

SCOTT BURNHAM

Gesprächsreihe **Der öffentliche Raum der Stadt**/Talk Series **The Public Space and the City**

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Einführung/Introduction

Die Fabrikanten: *Wir haben Scott Burnham voriges Jahr in Manchester kennengelernt, wo es ein riesiges Museum gibt, das sich dem Thema Urbanität verschrieben hat und wo Scott Burnham künstlerischer Leiter war. Er ist in Amerika geboren und 1997 nach England gekommen, wo er eigentlich nur drei Monate bleiben wollte, seitdem aber dort tätig ist. Das Interesse am öffentlichen Raum war ein Beweggrund, nach England zu kommen, denn der öffentliche Raum war in den USA kein Thema. Wenn man in den USA öffentlichen Raum brauchte, dann hat man sich den einfach genommen, weil ohnehin so viel Platz da war. Das hat sich mittlerweile allerdings geändert.*

Scott ist ein sehr gefragter Redner; vor kurzem hat er in London in der ‚Architecture Week‘ über ‚self curating cities‘ publiziert.

Der heutige Vortrag steht unter dem Motto der open source city, also des Open Source-Gedankens. Als Direktor des Urbis hat er zahlreiche größere Projekte organisiert und kuratiert. Seit kurzem ist er nicht mehr künstlerischer Leiter, sondern künstlerischer Berater des Urbis, weil er so viele andere Projekte betreut. Das hat den angenehmen Nebeneffekt, dass er das gleiche macht wie vorher, aber nichts mehr mit der Verwaltung zu tun hat.

Scott Burnham: Thank you very much for inviting me here tonight. I thought I would open with a few slides sampling some of the projects I have done – independent projects before Urbis, projects with Urbis, and a reference to some projects I am doing now post-Urbis. I am a great believer that **the city is a living, breathing organism**. Hence a lot of my talk will be about the **organic forces at work within a city** and creating relationships between people and the city.

For (the project) „**Blue**“ I was asked by the National Theatre in London to create a project for World Aids Day. I don't know how familiar you are with Derek Jarman's film „Blue“ – the film consists of nothing but a solid blue colour, and the soundtrack is Jarman talking about the final status of AIDS and experiencing life as he is affected by it. For the National Theatre I transformed the entire South Bank of London into a memorial for those lost to AIDS and then set up a radio broadcast of the soundtrack so anyone within eyesight of South Bank could listen to the soundtrack while they looked at the blue projection covering the National Theatre...what I really enjoyed about it is how the emotions of the city come forward in those who amassed along South Bank on the night to be part of it.

„**I thought about you**“ was a project commissioned by the city of Barcelona which revealed the memories that the city itself holds.

Each of the blue plaques you see here in this slide is a memory which took place at that specific location where the plaque is placed, yet one of the people involved in the memories has since been lost to AIDS. So it is the city telling stories it holds, that the individual no longer can. What I like about „I Thought About You“ is that it is animating the city using the memories and emotions of the city itself.

It may seem like a leap in projects as I move to the next one, but in my mind it isn't that great a leap. After animating public spaces with temporary projects, I then began looking at how I could do the same thing more permanently through the design of public spaces. This is a project which in London is fairly well known, the „**Mulberry Courtyards**“. At the top you see four courtyards which are in a section of London known as Tower Hamlets. Tower Hamlets is very intense, and has the least amount of open green space in the entire city. It is largely an Indian and Pakistani community that really has very little chance for any relationship with nature or relationships with public and shared spaces in their immediate area.

So when I was designing the spaces I worked very closely with the community and the school children who would use the spaces. What you see represented here are layers of the project. At the bottom is the pallet where I said, please take home a disposable camera and take a photo of a colour you like, a texture you like, a pattern you like, shapes you like. And those became the pallet I worked with during the visual and textual design of the courtyards. Moving up another layer, they were talking about what they enjoyed about doing space, how they enjoyed moving about in space. So that was designed into the areas. We invented a video game with them so they can move through space and build objects they wanted to see there and interact with. And all those layers came into the design of the space.

So my work began transitioning from looking at animating public space into actually designing public space, then moving into the more analytical nature of exploring opportunities for new relationships with public space and the urban aesthetic. That shift, and many other projects related to it, led to Urbis asking me to become its Creative Director in 2003.

Urbis is an institution devoted to **urban culture**, to **the modern city**. I will give just a quick overview of some of the many projects I directed during my time there. First is „**Ill communication**“ one of Europe's largest exhibitions of street art. The exhibition selected ten of the world's best graffiti artists from Sao Paulo, Milan, New York, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Munich and we flew them in to Urbis to work directly in the gallery space. It was a hugely successful exhibition; we had over 40.000 people attend that exhibition. Another show, the **Peter Saville Show** was a retrospective looking at one of Manchester's most famous **designers** who has worked with New Order, Joy Division, Happy Mondays and all of Manchester Factory Records, including a vast array of clients worldwide since his Manchester days.

Moving into more wide-ranging explorations, I worked with the architect **Will Alsop** to create a project called „**SuperCity**“. On the exhibition poster you see here is a map of the North of England. In the show we looked at redefining urbanity itself in the north. What if rather than an individual sense of urban relationship in separate cities you began **thinking of the region of the North of England as one urban environment?**

„SuperCity“ looks at how you can take different areas and begin breaking apart the notion of urbanity. This is largely about public space, but right from the beginning I began expanding the notion of public space to absolutely everything you experienced when you were in the public areas of the city. Sometimes I think it is very limiting to think about public space being just a public square outside. Yes – the square is public space, it is shared space. But you are deeply affected by your relation to the architecture that surrounds it, visuals that surround the square, by its signage, and by the experiences you had getting there.

So we began breaking apart the very notion of public space. Cars, public transport, shops, streetscapes – this deeply affects your relationship with space in the city. So this was a complete redefinition. For example: What if the city removed all the concrete it didn't want? And then we began breaking apart the very relationship with all the built environment of the city.

A key part of „SuperCity“ was the public forum. We invited professionals from across the North of England. Here you see them workshopping the future of their cities as we began to ask „how can we change your definition of a city? How can you have areas of the city to play in? How can you actually remove the barrier for people to interact with the city the way they want to?“ I find it a great irony that **in public space very little public activity is allowed**. There are very strict rules that govern your behavior in public space, and I find that a at odds with the intended nature of public space itself.

„**At home**“ was a project I did with **Peter Saville** where we looked at the city of Manchester and the way it had influenced Saville. This is about viewing **the city as inspiration**. I talked with Peter about what in the city of Manchester inspired him while he was growing up. What was it about this particular slice of urbanity, this urban environment which inspired him as he was living here? He selected a series of images he remembered from his time in Manchester, or a button, a postcard, a clipping from a newspaper. In the middle of this slide you see the image for „be seeing you.“ That was a little button he picked up at a shop somewhere in the city. This was getting inside what ephemera from the city of Manchester inspired him. We turned all the tiny bits and pieces that he found in the city into billboards. For six weeks the city of Manchester returned the inspiration to the rest of the city. These little pieces that were otherwise completely anonymous became inspiring to the entire city again.

Similarly we did a project called „**Urban Oasis**“ - at the left you see the space before and at the right the space after. Manchester is a pretty intense industrial city. It has the least green space of any city in Europe. We took what in the UK is known as a brownfield site and with the **Office of Subversive Architecture** transformed it into an urban oasis. At the far end you see a bar because of a rule I learned quickly in the city - if you want anyone to use a space in Manchester, put a bar there. We transformed it for one week only into a green urban oasis. You could have a beer, sit there, enjoy this new space. A week later we removed it. And that provoked more of a conversation within in the city about public space than anything else I have ever done. Because we gave someone public space and then removed public space. And that forced people to ask questions about why don't we have more public space permanently.

This brings us on the work that I am really focussing right now. To explain: I have transitioned from being the creative director of Urbis to being the creative consultant for Urbis now because a lot of the work I was doing with other cities required more of my time than I could give within Urbis, so I recognized it was necessary for me to become more mobile to work in other cities. A lot of what I am paying attention to now is what I refer to as **open source urbanism**.

One of the most inspiring quotes I have come across is that „**Every generation must build its own city**“ by Antonio Sant’Eli in the, Futurist Manifesto On Architecture.

I have been spending a lot of time in **China** recently and just finished an exhibition on contemporary creativity in China. In China the **Hutongs**, the traditional Chinese homes, are being destroyed at an amazing rate. When the Chinese government wants to expand an area of the city and wants to build new housing units or offices, it just happens. One day you may see a symbol on your door called a chai, and that means your building is marked to be destroyed. The grey roofs that you see here are the roofs and the building materials of the destroyed tiny village houses. What people have begun doing in China if you live in a tower block, is assembling this material, taking it home and actually adding layers onto their apartment block using the material salvaged from the destroyed city. **People take it upon themselves to recreate their own environment** from the salvages of the city.

This image has become a symbol for what I am focusing on now. It is a British **‘no parking at any time’** sign and underneath, someone placed a Post-It note that reads ‚I am real’ over the ‚no parking’ symbol. So to read the altered sign now, it states „I am real at any time.“ And that’s exactly what I am talking about. We need a new definition of urbanism, **a new definition to our relationship with public space that activates public space**, and makes public space active in our daily lives. So, taking inspiration from the note, our relationship with the city can be ‚real at any time’. Our prescribed spaces in the cities now, once they are designed, when the architect or designer walks away, that space is frozen in time. I am concerned about **how people relate to space after its creation and continually do so**. How they can both connect, and contribute, to that space.

A perfect example of how this can be done is in **Stockholm**: this is on a flyover inbetween two motorways. The artist **Akay** as an experiment just laid down these boards (*forming letters and words; annotation*) forming the phrase ‚I am sorry’ in Swedish, of course. Once every couple of days when he would pass on his way to and from work he’d take a photograph of the sign. And as members of the public were moving back and forth from work they began changing the words: „wake up“, „get away“, „jump“, „why“, „think“, „because“. This is completely outside any formal activity, but people instinctively took it upon themselves to play with space.

Next is Roadsworth in Montreal: An artist who takes the street markings as the starting point of creative intervention. This is also an important point I want to talk about – the **urban infrastructure as the starting point of a dialogue, not the end**, but the beginning of the creative process. An interesting point about Roadsworth is that last year he had 53 charges filed against him for his arrest in the city of Montreal.

Each and everyone of these markings became a warrant for his arrest. Shortly after the media began writing about his case and his work, attitudes towards him and what he did began to change. The end result is that he is now being commissioned by companies and the city of Montreal to do his work in certain areas around the city. It's very interesting to see his progress in coming from the subversive to being adopted as an acknowledged creative force in his reworking of the iconography of the city.

Here we see, in Chicago: „**You are beautiful**“ – an installation created by paper cups placed in a chainlike fence (*forming letters and words; annotation*). Like with the boards in Stockholm these guys walk by every few days with their camera and document the ongoing dialogue that people are taking upon themselves to create: „You're over“, „you're a lover“, „you are loved“, „you are a fever“, „you are forever“. Just individuals on their way to work, stopping and feeling: I want to have a connection with this project, with this space. And that is what happens when you begin breaking apart the rules of public space. You begin having a continually evolving **connection with the urban environment**.

You think about the expanse of the city, this chainlike fence, the boards in Stockholm, the street markings in Montreal – the largely anonymous spaces of the city that suddenly become very important locations in our ongoing relationship. I refer to these moments of interaction and those who witness them as catalysts which create **communities of experience**. If everyone in this room went outside into the square here and witnessed an extraordinary yet temporary moment in that space, we are at that point bound by a shared community of experience in taking part in that experience, even after the moment has passed – and I think that's very powerful.

This picture was taken today (*showing an underground passage way in Linz; annotation*). I think it is a good illustration of the line that exists between approved and in this case, literally underground, activity. What I like about this photo is this line – the aboveground and the underground, and how much more interesting stuff is happening below ground in the city; and this is quite a literal example of that. **When you go below the controlled layer of the city you begin finding these notions of expression.** Street art is always a tricky thing, and I will not stand here and say, ‚all graffiti is good.‘ But what I am saying is that this is an expression of people wanting more of a personal connection with the city.

Die Fabrikanten: *Within the program of Urbis there is a special program for schools which „stimulates and informs learners of all levels by exploring all aspects of urban life.“ What does this mean? Do teachers say, it is important for kids to know what public space is?*

Scott Burnham: The learning department at Urbis is quite exceptional. They recently created a workshop on the ground floor where kids and families were asked to design and change public space almost as straightforward as in the TV series „Changing Rooms“, which is an interior design show where strangers come in your room and completely redecorate it. What I like is that at Urbis they give kids the freedom to completely redress the city, asking simply „**How would you decorate a public space?**“ In the same way as „Changing Rooms“ – if you could put a comfortable chair over there, if you could pull fabric over a lampshade create cool lightning.

What I love about that is most of the kids participating are too young to know what they are not supposed to do. They just do what feels right – what they want to do. Everything is possible. They are putting sofas in public squares, draping fabric over street lamps because we're asking them to create their own idea of beauty in public spaces.

I think it's wildly important to have imagination when thinking about such things because public space is such a precious commodity. It is the place where life happens in the city. **Too often public space is being treated as functional.** One of the reasons Urbis has so many projects related to public space is because Manchester has an appalling relationship with public space. Appalling – it was an industrial city that treated space as wasted space. If you have a public square (*points outside; annotation*) – if this was Manchester a hundred years ago, that square would not be there. A factory would be there. Because empty space is wasted space, because it isn't producing. Interestingly China is going through the same thing right now. A Chinese architect I was talking to about this said: „When the space of a city changes from its function being to hold life to its function being to make profit, the fabric of a society changes.“ So I think one of the reasons why we are starting to talk with kids about public space is that I want people to say that a space is not good enough, that a space should be better.

Die Fabrikanten: *What was the main argument when you were chosen as the creative director?*

Scott Burnham: I think it was because my work was not based in theory but in street-level practice. It is very easy to write an article about how poor public space is. It is much more powerful to do something about it. And it is exceedingly difficult to actually physically change space in the short term. It can take years and millions of Euros to redevelop a space, but **in five weeks through cultural projects you can change someone's impression of that space and their relationship to it.** And it was „Blue“, and it was „I thought about you“ that made people realize that it was possible to change people's opinions about space through cultural projects. And that's why I was handed the keys to the place and they said: We want you to do the same thing at an institutional level.

Die Fabrikanten: *Now it seems you have a big influence. ‚The Guardian‘ wrote that you transformed Urbis into: „an intellectual powerhouse that explores urban environments with creative flair“; in a magazine you were voted as one of the 100 most influential people in the UK. How did this come? Is public space such an issue in the UK?*

Scott Burnham: The future of cities is generally one of the most important topics in Great Britain at the moment, I think. It feels very pretentious to talk about being voted as one of the top hundred most influential people in the UK. Deeply ironic as well, because I am not British. „SuperCity“ was the project that put me on that ranking because I was asking: What if ...? to all the issues facing British cities. **„What if ... ?“ is the most powerful question;** I think it's the two most powerful words in any language. What if. And when I set out to create „SuperCity“ Will Alsop (the architect behind the project) and I asked: What if the entire north of the country was one city? And this caused such outrage because everybody was saying, It's not possible, you can't do that - this problem, that problem – and I said, no, for one moment, don't get bogged down with logistics and politics, just ask yourself: What if ...?

And then we started talking how that could benefit agriculture, how the countryside in-between could be the food production areas for the cities on each side, how a collective identity is so much more powerful than a handful of individual ones. So that ranking came about because a huge amount of media influence began happening. Everyone, the BBC, The Times' in London, Architectural journals, everyone began writing articles about it. And that caused a huge amount of controversy simply because I asked the nation: What if ...?

There was a lot of criticism but you don't provoke original thought unless you provoke criticism. And so the ranking was a reaction to me saying, it's time the UK rethought cities. The United Kingdom is going through a bit of an urban crisis at the moment. There is runaway regeneration. Manchester is the fastest growing city in the UK and among the five fastest growing cities in Europe by some rankings because a huge amount of money is being poured into the city. The regeneration is just running away but there's a lot of problems there. I think it is time to ask about the larger notion of urbanism, so I went on the offensive and said: **It's time to rethink cities themselves**. Don't think about the individual city, think about the city region. Think about how different cities can begin working together to create a combination of identities rather than a series of individual ones.

Die Fabrikanten: *Do you already see an influence of your work? For example Liverpool which is competing with Manchester a lot – do you see things going on there because of Urbis and your work there?*

Scott Burnham: It is interesting that since „SuperCity“ there is **a greater sense of relationships between cities**. I think relationships is the word. It is too early to say definitively because the exhibition was only one year ago. So I can't say for example: This building was built because of the project that I did. But people are talking more about relationships between cities, interchanges between cities, how different cities can work together. The cities in the north - there's Leeds, there's Bradford, suddenly realizing, we can't do this on our own. It's a combination of parts. In Liverpool when there is talk about the Capital of Culture – Manchester has an international festival in 2007 - and that is done not specifically to compete; they did not want to compete with the Capital of Culture in 2008 but to augment it, to be something in 07, then something else in 08. So suddenly for the south of England you started getting this idea that once every summer you go up here because there is something great in Manchester, something great in Liverpool, something great in Leeds. You get a relationship with the region rather than the city. People are working together much more effectively.

Die Fabrikanten: *To finish this topic of urbanism – what will happen at Urbis in 2007?*

Scott Burnham: In the beginning of 2007 is an exhibition on Hong Kong, looking on how that city has changed since the British changeover, the changeover from British rule to Chinese rule and the impact this has had on the city and its artistic cultures.

Die Fabrikanten: *Can you give some examples for change in Hong Kong after the British left it?*

Scott Burnham: **Hong Kong** is a fascinating city because it sits **somewhere in between democracy and the lack of democracy**. It is its own independent republic in the eyes of China. On an urban level what is very interesting is that it is a **city of layers**.

When you move around the city you move through layers. There is the underground layer, there is street level, there is walkways above ground, maybe two, three stories above ground. People are doing tai-chi in these walkways hovering over the city, people are literally washing their hair in these walkways ... it is a city that is so dense that human life takes place on levels, on layers. So from an urban point of view it is a city of layers, from a sociological point of view the transition from being a British sovereign state to Chinese control was too much of an instant leap for the population so they have this very interesting kind of middle democracy – democracy through the actions of appointed leaders.

Die Fabrikanten: *Is there a clash between capitalism and the Chinese system?*

Scott Burnham: Yes and no. China itself is capitalism gone mad at the moment. It's not that rough of a fit surprisingly. In mainland China it is probably a more capitalist environment at the moment than America. You have got a runaway economy, and for the first time people have a disposable income that they never had before. It's a consumer-mad society. Hong Kong is somewhere in the middle as they have had a sense of opulence for longer.

Die Fabrikanten: *You said that in America in the middle of the nineties the way of thinking was that if you needed urban space you'd create it.*

Scott Burnham: Yes. One of the reasons American cities have been late in exploring creative approaches to urbanism is because of the vast amount of space available in America. If an area of a city was dying, or density was a problem, another ring would just be populated surrounding the city. You'd just go out of the centre and not worry about the inside.

Die Fabrikanten: *So the things you were dealing with were not topical in the US at that time. How does it come that you had a desire to work with public space when it was not a topic at all?*

Scott Burnham: That is always an interesting question. In what might seem a confusing answer, I have to say it was because I was born and raised in a very small village in Vermont on the Canadian border. I later moved to Boston to attend Boston University. I went as a young student and I remember very distinctly – as if I was in a film – of literally stepping off the bus, having travelled from a **small village into a massive city**. And I remember thinking that the city was like a playground. And I couldn't understand why there was not a greater sense of connection between these people and a greater sense of a shared buzz of being part of something so dynamic. Everyone sitting in a park and everyone being completely isolated while this vast urban drama played out around them. There was **no relationship between people, no relationship between space**. It was a naive attitude to enter the city with, but I think being naive when entering new areas is important. So I instantly began thinking that relationship to space, relationships with each other in that space was very important, and here you had no relationship with space around the city. What was important to me was finding a way that you could create projects, create ways that people's relationship to space could be new. So people could be excited just about going out and communicating with each other and with the city.

America is a very strange urban place because it has an enormous amount of land. When a city gets to dense you just create another layer outside of it.

And what's happening there now is what is called „exo-cities“ which are entire cities for example in Arizona at the edge of the desert that doesn't have a function in people's social lives – it's only function is a place to retreat to in the evenings after you work all day in the city. It breeds a disconnect in society.

So basically the beginning of my career was just me saying, there has to be something better, some better way to do this. The saying is that I went to London for three months, ten years ago. I just planned to go over and do a project, sort of prove myself and then bring it back to the states, but I got hooked and I stayed.

Die Fabrikanten: *But the discussion in America has changed.*

Scott Burnham: Yes. Interestingly – and this sounds the most bizarre thing one could possibly say – **the trouble in the Middle East has had a very beneficial knock-on effect in American cities.** It has made oil hugely expensive in America, and this has made driving expensive and therefore people are now for the first time having to think about „in“. They are having to think about the notion of living inside cities rather than living outside cities, or at the least, integrating with the physical city more through public transport and walking. **Also for the first time in a long time people are beginning to think about sustainability inside the city,** motivated by the fuel situation, but also the acknowledgement of global warming and the role cities play in that.

I have always been inspired by **Brian Eno's** work, in particular his work with the Long Now foundation. Long Now is an organisation that looks at the big, big picture. And Eno often talks of the ‚short now‘ and the ‚long now‘. The short now are decisions about what you do tonight, how you plan for this week, this year. The long now affects decisions about your children's future, and your grandchildren's future – not only in terms of your own family's context, but in society's – that's the long now. Interestingly he began talking about the same thing relating to cities: You have **the small here and the big here.** The small here is a decision that this would be a really nice piece of design to have in my house, or I could live in a gated community – that is the small here. The big here is thinking how can the entire city be a better place to live. How can we connect to the entire city. The big here is the future of urban design in the city – either in Linz, or in Austria's funding of new urban design on a national level for example.

America is beginning to go from the small here to the big here, asking: **How do we live more successfully in the city?** How can the city be more attractive at all levels of engagement? Chicago is a very interesting example. They are beginning to do a green roof project where a lot of roofs in Chicago are having greenery planted on top. In Europe these initiatives have been underway for some time; Berlin has quite a few examples and actually in the building I am staying in here in Linz, I am looking down on a green roof. And Chicago is beginning this as well because that saves on fuel, saves on heat efficiency, etc. America is beginning to think about the city as a whole now. That's a very good thing.

I have actually had offers to do work in America. I am the classic immigrant story, but in reverse – I left because no one wanted what I did and now they are inviting me back.

Die Fabrikanten: „SuperCity“ was a project to rethink urban environment. What was the result of this rethinking?

Scott Burnham: One area that quickly made its way to the top of the agenda was rethinking our relationship with food and agricultural production and consumption in cities. The north of England is a very interesting place. There's huge amounts of farming, of farmland that exists in the north of England, inbetween the cities. But so much of this agricultural production is shipped over seas. Let's say, local strawberries that are shipped to New Zealand. Then you go into a local supermarket, and you see that the strawberries there are coming from Israel. And you think – why can't we have the ones that are grown down the road from the supermarket? They'll have apples in the market, and these apples will come from France, while Britain's apples will go to Ireland. And you begin thinking, this is insane, it's wasting a huge amount of energy and it is only because of these independent trade relations. That is the agricultural version of needing to think about the big here. So this line of thinking really began to get others thinking. A group was established and began meeting at Urbis during the project that looked at a return to localised food production. And that group is still meeting regularly today.

You need to rethink the way relationships happen. It's about connectivity, it's about relationships. Just because something ‚always happens‘ a certain way doesn't mean it's the best way. This food production: Why isn't there a lorry going from your farmland outside the city right into the city with the produce? It doesn't make any sense. So we began rethinking the relationships between areas.

This relates to another area that came out of „SuperCity“: **areas for play**. Within the exhibition design there were areas where people could themselves, draw, write, etc. In essence, these are people who are living in the city, working in the city, but they have to come into a gallery to express themselves in a ‚public‘ way? We hear so much of the ‚creative city‘, there is Richard Florida's work, there is Charles Langley's work on the creative city, and we thought **it is strange to you never actually get to see the inheritant creativity in the city in the streets of the city**. There are galleries which show local artists' work, but again, that's a very small section, and a very much established market. That is what fascinates me about graffiti, and that is what fascinates me about that underpass by the river here in Linz that I showed you a photo of. That's an area where for the first time there is no barrier, no access point that's needed, but everything is still only happening in the underground.

The show itself was created with a lot of creativity generated by the public. In our workshops, we opened up the question to the public – **How would you redefine the city?** The workshops contributed hugely to the exhibition. We took ideas from the people and put them into parts of the exhibition. I think it is very dangerous to be precious about what you do. I wanted people's ideas to go into the show.

Die Fabrikanten: What project is it that you are doing right now in Amsterdam, Lisbon and other cities?

Scott Burnham: „Urban Play“. It is a very large project that is just at its beginning. I am working with **Droog Design** in Amsterdam and **Experimenta Design** in Lisbon. Urban Play is about **taking the innovation and the inventiveness of guerilla design and the subversive activity around the city and it as a design process**.

At the heart of it is inviting designers to create objects that – to use the open source analogy – will be released into the city in a version 1.0. So let's say for example a bench or a tram stop or a billboard – these will be released in the city as a starting point, and **objects that people are meant to interact with them**, meant to interfere with them. So as the project takes place in Madrid, in Istanbul, Tallinn, Lisbon it begins to physically answer the question of what the inheritant creative personality of that city actually is? How does the same object change in each city over time? Other designers are creating what we call tools and toys. These is **objects that can be used with the existing infrastructure of the city**.

One thing that I love here in Linz are your traffic sign stands. All day I was walking Linz back and forth taking dozens of photographs because you have these amazing pieces of urban infrastructure, urban furniture, which I think are great: This little stands that you can bolt things on like ‚No parking‘ signs. What I love about those is that because of this open-ended element to their design, they could also be used in a number of different ways. Why can't something much more fun or creative be done there so people can use a section of the sign post for whatever they want? That is the notion behind the tools and toys part in „Urban Play“ – using existing urban infrastructure in new innovative ways. Think of the chainlink fence in Chicago. The way that all that was was a fence where people put papercups and someone went by and said, oh, wait a minute.... What I liked about that was that when looked at it you realized that some people showed up with more papercups because they wanted to spell words that the existing structure wouldn't allow.

Die Fabrikanten: *What do you think should city councils in general provide for the people in a city?*

Scott Burnham: That's a very interesting question. I think **city councils should provide opportunities for people to enter into physical dialogues with the city and dialogues with each other**. Cities are getting more dense physically, and more people are living in cities. I think we are at the wrong end of the wedge when city governments insist that more control is needed in space. I think this is looking at the wrong end of the equation. Now – a certain amount of control is always needed. But more people are saying there needs to be another side to this equation. **Control is a limiting factor** and I think when you are getting more dense environments and you layer restrictions on a physically restricting environment, no one is winning and no one is enjoying their time in the city anymore.

I think **city councils should think of ways to allow a sense of play in the wider city**. I am not calling for total anarchy, I am not calling for a graffiti free-for-all, but **areas, systems, allowances for people to interact with public space in a personal way**. Think of the image I showed of the underpass by the river, that cloud with a smiling face on it? It is something that really moves me because someone did not do this to destroy property, somebody is not going around painting clouds with smiling faces on them in an underground passage way for a political purpose; they are doing it because it makes them smile when they are doing it and they want others to smile. They think it's funny. **There is something very powerful about someone taking the initiative to do something just for the sake of fun in a public space**. I think that needs to be acknowledged.

Die Fabrikanten: *Can rules also be kind of tools? Who should make the rules? Is it the city council that should make the rules? Could people using a place make the rules?*

Scott Burnham: Think of a playground. If you are in an inner city often the play area is just a piece of pavement. That place kids can enter with a ball, it can be a basketball, it can be a football, it can be any ball, and they can make up their own game in that space. That is a space in which a game is allowed. **Why aren't there more spaces for more games?** Games which haven't been invented yet. Why can't games just happen anywhere in the city? That sounds a naive statement and I am very cynical person by nature, but as I said earlier, it is also important to be naive at times when you face these problems. Why is it only if you have a ball in your hand that you are allowed to do what you want in a certain space?

Designmai in Berlin had an interesting game, a project with Nike a couple of years ago. It was called 'Urban Games'. It was just allowing people to make up games in the street. A designer invented this tape - it could turn any area of the city into a space where ball games could be played. They would put down lines and start playing a ball game. The police would walk by and say you are not allowed to do that. People would ask – why? We're just playing a ball game. And because it was a ball game it began playing with notions of what was allowed and what was not allowed. There is a strange relationship between rules and space. I think rules are important, but **there needs to be areas where it is possible to create new rules**. Rules should be open at one end.

In cities such as **Beijing, Hong Kong** and **Shanghai they use public space in a much more sophisticated way than anyone in the west does**. They have exercise equipment in public space because of the density, because of the extreme cohabitation. **Public space is a highly valued area**. We are talking about gym equipment, rowing machines, all designed in a very unique way, very sturdy and able to withstand the weather and repeated use. There will be areas where people can full workouts in public space, there is a great tradition of message boards in public space where people can write messages for each other; really informally.

There are wonderful public spaces that are used really very, very well. There is such an acknowledgement of the value of public space that there are no rules, because it is a self-governed code. With these windows here in this room, especially coming from a city like Manchester where they would have iron shutters over them at night, anyone could smash that window; I could go out and smash the window. **We could smash any window in this square – but we don't**. I think that needs to be taken into consideration, that needs to be acknowledged. People can abuse rules, but people can also adopt a common rule. It is unfortunate that cities don't seem to trust its own people to behave in public on their own regard.

Die Fabrikanten: *Do people feel more responsible for public space in Beijing?*

Scott Burnham: There is a greater responsibility in public space because it is a self-regulated space. If someone went up to the notice board and ripped down all the messages they would create a great crime against their community. If you damage or vandalize the exercise machines you are aware that you are taking away something from yourself and you are taking away something from your community.

The one slide I showed you with the apartment building with the roofs of the Hutongs on it is part of a much larger series called „Informal China“, a research project by Jiang Jung, in ways that people in dozens of different ways are using public space in very unique ways, creating little shop areas, shops in public spaces.

Public space in community areas in China is treated in a very sophisticated way because it is such a valued part of urban society. But there are other complications there as well, in that Chinese society is a much tighter society than any in the west.

I believe that you can tell a lot of a community if you walk into their public space, you know a lot about them: Do people respect their own environment? Do people respect each other? This is a great lesson I learned in China. You can see a shared respect when you enter the shared spaces of a community. I think this sense of shared responsibility should transfer over into Western cities as well.

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