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Term: Fall 2019

Vulnerable Populations in College Park?

Introduction

College Park is a public park and skating trail at 420 Yonge Street. It is located in a middle-to-high income neighbourhood, surrounded by high rise residential and commercial buildings. Covenant House homeless shelter, an Indigenous Youth Service Center, and the Metropolitan Police Headquarters are all located on the streets enclosing the park. Using our research, supplemented by theories and research done by others on the topic, we attempt to reveal: to what extent the design of College Park discourages certain activities or uses of the space? We argue that despite the prevalence of hostile architecture and security in College Park, the types of people and activities that the space is designed to exclude continue to use the space.

Literature Review

The first theory we used to frame our project was Defensible Space by Oscar Newman (1973). He theorized that the built environment can be designed in a way that prevents crime (Newman, 1973). He wrote that an area is safer when people feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for it - a criminal can sense a watchful community and would be less inclined to commit his crime (Newman, 1973). By creating a sense of territorialism among community members, they could mutually ensure a safe living environment (Newman, 1973).

Next we examined Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which is a crime prevention approach based on Newman's theory of Defensible Space. According to the Toronto Police, using CPTED, the design of the built environment can reduce the incidence and fear of crime, creating safer neighbourhoods (Toronto Police, N.d.). There are 3 concepts underpinning CPTED: natural surveillance, natural access control, and territorial reinforcement (Jeffery, 1977). Natural surveillance describes the presence of people or knowledge of being watched. Natural access control decreases crime opportunity through landscaping, barriers, and fencing (Jeffery, 1977). Through territorial reinforcement, showing ownership, occupancy, or influence of a space can deter unwanted activity (Jeffery, 1977).

Thirdly, we used Jane Jacobs' Sidewalk Ballet from her book "The Life and Death of Great American Cities" (1961). She wrote that for a street to be safe, "there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs, 1961). Busy streets are safer because the eyes on the street can

assist a person in danger (Jacobs, 1961). People watch these streets voluntarily and unconsciously because they are interested in the activity on the streets (Jacobs, 1961).

Lastly, we used Cara Chellew's theory Design Paranoia (2016). She revealed that paranoia of undesired use of public amenities leads designers to create less attractive spaces that are inviting and comfortable but not too much so (Chellew, 2016). For example, CPTED practices encourage the removal of public amenities to control activity but also make the space less attractive (Chellew, 2016). Upon interviewing a nurse in Toronto, she discovered that homeless people knew they were being designed against but that they continued to use the spaces because they had nowhere else to go (Chellew, 2016). Thus, she concluded that using design to address social issues only displaces it (Chellew, 2016).

Methodology

We employed four main methods for data collection. For our primary research we used alternative cartography, observations, visual imagery and interviews. To supplement our primary research, we utilized a literature review. The core of all of our primary research required field work. We visited College Park five times, spending about twelve hours there in total. We spent our time studying how space was organized in order to structure our research question and argument. Each visit to the park involved studying patterns of usage to develop a better understanding of how each area of the park gets utilized. Revisiting as a method itself was useful because it allowed us to not only track processes that occurred over time, but also allowed us to see how the park gets utilized at different times. Coupled with revisiting, our first primary method, visual imagery, played an important role in constructing the narratives that we were observing in the park. Mirzoeff's toolkit, *how to see the world* (2016), talks about the idea of a visual culture. We employed two parts of this idea to our research. The first part looks at the concept of "the police version of history" by Jacques Rancière (as quoted in Mirzoeff, 2016). Here we adjusted our framework to try and document activities that we might be told to ignore or look away from, within the space. The second part we were mindful of was the idea coined by Manuel Castell, "the network society". A type of social life that takes its form from a network of electronic information (as quoted in Mirzoeff, 2016). Bearing both ideas in mind, we used our visual imagery in conjunction with our field observations to construct narratives within images and space.

With our framework established, we were able to start looking for more specific spatial patterns. Our use of alternative cartography as a means of analysis was heavily inspired by Denis Wood's *A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights* as well as an excerpt by the *Hand Drawn Map Association*. Denis's article challenges what typically is mapped and instead focusing on what neighborhoods did. What Denis describes as a "transform[ation] [of] universal stuff – things in general – into particular things" (Krygier, 2008). The two maps, the Streetlight Map as well as the Jack-o-lantern Map opened our eyes to look for spatial patterns that we might not have thought about looking for. We also stopped focusing on nuanced details, instead focused on how we understand the space. In the article by *Hand Drawn Map Association*, they delve into the idea that "[maps are] meant as explanatory tools" and accuracy in the depiction may not always be necessary to get your point across (handmaps, 2019). We took both approaches into consideration when producing our map. We used photoshop in conjunction with artists renditions, maps from Esri, field drawings and notes to produce the map *What Happens in the Shadows, Stays in the Shadows*. We will discuss our analysis of the map in further sections.

The last primary research technique we used was interviews. We followed the guidelines laid out by Stacy Jacobs (2012) and her piece on *Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews*. We started off by contacting the interviewee and establishing a location that was mutually convenient as well as comfortable. We had prewritten a set of interview protocols to help guide our conversation, but we maintained an open question format as prescribed by Jacobs. Before the interview was conducted, we had recited a preamble on what the goal of our research project was and asked for consent. The interview, as a method, was key to understanding what Jacobs calls the "human experience". The method provided insight into the space but also helped validate our observations. Interviews also proved important because we were unable to perform an in-depth field study, so insider insight was invaluable to understanding the space. The final method that we employed is a literature review. Literature review provided the theories and necessary concepts to help bolster or explain our qualitative data. We use it extensively to help contextualize the space and understand some of the forces that were at play.

Reflections on Methods

When reflecting on our methods, there are two key areas that influence our results: positionality and limitations. The organization that we represent, a university,

has a connotation of neutrality that extends to its researchers. As students, there is a degree of innocence that we exude that makes approaching people easier. However, therein lies our first limitation: formality. The exact reason why we were unable to get in contact with the security company is unknown, but the impression that I got was we also exude a sense of informality that did not warrant addressing. In the scope of the research project, some other limitations we faced included: limited perspective on the area; time constraints, both personal and in the scope of the course; weather; and establishing a clear and defined research question and argument. We were only able to interview one person, which gives us a perspective that might not be shared by other residents or users of the park. We had very little time to explore and develop our research question within the time constraints of the course. Scheduling time also become an issue, as our research was conducted at night. Closer to the end of the term, weather started to become an issue. Inclement weather would make it either unsafe or there would not be anyone utilizing the park. Without a clear research question, it made it difficult to guide our fieldwork – we had a lot of disjointed data that we did not know what to make of.

Analysis

During our initial observations we noticed a pattern between lighting and the kinds of activities that took place. We were able to create two main discernable regions in the park, determined by their lighting. We called them the fountain or main park, which is at grade with the street and the brightest, and the pit, which is a concrete plaza that is below the main park level and dark. We found that the light level would attract certain people and activities. The conjunction between the two aspects formed our map *What Happens in the Shadows, Stays in the Shadows* (Figure. 2). The darker parts of the park attracted less people and more illicit activities. We were able to capture this through visual imagery. This is where the two methods, discussed in our methodology, play a strong part in constructing narratives of what was happening in the shadows. The first image (Figure. 3) takes some ideas of "the policed version" by Rancíere. The idea that the darkness hides away the illicit activities coupled with the glamor of the fountain draws your attention away from the hidden. Hence our map name. The second picture was comical (Figure. 4). It alludes to the idea of a "network society" as presented by Castell. On the table is graffiti of an instagram handle. Upon investigation we found it linked us to a group of young black men who call themselves *The All Around Boys*. They describe "all around" as individuals who do not limit themselves to one profession - they represent a lifestyle that extends simultaneously into careers in music, photography, modeling, fashion, and YouTube video making. What is interesting about this finding is that it highlights networks that extend beyond the borders of the park and connect into cultures and demographics that we have not seen during our fieldwork.

In the 1980s, Barbara Ann Scott Park and skating rink was built over an underground garage, but it had been neglected since 2012. In the winter of 2012, the city did not open the rink and in the spring of 2013 they did not turn on the fountain. As Peter Kuitenbrouwer, a journalist for the National Post, described in 2013: "Dirt covers the concrete. On the rink-house roof tiles have crumbled off, lights hang from wires, and the stucco is peeling. Pine needles, cigarette butts and pigeon feathers cover the flagstones. Most of the grass has died, as have many of the Austrian pine trees." The city decided to redevelop the park, financed $3 million by Aura Condominiums' developer through development fees and partly from the city and Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area. In early 2016, the park was closed for renovations and reopened in July 2019 as College Park, carried over from Aura Condominiums' marketing as Aura at College Park. The park was primarily financed by and revitalized for local residents. This is reflected in City Councillor Mike Layton's expression that he

was excited to see the park become a networking hub for local residents and visitors to the city.

Through observation, we discovered many elements of defensive urban design at College Park. We found skateboard prevention spikes, various kinds of dividers between seats, and overall narrow ledges, which all restrict the ways people use each piece of street furniture. Defensive urban design, also known as hostile architecture, describes design features that restrict behaviour in urban space as a form of crime prevention or protection of property. It intentionally targets people who use and rely on public space the most by restricting behaviour that are specific to them, such as sleeping in public and skateboarding. It also makes the city less welcoming to other vulnerable residents such as the elderly, mobility impaired, and young children. Thus, as Chellew describes, such features make the city less attractive for all patrons.

We also observed many elements of CPTED. There are apartments overlooking the park, giving the park a sense of ownership and feeling that one is being watched. Applying Jane Jacobs' Sidewalk Ballet (1961), to College Park, having eyes on the space makes the area safer because the people watching or nearby can assist a person in danger. In accordance with this theory, we noticed that crime and unwanted activity took place at night and in darker spaces which were less surveilled. The lights in the main area of the park are very bright, there is ample open space, and the hedges are low, which makes it easier for people to watch the park and makes it more difficult to engage in undesired activity. Surveillance cameras, security guards, and corporate branding also add to the sense of territoriality. Our interviewee, a local resident named Matthew, described that "the park gives a sense of security, it's built up… It feels like a safe space." He also remarked that sometimes he observed people sleeping on the floor and heard screaming and fighting at night.

Conclusion

Despite the prevalence of hostile architecture and security in College Park, the types of people and activities that the space is designed to exclude continue to use the space. According to Chellew (2016), unwelcome populations may use the space because they have nowhere else to go. The abundance of large, open space, makes it a generally attractive gathering space. There is seating (albeit uncomfortable) which may be the only place one may find to rest. It is less busy, and generally quieter than the bustling surrounding streets. Since the unwelcome groups mostly use the space at night when the park is less busy and people are not expected to be watching, hostile architecture and security are not enough to deter the groups from using the space. Due to the aforementioned limitations, we were unable to thoroughly reveal why unwelcome groups continue to use the space. More research must be done to identify a strongly conclusive response.

References

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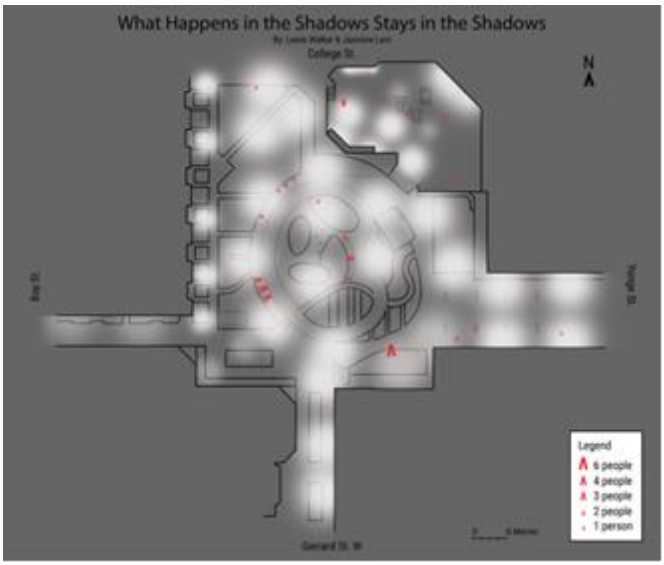
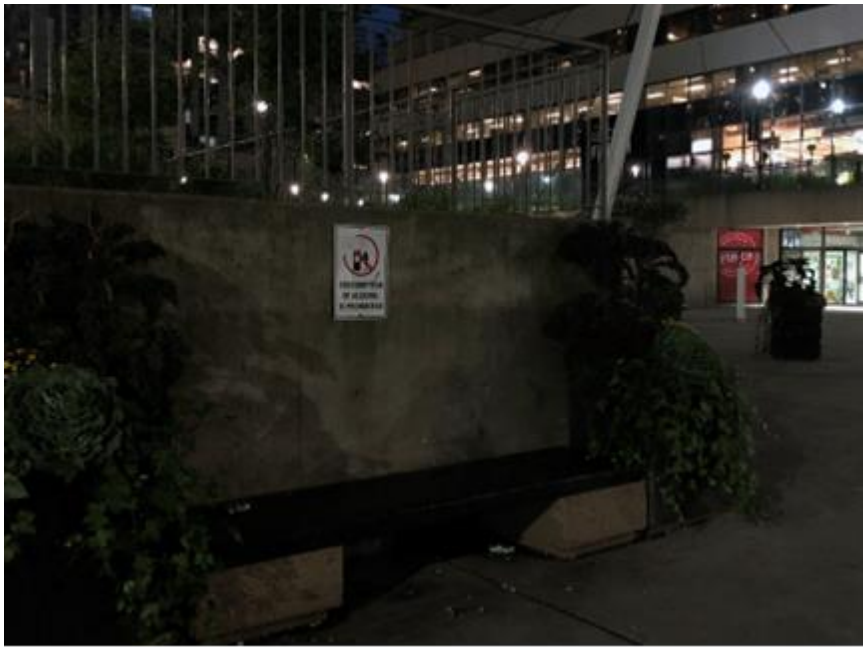
Maps and Images

Maps from Esri and an artist rendition of College Park. Both maps were used in conjunction with field observations to note down spatial data.



What Happens in the Shadows Stays in the Shadows is the final iteration of all of our field data on how the space was utilized. The map depicts the illumination rings around street lamps in juxtaposed with where people are.



Sign in the pit that reads “Consumption of alcohol is prohibited,” above a bench with cigarette butts scattered on the floor.

Vandalized table in the pit. We searched for the handle written on the table on Instagram and found that the “AV” logo drawn all over the table belongs to a group of young men who call themselves “The All Around Boys.”