ACTIVATING URBAN COMMONS

Animating & enlivening our shared city spaces:
DISCOVERY PHASE

Waymaking has been defined as "a multidisciplinary/knowledge media design methodology and a constellation of values for human engagement with the built environment that combines **Wayfinding** with **Placemaking** and helps users of the space in question to build and share meanings of their experiences with space mangers and other space users".[1] Waymaking is different from hacking in that it aims to increase the appreciated quality of the space/place rather than re-purposing it. Here quality is defined as the degree to which the built environment space/place is meeting all of the specified and aspirational goals for which it was created.

Our **design challenge** takes the waymaking idea, for which there are no key informants or guidebooks, and imagines a waymaking enabling embodiment (a 'kit') in collaboration with representatives of a built environment location (*in this case ourselves*).

The focus is on public spaces/places linked to a specific community; specifically, our **Lisgar Square case study.**
The aim is to imagine waymaking interventions that promote public engagement with the space/place and that acknowledge the multiple facets of influence determining how the built environment location was **imagined** in the first place as well as how it might be **maintained** and **managed** in the future.

These facets of inquiry include: 1) **Built Environment**; 2) **Public Space**; 3) **Activating Space**; 4) **Mapping and Digital Representations**; 5) **Governance and Shared Management of Public Space.**

Having investigated each of these areas, the essence of each will be distilled into a digital/physical *Activating the Urban Commons* Waymaking Kit.

This poster is part of our **Discovery Phase** and presents a preliminary list of activities designed to help participants appreciate the meaning of each facet for the waymaking exercise guided by the kit. We invite comments and suggestions on our proposed activities.

Case study: Lisgar Square, Toronto, Canada

lisgar square

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Public Commons Map

Sketch: Contemporary Pnyx, Stoa, Agora (4 dimensional) [2]
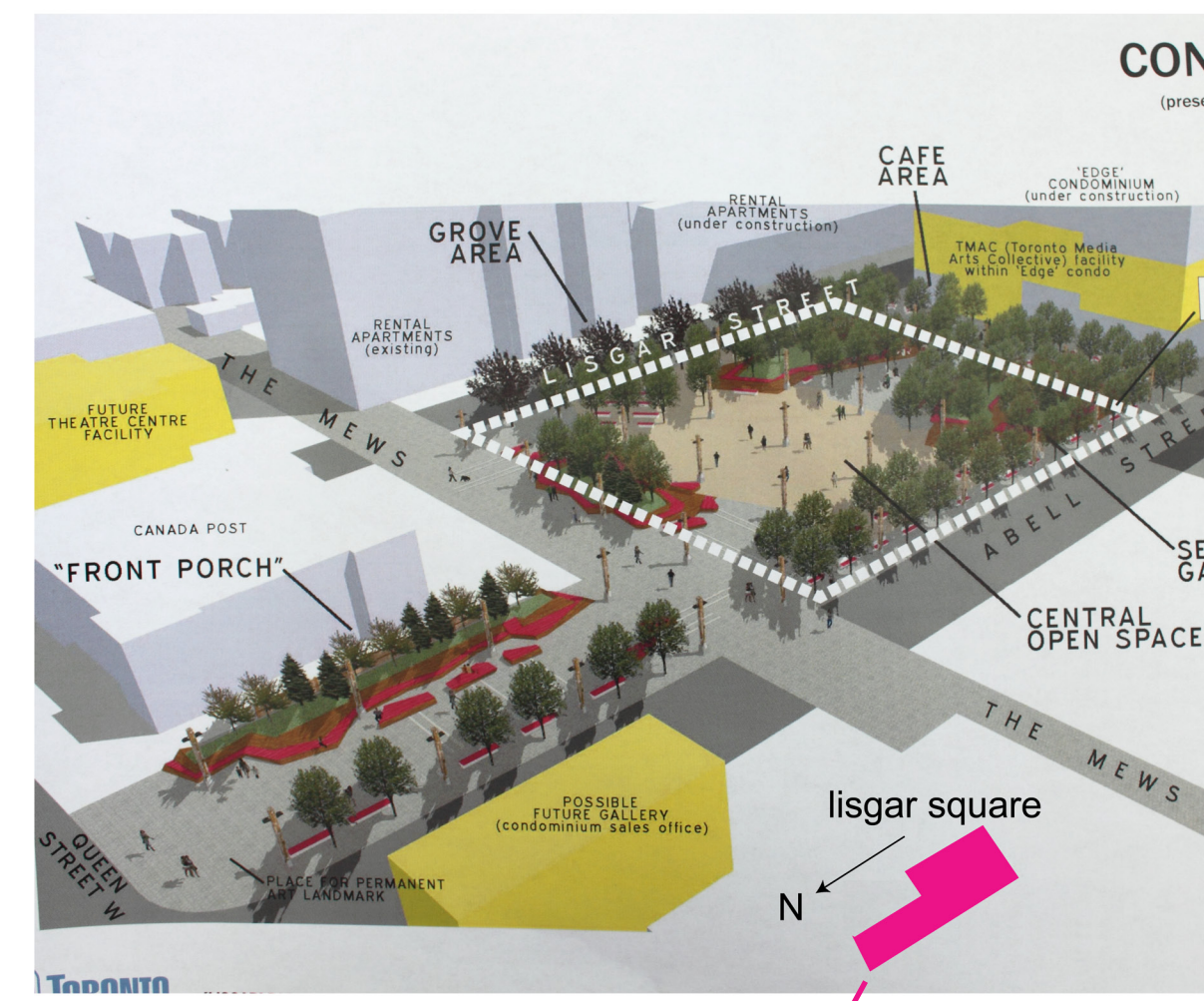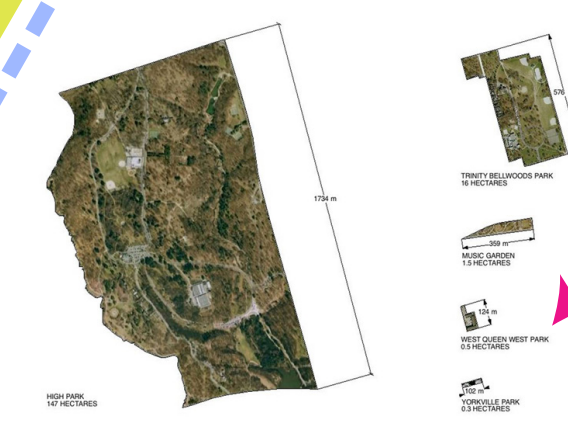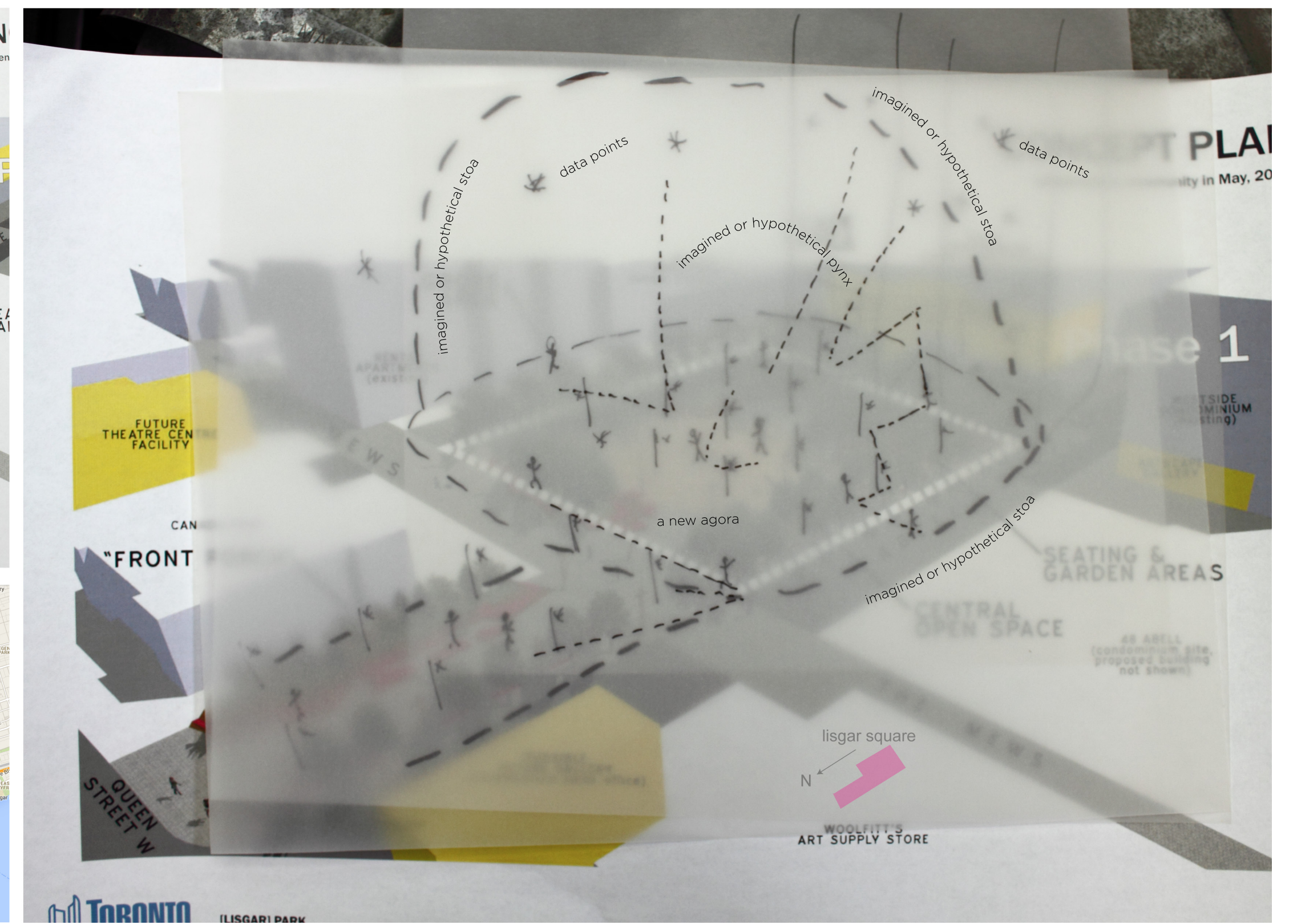
Lisgar Square is a 4000 m2 (.4 hectare) park-in-planning, which will be located in the West Queen West neighbourhood of Toronto (scheduled completion date is 2015). It is the only public space to be designed for the contentiously overdeveloped land area known as the Queen West Triangle.

The public square will serve the existing neighbourhood residents as well as the thousands of new residents expected from the insertion of 15 + high rise (between 8-26 storeys) condominium buildings added to the area.

The future Lisgar Square provides a backdrop against which we interpret the meanings of our **five facets of inquiry**, and ground the creation of our waymaking kit.

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facet : The Built Environment

"Not only is the city an object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While it may be stable in general outlines for some time, it is ever changing in detail. Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases."— Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*

CONCEPT: The built environment is the body of the city, replete with concrete and glass bones, a network of transit veins running from the heart to the extremities, patches of green parkland, orderly public squares. This facet uncovers the links between health and urban planning, contemplates the paths and edges of the urban fabric (Lynch, 1960), and explores triangulation - two people, one neutral object- in public space.

KEY INFORMANT: John Danahy, Coordinator of Research and Co-Director, Centre for Landscape Research; Associate Professor, University of Toronto

READINGS: 1. "Between Health and Place: Understanding the Built Environment," (Lisa Marie Williams, Wellesley Institute, 2013)
2. "The City Image and Its Elements," (Kevin Lynch, from *The Image of the City*, in *The City Reader*, eds. R.T. LeGates, F. Stout. London: Granta Books, 1996)
3. *Cities for People*, (Jan Gehl, Washington: Island Press, 2010)
4. "A Place Called Home", (Hazel Easthope. *Housing, Theory and Society.* Vol 21(3), 2004)

ACTIVITIES: Do a location or street audit. Travel to a place you know and discover it for the first time.

How would you explore and contribute to shaping our shared Built Environment?

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facet : Public Space

"As one moved from the open space into the *stoa*, one moved from a public realm in which citizen freely intermingled into more private spaces." - Richard Sennett, 1996 *Raoul Wallenberg Lecture*

"The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statement uttered." – Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

CONCEPT: Public space is a fraught question, waiting on us for answering. This facet explores the public/private space dichotomy, probes the ethics of public spaces, and uncovers "a theory of everyday practices" (de Certeau, 1984).

KEY INFORMANT: James Brown, Brown and Storey Architects (B+SA)

READINGS:
1. "The Spaces of Democracy" (Richard Sennett. *Raoul Wallenberg Lecture*, 1996).
2. "Theorizing Public Space," (John R. Parkinson in *Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance*, New York: Oxford, 2012).
3. "Walking in the City," (Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

ACTIVITIES:
Learn the art of urban planning storytelling. Note the spaces in your area that are publicly owned. Compare to private or publicly accessible private spaces.

How would you articulate the concept of public space?

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facet : Governance & Shared Management of Public Space

"Thus, spaces in which one can encounter the demos in all its variety have an important democratic function – they help us see and recognize others and make us more willing to take their right to make claims on us seriously when we encounter them in political debate. It is not the claims they make that are important here; it is recognizing them as rightful claim-makers that matters... " – John R. Parkinson, *Democracy & Public Space*

CONCEPT: Governance is the tightrope on which democracy balances. This facet examines non-expert, collaborative and participatory models of governance, and concepts related to 'new urbanism.' It seeks to understand how effective governance can accompany community engagement and civic participation.

KEY INFORMANT: Fiona Crean, Ombudsman, City of Toronto

READINGS:
1. "Placemaking through Participatory Planning," (Wayne Beyea et al. in *Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics*, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).
2. "Land-use regulation for the creative city," (Stefano Moroni, in *Handbook of Creative Cities*, eds. David Emanuel Andersson, Åke E. Andersson & Charlotta Mellander, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).
3. "Participatory Democracy, Decentralization and Local Governance: the Montreal Participatory Budget in the light of 'Empowered Participatory Governance," (Caroline Patsias, Anne Latendresse, & Laurence Bherer. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(6), 2214, 2013).

ACTIVITIES: Crowdsource your condo charter or look into Community Planning Boards. Invest your time in a collaborative model of neighbourhood governance.

Where do you see participatory governance playing out?

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facet : Activating Space

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*

CONCEPT: How to make space come alive, to solidify the invisible ties between us, to turn "strangers into neighbours" (Sandercock & Attili, 2007). This facet explores place-based, site specific, creative, social interventions. It seeks to understand how to engage people in the urban environment, how to cultivate a sense of community in the eternally evolving city.

The *Activating Urban Commons Wayfinding Kit* is our contribution to civic engagement. Structured around the five facets, with each section of the kit containing a conceptual explanation and an exploratory activity. Once deployed into the urban wilderness, the kit will provide a map for examining, sharing, and reclaiming public space.

KEY INFORMANT: Shawn Micallef; writer, editor, columnist, walker

READINGS: 1. "Clusters, Networks and Creativity," (Charlie Karlsson in *Handbook of Creative Cities*, eds. David Emanuel Andersson, Åke E. Andersson & Charlotta Mellander, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).
2. "Fun with Strangers," (Jane McGonigal in *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).
3. "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness," (Jesper Juul, Keynote, *Level Up* conference. Utrecht, 2003).

ACTIVITIES: Add creative interventions to public spaces that surprise, delight and even challenge people. For instance, plan an open invitation public picnic using urban-farmed food in a local park. Talk to neighbours you have never met before.

What is your definition of an 'activated' urban space?
What are some memorable interventions?

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facet : Mapping and Digital Representations of Space

"Interest has shifted from the map as object to mapping as practice." – Jeremy W. Crampton, "Cartography: performative, participatory, political"

"They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement. Walking follows them: 'I fill this great empty space with a beautiful name.' - Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

CONCEPT: Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mark our passage through the virtual world and real space. Physical "maps are performative, participatory and political" (Crampton, 2009) and above all, represent power over place. This facet explores knowledge and data sharing, GIS as way/place/ finder/maker, and creating communities in the digital space.

KEY INFORMANT: Maurice Yeates, FRSC, Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, Ryerson University

READINGS: 1. "Information Places: Navigating Interfaces between Physical and digital Space," (Katharine S. Willis, Jens Geelhaar in *Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics*, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).
2. "A Visual Approach to Locative Urban Information," (Viktor Bedö in *Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics*, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).
3. "Virtual Cities for Simulating Smart Urban Public spaces," (Hideyuki Nakanishi et al. in *Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics*, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).

ACTIVITIES: Document your neighbourhood by adding your knowledge of locations through OpenStreetMaps.org.

How do your virtual and physical worlds mesh in the cityscape?

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1 "KMD for Waymaking in the Built Environment", Poster, University of Toronto, KMD3001H, 2013, http://waymakinggroup.wordpress.com

2 The **Pnyx** is a hill in central Athens, the capital of Greece. Beginning as early as 507 BC, the Athenians gathered on the Pnyx to host their popular assemblies, thus making the hill one of the earliest and most important sites in the creation of democracy.

Stoa is a term defining, in ancient Greek architecture, covered walkways or porticos, commonly for public usage. Early stoas were open at the entrance with columns lining the side of the building; they created a safe, enveloping, protective atmosphere. Later examples were built as two stories, with a roof supporting the inner colonnades where shops or sometimes offices were located. These buildings were open to the public; merchants could sell their goods, artists could display their artwork, and religious gatherings could take place. Stoas usually surrounded the marketplaces of large cities.

The **agora** was a central spot in ancient Greek city-states. The literal meaning of the word is "gathering place" or "assembly". The Agora was the center of athletic, artistic, spiritual and political life of the city.

Source: Wikipedia. 2013

KMD4000:
Professor Peter Pennefather
Andi Argast + Michelle Gay
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4000.kmd.utoronto.ca

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