

Space as Event as Oeuvre

Coming back to style and to the oeuvre, that is, to the meaning of the monument and the space appropriated by the fête, art can create 'structures of enchantment'. Architecture taken separately and on its own, could neither restrict nor create possibilities. Something more, something better, something else is needed. Architecture as art and technique also needs an orientation...In other words, the future of art is not artistic, but urban, because the future of 'man' is not discovered in the cosmos, or in the people, or in production, but in urban society.

Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, 1996¹

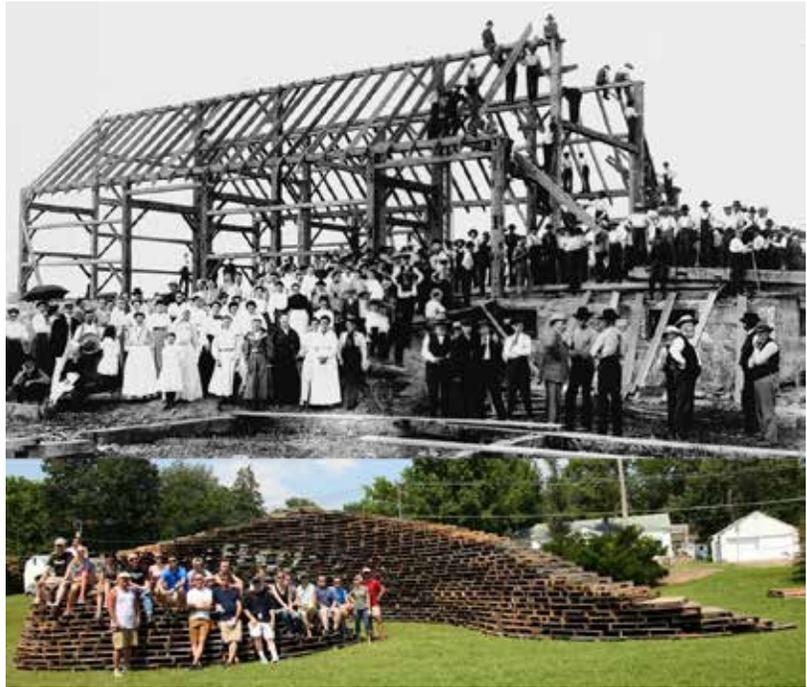
Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more.

Aldo van Eyck, *Labyrinthian Clarity*, 1966²

Situated at the intersection of architecture and art, architectural installations are increasingly recognized as a legitimate form of architectural discourse and practice.³ The communities created through the process of fabrication and installation are often an important, if publically overlooked, aspect of the work.⁴ A form within architectural installation comprising *space as event* focuses on the latent civic potential of the work, deriving from materials, methods of construction, and the self-organization of labor. The traditional Amish barn raising provides an analogy to this form of spatial practice, where by a community of invested volunteers who benefit socially from the work assemble a kit of parts in a short period of time to create space (Figure 1).⁵ While hand craft is important to architectural installation, space as event emphasizes engagement with the work by exploiting methodologies that introduce indeterminism into the process of construction, allowing the work to be designed, to a greater or lesser extent, as it is built. This form of practice has a great potential to create works embodying the totality of work and play,⁶ and to signify the possibility of the city as *oeuvre*, particularly when implemented as a consistent program of consecutive or simultaneous temporary constructions. *Space as event* is a method of prioritizing time over space, acknowledging that time itself is written in space, an aspect of space emphasized by the evidence of its making. Existing structures of urban and cultural revitalization, such as strategic plans, action plans, and cultural plans, can facilitate the implementation of space as event, even though a fundamental contradiction arises between the *appropriation* and *integration* inherent to the *oeuvre*, and the fundamental goal of promoting investment in neglected spatial infrastructure with strategies that increase the exchange value of urban districts.⁷ Indeed, under these circumstances, *works* themselves, while contributing to the *oeuvre*, can become signs for consumption, adding exchange value to the places where they occur. A resilient methodology for the creation of oeuvres has the potential, however, to meet urban needs unburdened by commerce. Art of Space, a project currently underway in Springfield, Missouri,

GERARD F. NADEAU

Drury University



1

suggests that “structures of enchantment,” realized as a “regulated succession of acts and actions,”⁸ have the potential not only to signify appropriation, integration and social accumulation, but also to demarcate and inscribe place-form in resistance to the homogenization of space and the fragmentation of experience.

Art of Space is a collaboration and an initiative, creating temporary, participatory, inhabitable ‘public’ art works in Springfield, a city of 162,191 inhabitants spread over 81.72 square miles, a density of 87.1 persons per square mile.⁹ Founded in the Fall of 2010, Art of Space constructs anywhere from 2 to 4 projects a year at locations in the combined Center City districts of Springfield, including Drury University.¹⁰ Anyone who participates in any aspect of an Art of Space installation is considered a member of the group. The methodology used by the participants promotes “space as event,” meaning that the communal work of creating space--understood as an event--and the temporal, and therefore sensuous, nature of the work, are as important as the formal, visual qualities of the finished space and product. “Space as event” also suggests the ludic aspect of the work (work as action and the thing installed) and the elimination of distinctions between work and play, denoting occasion as the ephemeral delineation of place within urban space. Through *space as event* we understand “structures of enchantment” as a pattern of social relations that occur in and obtain appropriated time and space, a pattern occasioning a form of spatial and signifying social practice--“labour...penetrated by a materially creative experimental science” --creating space as “meaning and pleasure.”¹¹ Meaning and pleasure join as the communal act of building for pleasure’s sake--an embodiment of community at play--and as the truth of *being*, locating meaning and pleasure in the human body. This truth of being, noted by Heidegger as a “thrust”, the “that it is’ of createdness”¹², is for Lefebvre the “animating principle” of “architecture as art and technique,” which “reproduces itself within those who *use* the space in question, within their lived experience.”¹³ *Meaning*, in its association with pleasure and being, is not conveyed or understood through the apprehension or consumption of signs, or through quantitative information; *meaning* is incarnate.

Figure 1: Top: Barn Raising in Lansing (City of Toronto Archives); Bottom: Art of Space, *Rhizomatic Grotto* (Russ RuBert).

KNOWLEDGE, MATERIAL AND TECHNIQUE

Art of Space installations require months of preparation, but fabrication may range from a few hours to several weeks. The installations themselves may endure anywhere from a single night to a few months, and even years when mobile enough for relocation. Participation in the conceptualization or selection, and production or removal of the installations is open to anyone who can comprehend the basic techniques used in the construction and who is willing to perform the work. Some of the installations are out of doors, while others occur as spaces within spaces, accessible when the host space is open to the public. None of the installations are objects for sale. Except in a single instance, at an art fair masquerading as “festival”, no form of payment was required for access to the work. Volunteers of diverse ages, incomes and backgrounds create the work as a gift to the city. Through the association with Drury University, most individuals consistently involved with creating the projects are Drury students or faculty. More recently, the total number of makers outside of the university exceeds the number of Drury affiliates. Up to four-dozen individuals have participated in the construction of a single space as event. All work is large scale, defining and enclosing space, inhabitable by groups as social space, or signifying social space. The project distinguishes itself through a consistent and deliberate program of installations—each one from 240 to 600 square feet in plan--as events in highly visible and accessible locations in Center City Springfield.

There are two approaches to determining projects. In one, the group forms a relationship with an artist whose work demonstrates the potential, to a greater or lesser degree, for ‘designing while building’. Assessing this potential is fairly straight-forward: a) the work must create a social space or transform an existing space into a social space through tectonic means, b) construction techniques must constitute a form of emergent design, allowing participants to design as they build within the constraints of material and site, and c) methods and materials must accommodate a broad range of participants. Under no circumstances are the group’s resources merely a means of realizing a formal work. An artist is invited either to execute a project that explores a latent potential of his or her work, or an invited artist will propose a project to the group. When a guest artist is not involved, the group has several approaches to selecting projects. Often, group participants compile a selection of proposed projects from antecedents, and participants select a project for détournement from the proposed list. This method of developing projects relies heavily on globally distributed information as a tool for learning techniques within the required participatory framework. Another process, which also potentially involves antecedents, requires a series of group brainstorming sessions to generate and select ideas for materials, methods, and site. In some cases a predetermined sites generates the constraints for determining the project, when projects are outdoors, for instance, and subject to rain. Art of Space tests all techniques through a series of workshops to determine best methods. In each case, the group determines projects specifications through discussion and voting at planning meetings.

Space as event methodology favors simple, iterative construction techniques using manufactured materials that typically function as equipment in everyday life. The “bringing forth” of packing tape or irrigation tubing, for instance, creating a heightened awareness of the material for what it is while radically altering the perception of its capabilities, is an important aspect of the work.¹⁴ The associations of materials with everyday life, and the transformation of these materials, contribute to a

metaphor of possibility. Cost is one issue in the selection of materials, expressed as favorably large ratios of surface area or volume to the amount of material used in the installation. Most projects require some amount of prefabrication, utilizing techniques that maximize the possibility for participation.

Materials and techniques used so far comprise a matrix of categories with important implications for interactions between participants, the degree of problem solving required during construction, statics, the type of engagement with the completed installation, and the proposed duration of the installation. Some of the methods utilized by the group will be familiar to informed observers from well publicized installations by internationally recognized artists and architecture studios. Others represent a substantial transformation of the initial inspiration. Plastics and wood predominate. The forms assumed by these materials are predominantly fibrous, as long continuous strands--either highly flexible (no bending resistance) or semi-rigid (such as polyethylene tubing)--and short, fairly rigid fibers (slats). Weaving is the most prevalent technique for creating space. Long continuous fibers--packing tape or irrigation tubing--lend themselves to forms of weaving by wrapping, resulting in catenary surfaces or a type of grid-shell. Knitting can create nets from shrink-wrap, stretched into tensile, anticlastic webs. Woven wooden slats, held together by friction, elasticity and gravity, comprise a lattice shell. The texture of these structures is evidence of the "createdness explicitly in the work" (Figure 2). Heat welded 9 mil polyethylene vapor barrier lends itself to pneumatic Ant Farm transformations. Stacked and corbelled wood shipping pallets emerge as organic monuments of appropriation. When techniques associated with material and performance requirements limit participation in the construction of the installation, the case with heat welded air-supported structures, a programmed activity requiring physical interaction--a form of relational aesthetics--enacts the work.¹⁵ Helium filled beach balls continually lofted from one person to another, while rapidly spinning against a brilliant white background to produce pulsating, stroboscopic effects in a buoyant, rounded, inflated space, constitute a deeply engaging aesthetic as well as a physical and social experience (Figure 3). Physical engagement with the structures, both in the making and consumption, are a component of the integrative strategy inherent to the work. The production of space as a *work* in most projects so far is inherently tactile, as is the experience of the installations. "Nest" installations, initiated in collaboration with artist Doug Johnston, provide an

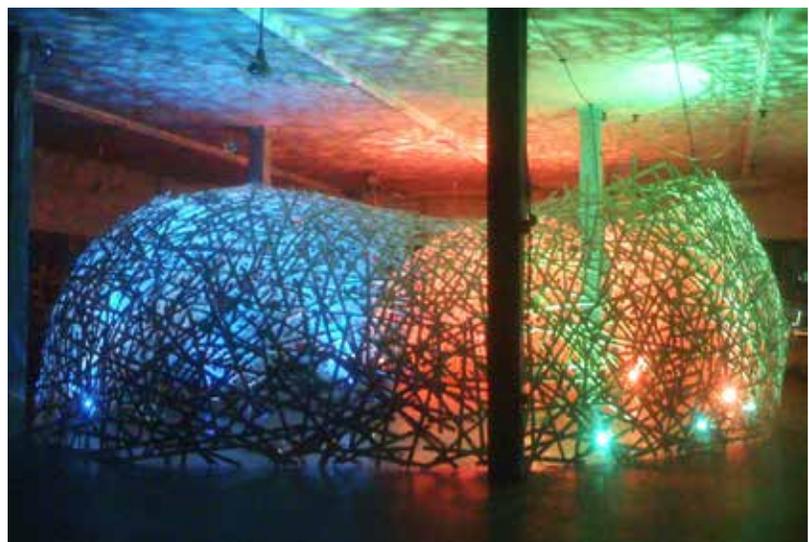


Figure 2: Art of Space, *Woven Lignin/Pick-Up Stick Pavilion* (Gerard Nadeau).

2



3

excellent example. The technique developed by Johnston and his partner, Yu-Chih Hsiao, entails wrapping the tubing in multiple layers around a wooden frame that delineates the desired volume of space. The pattern of the tubing is unimportant provided that the weave resulting from the multiple layers is thoroughly triangulated and adequately dense, but base layers typically establish a structural grid. There is much freedom of flowing, expressive line work possible using this form of space making. Lengths tubing uncoil from one person to the next, hand to hand, a cooperative form of drawing three-dimensional lines that coalesce in space as enclosure, as a form of writing time into space.¹⁶ At each intersection of the weave, participants fasten the overlapping tubes with nylon zip-ties, pulling the fasteners as tightly as they can. Even children contribute to the construction of a semi-rigid grid shell. The removal of the wooden armature realizes an occupiable, free standing 'basket', that when lined with pillows, becomes a gathering and resting place. A Nest can incorporate objects rooted to the site, as a torus, for instance, constructed with a large tree at its center (Figure 4).

The haptic emphasis places the work decisively in the realm of experience, insulating it from misapprehension and consumption as sign. The work promotes the integration of the visual with the sensual, not only through touch, but also through kinesthesia and proprioception, an awareness of the body's movement, location and position in space. This occurs as an aspect of moving through the space, heightened in several cases by the ability to walk, crawl, climb, tumble or bounce on an unfamiliar, disorienting, elastic surface. Sometimes this form of engagement occurs as a requirement for displacement, such as turning a Nest in order to loft its space after a period of sagging, or rolling a Nest as a means of transporting it symbolically from one location to another before occupying it. (Fig. 4b) While striking forms and monumental scale lends each installation to visual consumption, Kenneth Frampton's 'liberative importance of the tactile' remains embedded in the work, inviting touch as an antidote to 'loss of nearness'-- the suppression of senses inherent to scenographic conceptions of form and space. Art of Space adds its sensual emphasis to the 'tactile resilience' of City Center as place form.¹⁷ The methods of Art of Space, however, suggest that key attributes of the place-form resistant to abstract space are not necessarily fixed to the polis. These qualities, and the unity they provide, are in fact mobile, and even nomadic, as place inscribed

Figure 3: Art of Space, *Artsfest Pillow* (Pam Rubert).



4



5

Figure 4: Art of Space, *Sunderland Field Nest* (Blaine Whisenhunt).

Figure 5: Art of Space, *Nest Connect(ions)*(Doug Johnston).

geographically through ritual and memory. Art of Space confirms that “moveable centrality” is possible within existing urban typologies (Figure 5).¹⁸

APPROPRIATION AND FINANCE

The initial goal of Art of Space was the temporary, biannual occupation of empty retail spaces during Springfield’s First Friday Art Walk. In the fall of 2010, approximately 20% of the available ground floor retail space downtown was vacant, and the impacts of the 2008 global recession, while much less severe in Springfield than in other areas of the United States, had halted new construction downtown. Art of Space would appropriate, for use value, spaces of potential exchange value, temporarily returning sequestered space to the public sphere, asserting inhabitation as a right to the city.¹⁹ Space that had been taken off of the market indefinitely, because it could not produce adequate exchange value, would provide encounters, adventure, and transformation during the few hours of the fête like atmosphere pervading

downtown during First Friday Art Walk. In the absence of “collections of objects”, Art of Space would contribute “centrality of play” to the historic downtown. Based on a naïve assumption that building owners would be interested in enlivening their long-empty storefronts once or twice a year in a gesture of civic élan, the goal proved unrealistic after the first, highly successful installation. In response, the conception of the work expanded to accommodate contingencies, and a growing sense of purpose. Any public space in the Center City, municipal or academic, perceived as underutilized for social interaction and use value, became a possible site. Over the past three years, a successful series of works has helped secure an ArtPlace grant for the City of Springfield for the development of an empty retail building, slated for demolition, as a venue for large scale installations. In support of goals leading to this grant, Art of Space currently focuses on the elaboration of an arts district in the neighborhood of the formerly empty building, now known as ideaXfactory, while also producing commissions outside of the Center City.

Upon determination of site, material and scale, Art of Space generates a budget, and pursues funding for the work. City cooperation while asserting the right to public space can be expensive: permits for the occupation of streets and sidewalks, for instance, require a certificate of insurance that can add \$1000 to a project budget, limiting possibilities for appropriation. The Urban Districts Alliance has provided funding for Art of Space installations in the City Center through grants from the downtown Community Improvement District committee, and has collaborated with Art of Space and the Springfield Regional Arts Council to procure Missouri Arts Council project grants. Occasionally, business owners provide direct cash contributions, as well as direct donations of materials, in support of specific projects. Drury University’s Development staff have worked with Art of Space to procure at-cost donations of construction materials from major retailers. Several academic departments at Drury have contributed to events that further art and design pedagogy. Students within Art of Space have procured student organization status for the group as a path to funding through student activity fees distributed by the Student Government Association. A recent installation on the grounds of the municipal art museum—the first large scale public art work there in three decades—received supplemental funding from the museum. The group’s association with an ArtPlace America grant has created another source of funding for projects at the ideaXfactory. Art of Space also saves and reuses materials whenever possible. Logistical support from the Hammons School of Architecture, Facilities Services at Drury, and the Springfield Public Works Department also contribute to the execution of the work. The diversity of funding resources indicates the depth of involvement by the community, with positive implications for the sustainability of Art of Space. This diversity of funding, volunteerism, and institutional in-kind support have enabled the completion of eight large installations in the Center City, as well as three smaller scale prototypes at the Hammons School of Architecture.

Art of Space is not part of the curriculum at the Hammons School of Architecture or the Department of Art and Art History. The fact that participation in the project does not contribute to student credit hour requirements is, perhaps, a disincentive to greater student involvement, but a relatively low level of engagement by the student body makes room for participation by non-university members of the community. Strict volunteerism sustains the aura of community art for and by the community. While installations must account for student schedules and workloads, the freedom of the work from curricular or pedagogical expectations

affords flexibility, and shields participants from academic criticism, creating a space where they can assess the measure of the work on their own terms, in the responses of the general public to the work, and in the media coverage that conveys a sense of impact on the community. "Space as event" suggests a role for the architect as facilitator of appropriation, a difficult role without the financial security and research incentives provided by an academic institution, but a role that has not received pedagogical validation.

OEUVRES AND PLANNING IN SPRINGFIELD

Art of Space originated with and is embedded in programs promulgated by the City, property owners and business associations to promote the economic development of the City Center, framed within a broader "vision" promoting "quality of life" for the entire community. Some of the methods and goals of the group coincide with strategies and actions codified in development plans for the district, authored by committees comprising a broad range of stakeholders and advocates for maintaining the place form of the Center City. The coincidence of Art of Space strategies and actions with those of the strategic plan facilitated support and resources for the execution of works, even if these works critique the city's emphasis on increasing exchange value downtown. The social emphasis of Art of Space appeals to notions of community that enshrine development projects undertaken by the city, in spite of the 'edgy' opposition to the ideology of consumption.

Springfield's Vision 20/20 Strategic Plan/Action Plan established development goals and a range of strategies for achieving those goals, with action plans to implement the strategies. An outgrowth of planning developed in the mid 1990's, the strategic plan, adopted in 2004 and including a five year action plan, shaped city priorities for almost a decade. The plan proposed continuing "to build several distinctive, urban districts oriented around high-quality public spaces that are linked to one another and collectively recognized and organized as Center City," accompanied by a Cultural Plan which included "goals for City Center revitalization and for the use of the arts as a stimulus for economic development."²⁰ While the original intention of Art of Space focused on the commercial core around Park Central Square, the group quickly adopted Center City as its site, not as a series of linkages, but as an area lying within a boundary inscribed by the projects themselves, the boundary "from which something begins its presencing."²¹ Another important strategy in the Plan was to "expand Greater Downtown's position as an art and entertainment district" by supporting "activities such as First Friday Arts Walk, First Night, and other Community Arts Events,"²² events that require permits from the city. Other strategic goals in the plan encouraged infill development on vacant and underutilized sites, and linkages between the Center City Districts.

The strategies and language adopted by Springfield are clearly part of a global pattern merging "developer's interests with consumers' desires with officials' rhetoric for growth" identified by Sharon Zukin as the competitive creation of "destination culture", ultimately leading to restricted access to downtown, and homogenization that is different in form but very similar in structure to the strip-mall, sub-urban homogenization that finds an alternative in the City Center.²³ The activities of Art of Space, however, fit neatly into patterns of redevelopment that proceed through the creation of works authenticating distinct areas of the city. The "right to urban life", however, does not assume an urban morphology predicated on the historic city. The *urban* can potentially assume new forms and structures and "practico-material realization"²⁴ resistant to planning and development.

ENDNOTES

1. Henri Lefebvre, "Right to the City" in *Writings on Cities*, ed. & trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1996) 173.
2. Aldo van Eyck, "Labrynthian Clarity" in *World Architecture 3*, ed. John Donat (London: Studio Vista, 1966) 121-122.

CREATION OF THE POSSIBLE

While the visibility of Art of Space increases steadily with each installation, casual conversations with Springfield residents who encounter the work suggests that after three years of practice in Center City, the opportunity to participate in the creation of the work is not well understood. Continual publicity in the local news media, as well as the affiliation with the ideaXfactory has helped to broaden involvement in the creation of the work; but project planning typically remains the responsibility of a dedicated few. These few are always students and faculty at Drury University, a circumstance reflected in the strong association of the project with Drury, an institution with a tradition of productively engaging the surrounding community. Students at the Hammons School of Architecture have few opportunities to create works that appreciably impact the experience of the city, or that produce the delight evident on the faces of witnesses to the work. Observations of residents encountering the work leave little doubt of its immediate impression, and anecdotes suggest that the work arouses a sense of change in the city, and sense of possibilities that can only be described as 'urban': possibilities of "desire, permanent disequilibrium...dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable."²⁵

The continuing newness of Art of Space to the City after three years suggests longevity for the project, and further opportunities for experimentation and elaboration, for the accumulation and sharing of knowledge, for signification. *Space as Event* succeeds as part of a larger strategy to maintain the place form of downtown, participating in a resurgent accumulation within the space of Center City, as both agent and sign of this resurgence. Their true value, however, lies in the experience of the work and the signification of work and play freed from the market place. These installations comprise representations of the relations of production present in the space of the work, itself a form of building, of art, and while installation proceeds, the production of social space, the materialization of social being. The project is a sign of gathering, the production of that sign, and gathering itself, with the potential to inscribe place and time in even the most homogenous areas of the city.

The question asked at the completion of each project never varies: What's next?

3. Taubman School of Architecture. "Practice Discussion: Benjamin Ball, Elena Manferdini, Nick Gelpi, Jimenez Lai, Monica Ponce De Leon," Vimeo video, 39:30, February 2, 2012, <http://vimeo.com/album/1823604/video/36087412>.
4. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. "Célula Nave, a work by Ernesto Neto," YouTube video, 4:27, July 10, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gaDHWRVzqW4#t=36.
5. Henry Troyer, comments made as Rhizomatic Grotto participant, *Rhizomatic Grotto Artist Talk*, [City Name] Art Museum (August 30, 2013).
6. Lefebvre, "Right to the City," 147.
7. Vision 20/20 Coordinating Committee, *Vision 20/20: The Future is Now, Springfield and Greene County Strategic Plan Summary Document, A 5-Year Action Plan* (2004) 27, 68-80.
8. Lefebvre, "Right to the City," 103.
9. Springfield Missouri QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, accessed September 17, 2013, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/29/2970000.html>.
10. *Center City Planning Element* (May 1998).
11. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden; Blackwell Publishing, 1991) 135.
12. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971) 63.
13. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 137.
14. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 63.
15. Nicolas Bourriaud, "Relational Form" in *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods, with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2002) 11-24.
16. Lefebvre, "Right to the City," 171.
17. Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in *Labour, Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2002) 88-89.
18. Lefebvre, "Right to the City," 155.
19. Ibid, 173.
20. Vision 20/20 Coordinating Committee, *Vision 20/20: The Future is Now, Springfield and Greene County Strategic Plan Summary Document, A 5-Year Action Plan*, 27 & 70.
21. Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 152.
22. Vision 20/20 Coordinating Committee, *Vision 20/20: The Future is Now, [City Name] and Greene County Strategic Plan Summary Document, A 5-Year Action Plan*, 45.
23. Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 232-233.
24. Lefebvre, "Right to the City," 158.
25. Ibid, 129.