

WHO IS AN URBANIST?

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ALAN PROHM, *Berlin***Who is an urbanist?****What is a city?**

What isn't? — Lefebvre\*

So, **Who isn't?**

That's my first answer.

Who isn't? *Show up everybody; shape where you live.*

Who shapes that?

Urbanization in Lefebvre's sense is industrialization, a principle of extractive/accumulative/accelerative action on space/time, matter, life, value and power. It spreads, even if not another building is built, as an expanding/invasive network of wealth-extraction pathways. City is the ongoing industrialization of life everywhere. And, increasingly, of your life, personalized, networked and tracked.

Urbanists do not exist. That's my second answer. There are only industrialists, and either the ideologues who argue the process works, or the ideologues who prove the process is rigged. Do what you want to the city, you will not change life beyond the limits pre-set by the financial dictatorship. Unless you change the limits set by the financial dictatorship.

You are allowed to play in the labyrinth these days – but the labyrinth is data-mined, media-targeted and rigorously indexed to the market – so go ahead, be their guests. Even if you do get to move the walls around a bit, what you're changing is survival, not life.

Unless you're changing life.

*City is not something there to shape – it is something being waged against us.*

Crisis is in chronic outbreak on all parts of the planet, but it is in cities that the system becomes the great brutal paranoid defense-of-status-quo industry we call home, today in the security & surveillance state. Urbanism is war, to paraphrase Misselwitz and Weizman (see *S. Graham, Cities Under Siege, p16*). If you say you are an urbanist, at best you are a partisan.

**Build a body. Disentangle. Thrive/Love. Together.**

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\* Lefebvre in *The Urban Revolution* wrote that the process defining the urban phenomenon is not bound to geographic or population limits. The growth of this phenomenon, where it meets limits to extension, continues on the same principles, and at increasing speed, intensively. Thus by mid-20th Century the countryside is already urbanized, and by the start of the 21st also the oceans, the human nervous system, plant biology, and of course the web.



ALAN PROHM is an artist, theorist and educator living in Berlin. From 2004 to 2008 he taught for the MA Program in Environmental Art at Aalto University in Helsinki. Since 2008 he has also taught yearly in the Urban Studies program at the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn. He believes in speaking up in public.