

De-Code/Re-Code Atlanta

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The project, awarded first prize for the Streetscape site in the competition entitled, "Public Space in the New American City/Atlanta 1996" reveals the instrumental use of language in the construction of a singular, passive "public realm." Nested within the systems of power that define the city, the coded language of regulation, (zoning ordinances, building codes, and planning guidelines) define, regulate, and authorize the public(s) within the city. Seeking to dislodge static conceptions of "the public" and "the city," our project restructures the text of the zoning ordinance locating public space at the intersection of public policy, urban architecture, and public access.

PUBLIC POLICY

Operating between the formal specificity and interpretive intent of the existing ordinance, the project insets a re-written text into the body of the Atlanta Municipal Zoning Ordinance. The newly created text interrupts the code, establishing a Public Space District that defines the conditions rather than the form of urban "public space." Appropriating the authority of the coded regulatory language, the interpretive intent of the ordinance, once the sole province of administrators and inspectors, is transferred to the public(s). No longer defined as a residual space for passive consumers, the definition of the streetscape is expanded to include consensual action, experience, and, debate.

URBAN ARCHITECTURE

Revealing the city as a site marked by regulation, social action, and construction, lines of ordination (i.e., property lines, signage projection restrictions, access and right of way corridors, etc.) join traces of past structures, (houses, warehouses), systems (trolley, rail) and events (demonstrations, strikes, celebrations) marking the limits of the newly created district. In this way, the streetscape site offers a new context



for understanding the city as a site of conflicting, powers, events, and histories. Together with the information embedded in the surface of the street, structures proposed for the site; shade devices, seating, information panels, and restroom facilities define the streetscape as a space of public action.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Complementing a schedule of on-site public events to coincide with the temporal frame of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, a system of open and reserved-use days encourage continued access by individuals and groups. As defined in the text of the re-written ordinance, spaces within the newly created district may be

reserved by those wishing to organize in public. In contrast to traditional representations of a homogeneous "public body," **DE-CODE/RE-CODE ATLANTA** seeks to offer a locus for the organization and recognition of the "many publics" that constitute the urban population. Mechanisms of public access, given authority through the language of an expanded ordinance, define public space as the site of experience and exchange.

The re-written ordinance and the Public Space District it creates provide the basis for a system of decentralized management most responsive to local conditions. As a point of dialogue, permit processes and debates concerning the status of the public realm provide communication necessary for the support and possible funding of district wide initiatives.

The project resides in an on-going process of public debate, that fosters a shared understanding of the dynamics of public space. Given the legitimacy of public policy language, this debate affords local communities the opportunity to develop, defend, and expand definitions of urban public space.

The project was exhibited at the Nexus Center for Contemporary Art in Atlanta, GA, in 1994.

