Cracking the Façade:
Interrogating Space in the Process of Urban Planning

by

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Walking north on Portland Street in the North End of Middletown, Connecticut the urban *flaneur* might eventually reach two sets of train tracks, barricaded from cars by a chain-link fence. On foot it is possible to cross the tracks, walk down a narrow street alongside US Route 9, under the Arrigoni bridge which spans the Connecticut River between Middletown and Portland, to an intersection of two streets, which form the small neighborhood of Miller and Bridge Streets. The two streets are each a block long, with no more than sixteen residential buildings left standing. Continuing down Bridge Street, past its intersection with Miller Street, there eventually appears an expansive wilderness of wetlands and the Mattabesett River.

Bridge Street, which runs parallel to Route 9, was home to Alfredo's Restaurant, a staple of the formerly Italian North End. Alfredo Maturo, a resident of the neighborhood, ran the restaurant and had turned the establishment into a well-known venue for anyone looking for quality, authentic Italian food. The reputation of the restaurant ran far and wide; rumors even had it that every recent Connecticut governor had eaten there except for John Rowland (Friedland, 2001). But after Alfredo passed away in 2006, leaving his wife to run the restaurant, business started deteriorating. Eventually the restaurant closed, leaving a sign on the door that reads "temporarily closed for renovations."

The sign, in many ways, has become emblematic of the small neighborhood of Miller and Bridge Streets. Among the residents and those connected to the neighborhood there is a pervasive sense of waiting for some sort of change, of a supposedly temporary stagnation that seems to have become

permanent. Although the apartment on the second floor of Alfredo's Riverside Restaurant is currently being rented, it is clear that no one has set foot beyond the cobweb-encrusted restaurant façade in quite some time. In view of the window the tables still sit with chairs resting atop them, waiting for the morning staff to turn them over and begin the day – but the restaurant has been "temporarily" closed since 2008. The neighborhood's residents have also been "temporarily" awaiting relocation by the city since 2000, but much like Alfredo's, this plan seems to be permanently on hold as well. How did such a purgatory manifest, all but forgotten about by anyone beyond its borders?

Its physical existence is an urban anomaly in today's post-urban renewal city plans. Bordered on all sides by train tracks, highway, and wetlands, the neighborhood is only accessible to vehicles from a ramp off the southbound side of Route 9. Those Miller-Bridge residents who drive home from downtown Middletown must continue past the neighborhood going north to the next exit in the neighboring town of Cromwell, turn around and reenter Route 9 going south, all in order to reach a neighborhood that is less than a mile from downtown Middletown. In rush hour traffic, this process could take nearly half an hour.

These two streets had not always existed in such isolation, nor had the neighborhood always felt so abandoned and lifeless as it does today. The construction of many of the houses dates back to the mid-1800s, when the riverfront was bustling with economic activity and Middletown became home to an increasing number of Italian immigrants. The railways were constructed in 1873 and ran through the center of the city, cutting Miller and Bridge Streets off

from parts of Middletown. At that time trains moved slowly and infrequently, allowing residents to maintain normal access to the city. In the 1930s, however, a new bridge across the Connecticut River was conceived, and by 1937 the Arrigoni Bridge was opened with a grand parade and celebration, further dividing Miller and Bridge Streets from the city (Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, 1979: 5).

The most significant measure of separation, however, was yet to come. In the 1960s the US Route 9 highway was extended from its former point or termination further south in Middletown, which effectively cut the neighborhood and Middletown's downtown off from the riverfront. Most relevant for Miller-Bridge, the highway had a single on/off ramp that served as the neighborhood's only legal vehicular access to the rest of the city. While this at-grade entrance made it easy to reach places outside of Middletown, it made it difficult to access nearby locations and was a danger to drivers entering and exiting at high speeds.

Although separated from the city by a number of infrastructural barriers, the neighborhood developed what one person associated with the area referred to as an eccentric and offbeat character (Brewster, 2010). Its isolation afforded its residents an enclave to live and let live without interference. Drug activity eventually caught the attention of city officials and the complaints from residents of the neighborhood were eventually heard. The city's Department of Planning was aware of the increased drug activity, and the newspapers reported on a number of criminal incidents from the area throughout the 1990s. The pervasive drug use and sales had resulted in a couple of shootings, and those beyond the

neighborhoods' borders began to take notice (Blint and Rich, 1999).

City planners had long known that the neighborhood's isolation posed financial and liability risks to the city as a whole. In 1964, the Middletown Redevelopment Agency commissioned a report that evaluated the neighborhood as unsuitable for residential use, and which, at best, could be repurposed for "industrial re-use, provided, however, flood-control facilities are built" (1964: 54). The issue came up numerous times since then but was pushed aside in favor of focusing on more visibly "blighted" neighborhoods in downtown Middletown and the North End. Blight and slum clearance were common problems in urban planning parlance at that time, however this particular enclave was not yet garnering much attention. In fact, the neighborhood was often left out of plans for the North End, such as the 1989 Urban Renewal Plan, and the boundaries of the North End seemed to end at St. Johns and Portland Street (City of Middletown, 1999). The two-block neighborhood had little claim to a place in any larger institutional identity.

By the 1990s, residents of the North End had organized the North End Action Team (NEAT), a group that advocated that the problems of the North End be addressed by the city government. Although formed in response to a murder near the north end of Main Street, the group soon began advocating around the issues of limited, dangerous access and excessive drug activity in the Miller-Bridge Street area. The organization and residents also raised issues of lead poisoning from the repainting of the Arrigoni Bridge and of industrial run-off from further up-river. Despite NEAT's community organizing efforts, support for

neighborhood changes from the residents was fragmented. While some wanted safer access to the neighborhood, others wanted to maintain the isolation (Brewster, 2010). And when Bridge Street access to Portland Street was to be opened, one of the most vocal residents of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood rescinded her support due to increased traffic flow in what is currently a fairly safe dead-end street for children to play in (Greenberg, 2010).

The diversity of perspectives in the neighborhood often stood in the way of consensus. For the last few decades there has been no "typical" resident of Miller and Bridge Streets. Despite the negative connotations that the neighborhood has received due the publicity of its drug activity, the residents living in the sixteen to twenty structures (depending on the year) have consistently been of a variety of racial and economic backgrounds, ages, professional statuses, and varying attachment to the neighborhood. Although there has long been a level of transience in the neighborhood, the area has also maintained residents who are dedicated to its history and to continuing its vibrancy, though the total populations appears to have shrunken significantly since the city's 1999 resolution to relocate, demolish, and redevelop Miller and Bridge Streets by 2004.

The 2004 deadline passed, however, and as of 2010 this plan has not been completed. Sixteen of the original twenty-two residential structures still stand. Vehicular access to the neighborhood is still relegated to the single on/off ramp, though now only from the southbound direction. Code regulations are not maintained, but properties are no longer actively being acquired by the city. The

twenty-two public-school children in the neighborhood attend Macdonough

School right across the tracks, but instead of a more direct route, the school bus

must take them to school during rush hour via a blind right turn into one of the

State Department of Transportation's most dangerous intersections in

Connecticut. Many residents still hold out for the promise of relocation, but they

have yet to see the fruits of the city plan for their homes. In the meantime,

property values have plummeted further than the regional averages, with little

hope of rising when there is a demolition plan for the neighborhood in place.

How did the original decision to eliminate the neighborhood come to

pass? Whose voices were heard, and what does such a decision indicate about

the processes of urban planning and the relationship of marginalized urban

residents to their city's government? The Miller Bridge Street scenario, as written

and approved by the decision-making body of Middletown's government, is the

product of specific notions of space, coupled with economic constraints and

ignorance as to the socio-spatial processes that constitute urban existence.

Miller-Bridge, while a geographic anomaly, is also typical of the spatial conflation

and simplification of a city's decision-making body's relationship to its residents'

lived experiences. The process that condemned the Miller-Bridge Street

neighborhood, only to have it enter a state of "limbo" or "purgatory," deserves to

be examined to uncover where, exactly, lie the "cracks" in the façade of urban

planning.

The most recent publication of Middletown's approved plan for

development begins with a self-congratulatory assertion that Middletown has

become "a model for city planning," and goes on to cite the city's many planning, development, and conservation achievements (Middletown Plan Amendment, 2010). In many ways the city has progressed in reaching its goals for land use and quality of life that had been enumerated in earlier plans; however the city government has a long way to go in ensuring that the voices of its population are heard. The current situation of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood is an instance in which the larger city consistently chose to overlook the difficulties associated with living there, only to eventually lead an unsuccessful attempt to terminate its existence. Nonetheless the failed plan has altered the space, and the continued use of the space despite it being "legislated out of existence," as one reporter said, should be a daily reminder to the city government that the process of urban planning has much to be improved upon.

To explore why and how the Miller-Bridge redevelopment project came to be a failed initiative, we must examine the variety of sources that produce and are produced by the (social) space(s) of the neighborhood. Theories of social space are integral to understanding the intricacies behind spatialities – of simultaneously being both the subject and object of the spatial process. By exploring them and applying them to the representations and practices relayed by residents, media outlets, and government documents, the complexities of the issues at hand will become clearer. I hope that the inherent limitations of working with any *representation of space* will become clear, and that perhaps the urban planning practice will actively adopt more comprehensive methods of including all voices in the planning process.

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To plan a city is both to create a well-designed entity that gives its residents high qualities of life, and to maintain the ability of a city government to oversee and maintain its territory, both of which are upheld through the complex process of spatial production. The less overtly political role of urban planning is often subsumed by the prominence of the visible aspects of the planned city, and practitioners are often skewed towards planning a city from an architectural design bias, without explicitly engaging the myriad forces at play in approving, implementing, and appropriating their designs.

Maps, boundaries, classifications, figure-ground drawings, nodes and centers – these visual spatial interpretations form the backbone of urban design. They are often taken at face value for truth, no matter the superficiality with which they are produced. Urban planners, designers, and architects make recommendations and changes using this notion of the city as a totalized entity that is entirely knowable and understandable from a top down perspective. In these professions the city becomes a pure "Concept City," existing above and outside of the grasp of the everyday. When taken apart, however, the spaces that compose an urban area are much more complex, subversive, and marginalized than the Concept City would ever portray them to be.

To better understand urban spaces from the perspective of problematizing urban planning, I turn to Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau as foundations for exploring the complications of urban space that manifest

themselves in the discipline of urban planning. For the sake of focusing on urban planning, rather than on the discourse of spatial and temporal social theories, I will use Doreen Massey's 'alternative view of space' presented in her essay "Politics and Space/Time" (1992) as a basis for understanding the further complications of social space.[1] Massey asserts that that space is not a slice through time in which there is a depthless stasis, but rather it is a complex simultaneity of social processes. The spatial is political, dynamic, full of "power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation" (Massey, 1992: 10). It is composed of both order and chaos, and these elements are constituted simultaneously by interactions and phenomena occurring at a multitude of scales (1992: 9-11).

When planners design cities, the urban space is typically imagined as a homogenous entity that can be divided and compartmentalized into infinite configurations, each with the same properties but different objects (Lefebvre, 1991: 98). In this sense, objects within the space are the sole characterization of that space, rather than the space being characterized as a socially produced object (and subject) itself. In his book, *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre questions this urban planning perspective by describing the complicated process of the production of space. Coming from a Marxist perspective, Lefebvre confronts this standard notion of homogenous space with a theory that privileges space as subject-object through which time, political

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1 Massey's essay itself is a response to the spatial theories of Fredrick Jameson and Ernesto Laclau, among others, but I wish to avoid their debate over the presence of politics in space and time by simply accepting Massey's "alternative view of space" (1992).

economy, and social life can be understood.

Using Lefebvre, along with Foucault and de Certeau, we can construct a framework for understanding the complexities of social space. The outline Lefebvre sets up for better understanding the social production of space can be further explored from the perspective of power and control in Foucault's work, and from the perspective of the tactical subversion and everyday appropriations in de Certeau's work. From this framework we can look to better understand the unique space(s) of Miller-Bridge and begin to interrogate alternative possibilities for urban planning.

In a recently published book, entitled *Experience and Conflict: The Production of Urban Space* (2010), Panu Lehtovuori performs a similar analysis of the simplified conceptions of space used by urban planners to make integral decisions in planning a city. His exploration of an urban planning problematic comes from a perception similar to mine, that the planning and design professions employ the notion of a homogenous, mappable spatial reality in a way that is often detrimentally totalizing in its misguided attempts to maximize utility for the city and its residents. His explication of the dominant notions of space present in city planning synthesizes Lefebvre's and de Certeau's analyses of social space, revealing a complex reality that he criticizes for its usual reduction to visual elements of representations of space (maps, plans, etc) that are taken as transparent realities. The Concept City, or totalized notion of urban space, is often construed as a Visible City, or a space that is knowable and transformable through a solely visual interpretation. The image-ability of the city has been a

long standing component of urban planning, from Kevin Lynch's outline of city space as composed of five replicable forms (paths, nodes, edges, landmarks and districts) up to Rem Koolhaas's book of bird's-eye city views in *S, M, L, XL*.

This standard acceptance of the Visible City, Lehtovouri argues, is fundamental to the problem of contemporary urban planning. In a section entitled "Towards a New Epistemology," Lehtovuori acknowledges the work of Jane Jacobs, the Situationist International, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, and Lefebvre as having "valorized the experience and points of view of excluded groups and marginal voices" (Lehtovuori, 2010: 32). However, he goes on to say, the theoretical acceptance of the planning problematic has not translated to a practical acceptance of the need to move beyond the notion of the planner as an "expert" who knows best for the "public interest" (Lehtovuori, 2010: 33).

However, I am getting ahead of myself. Let us return to setting up the theoretical spatial dilemma of urban planning. Lefebvre classifies social space into three categories: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991: 33).

Spatial practices (experience) are methods of participating in and acting upon space, which produce and reproduce social space. *Representations of space* (perception) organize the relationship of productions of space through the production of knowledge and the political usage of codes and signs, such as in language and maps. *Representational spaces* (imagination) are the third set of spaces in Lefebvre's triad. They encompass symbolic spaces, either imagined,

such as heaven or hell, or real, such as a church or museum – much like the heterotopias in Michel Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces" (1976). These "other spaces" are integral to the production of social spaces, since they are used to inform spatial practices and to give legitimacy to representations of space. These three types of spaces are not discrete or isolated; rather, they overlap, exist simultaneously, and constantly influence each other. The increase of these simultaneities, their concentration and their accumulation are what characterize a space as urban (Lefebvre, 1991: 101).

David Harvey refines Lefebrve's triad in his book, *The Urban Experience* (1989), by using the concepts of accessibility/distanciation, appropriation, and domination. Lefebvre's categories of space as the experienced, perceived, and imagined, are cross-referenced by Harvey with these three concepts, all of which were also investigated by Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991: 164). *Accessibility/distanciation* refers to measure by which the "friction of space" stands between social practices. *Appropriation of space* are means by which space is "used and occupied" by social groups, as opposed to the more organizing power-laden and control-oriented category of the domination of space. The grid is then filled in with various actors; for example, mapping is one example of representations of space that deal with accessibility/distanciation (Harvey, 1989: 262).

In a Marxist sense, Lefebvre posits social spaces as the primary actor(s) in the conflict driving the reproduction of the political economy. They produce and are produced by all else, such that in this paradigm the urban space perpetuates

capital accumulation, rather than capital accumulation perpetuating the urban existence. Harvey disagrees with this logic, called by some "the fetishization of space," and instead remains adherent to the principle of class conflict as the driving force behind the perpetuation of our world system. Nonetheless, the basic idea that spatiality is a complex actor in the system is significant. The notion that social production of social space plays an integral part in the lived experience of any social being is a crucial step in deconstructing the urban planning process.

Michel Foucault's theories of power and biopolitics are closely related to Lefebvre's totalizing theory of social space. Although he does not privilege space to the same extent as Lefebvre, Foucault connects knowledge and power to the production of space. In his first lecture of *Security, Territory, Population* (2004), Foucault explains the means by which the contemporary security apparatus operates in and upon the spatial by using the milieu as a means for controlling the population. The control of urban space by a sovereign power is one means by which the security apparatus is exercised, and, Foucault argues, the characteristically-urban spatial domination and demarcation of territory (a Lefebvrian representation of space) are necessary to the proper exercise of security.

To give legitimacy to the notion of a defined territory, space must be given a political domain, one that operates crudely through representations of space. This political approach to producing social space is the prerequisite for what as been a driving force in urban planning – the Concept City which I introduced

earlier. Examined by Michel de Certeau in his chapter "Walking in the City," the Concept City is the city as it is viewed from the "top of the World Trade Center," without an acknowledgement of the lived experience of the city's "on the ground" spaces (1984). De Certeau does not concern himself, as Lefebvre and Foucault do, with problematizing the reproduction of social space and, by extension, the social relations and power dynamic that is perpetuated. Instead, he seeks to describe those practices that undermine the political Concept City through lived experience. He enumerates these "tactics," or practices of spatial production that come from the position of the "other" in a society – one without a defensible space.

His work relies on using linguistic principles of synecdoche (using the part to represent the whole) and asyndeton (suppressing linkages between concepts) to investigate daily experiences and perspectives of urban dwellers. His notions of "tactics" are predicated on the existence of a politicized space, in which there is a strong, controlling group that exercises "strategies" and an othered, weak group that exercises "tactics" (1984: 36-37). This control of space is more or less taken for granted in de Certeau's exploration of everyday practices, but he acknowledges Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu as a foundation for his analysis. The dichotomy of tactics and strategies are also implicit within the categories of accessibility, appropriation, and domination and the means by which weak and strong groups participate in experienced, perceived, and imagined space.

Equipped with notions of Lefebvrian production of space, Foucauldian power dynamics, and de Certeau's practices of everyday life, we can return to

Lehtovuori's desire to expose the "cracks in the façade" of the Concept City (2010: 33). The spatial practices that act, simultaneously, to compose the work of the planner and to undermine that work are present in the theories of these three authors. The constant production of space on a multitude of levels works to ensure that power is reproduced and maintained and that security is asserted, while also allowing individual users/producers to subvert and undermine the totalizing structure of an urban planning-influenced society. The categories listed here are methods of exploring these processes, such that one understanding of spatial production may read as follows: representations of space (perceptions) work with representational spaces (imaginations) to create the everyday practices (experiences) that may result in the reappropriation of the image-able city.

I present these theories as tools to aid in the unpacking, complication, and re-imagining of urban planning, with the City of Middletown's relationship with the Miller/Bridge Street neighborhood as my case study. No space can be relayed in a singular manner, and the Miller-Bridge neighborhood is no exception. By using a triad of sources as "texts" from which to extrapolate a few of the many spatialities produced and reproduced in and upon the neighborhood, the more nuanced nature of urban planning's effects may be understood. The three textual categories under examination are one, the city of Middletown's published documents of 1999-2004; two, a set of four interviews I have conducted with current and former residents or landlords of the neighborhood and a set of two interviews with the current and former directors of the North End Action Team;

and three, two compilations of newspaper articles from the *Hartford Courant,* the first published between 1997 and 1999 by a few different reporters, and the second published between 2002 and 2008 mainly by the reporter Josh Kovner.

Each of these sources and the information they chose to include will be examined as representations of the spatialities of the neighborhood that they reproduce. These aspects of social space include, among many possibilities, the ways in which each source refers to power and control over the space, the imagined possibilities and memories the place holds, and the spatial practices of inclusion and exclusion that each text, from a map to an interview, exercises.

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Before continuing, let me discuss for a moment the methodology and evolution of my research. I first became introduced to the Miller and Bridge Street neighborhood in a class with Professor Rob Rosenthal on Housing and Public Policy in the spring of 2010. The notion of the neighborhood as an example of urban planning gone terribly awry struck me. The same semester that I am writing this essay, I decided, based on an impassioned meeting with one of the residents from the neighborhood, to pursue the story of the neighborhood's relationship to the city of Middletown in a documentary filmmaking class. The assignment was to make a thirteen-minute documentary film for a social-justice based organization in the Middletown area. The Miller-Bridge Street neighborhood immediately came to mind, as it seemed from my outsider-perspective that there was a no more disenfranchised group than the residents of

a neighborhood that has been condemned. Nora Christiani, a fellow student in the documentary class, got on board with the project and together we went about making a movie.

I bring up this anecdote to give readers a sense of how I became involved with the case study I use for this essay on spatial analysis and urban planning. Documentary film is not a traditional medium for addressing idiographic issues in sociology, but I found my research in filmmaking to be fitting for this work as well. However, filmmaking has its own ethnographic issues, and the position of the filmmaker or ethnographer (myself), is both compromised and enhanced by the medium. On the one hand, what is said on film is not always the 'truth' of the situation. Interviewees are careful to say only that which will maintain or enhance their social and political positions in their communities, and in their behavior the Heisenberg principle of that which is observed is inherently altered, is especially obvious. Nonetheless, the "obviousness" of this altered behavior is in itself a good reminder for the ethnographer, the writer of sociology, that what is shown to the observing eye is often performative.

There is no doubt that my interviews were compromised by the presence of a camera. Many of interviews took place after more informal, unfilmed conversations had occurred and the information shared on film was most often an altered version of what had been said before. No community organizer wants to tell the city that they have no leverage with regards to a neighborhood, and no landlord wants to speak poorly of the politicians whom she has to win over in other endeavors. That being said, there is no interview that is uncompromised

by the presence of an interviewer. In my case, such changes were only made more obvious, but perhaps were not overly exaggerated.

In using this neighborhood as a case study, I have used my own observations from spending significant time filming in the area these past couple of months. I am also using the transcripts and notes I took on the seven interviews Nora and I captured on film, and an unrecorded interview we had with the city planner, Bill Warner (he refused to be recorded using any electronic device). Everyone who appeared on film signed release forms for the footage they appear in, allowing Nora and I to have complete control over the use and reproduction of their interviews. Due to this already agreed upon and contractual agreement to make their words public, I feel comfortable using their interviews in this research. I hope that the filmic-quality inherent to these interactions will not deter from their validity, but rather will enhance the readers' understanding of my relationship to their words.

At this juncture I must also explain that creating a documentary puts the filmmakers and editors, myself very much included, in a different relationship to their sources than an ethnographer would have. A documentary aims to portray the truth, and documentary advocacy aims to speak for organizations or groups that may not have a voice or who may benefit from the easily accessible medium of film. The audience, as well as the client or patron, is different from that of the traditional ethnographer. Sociological audiences are not the same audiences that determine whether or not a film is successful: a film must break even or even gross money (or in my case, earn a desirable grade), and it must be received well

by its audiences. In creating the documentary of this neighborhood's struggles, I am creating a story. I am looking for the hook to draw you in, and I am writing a narrative that may not follow chronology or a singular perspective. While I aim to produce authentic work, it is no more authentic than a short story, or a reporter's neighborhood profile.

However, I believe the same is true for the work of the ethnographer. Sociology is not truth. We may search to uncover truths, but that search will forever continue, thwarted by the nature of textual mediums. Despite these issues, I hope that the present essay will be of use in deconstructing the creation of an authoritative voice in urban affairs and in highlighting the need for a more complex theory of spatial analysis in all realms, but especially that of the knowledge-producing, landscape-producing, and government-backed urban planning process.

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It is possible for you or me to walk down to Bridge Street via Portland Street to try to gain an understanding of the place through our individual exploration. This practice will not be entirely accurate and is constantly biased by one's own perspective and notions of the authentic, but it still deserves to be interrogated as a piece of the many practices of the production of (social) space. In my own trips to Miller-Bridge I was confronted by an inconsistent sense of being simultaneously welcomed and excluded by the people I met and saw there. Part of the difficulty of walking around the neighborhood came from carrying a

large video camera, which inherently must have felt invasive and voyeuristic to anyone who was unfamiliar, or even familiar, with my project, but there was also an awareness who belonged and who did not. One resident I met told me that he had seen Nora and me out filming in the neighborhood before, but he had only watched without coming out to introduce himself until today. He seemed to be vetting our purpose for being there, at first wary but then welcoming us to film his own well-maintained garden and home.

While filming the underbelly of the looming Arrigoni Bridge on the same day, another woman emerged from her home to find out what we were up to. After initially accepting our introduction and explanation for being there, she returned to tell us that her mother was uncomfortable with our filming (though we were filming public property) and that she would like us leave immediately. There is a chance that the request was made in order to hide illicit activity; the first information the woman shared about the neighborhood was that there "aren't drugs here anymore," as if that must be what we were looking for. In fact, while we had not been searching for drug activity, we were often made aware of it. The tell-tale signs of cars frequently entering Miller-Bridge off the highway for mere minutes, passengers running out to the home of reputed dealers, and the immediate exit of the vehicles back on the highway was indicative enough, not to mention the dime bags we found in the street one day or the stories told by our interviewees.

I was surprised, however, that I consistently felt safe in the neighborhood. The sense that everyone in the neighborhood had an eye on the street gave me a

sense of security, and the large numbers of children playing in the street on a regular basis made the place feel like a family-oriented neighborhood. My own preconceived notions of the place, which were based on the reputation of the neighborhood's condition as portrayed by people I had talked to or in newspaper articles, were consistently proved wrong.

While not true across the board, most of the homes were in seemingly good condition. They were decorated for the season, periodically raked of any fall leaves, and as well kept as could be afforded. The three seemingly vacant homes were anomalies rather than commonalities, and the vacant lots were mostly mowed and clean of litter. There was a large garden where one of the demolished homes had been, and the park had been recently landscaped with new hoops for the basketball court. Due to the creation of a "utility corridor" on Bridge Street, a fuel line had been installed under the street and its surface was repaved. Despite these positive visual attributes, Alfredo's Restaurant remained vacant with its sign deteriorating, and the building next door to it appeared to have recently been caught in a fire. The sides of the railroad tracks, which were also the backyards of residents, were mostly lined with debris and construction waste, such as concrete and iron beams.

Nonetheless, every day that I spent in the neighborhood there were people out and about. In the early fall days the streets became playgrounds and sidewalk-chalk abounded, groups of men sat about and talked, and two older men ran a daily informal business of fixing up cars on Miller Street. Even in the winter a large number of people walked in and out of the neighborhood, either up Bridge

Street through Portland Street or along the railroad tracks that eventually met up

with Portland Street as well. The place appeared to me to be well traveled, its

routes in and out well known, but its vehicular congestion was minimal. My own

observations often became extensions of the stories told to me by residents and

interviewees, and it has become difficult to know what is my own opinion and

bias and what I have adopted from someone else. Still, I have do not authority to

speak for the experiences of those who live there, only the privilege to analyze

and infer from my interactions and interviews what the space of Miller-Bridge

potentially was, is, and could be to them.

The experiences and desires of the residents of Miller-Bridge have been

communicated to outsiders mostly through individual communication, city-

initiated research, community organizations, and the media. The media includes a

variety of mediums of expression, such as internet blogging on websites like the

Middletown Eye, a number of print newspapers – including the Middletown Press,

the Hartford Courant, and the New York Times – radio, television, and other

journalistic outlets. To explore outside portrayal of the Miller-Bridge

neighborhood by journalists, I have chosen to focus on the *Hartford Courant:*

Greater Middletown Edition, a publication that has provided fairly consistent

coverage of the neighborhood. From 1997 through 2008, there were nearly

twenty articles whose primary focus was the neighborhood, and at least ten more

that mentioned the neighborhood in a broader discussion. The consistent, in

depth coverage of a particular geographic space and its portrayal to readers as a

specific *place* is its own act of spatial production and is in itself an important

spatiality – or that which is *produced* by space while simultaneously *producing* that space.

Over the course of the eleven-year period in which they are published, the articles in the *Courant* undergo an evolution as the totalizing picture that they paint of the neighborhood shifts perspectives. From 1998 through 1999, when the neighborhood was under consideration for demolition by the city, the *Hartford Courant: Greater Middletown Edition* published a series of eleven articles on the Miller-Bridge neighborhood. The articles range in their focus, from emphasizing the daily lives of residents in the neighborhood to portraying the "rampant blight" that exists in on Miller and Bridge streets. Profiles of the residents of the neighborhood and their daily lives read along the lines of the following: "Small children play regularly on active unfenced railroad tracks outside their houses, arguing over the one toy in sight," begins one article (Taylor, 1998: 1). The relative lack of vehicular congestion goes unmentioned, and the reader is left with an image of impoverished children in immediate danger. Most of the articles focus more on the structural issues of the neighborhood and the effects of rundown and vacant buildings on the quality of life in the city as a whole. "Getting Tough on Run-Down Buildings," (Mayerowitz, 1998: 1) reads one such headline, and others are titled "A Goal for Blighted Buildings" (Daley, March 2, 1999: 1) or "City Gets Tough on Blight" (Daley, March 30, 1999: 1). The primary focus of each of these articles is the city's demolition of buildings in the neighborhood.

The readers of the *Courant* are observing the editors' own production of synecdoche and asyndeton. As de Certeau explained, the synecdoche is the

linguistic substitution of a part for the whole, such as referring to a fleet of ships as a fleet of sails. De Certeau applies this concept of a linguistic synecdoche to the practice of walking in the city and by associating places with only one of their parts (1984:101). In a similar sense, the information relayed in the print version of the newspaper is but a snapshot of the situation from a particular perspective. The commission and execution of particular articles contribute to a particular construction of the place. Concise explanations of blight and the causes for the neighborhood's "date with the wrecking ball," as one articles calls it, become stand ins for larger more complex explanations.

The active deciding of what to publish and what not publish creates a particular spatial practice with which each reader engages and comes to know through the reading of the newspaper. Choices must be made in selecting from all the information that could be relayed in the jump from setting up "here is a neighborhood in Middletown" to the explanation of "here is why the city is demolishing the neighborhood." This selection is the creation of a publication-wide asyndeton, or what de Certeau described as the bypassing of linkages in the creation of a larger structure. This concept is also originally found in linguistics; however, de Certeau applies it to walking in the city and the practice of transitioning from one place to another within the urban landscape. Similarly, I believe that the articles in the paper should be examined with such linguistic meta-concepts in mind, with a particular eye as to what might be suppressed by the "everyday practice" of journalism.

In one article from 1998, the mayor is quoted saying "a blighted building is

the biggest threat to the stability of a neighborhood" (Mayerowitz, 1998: B.1).

Based on the neighborhood residents' own grievances, this quotation cannot be

assumed to tell the entire narrative of instability in the neighborhood. The choice

of the reporter to include this quotation as the sole explanation of the city's

decision to demolish buildings in the neighborhood is, in a sense, its own sort of

"walking practice." Using a similar device but portraying a different perspective,

Lydia Brewster – former Director of the North End Action Team – is quoted in the

March 30th, 1999 articles as saying "In my mind if money is to be spent, it should

be spent on getting in and out of that neighborhood without killing yourselves."

It appears that Brewster assumes that the city will fail to fully demolish the

neighborhood, as has happened, and should instead be concerned for the safety

of those who remain there. She and everyone else aware of the neighborhood

seem to have different ideas of what needs to be addressed, and she and the

reporter chose this one issue to be front and center. The notion that there may

be more pressing issues for the residents of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood is

only glossed over in the *Hartford Courant* until 2002 when Josh Kovner begins

reporting for the Middletown beat.

Kovner's articles have a broader focus and incorporate more of the issues

affecting the daily lives of residents, rather than the issue of blight – which in itself

is posed as a threat to the values of the city security apparatus. He questions the

negative effects of redevelopment more than the previous articles. A quotation

from former resident Bruce Kilgore asks,

> What's a fair price? The city has already declared this a doomed
> neighborhood. They've slandered my title and, in effect, taken

> possession of my home without paying me anything for it yet. It would cost me $100,000 to replace this house (assessed in 1998 at $36,500) somewhere else (2002: B.3).

Aside from the residents' response to the redevelopment plan, Kovner also highlights the detrimental effects of lead from the Arrigoni Bridge on the children playing in the neighborhood as well as the threats to safety their posed by the Route 9 access ramp.

These articles attempt to expose the myriad issues faced by the residents of the neighborhood, and in an interview in 2010 Kovner continues to espouse the virtues of the residents and the hardships they face due to the realities of their geographic location and the city's redevelopment plan. His 2005 article begins as follows:

> Residents of the isolated, blighted Miller-Bridge neighborhood pleaded with city officials to either empty the area of people and homes or to scrap the 6-year-old redevelopment plan and improve services. Living in limbo, trying to fashion a life in a neighborhood that has been officially declared unfit, is hurting them deeply, a dozen residents and property owners told the redevelopment agency Tuesday night. (Kovner, 2005: 1)

These residents are not trying to fight the city's original 1999 decision, but they are attempting to make known their daily experience of life in the neighborhood. In many ways, Kovner argues throughout his tenure on the Middletown beat for the *Hartford Courant*, the city's plan only made things worse for the residents and the city itself. The issues in his articles are structurally imposed by forces outside the neighborhood, as opposed to the earlier discussions of blight as endemic to the space and its users.

The newspaper articles from 2002 through 2008 continue to portray the

problems in the neighborhood, quoting those who talk about the lead contamination or the access issues. But Kovner explained to Nora and me in an interview that he was also intending to build towards a larger narrative piece. He eventually wanted to publish an article to that affect as a series of profiles of residents in the neighborhood. Towards this endeavor a photographer captured emotions and activities of a number of people who had spent their lives, or perhaps only the last couple years, in the neighborhood. The photographs lend a human face to the depiction of the events surrounding the city's intervention to relocate and demolish the homes on Miller and Bridge Streets, acting as an entirely different sort of synecdoche or semiotic symbol for the neighborhood of Miller-Bridge.

Reporters and their publications are only a small piece of the many spatialiaties of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood. The articles published reflect an attempt to be conduits for the truth or reality of a situation. The need to communicate to a larger audience the problems that affect only a select few within the city was one of Kovner's goals, and he expressed hope that his coverage may have led to at least a small increase in attention paid towards the issues of Miller-Bridge. Kovner was not the only actor involved in this pursuit of calling citywide attention to small but chronic community issues. Working towards a similar goal, the North End Action Team (NEAT) also took up the problems of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood as one of its headline issues.

The neighborhood advocacy organization known as NEAT formed in 1996 out of a city-sponsored "Urban Homesteading Task Force" designed to engage the

grassroots community in improving the conditions of the North End. According to Lydia Brewster, the former Director of NEAT, the organizers first met with residents of Miller and Bridge Street after a couple who lived there contacted the group inquiring as to why Miller-Bridge was not included in the organization's agenda. Since then, NEAT has been instrumental in pushing for changes in the small neighborhood, including initiatives such as a planning charrette in May of 1998, hosting clean-ups in the area, and agitating the city in attempt to open the Portland Street railway crossing. Two interviews, one with Lydia Brewster, former director of NEAT, and one with Izzi Greenberg, current director of NEAT and a resident of the greater North End of Middletown, shed light on the relationship of an advocacy organization to the isolated neighborhood of Miller-Bridge, which has a somewhat separate identity from the rest of the North End.

Of particular note is Lydia Brewster's sense of belonging in the neighborhood. Although she lives across the Connecticut River from Middletown in East Haddam, she is quick to correct any suggestion that she is not truly one of the neighborhood residents. At one point in the interview we inquired as to her thoughts on her role in the neighborhood as an outsider advocate, but she immediately responded that, rather than being an outsider, her personal opinion is based on a "twelve year period of trying to get something to change for the better in that neighborhood." Throughout her tenure with NEAT, she has focused much of her energy on the neighborhood. Aside from organizing the 1998 charrette, Lydia also held her fiftieth birthday in the neighborhood to clean up the local park. Her comfort with the area has given her a sense of ownership for the

issues facing the neighborhood, allowing her to give me and Nora a narrated tour of Miller-Bridge with the authority of one who lives there.

Nonetheless, her observations come from a bird's-eye perspective, from the belief that as community organizers the group is privy to the true issues facing the people who live on Miller and Bridge Streets. Lydia describes the problems in the neighborhood as all encompassing, larger issues that, to her, lead to an objectively worse quality of life.

> We sat in their backyard and we heard about what it was like to live in that neighborhood. How difficult it was, how under-resourced it was, how dangerous it was to get in and out of. Many concerns about public safety, some concerns about environmental issues, but mainly concerns about being isolated and disconnected from the rest of the city and a sense of lawlessness that made some of the residents in that neighborhood feel slightly threatened.

Lydia's ability to sum up the issues of the neighborhood in a mere few sentences is indicative of her self-situated position as a sounding board and synthesizer for community information. However, her language is important to dissect, as she does not come from within the neighborhood, and she is not, as she would like to believe, a true "insider" – a resident of Miller or Bridge streets.

Lydia's all-encompassing perspective is much more unequivocal on the exact nature of the problems in the neighborhood than is Cookie Q, a former resident of the neighborhood who was also the elected President of NEAT for a number of years. Cookie, a Latina woman originally from New York City, spent sixteen years raising her three generation family in one of the houses on Bridge Street. She watched as her son got mild lead poisoning from the stripping of paint on the Arrigoni Bridge, which her house was almost directly under, and as

her daughter was hit in a car accident trying to exit the neighborhood onto the highway. Ultimately, she learned to fight back against the city's marginalization of the neighborhood and the untenable issues she faced there.

She positively described her experience of learning the art of community organizing, but expressed dismay at her assumed position as the singular voice of the neighborhood. Many times Cookie would be one of the few people from Miller-Bridge speaking at community and city council meetings, despite her conversations with fellow residents that indicated their desire to see similar changes take place. "Some of them wanted to speak but they didn't want to speak," she explained in a tired tone. Eventually the constant fighting exhausted her.

> You know you can only fight so much the city if at the end of the day whatever they say is what we have to settle for. We shouldn't have to, cause we got a voice, but you keep trying and trying and if you don't get it some people just get tired.

This sense of exhaustion and an attitude of "I just live here and eventually I'll move and whatever happens happens," as Cookie explained it, seems to be a common perspective of the neighborhood residents themselves, despite Lydia's strong desire to see changes happen.

Izzi Greenberg, Lydia's successor and the current director of NEAT, views her role as a community organizer a bit differently. Both Lydia and Izzi agree that a lack of consensus on the issues among residents is one of the major barriers to actualizing changes in the neighborhood; however, Izzi believes that it is not necessarily her role to make that happen. She feels that her organization should take up issues that the residents themselves raise, and that since a number of

people in the neighborhood seem to prefer the isolation from the city, it is not her

place to deem their quality of life unfit. With such different views of what is best,

she wonders a bit what NEAT's right to change the neighborhood is, since some

residents enjoy living there for its isolated qualities. Aside from the question of

whether changes are coming from within the neighborhood, which community

organizing usually depends on, Izzi also expressed concern for NEAT's own

political capital, which could be lost in repeated quests for change that are

undermined over and over again by residents and former residents of the

neighborhood itself.

NEAT has fought to remedy many of the issues faced by Miller-Bridge, but

it has done so without necessarily much support coming from tenants and non-

property owners in the neighborhood. The residents there enjoy their lives. Sure,

they concede that there are problems – but what about the positive attributes?

The community? The kids playing together in the street? The park? The close

proximity to downtown if you are on foot? In deciding to demolish the

neighborhood the city did not take these attributes into consideration. And in

pushing the city to either grant vehicular access to the neighborhood or demolish

it altogether, NEAT has perhaps helped contribute to what became an even more

intractable situation.

When push came to shove, however, the city government had the final

word on the neighborhood's redevelopment status – though its resolutions were

in turn mitigated by serious financial constraints. The options put forth by the

planning charrette, the redevelopment agency, the department of planning, the

eventual stamp of approval of the redevelopment plan, and subsequent motions by the Common Council were integral to the continuously changing relationship of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood to the city as a whole. Most importantly, the representations of the neighborhood to the city and the city government's decisions regarding the area have had very real and profound effects on the residents who live there, but perhaps not as the government intended.

The city and state have long looked to reshape, demolish, and take over the neighborhood, yielding a number of plans, meetings, reports, and other documents supporting the decision to deem the neighborhood a redevelopment zone. In May of 1998, the Yale Urban Design Workshop was brought in to perform a two-day charrette in the neighborhood to evaluate its viability and different options for improving vehicular access. Middletown's Planning Corporation, Redevelopment Agency, Common Council, and Planning and Zoning Committees spent years discussing plans to improve or demolish the neighborhood, and the viability of such an area within the 42 square-mile City of Middletown. In these maps, plans, reports, and meeting minutes, the residents of the nineteen-acre area were represented through numbers, statistics, and "common-sense" understandings of "quality of life" violations. Their buildings and properties were documented and their respective conditions evaluated, their tax dollars were measured against the resources spent on the neighborhood, and their safety was considered in terms of potential lawsuits and liability to the city.

The results of these studies, in the form of textual documentation, photographs, statistics, maps, and future recommendations were brought before

Middletown's Common Council to be voted upon. The Common Council is Middletown's primary legislative body and is comprised of twelve individuals, each of whom is elected at-large by all residents of Middletown. As the ultimate decision-making entity in determining the future of Miller-Bridge, the documents put forth by various city agencies and endorsed by the Common Council are important sources to interrogate. Through omission, conflation, selective emphasis, and perspective, the texts each navigate and produce/reproduce certain aspects of the space of the neighborhood. They work to position the neighborhood within a greater political and social geography and, ultimately, within the (social) spatial structure of Middletown as a whole.

Above all, these texts are predicated on the notion of the Concept City. Without the charter of the City of Middletown, which enabled a governing body to make decisions and instill apparatuses of security, organization, and discipline over a given territory, these documents would not be endowed with such importance. The power given to the governing entity that produced these documents makes these presentations of Miller and Bridge Streets into quintessential examples of Lefebvre's "representations of space." By looking at the overall Plan for Miller and Bridge Street, the maps and statistics documented in the city's application for a Section 108 loan, and the greater plan for the city of Middletown, the Concept City takes shape as one of the prime motivators for spatial intervention.

At this juncture I believe it is appropriate to introduce an aerial map of the neighborhood as constructed by the Middletown Redevelopment Agency. Before

doing so, however, I want the reader to imagine other types of maps, such as one indicating the location of residents who are mentioned the most in the city newspaper. Or perhaps a map of the volume of people who move in and out of the neighborhood, what method of transportation they use, and where they enter and exit. You or I could create a legible, image-able, interpretation of city life based on just about anything. Therefore, we must approach the following map by interrogating its choices. What did its creators choose to portray? Why? Where are the map's limits? Why? Maps are an easily recognized representation of space, and while they may indicate useful geographical information, they also reproduce a particular interpretation of a space.

[see map from Section 108 loan – appended at the end of the essay]

This map was created for the Section 108 Loan Guarantee that the city used to apply for funds to acquire and demolish more buildings in Miller-Bridge. The boundaries and barriers surrounding the neighborhood are clearly displayed, but the potential points of access are not. The surrounding area of the City of Middletown is not depicted in this map, or in any map in the loan guarantee, and instead the neighborhood appears more remote than it actually is. Unbeknownst to the casual observer of this map, Miller-Bridge is only three or four blocks from the heart of Middletown's downtown avenue, Main Street, and the area in between is developed residentially. The only separation between the two is the gated railroad. This map also has no indication of the type of structures that exist in the neighborhood or the residents who inhabit them. The document is useful,

however, in demonstrating both barriers to vehicular access and the marginalization of the neighborhood by the authority of the city itself.

The documents portray a desire to adhere to a standard quality, in a theoretical and a visual sense, that the City of Middletown would like to apply to all its territory. They allude to the notion that the neighborhood is home to a poor quality of life, that its existence is practically and visually unsuited to the overall goals of the City of Middletown. Its difficulty to service due to its location, marginal yield in tax revenue, potential liabilities, and visibility to highway drivers entering Middletown are undesirable to the government. The 1999 plan to redevelop Miller and Bridge Streets includes the following sections, 1) evaluation of existing area conditions, 2) an evaluation of existing structural conditions, 3) a project history detailing the primary concerns, 4) the Yale Study options listing the pros and cons of the neighborhood access proposals, 5) input from the Department of Transportation, 6) a resolution of findings, and 7) a detailed description of the agreed upon proposal, including funding, administration, and future designation of the area – each of which belies the city's intentions for the neighborhood and why it should not exist.

Sections one through four of the 1999 plan portray the values and ideals of Middletown's Department of Planning, Conservation and Development. Although the language is never explicit, the descriptions of the current land types, including rail lines, roads, wetlands, and flood plains indicate the city's belief in the inherent negative qualities of the existing infrastructure. The evaluation of existing conditions concludes that the current infrastructure leads to poor visibility,

difficult vehicular movement, and impairments to development. The evaluation goes on to discuss the conditions of the buildings in the area based on the elusive criteria of exterior evaluations and past data from code inspections. Each building was then classified into one of five categories ranging from being in sound condition (good) to having major defects not suitable for rehabilitation or reconstruction (poor). This study concludes that of the thirty-six residential units (and only twenty-two buildings) in the neighborhood, only seven are listed as in good condition, while seventeen are in poor condition and the remaining twelve are listed as fair.

This type of conditional analysis engages in an aspect of Foucault's security apparatus (*dispotif*). The organization of information regarding a population and a territory are used in this case study to enable the city, as the governing power, to make decisions with regard to ensuring "security." Foucault explains the concept of security as that which "inserts the phenomenon in question [...] within a series of probable events," and then evaluates those events in terms of their calculated costs, as well as their position within the range of acceptable to optimal (2004: 6). The document in question performs such an analysis as it evaluates the liabilities associated with the neighborhood, its likelihood to be taken by the State Department of Transportation, and its undesirable visibility as factors indicating that the neighborhood should not be reconnected to the city and should instead cease to exist as a residential area. The questions at stake are not those of quality of life for the residents, but of the greater risks and costs at stake for the city in allowing the neighborhood to

remain.

The mode of evaluation, which was, according to the document, primarily an external summary, is typical of planning discourse's reliance on the visual. The image-able city becomes more important than the internal experience of everyday users. Instead, the impressions of the voyeur are given the greatest value. In this plan the visual concept of the city prevails, indicating a governmental adherence to the outside ramifications of design rather than the everyday spatial practices – which, perhaps, have more authority on the "real" conditions than images do. Not one representative from the neighborhood itself or the surrounding areas gives her or his perspective or opinions on the Miller-Bridge conditions in the document, and thus the fact that the considerations are less about internal experience and more about external observation is not surprising. That being said, I do not mean to question the necessity of sound structural conditions to leading a safe and healthy life but rather to ask if the inspections we based more on aesthetics than on internal and less visible qualities. Without a doubt, many tragedies and loss of life occur due to unsound structures and unsafe conditions. However, do these conditions exist in the Miller Bridge neighborhood to such an extent that the structures are beyond the point of repair and rehabilitation?

The study conducted through the planning charrette organized by NEAT in conjunction with the city government and the Yale Urban Design Workshop would have been an ideal source for information on grassroots opinions and agendas of Miller-Bridge residents regarding the fate of their own neighborhood.

Charrettes are intensive workshops designed to engage both professionals and everyday users of a place in the process of planning. However, the city government's plan for Miller-Bridge only included the results of the workshop in its discussion of the monetary costs associated with reconnecting the neighborhood to the city streets. The discussion of the charrette and its implication for the future of the neighborhood are merely used to segue into discussing the Department of Planning's opinions on viability of the neighborhood at all.

The document moves on from its evaluation of the physical structure to a brief overview of the Miller-Bridge project thus far. The most emphasized issue had been, the document asserts, the lack of vehicular access to the neighborhood – such that without improved access, the neighborhood is unviable. Yet, in the subsequently enumerated Yale Report's options for creating access, each proposal is deemed inadequate. The first three options for inserting access are bypassed because they are too expensive, include more than one major rail crossing, or involve issues with the flood plain. The fourth option, however, is discounted for more ambiguous reasons. This option would create an at-grade rail crossing from Bridge Street to Portland Street. As the map and written plan both indicate, this proposal only requires 200 feet of road construction and an act of state legislature. While the act may be difficult to secure, the upgrade of the already existing emergency crossing would cost only $100,000.

Instead, the document dismisses the possibility of asserting political pressure to open the crossing and instead concludes that the three million dollar

relocation of the neighborhood residents and demolition of all structures are the best of available options – even though future documents note that there is no interest in future investments in the land for redevelopment. The Yale Report from the charrette is quoted as indicating that the fourth proposal is likely to be met with rejection from the railroad, the state department of transportation, and the residents of Portland Street.[2] The necessity of taking that risk for the sake of the safety and accessibility of the residents in the neighborhood is not significantly discussed in this section. In the place of such an analysis the plan goes on to evaluate whether the neighborhood is worth living in at all.

As is necessary for the effective operation of Foucault's security apparatus, the Miller-Bridge Street area is then evaluated based on a cost-benefit analysis. What are the liabilities of the neighborhood? Is it acceptable to have these residential conditions exist, or are its problems enough of a threat to the city's ability to govern to warrant being addressed? A detailed report from the Director of Planning, Bill Warner, lists the negative attributes of the physical location of the neighborhood, including its location in a flood plain, its close proximity to two rail lines, and its designation as a "carbon monoxide hot spot" from the traffic on Route 9. Based on these qualities and a singular, short quotation from the Yale

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2   The opening of the railway to ensure safe access to the neighborhood through Portland was considered again in 2007, when NEAT had gotten support from the neighborhood residents and the city's state legislator to take the issue to the legislature. In the end the initiative was blocked by St. John's Church, which was concerned that the vehicular traffic from Miller-Bridge neighborhood would have had to drive past to enter and exit the neighborhood. The parishioners of the church – led, apparently, by Joann Liljedahl – turned out in large numbers to the final Common Council meeting on submitting a request to open the crossing, expressing their opinion that the crossing should not be opened. The initiative was subsequently denied. (Interviews with Izzi Greenberg of NEAT, Joann Liljedahl of St. John's Church and a former resident of Miller-Bridge, and Josh Kovner of the *Hartford Courant*)

Report saying that even with the fourth option "the neighborhood becomes a quarter mile long, convoluted dead end street starting at the intersection of Portland and St Johns Street," the Director concludes that the area is not suitable for residential purposes.

Besides the geographic and environmental difficulties, the Director continues with an economic analysis of costs associated with sending the twenty-two children in the neighborhood to public school ($165,000/year), when compared with the minimal taxes paid by the neighborhood ($21,143/year). This analysis makes little sense given that these children would need to be bussed to school no matter where they live in Middletown; nonetheless the document includes this argument without question. On top of this discrepancy, the document notes that it would be difficult to attract real estate and commercial investment to the area. This report then is followed directly by a letter from the State Department of Transportation, which indicates that the rail regulatory division of the organization would be opposed to a "full-blown crossing." Altogether, the economic, social, environmental, and railroad issues associated with the neighborhood led the agency staff to approve a "resolution of finding that the neighborhood is not viable as a residential area."

Although the evidence is presented, the criteria for assessing the viability of a neighborhood are not discussed. This question- what makes a neighborhood viable or unviable – is inherently spatial in nature. Must the space produce economic revenue? Or must it simply have a meaning and purpose for those residents who call it home? When do environmental issues warrant being cleaned

up and dealt with, rather than simply removing people from the area altogether? The perspective of a city and its desire for a smoothly running governmental apparatus is necessarily different from the attachment to a place that residents feel, as actualized through memory, public life, and other place-making activity. Instead, the city government operates more along the lines of Foucault's analysis from *Security, Territory, Population*, by deeming the neighborhood to be outside of the acceptable range of visible and financial costs to the city. The risks and costs that this neighborhood's existence pose to the city's power apparatus are apparently too great to be allowed to continue, though the city has yet to find sufficient funding to make this goal a reality. Should something go wrong, say a lawsuit or further widespread drug use, the ensuing costs to the government would be too great.

However, making a decision to relocate all residents of the neighborhood and demolish all buildings, as the following pages of the plan do, does not take into consideration the immediate nature of the conditions imposed on the neighborhood, including pollution and lack of accessibility. Understandably the city could not necessarily foresee its future lack of finances for the project, but the initial disregard for the current issue at stake – opening safe access to Miller-Bridge – required the redevelopment agency to ignore the inconvenience and safety issues immediately facing the residents in the neighborhood. In a sense, this decision embodies one aspect of the tripartite of spatialities, Lefebvre's "representations of space." For political purposes, only certain façades of the neighborhood were portrayed. The document develops into an assertion of which

qualities of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood are of import. Those that are ignored

may as well not exist in the space itself, since the document acts on the authority

given to it by the power apparatus of the city.

While the written plan discusses input from the DOT, the Middletown

Planning Corporation, and city statistics, it never includes nor even alludes to the

opinions, desires, and experiences of residents living in the neighborhood. This

omission is a perfect example of what Michel de Certeau referred to in *The*

Practice of Everyday Life; the experiences of the everyday users of a space are

disregarded in favor of a top-down perspective of the Concept City (de Certeau,

1984: 91). The everyday practices are of an infinite variety, but they are the

authentic experiences of the users and producers of the space of Miller-Bridge.

These practices deserve to be interrogated as their own texts to shed a

different perspective on the conditions of the neighborhood as they affect and

are affected by each individual that lives there. If the City of Middletown were to

be "a model for city planning," as its 2010 Plan Amendment suggests it is, then

ideally that model would include more than broad statistical analyses, short-form

surveys, and infrequent public hearings as its means of engaging its citizenry.

Unable to be aggregated into statistical numbers, the daily (social) production of

space by those who actually inhabit it deserves an intensive and nuanced look.

The interviews that Nora and I conducted with Cookie, Dmitri, and Joann

offer glimpses into the concepts and practices that make their world livable,

viable, breathing entities. These interviewees do not exist in isolation from the

city, but rather each of them offer a bold interpretation of the neighborhood's

"outsider" relationship to the larger city of Middletown and the stigma that surrounds its isolation and poverty. In the personal lives of each of them, however, this stigma appears to be mitigated by other individual practices, including memory, selective representation of their space, and the imagining of ideal interventions to better the space(s). They are the practitioners of de Certeau's "Walking in the City," complete with synecdoche and asyndeton that cannot be observed or truly understood by the security apparatus. These are the people who engage daily with the spatial practices of the area, who are affected by the conditions of the place and who simultaneously shape the space in their own manner.

When not confronting the proclaimed authority of outside forces about the true nature of their lives in Miller-Bridge, the interviewees relay their problems, mostly of environmental justice, traffic safety, and drug-related activity, in the most visceral of terms. Each interviewee demonstrates, however, that these problems do not reflect on their ability to live decently and happily, ideally without stigma. Their perceptions of the physical and social problems associated with the neighborhood, their own desire to live a high quality of life, and the community organizers' and city's perceptions and decisions that relate to the future of the neighborhood all come into play in the production and reproduction of the personalized (social) space of residents in the neighborhood.

An interview with Joann L., who grew up in the Miller-Bridge neighborhood, demonstrates just how powerful these individualized practices may be. Joann is, in her own words, "eighty-three going on eighty-four" and is

currently the landlord of 103 Bridge Street. She spent her childhood living in the building she now owns, and she recalls the Arrigoni Bridge and the Route 9 highway being installed. These memories are an integral aspect of her construction of the space and its construction of her own experiences, though she now lives outside the neighborhood.

Joann's relationship to the geographic qualities of Miller-Bridge is intimate, which becomes apparent as she describes the ways in which she adapted to the geographic configuration of the neighborhood. Spaces were appropriated in a communal way, from the connection to other children in the neighborhood to the creation of new modes of access. She would sled down the middle of Miller Street, pick grapes with her neighbors, and watch the older girls go to college. Joann recounts being friends with all children in the neighborhood regardless of race, mental health, and economic status. In her childhood and adolescence Joann was a user, a creator, and an appropriator of the space of Miller-Bridge. She is and was part of the production of an individual spatiality as explored through her response to the changes wrought upon the neighborhood by the construction of obstacles to the center city and through her status as an outsider on, literally, the other side of the tracks.

However, in her presentation of the neighborhood to Nora and me, two outsiders, she immediately defines her relationship and understanding of the space of Miller/Bridge in response to that outside stigma. The problems associated with the neighborhood are very real to her, including its geographic isolation, drug use, blight, and lead contamination, yet she positions herself

outside of them and above them.   Despite these realities, or perhaps because of

them, she makes clear that the stigma that was and still is associated with the

neighborhood does not apply to her. In her current position as a landlord, she

refers to the neighborhood with an air of superiority. At one moment Joann

recalls, "People still say to me [...] 'Do you still live on Bridge St!?' [she makes a

face at such a reaction] and I say 'No, I still *own* it!'" She belies the prejudices

that she associates with the neighborhood throughout her conversations with us,

asking, for example, of the children we met coming off the school bus, "didn't they

look like normal children?"

Joann's imagined ideals for a future Bridge Street also attest to her

conceptions of the people who now live in Miller-Bridge, and well as her own

financial interest in the area. She does not have any dreams of grandeur in the

neighborhood; rather, she wants to turn the house she owns into a halfway house.

She believes that since most people do not want halfway houses in their

backyards, the Bridge Street location would be ideal. "It's walking distance from

downtown, the food pantry, the river. It's perfect," she argues. Even though she

wants us to know that she "doesn't want a halfway house in [her] backyard.

[She's] scared of them sometimes," she sees no issue with putting one in Miller-

Bridge. This apparent contradiction provides insight into Joann's own

perspective on her relationship to the neighborhood. She is no longer of the ilk of

the residents there, and therefore she is unaccountable to their desires regarding

the future character and residents of the neighborhood.

She is active in the production of the space by the decisions she makes

with her property, yet she does not want the reputation and stigma of the place to reflect on her standing in society. Her language is constantly referring to her long-standing loyalty to the neighborhood - "I'm different than everybody else- I *like* Miller-Bridge Street" and "It's fine down here, I don't see a problem," while simultaneously asserting that she is better than the type of people that live there by being a landlord rather than a tenant. There is no way, in Joann's mind, that the neighborhood affects her, but she will be the last to give up her stake in affecting it. She is adamantly against the opening of the railway crossing and the closing of the highway entrance, and she opposes demolition, talking constantly about how nice it is "down there." She has moved up and beyond the social space of Miller-Bridge, yet she is still attached, through memory and financial investment to the future of the space. Despite her changed perspective, however, Joann's continued impassioned engagement with neighborhood issues, such as opening the railway crossing, indicate the continued influence the neighborhood has on her.

Another resident who grew up in the neighborhood, Dmitri D., takes a different approach than Joann to navigating a spatiality that falls somewhere between the outsider perceptions of Miller-Bridge, his own personal identity, and the spatial constructions of his neighborhood. Unlike Joann, he situates himself squarely within the label of Miller-Bridge resident. He also was born in the neighborhood and later moved out, but he eventually returned in 2000 to manage his parents' three properties. Dmitri is a down-to-earth, younger resident of the neighborhood. Newly married with a five-month old son, he

speaks with a sense of a comic irony about his life and neighborhood, offering up phrases like "I guess I'm older and more cynical," in referring to his youthful days when living in an isolated neighborhood was a boon due to the ability to have large bonfires and related revelry without the city getting in the way. It is hard not to feel comfortable around Dmitri, whose sturdy gait and do-it-yourself attitude are countered by an admirable ability to laugh at himself and a warm smile.

Dmitri must fight to ensure that his life as a Miller-Bridge resident is a positive experience, a crusade that often puts him at odds with the city. Like Joann, his memories of the place from childhood reaffirm his attachment to the area. He recalls that his mother turned the somewhat decrepit backyard he now has into "a little garden of Eden," with a fish pond and a lush vegetable garden, and it is the site of his first job, a neighborhood paper route which allowed him to save up enough money to buy his first bike. Even now, when he describes the place, the images of the "beautiful park" and "wonderful wilderness" that are part of the neighborhood are the first to be mentioned. In the city's written representations of the neighborhood these attributes are never mentioned; they are part of Dmitri's own spatial practice and an aspect of his imagined spatiality. These memories and descriptions of the neighborhood are a constant producer of his personal social space, its borders, and his perception of its positive and negative attributes. Such concepts are integral to what turns a mere abstract, geometric, empty space in to a social space, or *place*.

He finds it possible to intelligently analyze the larger systems at work in

marginalizing the Miller-Bridge neighborhood without getting bogged down in the drama of the city and the community organizers' relationships with the neighborhood. The stigma associated with the place affects him as well, as he recalls, "it was always like thought of as the worst part of town and 'Oh you live *there!?*' Would be the reaction." Dmitri argues that the neighborhood is an example of "an attempt to isolate and marginalize a neighborhood in hopes that it will go away because it's not attractive or it's not the most ideal location," that is approved and perpetuated by those who are in power. At one point in our interviews with him, he generalized, "It's just a bunch of poor people down here. Myself included." His personal experience reaffirms the reputation of the neighborhood in the city.

To Dmitri, the problems with the neighborhood are tangible things, not abstract issues associated with poverty. "When it comes down to it," he tells us,

> It's not very nice living next to a highway. The rush hour traffic is insane, at the other end of Bridge Street the soil is very contaminated from the lead from the paint from the bridge and all the soil around here is contaminated from lead from vehicle exhaust. Like if you leave something outside here it gets dirty and it's not because of dust in the air, it's because of pollution from the highway.

So far, he has seen only buildings taken by eminent domain and tax foreclosure be demolished. Without extreme deterioration and defaulting tax payers, the city has not had enough capital to buy and demolish the neighborhood houses as was planned.

Besides fighting to maintain a stable neighborhood by going to city council meetings and pressuring NEAT, Dmitri also seems to feel that he is fighting the

apathy of his own neighbors. He explains,

> People who've been here long enough or know this neighborhood well enough know that the city and the powers that be don't care about us, and also aren't willing to do anything to try to better this situation because in a way they just want it to sort of go away.

It seems to him and to his neighbors that by "legislating the place out of existence" the neighborhood was turned into a no-man's-land on the mental maps of the city "powers that be."   This lack of action has led Dmitri on his most recent crusade to help ensure that the Brooklyn-based landlord who recently bought and renovated the three-unit building next door to him recruits upstanding tenants, rather than drug dealers, to live in his building. Such initiatives make up for the failings of the security apparatus and are an example of how grassroots motivation for purposely guiding the production of space is integral to the character of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood.

In many ways, Dmitri believes that the city has simply chosen not to see the good in the neighborhood. They have ignored the better attributes of the location and have written it off, hoping, he believes, "to see everything sort of go to a worse state." When asked what he would do if he had the city planner's role and infinite resources, Dmitri immediately jumped onto the idea that this neighborhood should be "brought back." "I think that [it] should be rebuilt as like a Sturbridge Village type of 1800s trading neighborhood and made into a tourist attraction." Even though he admits that the notion is "kind of pie in the sky," it was a well thought out idea based on the city's trading history and a tangible connection to a larger sense of place, as a *space of representation*. Like Joann's desire to see her property turned into a halfway house, Dmitri's grand dream for

something new, exciting, and development-focused in the neighborhood offers a glimpse into his "imagined space." Clearly he does not see the place as endemic to blight and environmental issues, but instead as a source of great potential for the city.

The different perspectives on quality of life in the neighborhood are perhaps at the heart of the differing views on and representations of the neighborhood. Of the residents and formers residents that Nora and I talked to, each was ready to discuss a laundry list of grievances about the neighborhood's problems, but they were all equally adamant that their quality of life was not *bad*. Cookie told us that her favorite part about the neighborhood was that her grandchildren could play in the street without having to worry about traffic, and both Dmitri D. and Joann L. do not see the neighborhood in the same black and white view as the city's image of the place as blighted and irredeemable. Although immeasurably different in most walks of life, the two are indignant that they did not and are not, by the definition of their location, living unhealthy lives. Despite his qualms with the city's attempt to marginalize the neighborhood and the environmental issues of air and lead pollution, Dmitri believes that

> It's sort of a real BS thing to say we have not the greatest quality of life living down here because everything is relative. [...] Would I love to go live in a mansion in the woods? Sure but I would be just as happy there as I am here. There's problems with any place you are. [...] Yeah there's lead pollution – ok you can't argue that- the traffic's horrible – yeah you can't argue with that, there's dust from the car exhaust and yeah, those are like straightforward things but quality of live is intangible. You see kids running around and playing here and they don't think that they have a low quality of life. They probably don't know any better or care. They're just happy like kids play.

Joann was onto the same idea when she indignantly replied to a question about quality of life, crying:

> Healthy!? Tell me where there is a healthy place, for sure. Tell me what's healthy. [...] I mean what's healthy for some might not be healthy for others. But it's fine down here, I don't see a problem. There's been people coming and going here for years. [...] When I lived down here we didn't know anything else. It was perfect.

These sorts of comments from Dmitri and Joann indicate a gap between how worlds are experienced and imagined by those who live in them and have a vested financial interest in them, and how outside parties or more transient persons represent them. Understanding and incorporating such notions of a space is necessary to an urban planning process that is successful in the eyes of its citizenry.

With such a multitude of actors pushing individual agendas based on clear notions of right and wrong, which in turn are based on individual perceptions of the production of space, who is to say what the "truth" of the space is? Who decides quality of life? Who decides what is marginal? In social scientific and geographic terms, marginal is based on the existence of a center and a periphery. In most scenarios the city plays the role of the center, the all-powerful, panoptic machine that structures its spatiality such that the power remains with the center. However, the children of Miller-Bridge would be more likely to draw a map with their home as the center, to refer to their favorite playtime spots as the center of the universe. When Dmitri tells us that the neighborhood has always been referred to as the "worst part of town," we are left imagining the lowest common denominator of the city. Every town has the "worst part," to which

those who live in the better parts define themselves in opposition.

The different representations of social space found within each of these texts allude to the other aspects of social space – experienced and imagined space – but they are, in the end, mere representations of those spatialities. None can represent a perfect truth, but each can offer some degree of authenticity to the process. Attempting to uncover the extent of their diversity could have significant implications for the practice of urban planning. The "actual" situation is much more complex than any of these sources may lead the reader of the texts to believe. The reliance on one of these texts, such as the city documents that are produced from the perspective of a privileged power, or "Concept City," has led to misguided changes for both the city itself and the residents who are affected by subsequent changes in policy.

These reproductions of social relationships through the social production of space, as Lefebvre understands to be the case, have existed throughout urban planning's history. They have been present from the development of urban design in Ebenezer Howard's Garden City, through the modernist schemes championed by Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier, past the postmodern backlash of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, up to the New Urbanist, Greening, and Transit-Oriented Development designers of today. The long-standing tools of urban planning have included a primary reliance on maps and visual forms of communicating to those who actually approve and carry out the implementation of the plans themselves. When it comes to who makes the decisions, the planners and designers are powerless to make any crucial decisions, other than to put

forth their own argument for what is best to be done.

In Middletown, for example, the committees and departments that oversee planning and development must have their initiatives approved by the Common Council and, if the funds required are great enough, by a citywide referendum as well. Of course, much of planning is motivated by development, and Miller-Bridge is unique in its lack of "redevelopment potential," or the possibility of reinventing the area for further production of capital through real estate, tourism, industry, or commercial uses. Perhaps the lack of funds or potential for a return on investments is what has doomed the neighborhood to stagnation.

Middletown's planning history has incorporated many of the most prominent aspects of the American traditions of urban planning, from following the mantra of blight removal and slum clearance in the 1950s and 60s to employing planning as economic development in the 1980s and 90s. Currently the city is focusing its planning publications on environmental issues, calling attention to the needs for open space preservation, better air quality, and fighting global warming (Middletown Plan Amendment, 2010). In the fifties and sixties, the construction of Route 9 and the expansion of Wesleyan University helped the city government to take part in the urban renewal that was sweeping the nation, resulting in the removal of low income communities along the river and in the central business district and the relocation of a portion of that population into new properties such as Traverse Square.

Perhaps the Miller-Bridge project lost traction with the city because of its timing. By 1990, the Middletown City Plan was focused on spurring economic

development and increasing revenue from the central business district. The

process of blight clearance came to matter only in so much as it affected the

ability of the city to attract people and capital to its center. The city could then

redevelop the space, attract investors, and increase commercial activity. Although

the Miller-Bridge neighborhood is alongside one of the gateways to Middletown,

the city does not view it as an opportunity for future investment and development.

Unlike the affordable housing project that gained momentum in mid-2000s on

Ferry, Green, and Rapallo Streets, there is no opportunity for growth in Miller-

Bridge (Redevelopment Agency Meeting Minutes, January 13, 2004).

In a meeting with Bill Warner, the Director of Planning for the City of

Middletown, he indicated quite plainly that there was a lack of funding for

continuing the Miller-Bridge demolition and relocation plan. There was no

question in his mind that it "is not a neighborhood we want Middletown residents

living in. [Demolishing it] is the right thing to do," but the lack of financial support

from the city at large made it impossible (Varnon, 2002 and Warner, 2010).

When questioned on the possibility of unintended negative consequences having

come of the plan, Warner continued to respond as adamantly as he had in the

Middletown Press article from 2002, that relocating and demolishing Miller-Bridge

was the *right* thing to do. If urban planning is a question of ethics – and whether

or not it is, Warner seems to be relying on that rationale – then the qualification

of what makes a place ethically sound and viable for inhabiting must be

examined closely.

To be comprehensive, such an examination would likely take into

consideration the (social) production of the space of the neighborhood, its affects on those who live there as represented by the residents, the media, and the organizers, and the myriad ways in which spatial practices re-imagine and reproduce that space. The health and safety issues affecting the site may be the most untenable of all, yet the process by which such a situation should be changed is more complex than current planning movements assume. The place is both full of private spaces, each with their own social meanings and specific users, as well as public space of a distinct character. That character, as realized through the spatial practices of all involved with it, is what gives the neighborhood socio-spatial meaning – and that meaning should be at the heart of the urban planning process.

At the end of his book on the production of urban space, Panu Lehtovuori realizes he has run the risk of condemning planning entirely and instead presents a series of ten theses that he believes should be a tenet of any *good* planning process. One among them reads, "Reason and emotion are not opposites; new phenomena call for new ways of seeing. An emphasis on personal experience and signification does not mean an abandonment of reason" (2010: 214). This doctrine is integral to the reading the many spaces of Miller-Bridge, and it provides a much needed direction for the future planning of such a place. The heart, the emotion, the personal experience of the place – such as the aforementioned walking practices, site-specific memories, or future imaginings – should be addressed in conjunction with the rationally-based and security apparatus-motivated desires of the planning council.

In this light, Lefebvre's specific categories of spatial practices, representations of space, and spatial representations are simple tools to demonstrate the complex actors pushing the boundaries of spatialities. The ability to name these actors is a useful exercise in questioning utility of planning, its rational and emotional effects, and its non-imageable qualities. The theory is not necessary to the practice of planning a place such as Miller-Bridge, but internalizing these myriad lessons into the very process of changing the negative qualities of the neighborhood could yield the most creative and positive results that planning has ever actualized in Middletown. In pursuit of understanding what makes the tucked away space of Miller-Bridge appealing, discovering what aspects of the space itself are cherished, what the major issues affecting it are, and actively seeking to reconcile the conflicting views of landlords, tenants, and city officials, these considerations are all necessary to the process of urban planning moving forward without demolishing the potential for the discipline to create opportunities for positive moments and spatial reinventions.

Perhaps the site has too many environmental issues to be worth remediating, or perhaps DOT will eventually take it over, but these rational issues can and should be teased out in their relationship to the spatial practices of those who interact with, use, and produce the space of the neighborhood itself. The social conditions that reproduce the poverty that is found in the Miller-Bridge neighborhood have been reinforced and reproduced, in part, by a series of actors including the city government and the media. This paradigm calls into question the integrity of any redevelopment project in the area, and also makes the

understanding of Foucauldian dynamics of power and security of the utmost importance in the realization of a truly *better* re-imagined space for Miller-Bridge and its residents.

I hope that the interrogation of the various means of producing, interacting with, and being influenced by an urban space can serve as an example as to what a more comprehensive investigation might look like. Planning and design require intensive research, grassroots input, and creative thinking processes that should not be dismissed when they fail to succeed, but rather should be improved upon. Instead of dismissing the untenable limbo of the Miller-Bridge neighborhood as a failure of a planning method that is beholden to the "Concept City," perhaps the process could be reworked and improved upon. Among many tenets that deserve further discussion, such an improvement would necessarily have to acknowledge and express through conflict, dialectic, and creativity all affecting and effected parties and spatialities. Only then might Middletown become more deserved of its self-proclaimed status as a "model of good and effective city planning."

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Appendix

Miller & Bridge Project Area

Bridge Street

Ct. Rt. 9

Miller Street

Providence & Worcester
Rail Yard

Arrigoni Bridge

300   0   300   600   Feet

Rt 66 & Rt 9
Property Lines
Buildings
Rail Lines

N
W   E
S

Miller and Bridge Street Redevelopment Project
Department of Planning, Conservation & Development, Fall of 1999.