SPATIAL INFORMATION DESIGN LAB

Architecture & Justice

9/12/2005
The Project

We propose to display a series of maps, diagrams, charts and images of prison populations in various cities in the United States which dramatically demonstrate the phenomenon of “Million Dollar Blocks,” urban census blocks ones where so many residents are in prison that it costs at least $1 million to incarcerate them. We will present work done on Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, with additional studies of New Orleans, Wichita, New Haven, and Watts.

We will highlight the Bronx as a case study of the pattern: the exhibition will be dominated by a very large (and visually spectacular) map of the entire borough, accompanied by an enormous range of supplementary visual material and parallel case studies from a range of US cities. During the exhibition, which we imagine will run for approximately six weeks, we want to explore the possibility of moving the work off the walls, as it were, and into the charged world of criminal justice policy, but in a way which takes advantage as fully as possible of the public dimension of the exhibition. So we propose as well to convene an intensive policy-oriented meeting, in the gallery during the exhibition, bringing together an unusual collection of experts and stakeholders, to work with the data and maps and produce a series of plans for action in architectural and urban space.

We have developed the maps, using advanced GIS software, in an innovative collaborative research program on “Graphical Innovation in Justice Mapping,” the inaugural project in the Spatial Information Design Lab of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia. Most of them, which draw on extremely hard-to-obtain data, have never been produced before, and the results have never been seen outside the Lab and the rarified world of state correctional departments.

The work on prison populations and urban dis- and re-investment is at the cutting edge of new policy initiatives on criminal justice. Spatial analysis plays a central role in these discussions, and architects and planners now have a remarkable opportunity to shape practical ways of approaching the nexus between crime, justice, and urban change. We want to create an environment in which dramatic public presentations of accessible and compelling graphical material can stimulate a wide public and media discussion, and we will use the wide accessibility of the maps and images to launch a broad discussion on the difference confronting these spatial phenomena can make to public policy and citizen activism.

Half way through the exhibition we propose to facilitate and host a ‘scenario-planning’ workshop in the gallery, bringing together an invited group of policy makers, architects, planners, sociologists, artists, advocates, and community representatives, to focus on spatial analysis and re-entry. (“Re-entry” is the technical term among criminal justice experts for the process of reestablishing citizen status in the free world following imprisonment.) This topic and our proposed cross disciplinary approach are uniquely suited to one and other because re-entry and the issues faced by high resettlement communities fall at the nexus of cross-cutting civil arenas: housing, public health, work, schooling, and political participation.

The workshop will take place against the backdrop, literally, of the huge map of the Bronx, and we will create GIS products tailored to the expertise and interests of each of the participants. We will work with experienced workshop planners and make use of current scenario-planning techniques. The workshop will explore different ways of working with the maps and GIS presentations in order to develop new policy strategies — what is “justice reinvestment?” and what sort of reinvestment can be imagined for these census blocks? — and to measure what is truly at stake, ethically and politically and socially, in these urban phenomena. The results of the workshop will be on view during the second half of the exhibit, and the original map and its transformation into a set of programming and design strategies for the city will be documented in a follow-up publication.

The result: a provocative and fresh look at the city, at the criminal justice system, and at a participatory and collaborative model of design across disciplines. How and where should the familiar tools of the designer, planner and architects be transformed by the encounter with justice? One possible outcome is a model which could be replicated in other cities with a similar cross-section of participants and disciplines.

Our proposal is hence two-fold: we will present the work we have done to the general public and the media, and we will use the wide accessibility of the maps and images to launch a broad discussion on the difference confronting these spatial phenomena can make to public policy and citizen activism.

The mission of the Design Lab — which has collaborated over the course of this project with criminal justice reform advocates at the Justice Mapping Center (UMC) and the JFA Institute (JFA), and has worked closely with the After Prison Initiative at the Open Society Institute and the Community Justice Project at the JEHT Foundation — is to use spatial analysis in partnerships between academic analysts, advocates, policy-makers to address urgent political, social and ethical questions.

The project budget we outline here will extend, and enable the public presentation and debate of, research currently supported by grants from OSI and JEHT. It will open a public forum for the work, and encourage a new model of interdisciplinary work between activism and research, policy and design, architecture and justice.

Executive Summary

We propose to exhibit the results of the first year of our research project on “Million Dollar Blocks” — exploring urban space and ‘justice reinvestment’ — and to convene a strategy meeting of architects, planners, government officials, and advocates to demonstrate and put into practice the difference that thinking in architectural terms can make to policy initiatives.

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The term “Million Dollar Block” describes the result of visualizing traditional criminal justice data with new geographic tools.

Jennifer Gonnerman described the phenomenon, and the early phases of this research, in the Village Voice (16 November 2004), beginning in a public housing project in Brooklyn where in 2003 five residents were sent ‘upstate,’ at an annual cost of about $30,000 a person. Overall, their incarceration will cost at least $1 million.

Criminal-justice experts have a name for this phenomenon: “million-dollar blocks.” In Brooklyn last year, there were 35 blocks that fit this category—ones where so many residents were sent to state prison that the total cost of their incarceration will be more than $1 million.

In at least one case, the price tag will actually surpass $5 million. These blocks are largely concentrated in the poorest pockets of the borough’s poorest neighborhoods, including East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Brownsville.

In recent years, as the U.S. prison population has soared, million-dollar blocks have popped up in cities across the country. Maps of prison spending suggest a new way of looking at this phenomenon, illustrating the oft ignored reality that most prisoners come from just a handful of urban neighborhoods. These maps invite numerous questions: How is the community benefiting from all the money being spent? And might there be another, better way to spend those same criminal-justice dollars?

These maps have attracted attention nationwide from state legislators struggling to balance their budgets. In a few state capitols, prison-spending maps have begun to influence the dynamics of the political debate, suggesting new ways to think about crime and punishment, recidivism and reform. One state, Connecticut, has even gone so far as to change its spending priorities, taking dollars out of the prison budget and steering them toward the neighborhoods with the highest rates of incarceration.

Gonnerman is right to place the emphasis on the maps. Although incarceration decisions are made individually, one person at a time, when mapped collectively and over time the data reveal and make accessible striking patterns otherwise hidden by traditional forms of examination. The maps present a new way of understanding the costs of mass incarceration, concentrating on the residents of particular neighborhoods.

Maps and datasets are never neutral, and these are no exception. The “crime map” — charting the locations and neighborhoods in which crimes are reported — proved to be a very powerful tool in 1980s campaigns to ‘get tough on crime.’ Of course, other datasets existed, and little by little they are now being explored. As Peter Wagner has pointed out, until quite recently, "nobody knew exactly where in [New York] city prisoners came from. The Census Bureau doesn't collect this information, and the Department of Correctional Services does not publish this information in any more detail than the number of prisoners that come from New York City as a whole." The breakthrough came when our collaborator Eric Cadora went looking for the data. "As part of a study looking to see where the

Architecture & Justice: Million Dollar Blocks, Tax Block #2887

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Block #2887</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prison Admissions:</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Sentence:</td>
<td>900 months (75 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sentence:</td>
<td>71 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Cost / Inmate</td>
<td>$189,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Expenditure:</td>
<td>$5,309,323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Address of Prison Admittees
  - 1+2 Family
  - Walk-up
  - Elevator Apts
  - Store
  - Misc/Facilities
state spends its criminal justice resources," writes Wagner, "Cadora used judicial records to map the homes of prisoners from the Brooklyn borough sent to state prison in 2003.

In the Lab over the last year, working with Cadora and others, we have extended this method to a range of new data and locations, many of them in New York City (Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx) but also including New Orleans, Watts/Los Angeles, New Haven, and Wichita (all completed), with further maps in progress of post-Katrina New Orleans, Providence, and Phoenix.

This simple move had profound results, and the Million Dollar Block maps provide striking evidence of the revelations. By privileging the home address, neighborhood, and community of the incarcerated person, prison expenditure maps turn traditional maps of disadvantage into maps of investment opportunity. Measured in dollars, and compared to other government expenditures, it turns out that the criminal justice system is the most important government institution in these neighborhoods. In a very real sense, the state is spending money on these blocks, but the funds are going elsewhere. What other possibilities are there? If we were to plan for the reinvestment of these funds, what would we do? This is an economic and social question, of course, but it is also profoundly a spatial or architectural one.

The maps direct our attention to the city, and particularly to those parts of the city where the various parts of the criminal justice system (prison, jail, court, police, courts, parole, probation) function as the most common civic institutions – even though they are often miles away from the community. These are high resettlement neighborhoods, ones in which populations simply migrate in a cycle between their community and various prisons across the state and even beyond.

The maps also point to an anomaly. Despite ten years of dropping crime rates during the prosperous 1990’s, states have not witnessed a reduction in prison costs – in fact they have continued to rise. By 2000, state and local governments began to feel the pressure of a cooling economy and ever increasing prison and jail budgets.

In a new economic environment, states are now trying to reduce prison expenditures. Many officials have identified the twin problems of recidivism and re-entry as a primary site for intervention. Studies have documented the unprecedented number of people being released from prison each year, and the number who return. The U.S. prison population increased from 200,000 in the 1970’s to 2,000,000 by the year 2000, of whom 600,000 annually leave prison and return to their home communities. Further analyses showed that almost half were back in prison within three years.

Crime rates were falling, and yet the prison population continued to increase. Other studies began to explain why this was happening: a third of all those entering prison are admitted for violating parole and probation, signaling a double crisis. Prisons are failing, across the country, to prepare inmates adequately for community re-entry, and likewise, the probation and community supervision institutions are poorly structured and often radically ill-equipped to help those in their charge.

The result: corrections officials, district attorneys, court officers, community activists, prison reformers, and formerly incarcerated people are now motivated, for many reasons, and enabled politically to speak with one another and develop new tactics and strategies for addressing this situation.
Exhibition and Meeting

We want to catalyze one exemplary exchange of this kind, drawing directly on this mapping work and on the urban and architectural expertise assembled around the Lab, and taking advantage of the convening power, reputation, and public exposure of the Architectural League.

We propose to exhibit work focusing on a range of US cities: New York City (Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx) but also New Orleans, Watts/Los Angeles, New Haven, and Wichita (all completed), in progress are post-Katrina New Orleans, Providence, and Phoenix. We will display the work as pages of PDF booklets, and web-based PSA’s on the Lab’s website. The focus of the exhibit will be a very large and detailed map of the Bronx, which takes advantage of the size of the exhibition space, and which will render legible everything from building footprints to types of housing, public institutions (police, schools, parole and probation offices, parks, hospitals, employment, etc). Prison populations are directly associated with specific lots, and this map will enable viewers to understand in one glance what is at stake.

Then, extending our experience in creating community design workshops around public high school projects in the Bronx and elsewhere, and working closely with staff from the Global Business Network (pioneers in scenario planning), we will organize a day-long scenario-planning event in the gallery with participants from across the spectrum of affected and involved participants in this project. The group we plan on assembling will introduce designers and thinkers to a world of criminal justice reform policy makers and activists. After extensive advance preparation with each participant, we will draft a policy scenario for justice reinvestment to be explored by the assembled team. Given certain budgetary and political conditions, as well as the spatial ones mapped out, what kinds of new projects might be incubated? What are likely sites for investment, and how can the diverse agendas of a range of stakeholders be articulated and put into debate and negotiation. Participants – experts and community members alike – will contribute details to the map, identify sites of opportunity, and open up for debate the sometimes conflicting interests and ideologies which make the politics of criminal justice so complicated. We want to use the new possibilities for funding re-entry programs to help rethink these parts of the city.

The results of this workshop will remain on display for the rest of the exhibition. Notes, post-its, annotations to the map – the traces of the discussion at the meeting should be viewable by a more general audience. The results will also be more formally recorded in a publication following the event.
Background and Accomplishments, or, Why Us?

The project will be coordinated by Laura Kurgan and Eric Cadora of Columbia’s Spatial Information Design Lab. Biographies are below. The Lab is a think- and action-tank for the visual display of spatial information. We take an action-oriented and yet critical approach to the field of GIS, working with spatial data to design innovative ways in which the resulting images and map can communicate what they picture with clarity, integrity, responsibility, creativity and invention. We take as given that no data and no maps are neutral, and we will exploit “non-neutrality” as a positive and productive aspect of data. What can we do with data? How can we visualize what it does? How can we put these important and growing resources to use responsibly, experimentally and effectively? We look for partnerships with people and organizations whose research requires the independence and rigor of an academic setting, and who thrive in an atmosphere of open inquiry, experimentation, and risk-taking, in order to expand the ways in which data is collected, used, and presented.

We have worked in the Lab on this project for more than a year and are intimately familiar with its details and complications, as well as its force. We have the full support of GSAPP as well as the extensive network which has grown up around the After Prison Initiative at the Open Society Institute. We have extensive experience in architecture and urbanism, as teachers and as practitioners. Eric Cadora is a pioneer in justice mapping, and has traveled and consulted widely to present his research results. Laura Kurgan has a dozen years of experience in installation work for public projects, and has recently developed new models for community participation in design projects.

Thanks to JFA and Council of State Governments, the Million Dollar Block strategy has become a national policy initiative, offering us unusual access to state and municipal executives and elected officials from Connecticut to Louisiana and Arizona to Rhode Island. For this reason, the design ‘exercise’ will be able to feed into a live national policy effort already underway.

Laura Kurgan teaches architecture at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, where she is Director of Visual Studies and the Director of the Spatial Information Design Lab. Her research has followed the declassification of satellite imagery and GPS technology in a series of projects across the significant political events of the last decade. This work, which has been exhibited internationally, is collected in You Are Here: Post-Military Technology and the New Landscape of Digital Mapping, forthcoming from Zone Books. She has published articles in Alphabet City, ANY, Archis, Assemblage, Grey Room, and Volume. She received the Young Architects Award from the Architectural League of New York in 1995. She runs an interdisciplinary design practice in New York City, blending academic research with design, information, communication, advocacy and architecture. Most recently she has worked with New Visions for Public Schools on the re-programming and master-planning of 21 existing large New York City public school buildings into campuses of small schools, including the development of a model for community design workshops in these schools (documented in Participation By Design, NVPS, 2004).

Eric Cadora directs the Justice Mapping Center (JMC) at the JFA Institute, working with Columbia’s Spatial Information Design Lab to forge new geographical analyses and graphical visualizations of criminal justice data and policy. Justice Mapping produces geographical analyses and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) generated maps to help states and local jurisdictions analyze, rethink, and tailor their use of criminal justice and related government resources to high incarceration and reentry neighborhoods. Prior to establishing the JMC, Cadora served as Program Officer for The After Prison Initiative at the Open Society Institute for four years. Cadora previously spent 14 years at the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), New York’s largest and longest running intermediate sanctions program. Cadora directed the work of CASES’ Research, and Policy, Court Communications, and Information Systems units, as well as its Day Center program. He was the recipient of an Edna McConnell Clarke justice grant in 1996 to help the North Carolina Division of Adult Probation/Parole-with whom he worked for the following five years-to help implement intermediate sanctions programs under the state’s new structured sentencing guidelines. He is co-author of the book, Community Justice, with Todd Clear, which reviews the emergence of community policing in the 1980’s, community courts in the 1990’s, and the beginnings of a new community corrections in 2000.

Research Associates SIDL: Seth Spielman, Sarah Williams, David Reinfurt. Justice Mapping Center: Charles Swartz
Proposed Participants

Michael Bell, GSAPP, Columbia Univ.; Michael Bell Architecture
Andrew Blau, Scenario Practitioner, Global Business Network
David Byrne, Department of Design and Construction, New York City
Majora Carter, Director, Sustainable South Bronx
Richard Cho, Program Officer, Corporation for Supportive Housing
Todd Clear, Professor of Criminal Justice, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY)
Lance Freeman, Urban Planning, wGSAPP
Eroll Lewis, Former Director, Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Design.
Martin Horn, Commissioner, New York City Department of Corrections
Daniel Karpowitz, Bard Prison Initiative
Max Kenner, Bard Prison Initiative
Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, journalist and writer (Random Family, 2002)
Mary Northridge, School of Public Health, Columbia University
Greg Pasquarelli, SHoP Architects
Adam Rubin, Senior Policy Director, New Visions for Public Schools
Carol Shapiro, Founder and Executive Director, Family Justice
Michael Sorkin, Architecture, City College of New York.
Bill Strickland, President, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center
Gail Suchman, Former Senior Fellow, Council on NY Lawyer's for the Public Interest
Miquel Trenkle, Director, Criminal Justice Program, Council of State Governments
Sudhir Venkatesh, Sociology, Columbia University
Peter Wagner, Director of the Center for Prison Policy Initiative.
Mabel Wilson, Architecture, California College of Arts and Crafts; KW,a, Oakland

Provisional Budget*

Display, printing and installation of maps and diagrams $10,000
Participation fees for meeting (10 @ $750) $7,500
Set-up, supplies, meals, etc. $2,500
Total $20,000

* We require no stipend for this project. A significant part of the expenses of the exhibition and meeting will, we expect, be covered by the Lab’s existing budget, including a website and publicity, publications, some organizational expenses, etc. We also intend to look to other funders to support some elements of the project, and to seek pro bono donation of some expertise in organizing the workshop.