Violence at Rest

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Abstract

*Violence at Rest* is a multidisciplinary project centered on the exploits of the International Urbanauts, a society of artists and activists dedicated to the use of education and direct action for the creation of kinder, more equitable and more compassionate cities. This thesis examines the history, usage and motives behind exclusionary design and how artists have reframed public perception of homelessness. The use of exclusionary design within Boston, Los Angeles and other American cities is a moral, artistic and societal failure. As artists are essential to the creation of exclusionary design, it is the responsibility of artists to critique, expose and undermine exclusionary design.

Through humor and absurdity *Violence and Rest* exposes exclusionary design as an ineffective and cruel response to homelessness. This thesis analyzes the Centennial Circle Action, a direct action taken by the Urbanauts as an artistic critique of exclusionary design. The Urbanauts are an imagined public service dedicated to reintroduce compassion to exclusionary environments and the self appointed stewards of a more equitable city. For this goal, the Urbanauts work to strip exclusionary design of its effectiveness with education and through direct public action.
Introduction

My role as an artist is to imagine a better world. Art has the power to reveal and challenge unethical power structures. The International Urbanauts were conceived of as a mock emergency service dedicated to compassionate action to reinforce the right of people experiencing homelessness to live within the city and to question the accepted cruelty of exclusionary design. Through my project, Violence at Rest, I use artistic intervention both to reframe the conversation around people experiencing homelessness from public nuisance to human beings and to uncover the tools cities use to exclude them.

In America, most noticeably in the larger cities, there is a crisis of homelessness. The cause of this crisis is multifaceted, including rising property prices, a crumbling social safety net, and inadequate mental health care. In response to rising rates of homelessness there has been a clear social response, but it rarely involves compassionately increasing services or rehousing. Instead, urban designers have purposefully redesigned spaces to make them hostile towards people experiencing homelessness through the use of exclusionary design.
Chapter 1: Defining and Understanding Exclusionary Design

Exclusionary design is the purposeful use of design to make spaces quietly hostile towards certain populations — most notably people experiencing homelessness. All design encourages desired usage and discourages undesired uses, it is the purposeful targeted nature of exclusionary design that makes it harmful. Possibly the earliest use of the phrase ‘exclusionary design’ is by Linda Marie Lamb in “The Relationship of Past and Present Homogeneous of Elderly Residents in Low-Income Housing” (1990). Lamb, focusing on design’s impact on the elderly, describes exclusionary design as “the social and political consequences of creating an environment or building that denies access and mobility to various population based on their physical characteristics.”¹ The phrase, as I use it, is closer to Gordan Savičić and Selena Savić’s definition of ‘unpleasant design’ in Unpleasant Design.

Unpleasant design is an accumulation of urban phenomena in which social control and its inherent design play a significant role in the way we perceive and engage in public, semi public and semi private space [...] We look into the silent agents that take care of behavior in (semi-) public space, without the explicit presence of authorities (security, police, etc.). These agents are materialized in objects and installations, which ensure that control is implemented in the environment, through design of urban spaces, urban furniture and communication strategies.

Unpleasant design has specific target groups and operates primarily at several demographic layers the congregation of marginal groups is often a target of unpleasant design implementations. Young, substance misusers and homeless people are frequently official reasons for unpleasant installations in public space.² Savičić and Savić popularized the usage of the phrase ‘unpleasant design’ in 2013, however, other phrases have been introduced, including ‘hostile design,’ and ‘defensive architecture.’ For this thesis I use the phrase exclusionary design, as it most precisely describes the intent of these designs and fixtures and focuses attention on the harm caused by exclusion. Likewise, I use the phrase ‘people experiencing homelessness’ as opposed to ‘the homeless.’ This word choice
denotes the transitory nature of homelessness, does not define people by their situation, and reflects people experiencing homelessness’s inherent humanity.

Exclusionary spaces and objects are designed with only one use in mind and resist all others. An exclusionary bench is one where only sitting is possible. Certain examples of exclusionary design serve useful purposes. Bollards protect pedestrians from cars jumping the sidewalk, and dangerous or restricted areas are often constructed in ways to avoid attention. *Violence at Rest* is focused on exclusionary design used to punish, expel, and exclude people experiencing homelessness. Spaces exclude people experiencing homelessness in two ways: the introduction of architectural fixtures that resist being rested on and the removal of more inclusive fixtures.

My project, *Violence at Rest*, is an artistic response to exclusionary design. I view exclusionary design as an artistic malfeasance: the use of design and art to punish vulnerable people. Exclusionary design is art misused, and it must be directly rejected by artists with art. *Violence at Rest* is focused on design that excludes people experiencing homelessness, with other examples brought in for context or to make specific points for the sake of clarity. Likewise, the direct action and research occurred in Boston, focusing on exclusionary design used by Northeastern University and the city of Boston. This action was timely and necessary, as the City of Boston is currently implementing more exclusionary design in new developments. My project is further influenced by my experience of living in Los Angeles and New York, where exclusionary design is the norm. The pervasiveness of exclusionary design in Los Angeles serves as a warning of what Boston could become if exclusionary design is allowed to spread unchecked.
The most common exclusionary fixture is the three-armed bench. Their form is similar to a traditional bench with a long sitting space and back. However, instead of an uninterrupted seat there is an additional arm that bisects the bench lengthwise. This arm makes lying down impossible, removes sitting space for a third sitter, and makes sitting with friends awkward. Other examples of exclusionary design are long spiked rails bolted to formerly unoccupied flat planes (a place to sit or lie down), large planters crowding out space underneath overhangs (refuge from the rain and snow), and angled grates or caged over heat exhaust vents (places to gather in the cold). Widening the definition beyond fixtures designed to exclude people experiencing homelessness adds further related examples, such as attachments to stop skateboarders and statues to Confederate generals intended to make communities feel unsafe to black residents.

The modern influx of exclusionary design seems to have originated in the 1990’s policing push to “Design out Crime.” This still ongoing movement is a collaboration between police, city planners, designers and citizens. Their goal is to create defensive, and easily surveyed public spaces to reduce crime. This movement aimed to reduce potential areas for loitering and crime by walling off spaces, using natural and video surveillance and by using exclusionary design. Artist Sarah Ross critiqued these defensive spaces in her Archisuit (2005) series. Her series of sewn tracksuits have large extensions that fit into the negative spaces that exclusionary design leaves. The almost alien silhouette of the Archisuits reveal the inhumanity of the exclusionary design by showing the lengths people have to go to find comfort on them. Artistic interventions like Sarah Ross’s Archisuits strip the veneer of normalcy from exclusionary design and implore the audience to question exclusionary design’s purpose.
Arch suits (2005), Sarah Ross. Image used with permission.
Three armed benches are the most common exclusionary design feature because they are easily integrated and easy to ignore. The most obvious examples of exclusionary design are easy to spot—spiked gates and new arms bolted haphazardly onto old benches—but exclusionary design is most insidious when it is camouflaged. These exclusionary designs, meant to be hidden from the public, can be as subtle as a planter under an overhang or as gaudy as a sculpture covering a heat exhaust vent.
Camouflaged exclusionary features do the same damage as other exclusionary features while avoiding critique. In attempting to hide the exclusionary intent, those who implement exclusionary design show that they understand its inherent cruelty and potential for protest. When there is a design improvement it is often lauded and bragged about. Exclusionary design in contrast only functions when it does not attract attention. The camouflage is a specific application of design used to hide its hostility. As design is being used to hide the damage of exclusionary design, *Violence at Rest* uses art and education to counter that camouflage.

Exclusionary design features are implemented in conjunction with the removal of public services. The removal of public restrooms from parks and other public spaces is a particularly striking example. Mike Davis documents this phenomenon happening in Los Angeles during the 1990s in *City of Quartz*. He explains that, Los Angeles as a matter of deliberate policy has fewer available public lavatories than any major North American city. On the advice of the LAPD (who actually sit on the design board of at least one major downtown redevelopment project), the Community Redevelopment Agency bulldozed the remaining public toilet in Skid Row. Agency planners then agonized for months over whether to include a ‘free standing public-toilet in their design for South Park. As CRA Chairman Jim Wood later admitted the decision not to include the toilet was a ‘policy decision and not a design decision’. The CRA downtown prefers the solution of quasi-public restrooms’- meaning toilets in restaurants, art galleries and office buildings- which can be made available to tourists and office workers while being denied to vagrants and other unsuitable. The toiletless no-man’s land east of Hill Street in Downtown is also barren of outside water sources for drinking or washing7.

The policy turns toward ‘quasi-public restrooms’ is also the norm in 2019 and has made cities more unlivable for everyone. Removing public restrooms targets the base human needs of people experiencing homelessness by making the act of using the restroom into an economic transaction. The city’s abdication of responsibility for the needs of the people allows for businesses to discriminate against people experiencing homelessness. With stymied legitimate
options to use the restroom, those who cannot find a restroom use illegitimate unhygienic options including public defecation. This is a public and personal health hazard, as well as a legal one. By removing legitimate and legal options to use the restroom, communities criminalize this need, giving police another reason to arrest.

Various city’s departments of transportation have removed benches in favor of ‘lean bars’ or simply removed seating altogether in an attempt to make the space hostile towards sleeping. Instead of benches, the City of Santa Monica, California uses in its bus system single seats with armrests and a small structure nominally for shade but situated so the shade is rarely on the seat.

Removal of public features punishes not only people experiencing homelessness but everyone when they need to use the restroom or wait for the bus. In an attempt to use design to
make space undesirable for people experiencing homelessness, city planners have created a more unhygienic environment where finding a restroom is a stressful economic transaction for everyone. The removal of seating in subways and bus stops similarly punishes the wider population. Exclusionary spaces make the city more unlivable for the elderly and people who have just finished a long shift of work.

These design decisions are neither neutral nor isolated. Instead, they exist within legal structures and have to be maintained by the force of law. The removal of exclusionary fixtures by members of the public is vandalism. Likewise, attempts by people experiencing homelessness to create safe spaces are impeded by city governments. When, Seattle Police removed an encampment from under a bridge in 2018, the Seattle Department of Transportation quickly installed a bike rack to make putting up tents in the area impossible. The City of Seattle, their Police and the Department of Transportation all worked in concert, to address homelessness as an emergency and what they achieved was stopping people from finding shelter from the rain.8

Police breaking up encampments of people experiencing homelessness is neither new nor rare. In City of Quartz, Mike Davis’s 1990 history of Los Angeles provides historical context for the current crisis of homelessness. Davis chronicled the efforts police took in the mid-nineties to remove people experiencing homelessness and their disastrous results.

The police lobbied by Downtown Merchants and developers, have broken up every attempt by the homeless and their allies to create safe havens or self organized encampments. ‘Justiceville’, founded by homeless activist Ted Hayes, was roughly dispersed; when its inhabitants attempted to find refuge at Venice Beach, they were arrested at the behest of the local councilperson (a renowned environmentalist) and sent back to the inferno of Skid Row[…] The LAPD periodically sweep through the Nickel [Skid Row], confiscating shelters and other possessions and arresting resisters.9

When city governments have to interact immediately with the public, they currently have relatively few options. Medical emergencies are dealt with by Emergency Medical Services.
Fires, car accidents, spills and miscellaneous hazards are dealt with through the Fire Department. That cities respond to people experiencing homelessness with the police force frames them as dangerous, possible criminals, and puts people experiencing homelessness at risk.

Since the mid-nineties when Davis wrote *City of Quartz*, there has been tangible progress. In *Martin v City of Boise* (2018) the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals determined that the “government cannot criminalize indigent homeless people for sleeping outdoors, on public property on the false premise they had a choice in the matter.” More so, the ruling determines this on the grounds that punishing sleeping outdoors when there are no other options is cruel and unusual punishment, a violation of their eighth amendment rights. This ruling directly affects California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands. While this ruling is not in effect nationwide it may act as precedent for people experiencing homelessness in other states. Boise is attempting to challenge the court ruling in the Supreme Court and the final outcome is unknown.

While the law in California has changed, public attitudes and policing tactics necessary for positive change are slow to shift. There are multiple reports of cities surrounding Los Angeles hassling people experiencing homelessness to move to City of Los Angeles property. In response to public and police pressure, tents are often hidden, in Los Angeles on freeway embankments and in Boston hidden amongst high vegetation.

Even the most positive advancements such as Measure HHH, which passed in Los Angeles, have been slow and unequipped to deal with the scope of the problem. The measure appropriated 1.2 billion dollars to provide 10,000 residencies for people experiencing homelessness. Under a third of proposed units are approved and fewer are under construction.
with only one, The Irmas Family Campus, complete. With rising construction costs, it is unlikely that Los Angeles will meet their already inadequate goal of 10,000 units for housing the estimated 50,000 Los Angeles residents who experience homelessness.\textsuperscript{13}

Homelessness has many causes, and each person experiencing homelessness will have a different journey. However the latest statistical research by Chris Glynn and Emily B Fox has shown a strong correlation between rising housing costs and homelessness. This study expects a $100 increase in median rent to result in a 6.34 percent rise in homelessness.\textsuperscript{14} The link between rising rent prices and homelessness is logically very clear: if the cost of rent increases more people will be unable to afford housing. A dynamic where employers are incentivized to minimize employee pay for company profits and landlords are incentivized to maximize rent prices to increase the profitability of their investment will inevitably create homelessness.

The link between rising property values, a capitalist measure of success, and homelessness makes addressing the homelessness crisis difficult. Any action to assuage or prevent homelessness, such as shelters or rent control, is seen as coming at the expense of property values or company profits. Likewise, the visible existence of people experiencing homelessness is framed as damaging to commercial profits and property values. The view of the business community seems to be that primary ‘crisis’ of homelessness is not the half million men, women and children living unhoused in the United States, but rather any decrease in property values and commercial profit that might be necessary to prevent or assuage homelessness.\textsuperscript{15}

Karl de Fine Licht’s “Hostile Urban Architecture: A critical discussion of the seemingly offensive art of keeping people away” provides insight into this perspective. To defend
exclusionary architecture, de Fine Licht attempts to equalize the real pain of people experiencing homelessness with the discomfort of people who interact with them. His defense of hostile architecture rests upon the idea that, “When the worse-off population is not the largest group, some situations will result in which the negative effects on the worse-off group will be outweighed by the larger better-off group.” Examples he puts forward include people feeling unsafe at bus stops, people feeling unsafe in green spaces and a hypothetical business owner who is afraid customers will not enter her store if people experiencing homelessness are outside. Afraid that people experiencing homelessness will decrease value and profit they are also unwilling to address problems within the environment that inevitably create homelessness. Instead, businesses and property owners have tried to evade the crisis by using exclusionary design to expel and shame people experiencing poverty and homelessness. De Fine Licht’s argument relies upon a moral mathematics in which the discomfort people feel when they interact with people experiencing homelessness is more important than the actual physical danger people experiencing homelessness face.

I reject De Fine Licht’s attempt to equate group discomfort with the dangers of experiencing homelessness. Instead, I view homelessness as a community emergency. My experience in emergency services has led me to approach this community emergency through the process of triage. Triage is a tested and results oriented practice in emergency situations in which victims of a disaster are separated into three groups: red (victims whose injuries will likely result in death, despite help), yellow (victims whose lives can be saved, or have greatly improved quality of life, through quick intervention) and green (victims who do not need immediate medical attention). Triage focuses on the yellow group where time and resources can do the most good and alleviate the most pain, before addressing the red group, while allowing those in the
green group to help themselves and each other. People experiencing homelessness clearly belong in the yellow group—emergency action can do incredible good—while property owners are in no immediate danger. In this frame, the resources spent on creating exclusionary design are wasted harming and shaming people who need immediate help. Discomfort at seeing someone else’s misfortune is legitimate. However, the most effective way to address that discomfort is to ease the real suffering of people experiencing homelessness rather than using design to hide them.

The ‘out of sight, out of mind’ perspective relies on the dehumanization and othering of people experiencing homelessness. This othering allows people to avoid or invalidate other people’s suffering. Artists can combat this othering by reintroducing compassion and humanity. Krzysztof Wodiczko aims to ‘unfreeze’ the status quo of poverty and homelessness through the use of art.

Media art and performative public art can play a role in recovering or “unfreezing” - the capacity to speak by creating situations in which marginalized people might insert their experience into public discourse... Public space after is after all the space of rights- a space that allows the questioning of rights to spread freely. This democratic foundation of public space cannot be sustained if we do not provide the cultural, psychological, technological and aesthetic conditions for the inclusion (and acknowledgement)of voices that are economically, culturally, and socially marginalized and estranged; the homeless, illegal or legal immigrants, refugees, present day slaves, neglected and abused men, women and children and all others who often live in our cities as speechless monuments to their own trauma.  

Krzysztof Wodiczko’s Homeless Vehicles (1988-89) are a series of constructed vehicles made in conjunction with people experiencing homelessness in New York City. Functionally the vehicles provide some security and a sleeping space to their owners while protecting their belongings. Referencing the shopping carts often used by people experiencing homelessness, these well-
designed carts reinforce each person’s right to live within the city by humanizing them and making them protagonists within the city.

The *Homeless Vehicles* have a retro futuristic aesthetic harking back to the 1950’s view of advanced technology. This retro-futurism juxtaposed with poverty condemns how far we are from achieving the promise of the future. The vehicles are six feet long living chambers for a single person, made of one long arch with a cone at both ends. The shape and the caution colors of the vehicle resemble military technology call out military funding as priority in America, not housing for all. This idealized form of inclusive design is in direct conflict with the exclusionary design that is becoming more common throughout American cities.

**The Ethos and Spread of Exclusionary Design**

The motive behind the creation and spread of exclusionary design can be gleaned through the writings of those who implement these policies. For some, exclusionary design is framed as an attempt to create safety for residents, for others, homelessness is framed as ‘anti-social behavior’ and lumped in with illegal acts to be discouraged and/or punished. The Design Council, a design firm in London, lauds that the ‘Camden Bench,’ a full concrete bench with no flat surfaces and no back would resist criminal or anti-social behaviour such as graffiti, fly-posting, skateboarding, littering, drug dealing and rough sleeping. The bench incorporates a number of design features to prevent these activities: it has an anti-graffiti coating, has few flat surfaces which will help stop fly-posters, skateboarders and rough sleepers from using the bench and prevent people from leaving litter on it. The absence of cracks or slots also means drug dealers can’t hide materials in the bench.19

The Design Council ultimately views “rough sleepers,” people experiencing homelessness, as an anti-social element that can simply be designed away. In this way, they compare people experiencing homelessness to criminals and drug dealers, vandals, and a nuisance of city life to
be avoided and whisked away by smart design. Furthermore, in the Design Council’s course on Inclusive Design, homelessness is never mentioned and a three armed bench serves as their website’s banner. While the Design Council wishes to make a more inclusive world for the elderly and people with disabilities, their view of inclusivity does not extend to people experiencing homelessness. San Francisco’s Better Street Plan, advice the city gives to the citizens to make the city better, suggests private citizens may install exclusionary design fixtures to discourage sleeping, but to limit the impact so they are not uncomfortable to sit on. In this approach, they strive for the impossible balance, exclusionary design for people experiencing homelessness that can be palatable and unnoticeable by the wider population.  

Problems of Exclusionary Design

Exclusionary design, if you look around Los Angeles, is a failure. It does not help people to find shelter elsewhere, and it does not even accomplish its most cynical goal to expel people away from locations. Exclusionary design neither attempts to solve the inequality that causes homelessness nor alleviates the symptoms of homelessness by providing shelter or care. Instead, exclusionary design views excluding people experiencing homelessness as an obstacle for economic gain and rising property values. What exclusionary design succeeds at is making people sleep on the ground and in the rain.

The very concept of removing people via design fails to ask or answer a simple question: move them to where? In a large city or metropolitan area, once one area begins to implement exclusionary design, others follow. I documented this in the development of new or updated parks in Boston where newer parks inevitably have more exclusionary fixtures.
International Urbanaut map of Boston. Note how exclusionary design forms zones around semi-public spaces like universities and museums.
The attempt to clear areas or people seen as undesirable has a long history of failure as was pointed out by Engels in 1872 in response to the clearing of slums.

The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also.\textsuperscript{21}
This 140 year old quote by Engels could easily describe Los Angeles’s response to Justiceville or Seattle’s displacement of people experiencing homelessness using bike racks. Exclusionary design aims to accomplish the same goal, addressing a symptom of our economic system while failing to address the root causes.
Chapter 2: Radical Inclusivity and Artistic Intervention.

Artists Sarah Ross and Krzysztof Wodiczko, discussed earlier, approach the social problems of exclusionary design and homelessness through radical inclusivity. Their interventions presupposed everyone’s right to live within the city and that exclusionary design is a hostile act against the people living there. Perhaps more importantly, Wodiczko and Ross believe that artistic intervention can do real social good. Anthropologist Néstor García Canclini critiques art’s efficacy to address social ills. In “The Public Sphere Is Our Abyss”, Canclini states

Since the 1960s and 1970s we have seen the limited social effects of artistic actions at the service of movements that criticize injustice and reassesses public life… Works as powerful as Guernica move us but do not elicit the mobilization of its spectators.\textsuperscript{22} In this I disagree conceptually; being emotionally moved is a necessary prerequisite for social mobilization. Similar to how exclusionary design does continuous damage, a piece of art can do continuous good. Guernica may no longer mobilize immediate action against Franco’s Spain, however it remains a testament to anti-fascism. It becomes a site of remembrance to the horrors of war and can be activated as a point of protest. The slow work of social change regarding homelessness, human rights of marginalized groups, climate change, war or any of the many challenges we face cannot be completed by art alone. Yet, neither can it be done without art continuously working to change minds and questioning unjust power structures.

Curator Nato Thomson examines various moral and practical critiques of socially engaged artworks in the catalog accompanying the landmark 2011 exhibition, Living as Form. The first critique he examines is that socially engaged art works are often seen as ineffective. The examples he cites are Women on Waves (1999-ongoing), and Palas por Pistolas (2008). Women on Waves is an art and activist project founded by physician Rebecca Gomperts that
performs legal abortions on a boat in international waters off the coasts of countries where abortion is illegal. In *Palas por Pistolas*, Pedro Reyes collected 1527 weapons from residents of violence-ridden Culiacán and recast them as shovels. Organizations in the community then used the shovels to plant 1527 trees. Both projects faced criticism for being more symbolic than practical. Thompson notes *Women on Waves* performed few actual abortions, and *Palas por Pistolas* did not make a concrete impact on gun violence in Culiacán. However, he celebrates them as symbolic achievements, noting, “symbolic gestures can be powerful and effective methods for change.”23 The criticism that participatory art is ineffective fails to appreciate the actual good done. While *Women on Waves* may not perform many abortions, each one they perform has a profound impact on the patient’s life. Pedro Reyes did not end violence in Culiacán, but he inspired hundreds of people to turn over their firearms. These people might be inspired to further organize against violence in their own way. Furthermore, the trees planted will provide respite for a century to come and, perhaps fortuitously, help to combat climate change. The cumulative effect of a good action is real but difficult to quantify. Thompson also describes Christoph Schlingensief’s *Please Love Austria – First Austrian Coalition Week* (2002), a sort of Big Brother-esque performative piece where actors pretending to be refugees competed for political asylum. In this performance, the ‘refugees’ lived in a shipping container for six days under constant internet surveillance. The audience was encouraged to vote out contestants. Each morning the two least popular contestants were removed to be deported. This, according to Thompson, created a space of “deep discord and frustration.”24 While *Please Love Austria* attempted to reveal racism and animosity within Austria, it became a nexus for that racism and animosity.
In *Violence at Rest*, I took these critiques into consideration. I want the work to behave closer to *Women on Waves* and *Palas por Pistolas*, than *Please Love Austria*. Reyes’s and Gompert’s works are compassionate actions in pursuit of a compassionate goal. This seems to have a higher likelihood for positive effects than *Please Love Austria*, where the presentation of negative actions is meant to reveal deep-seated societal cruelties. Ultimately, I understand that *Violence at Rest* cannot singlehandedly end exclusionary design or people’s cruelty when faced with poverty. Nor can the work control how the audience ultimately acts in response to *Violence at Rest*. Because of this, I make sure that my own actions within *Violence at Rest* are compassionate. Similarly, *Violence at Rest* does not approach the effectiveness of activist organizations to give aid to people experiencing homelessness. For this reason, I make sure to direct audience members to concrete actions they can take and to these organizations.

Artist Michael Rakowitz’s work functions as anti-exclusionary design acting to give real comfort while confronting biases against people experiencing homelessness. Instead of using design to hide or exclude people experiencing homelessness, he creates radically inclusive fixtures. His work approaches homelessness and exclusionary design by creating inclusionary fixtures that provide comfort and call into question America’s social priorities. Rakowitz’s *(p)LOT* (2004-ongoing) is a series of tents shaped as cars that call into question who has the right to use the resources of the city. While the sight of tents on city streets causes alarm, devoting so much space to cars is foolish. These tents show the injustice of a society so built around automobiles that more space is set aside for them to park, unused, than for people experiencing homelessness. The tents shaped as luxury vehicles, such as Lexuses and Porsches, juxtapose the gap between poverty and wealth within modern society. Rakowitz’s *paraSITE* (1998-ongoing) are a series of custom-built shelters designed in conjunction with people experiencing
homelessness in Boston and New York. Built of plastic and tubing, the shelters are designed to attach to buildings’ heat exhausts, showing how society’s waste can be life-saving. The *paraSITE* project was designed to fit within Boston’s tent laws.²⁵
The title *paraSITE* linguistically calls attention to society's view of people experiencing homelessness as being parasites and describes the shelters’ parasitic relationship with the buildings they are attached to. Yet the title is also a call to share the space with everyone. Rakowitz’s work, like his teacher Wodiczko’s, serves to emphasize the humanity of people experiencing homelessness.
Chapter 3: Violence at Rest and the International Urbanauts

Exclusionary design requires the cooperative efforts of business owners, the city and the force of law. Acting humanely to counter the cruelty of exclusionary design used by the state, the International Urbanauts appropriate the language and style of authority to create a better city. The International Urbanauts view exclusionary design as an invasive species spreading throughout and damaging cities, communities and people. The International Urbanauts presuppose equality between all people regardless of wealth and status. The Urbanauts have a bias toward action; and a belief that compassionate, direct action should be taken to rectify the callousness of the built world.

Violence at Rest takes inspiration from the works of Ross, Wodiczko and Rakowitz. Ross’s work educates and brings attention to exclusionary design, and Wodiczko and Rakowitz create radically inclusive features to unfreeze the social understanding of homelessness. Violence at Rest targets the institutions that use exclusionary design and provides an example and guide for others who want to combat exclusionary design. Furthermore the Urbanauts imagine a world where organized structures promote compassion rather than defend exclusionary design.

As a mock emergency service, the Urbanauts are influenced by my own experience as a volunteer firefighter. As a college student, I looked for an uncomplicated social good I could do within my community. The community of Fire and Rescue, while they had their own problems, were such a group dedicated to immediate social good. This feeling of seeing harm and immediately addressing it was something I wanted the Urbanauts to emulate. This experience revealed to me that all things, good and ill, are just done by organizations of people. Seemingly monolithic rules governed organizations are comprised of individuals, who can enforce the rules
at their discretion. The power I was given to enter restricted areas or stop traffic were bound to the uniform, a signifier of authority. That authority is monolithic reflecting an idea of state competence. The uniform papers over our more complicated human foibles.

The International Urbanauts complicates the monolithic uniform. Emergency Services uniforms are designed to project competence and strength. The aesthetic of Emergency Service uniforms tends toward the tactical, the color of the uniforms is often black for intimidation or a more ‘neutral’ or male tan or blue. The uniforms worn by the Urbanauts during the performance are hazmat suits dyed a subtle iridescent pink, contrasting the more masculine colors typically seen in Emergency Services. The Tyvek safety suits worn by the Urbanauts almost completely dehumanize the wearer, all facial features are obscured, and gender signifiers are lost beneath the baggy exterior. In the Tyvek suit the wearer is separated from the world by a thin barrier, reminiscent of the illusion of authority. The suits and accompanying emblems signify authority. They mark the wearers as members of an organization with the right and self mandated charge to change the environment.
The Urbanaut Uniform is marked by the symbol of a five pointed flower within a hexagon. The design of the symbol and its mixture of natural and constructed features is a visual metaphor for the Urbanaut’s goal of creating a more inclusive society. These design choices are mirrored in the tour guide clothes worn at the beginning of the action, the subtle pink flowered tie foreshadowing the Urbanaut’s pink tyvek suits.

The Urbanaut’s uniform critiques the uniform as a signifier of authority and removes the potential for audience members to be fooled entirely into believing they are a sanctioned
emergency service. In this, the Urbanauts avoid the prankish nature of the Yes Men, famous for posing as representatives of British Petroleum to claim the company would take full financial responsibility for the Bhopal disaster. The Yes Men’s goals, while morally sound, are often overshadowed by the audacity of their pranks, or questions of the ethics of misrepresenting themselves. Instead the Urbanauts are clearly a utopian organization, holding the practice of exclusionary design in contempt. Violence at Rest and the Urbanauts function closer to a funhouse mirror version of Critical Art Ensemble’s Radiation Burn (2010). In this action Critical Art Ensemble publicly showed the response to a dirty bomb explosion, while educating the public that such a weapon would be no more dangerous than a normal explosion. Where CAE used authority to reveal that fears of a dirty bomb are overblown, the Urbanauts aim to show the hostility of accepted exclusionary design.

The International Urbanaut Cosmology

The International Urbanauts view ‘The Right to the City’ as an inalienable right that must be defended by themselves and the public. The Right to the City, first posited by Henri Lefebvre and explored by Marxist geographer Harvey, is the right, “to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade and to do so in a fundamental and radical way.”

The Urbanauts are meant to exist within the ideals of Lefebvre, “only groups, social classes and class factions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and realize solutions to urban problems.” The Urbanauts are the social revolutionary class organized and made bureaucratic. When the Urbanauts see a person or object interfering with a person’s Right to the City, they act immediately to re-enforce that right with compassion. The Urbanauts do not need
any exterior authorization to do good. Instead, they trust their own principles to guide them to
good action. Trusting the rightness of their own cause over the authority of the state allows them
to counteract the accepted cruelty of exclusionary design. This is shown when they are
confronted with a three armed bench during the Centennial Circle Action which will be
discussed later. The Urbanauts take the idea of the Right to the City to illogical extremes
morphing them with their own bizarre cosmology.

Inspired by my upbringing in the Catholic Church, the Urbanaut’s actions are guided by
their own unprovable internal cosmology. The cosmology is slowly teased throughout chants and
other hints within the Urbanaut action. This builds to the revealed that the audience is
participating in a cultish ritual. The Urbanaut Cosmology presupposes reality as an interaction of
various levels of consciousness inherent in all things from the simplest cell, to the city as a super-
organism, to the planet itself. A human cannot communicate with the city or the bacteria within
their body; however, the health and actions of the city and bacteria are intrinsic to the human’s
health. Humans in the Urbanaut’s worldview are not central to this network. Instead humans are
influenced by the bacteria living within their micro-biome, the memetic ideas mutating and
spreading between their minds, and the natural and built environment they live in. The Urbanauts
view groupings of humans as a super-organism with a consciousness as unknowable to each
individual member as human consciousness is to a liver cell or an ant hills to the ant. While
Urbanauts cannot directly commune with the personified city, they see exclusionary design as a
sign of sickness within the super-organism. Exclusionary defensive measures are taken against
individuals within the city, as the city harms its own faunal system.

The Urbanauts view exclusionary design as part of a disease within the network. Cruel
memetic ideas spread throughout individual people who then employ exclusionary design which
makes the city more unlivable. Within the more unlivable city cruel ideas spread more easily creating a vicious cycle. Here the Urbanauts believe they can work to create a better environment through the removal of exclusionary design, in doing so make the city more livable.

The Urbanauts Cosmology is not directly referenced within the tour or the gallery. Instead, it serves as an unseen motive and is vaguely alluded to. Throughout the tour I personified the fixtures and the Northeastern environment. The hazmat suits are needed within the cosmology to protect from hazards released from the exclusionary bench, and the blood shows the bench to be part of the living city. The Urbanauts cosmology is philosophical, and they are uninterested in proving or disproving what for them is a matter of faith. Instead of worrying about proving their worldview, they validate the cosmology as an inspiration to take direct compassionate action in making a better world. Violence at Rest can be approached with varying levels of commitment, from those who simply want to experience the performance, to those who want to take direct actions themselves, to those who want to delve into the Urbanaut cosmology. Wider aspects of the cosmology will be revealed in further actions.
The Tour

**Violence at Rest** is the second International Urbanaut action on the Northeastern University campus. The first was an Exclusionary Design Watching Tour at Carter Park that examined how the cooperation between the city of Boston and Northeastern created a gated and exclusionary park. The Violence at Rest action was focused specifically on the exclusionary design hidden on Northeastern’s campus.

I introduced myself as an ‘expert in inclusionary spaces and holistic architecture’; and as ‘a member of the International Urbanauts.’ I was dressed in a nice pair of jeans, with a purple shirt, strategically ruffled, and purple tie with subtle pink flowers. This outfit was not out of place for a tour guide, but the pink flower accents foreshadowed the uniforms in upcoming
action. I began the tour showing various examples of exclusionary design. The group, composed of Northeastern students and professors, catalogued single person chairs easily removable by the school, and the various designs of three armed benches. We discussed the spreading viral nature of exclusionary design by examining the skate-stops that are still ubiquitous and standard in new construction despite the fact that skateboarding has been in decline for a decade. Walking through the campus, the tour members offered examples of exclusionary design fixtures that were common in their neighborhoods including walls with jagged stone tops.

The tour strips the anonymity and camouflage from exclusionary design. As exclusionary design only functions when it blends into the background the first step to combating exclusionary design must be education. Northeastern is an institution that prides itself on its inclusivity, yet their use of exclusionary design shows their antipathy towards those experiencing homelessness. Northeastern tries to appear inclusive by avoiding imposing walls or spikes. Northeastern prefers exclusive design as it allows them to maintain the atmosphere of inclusion while excluding people experiencing homelessness. The tour showed demonstrated exclusionary design tactics while giving the participants the tools to spot new advancements in exclusionary design. The tour is designed to make the invisible nature of exclusionary design visible and make clear the harm it causes.

At the midpoint of the tour the International Urbanauts took direct action on a three armed bench in Centennial Circle. The action was scheduled during Northeastern Giving Day due to the large amount of public traffic. The action began when I was approached by two International Urbanauts dressed in the pink Tyvek uniforms who informed me that I was cleared to intervene in the environment. I took a moment to prepare the gathering crowd for the upcoming action. I then donned a pink tyvek suit, while one of the other Urbanauts prepared a
reciprocating saw. I warned the crowd of upcoming violence, then took the reciprocating saw and cut into the central arm. As the saw bit into the center arm it began to bleed, the blood spraying from the force of the saw blade misting the Urbanauts uniforms and leaving the bench covered with blood. I then placed the cut arm into a plastic bag sealed with duct tape to isolate the contaminant. A compatriot then awarded me a large gold Stewardship Badge for my role in ‘creating a more a more inclusive community.’ We exchanged the Urbanauts mantra, “We create the Environment that creates itself,” and then I addressed the assembled group. The Urbanauts awarded the viewers small 3D printed coins painted silver--“observer badges” for bearing witness to the direct action. The mantra was repeated between the Urbanauts and the gathered observers. I detailed some ways they could help in their community including a local Homeless Bill of Right to support. Afraid of interference from public safety we dispersed leaving the inclusive bench with fake blood alluding to the cut third arm.

In cutting through the third arm, the other Urbanauts and I created a more inclusionary feature on campus. This in turn made the campus more inclusive. However, this action had other effects. It was a quick tutorial on how easily an exclusionary design could be made inclusive. The handmade nature of the bench, likewise, shows the observant viewer how easily an inclusive bench can be constructed and surreptitiously installed into the environment.
Centennial Circle Action. Photography by Rio Phoenix
The bench bleeding unnerves the audience tapping into the deep seated human reaction to unexpected blood. As a metaphor it serves to stand in for the hidden violence of exclusionary design. More practically, the bleeding bench removes the anonymity of exclusionary design, replacing it with disgust. The goal of the blood is to create a marker in the memory of the viewers as a new strongest reference point for exclusionary design. The physical repulsion to blood is meant to color the viewer’s interaction with exclusionary design. The fake blood covering the front of the bench is focused around where the arm was cut, hinting to newcomers that something has been removed. This draws attention, through contrast, to the exclusionary three armed benches elsewhere in Centennial Circle.

Centennial Circle Action, completed. Photography by Rio Phoenix
The structure of the direct action references my upbringing in Roman Catholicism. It begins with a reading or a community discussion, followed by a sacrifice, a body being changed for the benefit of the community. The Urbanauts passing out the coins closely mirrors closely the Eucharist. Finally, the observers return to go and do good in the world, having been changed by the experience. The Urbanauts’ opaque bureaucratic non hierarchical organization acts as a foil to the strict hierarchy of the Church and emergency services. With this structure the audience plays the role of a disciple or follower and takes the first step toward membership in the Urbanaut community. The call and response, “We create the environment that creates ourselves,” requires the audience to choose whether to participate with the community or to be an outsider. Once the audience has chosen to participate and take the observer badge, they symbolically accept some responsibility to the Urbanauts and the community.

The bench was left in public and monitored daily. It was removed after eleven days in conjunction with campus upkeep prior to graduation. The bench’s handmade and hand painted qualities, the red ‘blood splatter’ and its location next to an art building marked the bench as an art object. Leaving the bench in the community was a test was to see if the veil of art would protect the inclusive bench. If not, I wanted to document how quickly those in charge of campus would remove the bench, returning the campus to stasis. After the bench was removed, neither I nor any member of the International Urbanauts could locate it.
The Gallery

I collected relics from the Centennial Circle Action for a gallery show to introduce more people to the International Urbanauts and exclusionary design. Bringing documentation of the action into the gallery allowed me to expand the ideas of the Urbanauts and frame them as heroes. The Gallery portion consists of articles collected from the Centennial Circle Action, the cut pieces of the bench, the observer and Stewardship Badges, and the bloody reciprocating saw blade. Each piece is held and presented with text in a vitrine similar to a museum case. Along with these, the safety gear and Urbanaut Tyvek suit now stained red with fake blood is displayed.
hanging as a stand in for the Urbanauts. A photograph presents the inclusionary bench removed and presumably destroyed by Northeastern.

Presenting the Centennial Circle Action in the context of a gallery again appropriates the language of authority. The Gallery show presents the Urbanauts from their own point of view, heroic, necessary, and just but most importantly authorities and experts; a voice that must be taken into consideration. The presentation of the relics and the suit in this gallery style marks the Centennial Circle Action not as a single art event, but instead, as a historic event, worthy of remembering.

Centennial Circle Relic: reciprocating saw blade

The final section of the gallery show is video documentation of the Centennial Circle Action filmed by David Cohn, and edited by David Cohn and myself. The video is presented as an internal product of the International Urbanauts, both exaggerating the importance of the event and as instructions on how to convert an exclusionary fixture into an inclusionary fixture. The video documents the Centennial Circle action beginning at the cutting of the bench. The film plays up the bizarre, sci-fi, and cultish aspect of the Urbanauts as an alternative emergency service; the music is a slow uncomfortable piece, and the text is portrayed in a pixilated Courier font commonly seen in government documents prior to 2004. This serves to recontextualize
exclusionary design as a conspiracy, as mind and space control imposed from an unknown source.

The video serves as the only record of the Centennial Circle Action. In having the only record of the action, the Urbanauts are free to exaggerate and mythologize the action to their benefit. The video and the gallery show take advantage of the authority of the gallery as an arbiter of truth and in doing so rewrite the past and the action. The video reframes the Urbanauts as heroic, and the action as a triumph. The use of bureaucratic language and the authority of the gallery for such a clearly biased purpose calls attention to the flimsiness of such authority.
Conclusion

*Violence at Rest* critiques exclusionary design and educates the public to exclusionary design’s hidden hostility. In educating the public, the Urbanauts strip the effectiveness of exclusionary design, while recontextualizing it as something upsetting and gross. The International Urbanauts are dedicated to the compassionate transformation of exclusionary spaces to inclusionary space through direct action. The Centennial Circle Action is a starting point for further growth and actions. The first wave of planned Urbanaut actions will occur in Los Angeles where exclusionary environments are common. In these actions Urbanauts will surreptitiously reintroduce inclusive fixtures into exclusionary public parks, beaches, public buildings and churches. These fixtures will be more sculptural: long, winding, and twisting benches that can be slept on. These will represent new inclusive fixtures mutating in a more exclusionary environment. These fixtures will vary in complexity, artistry, and subtlety. The features and locations will be catalogued and usage will be monitored throughout the fixtures’ lifespan to determine which exclusionary spaces are primed for inclusive reclamation. Following the successful interventions in Boston and planned interventions in Los Angeles, members of the International Urbanauts will begin a series of international actions. Continued Urbanaut actions will counteract the hostility of exclusionary design with the reintroduction of compassionate design to public spaces. In this the Urbanauts will create a more compassionate environment that will inspire the wider public to their own compassionate actions.
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