

iv. Essay

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Ambulante Therapie: Psychologien
der Pedestrianisierung in
New York und Kopenhagen



Ambulatory Therapy:
Psychologies of
Pedestrianization in
New York and
Copenhagen

How have projects for pedestrian streets created atmospheres of conviviality while failing to contribute to a real expansion of citizenship? A historical review of pedestrian projects in New York City and Copenhagen reveals the critical role of psychology in the production and experience of the public realm. Psychological theories and experimental techniques lie behind projects of temporary street closures in 1970s' New York to Copenhagen's Superkilen and the fictional city of Bricksburg today, as they transform the public realm in the service of self-actualization and happiness. Yet the promotion of feelings of wellbeing in urban space has largely been in the service of economic development and competition, rather than citizenship. Historicizing the "happy city" calls for a reexamination of the claims of psychologists, planners, and designers in remaking city streets.



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The widely circulating images of New York's recent efforts in the realm of pedestrianization are emblematic of the city's perceived physical and social transformation (Fig. A). Before, we see aggressive taxis churning an asphalt sea; after, the street is an urban garden with visitors strolling and at rest, the pavement hardly visible for all the people. Alongside new bicycle lanes and other transit interventions, the image of people walking and sitting on streets where cars used to rush symbolizes perhaps more than anything else contemporary hopes for an urban condition of sustainability and even happiness. The

throng of people on Broadway, walking or availing themselves of new amenities—brightly colored cafe tables and chairs, potted plants—present a picture of the urban good life, collective and car-free. Pedestrianization appears an act of urban reclamation and, even an affirmation of "rights to the city" however vaguely defined.

- A (Cover Image) Broadway Boulevard, New York City, 2009. Courtesy New York City Department of Transportation.
 B Women's Equality March / Demonstration für die Gleichberechtigung der Frauen, New York City, August 1970.
 ©John Olson / The LIFE Picture Collection / Getty Images

New York's "Broadway Boulevard," extending from 59th to 23rd Streets, substituted two lanes of traffic with a protected bike lane and a series of "pedestrian living rooms," cutting traffic entirely to create pedestrian plazas at Times and Herald Squares. A signature project of Michael Bloomberg's mayoralty, what began as a temporary installation in 2009—green and red paint on asphalt beneath moveable furniture—paved the way for more permanent changes and an extended infrastructure of bike sharing, pedestrian plazas, and additional streetscape improvements, even guidelines for implementation in other cities. Such measures are part of what some commentators have described as "happy city principles," part of a new "transformative urbanism."¹

Yet it is difficult to square these infrastructures of conviviality, and the vindication of the rights of the pedestrian, with the status of the citizen in the contemporary city. Aggressive policing, skyrocketing homelessness, and efforts to accommodate and promote a dramatic increase in foreign tourism, too, are a part of Bloomberg-era urbanism. Concerns with security and sustainability, as well as new measures of happiness economics, all play a role here. As a psycho-spatial intervention, the "happy city" is not limited to New York, and in fact is spread by its advocates across the globe. But what kind of an urban vision does the happy city imply? Psychology, politics, and urban design meet on these pedestrianized streets, though not for the first time. A historical review of pedestrian projects in New York City and Copenhagen from the 1960s through the present day reveals the critical role of psychology in the production and experience of the public realm. Thus in the happy city claims to street life are conflated with claims to full urban citizenship.

A Pedestrian Revolution

New York's pedestrianized streets are the realization of a dream almost a half-century old. The first systematic interventions in the city date to the early 1970s, an equal product of early innercity mall designs and the scenes of the street of the 1960s.² Protests, be-ins, marches, and riots were central to the political imagination of the streets, then a site of debate and

demands for the expansion of citizenship to include poor people, women, gays, and racial minorities in urban polities (Fig. B). Collective expression gave way to official policy on the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970, when Mayor John Lindsay closed a central, forty-five block stretch of Fifth Avenue to traffic and tens of thousands of people streamed down the street not to secure citizenship rights but in support of the much more universal and abstract cause of the environment. The purpose of this temporary street closing, and the closings on Fifth Avenue and other city streets that followed that summer, was a traffic experiment: could the city lower air pollution by reducing traffic volumes without excessive disruption? The results, however, were largely interpreted by participants as a civic experiment.³

New Yorkers and visitors saw ongoing debates around citizenship and the nature of urban life dramatized on the street. Letters poured in to the mayor as people self-reported on what one journalist described as a "civic experiment in returning the streets to the people."⁴ Writing to recount their experiences walking down Fifth and Madison Avenues and to support (or oppose) further closings, the mayor's correspondents revealed through their language the degree to which they had internalized the connection between the street, individual freedom, and collective belonging. One Upper East Sider wrote "for the first time, I really felt like a citizen of somewhere," while a suburban teenager who visited the city with her entire family reported that "although when I have come into the city in the past, each individual seemed to be alienated, I felt some kind of bond with the crowds today."⁵ The festival atmosphere was directly interpreted by pedestrians in terms of citizenship, the street as a site both empowering and democratic. This combination was resonant with the humanist psychology of Abraham Maslow, then circulating both

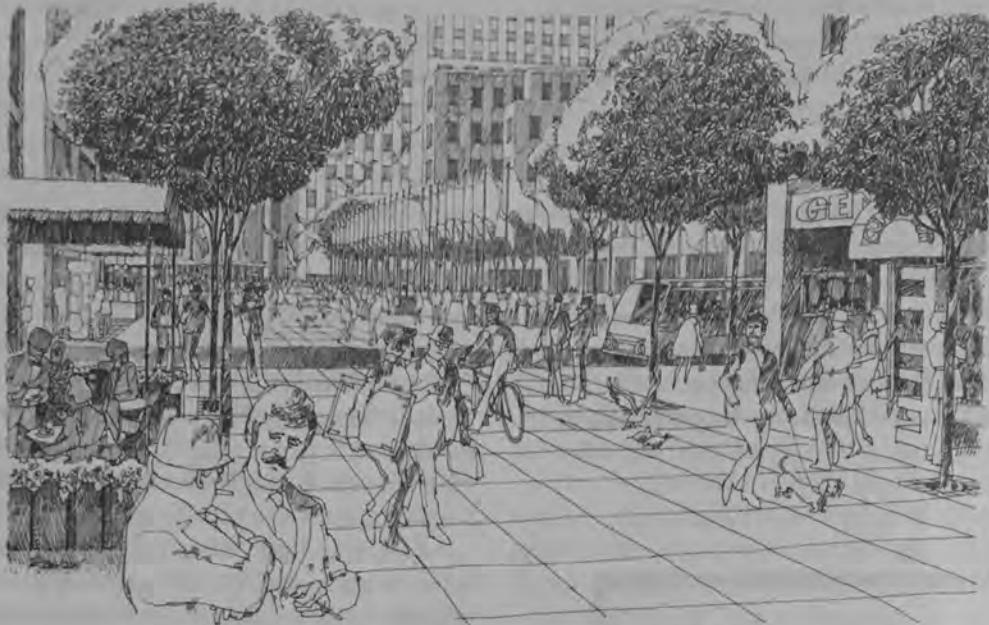
1 Montgomery 2013: 6.

2 The modern pedestrian mall can be traced back in the history of American architecture to Viennese-born architect Victor Gruen's proposals for downtown Fort Worth and other projects of the 1950s and early 60s. Lawrence Halprin's Nicollet Mall is an important reference, as are the early writings of Jane Jacobs. Jacobs' vindication of the street does not need revisiting here, save to point out that her celebration of diversity is equally committed to questions of safety and social control.

3 For more extensive elaboration, see Mogilevich 2012.

4 Lawrence Van Gelder, "A Mile of Madison Ave. Becomes a Mall for the Night," *New York Times*, September 23, 1970.

5 John Vliet Lindsay papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.



C

through the counterculture and the business world. Best known for his pyramidal hierarchy of needs, Maslow's writing on self-actualization connected individual development and freedom with the flourishing of democratic citizenship. This equation was central to the imagination of new pedestrian environments.

The popularity of the experimental street closings led Mayor Lindsay on a three-year campaign, ultimately unsuccessful, to implement a permanent pedestrian mall on Madison Avenue (Fig. C). Madison Mall's architects could draw on a number of contemporary design experiments promising political and personal transformation. Architects were not bystanders to what one, Simon Breines, would call a "pedestrian revolution." "Improve streets," the architect and advocate of pedestrianization claimed, "and you affect beneficially the life of every urban resident."⁶ Breines employed terms of both citizenship rights and personal development in a "Pedestrian Bill of Rights" of confused political content. Bicycling promised "a voyage of self-discovery," but it is less clear how it contributed to a landscape of social integration (Fig. F). Architect Ulrich Franzen used similar rhetoric, making claims of "liberating the street" for its "return to the collective use of people" in an unrealized 1969 proposal for the pedestrianization of

Manhattan's Upper East Side.⁷ Plazas, markets, and banners dominated city streets, while traffic and industry would be funneled out of the neighborhood and into a service megastructure across the river (Fig. D). Franzen sought to address the problem of urban "overload" by removing vehicular traffic from streets and replacing it with an infrastructure of conviviality.

Pedestrian Experiments

Pedestrian behavior and sensory "overload" in dense urban conditions were a major concern of researchers and psychologists who were at that

C Van Ginkel and Associates (B. Johnson, draughtsman), *Movement in Midtown, New York City*, perspective view of proposed Madison Mall, 1970–71. / Van Ginkel and Associates (B. Johnson, Zeichner), *Bewegung in Midtown, New York City*, Perspektivansicht der geplanten Madison Mall, 1970–71.

©Van Ginkel Associates Fonds. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Center for Architecture, Montréal. Gift of H.P. Daniel and Blanche Lemco van Ginkel.

6 Breines and Dean 1974: 11.

7 Ulrich Franzen, "Street," in Wolf 1974: 14.

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 ...ster Lindsay, eine
 ..., Kampagne unter-
 ...ßgängerzone auf
 ...hten. (Abb. C) Die
 ...Mall“ konnten auf
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berichtigten Experimente zum Autoritätsgehorsam
 besser bekannt als für seine Urbanitätsforschung.



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Experimente

rische „Überlastung“
 ...ingungen standen
 ...Wissenschaftlern
 ...perimente in Stadt-
 ...en. Erkenntnisse über

1961 nötigten Forscher in Milgrams Laboratorium
 ihre Versuchspersonen, vermeintlichen anderen
 Versuchspersonen, die von einem benachbarten
 Raum zu hören waren, zunehmend stärkere

D Ulrich Franzen, Street Proposals / Straßenentwürfe, 1969–74.

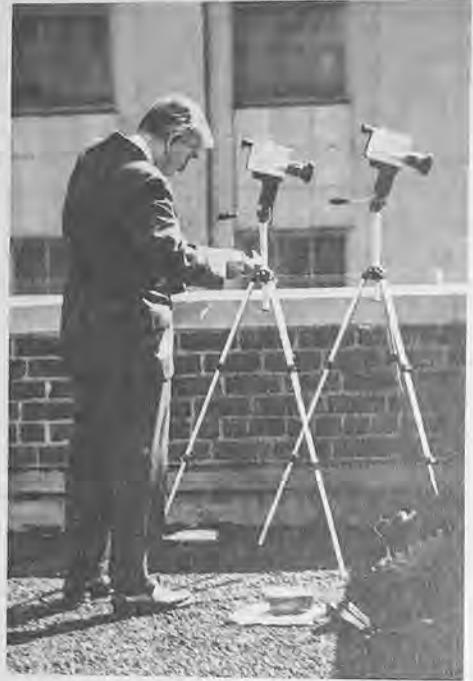
Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University

time conducting experiments in city streets. A better understanding of human interactions was believed to be able to inform designs for more pleasant, less stressful streets. Psychologist Stanley Milgram is better known for his infamous experiments in obedience to authority than for his urban research. In 1961 researchers in Milgram's lab pressured their subjects to apply what they thought were electric shocks of increasing intensity to supposed test subjects audible from an adjacent room. These experiments confirmed arguments about the "banality of evil" and gave urgency to the cultivation of individual freedom as a defense against a conformist and ultimately totalitarian society. The obedience experiments have been described as a culmination of the attempt by American experimental psychologists to direct human behavior by shaping laboratory environments, marking a critical moment where their attempt to recreate the world escaped the confines of the laboratory and spilled out into the real world.⁸

The streets of New York became Milgram's laboratory when he took a position at the City University of New York in 1967, with office windows looking down on busy 42nd Street. It was a burgeoning interest in the psychology of urban life that led Milgram to the city, where he could attempt to embed "objective experimental measures in the daily flux of city life."⁹ Milgram and his students created experimental conditions on the street to test social interactions among strangers. They sent experimenters to intentionally collide with pedestrians while someone filmed out a twelfth-story window. The researchers then watched how the pedestrian subjects regulated their behavior and negotiated rights of way, classifying the different behaviors they saw. These and other experiments served as the basis for interventions to regulate crowding on city streets.

City planners attempted to understand the psychology of crowding to make the case and space for more commercial development in the city center. They worked closely with psychologists, even hiring some of Milgram's students as consultants to analyze the results of the Fifth Avenue summer closing experiments. Also taking advantage of the experimental conditions of street closings on Madison Avenue was urbanist William H. Whyte (Fig. E). Rather than creating experimental situations, Whyte and his

team made time-lapse photos of pedestrian behavior for his "Street Life Project," a post-occupancy study designed to observe behavior in the city's streets and plazas. Like Milgram, Whyte wanted to learn from street life in order to manipulate it. New street designs and pedestrian plazas provided for face to face encounters and the ability to talk to strangers. Whyte praised these as spaces for the cultivation and actualization of individuals, promoting the experience of freedom in the city. But they were also, and Whyte was the first to admit it, good for



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business, encouraging corporate executives to keep their headquarters and employees in Manhattan even as the city teetered on the brink of bankruptcy and fears of crime and disorder grew. What we might now call happy streets were the safeguards of New York City's Central Business District in a moment of profound spatial and demographic change. By 1974, Whyte would proclaim New York City as having "the best street life in the world." "Never before have so many people been having so good a time on the streets," he reported.¹⁰ Whyte's celebration of urbanity and the happiness of the

E William H. Whyte at work / William H. Whyte an der Arbeit. Courtesy Project for Public Spaces

8 Lemov 2005.

9 Blass 2004.

10 Whyte 1974.

pedestrian was a vindication of the city in a context of a political and economic crisis which appeared to threaten New York's very survival.

Out of this urban and fiscal crisis, New York would undergo a transition to a different kind of city. Thus, in a moment of decreasing citizenship—as the city was redesigned for the tourist, the investor, and the commuter—urban spaces were reenvisioned as spaces of freedom and spaces of belonging, even as fewer people belonged there. This rehearses, in essence, the argument of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. In their analysis of management discourse in France from the 1960s through the 1990s, the authors traced a process whereby capitalism appropriated its own critique with a new promise of self-actualization. In the context of 1970s New York, the same process is enacted, not through the language of management, but through the appropriation of urban space. Fortified by insights and rhetoric of a combination of humanist, behavioral, and environmental psychology, it is design that makes the city safe for a new iteration of redevelopment. So the pedestrian revolution, one could say, is a psychological experiment in the service of Midtown development.

Continuity in Conviviality

Today's pedestrian streets and plazas are the realization of the contradictory visions of the 1970s. As urban design follows psychology, the humanist language of freedom and self-actualization has been superseded by positive psychology, with its emphasis on happiness. But just as the psychological rationale for urban intervention is characterized by continuity, so too the advocates of streets for people remain the same. William H. Whyte remains a touchstone. His counterpart Jan Gehl, the Danish architect and researcher of behavior in public space, has sown infrastructures of conviviality from the earliest experiments of the 1960s to their global spread today. New York City's recent street interventions were the product of Gehl's advice, after the city's Department of Transportation hired him to conduct a public life study

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like those he pioneered in his native Copenhagen. Gehl began his career collaborating with his wife, the environmental psychologist Ingrid Gehl, on research projects similar to those of William H. Whyte. The initial closing of Copenhagen's principal market street Strøget to traffic in 1962 provided Gehl with the ideal laboratory in which to study public life and the research findings to justify more street closings in the city's core. More social activity on the street, Gehl's principal goal for the city, promoted the satisfaction of human needs along Maslowian lines. The stimulation and inspiration of social interaction on streets made city life a vehicle for self-actualization.

Between 1962 and 2005, pedestrian space in the center of Copenhagen increased sevenfold. Copenhagen remains a primary reference for pedestrian and bicycle-centered urban design. As Gehl's work has been exported around the world—not just New York, but London, Melbourne, Moscow, Istanbul and Chongqing are among Gehl's recent clients—arguments for convivial streets have evolved with visions of the “good city.” In a recent book, Gehl likens a good city to a good party, with people as the “guests.”¹¹ Planners “invite” people to spend time in the city, they stay on if they are enjoying themselves. Attendance is always conditional. New York City's new streetscapes are object lessons in creating cities that are lively, safe, sustainable, and also healthy—wellbeing trumping political participation.

Ambulatory Therapy

It is worth noting that Copenhagen, as a model walking city, is also a global capital of wellbeing. Denmark is a star of hedonic measurement, ranked at the very top of the first *World Happiness Reports* submitted to the United Nations. Like pedestrianization, happiness economics is a product of the 1960s. Born of humanist psychology and the social indicators movement, to a critical eye, it is an attempt to address the fact that “unhappiness has become the critical negative externality of contemporary capitalism.”¹²

¹¹ Gehl 2010: 147.

¹² Davies 2011: 68.

THE PEDESTRIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

- The city shall not harm the pedestrian.
- The streets belong to all the people, and shall not be usurped for the passage and storage of motor vehicles.
- People shall have the right to cycle in safety; that means ample provision of bikeways separate from trucks, buses and automobiles.
- To reduce dependence on the automobile, city and suburban residents shall have the right to convenient, clean and safe mass transportation.
- People shall be freed from the heavy burdens of daily travel by having the opportunity to live near their places of work.
- Urban residents shall have plentiful and generous open public places—outside of parks—for gathering and ceremonies.
- Pedestrians shall have the right to breathe clean air on streets, free of the harmful fumes of vehicles.
- Standing room only on city streets shall end by providing benches for sitting and relaxation.
- The sounds of human voices shall replace vehicular noise on city streets.
- Concern for the welfare of pedestrians shall extend to the surface under foot—with paving congenial for walking—and shall include human-scale street furniture and signs.
- Urban man shall have the right to experience trees, plants and flowers along city streets.
- Cities shall exist for the care and culture of human beings, pedestrians all!



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Kontinuität in der Konvivialität

Die Fußgängerstraßen und Plätze von heute sind die Verwirklichung der widersprüchlichen Visionen der 1970er-Jahre. Da Stadtplanung der Psychologie folgt, wurde die humanistische Sprache der Freiheit und der Selbstverwirklichung von der positiven Psychologie abgelöst, mit ihrer Betonung auf Glück und Zufriedenheit. Doch genauso wie die psychologische Begründung für urbane Interventionen sich nicht verändert hat, sind auch die Verfechter des Prinzips „Straßen für Menschen“ nach wie vor dieselben. William H. Whyte ist heute wie damals eine unangefochtene Größe. Sein Pendant, der finnische Architekt und Forscher menschlichen Verhaltens im öffentlichen Raum, Jan Gehl hat schon in den 1960er-Jahren mit Infrastruktur der Konvivialität experimentiert, die inzwischen globale Verbreitung gefunden haben. New Yorks jüngste Straßeninterventionen beruhen auf konkreten Empfehlungen, die als Ergebnis einer vom Verkehrsamt der Stadt New York getragenen Studie über das Leben im öffentlichen Raum, wie er sie in seiner Heimatstadt Kopenhagen begründet hatte. Am Anfang seiner beruflichen Karriere arbeitete Gehl mit seiner Frau, der Umweltpsychologin Ingrid Gehl, bei Forschungsprojekten zusammen, die jenen von William H. Whyte ähnelten. Die erste Straßenschließung,

von Kopenhagens wichtigster Marktstraße Strøget, für den Verkehr im Jahr 1962 bot Gehl ideale Laborbedingungen, um das Leben im öffentlichen Raum zu beobachten. Diese lieferte ihm die Forschungsergebnisse zur Rechtfertigung weiterer Straßenschließungen im Stadtkern. Gehls Hauptziel für die Stadt, die Steigerung der sozialen Konvivialität auf der Straße, begünstigte die Erfüllung menschlicher Bedürfnisse im Sinne Maslows. Durch die Stimulierung sozialer Interaktion auf den Straßen wurde das Stadtleben zu einem Vehikel der Selbstverwirklichung.

Zwischen 1962 und 2005 vergrößerte die Fläche für Fußgänger im Zentrum Kopenhagens um das Siebenfache. Kopenhagen ist nach wie vor eine wichtige Referenz für stadtplanerische Ansätze, die Fußgänger und Fahrräder im Zentrum stehen. In dem Maße wie Gehls Konzepte in der ganzen Welt angewendet werden – nicht nur New York, auch London, Melbourne, Moskau, Istanbul und Chongqing gehören zu Gehls Kunden der letzten Jahre – haben sich Argumente für konvivielle Straßen zusammen mit Visionen der guten Stadt weiterentwickelt. In einem vor wenigen Jahren erschienenen Buch vergleicht Gehl eine gute Stadt mit einer guten Party. Die Menschen, die sich in der Stadt aufhalten, werden als „Gäste“ beschrieben.¹¹

F Simon Breines, *Pedestrian Bill of Rights / Fußgänger-Charta*, 1974.

Excerpt from *The Pedestrian Revolution: Streets Without Cars* by S. Breines and William J. Dean, copyright ©1974 by Simon Breines and William J. Dean. Used by permission of Vintage Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

11 Gehl 2010: 147.

In recent years, social scientists and development experts acknowledging “the realities of poverty, anxiety, environmental degradation and unhappiness in the midst of great plenty” have embraced happiness as a policy metric. “The measurement of happiness, putting happiness at the center of analysis, and translation of well-being research into design and delivery of services,” advocates argue, promise better policies and a better world.¹³ While acknowledging the varied factors underlying collective happiness—social support, freedom to make life choices, generosity, perceptions of corruption, life expectancy, and GDP per capita—one determinant stands out. For the authors of the *World Happiness Reports*, mental health has the highest societal and state costs and is the “single most important determinant of individual happiness.”¹⁴

Clinical depression and anxiety in particular are singled out for their contribution to misery and for their high economic costs.¹⁵ Happiness and mental health are therefore to be promoted for the sake of development both individual and economic.

As happiness economics and positive psychology are applied at the level of the city, some limitations of this framework emerge. A good example is the city of Bricksburg. This urban world is made of pieces of Lego—another Danish global export—and invented by Hollywood, but *The LEGO Movie* is an apt context in which to explore the shortcomings of the happy city. The 2014 film questions the quality of life in a city where “everything is awesome” but tightly choreographed and controlled. As the city devotes itself to growth physical and economic, Lego skyscrapers rising in the air, its residents live a satisfied life of mass consumption, even as they pay thirty-seven dollars for a cup of coffee (perhaps we are in Copenhagen, after all). The citizens of Bricksburg follow instructions to “always be happy.” Their wellbeing comes at the expense of the “weird,” the different or dissenting, for which there is no room, and everything is ultimately in the service of business. In the film, a heterogeneous bunch of obsolete Lego minifigures must disrupt the urban order so as to save themselves and everyone else from total disenfranchisement (they are to be glued in place for eternity). Meanwhile, Cloud Cuckoo Land, the heroes’ self-built home in exile, points to a different measure of urban happiness. A multicolored festival, it is full of music, free of cars, with room for all types.

A possible real-life approximation can be found, once more, in Copenhagen.

The city is also the site of the mix-and-match space of Superkilen, designed by architects BIG, landscape architects Topotek 1, and artist collective Superflex and inaugurated in the summer of 2012 (Fig. G). “Super wedge” in English, this linear park is sited not in the city center but a less happy part of town. Nørrebro is a residential neighborhood with a mixed immigrant population, a history of conflict between squatters and police, and a reputation for crime and violence. In a way, Superkilen is, like Bricksburg, an urbanistic spoof. Conceived as a gallery of best practices and recognized urban features, it assembles abundant greenery, space for sports and play, and



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a market in three color-coded spaces along a major bicycle corridor. It also brings together a series of objects, artifacts, and street furniture selected by Nørrebro residents and the designers: 150-plus objects from more than 60 countries, including benches, fountains, neon signs, playground equipment, a Thai boxing ring, and a Moroccan fountain with an Islamic design. These disparate objects do not blend into a happy whole but rather exist

G (above and on page 112) BIG / Topotek 1 / Superflex, Superkilen, Copenhagen / Copenhagen, 2012.
Photos: Mariana Mogilevich

¹³ Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2012: 3; 9.

¹⁴ Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2013: 4.

¹⁵ Denmark is also a very high scorer in world antidepressant consumption.

in cultural and aesthetic tension, demanding to be interpreted and appropriated.

This tongue-in-cheek, intentionally tacky critique of smoother forms of urbanism is at the same time in the vanguard of happy city principles. Seeking to uncover a “geography of happiness,” Richard Florida created a Place and Happiness survey (since 2008, the Gallup-Healthways Well-being Index), organized around Maslowian needs. In his findings, security and services are important, but aesthetics, including a taste for “messy urbanisms” and openness, defined as “a communal sense of tolerance and acceptance of diversity,” rate among the highest factors in contributing to place-based happiness.¹⁶ Part of a redevelopment project to upgrade a “dangerous” neighborhood, now a tourist-guide favorite, Superkilen provides the features that appeal to what Florida calls the “creative class.” They can find their bliss in Copenhagen, recently ranked at the top of “open-to-experience” cities by Florida, and in other surveys, number five for perceptions of safety in global cities, and in the top ten in separate rankings for “livability” and “quality of life.”¹⁷

Superkilen, on the one hand, raises questions about urban belonging, difference, and universality. But its appropriation of play, happiness, and even edgy discord in service of urban development is akin to *The LEGO Movie*'s celebration of heterogeneity in the service of buying more Legos. A city where pirates and princesses coexist is one whose builders should buy both pirate and princess Lego sets. Today's infrastructures of conviviality are designed for happiness, but of what kind? In his recently discovered 1973 manuscript, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment*, commissioned in between his writings on the right to the city and the production of space, Henri Lefebvre notes that happiness and enjoyment are not produced like material goods but instead arise from use. Extending this principle to urban space, he describes space as a collective work, a productive and creative activity. This goes beyond the metonym of moveable tables and chairs which lend the appearance of freedom and self-determination to so many urban plazas, and would demand more potent forms of appropriation and participation. The street is a reservoir of possibility, and architecture, as a mode of imagination, might help to draw it out. New pedestrian streets, while hardly a direct route to democracy, have the potential to open the city to discussion, through collective construction and reappropriation. The

passive, medicated pedestrian might possibly become a more active citizen, and find, for some of our urban maladies, a walking—and talking—cure.

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16 Florida 2008: 176.

17 Florida 2009: ch. 10.

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