed interview conversation prompts based on the case narrative outlined used by Participedia.xyz. The prompts covered four main areas including history and purpose, how the site is operated, what happens in the space and the impact the initiative has had on the founders as well as the community.

Engaging with Life Yard organizers proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. While I was introduced personally through a mutual friend, and approached with enthusiasm for the project, I was met with a lack of responsiveness. I realized I couldn’t jump right into the project but would first have to integrate slowly and gain the trust of founding members. Without being too discouraged, I left my agenda at the door, and proceeded to genuinely connect with the Life Yard community. This took a series of encounters, and I was able to find ways to contribute to “the mission” of Life Yard I hadn’t expected. I played with the local children, lead yoga classes and even donated one of my external drives to an aspiring local filmmaker. I believe these gestures and my willingness to participate contributed to the process of building trust.

During my final days in Jamaica, Life Yard’s lead organizer, Shane Morgan, was suddenly willing and excited to do a 360° film and audio recorded interview with me. With permission, I had been recording 360° shots of the space since I arrived, and I think this also generated some interest, as intrigued community members asked me about the equipment and what
I was up to. The children in particular were very interested in the camera and we had a lot of fun with it, and some of the best shots came from those playful experiences. With Shane’s interview recorded, I was able to craft a storyboard and remaining shot list for a short film about Life Yard.

Results
The process of journaling helped me overcome the challenges I faced with engagement. I documented my thoughts, sketches, process and reflections in a detailed sketchbook. In addition to slowing down and building trust, my sketchbook and the tools of design helped me communicate with community members. For example, the storyboard I created for the film inspired the founders of Life Yard to engage with the documentary process. On the day before I left, I brought the storyboard and shot list to Life Yard and was able to generate enough excitement to get some shots of the founders.

Upon returning to Vancouver, I produced a short documentary about Life Yard that was shared via Vimeo and Dropbox with organizers (https://vimeo.com/216314518).

Fig. 17 Photo of sketchbook showing Life Yard storyboard. Carson, Jesi. Kingston, Jamaica. 2017. Photo.
Observations
Building trust is critical to the process of collaborative storytelling. More time in Jamaica (I had three weeks) would have been preferable as well. I would have liked to produce the film in-country and host a screening at the Life Yard site.

The transformation of public space for community use can positively impact neighbourhood safety and foster social bonds among local participants. The garden itself contributes to food security and provides a refuge for youth to gather and participate in workshops and clubs. The surrounding neighbourhood was revitalized by the addition of murals. The vacant lot across the street from the Life Yard site used to be a place for residents to dump garbage, but now is kept clean and used for a variety of community events, such as sports matches. Most importantly, the community is now known for its safety. According to community members, the project has created an environment where neighbours now feel confident to talk to one another, to let each other know when something feels unsafe and to watch out for each other and their children.

Accessibility of new technology can be a barrier to the production of media content. Due to the size of the raw video files, and the poor quality of internet connection in Jamaica, only the Vimeo version of the Life Yard film was able to be accessed after production by founders. We discussed how to overcome this problem by shipping a USB drive to Jamaica, and eventually one of the organizers was able to download the files during a trip to the USA. There are also challenges related to screening 360° film. Viewing 360° film in 2D is not ideal, and someone else “scrolling around” on your behalf can feel uncomfortable. This poses both a challenge and design opportunity that falls outside the boundaries of this thesis, but which I am interested in exploring further.

3.1.3 Montreal - Saving Urban Jungles

Context
Part of a trend known as “greening,” community gardens, green laneways and initiatives to save urban green space are examples of public participation in Montreal. For example, the Ruelles Vertes (Green Laneways) initiative allows laneways to be legally closed to traffic and facilitating the addition of grass and other greenery. Residents take ownership of these public spaces, adding plants and public art to transform formerly underused laneways into community spaces for play and leisure.

Small pockets of dense, forested green space known as “urban jungles” exist within Montreal neighbourhoods, or boroughs. Two examples of these wild green spaces include Parc Des Gorilles (Gorilla Park) and Jardin Notman (Notman Garden), and both are special places to the citizens
who live nearby. In both cases, the land on which these urban jungles grow was previously owned by a railway company and quietly sold to real estate developers as land values increased in the urban core. Notman Garden still exists in its lush, forest form, having been saved from demolition (for now) by an adamant citizen group. However, Gorilla Park was not so lucky. Even after negotiations with the city, and the rallying of much community support, the urban green space was demolished overnight by the developer, and a vacant lot remains.

**Experimental Project**

In June 2017, I spent two weeks in Montreal learning about participatory citizen initiatives and attending Participedia’s first Summer School at the University of Montreal. I connected with Participedia team member and summer school organizer Françoise Montambeault and some of her students and identified potential sites for 360° filmmaking about grassroots participation or art and design activism. Her focus of research was participation through “greening,” and through her I was introduced to the citizen group responsible for fighting for the re-establishment of Gorilla Park. Through social media I discovered that Notman Garden had a very similar story. I realized these two stories could be told in parallel and continued with the process of 360° filmmaking, using the same interview questions I had used in Jamaica.

I interviewed one of the founders of the Friends of Gorilla Park citizen initiative for the 360° film. This led to a detailed conversation about the initiative, its history and ongoing struggles. A tour of the site was organized for the Participedia summer school students, which I was also able to film.
My experience with Notman Garden was more serendipitous, as I arrived at the site to see if I could record some initial shots and was surprised to find a community protest in progress. I entered the space and listened to speeches. I took note of the speakers, approached them after the event and was able to interview two organizers. I also chatted with participants at the event and found the community really cared about this lush green site and would be very upset to see it destroyed.

**Results**
After transcribing the interviews from both sites, I produced a storyboard juxtaposing the two stories. I used experimental editing techniques to create frames within 360° viewing space. Production of this experimental film is still underway.

Improvements to the documentary process were made, including the introduction of myself as a character in the film. I had realized when editing the Life Yard film that I was in most of the shots, but I had not introduced myself as part of the narrative. This time, I made sure the interviews were not only recorded by audio, but also with the 360° camera, so I could cut in the context shots of myself within the story. I also recorded introductory and reflection shots of myself on both sites to include in the film.

**Observations**
Grassroots initiatives intended to transform permanent sites sometimes make use of temporary or “pop-up” interventions as tactics to achieve these goals. Gorilla Park participants installed a pop-up garden on the vacant site, expecting it to be removed immediately by developers. However, due to the overwhelming support of the community, the developers left the garden in place for months. By leaving the Gorilla Park pop-up garden intact, the developers may have lessened the pressure on themselves.

Transformation of a site for long-term community benefit can build a large network of voluntary support for a sustained amount of time. The Friends of Gorilla Park have been engaged in this process for over twenty years, and the citizen group now fighting for Notman Garden has also participated in multiple other initiatives to improve community life in their borough.

Many initiatives I looked at in Montreal appeared to be community group or citizen-led but were actually launched by local governments. This could be interpreted as acknowledgement by the state that participation in citizen initiatives can contribute positively to urban life, or other political motivations could contribute to this trend.

Fig. 19 (right) *The Vancouver Bubble* at POP! Korb, Jared. Vancouver, BC. 2018. Photos. (Used with permission)
3.1.4 Vancouver - The Vancouver Bubble

Context
Vancouver is known for being an expensive and isolating city. Real estate prices have skyrocketed in the last few decades, pricing out many locals who now live in the suburbs and resulting in gentrification of traditional cultural communities like Chinatown. Census data and studies by the Vancouver Foundation also indicate Vancouver is a socially isolating place to live (Lu, Schellenberg et. al.). To combat this reality, a trend of temporary, pop-up interventions has emerged, often with the goal of connecting isolated Vancouverites.

“Placemaking” is common in Vancouver, with “placemakers” being people who are part of organizations, businesses or community groups who host events and installations in public space. The Vancouver Public Space Network organizes community engaged action in underused spaces, Part-y4Health hosts free, public dance parties and Frida&Frank organizes pop-up ping pong. The question remains as to whether or not these temporary interventions have the desired effect of reducing social isolation, but we can observe that the local government has taken up the cause. The City of Vancouver is currently working on a Public Space Strategy through the Places for People campaign. They also support VIVA Vancouver, which provides funding for artists and designers to activate public spaces. A system of exchange exists between grassroots and top-down approaches in Vancouver, creating opportunities for community groups to benefit from funding and removal of barriers to the use of public space, and for the city to improve its image by facilitating fun and engaging activities for residents and visitors. However, a critical look at this context may reveal another form of pacification, offering token levels of support to potentially build permission at a social scale for larger changes that may not be similarly aligned. For example, developers in Vancouver have installed community gardens on land under speculation, offering a temporary community amenity to pacify local residents who may otherwise take issue with forthcoming redevelopments.

Fig 20 (above, left) Life Between Umbrellas. Vancouver Public Space Network. 2018. Photo.
Fig. 21 (above, right) Frida&Frank host public ping pong at Jim Deva Plaza. Carson, Jesi. 2018. Photo.
Experimental Project
As a final experiment, I launched and documented a participatory public art project with the intention of creating a citizen space. The *Vancouver Bubble* was an inflatable public art installation, or urban intervention, I produced as Project Lead for the Vancouver Design Nerds. VDN is a non-profit society dedicated to addressing a wide range of urban issues through participatory engagement and design. We partnered with HCMA Architecture + Design and their Tilt Curiosity Lab to apply for grant funding in the summer of 2017. VIVA Vancouver awarded $5,000 to produce our project.

This experiment included multiple levels of participation, including a collaborative design and production process. The installation was also intended to create opportunities for building community connections and promote dialogue within a citizen space. The form of an inflatable structure offered a dual metaphor for visitors to consider, referring to both the unaffordability of the “housing bubble,” and social isolation of “living in our own bubble.”

The participatory design process for the *Vancouver Bubble* began with a public design jam at the office of HCMA Architecture + Design. I presented project parameters and possible sites as well as my research interests. After group brainstorming and prototyping, five teams presented ideas for form and programming of the inflatable. Two ideas were related to social issues, housing and food security (using the Alley Oop laneway site near Granville and Hastings Streets), and three were geared towards light-hearted engagement, creating a sense of wonder (under the South side of the Cambie Bridge).

One particular idea from the jam, a concept called *Dream House*, was particularly evocative. *Dream House* proposed that a large-scale inflatable home shape be wedged high overhead in the Alley Oop laneway, making the statement about affordable housing being out of reach for many Vancouver residents. The team hopes to take on this proposal in a future iteration of the *Vancouver Bubble*.

The concept that stood out for the team the most was the idea of the bubble as a “platform” for various types of programming. Therefore, we designed an inflatable shape in response to the Cambie Bridge site for a temporary installation with selected programming partners: Frida&Frank, a placemaking organization specializing in public ping pong, and CityHive, a youth-run organization that recently launched a public space activation initiative.

Results
With our programming partners, we produced *POP! Get out of your bubble and into ours* on January 27, 2018 under the south side of the Cambie Bridge. We designed and built a simple oblong inflatable that served as a platform for various types of programming where the aim was to generate
a discursive temporary public space welcoming all citizens, focusing on engaging youth in the community. The bubble itself responded to the site with its rectangular form, aligning with the bridge above. The AstroTurf below the shape and inflatable seating provided a cozy and welcoming interior environment, with professional lighting and sound equipment adding to the quality of the experience.

Approximately 400 visitors attended the event. Programming began with a mini-design Jam, hosted by the Vancouver Design Nerds. We asked participants to share stories about memorable experiences in public space, and to envision what else the Vancouver Bubble could be. CityHive hosted a storytelling event, where youth shared their personal experiences about how public space in the city has affected their lives. Participants took part in a dialogue about urban public spaces and how youth can get more engaged. Finally, local soundscape artists Soft Fit and Big Zen activated the Vancouver Bubble with ambient music, and visitors lounged on inflatable furniture as an LED lighting installation by Hfour Studio, another local collaborator, was shown under the night sky. All day passers-by were invited to play ping pong with Frida&Frank, sip coffee and tea, write on the CityStudio chalkboards and blow giant bubbles.

I have recorded 360° footage from all stages of this experiment, with plans to produce a documentary in the future.

**Observations**

Placemaking creates opportunities for citizens to interact. Intentional programming can bolster placemaking initiatives by promoting dialogue about specific topics in order to create citizen spaces. POP! achieved this by focusing on the topic of public space itself, providing facilitated activities where visitors were prompted with questions about their own experiences in public space and given opportunities to make new connections through conversations on this topic.

While we didn’t track the impact of visitor interactions at POP! doing so is potentially possible and worth consideration for future iterations of the Vancouver Bubble. For example, we could task volunteers with counting participants, as well as conduct short surveys or interviews during events.

The community of placemakers in Vancouver is well-connected, and the participatory nature of this experiment allowed me to expand my own network. Beginning with a small group, the community surrounding the Vancouver Bubble grew exponentially since the launch of the project. VIVA Vancouver facilitated some of those connections via Slack, including Transformation Projects, CityStudio, Hfour Studio and others who had received VIVA funding for pop-up events. Eventually Frida&Frank founders Ellie Arkin and Haley Roeser became a core part of the team and helped with the design and construction of our first iteration. Spending time with
these collaborators allowed me to learn more about the placemaking trend in Vancouver, as well as get connected to CityHive and propel the POP! project forward.

The Vancouver Bubble project differs from Madrid, Jamaica and Montreal experiments because I documented the process from within, as a design lead and organizer, as opposed to coming in as an outside observer. I still used 360° film, kept a detailed process book and used my journal and sketchbook to reflect on the work. However, even though I observed and participated in this project as an organizer, I went through a similar process of connecting with community members and building trust within local networks as I had to do in the other experimental case studies. The fact that I live in Vancouver, and the longer project timeline, helped with this networking process, and highlights the need for more time in-country if working on documentary projects abroad. Finally, as an organizer and participant in this project, I was able to exercise my own right to the city by creating a citizen space.

Future opportunities for the Vancouver Bubble include a pop-up event at Robson Square, also funded by VIVA Vancouver, installing it at MakerLabs, and creating our own event with HCMA in the Alley Oop laneway (possibly the Dream House). Considerations include rain-proofing the bubble, more portable flooring solutions and tracking impact.

Fig. 22 (right) The Vancouver Bubble at POP! Korb, Jared. Vancouver, BC. 2018. Photos. (Used with permission)
Fig. 23-26 The Vancouver Bubble at POP! Korb, Jared. Vancouver, BC. 2018. Photos. (Used with permission)
4.0 ANALYSIS

The analysis section will address the commonalities and distinctions between the sites of grassroots participation and art and design activism I explored in my thesis. To do this I have developed a series of axes that define characteristics of these initiatives that affect the use of urban public space and contribute to the empowerment of citizens by promoting the right to the city. I will also illustrate how understanding how these aspects operate within their varied contexts lays the groundwork for future work in creating citizen spaces that reclaim the right to the city.

4.1 Axes of Participation

The following four axes identify aspects of initiatives of grassroots participation and art and design activism for analysis.

*Threatened vs. Safe Tenancy* (related to site-specificity)
*Top-Down vs. Grassroots Initiatives* (related to organizing body)
*Intervention vs. Site Transformation* (related to action and duration)
*Oppressed vs. Empowered Communities* (related to outcome and impact)

In the following sections, I define the terms of the axes of participation and explain how they relate to each other and operate within the projects described in this thesis. By plotting the initiatives I explored in my research on these axes and intersecting them, I illustrate how they can be used to identify trends in different urban contexts, while acknowledging the perils of so-called “one-size-fits-all” solutions for participatory action and empowerment. Also important to this analysis is the observational insight I experienced by taking the time to engage with and listen to organizers and participants of the initiatives described in the case studies. Finally, this analysis highlights that the axes of participation can help to identify opportunity spaces and possible collaborators for experimental projects such as 360° filmmaking and design interventions like the *Vancouver Bubble*.

4.1.1 Threatened vs. Safe Tenancy

“Threatened” means that the initiative has insecure tenancy or operates under the threat of eviction or demolition, while “safe” implies secure tenancy on a specific site.

Threatened versus safe tenancy is related to the site-specificity of the initiatives explored in this thesis. Security of tenancy refers to the degree to which citizens can access, occupy and use specific sites over time within their communities. Examining tenancy is important in this analysis because of its direct relation to the way citizens can use public space to
activate discourse on issues affecting their right to the city. While interventions on sites of threatened tenancy often affect change in the short-term, creating the conditions to transition from threatened to safe tenancy takes time, but has the potential to transform communities in ways that empower citizens in the long-term. Citizens exercise their right to the city through sustained engagements over a period of time, creating opportunities for new social structures to emerge, which in turn can lead to the physical transformation of the urban environment for community use.

Threatened Tenancy
Public spaces exist in cities that could benefit local communities if programmed to meet citizens needs, but often these sites are only accessible, legally, to certain groups for certain uses. Grassroots participation or art and design activism initiatives may be launched to represent community wishes for a site, often in opposition to state or corporate interests. This type of engagement occurs with a sense of urgency on contested sites, and sometimes requires participation in actions of civil disobedience such as illegal occupation of public space. While actions taking place on sites of threatened tenancy can involve legal risks, they can also afford increased solidarity among participants who are fighting for a common goal and stand to lose something as a group should the initiative fail. Transitioning from threatened to safe tenancy can lead to a significant positive social impact in communities. My work pays particular attention to sites of threatened tenancy and sites in transition from threatened to safe tenancy for these reasons, and to help me understand how to contribute to this kind of transformation through my practice.

Notman Garden and Gorilla Park in Montreal both involve community groups which have mobilized long-term grassroots movements and involve illegal actions on corporate property. The aim is to protect the urban spaces with abundant wildlife, known as “urban jungles,” that have meaning for them. Both groups are interested in securing safe tenancy and have involved a process of participation that has engaged a core group of community organizers and countless volunteers for over 20 years. A deep passion to save the sites from the threat of demolition helps sustain their long-term engagement. Organizers I spoke with in Montreal emphasized the importance of the relationships between participants to maintain energy for the movement throughout the years and iterations of actions that have taken place on each site. Gorilla Park highlights how easily years of effort can fail, as the urban jungle was bulldozed by developers despite a pending agreement with municipal government to preserve the site. Regardless, the Friends of Gorilla Park initiative continues to take action, hoping to restore the site to a community park.

Safe Tenancy
Security of tenancy can affect how long an initiative can last, who can participate, who organizes it and why, short and long-term goals and even
possible outcomes. Safe tenancy refers to an initiative taking place on a specific site, and that has an arrangement, either with local government or private property owners, allowing them to occupy a particular space legally. Typically, initiatives with safe tenancy are sanctioned by the state, which sometimes implies that capitalist interests or other political motives are at play. In these cases, community groups can sometimes take advantage of these motives in order to achieve positive impact by exercising their right to the city through formal channels. Nonetheless, such positive impacts depend on the contemporary political climate. Safe tenancy also affords a level of security and engagement that, while maybe not urgent, are still important to healthy communities, such as fostering human connections as a way to combat social isolation. Frida&Frank’s pop-up ping pong events are an example of this kind of community building that operates through playful actions and installations. Safe initiatives may also recur or take place over a long period of time, allowing organizers the freedom to plan and initiate sustained and thoughtful opportunities for community participation.

The unique context of different cities also affects security of tenancy for initiatives. Due to the skyrocketing cost of real estate and limited space in Vancouver, land use is highly monitored and there is a distinct lack of public space that isn’t owned by either the government or corporate land developers. Therefore, the majority of grassroots participation and art and design activism examples reviewed in Vancouver (other than protests) hold safe tenancy and are less site-specific, as they have gone through legal channels on state-sanctioned sites. These examples are also more temporary, as the use of land for community purposes is tightly controlled by the city, limiting the opportunity for long-term transformation of urban space. VIVA Vancouver exists to promote the short-term use of public space by community and artist groups that may have otherwise transformed space through grassroots means. The Vancouver Bubble project is one example, as my team could have illegally occupied a site to inflate the structure but could have been shut down or fined. However since we were sanctioned by the city and funded by VIVA Vancouver, we were empowered to initiate an entire day of community participation. This connection to the city also afforded the Vancouver Bubble project funding for materials and insurance, access to electricity, a city worker to adjust the lighting under the Cambie Bridge and even social media promotion via VIVA Vancouver Channels.

**Transition from threatened to safe tenancy**
The transition of a site from threatened to safe tenancy through grassroots participation and art and design activism challenges the status quo of public space designed for state or corporate interests rather than community needs. Safe tenancy can be a goal as well as a possible outcome of site-specific initiatives, particularly those intended to make use of a space on a long-term basis. Achieving this transition supports the right to the city
by empowering citizens to legally occupy sites and engage in activities they define and steward for their own benefit through cooperative means, as opposed to uses dictated by the state.

Unfortunately, initiatives must go through a process of proving themselves, sometimes through illegal occupation of public space, before safe tenancy can be achieved, and it often is not. As seen with indigenous-led resistance to BC Hydro’s Site C project, safe tenancy can be strongly opposed by state and corporate interests and block the transition of a site from threatened to safe tenancy. On the other hand, grassroots action can successfully transform sites despite corporate interests, such as in the case of Park Fiction. In this art and design activism example, artist and community participation won the right for citizens to physically transform and use the waterfront space as a public park, rather than submit the site to redevelopment for corporate gain. Another successful transition from threatened to safe tenancy is seen in Madrid at Campo De Cebada where citizens had to organize multiple protest actions before the municipal authorities agreed to allow the community to occupy and maintain the event space over the long-term. The historic example of Jane Jacobs rallying the community to preserve neighbourhoods and public spaces in New York in the 1960s also illustrates a transition from threatened to safe tenancy by means of protest. The fact that these victories are achieved at all—when safe tenancy is secured through grassroots means—highlights the potential power of collaboration, participation and citizen-initiated action.

4.1.2 Top-down vs Grassroots Initiatives

“Top-down” refers to government-initiated, and “grassroots” refers to citizen-initiated examples of public space activation.

This axis is related to the organizing body of initiatives. Understanding who is responsible for organizing, funding, sanctioning and promoting participatory action in public space can affect its authenticity, potentially revealing ulterior motives for citizen engagement such as political popularity or corporate gain. Affordances change dramatically when comparing top-down to grassroots initiatives. Top-down initiatives can have positive impact and legal advantages, but grassroots movements potentially cultivate an even deeper engagement through collaborative stewardship, overcoming barriers to the use of public space, reclaiming the right to the city and resulting in community empowerment.

Top-Down Initiatives

Top-down initiatives are organized by a formal organization or governing body, usually affording safe tenancy along with other benefits. From a critical perspective, top-down initiatives can potentially be considered the participatory equivalent of “greenwashing,” creating a false sense of
engagement (pacification) for political or corporate gain. For example, developers in Vancouver sometimes fund the creation of community gardens on vacant lots, heavily marked by highly visible corporate logos along the perimeters, while they speculate on land values or wait for redevelopment applications to be approved. These temporary community gardens operate as small concessions whose actual value to the community pales in comparison to the value developers gain from the positive image produced by these installations. Additionally, the power structures of top-down initiatives sometimes involve one or a small group of decision makers who have final say in how public space should be used.

While it is important to look at top-down initiatives with a critical eye, many of the examples I encountered in my research seemed to make genuine attempts to empower communities through formal channels. For example, the Green Laneways project in Montreal initiates an application processes to spark interest and create a sense of ownership over each laneway transformation project for participating residents. The initiative provides funding to applicants who meet community support criteria as well as oversees the logistics and engineering sign-off required to transform traditional laneways into green, traffic-calmed spaces. Finally, once each green laneway is built, stewardship of the space is passed on to community members. The transformation of laneways to green spaces has visibly impacted the social structures of local neighbourhoods in Montreal, promoting collaboration and enabling access to public community space. However, the type of top-down initiatives that work in Montreal may not exist in other contexts, for example where the state cannot (or will not) spare resources for purely social benefits. In Jamaica, participatory initiatives like Life Yard are necessarily citizen-led, responding to a political context where residents cannot rely on top-down resources to protect their interests or even their well being and safety.

Grassroots Initiatives
Grassroots initiatives often respond to urgent community needs, such as access to food, housing and social services, by demanding these human rights from the state through protest. In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides that citizens should be granted the freedom of peaceful assembly (PEN Canada). However, this right only extends as far as the government will allow, and legal injunctions often force evictions of protests that attempt to occupy public space for a sustained amount of time, such as sites of temporary housing known as “Tent Cities” in Vancouver.

Additional barriers to grassroots use of public space exist, such as lengthy municipal application processes, fees for use of particular spaces, the need for costly insurance and permits and poorly facilitated or, in the worst cases, corrupt process of selection. Grassroots groups often lack funding, relying on volunteer labour and fundraising, and need to mobilize quickly to act on a particular issue. This usually means grassroots actions are
not achieved through formal channels and participants risk fines or even arrest, despite the legal right to protest. When use of public space by citizens is deemed illegal, the right to the city is threatened and that space loses its status as public. All citizens should have the right to use public space, but in practice that are considered public are often under tight control. Grassroots methods seek to overcome barriers through thoughtful communication and collaborative planning, incorporating democratic, flat or bottom-up organizing structures and decision-making processes.

Grassroots initiatives tend to cultivate strong social bonds, participant motivation and voluntary stewardship. Often, the very individuals affected by an issue are the ones who launch an initiative, and a social support constellation of participants is built from their social circle, expanding outward as awareness grows. This can be seen in the Site C example, where local First Nations launched a resistance movement and solidarity initiatives have expanded throughout the province of BC and beyond. At Campo De Cebada in Madrid, what began as a small group of local citizens rallying for the right to make use of a vacant lot grew into a thriving community-run space with a large network of local volunteer participants actively working together to program and maintain it. Grassroots initiatives provide opportunities for citizens to reclaim their right to the city while developing new and strong social bonds with other participants. While top-down initiatives can also have positive impact in communities, the sense of ownership and stewardship cultivated by grassroots initiatives illustrates a deep level of engagement, resulting in community empowerment.

**Safe tenancy of top-down initiatives**

When the axis of safe versus threatened tenancy intersects with grassroots versus top-town initiatives in both Montreal and Vancouver, a distinctly empty quadrant of top-down and threatened tenancy is revealed, as seen in figures 27 and 28. This highlights that top-down initiatives are more likely to be considered safe in terms of tenancy. It is when an initiative is launched by citizens themselves, sometimes requiring it to occupy public space illegally, that tenancy is more likely to be threatened. What seems like simple logic stands out as a highly problematic reality. Why should the use of public space be privileged to top-down initiatives? This is a clear violation of the right to the city for grassroots groups.

I used these intersecting axes to identify possible collaborators for a 360° film project in Montreal. As seen in figure 27, the two urban jungle sites, Notman Garden and Gorilla Park, fall into the category of grassroots and threatened tenancy due risk of demolition by developers. In both cases, corporate interests threatened the sites, but Notman Garden, despite being demolished by developers, has since been able to achieve the promise of safe tenancy from the borough district which has committed to restore the property as a community green space. The right to the city is called into question when a valued community asset can only be saved by the arbitrary good graces of top-down power structures.
The trend of safe tenancy for top-down initiatives revealed an opportunity space for design intervention in Vancouver. The *Vancouver Bubble* project was able to work within the context of safe tenancy by engaging with VIVA Vancouver, a top-down organizer that facilitated the use of public space. However, even though the *Vancouver Bubble* was empowered to exist via top-down channels, this doesn’t address the problematic condition of threatened tenancy of grassroots initiatives. It also presents limitations to the work that we produced, requiring approval from top-down power structures before moving forward. This condition remains a future consideration for my continued work in the placemaking space in Vancouver.

Fig. 27 Slide from ECUAD MDes Summer Research Presentation showing Montreal sites on dual axes of safe versus threatened and grassroots versus top-down. Carson, Jesi. 2017.

Fig. 28 Slide from ECUAD MDes Summer Research Presentation showing Vancouver sites on dual axes of safe versus threatened and grassroots versus top-down. Carson, Jesi. 2017.
4.1.3 Intervention vs Site Transformation

“Intervention” implies a short-term or temporary installation or activation of a site, and “transformation” refers to the long-term occupation of public space and its repurposing for community use.

The intervention versus transformation axis is related to the type of action taking place on a site and how long it lasts. Community needs inform the use of particular sites, including factors such as their suitability for short-term intervention or long-term transformation. Both interventions and transformations offer benefits, including opportunities for new social interactions in public space as well as temporary or sustained engagement in the physical transformation of a site for community use.

**Intervention**

Intervention on a site occurs when citizens are unable to transform an underused site permanently, often for legal reasons, but are able to change it temporarily. Interventions can lead to increased public awareness for particular issues, and social bonds that develop through the process from organization to action. They can also be used as tactics to achieve community goals. For example, Gorilla Park organizers installed a pop-up community garden on the site after it had been bulldozed by developers to illustrate what could exist there if the community were given stewardship of the space. Even though this intervention was illegal, it remained on the site for a number of weeks, showing the developer might have an interest in meeting community needs (likely not for social reasons, but rather to secure the sale of the land to the state for a profit).

Interventions promote social interactions and build community in a particular space. In Vancouver I observed a trend clearly weighted toward intervention, with a focus on short-term placemaking and pop-up initiatives that create opportunities for social interactions in public space (see figure 29). The City of Vancouver is known for publicly promoting the trend of placemaking, offering funding for artists and other groups to activate underused spaces temporarily for social purposes.

This axis contributed to the initiation of the *Vancouver Bubble* project as an opportunity to experiment with the form of urban-scale interventions and learn the opportunities and limitations of working through these formal channels in the local Vancouver context. The *Vancouver Bubble* used a participatory design process and engaged a large number of volunteers to design and build our intervention, offering unique opportunities for collaboration and new social constellations to be formed. Since the *POP!* event in January 2018, organizers and volunteers have re-grouped and are currently working on another iteration of the project, illustrating that the process of intervention has built a community around itself, regardless of the temporary nature of the project.
Transformation of Site

Transformation occurs when citizens see an opportunity to make use of a site and set about physically and programmatically changing it in ways that make it more accessible and functional for the long-term benefit of the local community. Often, this transformation involves collaborative design and construction of community amenities like street furniture, sports or play equipment, games, outdoor theatre screens and seating, and garden planters, to name a few. When citizens are empowered to care for and maintain a site for their own community to use, fair and equal decision-making processes emerge, creating opportunities for leadership and collaboration. Participating in informal governance is another way for citizens to be empowered, to have their voices heard among their peers and to take initiative by launching new activities with and for other community members. When transformation is achieved by grassroots means, benefits like sustained engagement and a sense of ownership are developed among participants, who may be invested personally in a particular site or cause, as opposed to top-down use of public space decided by the state.

In Madrid, transformative initiatives, where urban sites are often repurposed for long-term community use, are common. Campo de Cebada participants were a part of the original transformation of a vacant lot and continue to remain engaged in the ongoing stewardship of the space, from building street furniture to making sure the garbage gets collected. Another example from Madrid, Esta Es Una Plaza is a community-run space that was initiated by local residents to transform a vacant lot into a community garden, a playground for children and even a bicycle cooper-
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ative where neighbours can learn to repair their bikes. Life Yard in Jamaica also required a sustained community effort to transform a dangerous neighbourhood into a safe space for children to learn, grow and play. In all three of these sites of transformation, a community aesthetic emerged including large scale murals and colourful pallet furniture and other structures unique to each cultural context. Strategies like general assemblies (community meetings to collaboratively plan programming) are used in all of these examples to make decisions about the use of the space, empowering community members to take on grassroots governance roles and contribute in their own ways to their collective projects.

4.1.4 Oppressed vs Empowered Communities

“Oppressed” means that an initiative was unable to achieve its desired outcomes for any reason, community needs were not met, or that its impact was visibly minimal. “Empowered” refers to the positive impact of an initiative within a community, socially, physically or otherwise, evaluated based on the observed achievement of purpose or goals to meet community needs.

This axis proposes to comment on potential impact by evaluating whether or not the desired purpose or goals of an initiative are achieved based on its outcomes, including unexpected results or outcomes that occur after the fact (downstream). Observations of impact are subjective, but qualitatively evaluating goals and outcomes can potentially be achieved by listening to the perspectives and stories of participants, which I have begun to do with my experimental 360° filmmaking work.

Oppressed Communities

If the right to the city is infringed upon, with state or corporate interests creating barriers to citizens use of public space, an initiative may be considered oppressed. However, with most participatory actions, an unintentional result is the building of new social networks and solidarity among participants. Therefore, it is unlikely any initiative would be entirely oppressed if participation is being practiced and opportunities for engagement are presented, regardless if goals are met. The Gorilla Park initiative in Montreal could be considered oppressed because the goal was to save the urban jungle site, but an outcome was that the urban jungle was demolished by developers despite the efforts of this citizen group. However, it can also be considered empowered because of the connections made between community members during the process, and the ongoing energy the group maintains to get their jungle back. Although social ties and community building may not have been an explicit goal of the initiative, it is an unexpected result, and therefore Gorilla Park should fall somewhere in between these two axis points. Similarly, while resistance to the Site C project has been challenged by state and corporate power, and the BC
Hydro dam project is currently under construction (rendering it oppressed, as the goal was to save the site), a downstream result is the growing network of solidarity movements in support of the initiative, which continues to oppose the ongoing construction.

**Empowered Communities**

If participants are able to exercise their right to the city, engaging in the transformation of public space to achieve goals they help to define, the community is considered empowered. In addition to transforming a site for community use and providing alternatives to the culture of individualism and pacification caused by urbanization under capitalism, specific community needs or goals requiring the use of public space can range widely. A few examples include providing housing, promoting neighbourhood safety or constructing community amenities. The achievement of these goals, particularly if they are self-defined and self-initiated by a community, indicates empowerment and positive impact.

In Vancouver, while Tent Cities are a symptom of inequitable state support, they can provide temporary empowerment, with the transformation of urban sites for housing being achieved for as long as is possible before the government intervenes. Meanwhile, the trend of placemaking in Vancouver has led to many small grassroots organizations emerging with the goal of increasing citizen engagement in public space by activating underused sites in the city. In Jamaica, many downstream benefits from the transformation of an urban neighbourhood occurred, although the main goal was simply to grow food for local residents. Increased community safety became apparent, along with stronger bonds among neighbours. A community event space emerged, with soccer matches and musical performances becoming common.

In the analysis section I defined four axes and used examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism explored in this thesis in order to develop an understanding of the characteristics of participatory initiatives. These axes help unpack the various ways in which design can operate in a given site. In addition to this analytical approach, the methods employed during the experimental case studies are important, including observation, listening and reflection. By looking at the affordances and challenges of various aspects of participation, this analysis lays the groundwork for my design practice, including future experiments in creating citizen spaces and reclaiming the right to the city.
5.0 CONCLUSION

Through an exploration of the themes of public space, the right to the city, grassroots participation and art and design activism to create citizen spaces, this thesis provides relevant theory and examples that respond to the condition of urbanization under capitalism. My design practice is grounded in this context and theory and includes ongoing development of a methodology for collaborative storytelling using 360° filmmaking and documentation of experimental case studies in Madrid, Jamaica, Montreal and Vancouver. This research and fieldwork has led to the following conclusions: 1) Grassroots participation can help citizens reclaim their right to the city by challenging power structures that control, plan and build the urban environment; and 2) Art and design activism to create citizen spaces can promote localized collective empowerment by fostering opportunities for dialogue and community connections leading to transformative action.

The Participedia project will benefit from this research as well as the resulting experimental creative output. In addition to increasing the number of cases of grassroots participation and art and design activism on Participedia.xyz, I am developing a process for community-engaged visual media production that can help, where appropriate, make these stories more accessible to a wider audience. Adding visual media stories to Participedia.xyz will offer a new channel for community groups to potentially reach new volunteers or funders. I also intend to explore participatory video facilitation as part of my future work on this project, a process intended to benefit communities by empowering them to produce and share their own media. Finally, the axes of participation may also contribute to Participedia by offering a system to reflect on grassroots participation and art and design activism as methodologies for participatory democracy.

Using the axes of participation to examine real world examples of grassroots participation and art and design activism, I have laid the groundwork for future experiments in public space and reclaiming the right to the city in my own practice. Comparing grassroots to top-down initiatives reveals the need for systems and structures of power to be challenged and highlights the fact that grassroots action can lead to reclaiming public space and securing safe tenancy for community use. Identifying trends in transformation of space versus short-term intervention, particularly actions driven by art and design activism, allowed me to see the potential of working within existing systems, and to take advantage of the safe status of top-down initiatives with the creation of the Vancouver Bubble.
The *Vancouver Bubble* was a discursive citizen space where visitors were challenged to directly confront their own experiences in public space and in particular how youth in Vancouver can be more engaged in its use. Although I acknowledge the limitations of top-down initiatives, I would describe this experiment as largely empowering based on the amount of community connections formed and fostered. The collaborative design process built a network of artists, designers, placemakers and eventually public participants around the concept of reclaiming public space. Adding elements of impact analysis, such as volunteer surveys, video or audio interviews with participants can further add to future iterations of this intervention. Through the *Vancouver Bubble* intervention, I was empowered to exercise my own right to the city, and I learned that creating citizen spaces can contribute to collective empowerment. As I build my practice in design activism, particularly in the temporary placemaking context of Vancouver, I hope to further examine the potential of transforming public space to meet the needs of communities in the long-term. I also encourage art activism practitioners as well as grassroots organizers to explore this space by launching their own experiments in reclaiming the right to the city.
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CITIZEN SPACES
Experiments in Reclaiming the Right to the City

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