Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Commons-centric Participatory Design as Driver of Wellbeing.

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• Abstract (300 words):
How might participatory design influence residents to be stewards of public spaces? Design for Agency believes that ongoing stewardship of public/urban spaces (maintenance, not littering, curbing your dog, etc.) requires creating a sense of pride and respect for our urban environment, and inspiring empathy for our natural environment.

This paper will discuss how first-hand research in Flatbush, Brooklyn between 2016-2018 elicited the desire for less waste and better management of waste issues in the area, and a participatory design project that addressed those issues with a spatial intervention in partnership with a community garden. By enhancing the commons and encourage stewardship, we expand the management of our shared urban environment from city governments, nonprofits, and private businesses to the everyday resident. We refer to the commons here as areas that exist in public that have potential to nurture neighborhoods
through ongoing, cooperative stewardship, but stand at risk to be enclosed by privatization.

With more shared ownership of public spaces (our commons, such as swaths of sidewalk, empty lots, city tree pits, lawns of grass on public and private property), there is more pride of place. During the research process of examining spaces and local needs, and the process of designing interventions that respond to them, people cooperate with each other. They get to know each other, their surroundings, build trust, and learn what values they share between them.

We believe the potential for a process at this scale and in this context is an engaged, informed, and motivated populace. When everyone works for the community, there will be no separation between the government and the people.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Taylor founded Design for Agency with the belief we can design more agency in our lives, and help others to so too.

She has a MFA in transdisciplinary design from Parsons, The New School, a BFA in communication and packaging design from the Fashion Institute of Technology. She is passionate about contributing to the awareness and practice of the commons as a resource for community resilience, and using creativity as a tool to bring people together around those shared civic issues. She is the director of Building Blocks, a program that leads participatory design projects that enhance our ownership of our shared public spaces.