URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Subverting the Smart City: Dis-)Assembling Urbanity in the Age of Neoliberal Governmentality

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• Abstract (300 words):
Batty’s (2017) assertion of the increasingly pervasive role of computers and algorithms in the making (and unmaking) of the public sphere and public space is as accurate as it is not engaging with how such technologies are affecting extant patterns of social and environmental injustice, uneven development, neocolonial and post-colonial power differentials, and the “right to the city” in its numerous constructions and iterations.

This paper will investigate how “techno-managerial solutions” (Kaika 2017, 95) have failed to deliver socio-environmental justice, and the deployment of computers and other types of technology has, under the guise of developing sustainable and resilient cities, exacerbated the marginalization, exclusion and disempowerment of already marginalized and disenfranchised neighborhoods, demographics, and communities. It will also look at how members of these groups are developing counter-measures, strategies and tactics. Using frameworks such as DeCerteau’s “spatial strategies and spatial tactics”, assemblage theory (e.g. Latour 2005), agonistic pluralism (e.g. Mouffe
it proposes technology as an extension of material and spatial culture, and another dimension where conflicts and contestations are enacted. In doing so, it challenges technocratic, expertist and largely apolitical positions often iterated by algorithm-driven design, planning and decision-making methods, and argues that the technologies that make cities “smart” are suppressive, but also may form a contested terrain where conflicts about fundamental values and the form and performance of society are being fought out. Looking in particular at recent movements such as Black Lives Matter, the insurgency at the US capitol, and predecessors such as the Arab Spring or the Occupy movement, it develops a framework that makes visible the often hidden or camouflaged entanglements between physical-material urban space and the technologies used to map, design, plan and ultimately control such space. Rendering these invisible relationships visible is a key tactic in “exposing, proposing, and politicizing” (Marcuse 2009) processes and actors, and achieves Mitchell’s (2003, 211) postulate “to be effective, politics must be made visible in public space.”

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

Joern Langhorst is an Associate Professor in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver, the Interim Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture, and a fellow of the Colorado Center for Sustainable Urbanism. Previously he has held faculty positions at the University of Oregon and Iowa State University. His research and teaching focus on theories of space, place and landscape, on media theory and issues of visualization and representation, emphasizing film, and on post-industrial and post-disaster sites with a focus on the cultural production and agency of space and place. A particular emphasis is on post-industrial, post-colonial and post-disaster cities and their mechanisms of de-development and re-development. He has been consulting on the recovery and redevelopment of post-disaster and post-industrial sites nationally and internationally, with a particular emphasis on the role of emergent technologies, alternative processes and the relationships between traditional and new actors and agents.