

2016

#Cone-Versation: A Tactical Urbanist Experiment

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#CONE-VERSATION
A TACTICAL URBANIST EXPERIMENT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Landscape Architecture

in

Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture

by

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May 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Thesis is dedicated to the residents who fought for the recovery of New Orleans from the Hurricane Katrina, to those who cherish the indigeneity of the city, and those who act for change.

In the process of design and installing the process, my thesis committee has provided unprecedented support which allow the projects to happen. I would want to thank Professor Wes Michaels for installing insights of design and motivations of action in me. Thanks for Professor Austin Allen for providing profound knowledge in humanity and stewardship. Thank you for Professor Lake Douglas for the strictness in the validity of knowledge and standard of work.

I would also want to thank those who helped me through the process of installation: Bernadette Carriere for being the gatekeeper of indigenous culture of residents in Lower Ninth Ward, and making New Orleans feel like home to me; Shaohuai Xing for being a friend always ready for help; and Matty Williams for the tools and the great conversations we had.

Thanks for the experience with a lot of friends a co-works who I might not be able to list here, thank you for the memories that shaped me into the thinker and activist that I am.

Thank you for my family that I was not able of offer accompany during the seven years of college.

Yifu Liu
2016.04.01

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
1 NEW ORLEANS' DILEMMA.....	1
1.1 Bring New Orleans Back Commission Plan	1
1.2 The Lambert Plan and the Unified New Orleans Plan.....	2
1.3 From Paper to Action.....	3
2 EXPANDING TOOLKIT	4
2.1 The Missing Tools	4
2.2 Tactical Urbanism as a Conversation	6
2.3 Tactical Urbanism as a Physical Solution.....	9
3 EXPERIMENT	12
3.1 Brief	12
3.2 Material & Message	12
3.3 Methods.....	15
3.4 Sites.....	18
4 OUTCOMES	19
4.1 The Instant Rain Garden	19
4.2 The Crossy Road.....	24
4.3 The Cone-Versation Facebook Page.....	29
5 DISCUSSIONS	30
REFERENCES	32
VITA	34

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 "Plan for the Future" staff graphic diagram released in the Time-Picayune on January 11, 2006.....	2
Figure 2 Traditional Client-Consultant Partnership.....	5
Figure 3 Increasing Public Engagement Process Requires Expanded Toolkit.	5
Figure 4 "Intersection Repair", Portland, Oregon. Picture from the Project Website.....	7
Figure 5 Interactive Model, Sasaki Associates Inc.	7
Figure 6 Traditional Planning Process vs. Tactical Urbanism Incorporated Process, looking at how long will desired functions take place on site.	10
Figure 7 White Space Cambridge, Nina Chase, Emily Milliman, David Buckley Borden. Cambridge, MA 2015.....	10
Figure 8 "Safety Marker", Diagram from the Pattern Document	14
Figure 9 Marks on the Sidewalk,	16
Figure 10 Screenshots from the Opening of "Treme"	17
Figure 11 Configurations of Each Iteration	20
Figure 12 Talking with the Home Owner next to the Installation	21
Figure 13 Before and After the Installation.	27
Figure 14 Screenshots from the Installation Video	28
Figure 15 Stickers, QR Code, Logo and Hashtag	29
Figure 16 Oyster Shells on Maple Street, the first day and a week after. Photo by Richard Campanella	31

ABSTRACT

The thesis intends to introduce tactical urbanism as a way to expand the toolkit for designers to communicate with their audiences from the public. Lessons from the post-Katrina planning processes urges for better communication tool that invites broader conversation while providing more direct physical outcome from the process. Tactical urbanism is introduced to the city and the discipline of landscape architecture in order to provide a fresh solution to the communication by changing the speech between the authority figure and the residents into a more personal conversation with an invitation through on-site installation. At the same time, it is a powerful tool to achieve instant physical outcome from the process and to provide important feedback for design.

The article documented two on-site projects that the team did in order to invite conversations on the issue of New Orleans' landscape. Through the process of installation, some interesting interaction with the local residents are recorded which exemplify the potential of this methodology and they provides insights for the future interventions.

In the end, the thesis suggested that the design and planning professionals in New Orleans to add tactical urbanism into their toolkit, for a better future of the city.

1 NEW ORLEANS' DILEMMA

It has been 10 years since the traumatic catastrophe happened to the Crescent City. Ever since the failure of the levee, the conversation on how the reconstruction of New Orleans should play out happens in every corner of the city, in the City Hall with technically-equipped professionals, in community centers where the residents try to reinforce the value of their own community, in the newspaper where the a carelessly illustrated diagram incurred furious reactions, at the street corner of Lower-Ninth Ward where folks hangout while looking at the never-the-same scene.

The post-Katrina planning, with the hope of bring the city back and move the city forward, was limited by the dilemma of the city. The need for consensus and the call of action were not fulfill at the same time. Thus, the plans, as Mike Davis once criticized, they died as piles of paper (ix).

In this chapter, we review some important post-Katrina planning process, in order to articulate the planning dilemma of the city.

1.1 Bring New Orleans Back Commission Plan

One particular example of the dilemma in post-Katrina planning, is the furious reaction to the ULI master plan released on January 2006. The infamous diagram was released on local newspaper *Times-Picayune* titled “Plan for the Future”, now broadly known as “the Green Dot Map” (Figure 1). In the diagram, six areas were marked in green circles, where the ULI team has identified as key spots to install large scale of green infrastructure for flood control. The sizes of the circles are the estimated size of the green space in each area. The science behind the diagram is solid. The six areas are the lowest points of New Orleans, where if there comes another flood, whether from internal storm water, or hurricane surges, the most damage would happen. The retention areas would largely contribute to the safety of the whole city. At the same time, the proposed green spaces would largely transform the urbanism of the old neighborhoods, where vast vacancy prevails before the Hurricane. It would encourage denser construction with better concentrated services for the residents.

However, the proposal with insightful vision received furious rejection. One of the key reason is the “Green Dot Map” in the newspaper. The green dots, with “approximate areas of [spaces] expected to become parks and greenspace”, laid directly over the existing neighborhoods, where all the imagination and experience of the residents took place. The green covers houses, where the land and structures have been passed to the residents from generations ahead. It took over schools and other institutions, which the residents fought for with heart and soul from the free-market capitalism. It eliminates the streets, where linger the memory of friendship, love, happiness, and solidity of the people. The over simplification and abstraction in the diagram,

caused extreme misunderstanding. Thus, it aroused unprecedented emotion and objection. The bold plan, however, was never further developed, and died in the form of a poorly developed staff drawn diagram (Harris-Perry, and Harris 159).



Figure 1 "Plan for the Future" staff graphic diagram released in the Time-Picayune on January 11, 2006

1.2 The Lambert Plan and the Unified New Orleans Plan

With lessons learned from the ULI's failed attempt. Another ambitious plan, known as Lambert plan, which tries to bring New Orleans back in the scale of the whole city, start its process. In order to avoid the drastic refusal from the public, which incurs the further development of the ULI's plan, the planning team started from a neighborhood based strategy. Multiple community meetings were held in each neighborhood. Coupling with the community meetings, a website is created as a platform to curate news and other information ("Welcome."). With the extensive engagement processes, the planning agencies were able to create trust from the public to the

planning process. However, as M. Christine Boyer criticized, a lot of the engagement process eventually developed into “meaningless debates” and the public are exhausted from the conversation (132). The planning outcomes are neighborhood specified plans, which fail to address the city of New Orleans as a holistic system.

With the outcome of the community meetings from the Lambert plan, the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) started with the goal to achieve a master plan that addresses the comprehensive issues of New Orleans in the city level. With continued public input through public discussion, the master plan provided an illustrated framework based on three scenarios, Re-pair, Re-build, and Re-vision (City of New Orleans). It is the most detailed master plan in the emergency phase of New Orleans recovery, with comprehensive framework, detailed neighborhood plan, and a list of key points of investment. What worried the residents who participated in the engagement processes is that no real construction outcome happened from the master plan processes. And they felt the citizen participation being a waste of time and energy (Boyer 137).

1.3 From Paper to Action

The two cases demonstrated the dilemma that the city was and is still experiencing in the planning process. On one hand, the huge gap of trust between the authority and the residents requires extensive engagement process. The distrust comes from the long history of racial and social segregation and oppression in the city, as well as the corruption of the government and whole-sale evacuation that Bush government did in the emergency phase. On the other hand, Physical construction from the community input should come in as soon as possible. The physical construction not solely provides functions in the physical space, but it establishes a symbol of one’s intellectual input being respected. However, the two processes both requires time and financial input, and some time they are in competition with each other.

Some cities now, are applying pilot projects in their master planning process. Cambridge, MA for example, in their new planning process starting from July, 2015, might be launching “early action items” and “pilot projects” (“City of Cambridge Selects Consultant for Citywide Plan.”). This strategy shortened the time gap between the community inputs to the final outcomes, but still, the construction of projects themselves might be a multiple-year process.

In the case of New Orleans, the 10 years of recovery and planning has slowly drained the patience of the residents. The public would want to see their opinions being expressed instantly and physically. As design professionals working in this era, we should look for alternative solutions to negotiate with the residents, which not only reflect their options but also can result in substantial changes in the physical space.

2 EXPANDING TOOLKIT

2.1 The Missing Tools

As landscape architects, communication is in every part of our job. Conventional media, such as orthometric measured drawings, collages, physical models, and videos are what we are used to communicate with. The reason for the broad application of the conventional media is the position that designers take in the process of planning and construction. Designers, are generally engaged as consultants to the projects, hired by developers or the city and authorities. The client-consultant relationship defines the workflow of designers (Figure 2). The clients issue the request to the consultant, and the consultant report back to the client with products. The priority of the point to point communication is the clarity and efficiency in the delivery of ideas and messages.

Conventional media is appropriate to fulfill the task in the client-consultant model. They are clear: with all the conventions and paradigms, they help to convey the information clearly with precision. However, the more importation reason for the form of deliverables is that they can be developed independently, which means that the designers can get information of the site, and do their work in the offices, without constantly being on the site. Conventionally, the orthometric measured drawings allow designers to have control over the design with rulers and pencils. Nowadays, digital models and BIM software allow the designers to visualize their work instantly on the computer screen. They deliverables are then turned into the client for reviews. The efficiency of the model enables the participants to concentrate in their own specialty, thus, further structuralize the workflow and conventions.

Urban landscape has intrinsic publicity. The publicity means that the project might affect the public either they are the direct users, they are adjacent to it, or the residents are mutually paying for them through tax. As Melissa Harris-Perrot and William M. Harris Sr. emphasized in their writing, the tradition of American democracy determines that the process of public engagement weights the same as its outcome in the planning process (161). The consensus of the stakeholders validates the plan. The importance of public out-reach cannot be over-emphasized. Community meetings, project websites, social media, are the emerging tools for public engagement. The engagement process has changed the model of work as designers, as they are now not solely reporting to the client as a professional agency. Designers are facing the public who might have little knowledge to the professional toolkits while being extremely passionate about the design. With the public added into the interaction model of design processes, an expansion in our professional toolkit is urgent. (Figure 3)

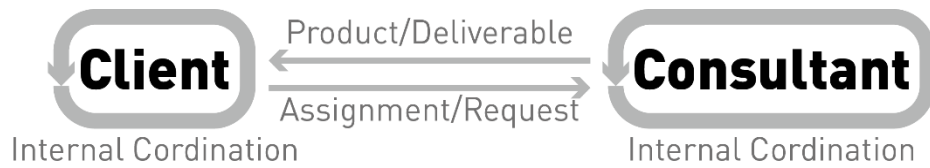


Figure 2 Traditional Client-Consultant Partnership

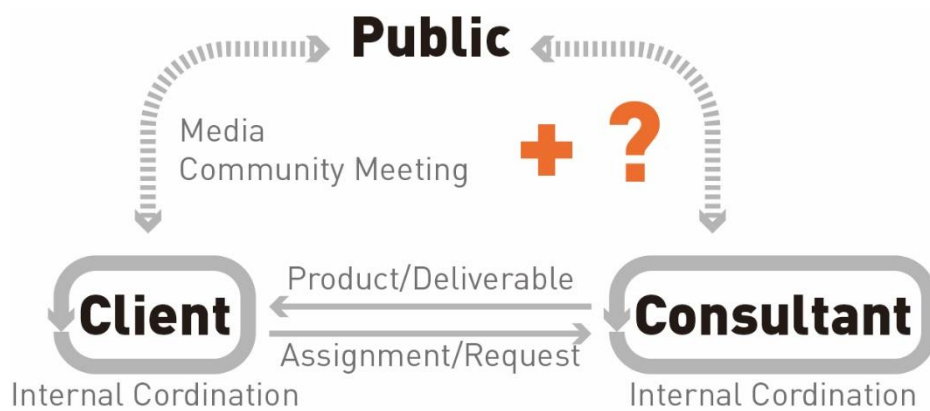


Figure 3 Increasing Public Engagement Process Requires Expanded Toolkit.

2.2 Tactical Urbanism as a Conversation

Tactical urbanism is one of the emerging trend of the place-making practices. In the subtitle of their book, Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia articulate tactical urbanism as “short-term action for long-term change”. Instead of coming from the same theoretic genesis, tactical urbanism practices are a collection of works that have different motives. Some of them are led by the city, while a great range of the practices come from grass-root and community-based initiatives. The authors tried to theorize and unify all the practices in the same framework, while there is still large vacuum in the theory and practices to be filled.

The incomplete theoretic framework, and the power of precedent practices invite us as designers whose works to create space to be part of the conversation. Some of the qualities from the practices of tactical urbanism provide insights to potentially untangle the dilemmas that New Orleans’ planning processes has been confronting:

Change of Speech

Existing practices of tactical urbanism are largely led by grass-root initiatives. “Intersection Repair” is an example: the local communities have safety concern with the fast traffic in the neighborhood intersections. They were expecting the low efficient government would contribute to their urgent need, so they decided to fix the intersection by themselves. With paint from the market and the labor from the residents, the intersection was totally transformed. The bold and colorful paint invites resident to stay in the space, while it calms down the traffic (Figure 4). With other furniture provided by the residents, the intersection has been transformed into a neighborhood center.

The outcomes coincide with the planner’s vision, while the driver being the community and non-authority figures, the project received impressive acceptance. In the conversation of this project, the speech has been replaced from “You” and “Us” into only “Us”.

What New Orleans could learn from the example is, instead of trying to illustrate a vision and conduct works through the traditional planning process, allowing initiatives and individuals to express and construct by themselves, thus creating an inner-group relationship and get to a better outcome that share the same vision with the planner is possible. Tactical urbanism as an engagement approach could probable segue to the establishment of consensus and trust inside the community.



Figure 4 "Intersection Repair", Portland, Oregon. Picture from the Project Website.

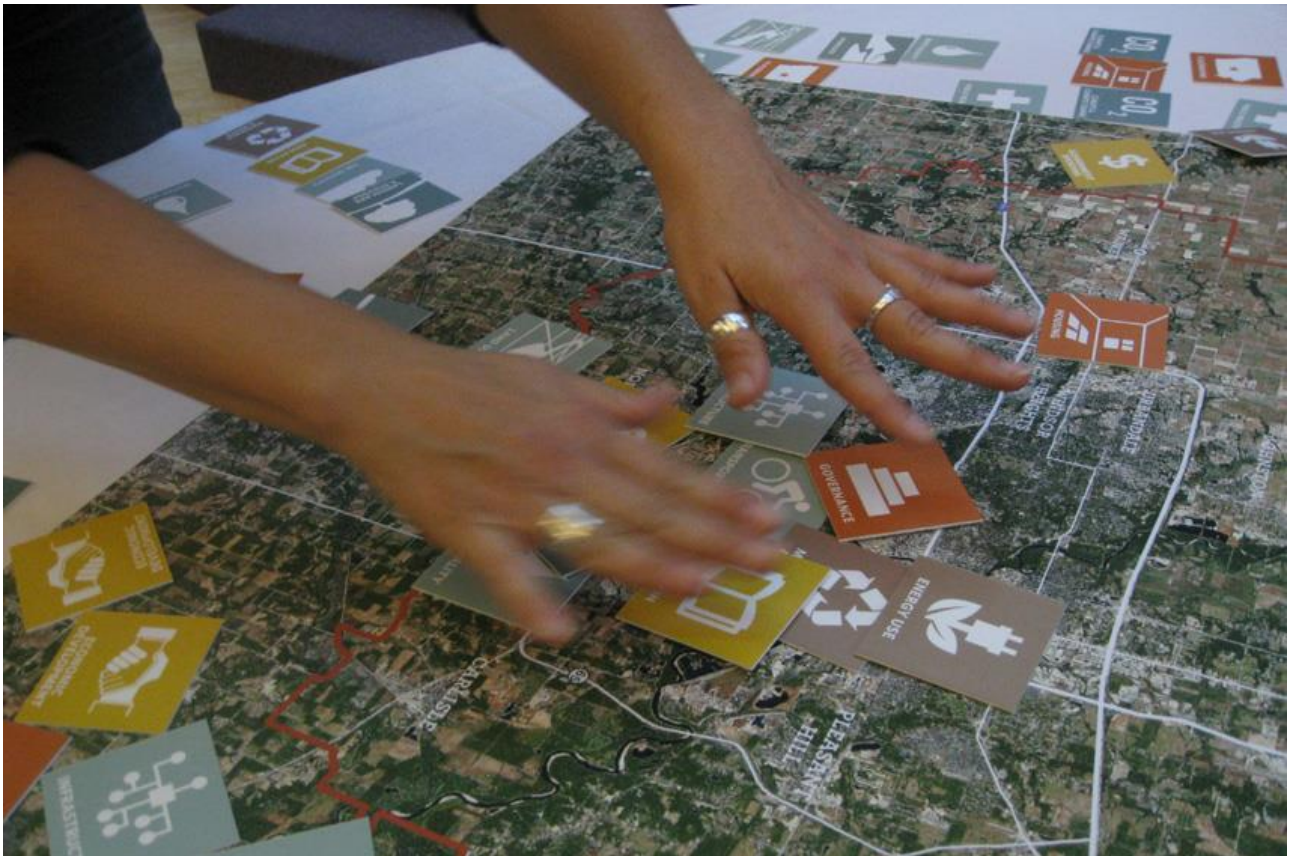


Figure 5 Interactive Model, Sasaki Associates Inc.

Interactivity

Interactivity is an important factor to the success of community engagement. Lending the ability of form and decision making to the community would help to create trust and the sense of ownership. In the existing toolkit, interactive models and sketches are frequently use to channel the community into the process of design (Figure 5).

In the tactical urbanist practices, the temporal and simple materials allow the community to participate in the making of space. In the “Intersection Repair” case, the community painted the intersection, the process allow them to install their personal expression into the final product, and they will show instantly in the landscape. The satisfaction from the process is a powerful bund between the community and the space, hence it further ensure the success of the space.

On-Site

The very quality that differentiate tactical urbanism from the other engagement practices is its on-site quality. In the other design process, the team, both the design team and the community, would only see the results in the physical space during and after the construction. Before that, all the imaginaries that they are exposed to is on paper and scaled model.

People live in physical space. All of our sense systems are structured to interact with physical space, so when the information come from real space, the reaction from our intuition would be much stronger than reading from paper space. The haptic quality of the space, the sound and color, and the interaction with the other people in the same space, allow for not only visualizing the potential of the space, but really forming the sense of existence.

In terms of communication, being in the real space not only allows the audience group to have direct experience from the space, but also avoids confusion and miscommunication. When diagrams are drawing in paper space, because of the lack of physical regulations and details, for those who have no professional experience, it is hard for them to read and refer to the real space. The inability of reading, might cause extreme confusions, which might further incur the resistance to the content and intention of communication. Working in the physical space means that the behaviors are regulated by the context of the site, from both the physical conditions and the social rules of interaction. The regulations limit the efficiency and freedom of illustration, while on the other hand they provide a constant reference to the site conditions, thus, reinforce to power of statement made through the intervention. At the same time, building on the site requires the presence of the designer, or those who possess the knowledge and act the intervention. The presence on-site, is not only a handy way to illustrate the problems and potentials, but also constructed a personal connection to those who need to be engaged. The presence of designer in the community’s daily scene, with the constant exposure and personal interaction with the individuals, allows the designers to get rid of the role as authority. The personal interaction would allow better interaction that might trigger further success.

2.3 Tactical Urbanism as a Physical Solution

Not only will tactical urbanism segue to deeper connection with the public, it also results in substantial change to the physical space. Tactical urbanist interventions might be perceived as cosmetic. We have to admit that the interventions are not able to resolve systematic infrastructural problems. Infrastructural works such as drainage, highway, have to be approached through the traditional process. However, the tactical urbanist approach can result in physical improvement and provides solutions that traditional methods are unable to achieve.

Most projects identified as tactical urbanism do not require massive construction, but it does not mean it has no substantial influence. In the “intersection repair” example, the only materials are paint and removable furniture. Some other tactics concerning the addition of bike line, safer pedestrian cross, can be also achieved through the application of tactical urbanism. The project mentioned are only those which are grass-rooted. With the strategic input from the city and the planning agencies, more can be achieved. In the case of Cambridge, public agencies are to lead the interventions (Kaufman). With more professional input, and greater resources available, we can expect more to be achieved through the tactical urbanist scheme.

Instantness and flexibility

The major difference resulted from the tactical urbanism incorporated planning (TUIP), from the traditional planning and design process is its instant outcome. In the traditional planning process, from the start, a project would have to go through planning, funding, design, and construction, then it could be finally in function. The whole span of time of the process might take multiple years or even decades. With the planning driving tactical urbanism process, the site can be activated instantly with the intervention, so that it can partially fulfill the function as expected from the planning process. (Figure 6)

Traditional Process



Tactical Urbanism

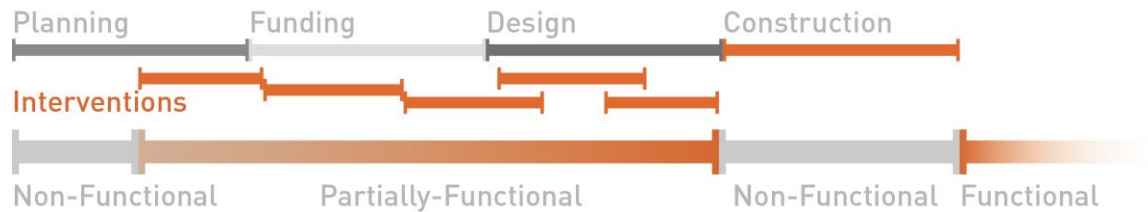


Figure 6 Traditional Planning Process vs. Tactical Urbanism Incorporated Process, looking at how long will desired functions take place on site.



Figure 7 White Space Cambridge, Nina Chase, Emily Milliman, David Buckley Borden. Cambridge, MA 2015

Another important quality that the TUIP offers to achieve success in planning is the flexibility of the interventions. As the installations can be quickly applied, they could also be quickly removed or adjusted. The flexibility of the installations means that through the process of installation and reconfiguration, the function of the site can be ameliorated. In the traditional design process, how the site could function can only be tested through the application of digital modeling tools. With the TUIP, the site itself is used as a model that react to the physical configuration of the intervention, would could provide important experience and data to help designer to optimize the design for the final construction.

Vision

With the material being temporal and economical, tactical urbanist installations casts a unique character to the physical space. The material that are used are usually in vibrant color, since the other materiality is limited by the budget and temporality of the projects. In the project of White Place Cambridge, Nina Chase and her team used inner tubes to activate the underused open space in front of Cambridge City Hall. (Figure 7) The pink and orange color has direct contrast with the snow that covered the landscape, which visually activated the space. On the other hand the color and material invite the users to engage with, thus, children and adults play together creating a vision for the city that has been never witnessed during this time of the year. The vision also helps to install optimism in the city, which is what the planning process tries to achieve.

Tactical Urbanism and Tactical Urbanism Incorporated Planning offer great opportunities to untangle the dilemma that the city is currently facing. They help better engage the audience, offer instant and iterative outcome, and install optimism. Ten years after Hurricane Katrina, with the decade long conversation, some real actions should be taken.

In the following chapter, the article is to document two projects that are done during the spring semester, 2016. The projects are to experiment some of the core qualities of the tactical urbanism.

3 EXPERIMENT

In order to further articulate to potential of tactical urbanism as a possible approach to engage the community in New Orleans and move the city forward, the team designed a series of the interventions as experiments.

3.1 Brief

Create interventions in physical space.
Communicated the idea of change.
Be creative.

3.2 Material & Message

The primary material for the Installation is the traffic cone. It symbolizes Change.

New Orleans after Katrina has gone through a long process of recovery. Regardless of the validity of input from post-Katrina planning, the city is going through vast reconstructions. A Citizen might not have a clear vision for where the city is going, but they experience the change: traffic cones, concrete barriers, traffic tapes, fences, and signs make up our daily experience to the city. They lie in the neutral ground of Claiborne Avenue, Napoleon Avenue, and Jefferson Avenue where the city is renewing its under-sized drainage system. They sit by the side of North Galvez Street in Lower Ninth Ward, where the pot-hole-dotted street is being replaced trying to attract residents back and other investments. They pile up under the intersection of Carrollton and I10, waiting to be placed wherever changes and futures are to be made in New Orleans.

With the construction being the daily scene of a New Orleanian. The traffic cones has partially become a “collective unconsciousness” of citizens. The term is originally defined by Carl Jung trying to describe the behavior of a collective group, which is developed through its successive exposure and intake to certain symbol and image, then became an instinct of the group. For the citizens, they drive on the bumpy roads and maneuver around the traffic cones, precisely and elegantly, as much as what they did to the traffic lights and stop signs that are fixed to the site. As for the contractor and designers, it is the standard easement for construction: they are used repetitively but they will never be drawn in the construction documents. They are well-engineered material -- the PVC coating reflecting vibrant colors, the rubber structure that is tough enough to hold the cone standing and soft enough to avoid damaging the cars, and a rugged base to maximize friction. You will never notice its intricate property unless you ran your car into one someday, or you are like me, someone just went to Home Depot and bought for curiosity. They are flattened in our daily experience into colors, and shape, and instinct reactions.

The reduction and simplification is the way we live our daily life. “You never forget how to ride a bicycle” is a perfect example. When you first sit on a bike, your nerves start to get tight. You curated enough courage to step on the paddle, and then a fall followed. You felt like you were flying when you ride 30 yards for the first time. You were so proud to go riding with your friends for the first several days. Then in the coming 50 years, you will never have that experience again, you are just living with it. Scientist studied human learning process as an establishment of Neuro interactions (PhysOrg.com). Emotion is critical to the process of learning, and it is the fundament of our experiences. After the neuron interactions are well established, our action became more and more intuitive, and we stop feeling from the day-to-day experience that we encounter. One might argue that we do feel emotion in our daily routine. The emotion in our daily routine are acquired in a similar process as riding a bike, it is simplified reaction.

This acquired ignorance has largely influenced how post-Katrina planning processes, through the consequential reactions from the public and planning agencies. Traffic cone is one of the best symbol to demonstrate the ignorance.

A cone is a mark in the space. A mark is a concept, not a form. Laurie Olin once illustrated that “forms comes from forms first” in his infamous essay “Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture” (149). In order to understand the formation of a traffic cone now, we have to go back to its history. Thanks to the citation system of US patterns, we were able to trace its origin.

Traffic cones nowadays are mostly in a cones shape which has the perfect purity and stability as a mark in the land, but they did not show up with such uniformity. The first cone shape traffic sign pattern called “Safety Marker” (Figure 8) can be dated back to 1941, invented by Charles D

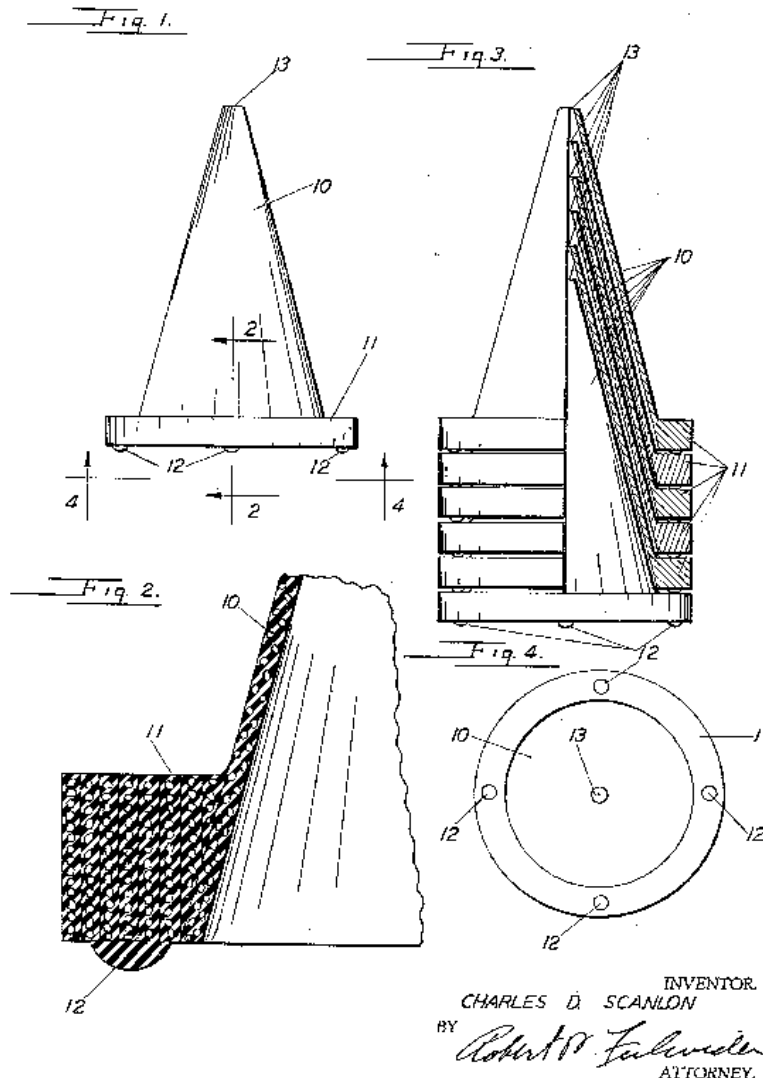


Figure 8 "Safety Marker", Diagram from the Pattern Document

Scanlon, as a replacement to "small wooden tripods or larger wooden barriers to indicate the presence of dangerous spots". They feature the convenience for stacking up and stability while being movable, and reducing damage to collapsing vehicles, from its hollow structure, cone-shape and footing. While at around the same time, there are other varieties that fulfill the purpose of temporal marking. "Traffic warning and directing signal" by Robert J Peterson and "Marker" by Segelhorst George featured self-righting function by providing a rounded bottom with weight. Some other prototypes includes pyramidal shaped signs (Neal) and column shaped "Safety stanchion" (Ford). Compared to the other prototypes, the cone has significant

advantages: minimal details to distract viewers from the central information, reduced damage to vehicles, material efficiency and simplicity in production. With the development of chemical industry, the cone shaped traffic sign is mass-produced.

The material of traffic cones are much less of a discussion, since the major function of cones is to deliver an image other than providing haptic sensations. In the original prototype “Safety Marker”, Scanlon described its materiality as “collapsible hollow conical body formed of rubberized fabric material of substantially uniform thickness”, it is still the same case in the newly fabricated traffic cones from 3M. There might be improvement in the material itself, but the construction language is still consistent.

The purpose of traffic cone is, as Scanlon indicates, being “highly Visible” to “indicate the presence” of something else. There is a strong dilemma of its design. It should be pronouncing itself loudly enough to draw the attention of its viewer, while being transparent enough from distracting the real problems. In reaction to this dilemma, traffic cone become the best form for a “signifier”¹ in linguistic philosophy. In the conceptual situation, a signifier should be faithfully indicating its signified than itself. Traffic cones did the perfect job—it is minimal: a cone shape would be seen as an almost perfect triangle from a distance, the forms from the other prototypes, has lost of redundant details and intricacy. A triangle is the simplest form that we can build in a real world, since you cannot built a point or a line per se. That is why Pharaohs build pyramids, they are triangles in space. Pyramidal traffic markers are not simply enough since they will always cast a linear shadow adding redundant information. In the conceptual process, when one see a traffic cone, what should be paid attention to is what is really going on, construction process, or a barriers etc. That is to say, a cone is an intrinsic indicator to its environment.

The reality is, like every signifier, traffic cones float. “Floating Signifier” or “Empty Signifier” is the term introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss, to illustrate when a signifier would not point to any actual existence. Traffic cones are self-referential. In our everyday experience. As described previously, we subconsciously react to the traffic cones. In this case, traffic cones are referring themselves as a sequence of instructions: “Avoid! Move! Go!”

With the intentional use of traffic cone as the primary material, the designer intend to restore the sense of change to the material an use it as the reminder to the residents for the uncertainty and the potential of the daily landscape that they are living in.

3.3 Methods

In his earlier career, James Corner has taken on a massive mapping project, which then became his master piece “Taking Measures across the American Landscape”. In this project, he

1 The concept is first introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, in his influential work “Course in General Linguistics”

examined the American landscape through the illustration of important parameters in the space: lines, patterns, dimensions, angles etc. He took the daily landscape of America, and by isolating and correlating elements in the researched area, unveiled how the intricate system of landscape is functioning. The methodology can be sourced back its theoretic foundation from J.B. Jackson's writing.

The most significant contribution the work has to the discipline is the demonstration of representation as a central part of design. The work allows viewers to discover facts and knowledge from what is familiar but overlooked to them. The magnificent power of unveils is demonstrated in the paper printed project.

In our daily life, we act similar behavior confusedly or subconsciously. We spray paint our sidewalks to demonstrate the direction of underground pipes, and mark the cracks on it to avoid tripping over (Figure 9). The mark talks to its own audience, such as the engineers and contractors. They are overlooked for the fact that they only speak to the professionals, in the jargon that can only be understood by insiders. However, the moment one realizes that it conveys a hidden system behind the scene, the power of knowledge would create a radical emotional reaction. The emotion, could trigger motivation for actions and conversations, which fulfill the goals of the project.



Figure 9 Marks on the Sidewalk,
Uptown, New Orleans

Another example to demonstrate the power of marking comes from the TV series “Treme” from HBO. In the title sequence, successive images are enumerated, with traces caused by the Katrina flooding: mosses on the ceiling, grass and dirt clinging on the wall, water mark dyeing the wallpaper... with John Boutte singing the “Treme Song” swiftly. With the footage from the Hurricane itself, the sequence secured the signs to the content, with great tension from both repetition and contrast.

Learning from the method, the design team would use the material to mark to potential of the space. With the dimension and location fixed to the physical space, we wanted to channel the perception of the space into its greater potential in the future. The marking process would result in a moment of understanding and curiosity, which would invite the viewer into the conversation that the designer would like to have.

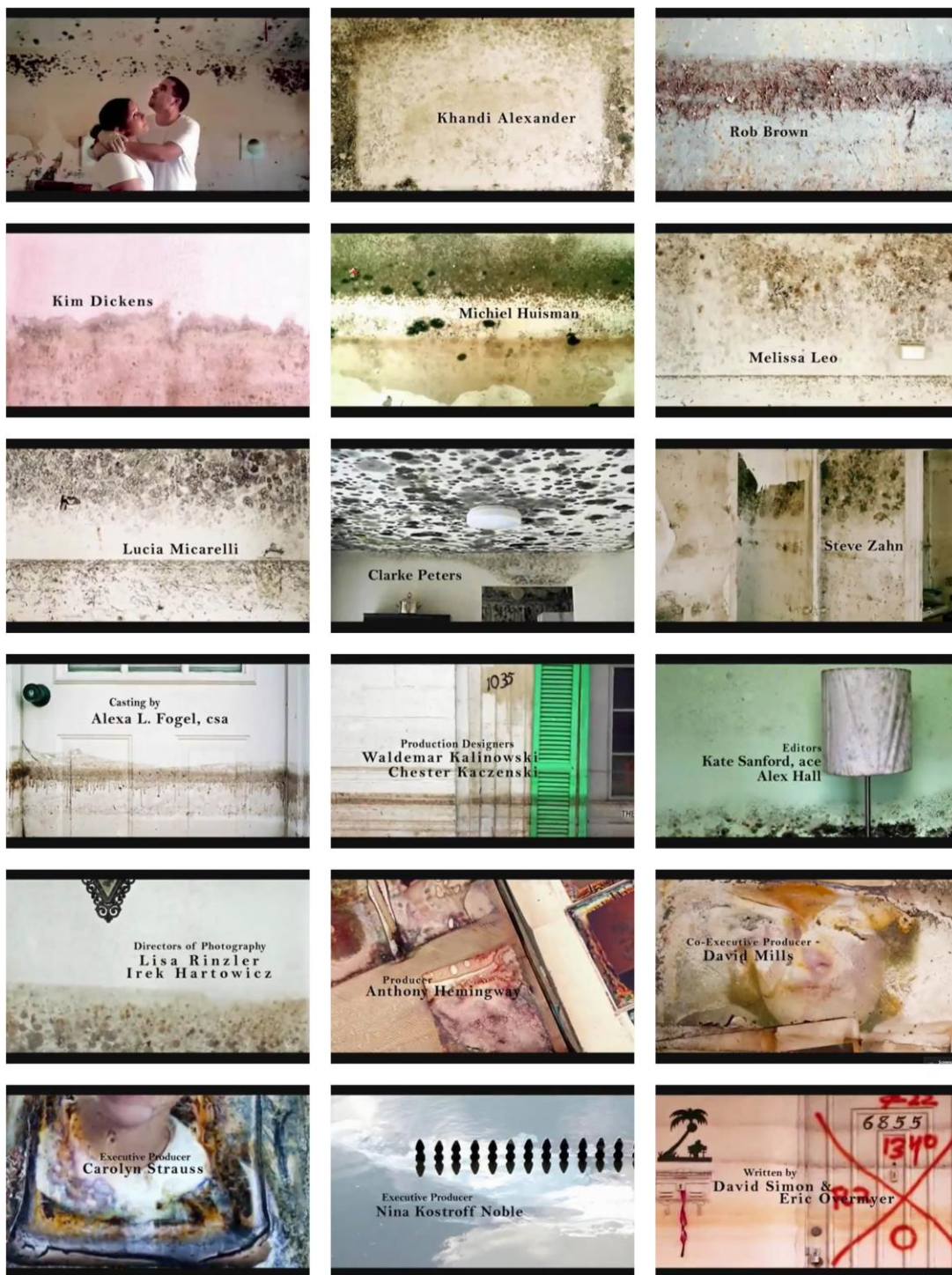


Figure 10 Screenshots from the Opening of "Treme"

3.4 Sites

The installation should happen in the public realm. With the knowledge of private property also has its publicity, the experiment would still take place in the public space with its message to deliver.

Infrastructure, is receiving most attention in post-Katrina planning, either about the green infrastructure that mitigate the flooding issues, or transportation infrastructure that facilitate the recovery of the urban areas. The installation would also want to urge for the consideration of investment in public realm, so it would try to realize the potential of the public space by the temporal installation.

The street-space, is the most direct public realm in the neighborhood. It constructed the very intimate public experience of the residents. In the urban fabric of New Orleans, two major street conditions are identified: the neighborhood streets and the boulevards. Although some of them might vary in scale, most of the streets fall in to these two categories.

With the structural difference, the two major street conditions are different in the sense of space, the speed of vehicles, and the traffic patterns of pedestrians. Neighborhood streets, as being more intimate in scale, created better pedestrian experience, also its slow traffic would allow pedestrian to walk on the surface of the road. The boulevards, often have more lanes on both sides than the neighborhood street, which encourages faster speed of vehicular traffic and the pedestrians would stay strictly on the sidewalk. The boulevards often come with matured oak trees, who linear volume create strong sense of corridors.

The two different conditions also requires different types of interventions, as much they required different design strategies in site designs. For the neighborhoods street, we would prioritize for the pedestrians' right of way. The boulevards, being major arterial vehicular corridor, the car keeps the right of way while more investigations would be on the neutral ground.

4 OUTCOMES

4.1 The Instant Rain Garden

Date: March 21, 2016
Location: Intersection between S. Robertson St. and State St.,
Uptown, New Orleans
People: Yifu Liu, Shaohuai Xing, Bernadette Carriere
Material: Traffic Cones,
Nephrolepis exaltata “Boston Fern”,
Cordyline fruticose “Palm Lily”,
Nandina domestica “Blush Pink”,
Alpinia zerumbet “Shell Ginger”,
Trachycarpus fortune “Windmill Palm”,
Ligustrum sinense ‘Sunshine’ “Privet”.

Purpose:

Testing the iterative potential of physical space intervention.

Process:

1. Material for the installation are bought from Home Depot. The selection of materials are tested against the following criteria:

Indigeneity

The climate and geomorphology of South Louisiana define the flora in this region. The aesthetics of plant material are derived from European and Caribbean influence, in combined with the material that is native in the region. In order to create the aesthetic connection to the local residents, we chose material that is widely used in the region.

Composition

The form of the plant material is another important criteria for the functionality of the installation. We selected the plants that are vibrant in colors: purple, yellow and lime green. The textures of the plant materials are carefully considered. Also the plants come in various heights so they can structure accordingly in order to buffer the traffic from the street, and also matching the height of the traffic cones.

2. Installation took place at around 2:00 PM, on a Monday. The time is decided according to the predicted traffic pattern at the intersection. As S. Robertson St. is not arterial, very few houses are facing the street, and it is blocked on the other side by Tulane University, little vehicular traffic was appending to the street. At the same time, pedestrian flows through the site since it directly lead to the university campus, with no major vehicular traffic.

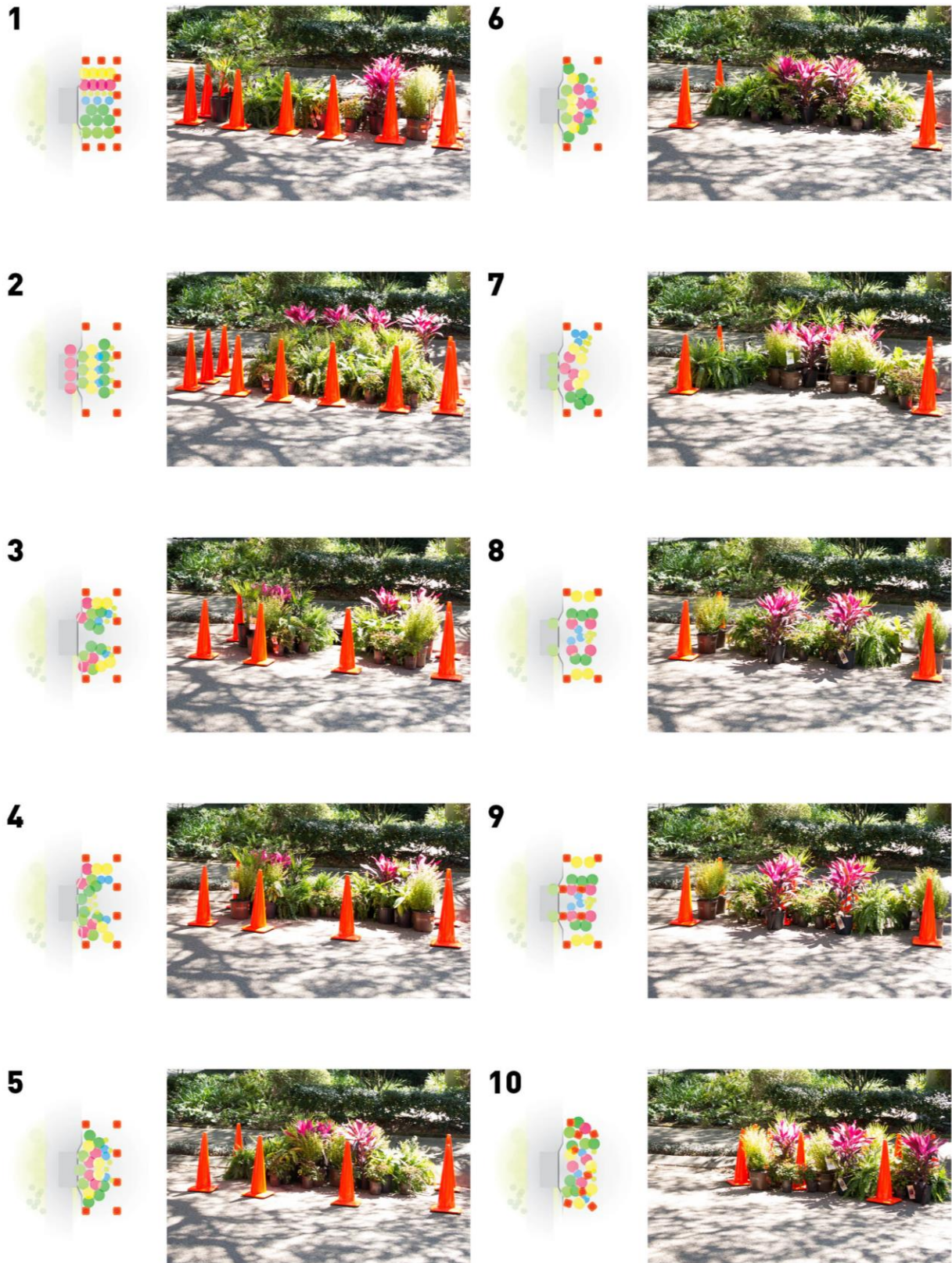


Figure 11 Configurations of Each Iteration

3. The arrangement of materials are not decided before-hand, given the fact that the installation is to test the ability of iterating on site. The team identified a 10' by 3' area along the drain as the boundary of the installation marked with the traffic cones, and start filling in plant materials in a linear pattern. Then the team quickly shift the patterns according to their aesthetics. In the final iterations, the traffic cones are also incorporated into the planting.
4. As the purpose of the installation in to communicate with the community, the team have had interactions with several different groups, as identified below:

Residents

With the street pattern in New Orleans' neighborhoods, the public street is close to the private lots. The adjacency of the public and private activities creates intense relation between the residents and the public. In this case, our street installation, and the sound that we made attract the home owner next to the installation. More details about this incident is described in the notes.

Pedestrians

As S. Robertson St. is a major pedestrian access to the Tulane Campus, a lot of pedestrians passed by the installation during the process.

Some of them stopped and smiled to us, and are curious and happy about the installation.

Drivers

Although there is no major traffic happening on S. Robertson St. in this section, we did encountered a few drivers. They would slow down, and some of them rolled down the window to wave or smile to the team.

5. The installation process lasted for around two hours. It was removed afterward.



Figure 12 Talking with the Home Owner next to the Installation

Notes:

In this installation, we were able to successfully exam two qualities of the on-site installation as a way of communication to the public: the publicity and the iteration. The temporality of the installation allows the projects to happen.

Publicity

We have has an interesting interaction with the home owner close to the installation:

She stepped into **the porch** and start talking to us, her tone sound skeptical and bothered. She asked about what we were doing. After we explained that we are students doing installations in order to test possible solutions for storm water management schemes, she replied that as long as we stay off **her front yard** she is not bothered, and hoped that we could fix **the drain** as it was not functioning well, still with a skeptical voice. She went back into the house after the conversation.

The sets of space articulates the gradient from private space to public realm. From the house to the porch, then the front yard and the street, the publicity increases. Although the street is logistically public, which means that it belongs to everyone, but because of its adjacency to the private lot, the home owner will take a strong sense of the ownership of the public space. This sense of ownership facilitate the formation of the institutions of a neighborhood.

Understanding the sense of ownership will help to understand the case when huge rejection are pushed towards public project proposals, from both the wealthy neighborhoods and the less prosperous ones. The residents, created an inner-group relationship through the shared sense of ownership to the public space, and are strengthened through the daily interaction with each other. When a stranger appear, in a lot of the cases, the professional and unpassionate urban planner and designers, are identified as the “others”, which might incur hostility from the core neighbor groups.

We, in this case, are the strangers in the neighborhood. The installation in this case operated as a cause, a start for the conversation. It avoids the awkwardness of stepping up to the residents and introduce the knowledge. Instead, the installation process allows us to have a conversation that is meaningful and constructive, with the attention from the listener. The transformation of the target audience from a passive listener to an active questioner fulfill the purpose of communication with the installation.

Iteration

In the short two hours, we were able to achieve 10 iterations. (Figure 11). As the design of configurations not being made before-hand, the team act with intuitions like the residents. The materials in the installation, being movable and manageable, fulfill the purpose interaction.

The iterative quality helped the installation to conduct a conversation to the audience. Being able to move the components around, the installation demonstrate strong playfulness, and trigger strong sense of achievement and ownership. It lend in a happy emotion that would help to trigger deeper conversation about the potential of the space, which is hidden behind the daily scene. Secondly, the iterative processes itself is inviting, it installs a sense of mastery and knowledge in the process of breaking down and reorganization. It is the same feeling as watching process videos, the gradual assembly of objects provide great satisfaction to the viewer.

With the process mentioned, the iterative process activate a conversation.

Temporality

The installation is temporal. In the conversation with the lady, we have to assure that we stay strictly off the street and the installation will be removed after the process.

Being temporal allows actions to happen in the street. With the regulations, the lady could have call for a police if she wanted. Our emphasis on the temporality while maintaining a personal conversation with her allows the action to happen without major interruption. She knew that if the installation was an eye-soar to her, she would not see it after it being dismantled. The temporality allows better tolerant to change and interventions. In the case of New Orleans, a lot of projects are not even given a chance to develop, the incremental victory in changing the space could lead into bigger change that the community is hoping for.

Being temporal also make the installation more attractive. Knowing that the installation would be removed, one would like to look and think more during the time it exists. Thus, we can build up the audience crowd through the process, hence, reaching more people and create better consensus in the community.

Through the two paths, the temporality of the installation created better outcomes of communication.

4.2 The Crossy Road

Date: March 23, 2016

Location: The neutral ground on Canal Blvd. to the Lake Pontchartrain side,
Lakeview, New Orleans

People: Yifu Liu,

Material: Traffic Cones.

Purpose:

Testing the transformative potential of temporal installation.

Process:

The neutral ground is now very inactive in certain neighborhoods in the city. The major factor that contribute to the inactiveness on the neutral ground is its passive landscape features: cut-off by arterial roads, lack of programs. Some of the inactiveness is due to the characteristics of the neighborhoods: the more suburban neighborhoods with bigger backyard has much less need for active open spaces.

The site is picked at the location where less traffic is happening and the neutral ground is generally passive. The expectation is when the installation is assembled, the space can be activated.

With limited budget, we have only get 10 cones, which is not enough to construct the whole installation. So we decided that we will place the cones in two parallel lines, which shape the width of a linear path, and then we will “walk” them by removing the last ones in the rows and put them in the front, so that the two lines seemed to move forwards. Then we overlap all the images to demonstrate how much can the space be changed with the temporal installation (Figure 13).

During the installation process, there is an adjacent resident who came to talk.

Notes:

Curiosity

During the process of installation, there came an elderly man, who lives right across the street. He walked towards me and offered a 100 feet measuring tape. He thought that I was using the traffic cones to measure the length of the neutral ground. After I explain that I was doing the installation for school work, he commended that if he were young he would also like to “jump” like me. Then he said if I would need anything he would love to help, and stepped back to the house.

Although the dramatic attitude differences from the lady in the first project might be caused by the personality and gender difference, or even caused by some other incidental factors. The juxtaposition of the two cases that we encountered would still provide insights to our way of public engagement. Both of the cases started by the attention that we caught by doing on site installations, but they went with different directions. The incentive emotion plays an important role in the cases.

In the second case, the incentive emotion is curiosity.

Interestingly, the conventional way of community engagement tries to articulate the facts as clear as possible, which is derived from the client-consultant interaction model. Clarity is also the key of public communication between authorities and public, since any confusion would be exaggerated through public interaction. In our case, there is a change of voice from tradition public engagement process: we are not representing authorities (after explaining that we are from LSU, the authority of the institution helped us to avoid troubles, but we did not represent the authority when we caught his curiosity). We are only representing a grassroots individual. The curiosity that is encouraged in this intervention, might not be generated through the traditional engagement process with clarity, but the nature of the installation process that take efforts to understand, thus, sparks curiosity.

Distance

The different reaction from local residents in the two projects, might also be caused by the physical conditions of the two sites. As identified, the street side conditions and neutral ground conditions have intrinsic difference, the types of conditions defined the everyday landscape of New Orleans.

Based on our observation, the most determinative factor to the reaction is the distance between the installation and the resident. In the first installation case, the installation is right by the side of the house. Although we are in a public space, the distance to one's private property would incur antipathy, while all the passers-by were smiling with us. In the second case, the resident's house is on the other side of the street, there is distinct layers physical boundaries between the installation and the private property: trees, street, and side walk. While being able to see and be curious, the residents still maintain the sense of security from strangers.

Transformation

The intention of the installation is to test how much can the space be altered through temporal installation. In the specific case, with the limitation of the material. We have to look from both the on-site activities and the final overlay of images.

The neutral ground is rarely used for its passive design. With the bold color of the traffic cones

and the activities happening in where there is usually passive, we successfully created a focus point in the space. With the regard that the location we were in where it is more suburban, the focal point is drastically altering the experience of the space.

When the images are overlaid (Figure 13), the linear structure of the site formed by the parallel arrangement of tree lines, streets and houses is disrupted by the perpendicular transection of the line created by the traffic cones. Also, with the video composed by the footages from the time-lapse of the installation process, we were able to create interesting dynamics that was sparse in the neighborhood (Figure 14).

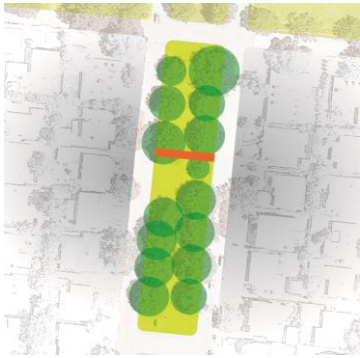


Figure 13 Before and After the Installation.



Figure 14 Screenshots from the Installation Video

4.3 The Cone-Versation Facebook Page

Coupling with the installation, the team also created a Facebook page in order to have more interaction with the general public. The website works in complimentary to the on-site installations: with the installations being more non-explanatory, the website serves as a portal that delivers more in depth information to the public.

As discussed above, the installations are empowered by the temporality in construction to public cognition, while the limitation is obvious: the message can be only delivered on the short period of time when the installation existing. With the website being a more permanent record, the process of installation can be found through the webpage, and there are related information that discusses about more urbanism- related issues in New Orleans.

The Url for the website is:

<https://www.facebook.com/NOLAconeversation>

In order to create better interaction between the cyber space and the physical space, a QR code was generated to allow users to scan and get into the webpage. The hashtag, also allows information being sorted and browsed easily. The icon is to brand the website. They are printed as stickers, allowing instant installation in the physical space. (Figure 15)



Figure 15 Stickers, QR Code, Logo and Hashtag

5 DISCUSSIONS

The projects are to illustrate the core qualities of tactical urbanist interventions. The goal to initiate a conversation through the project is achieved, and the spatial interventions have successfully change the quality of the space. However, as any planning or construction process, resources are key to the success of the outcome. Limited budget and the lack of connections have limited the possibility of the installation.

The projects done have experimented the theory of tactical urbanism in the city of New Orleans, the experience from the physical the cultural context is important for further application of the theory. We want to encourage those who have the wish and resources to participate in the process of constructing New Orleans in a grass-root fashion. We would also want to encourage the planning agencies to apply tactical urbanism as a tool for better community outreach and better design solutions. There are two major reasons for us to believe that tactical urbanism should be incorporated:

Firstly, the physical conditions of neutral grounds provide opportunity for actions in the city level. For the city of New Orleans, the experiment results shows that the neutral grounds appears to be a better location for the interventions. The urban fabric of New Orleans is weaved together by the Extensive neutral ground network, which spread the opportunity of intervention and engagement to the whole city.

On the other hand, New Orleanians are in action now. On 03, March, 2016, Professor Richard Campanella posted on tweeter that an anonymous individual filled the potholes on Maple Street with oyster shells (WGNO). The unsettled creative energy can be channeled to contribute to the Tactical Urbanism Incorporated Planning of New Orleans.

We urge that the planning and design professionals in New Orleans to take serious consideration of tactical urbanism as a tool to achieve both better engagement with the residents and better design outcome from the process. With deeper collaboration between professionals, residents and activists, the city of New Orleans would move forward stronger than ever.



Figure 16 Oyster Shells on Maple Street, the first day and a week after.
Photo by Richard Campanella

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VITA

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