

Walls, Enclaves and the [Counter] Politics of Design

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Abstract

This article focuses on the political role of urban design in the transformation of urban and rural, central and peripheral, formal and informal landscapes in Israel. Based on design anthropology methodology we will explore the political role of urban design in the production of aesthetic objects and landscapes that signify the control over individuals and communities. As this article suggests, such new form of political influence is hidden beneath an aesthetic and user-oriented façade, making it even more dangerous than previous more direct actions, such as gated communities, separated from public space by stone walls. Our interdisciplinary approach that is rooted in anthropology, design, architecture and politics will also point out some similarities between specific sites that are often considered different, namely Tel Aviv's global and privatized gated communities on one hand and the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the peripheral Negev region on the hand. As we would argue, these similarities are the product of the politics of militarization, privatization and social fragmentation that are translated into urban design practices from "above" via state and municipal planning policy as well as formal design, and from "below", through informal and often unauthorized construction initiated by marginalized communities.

Key Words: urban design, design anthropology, power, resistance

Introduction

The ongoing frustration from modern urban planning as both ideology and practice that will enhance better urban future has been widely discussed in the academic literature (Sandercock, 1998). Instead, it is suggested that urban design, as an emerging discipline and practice, takes into account small-scale urban spaces, everyday life, people's mobility as well as environmental, economic and social reality (Sennet, 2015) and thus should be considered as the most relevant "tool-box" for spatial intervention in cities. Yet, this approach is based on a Euro-centric vision of the "good-city", "public space" and "urban life" while ignoring the "dark side" of urban design - using Yiftachel's terminology (Yiftachel, 1994) – as a mechanism of control – a lacuna that this article aims to fill.

Moreover, urban design research has focused mainly on various applied dimensions overlooking the necessity to develop critical theory; as argued by Biddulph (2005) we need not only to think *about* urban design, but also to think *for* urban design, i.e., combining theoretical and applied knowledge. Such approach is often overlooked by designers involved in the (re)production of urban spaces by focussing on the physical aspects of their work. In reference of this critic, this article is based on the research experience and practice of an architect specializing in urban politics, a design anthropologist specializing in design history and theories and a design practitioner. Our interdisciplinary approach is the basis for claiming the necessity to use design anthropology as a methodology and theoretical outline for understanding contemporary urban design.

Based on the above view, in this article we will discuss two different, yet complimentary case studies. The first refers to the role of urban design in the production of privatized space in the form of luxury high-rise, gated communities, compounds in Tel Aviv. The second focuses on the "bottom-up" informal design of the unrecognized settlements of the Bedouin community in the Negev region. The presentation of these two different cases will follow some recent development in the ways in which urban design is coming to terms with the politics of the discipline (Boano and Talocci, 2014). Following this argument, we ascertain that design has become a method for camouflaging the occupation and privatization of public space under an aesthetic shroud. Echoing Gramsci's (1992), this new form of power is inflicting control under the guise of making public spaces more attractive and "designed". In an era of design and designer-stars, we need to follow a different path.

Following Papanek's seminal book *Design for the Real World* (1984), Victor Margolin (2002) urged designers to think not of finding answers to question of design, but rather to rephrase their questions all together, i.e., while classic design urged designers to redefine known questions, resulting in an abundance of [unnecessary] objects, Margolin urges designers to ask whether these objects are needed in the first place, rather than redesigning or improving them. Coupled with Tomas Maldonado's (1991) famous essay on the political ramifications of comfort, we would suggest that design's political involvement has yet to flourish. In order to better understand the users' point of view, designers turned to ethnography for methodological ways to

better understand the socio-cultural relations between the person and the material surroundings.

Methodological notes: towards design anthropology for urban design research

Prior to the discussion of the case studies, let us present some methodological aspects of our research. As mentioned above our case studies present a wide range of spatial and social phenomenon; travelling between Israel's wealthy centre of Tel Aviv, and the country's most marginalized community of the Bedouins of the Negev, we will display these cases by using a mixture of semiotics, material culture and design anthropology. In more detail, our work is inspired by comparative urbanism (Robinson, 2011) that encourages to strive beyond the scope of current research which has been profoundly limited by certain long-standing assumptions embedded in urban design theory – assumptions that propose the fundamental incommensurability of varying spaces, cities, and environments (Robinson, 2011: 2). As such, we aim to raise questions regarding new tools to perceive and analyse contemporary design, its practices and politics. Importantly, we would argue, comparing two different contexts, draws attention to the understanding of urban design not solely as technical or instrumental spatial practice, but rather as a field of knowledge production and as an arena of circulation of materials, imagery and imagination within any given socio-political context.

Our main methodological research method was design ethnography mixed with subject-oriented interviews. Indeed, while the term "place-making" (Pink, 2012), alluding to the subjectivity and flexibility of spaces, is an alluring concept, we wish to view places as an amalgam of material, visual and aesthetic decisions stemming from political dynamics of power, control and resistance. The findings to be discussed

throughout this article, are based on extensive documentation and informal interviews with inhabitants of Tel Aviv and the Negev region. Our fieldwork started in 2006 and lasted ten years. The fieldwork included ongoing observations in the different sites, photographing as well as "cultural reading of space", as it has been coined by David Sibley (1998).

Roland Barthes, one of the leading theoreticians of semiotics conceptualized some theoretical terms, such as the myth, denotative and connotative meanings among others, which have become key concepts (Barthes, 2012; 1977; 1977a; 1994). In these classic texts, Barthes explains that each representation, visual, textual or material, has two meanings: a denotative meaning in which the "simple" and obvious traits are illustrated, and a more "complex" and culturally dependent one, called connotative. When analysing material objects, and in our case – designed spaces and objects, one usually highlights the object's connotative dimensions (Penn, 2000).

While using Barthes theory in relation to semiotic systems, one can understand the various meanings of colour, material selection, shapes and forms – all of which consist of the practical world of designers' professional work. In de Saussure's (2011 [1916]) classic view, the sign is comprised of a signifier (a word or symbol) and a signified (in our case the designed object), a view which was ultimately continued and elaborated by Baudrillard (2005 [1968]).

Barthes describes the relation between a material object (in this case, a Citroën DS) and the world of low bourgeoisie. In his seminal work *Elements of Semiology* (1977),

Barthes adds to the classic semiotic theory presented by de Saussure (2011 [1916]) to interpret linguistics as well as visual structures as semiotic systems. The basic hypothesis (for example, Eco, 1979; 1986) in which socio-cultural linguistic systems, seen as a combination of the signified and the signifier can be implemented in other disciplines, such as visual communication or graphic design. Symbols, gestures, colours and materials, combine to create a complex visual system of meanings.

Conversely, basic semiotic system is referred to in industrial design as CMF (colour, material, finish), attesting to the three material and visual attributes of objects. As we shall see, the semiotic system presented in our research around the urban landscape bolsters a significant resemblance. Furthermore, as is the case in Boudrillard's *System of Objects*, so does the urban landscape built around a specific and well-defined semiotic system, comprised of various materials, shapes and colours. In order to better understand this intricate system we based our methodology on Pink's (2004) work on visual ethnography. Yet, we wish to add to that method a more suitable one for the urban material setting which is design anthropology. This multi-layered research enabled us to create a more nuanced understanding of the material and visual urban setting and design's influence of this complex topic. Indeed, regarding the advantages of ethnography to visual or material studies, Pink's description is lucid::

"Although other social scientists also use ethnographic methods, our focus is on ethnography as practice and specifically with visual ethnography that is informed by anthropological theory

and embedded in anthropological research questions" (Pink, 2004:2).

Indeed, Pink (2001) rightfully explains, visual ethnography is *done*, rather than conducted. In this research as well, the best way, if not the only way to understand our relation with the urban landscape is through a journey in and through the visual documentation of designed objects. Certainly, one of the better linkages between disciplines is the duality of urban design and material culture and design anthropology. While the former is embedded in daily materials, the latter deals with the interrelations between these and the persons inhabiting the urban space, therefore the appropriate way to understand this relation is through design ethnography. Recently, "design ethnography" has been replaced by "design anthropology", signalling a change in scope and the emergence of a new anthropological sub-discipline. Gunn et al. (2013: xiii) claim:

"[P]ractitioners of design anthropology follow dynamic situations and social relations and are concerned with how people perceive, create and transform their environments through their everyday activities [...] design anthropology practices occur across different scales and timelines and involves many disciplines, each bringing their own distinct ways of knowing and doing".

Urban Design as a Political Technology

"[A]ll that was needed was that the separations should be clear and the openings well arranged. The heaviness of the old 'houses of security' with their fortress-like architecture, could be replaced by the simple, economic geometry of a house of certainty" (Foucault, 1977: 362).

In June 2014, the Israeli Ministry of Interior Security published a manual titled "Crime Prevention through Design". In this publication, which has been considered by professionals and policy makers as a progressive document, one can read between the lines Foucault's description of the panopticon. In this materialized battleground, the government and the citizens face each other, through the former's attempt to marginalized "unwanted elements in the public sphere", as indicated in the title of the report (2014) while implicitly referring to the homeless or various ethno-class minorities. Through detailed and technical illustrations, government officials use design theories to politicize urban public and liminal spaces which fall between public and private spaces, such as strips of land adjacent to a resident's lawn, or the redesign of public benches in such a manner that would not allow for sprawling or sleeping on the bench, to mention a few.

Indeed, the notion of panopticism mentioned above is derived from the work of Foucault who understood space as a crucial element explaining power relations. Furthermore, modern urban space is perceived in Foucault's words as a 'laboratory of

power' (Foucault, 1977: 204), which has a great relevance to our case and for the attempt to order space using urban design. Yet, Foucault himself developed this theme far beyond an analysis of the architectural form. Following this line of thought he described panopticism reflecting and symbolizing the location of bodies in space and the hierarchical organization of power whenever a particular form of behavior is imposed (Foucault, 1977: 364). Focusing on panopticism as a form of "political technology". Very often the panopticon in post-modern societies is explained in relation to surveillance technology such as CCTV (Koskela, 2003). Yet, in this article we refer to it as sets of regulations and institutions that shape urban space (Danahar et al., 2000: Chap.5), which is indeed a key for our ethnography that is detailed below.

Tel Aviv: the beautification of boundaries

The work of Rosen and Razin on gated communities in Israel (Rosen and Razin, 2008; 2009) reveals that the present-day development of gated communities is indeed attached to privatization, globalization and the production of a neo-liberal cityscape. Rosen and Razin rightly suggest that viewing the production of such neo-liberal spaces as part of the weakening of state intervention is misleading. Rather they suggest that neo-liberal urban regimes do not imply the demise of regulation "but rather its changing nature" (Rosen and Razin, 2009: 1703). A similar perspective is also offered by other scholars (Tzfadia, 2008; Yacobi, 2012) accentuating the characteristics of gated communities in Israel which are often developed by the private sector and appropriating public spaces or the accessibility to them in the name of security and privacy.

The above has also been observed in our first visit to one of Tel Aviv's new luxury complex, where the panopticon was all too visible (see fig. 1). As we shall see in this section, the A1 luxury complex, a fairly new housing complex at the northern part of Tel Aviv comprising of a circle of buildings guarded by two security entrances, is no different from other similar neighborhoods in the use of design and materials as an urban method, warning pedestrians they are about to enter private property, through the redesign areas on the threshold between the private and the public (Turner et al., 1983). The use of high-grade concrete slates, polished wood and other designed elements, this distinction of safely rooted out. After circling the complex, we find another, less central entrance, guarded by a security officer.

After introducing ourselves as researchers, we strike a conversation. Apparently, the guard cannot grant us entrance unless we discuss the matter with two of his superiors. To our amazement, he described the highest echelon's supervisor, sitting in his own luxury apartment, watching this very discussion between the guard and us through his laptop. Walking out of the complex, we can clearly see the seam between the street and the complex, an expensive-looking Mercedes drives out of one of the gates, proving this is the realm of German cars, not pedestrians.

In complex A2, situated at the north of Tel Aviv at a new neighborhood called "the greenhouse", the situation is similar. After discussing with the security officer, we glance the luxury residence, heralded by a large pool. There are no visual or material

relations between the design of this complex and the urban settings. Designed by a famous Israeli architect, catering to the super-rich, this residence is overly unique, glittering with its white walls and flowing structure.

The Tel Aviv luxury complexes have undergone a process of design evolution in which the method of exclusion and desegregation between private and public spaces have undergone important and acute changes. While in the first prototype of gated community compound (fig. 4), material features meant to disavow pedestrians from entering the private property (spikey metal triangles), in the second generation the methods are much more subtle. As luxury complexes grew more and more expensive and targeted richer clientele, local municipalities started demanding lower fences and more investment in public landscape design.

As we can see (fig. 5), the new model of luxury high-rises offers no walls or fences, only designed features. Yet, as we can see, following Mauss' classic *Techniques of the Body* (1973), the body knows how to behave according to changing socio-cultural atmospheres. In this case, using design as a tool for segregation, the body feels the shift from light to shade. The feet feel the change in material from asphalt or cheap paving stones to the more expensive concrete slates.

While clothing their promotion of wealthy residents, local municipalities claim these residents improve public spaces and give back to the community. As we can see, on every occasion we conducted observations these "public" spaces were deserted.

Again, the use of materials to create a difference between public and private space is more present the more expensive the building (see for example fig. 6).

This use of materials and design to create a physical and metaphoric wall between private and public spaces even more pronounced in Zahala, an exclusive neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Once a residence for Israel's military elite, now a home for TV stars and local celebs, Zahala is a portrait of the socio-economic shift Israel has went through. While early residences from the 1950s are an example of low-key and humble vernacular architecture, the new houses boast contemporary muscular design flaunting each resident's worth. While the original architecture of the neighbourhood draws from Israeli history and national identity of the period, contemporary architecture in the neighbourhood is firmly based on military tactics. These include "funnelling" (directing the visitor towards the wanted direction), zigzagging from the street to the residence's entrance, walling, camouflaging the entrance and creating a built wall towards the street while the windows face the opposite direction and more.

The Negev: Design as counter-space

"...[W]e can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality: against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power..."
(Lefebvre, 1991: 382).

Surprisingly, we found some similarities between the tactics, being used by Israel's wealthiest to the Bedouin community in the Negev, while the former is shaped from "above" by professional planners and designers, the latter is an act of design, initiated from "below". As we shall see, in both cases, the individual uses design and a smart use of materials, shapes and colours in order to walling himself inside a private space, while erasing any contact with the public sphere.

In the scope of this article we will not be able to discuss in details the political history of the Bedouin community in Israel. Yet, some background is crucial in order to understand our argument. The Arab-Bedouins are Muslims by religion and speak a dialect of Arabic. They live in Israel in two separate areas: the Negev desert (around 120,000 people) and the Galilee (about 60,000 people). These two groups are from different origins, and there are differences in their ways of life. Socially, the Bedouins are divided into three main groups: the 'original' Bedouins who are descended of nomadic ancestors from Saudi Arabia which moved through the Sinai Peninsula into the Negev. The 'Fallachim' are peasants who joined the 'original' Bedouins in the mid 19th century as agricultural workers, and the 'Abid' group, who were black slaves. The 'original' Bedouins are considered superior to the 'Fallachim' and 'Abid', groups (Stern and Gradus, 1979; Fenster, 1993, 1996; Meir, 1997).

After 1948, with the establishment of the state of Israel, only 11,000 (15 percent) Bedouins remained in the Negev area. Most of their land that did not fit with state's legal regulations was expropriated by the government and transferred into state land through legislation (Kedar, 1998); this land was then redistributed, mainly to the

Jewish settlements. It is important to note that following the 1948 war most of the Bedouin population expelled or fled to Jordan, Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

The remained Bedouin population reacted to the massive land expropriation and to their new living conditions in a rapid construction of informal settlements, which were defined by the authorities as illegal. These informal settlements received no supply of basic infrastructure and services. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities view the expansion of informal Bedouin settlements as a threat to state control over state land, and therefore regularly demolish these illegal shelters (Fenster, 1993). Since the mid 1960's, the Israeli government initiated a plan for re-settling the Bedouins in modern towns in the Negev region. The government planned these settlement and housing, infrastructure, education and health services were partly supplied. The Bedouin families that move into these new towns had to withdraw any claims on their unregistered land or informal houses in order to eligible to subsidized plots of state land in the new Bedouin towns.

With reference to the above, within the Bedouin community, the process of walling is meant as a dual strategy. First, habitants use walls as a material identity meant to broadcast the area used by a specific tribe. Second, this design is meant to create as low a profile as possible to avoid the ever watching gaze of government officials, leading to the brutal destruction of "unrecognized" villages. As we can see in two distinct strategies used by the Bedouin community in the Negev, the main feature is to keep the community unnoticed from the "mainland". In figure 8 we can clearly see the efforts taken by local community to remain unseen from the highway. An earthen

ramp, coupled with a fence and in some cases trees or rusted chassis of cars would to the trick.

In a more innovative example, spontaneous design becomes the innovative solution to escape unwanted attention from state officials. While mosque minarets are highly visible and costly, a clever use of materials and colours create a difference. As seen in fig. 9, local residents use existing platform for a dual use (on the right we can see a ladder serving as a platform for speakers announcing prayers). In other cases (fig. 9 left), local residents use cheap materials to quickly erect a temporary minaret, knowing it would be destroyed by the government several weeks later. Interestingly, the builders, while using metal sheets for the minaret, chose to artfully paint it as a stoned pillar, creating an illusion of longevity.

Discussion: Semiotics, Politics and Design

City spaces are experienced by people who live in them in many different ways. "Culture" for some can be "oppression" to others ... (Zukin, 1995: 293-294)

The above citation by Sharon Zukin, accentuates the well-discussed Lefebvrian thinking of space as a social product (Lefebvre, 1991). Space as a social product thus shapes socio-political relations and in turn is shaped by them. Furthermore, our description of design harnessed as a politicized tool echoes with Lefebvre's famous discussion of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1996). This claim also highlights the

necessity to theoretically analyse urban design as a multi-layered phenomenon involving politics, symbolic meaning and materiality. Such a vein of thinking inspired this article which discussed the ways in which urban design from "above" as well as from "below" are not separated components in producing space in the case of Israeli contested landscape. Rather, as we have shown, these are complementary approaches which are rarely discussed together.

An illustration of the mixture of "above" and "below" approaches towards design could be articulated through the social, cultural and architectural aspects of the enclave. While historically, the rich always tended to keep their belongings walled, yet at the outskirts of the city, the consumer culture's spread led to their reallocation at the city's centre. This led to small areas at central locations completely segregated and closed to the public. As we have seen, this tendency is rapidly starting to engulf adjacent public areas as well. Since this urban phenomenon is worth our attention, we wish to outline several relevant concepts.

Indeed, the spaces discussed in this article could be described as a mixture of a citadel and an enclave. In both cases, a material manifestation of excluding oneself is the erection of walls and fences, even if these are designed and aesthetic. Walling out, as we have shown, is the extreme physical form of social and economic withdrawal. Walling out may be involved in the formation of an exclusionary enclave, and is also involved in the formation of a citadel. Fortification is the voluntary coming together

of a population group for purposes of protecting, strengthening, and symbolizing dominance. Fortification is the process of forming a citadel. While this urban phenomenon is usually related to the rich and powerful, when the formation of a citadel is made out of necessity and by the government, targeted at low-income populace, the relevant term would be an enclave. An enclave is an area of spatial concentration in which members of a particular population group, self-defined by ethnicity or religion or otherwise, congregate as a means of protecting and enhancing their economic, social, political, and/or cultural development (Marcuse, 2005: 17). In some cases, the enclave culture takes a different form, as a strong social group, backed by the government, acts to create an enclave, out of strength rather than weakness (Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003). While in the case of the luxury high-rises this is indeed the case, the Bedouins of the Negev present a different approach, as we shall see in the following paragraphs.

The urban forms we have presented, so far, are recently being discussed by researchers, yet the focus is usually socio-cultural dimensions or geo-political ramifications of such phenomena. However, design's role (both urban as well as industrial) is mostly ignored. Furthermore, while urban planners' ideology is well-discussed in academic literature, the role of design and designers is usually overlooked, assuming such interventions as less contested. Yet our visuo-material analysis of design sheds light on the ways in which the use of materials and aesthetics serves the larger ideologies of power such as the privatization of space, realized by the act of design. On the other side, our ethnographic approach also reveals that

creating an informal vernacular- dictionary of materials, forms, colors and shapes materialize counter politics of resistance in daily surroundings.

let us conclude that the new high-rises' choice of design portray an image of openness, accessibility and lack of fences that fits with the vision of the current agenda of urban design (Sennet, 2015), yet we suggest that this subtle way of subjugating social space is much more dangerous than previous more acute models; the apparent openness and accessibility to public space masks privatization of space, separation which is based on ethnic and class affiliation and the appropriation of space by those in power in the neoliberal city.

While the term "gated community" is well researched, in this article we have highlighted the role of urban design in the creation of urban enclave. Mary Douglas (2007) describes an enclave culture via a basic equation in which our quality of life equals ideology, social organization and behavioural norms. This behaviour is clear when looking at urban design's influence on our movement through the cityscape: the places we avoid, the zones that somehow we know that are not for our use, or those that are explicitly blocked. Cresswell (2010: 20) describes such aspects of mobility:

"The fact of physical movement – getting from one place to another; the representations of movement that give it shared meaning; and, finally, the experienced and embodied practice of movement. In practice, these elements of mobility are unlikely

to be easy to untangle. They are bound up with Situating
Everyday Life one another.

As luxury apartments enclose their tenants in a golden bubble, the rest of the city's inhabitants are marginalized from a growing number of public places. As such, our movement is hindered by urban design that aestheticises urban space - as Sharon Zukin suggests (1995) – by producing a more “ordered” landscape that aims to hide the undesirable.

While the end result of the Bedouin community is somewhat similar – i.e., the strive to evade the government's gaze – the tactics are different. Living in constant uncertainty, the Bedouin community uses design as a way to materialize temporal spaces. As we have shown, the colouring of a minaret in a way so as to resemble a stone wall tries not only to aestheticize the space, but to break its temporality. In other words, contrary to classic approaches, radical design is better articulated in a marginalized community than in the richer urban centres. Bedouin design is manifested as a tool to broadcast self-reliance, as in De Certeau's (1984) famous description of design as a quiet and aesthetic form of protest.

As we have demonstrated in this article, panopticism cannot be understood and analysed only through the architectural dimension of space or through the interpretation of the form, as noted by Foucault himself (1982: 376-377):

"...[A]rchitecture... is only taken as an element of support, to ensure a certain allocation of people in space... as well as the coding of their reciprocal relations. So it is not only considered as an element in space, but is especially thought of as a plunge into a field of social relations..."

Here stands the theoretical link to Lefebvre's notion of space. Lefebvrian understanding of the simultaneous production of space (i.e., the conceived, perceived and lived) paves the road for a new understanding of power relations and their effect on the design of spaces. Furthermore, this attitude also gives attention to the "bottom-up" counter products and their potential effect in transforming reality. In other words, colors, materials, textures and shapes are not merely parts of a structuralist semiotic system, but rather cleverly used ways to politicize spaces and marginalize communities. Indeed, hegemonic oppression calls for a reaction, which comes in the form of initiatives taken by the Bedouin community. As noted by Koskela (2003: 306):

"control is never completely hegemonic. There is always an element of resistance. Surveillance can be turned to 'counter surveillance', to a weapon for those who are oppressed".

The conceptualization and the role of "bottom-up" design as an alternative pattern of social opposition is important. "Bottom-up" design as we will conclude is characterized by the formation of autonomous acts reflecting personal and social

needs that often contradict the interests of those in power. These acts are based on existing social networks and despite their informality they identify the limits of the state's control which requires to compliance with a dictated social order (Holston, 1989). Moreover, this pattern of objection, despite its arbitrariness, produces social and political consciousness and thus has a subversive potential.

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