

Acting in Common: Critical Participation in Controversial Urban Development Projects

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Introduction

Recent years have brought increased pressure to open spaces in cities around the globe—be they former industrial sites, cemeteries, or landscapes—by urban development of large infrastructural projects and new residential areas that mostly target a well-to-do clientele. Many of these developments have been criticized as spatially and environmentally problematic (Cuff and Sherman 2011) and socially unjust (Lim 2005; Purcell 2008; Lim 2011), and many are attended by political controversies, civic protests, and a resistance to participate in a prescribed and tokenistic manner in institutionally governed planning processes. What has developed instead is *critical participation* by engaged groups, citizens' initiatives, and social movements that challenge planning processes by employing social media, interventionist practices, and performative methods with which they create a form of "insurgent space" as a starting point for negotiation.

The context-specific tactics and strategies employed globally by civil actors share significant similarities. Furthermore, activist and critical art practices often overlap in struggles for affordable housing, public space, sense of citizenship, and political participation. They have served as tools of critical participation and as such have contributed to urban development processes, where they have strongly influenced public debates and in some instances have instigated new laws or have become a direct input to planning procedures. On a community and individual level, they have contributed to the production of new social relations, subjectivities, and the collective imagining of "other worlds" (Petrescu 2007; Gibson-Graham 2008; Mouffe 2013).

In this article, we address recent performative modes of artistic intervention (Sustersic 2013) and civic, critical practices, many of which include alliances with professional spatial practitioners such as artists, architects, and planners (Rendell 2006; Hillier 2007; Mouffe 2013), by exploring two cases of controversy over large urban development projects in two cities that differ greatly in culture, politics, and tradition. The two cases are Tempelhofer Feld (Tempelhof Field) in Berlin and Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore. We regard these struggles through the perspective of performative acts, including site-specific intervention and material production, and discern *historical reworking*, *curatorial strategies*, and *tactical media* as modes of criticality. Our questions include: What is the agency of critical and creative practices in city planning? Can they inspire novel types of democratic planning? And can they create openings for more-egalitarian cities in the long run?

We propose alternatives to the traditional understanding of participation in planning by broadening the circle of main actors from authorities and experts to engaged citizens and by repoliticizing the discourse on possible urban futures. Research was conducted through participatory actions and interviews with actors in situ, as well as through documentation of processes of struggle in text, timelines, images, and video to draw out and examine participants' experiences in the two cases and thus produce new understandings (Conrad 2004).

Participation through Resistance

The term *critical participation* problematizes the notion of participation and is derived from the concepts of *creative participation* (Micheletti and McFarland 2012) and *critical spatial practice* (Rendell 2011). Political scientists Michele Micheletti and Andrew S. McFarland understand creative participation as innovative forms of participating in politics in more individualized formats, such as in direct actions, in contrast to collectivist forms such as participating in elections and party politics (Micheletti and McFarland 2012). They are aware of civic engagement as crucial for democracy, as well as the problems that arise when social movements turn away from the institutions of representational democracy. In their opinion, many everyday practices are a form of creative participation; that is, they include politically aware consumption. But, despite its transformative potential, their creative participation is not always critical. In contrast, architectural theorist and writer Jane Rendell uses *critical spatial practice* to describe both *everyday activities* and *creative practices* that “resist the dominant social order of capitalism” (Rendell 2011: 24). She places critical spatial practice in relation to recent interdisciplinary studies of the city and argues that we need critical practices that, instead of focusing on solutions, formulate alternative questions. Her critical spatial practice is located between theory and practice and has rarely been discussed in terms of collective action.

The issue of *insurgency* has been raised in planning and geography as a critique of citizen participation in planning, which often occurs through informal processes that are not legally binding and involve the collection or provision of information with no intention to share power. Such “participation” amounts to little more than tokenism. James Holston sees “insurgent citizenship” as a necessary counteragent to modernist planning with relation to state building. He claims that planning theory must be grounded in antagonistic complements: on the one hand, “the project of state-directed futures and politics, and on the other, the project of engaging planners with the insurgent forms of the social that often derive from and transform the first” (Holston 1999: 167). He finds insurgent forms both in social movements and in everyday practices that, “in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas” (ibid.). Holston states that insurgent forms reside in struggles over what it means to be a member of the state, and they result in new forms and spaces of citizenship, as a product of migration, deindustrialization, and other dynamics, where they disrupt normative assumptions and introduce into the city new identities and practices that disturb established histories.

David Harvey (2000) takes up the figure of the “insurgent architect” in his discussion of utopian dialectics. For Harvey, the insurgent architect is a metaphor that portrays an individual with a desire for transformative action who thinks strategically and tactically about her tools and collaborations. Harvey suggests that such an architect is rooted with one foot in today’s reality and the other in some alternative camp, giving her the ability to develop subversive strategies *toward*, create practical tools *for*, and foster utopian visions *of* new social realities. Harvey emphasizes performance and performativity when he notes

that insurgent political practices happen in several “theaters” of thought and action—from the personal, collectivist, and institutional to the universal.

Using Holston’s notion of “insurgent citizenship” (Holston 1998) and Leonie Sandercock’s “insurgent historiographies” (Sandercock 1998), Faranak Miraftab uses the term *insurgent planning* to describe counterhegemonic planning practices in the Global South (Miraftab and Will 2004; Miraftab 2009). She characterizes insurgent planning as transgressive and imaginative. Indebted to Holston’s work, Jeffrey Hou writes about “insurgent public space” (Hou 2010). As with opposition to the state’s legitimization of the notion of citizenship, the insurgent public space is in opposition to the kind of public space that is regulated, controlled, and maintained solely by the state. It is animated by alternative urban practices and forms of activism to imagine a different mode of production in the making of public space. Erik Swingedouw speaks of insurgent political practices when discussing civic protests such as the demonstrations at Taksim Square in Istanbul in 2013 (Swingedouw 2015).

In recent artistic research, participation has been analyzed as a process related to the formation of self-awareness of individuals within the social situation of a participatory process (Sustersic 2013). This process builds on the intersubjective relations that produce the desire to participate and create the motivation to act, as in the collective creation of a self-managed community pavilion with a group of residents in Bochum-Hustadt, Germany (Sustersic 2013).

Performance and performativity can inform political engagement that resists current processes of rapid urbanization. When citizen participation in urban planning strongly influences planning procedures and planning outcomes, the participation itself is often uninvited and in resistance to dominant notions of urban development, such as the assumption that participatory processes in cities must always be instigated institutionally. On the other hand, uninvited participants have used, and benefitted from, existing institutional and legal frameworks and procedures, as in the case of Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin. Whereas traditional models of participation are based on hegemonic conceptions of urban planning, we propose here an open conception in which diverse layers of critical spatial practice are considered in the dynamics of urban development processes.

The Role of Critical Art and Architecture Practice

Chantal Mouffe opposes the pessimistic view that artists and cultural workers (here we include architects and other spatial practitioners, such as planners) can no longer play a critical role in society, having become a necessary part of capitalist production within the culture industries. Instead, she argues, *critical artistic practices* could make decisive contributions to novel types of resistance. She advocates “engagement with institutions” with the aim of transforming them from within as opposed to an autonomist strategy of deserting institutions altogether and acting outside them (Mouffe 2007; 2013). Other critical thinkers and spatial practitioners who, like Mouffe, stress the necessity



of producing new subjectivities and new forms of organization remind us that critical practices are already happening in various contexts, including within institutions (e.g., universities, cultural institutions, even city planning offices), often by taking the form of a tactical micropolitics of resistance (Gibson-Graham 2006; Petrescu 2007).

Gerald Raunig (2009) suggests that artistic modes of criticism are possible as *instituent practices*, which he describes as a form of exodus from institutionalism without escape; that is, neither rejecting institutions nor serving them but challenging and transforming them. A point of departure for Raunig is Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality, as in "the art not to be governed *like that*," which is different from the ideal of not being governed *at all*: "not like that, not for that, not by them" (Foucault 2007). According to Raunig (2009), such critically engaged artistic practice links social criticism, institutional critique, and self-criticism (Sandin 2013; 2015). Among current critical and creative practices, we find three main strands to be crucial: historical reworking, curatorial strategies, and tactical media. Together, they serve as a theoretical and methodological resource for developing and presenting the two cases of Tempelhofer Feld and Bukit Brown Cemetery.

Historical Reworking

National history writing contributes to the making of nations and the production of different kinds of citizens. This is mirrored in the inclusion and exclusion of representations of different groups in national cultural institutions and in the ways cities are spatially, socioeconomically, and culturally divided. However, urban renewal driven by migration, segregation, and gentrification has also led to the writing of alternative histories. Historical approaches have become part of activist strategies resisting urban development and indicating alternative futures. For example, from the movement

protesting Stuttgart 21, a large-scale urban renewal project in Germany, a group was formed that organizes a historical reworking of the contested area through lectures, guided walks, and publications, bringing to the fore forgotten histories (Begleitbüro 2015). Citizens' initiatives focusing on Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin have foregrounded, in historical walks and on websites, the fact that, during World War II, a concentration camp for forced workers was located on the site of the former airport.¹ In Singapore, All Things Bukit Brown and SOS Bukit Brown are citizens' initiatives that conduct educational historical walks through the site of the Bukit Brown Cemetery. Such *performative historical approaches* produce varied urban experiences and urban environments, and they also produce "communities of resistance" and new "contact zones" (Pratt 1991).

Spatial practitioners have used historical strategies to produce new historical knowledge that diversifies mainstream history and foregrounds forgotten or repressed perspectives. Artist Per Hasselberg, in his work *Husbyarkivet* (Husby archive), asked residents of Husby, a suburb of Stockholm, to donate material to his archive as a way of gaining control of the process of contemporary history writing and thus taking control of the representation of the suburb, which usually is highlighted as a problem area in the media (Hasselberg 2012). Aktion Arkiv (Action Archive; AA), a not-for-profit association, is concerned with collectively rewriting a critical urban history.² Through actions such as witness seminars, guided walks, reenactments, public debates, and collective mappings, AA is rediscovering *diverse* histories of common space. The project suggests that, by changing perspective and thus *reframing* how we look upon architecture and urban history, repressed material can be recovered that questions hegemonic positions in urban development and open new spatial and political imaginaries as a precondition for alternative planning futures (Schalk 2017).

Historical strategies, though sometimes criticized for advocating conservative values and not-in-my-backyard attitudes, can map the potential of sites hitherto overlooked, make voices heard that have not been heard before, and foreground perspectives not previously considered. Often they broaden overly narrow discussions by introducing new knowledge and new understanding. Citizens' initiatives such as 100% Tempelhofer Feld (100% ThF) in Berlin, and All Things Bukit Brown in Singapore introduce issues of ethics and spatial justice by supporting marginal claims to space that privilege a multiplicity of the small and the modest over the overarching (muf 2001).

1. See, for example, <http://thf33-45.de> (accessed March 12, 2016).

2. Aktion Arkiv is a project by Sara Brolund de Carvalho, Helena Mattsson, and Meike Schalk.

Curatorial Strategies

Both art and civic critical practices have employed curatorial strategies. We broaden the meaning of *curatorial practices* from “to oversee, interpret, and manage sites of public interest” to include the encouragement of common activities, thus taking care of places and communities as opposed to ignoring or suppressing their local specificities, as may be the case in, for instance, the large-scale exploitation of land.

Curating in this context may be viewed as a “connectionist practice,” whereby spatial practitioners act as curators and creators of meaning through unusual and unexpected connections rather than as planners imposing their “patronizing” meaning on space. *Connectedness* in this respect can be described as a quality of bringing into the planning process aspects that might otherwise not be considered (Schalk 2007). Rather than designing objects and buildings, an urban practice that works to curate might establish and design processes, interactions, and organizational structures. This way of working allows architects and artists to engage with a wide variety of people. Artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, who calls herself an urban curator, unravels invisible legislation, governmental codes, and social institutions so that communities can take control of their own futures (Heeswijk 2015). Writer Sophie Handler, in her work on elder care in public spaces, draws out the hidden etymological roots of care in the word *curating* (from the Latin *curare*) and builds on the urban practice of acting “otherhow” (Petrescu 2007), by enacting a series of ludological interventions that playfully-critically subvert the standard clinical understanding of intervention in public space (especially as used in elder care). For Handler (2013), urban curating takes care of relational/temporal dynamics by engaging in play, care, fantasy, and critique.

Tactical Media

In art practice, corporate and entrepreneurial strategies are often explored and used to critique government organizations and large corporations. For example, artist Carey Young’s exploration of entrepreneurial strategies is an investigation of the incorporation of the personal and public domains into the realm of the commercial world. Mouffe (2007) mentions the Yes Men as artists who use media channels, tactical public appearances, and performance to mimic entrepreneurial strategies in order to demystify and reveal corporations’ and government organizations’ dehumanizing actions against the public. In analogous ways, artists may use an entrepreneurial logic and the infrastructure of existing organizations and systems to imagine and bring about change from within. In architecture, Liza Fior (of the art and architecture practice muf) and planner Ananya Roy speak of the architect as a double agent—as entrepreneur and activist—involved in spatial negotiation on behalf of a client but also with a responsibility toward the public, as a custodian or curator of the public realm. In Roy’s words, the architect is complicit in the production of space but with a potential for social change (Roy 2012).

The citizens’ initiative 100% ThF in Berlin used various media to reach the public, producing umbrellas, T-shirts, and bags with a logo; a professionally designed website; and a newspaper, *Feld* (Field), that is a persiflage of the layout and language of the German yellow press newspaper *Bild*. Their media campaigns made a tremendous difference in how the group was perceived by the public and contributed to winning the 2014 referendum on whether to deviate from the urban development plans of the Berlin Senate by leaving the former airfield open.

Land-Use Controversies:

Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin and Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore

The Berlin and Singapore controversies involve political and planning cultures and institutional and legal frameworks, processes, and traditions that differ greatly. Despite the different contexts, both social movements include critical practitioners who employ similar critical and creative practices. In their struggles, artifacts such as maps, stories, images, and scenarios play important roles in articulating different understandings and possible alternative futures. In both cases, the conflict goes beyond a debate about spatial justice, the right to public space, and the ability to partake in urban development decisions; it has also triggered questions of history, identity, and representation that take on a symbolic significance.

Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin

The planning of Tempelhofer Feld, a former airport in central Berlin comprising 345 hectares, has employed various forms of citizen involvement operating in parallel with top-down planning since officials decided to close the airport in 2008 (Schalk 2013; 2014). The closing of the airport in 2010 can be traced to a 1980s citizens’ initiative demanding the creation of a park. Since then, various ideas and plans incompatible with each other have emerged for the field through open and invited competitions and proposals commissioned by the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment that target the field as a site for urban development. Citizens’ groups, such as 100% Tempelhofer Feld, fear the gentrification of the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and demand the field remain open and available to the citizenry’s disposition. In parallel with traditional instruments of planning and informal participatory processes, the city opened a so-called pioneer process allowing groups and associations to apply to rent, temporarily, a plot on the field. Today, several urban gardening associations and other educational, cultural, and recreational organizations are active there. The citizens’ initiative 100% ThF, although closely related to the pioneers, criticized the pioneer process for catering to future developers. The group pursued legal action to stop the urban development of the site and succeeded in bringing about a referendum, an instrument of direct democracy, which defeated the city’s plan by an overwhelming majority in 2014, in the so-called Tempelhof Law. Since then, 100% ThF has engaged in the right to maintain the field. However, due to the sudden influx of 80,000 Syrian refugees in Berlin

in 2015, the Berlin Senate in February 2016 changed the Tempelhof Law to allow the field to be used as a site for temporary housing for up to 7,000 refugees for a maximum of seven years. The Senate's decision faced strong resistance from the public.³ Citizens' groups criticized the cancellation of the result of the legal referendum as a symbolic act demonstrating governmental power and feared the new plan would lead to one of the largest, most expensive, and most inhumane refugee camps in Germany.⁴

In Berlin, green areas are excepted from the legally prescribed participation process for urban development.⁵ Many of Berlin's large parks and open areas, such as the Tiergarten and Tempelhofer Feld, are administered by a government-owned company, Berlin Grün GmbH, which releases the Senate from some of its legal responsibilities. However, although not required, informal participation processes are usually conducted in green planning as a way to anchor planning decisions in the public. Informal participation activities often consist of workshops led by architecture offices commissioned by the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment. At these meetings, citizens are allowed to react to already developed ideas. This usually results in conflict. Participation in green planning in Berlin is promoted by the politicians but seen as unproductive by both the citizens' initiatives and the administrators of the Senate.⁶

Who are the actors in this critical participation process, and what are their demands? The various driving forces behind the Tempelhof case managed to come together in the citizens' initiative 100% ThF, which developed out of several smaller initiatives and activist groups. 100% ThF includes professionals such as landscape architects and political scientists; associations concerned with environmental rights, such as BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany); and neighborhood groups from the surrounding areas, such as the Nachbarschaftsinitiative Schillerkiez (Neighborhood Initiative Schillerkiez), which addresses social concerns. 100% ThF connects social, environmental, and political interests and claims, such as the environmental protection of the site as a recreation space within an otherwise dense urban environment. Others stress the fact that the field is unique because of its geology and topography, its meager soil composition, and its location slightly higher than its surroundings, which precipitates a flow of cold air that ventilates the city—but only if the field stays open. The main claim is political, however. With “the right to the city” as a point of departure, the citizens' groups demand a fairer process for participation and a more equitable sharing of power (Lefebvre [1968] 1999; Bradley 2009; Purcell 2013).

3. Seventy Berlin citizens' initiatives have joined forces to save the Tempelhof law brought about through the referendum. Simultaneously, they have expressed solidarity with the refugees.

4. Georg Classen, a member of the refugee board in Berlin, calls the accommodation of 2,500 refugees in the hangars of the former airport the largest, worst, and most expensive refugee camp in Berlin (“Berlin plant Stadtteil für Flüchtlinge” 2016).

5. The official participation process includes the publication of information in all major newspapers in Berlin and on the Senate website. Citizens may object within one month and up to two weeks after the objection period.

6. According to interviews with the press responsible for the Berlin Senate Department of Urban Development, pioneers, and members of the citizens' initiative 100% ThF.



In addition to the activists who have organized the citizens' initiatives, so-called pioneer groups use the field for urban gardening, education, and recreation. These groups include not-for-profit organizations, school and university projects, and small-scale social businesses. The pioneer fields are located at the edges of the former airfield on spaces the Senate designated for building and which are administered by the state-owned Tempelhof Projekt GmbH. At the start of the project the pioneers were promised they would be important stakeholders in the planning process, with opportunities for hands-on participation in the transformation of the former airfield into a park. The plan passed in 2012, however, while it included a few pioneer plots, placed them in areas other than those where they are actually located today. The citizens' initiative criticized the pioneers' role as becoming a mere co-opted contribution to the field's mediated attractiveness for investors. Nevertheless, one active member of 100% ThF, the Nachbarschaftsinitiative Schillerkiez, ran a pioneer plot of its own, the Stadtteilgarten Schillerkiez (City District Garden Schillerkiez). On the Tempelhof Projekt GmbH's website, the group defined its role as monitoring the development of Tempelhofer Freiheit “critically [and] constructively.”⁷

7. The detailed presentation of the individual pioneer projects has disappeared from Tempelhof Projekt GmbH's website (<http://www.thf-berlin.de/tempelhofer-feld/pionierprojekte>). The Senate's initial attempt to brand the new Tempelhof area as Tempelhofer Freiheit (Tempelhof Freedom), connecting it to the history of the Allied airlift of the occupied city in 1948–1949, was met with criticism and reminders of the site's earlier incarnation as a concentration camp.

The group used its plot to bring together actors who were concerned about the rising rents in the area and were interested in participating in the development of their neighborhood on their own terms. They positioned themselves as antagonists to their landlords' plans.

In this way, they turned their pioneer plot into a tactical medium, providing a space for meetings, discussions, and the sharing of information, as well as for collecting signatures in preparation for the referendum challenging the Senate's plans. Their pioneer plot was used to bring attention to the issue of gentrification and spatial injustice in the neighborhood and probably contributed significantly to the outcome of the referendum. By participating in the pioneer program, the group also created a channel to the power hierarchies it fought against. Many of the pioneer activities were, in this sense, Trojan horses. They acted within an established technocratic system and used its vocabulary to other ends, critically appropriating and transforming the preexisting structures of the pioneer fields (Richardson 2002). Tactical media often aim to do the opposite of the media they penetrate (Holmes and Sholette 2005), and in this case the medium revealed the Senate's invitation to participation as dishonest and formulated an antithesis to the Senate's hegemonic urban planning paradigm as exercised on the former airfield. It also turned consumers into producers (de Certeau 1984). However, as of 2016, the former airport hangars house 2,500 refugees, and the Senate plans to expand the refugee housing onto the field. Rightwing groups have discovered tactical media, too, and have begun to spread racist propaganda on the Internet by producing YouTube clips of fake news bearing the logo of Berlin's public-service Radio Berlin Brandenburg.

Early in the debate about the future of the former airfield, activists and citizens' groups studied the history of the site, especially its Nazi past.⁸ An association dedicated to commemorating Nazi crimes perpetrated in and around the Tempelhof airfield started to form soon after the decision was reached to close the airport in 2008.⁹ The association, which was formalized in 2011, organizes walks, lectures, readings, and open conversations with former forced laborers and eyewitnesses. The reworking of history through the citizens' initiative has led to an increased awareness and interest in the history of the site by universities and some political parties and finally also the Berlin Senate. In 2012 and 2013, archaeological excavations took place, after which three informational signs were placed, forming the start of an "information path" that would gradually evolve to twenty-seven signs describing the site's past.¹⁰ Citizens have thus initiated a historical reworking of the past that has reached a broader public.

8. They were following up earlier initiatives such as the anti-fascist promenades (Antifaschistische Spaziergänge) of the 1980s by Erwin Beck and Heinz Drebert, who had been persecuted as Social Democrats during the Third Reich, and the efforts of the early 1990s anti-fascist associations and organizations to erect a memorial for the politically persecuted.

9. The association was named THF 1933-1945, Förderverein zum Gedenken an Nazi-Verbrechen um und auf dem Tempelhofer Flugfeld e.V. (Association for commemorating Nazi crimes perpetrated in and around the Tempelhof airfield).

10. The excavations were conducted by the Institute for Cultural Heritage in Berlin (Denkmalamt) and the Freie Universität. The last signs were installed in December 2015.

Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore

Since 2011, the All Things Bukit Brown and SOS Bukit Brown citizens' initiatives have struggled to save the historic Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore, which authorities and developers want to destroy to make room for a new housing development and motorway. As the need to obtain land for new urban development has increased along with the rapidly growing economy, former cemeteries and burial sites have been gradually cleared to make way for redevelopment. Through their social media channels, the activists foreground both Bukit Brown's value as a historic site and its ecological value as part of an estimated 233 hectare "green lung" within the city (Nature Society (Singapore) 2011; "Petition: SOS Bukit Brown" 2012). These citizens' initiatives strive to raise awareness both locally—through historical walks, site clean-ups, public lectures, and art exhibitions supported by artists and freelance cultural workers—and internationally, by connecting to global organizations such as the World Monuments Watch. The initiative has mobilized thousands of participants through events at Bukit Brown and via social media; it has also publicly criticized the government for its undemocratic and relentless urban planning practices while, at the same time, seeking dialogue with the authorities.

The current detail plan of November 2014, which proposes the building of an eight-lane motorway through the cemetery, goes back to a master plan developed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of 1991 (Chong, Lin, and Heng 2014). The citizens' initiatives All Things Bukit Brown and SOS Bukit Brown formed in October 2011 after a lecture at the Singapore Heritage Society presented a plan to demolish large parts of Bukit Brown and exhume of 5,000 graves. Since then, the initiatives have protested the dismantling of the cemetery. Their aim is to save this culturally and ecologically unique urban space and formalize its status as a national park that showcases Singapore's cultural heritage and biodiversity.

Early participants in the initiative included workers in the fields of culture and the arts who were concerned with questions of cultural heritage, urban development, and nature preservation in Singapore.¹¹ Over time, the initiative attracted a diverse group of active members, volunteers, visitors, and tourists, through a variety of public events, cultural and educational programs, campaigns, social media, and newspaper articles.¹² The initiative consists mainly of three units that work closely together: All Things Bukit Brown, which seeks to educate the public about cultural and natural heritage through the

11. The initiative includes prominent figures such as the architect William Lim.

12. Bukit Brown Cemetery is listed in all major tourist guides.

experience of historical spaces and storytelling; SOS Bukit Brown, the more outspoken branch of the initiative, whose campaigns openly oppose the government's development plans; and a group of volunteers who offer regular free cemetery tours. They collaborate with two nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations: Nature Society (Singapore) and Singapore Heritage Society.

Rather than use tactical media, the initiative strategically employs a variety of media channels to inform the public about the government's demolition plans. In 2012, after a closed-door meeting with the authorities, All Things Bukit Brown published an open letter to the Ministry of National Development and issued out a press release calling for a moratorium on all building activities in Bukit Brown Cemetery "until there is clarity over long-term plans for the area and discussions over alternatives have been exhausted" (All Things Bukit Brown 2012). Their activities also reach well beyond the local communities. In addition to websites and Facebook pages, the journalist Claire Leow (2013), one of the founding members of All Things Bukit Brown, used an appearance on TEDx Singapore as an opportunity to introduce Bukit Brown to a wider public. The Brownies, as the activists call themselves, successfully lobbied for the inclusion of Bukit Brown Cemetery on the Monuments Watch List of the New York-based World Monuments Fund in 2014 (World Monuments Fund [n.d.]). Bukit Brown is now internationally recognized as a valuable heritage site, and any development on the site will be documented and highlighted (Chong 2015). Moreover, since 2012 the historical and cultural value of Bukit Brown Cemetery has repeatedly been brought to the attention of the global community through international press reports, including in the *Wall Street Journal*, the BBC, CNN, Voice of America, *The Economist*, and China's Xinhua News and CCTV. Even the United Nations inquired into the decision-making process and public complaints over the proposed highway.¹³

Bukit Brown Cemetery, one of the rare green spaces in Singapore, appears as if "unplanned," wild, and uncontrolled. The municipal cemetery was abandoned in 1973 and since then has developed into a nature reserve with high biodiversity and an abundance of species. Recently rediscovered, it became a site for recreation, picnics, and animal watching in the middle of the city. The citizens' initiatives foreground the many qualities of the site by taking care of Bukit Brown Cemetery, and by curating actions such as historical walks, storytelling, drawing lessons, bird watching groups, contemporary art exhibitions, filmmaking, and photography. Guided walking tours combined with storytelling

about individual ancestors are a core activity of the initiative. The tours attract relatives whose ancestors are buried in Bukit Brown Cemetery, as well as interested visitors and tourists. In many cases the relatives tell their own personal stories about their ancestors who are buried in the cemetery. The design of these public tours changes constantly to accommodate newly discovered tombs or to adapt to demolitions that have already taken place. The tours focus on experiencing colonial and national history through the discovery of individuals' destinies, often by unearthing the personal life paths of ordinary people.



13. Farida Shaheed, special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights at the United Nations, sent a letter to the Singaporean government on May 29, 2012. The government responded two months later (Chong 2015).

Over time many of the volunteer guides have become autodidactic repositories of information and knowledge and have taken on the role of unofficial custodians of the cemetery.¹⁴ The tours are conducted in English and Mandarin to cater to an international and multiethnic audience. They have de facto become inquiries into the national representation of “authenticity.” In official history, Bukit Brown, founded in 1922, is presented as the first municipal Chinese cemetery in Singapore, as well as the oldest and largest outside China. Terence Chong, a scholar of social and cultural studies, together with historian Chia Ai Lin and sociologist and photographer Terence Heng, argue that “the multi-ethnic complexion of the immigrant population” was selectively suppressed, thus allowing the People’s Action Party government “to exorcize the ‘ancestral ghosts’ of different ethnic groups for universally accessible myths such as multiculturalism and meritocracy.” The walks following individual ancestors’ stories are a form of critical history writing that has uncovered a burial ground of ancestors of many ethnicities, cultures, and religions (Chong, Lin, and Heng 2014: 36). Collectively they show another picture, of broader regional flows and networks that have converged on the island of Singapore.

Chong, Lin, and Heng situate the authorities’ construction of Bukit Brown Cemetery as an “authentic” Chinese space within the on-going tension between the contradiction posed by the economic demands of a global city and a desire for a nation-state identity. At the same time, they note that constructions of different authenticities have been vital for the sustained public interest in Bukit Brown. They have expanded the representation of the space’s ethnic Chinese origins, as well as the state’s rigid CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) structure. Instead of being seen as an exclusively Chinese cultural space, the cemetery, thanks to a historical approach that focuses on individuals’ life traces, has become a place for a multiethnic community’s shared past (Chong, Lin, and Heng 2014).

14. Since 2012, the “Brownies” have given tours to approximately 11,000 people. In addition to public tours, a variety of organizations have engaged the Brownies for guided walks. These include international organizations such as the United Nations Women’s Group, the Penang Heritage Trust, and the Cub Scouts of America; local organizations such as community clubs, the

women’s rights group AWARE, the Peranakan Museum Docents, and the Society for the Deaf; and educational organizations such as the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Concluding Remarks

The hard facts suggest the failure or partial failure of both struggles. A motorway will run through Bukit Brown Cemetery, and temporary buildings will be raised on Tempelhofer Feld. Despite this, the conflicts have led to new questions about citizenship, discoveries of repressed history, and a stronger awareness of the environment. Our interest is in site-specific performative practices in actual conflicts over the use and designation of public space. These controversies highlight current issues of undemocratic and spatially unjust land-use politics, such as the lack of diverse historical accounts and thus the exclusion of some groups from representation as citizens, and the repression of crimes against humanity for the sake of marketing real estate. They also suggest the possibility that alternative narratives can be produced for future perspectives in urban development.

These struggles challenge institutional models and routines of democratic practice, whereby practices of resistance and participation mutually shape one another. Further, they evoke the emergence of symbolically important images of the contested places, and as common actions they may contribute to the creation of shared memories and community building, which may affect the perception of place for several generations.

Critical participation also produces social relations between the institutions and the “insurgent architects.” To explore these relations, we examined the performative tactics and strategies of resistance used by citizens’ initiatives and the spaces thereby produced. The two sites addressed in this article, Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin and Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore, provide examples of the three types of critical performative practices that were sketched theoretically: *historical reworking* using performative collective actions such as walking and storytelling; *tactical media* and the strategic employment of media as more-or-less subversive appropriations of existing structures; and *curatorial strategies* such as taking care of the concerns of sites in conflict and the marginalized communities that may be involved by making them visible and raising awareness. Both cases show the necessity of anchoring participation critically and socially; for instance, by partially rejecting the prescribed modes of participation in urban processes. In Rendell’s (2006) words, a critical spatial practice may work in relation to dominant ideologies by questioning them while simultaneously drawing attention to wider social and political problems. Processes, tactics, and strategies of critical participation in urban development projects, though context-specific, also show similarities and correspondence in a globalized world. Through social media they reach out to an international community engaged in questions of spatial justice by exemplifying the environmental conditions, political circumstances, and consequential tactics bound to local cultural, social, and political contexts.

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