

S.Alt City: Interactive Mural

Brett Snyder
University of California, Davis

S.Alt City is an interactive mural in downtown Syracuse that celebrates both the city's industrial past and its current status as an artistic hub. At first glance, the image appears historical, depicting a salt barge and a brine distribution center. On closer inspection, the mural turns out to be a mosaic composed of hundreds of QR codes, each linking to a contemporary arts organization in the greater Syracuse region.

The mural was conceived as a piece of the Connective Corridor, which seeks to relink Syracuse University with the downtown through a combination of signage, pedestrian friendly infrastructure, and interactive installations. While the S.Alt City mural itself is static, viewers are directed to websites with live feed updates, including one that announces events sponsored by local arts organizations, including the Everson Museum, Erie Canal Museum, Artrage, and Lightwork. The QR links are also flexible: they can be changed or updated as new institutions emerge. The mural engages two critical issues in design—first, the use of new media and second, the problem of how to instigate urban life in the post industrial city.

While QR codes have become ubiquitous in advertising and branding, they have yet to be exploited in more artistic or experimental ways. Mobile devices have changed the ways in which we navigate through cities, but have rarely directly affected the built environment. S.Alt City, like other recent QR mosaics such as the Russian Pavilion at the 2012 Venice Biennale, asks how mobile devices might allow city dwellers to engage our surroundings in new and different ways. While the Internet has made information ubiquitous, projects like S.Alt City suggest that new technologies can also be deployed in hyper-local ways that allow pedestrians to access the invisible layers within specific and concrete places.

In addition, by recasting a blank urban wall and an adjacent parking lot as a design opportunity, S.Alt City explores how the existing built landscapes of post industrial cities can be repurposed. Such underutilized spaces are ubiquitous in the contemporary city—voids of activity, not blighted enough to be torn down, but not aesthetically or programmatically rich enough to support the downtown as a vibrant pedestrian environment.

If the car was the primary tool that shaped cities in the 20th century—often inadvertently—it is our job as designers to question how the primary “transportation device”—ie, mobile media, might reshape our cities in positive and meaningful ways.



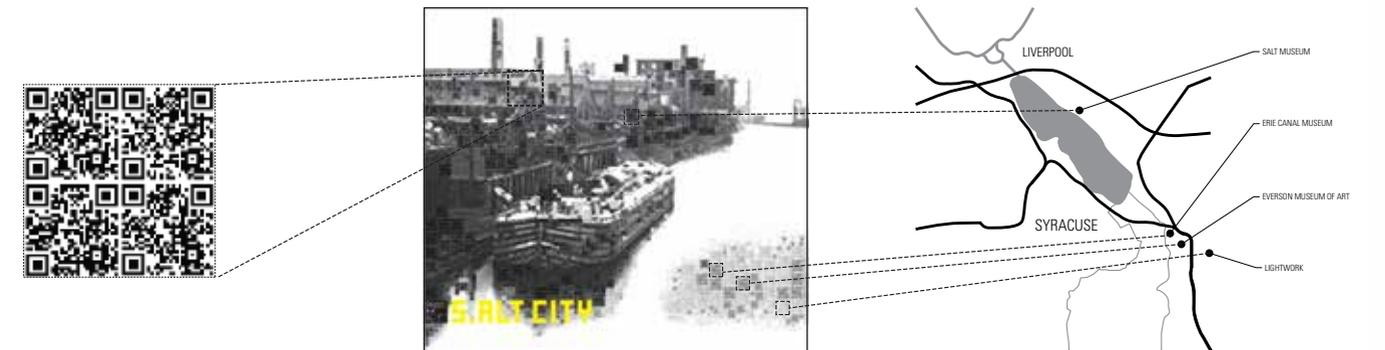
installation sequence



detail



HOW IT WORKS:



1_Small Scale QR tiles

2_Medium Scale Mural

3_Large Scale links to regional arts community