

THE GENERIC CITY TOUR

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WORK IN PROCESS: CREATED BY ANNA KOSTREVA

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INTRODUCTION

THE UBIQUITOUS FACE OF THE URBAN SCENE

The idea is, that if people spend time imagining their cities differently, using them differently and sharing these experiences, the world will change to reflect that.

Meaning and identity are performative - which means that every time a person goes into the city they are performing its meaning and identity. They have the opportunity to rewrite the myths and rituals of the city with their behavior, individually or as a group. Through visibility, acts of gathering and creating community, shared meanings and shared identities can emerge. Repetition of alternative use can formalize, institutionalize and impact your world. Elite social mileaus based on income characteristics (as is often the case with shopping districts) can be rewritten for tolerance. Barriers to opportunity to use the civic spaces of the street can be broken down through suggested public use and the eventual installation of public facilities. The current use of public street spaces can be reprogrammed for activities like outdoor karaoke/performances, outdoor cinemas, bike/building workshops, small cabinets for the exchange of free goods and community notice boards, small sport parks for handball or pingpong, or the eventual reprogramming of indoor spaces for arcades, public kitchens, libraries and public baths. These examples are just a few possibilities for the next direction of the 'the generic city' we are creating all over the world.

Do you even agree with the power structures of your city?
For instance:

How much space should be dedicated to commercial consumption?
How much space should be dedicated to all those new and old cars?
Should global brands be able to accumulate to create the generic city?
Is shopping a viable form of 'taking in the airs' of the city?
How many things does a person really need to own?
Are you interested in alternatives to ownership?
How should the civic space of the main streets be regulated and used?

Even if your city has been overrun by the generic - it is still yours. There is always something unique, even in the most banal. This is the limit and liberty of the generic, of normcore, of the globalized condition. Settle into some of the positive aspects of repetition - if you want! Stability and reliability may be part of your value system for experiencing (and maybe purchasing) the world. But, there is also terror in the crystallization of our cities as well as our subjectivities as part of globalization. So, if you don't want to embrace it, know that you are entitled to be part of rewriting your city.

Consider this tour of your-own-generic-city an attack, but feel free to fight with your own methods, the following are only some tactics and examples for practices of aggression and support in your urban environment.

THE GENERIC CITY TOUR

ENCOUNTERED BY UNIQUE BODIES

A Three Phase Walking Tour

Please choose the most generic 1-2km stretch of your city with the highest density of globalized stores along one street (or in one area) for the following three consecutive walks. Walk 1 should be across the entire length in one direction, walk 2 should be across the entire length in the opposite direction and walk 3 should begin at the same point and with the same direction as walk 1, but can be left at any point along the length of the walk.

Walk 1. Sense the Generic City

Walk 2. Critique the Generic City

Walk 3. Escape the Generic City

Please go to the starting point of your walk and sit or stand somewhere outside to read as many and as much of the case studies as you like before starting your own walk.

You are invited to document your walk and submit it for the next edition of *The Generic City Tour*. Submit to: GenericCityTour@annakostreva.org.

CASE STUDY ONE: OSLO

BOGSTADVEIEN, FROM PARKVEIEN TO INDUSTRIGATA

Walk 1. Sense the Generic City

I'm at the mouth of the main drag and I've turned off my cell phone. This walk will not be tracked by my 'location services.' A banner spanning the street greets me, telling me there is free parking in 400m. I am on foot, it's Sunday and the stores will be closed. I hope to have the street to myself.

The trams, a few cars, some joggers and other pedestrians on their way from A to B dot the street regularly – much more often than I'd like. About one third of the 34 stores on the first block are global brands that I recognize.

'COS' is situated almost directly across from 'The North Face.' Their juxtaposed relation to the street and street life might be telling.

Both are in older, standard, turn of the century European buildings. 'COS' (a high-end clothing store) has two display windows on street level with Mannequins facing outwards. The lights behind them are on, even though the store is closed. On the second floor, the mannequins face inwards. I suppose the store does not expect people to look up there from the street. At eye level, on the storefront windows, a barely visible message (in English) has been applied to the glass:

"It's ending soon..."

Find something good before it disappears"

'The North Face' (a high-end sports clothing store) takes the opposite tactic from 'COS.' Ironically, there is nothing in the storefront at ground level because they recently closed and moved location. However, above their building, they painted their logo on the blank wall of the next building – normally where one would expect to find a prized graffiti tag.

Back on the side of the 'COS' building, someone has sprayed 'FUCK-ERS' twice. No. Three times.

Both stores know how to get in the heads of their demographic, by acknowledging the places that they look.

I am reminded of the renovation tactics in Singapore, where new two story storefront building facades are wrapped around older tower buildings: adding a fancy new architectural skirt and trousers, but forgetting about finding a matching top. That seemed extreme.

Places so full of stimuli as the generic city, yet they also contain huge blind spots. So, what should I focus on as the public space of engagement: the performative space of identity? Perhaps there is plenty to talk about, find, examine above and below the storefront – the back stories of the brands themselves. Or the technology and history of fundamental building elements like asphalt concrete or window glazing. Or even people's lives behind bauhaus balconies and bay windows...the work done behind curtain wall facades. At the same time, I am sitting caddy corner from a beggar who has chosen not to sit on one of the six public benches at this intersection. They have tucked themselves in to a very conspicuous red blanket. It still took me several minutes to notice that the shape was a freezing human being on this street in the generic city.

Besides the signage,
the things I should see:

The bakery, which is open, puts free samples out on the street.

The pharmacy has positioned a sculpture of a woman with a snake wrapped around her arm so you can only see it when exiting the store.

The city government (I guess) has set up a small sculpture garden with terrible art. Is this supposed to balance out the commercial aspect of this street?

Hmmm.

I attempt different modes of perception to subvert anticipated outcomes, with varying degrees of success.

- 1) I read the name of some stores,
rolling them off the tongue
until they are dislocated from their source.

“Joe & The Juice”

joe and the juice
join the juice
jo in the juice
joe in the juice
joy in the juice
joe and the juice
cho and the chuse
joy in the choose
joe and the choice
joy in the choice

“coffee, juice + much more”

- 2) I feel my weight, trying to take in a situation with my bodies
movement, looking for resonance with space by taking on different
postures, shifting from one foot to the other, taking very large steps,
placing my hands on my hips, then clasping them behind my back as
I walk up a hill.

Eventually, I cross my arms across my chest, and lean myself against
a window ledge on a slope in the street, so that it fits the length of
my legs perfectly, and I can turn my heels up so that the soles of my
shoes no longer touch the pavement, except the very back edge. I
wish and try to warm up in the freezing weather as the sun shines
momentarily on me as well as the reflective glass supporting my
back. I find a white snus (form of tobacco) tin and open it out of
curiosity, a wave of peppermint scent rising to my face. Eyes turned
down, I do that a few times, slightly disgusted and slightly amused,
as I claim ownership of the sidewalk in front of my window. I also
claim ownership over everyone’s shoes and movements that pass
through that sidewalk, regardless of race, age or gender.

At some point, I feel I don't really have a choice as a chill has entered through my feet and up my body to the point of no return and shivers threaten as well. So, I enter a bakery to warm up, catch my breath and prepare with fire breath.

10 normal breaths looking out the window
(or until breathing becomes regular)

10 fire breaths:
through the nose, down the back of the throat, with sound

10 fire breaths:
locking the throat and belly chakra
in between each inhale and exhale

10 forceful exhales

Walk 2. Critique the Generic City

- I start back.
- I push a few car mirrors in on parked cars,
generally hoping less people drove in the world.
- I use chalk to draw a table and chairs where the sun is hitting a façade.
- I pick up a fallen children's hat and place it on an electric box.
I watch mother scold child when they return for it.
- I put a sticky note underneath H&M's security stickers that says
"Please make less trash."
- In front of Zara, I fart loudly.
- I spend some time appreciating an art deco building.
I draw one of the dragons on the sidewalk below it.
I lament the facade renovation which has replaced a
quarter of one side with a huge store front window.
- I imagine the fence being removed from around the 'sculpture garden'
- I imagine people making things in that place.
- I imagine people busy reading Goethe, Kafka, Seneca,
and Ingeborg Bachman in a large beautiful reading room
next to the antique store piled to the brim with old books.
- I place a toothbrush in a sculpture's hand.
- I draw small squares
connecting the space between
skateboard deterrent brackets on a low wall.
- I wish for a warm place where I don't need to spend money
and I find it in the anonymity
of an overcrowded chain coffee shop.

Walk 3. Escape the Generic City

I imagine myself a child without words or money and begin again. I inhabit the city. The city inhabits me.

I look down through grates, jump off of things and sing to myself. The texture of the trashcan, irresistible to my shoe pushed across it, makes a zipping noise. Over and over again. I go down many short side streets to look behind buildings. I find dead plants, icy patches (which I pick up), and boulders to climb on. I find pipes that turn into snakes and large gates that could only be the entrances to castles. A terracotta vestibule is my dance hall. The top of some steps is a stage for high kicks.

I imagine everyone had chalk today and a desire to draw on pavement. A naive story begins to form in my head for a drawing festival. I push it away, for now, and watch people's feet. Every stone and metal cover in the sidewalk is a square in a game board and every person on the street is playing, weather they know it or not.

NOTES
DRAWINGS, CALCULATIONS, AND/OR PRESSED LEAVES

ANNA KOSTREVA, 2016