

Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

01-03 April 2016

Abstract Submission Form

- 1. Paper / Proposal Title:** Tweet This!: How Digital Networks are (re)Defining Political Agency in Cincinnati
- 2. Format:** Written paper / Verbal presentation.
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- 5. University or Company Affiliation:** Studio AMD

6. Abstract:

Medium-sized cities in the United States have historically held weak political agency relative to the concentration of social and economic capital in their surrounding suburbs. In Cincinnati, this economic and legal dependence for funding has forced the city to appeal to the non-urban interests of its wealthy periphery for the approval and success of its political agenda. The decades-long failure of such appeals has caused the cyclical deterioration of Cincinnati's infrastructure and the marginalization from the political arena of those it serves. Further, the increased power of the suburbs to determine everyday life in Cincinnati from afar has privileged individual, distant, and digitally mediated rather than communal and physical forms of political engagement with the city.

The same digitally mediated forms of engagement, however, are becoming increasingly available to all demographics of citizens, (re)opening the exclusive discourse on Cincinnati's urban planning to those who were previously marginalized. This paper focuses on the tactical use of social media and its operational protocols in the intense online debates surrounding Cincinnati's 2009 and 2011 streetcar funding referenda as examples of new forms of political agency in contemporary urban planning discourse. These tactics challenged traditional narratives and pathways of mass information dissemination by emphasizing unfiltered, spontaneous, and individualized actions of digital-citizens. In doing so, they leveraged digital-citizens'

powerful networks of shared interests to create grass-roots coalitions which transcend the suburban/urban dichotomy.

From this analysis I propose expanding the city to new constituencies and new areas through its integration with digitally-mediated networks. Understanding such networks of interest as expanding the social contract of the city to former 'non-residents,' I question whether the contemporary city can still be imagined as a static, bounded object. Ultimately, I ask what the continued viability of cities will be as urban participation, identity, and capital becomes increasingly digital-global.

7. Author(s) Biography:

Aaron Tobey is an architectural designer, and thinker from Providence, Rhode Island. He is currently working as a digital artist conducting research on the relationship between digital tools, forms of representation, and political agency. Aaron attended the Rhode Island School of Design on a graduate fellowship for his Master of Architecture where he was awarded a 2015 Graduate Studies Grant, to continue his thesis work through field research aboard the container ship, ZIM San Francisco. Aaron obtained his Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the University of Cincinnati during which time he also attended the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris. His academic work has explored the effects of utilizing global trade mechanisms, new media, and perception on architectural space as a tool to affect social change.



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