

An Inquiry into Boomer Landscapes

Tomás Criado

In my work, I have been researching the relationship between different types of bodies and city-making in modernist Euro-American settings. In particular, I have studied how, because of activist struggles, technicians, activists, and design teachers have become fascinated with and mobilised by bodily diversity, developing urban accessibility into:

- (a) a political idiom of particular approaches to urban design, many times enacting distinct forms of “technologized inclusion” (e.g., through infrastructures of standards);
- (b) a driver of more plural and experiential forms of knowledge, creating new forms of expertise in participatory urban design and government, following an aspiration for technical democracy and spatial justice.

My book monograph, titled *An Uncommon City: Bodily Diversity and the Activation of Possible Urbanisms*, condenses my research on these topics over the past ten years.

I also plan to expand my interests in the study of the genealogy and challenges of ageing-friendly cities/late life urbanism, paying special attention to the mutual transformations of bodies and urban infrastructures for and by Euro-American “baby boomers.” I am particularly invested in approaching this research from the study of landscape, drawing from environmental humanities, landscape architecture, new materialisms, and environmental anthropological research. This investigation might allow telling other stories of the perhaps most ambiguous and allegedly benevolent side of the modern project: “welfare,” which despite its many incarnations, chronical incompleteness and violence, technocratic or neoliberal predicaments, remains central to Euro-American ways of life, particularly for the postwar generations.

Whereas in STS and anthropology, care practices and politics are regularly discussed, drawing on environmental and ecological metaphors—who cares where, as well the forms of neglect there enacted—what if we took ecological tropes more seriously to provide alternative readings of welfare beyond interpersonal and human-machine configurations? Could “re-ecologizing welfare” perhaps enable us to consider the side-effects of “the more careful” side of the modern project, where we clearly see how “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” as the saying goes? How to engage in an exploration of these assemblages without debunking and dismissing the many potential goods Welfare as a project of life protection might have entailed?

To do this, we might want to follow the steps of Bruno Latour in “bringing welfare down to Earth” in attempts at describing, using the collaborative repertoires of the social sciences and the arts, the terraforming effects of welfare. The study of landscape might be a relevant scale of analysis to describe the emergence through time of “situated biologies” of ageing happening as an effect of modernist welfare arrangements for older people to thrive in the last decades. But one must also pay attention to the emergent vulnerabilities of ageing bodies that arise within those terraformed welfare landscapes, now increasingly prone to anthropogenic disaster—ranging from extreme weather events to pandemics. Although the term “boomer” has recently acquired derogatory connotations, this project will approach the double-edged hopes around welfare that this generation has carried forth, and how generations and territories have become tangled up as a result.