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(Re)Claiming Spaces:

Collaborations towards community advocacy

Naming Space

As a young boy we constantly migrated. The spaces we interacted with were approached as passive and were only a temporary stop on our way back home. Like many families in marginalized communities, our family was in constant search for opportunities in the neighborhoods we lived in, the schools we attended, the languages we spoke, and the jobs we worked. Space was something we passively interacted with, a place we rested in and learned in while building support networks through friends and family. Spaces we lived in lacked the infrastructure to support our needs or those of many other families, the lack of access to power and language made the idea of affecting change difficult to imagine. It was these experiences that first brought about discussions with family and neighbors about our responsibility to enact change in the communities we live in. These conversations were the first to begin framing what space meant, how it was constructed and who was responsible for the creation, development, and maintenance of the spaces we live in.

Reimagining Space

My parent's lack of interest, as with many other families in the community, was not out of disinterest with how our community looked, felt, or what resources were offered. It was the belief that citizens like them - citizens within marginalized communities - didn't have enough power or efficacy in being agents of change to actively transform the communities we lived in. Through one on one engagement with citizens that interact with public space on a daily basis we can begin reimagining how space can be redesigned and used to address the needs of the citizens. Spaces can be reclaimed, reimagined, and reappropriated through a collective vision of what space can be. As an artist, community member and teacher I believe that the role of the artist is to explore and advocate for access to design, construction, and equity in ownership of spaces within the communities we learn, live and work in. As artists, teachers, citizens, and community members it is our responsibility to create safe spaces that promote the facilitation and fabrication of ideas amongst people with various levels of access to power to feel comfortable transforming and activating the spaces they live in.

Deconstructing Space

Many programs are looking at addressing the failing infrastructure of schools, housing, and communities. Community members along with artist, politicians, and citizens are beginning to think about how we can reclaim spaces by addressing needs and beautifying them and in doing so open up possibilities for design interventions that address underutilized spaces. Through the design

and creation of public interventions, we analyze underutilized spaces in the community, learn who has access to power in a particular space, and regain our own power over these spaces. Artists - People need to be intentional and honest with our time, patience, and trust in engaging community members to look and pay attention - to notice those things they have become distant from. As artists, it's our responsibility to build relationships and work with communities in a way that creates an equitable, honest, and trustful relationship where the artists' ideas aren't the only ones that matter. Through collaborative actions we can bring attention to underutilized spaces to begin indicating the need to transform them. It is the discussions, the development of projects that address the concerns people have that will ultimately transform our perception as citizens and artists in reimagining what type of impact we have on the spaces we are part of. It is these activations that can generate more questions, more curiosity on how we could impact the spaces we live in, learn in and work in.

Activate Space

This is my call to action to readers of this essay, to politicians who want to engage their constituents in participatory budgeting, to community members who want to see change happen within their communities, to those who don't feel they have power or agency and to the artists that live and work in marginalized communities where these conversations are constantly happening. How will we enact the change we want to see in our communities through the development of spaces that invite collaboration, discussion, and generate

participatory systems that activate the community spaces we have a responsibility to reclaim?

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