

THE TOUR

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

THE TOUR

The area is a fiction, the story is real.

THE TOUR is a performance that explored Phoenix and its downtown arts district by looking at reality through fiction. Andrew, a computer generated voice, led participants on guided walking tours. His staff amplified stories about the neighborhood and its history with a portable PA system. But as was the case with Phoenix, Andrew's stories were delusional and fictitious.

So as to correct the record, concluding each tour the staff ushered participants into the tour office for informal discussions to challenge the information they were given. Responses were mixed and emotional, sparking deeper discussions challenging racism, poverty, politics, predatory development and the role the arts district has in it.

This following transcript is a summary and collage of several of the discussions that followed each performance.

A Project By

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THE TOUR IS FICTION

Finn Brüggemann: What did you think of the stories?

Participant: I liked them, and found myself questioning. I was like, “whoa, are these real stories?” and then at some points, with the water one, I said to myself “this is awesome, I don’t know who wrote this, but this is amazing right now!”

Participant: I’ve heard the stadium story about the arts district, but there’s a lot of artists that show who don’t know the story. Like the history of how Roosevelt came about ending the prominence of the Graffiti scene.

Participant: You know so much about the city, so much more than we do and we’ve been living here since forever. You must have done a lot of research.

William Schwartz: We actually did very little research.

Participant: It’s made up.

WS: Yes, it’s partly fictional.

Participant: Oh is it?

Participant: Yep. A lot of the facts they said, are in fact, not actually true.

Participant: Were the stories all from people you’ve met?

WS: Half the process was learning about the city, and the other half was kind of accentuating what we were seeing in the city and responding to it in kind of an exaggeration of reality, but also mirroring that reality. Learning about the area ten years ago, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, and knowing it now, today’s state could be seen as unbelievable by the decades prior. Time has a weird effect in normalizing change, it’s easy to forget the craziness of change. The tour is not completely honest to this current moment in reality, but maybe more honest to a future reality. It’s all a little sci-fi.

FB: We felt that even though we wrote the stories, our stories are real and the area is fiction.

Participant: You were talking about some initial doubt. Did it change how you perceived all the other stories?

Participant: I think that the doubt was there but I feel it told me that it's okay to doubt this, you know. Because I thought "should I be questioning this?"

Charlotte Livine: Okay, was anybody doubting it since the beginning?

Participant: Yes, because I thought you purposely took us in front of a homeless person at that house. I thought that it was fake from that point on. The homeless person was one of the first things that you took us to, I thought that it was on purpose. I don't know.

WS: So at the end of each tour we have a fire round. So this is basically a moment in the circle where you can say whatever the hell you want to say and no one will criticize. So let's start the fire round!

Participant: I feel like you duped me. Cause you didn't really tell me what I was going on. You told me I was going on a tour and then I ended up walking around this place. In the end I liked it, but I just didn't know what it was. I thought it was an informational tour, but it was just an art thing.

WS: Notice there's no fine print, we're being transparent, at least to a certain level. We reiterate the same words over and over "Book Now" and "Real Nice" and "40 Minute Walking Tour" like other advertisements in the area. We don't mean to dupe, we are just selective with the information we share beforehand.

CL: Would you have come if you knew that it was fictional?

Participant: I probably still would have come, but I think it was better that I came thinking it was something real.

Participant: Who wrote the poem, was it the actual poet?

FB: No, Willy and I.

CL: It's a collaborative poem.

WS: It's really terrible.

Participant: Yeah, when you were reading the poem, I was like, "??"

WHO WE ARE

Participant: Can you talk a little more about the alley project you mentioned during The Tour, that was you guys?

WS: No, but we are art students from Germany and we study what is called social practice here in the US. As a class, we travel to different places and find ourselves in unique situations that we adapt to. Usually we'll work together with a community of some scope. In Phoenix we were a bit stuck, the community functions so differently than what we are used to. We've been on foot and on bicycle and we literally sleep above this tour office. So this neighborhood has been our home base for the last month. And with that the tour is very autobiographical. We are not commenting on all of Phoenix. We see the city through the vantage point of living here in downtown and being on foot, so it's this immediate radius and context that we are trying to understand and comment on. For the most part the streets are empty, really empty, those we've seen on the street have been the homeless, so we haven't really seen a formal community present in Phoenix.

And as for those we've talked with out on the street, we picked up on a recurring defeatist quality people had, "well, I'm here, because I've been here since 17 years," or "I guess the weather is pretty okay," or "I've been thinking about moving, just haven't done it yet." There is no "I love this or that about Phoenix." People tend to make an excuse why they are here. There's a sad nature to it.

We haven't found any real traction working together with people, everything seems, understandably, isolated due to the city's car culture. Here, life seems to take place in private spaces, spaces which we are not invited into, for good reason, because no one knows who we are. So after re-

thinking we reformulated our thoughts and ended up creating a performance.

So the reference to the alley project was kind of a stab at ourselves. It is this unrealistic idea of working with the community by painting dumpsters as a way of beautifying the area, creating what is perhaps a problematic situation for a community such as this, to come in and just beautify it. Leaving an open question of what that outcome might bear. That was our cameo.

Participant: I think that the tour was pretty inspiring for us. It was a breath of fresh air to walk around and absorb your different perspectives. You have a tour guide that is giving you information and you have music. We come from bordertown and our idea is to create something similar there. To kind beautify the back alleys to make them more fun for people to dispose their garbage. So thank you guys for having us and thank you for the tour.

(Laughter)

Participant: I think the serotonin inhibitors helped me. I feel much less depressed now.

THE MAKING OF THE TOUR

Participant: So you guys all picked out a spot and made up a story about it. The tree for instance, who picked that?

CL: The stories came first, and then the rest was built on top. The more we developed the stories, the more we tried to link them to the neighborhood.

Participant: I think the script is really good. Can you tell us how you wrote it?

FB: We wrote it together. We were on Google Docs for days, we sat in this room, with five laptops, and everybody was working away at the text. We all came up with ideas.

First we would had a few stories that we wrote, and then we'd walk around and try to find the right locations to share the stories. There are basically only two stories that are directly linked to a place. The cows and the one on the rooftop. You kind of have to tell it there because you see the university and you have an overview of the city. So this story was always thought to take place there but for the other stories the places are totally interchangeable. The garden story you can tell anywhere. Or the house of the poet, really, could be any house.

Konouz Saeed: It is any house.

FB: Yes, sometimes it is also just logistical. For example, what stories we have, where they could play, where can we walk, and how long does it take to tell the story.

Radoš Vujaklija: And one of the guidelines was to go to places that are not spectacular. Well, except for the rooftop, which is kind of a spectacle with the sunset.

Participant: It was perfect, omniscient. There were clouds, it was cool, it was very real.

Participant: I don't know much about Arizonian history so I was so willing to believe everything. It sounded so light and made you feel like you were part of something big, you know. For example, you have a tour guide and he is showing you a lot. And it's a lot that we pass by all the time, we place no value to our everyday experience. But when we hear this fictitious story about the empty lot you think, "wow, this lot is so important." It can be. It made me look at this area in a different way for a moment. It made me put more attention to the small pieces of land and what is insignificant for most people. The tour makes you look at it in a different perspective. I thought it was also really cool how we walked up the parking garage and the sky was all gloomy and it felt like being in a movie. I feel the tour is pushing us out of our box, we are in this comfort zone all the time and we follow our routines and we do the same thing every day.

Participant: Although the story was fictional, I think that switching it

around with an actual true story would be good. I am not from Phoenix. I took all that crap in. But I think that in the future it would be cool if there was an actual guide with actual information in the neighborhood. The whole scenery was just perfect. It was something you don't think of... good job, the performance was great.

Participant: How did you come up with Andrew?

FB: Ah that was the name of the computer voice in the program that reads the script.

Participant: How did you decide that you wouldn't read the script aloud, but instead have the robot voice?

WS: Because Andrew has an intrinsic authority in his voice, and it's clear, he doesn't have an accent or mumble, or get nervous. It feels like the right kind of form for this kind of information. We were five different people, five different stories, five different ways of expressing ourselves, and Andrew was our singular, and somewhat schizophrenic voice.

CL: Andrew combines our voices in the text. It's the same for how we chose the music, we wanted it to create an atmosphere that surrounds the text.

Participant: So how did you guys select the music? What was the thought process behind those songs?

WS: The music we made ourselves, for the most part, it's all remixed.

RV: Two songs we made into loops. The first being 'How Deep Is Your Love' and the other is 'These Boots Are Made For Walking.' 'How Deep Is Your Love' is kind of a cozy song, cheesy and a bit over the top, in this sense. And then it repeats a moment, or we repeated a moment of the song so it lasts too long.

Participant: The Nancy Sinatra song begins, but it never comes to an end... and then it goes on. How did you choose those references?

WS: I was playing the Bee Gees one night, and then Radoš proposed, “what if we could just hold onto this moment in the song?” So this led to him making a remix of the song with this prolonged moment, and again we’re in this coma. Just stuck in the situation, colliding across a frozen situation. Then he gave that Nancy Sinatra song the same treatment.

FB: It is about walking...

CL: It’s the same thing, before the climax, it just repeats.

FB: It is all this happy go lucky music, and it fits from the mood.

WS: And there are some recordings of Finn playing a ukulele that Konouz acquired in Bisbee. Finn was plucking around on it, triggering Charlotte to hit record. Like with a lot of experiences and moments throughout our stay we reused and remixed the material and plugged it into the tour.

CL: The way Finn was playing ukulele, sounded to me, a bit like a waiting room song. I really thought it fit to this walking, between Andrew’s storytelling.

I think the music in the parking lot is really something, Vangelis.

THE PERFORMANCE

Participant: Just to touch on the performance part of the piece: I loved all the gestures, I was drawn to you guys. I felt safe.

Participant: I rarely stand in the street, and don’t walk much. I liked cutting through narrow passages. I liked how you guided us through the bushes and then back over here around the corner. That was a nice compression of the space. You know, in Phoenix it’s an open landscape, you can see the horizon and everything in front of you.

You don’t need to super-focus and watch your step. That was a nice feeling to get that, mixed with me looking around for everything. Like “what is real, what is not, where is it, where are we walking.” There were a lot of things compressed for me. And setting the pace to do that. I liked these

small touches, like cutting through by the dumpster. Usually in Phoenix you stay on the sidewalk, and if you can't cut across, you just don't.

Participant: I came in here spontaneously and then felt a little scared. I asked myself "what if they kill us?" Especially when the one tour guide walked away, I asked myself "where is he walking to?" I feel a little apprehensive considering everything that is going on in the world right now and part of me felt for a moment "was this really the best decision to walk to this lot with these guys? What if this was orchestrated and everybody was in on it?" Maybe this was just me being paranoid.

WS: Lock the door...

(Laughter)

FB: It's the vests I think that make us seem frightening.

WS: The voice of the Robot, Andrew, is also the voice of the Chicago subway system. So it's a very authoritarian voice. Someone you trust, without question.

Participant: I liked when we got to have this adventure of going all the way up to the top of the roof, and I have to say that your climactic sort of ending with the arms and this sort of heroic music and the sunset was really beautiful.

I found myself wondering what was real and what was not. With the person sleeping and the cats around, what did you... were the cats real?

Participant: I found myself disoriented. I'm spending a lot a time down here, and I'm familiar with the area. And I found myself looking around, asking "where am I? What is that?" and wondering the same thing about a couple of people we went by, "is that... part of the tour?" It was entertaining, to have this different perspective from the one I'm used to every day.

It is one of those things when you live here, and work here, I put those blinders on, and go to work, without looking around me.

THE DOWNTOWN ARTS DISTRICT

Participant: You see, I feel as if I am not allowed in this neighborhood. As a white...

FB: Why not?

Participant: Because it's dangerous. Its reputation in other parts of the city. I would not come here by myself at night. I've lived here more than 15 years. I do not feel welcomed.

WS: Did you feel safe with us?

Participant: I felt safe with you. Yeah. And it is changing with all the people who are out in the restaurants. But, not by myself, I do not feel welcomed.

Participant: The irony is that the reason we don't feel welcome and are indifferent to this, is like what you mentioned about "niceness" and how spread out we are. There is no place like the agora, where people go and talk to each other, maybe buy stuff, and just hangout. There is not a single place like that in Phoenix.

Participant: I'm new to the city, and when I think about the city I came from, in certain areas, twenty years ago were really different from what they are right now. I can imagine what your experience is being here. The Roosevelt neighborhood is on the top ten list of most gentrified neighborhoods in Phoenix. They are becoming much more palatable for the upper middle class, young professionals without children. Places like that, where people can have their needs met and have nothing necessarily to do with the roots of a place.

Participant: I've been in Phoenix since the mid 90's and I used to be in exhibitions down here, we used to have to pay people to come to our shows. Because people were so scared to drive here because they thought their tires would be slashed or something. I feel now, I don't want to come here because there are too many people. It is too active and I'll run into too many people when I just want to have dinner. That's the reason why I don't want to come as much. But definitely, when I come, I

go to specific places and rarely do I stop and look at an empty lot. I really loved the two times we stopped there. You were all just standing there looking at the lot. Maybe it was three times. That is wonderful, I think that that is an incredible moment. Bodies, participants, looking at something, where there is nothing and just being there. Whether it is a fictional story or a real history, it doesn't really matter. I feel, acknowledging those empty spaces are really significant moments.

Participant: What do you think would activate a community here?

WS: The activation is what we are a little nervous about. We went to a so called "artist meet and greet" and I had a conversation with an older gentleman who on the one hand was saying that he can no longer afford the apartment he's been living in the past 8 years, and how he now has to find a new apartment. He said that it was terrible and then said we need to look at New York, the same thing happened there, on the Bowery. He had this colorful story about the artists making a neighborhood livable, and then how the artists are kicked out and how it's unfair. Then, with the same breath, he said, "Eh man, you have to check out Grand Street, that's where it's at! This is where the rent prices are low, this is going to be the next big thing." It is exactly this mindset that is not helping such situations. In a certain way we are a little nervous when we see artists as the voluntary front line for this sort of development. There's no real exchange. The idea of activation is also a word that we have to take with caution before partaking in it. It also feels like this area is saturated with activation. We didn't see a reason to do something in that vain.

Participant: I think it is an opportunity and responsibility for us as people in a community to provide something, to really think about, and not just stuff to buy, but really contemplation, questions, and conversations. That is our responsibility, because suddenly people are here. There are tons of people coming. So what do we do? What are we saying? What are we giving people to think about? How are we engaging audiences? That would be my big question, being somebody who lives here.

Marjetica Potrč: We thought that especially this First Friday is what needs to be reimagined. So it is not good as it is.

Participant: No, I know!

MP: We learned that people also go out for events. There really is no agora, no discussion, it's more like a mall, there are opportunities for shopping and eating.

Participant: But like an edgy mall. It is supposedly the art mall, which is a problem. The edgy mall, which is still a nightmare.

Participant: Did you do this for First Friday ?

FB: No.

Participant: That would have been so good. I mean that is something I'd like to see on a First Friday.

KS: What is good about not doing it on First Friday, is that we weren't targeting any kind of group or sort of people. So all sorts of people came together, bringing different points of view on the different parts of the tour. Really interesting personal perspectives, too. There was, for example, a homeless person.

Participant: I think people would recognize you guys going through the streets every day as art. I felt after a while, that I was a part of your performance. A person might go home, and say he saw a peculiar thing happening downtown.

Participant: I think I would have thought it would be some art, or art tour.

Participant: I think that it is a good way to affect other people, to get them to notice what is going on, because it doesn't completely make sense.

MP: This tour is about civilization. Talking about an apocalypse. But it is also about the future. Our position in the society. I think, that that's the value of it.

THE IDEOLOGY OF “THE NICE”

Participant: The founding character, was he based on a real person? What is the history, what happened to the founder of the Nice? What became of him?

WS: Jack Swilling is considered the founding father of Phoenix, he left the Civil War by changing sides to join the Union, after the war he was deemed an outcast back home, and then escaped westward. He tried his luck in the Southwest and married a Mexican woman and together they became the founding father and founding mother of Phoenix. With the help of the Mexican population they together helped build Phoenix. But there are so many conflicting narratives that are of course excluded from this selective tour. The Nice was our own invention. It’s an Ideology. It does not refer to nice people.

Participant: The idea of the nice, is this what you felt being in Phoenix? If you weren’t a native person, would you truly feel “The Niceness”?

FB: “The Nice” is a mask that we used for a lot of things that we encountered since arriving here. A word that was coming up again and again was “the apocalypse,” that some sort of apocalypse must have occurred here, or that an apocalypse is happening at this very moment. Everything seems so final, we felt like this is the end of ideology. This is it, this is where it is all going to end up. This is what everybody seems to have accepted. You work and you have spare time, that you spend in shopping malls. You spend your money on entertainment and then you work again. It is a super naive view, of course, but we saw more and more of The Nice in the way the city communicates. It is all about development. Many people that we encountered perpetuate this communication as well. The story that: “There was nothing before and now there are 100 businesses.” We heard this a couple of times. Or “South of the rail tracks there is nothing, because it has not been developed yet.”

It conveys the idea that if something is not economically developed it is, simply put, nothing. We heard a lot this kind of talk and tried to put it together, creating the concept of The Nice that is shaping this city.

WS: One guest found it truly offensive, “why would you make fun of nice people?” It is not what we are trying to do. We have encountered tons of nice people, incredibly nice. People have done incredibly kind acts. We haven’t had any bad experiences in that sense in Phoenix. We were creating this ideology coming from the city’s expectations of its citizens and how they conform to the city’s grand image of itself and how the city is to function for its hypothetical population of future residents. What it is creating is a beautiful, perfect, facade to a complex and problematic background.

So it is clear what kind of city Andrew, the robotic voice, is trying to present, to offer you. He suffers from some kind of amnesia, he’s removed from reality.

FB: One other important aspect of The Nice is that “you keep the others at a nice distance with a smile.” It is about the smile, the niceties that are keeping a community from forming. It stands in the way of it. It is about this attitude of looking how to use other people for one’s own benefit and to use the niceness for this exact purpose. This is something which was most staggering for us. We saw The Nice as being the concept which was hindering a community to form. We saw it as a reason for it not to be there.

That is also something about the Southwest. Because we tend to be spread out, there is a kind of artificial connection. But it is never too close, because we are never spatially close. In New York, nobody’s smiling, people are not smiling to each other. Because there are too many people, too close together. For example, California has a lot of the smiling, The Nice as well, L.A. in particular, so I am wondering if it is about the landscape itself, that promoted this smile, this thing you are talking about. It is safe. Usually you are in a car, you know, not walking.

Participant: It is also hard to...the word “nice” was probably used 175 times in the script. It is hard to hear that. And not to go, “wait a second... this is a human condition.” It is not a city condition, when people go beyond the surface of things it gets difficult and uncomfortable. It is corny. Remember the Real World show? “Stop being nice, and start getting real.” So I think that it is a human condition.

Talking about the additives in the water and things like that, I do not think it is an urban core problem, except for the fact that there are more people around, that are being superficial and smiling. I think that this sort of thing can be a great start of a conversation about why we don't move beyond the surface, why is it hard to just confront somebody, or why is it hard to get into people's pretty reality. But in fact, maybe it is not. Because we just don't care enough about other people. And so, I can understand why someone felt insulted, because being nice is good. It is hard to see beyond your own reflection, beyond one's own human condition.

Participant: Did you find a connection between The Nice and the Western notion that "anything is possible?"

MP: It is definitely West.

Participant: I think people of Phoenix are hungry for some ideas that are a little up there, more than what is usually available to us as far as the art is concerned. But all the arts have been steadily improving over the years, but everybody would like things like this, more challenging and layered.

THE AMBASSADORS

WS: We actually went on a tour downtown with a really enthusiastic guy from the "Ambassadors." This is a group of tour guides who are basically paid by downtown property owners as a fill-in security and informational force. Anyways, It was an hour long tour and it got very surreal very quick. The information he shared with us is the same caliber of absurdity we used on our tours, but with a completely straight face.

FB: We tried to keep our tour in the same kind of voice. Just like the Ambassadors tour, they are just praising benefits of the city.

HOMELESSNESS

Participant: Did everyone notice the person in the sleeping bag twice?

WS: Would you lose your mind if we told you that that person was in the room right now?

Participant: No, because I thought that's what you were doing.

Participant: I thought someone is home perhaps, on the porch. So then I thought, "is that an installation that has been created or are we invading someone's home?"

Participant: Yeah I asked myself, "why was he over there, when he was just over there?"

CL: He crossed our path too.

Participant: Homeless people here, they're congregated in this part of town like in every large American city. I did appreciate that, that was a strong political statement.

Participant: Well for me, you know, I've been homeless in the street. I'm currently semi-homeless, staying on a couch on a friends porch. For me, they're often times the unseen people, the ones just by appearance, we don't necessarily reach out to. So, for me, it was huge, because I've been in that position where I felt like I was not a member of the community just because of my living situation. I was really thankful that they put that in. I was hoping he'd move a little bit. I was wondering if it was a sleeping bag or a body bag.

(Laughter)

Participant: The line was curious though in the statement with the businessmen frequenting the area and taking afternoon naps.

Participant: What was the concept behind having the homeless person in multiple locations? Is it the interaction you are looking for? Or an awareness? You are keeping it somewhat open.

WS: There have been so many different interpretations, and we do want to keep it like that. But it is sort of bringing the background into the foreground, in a very real sense.

KS: We actually encountered homeless persons multiple times during the trip.

Participant: You increase the visual awareness exponentially. You do become very sensitive to your surroundings, or what is part of it, or what is not. Even I, at a certain point, saw things that could have been staged. The bicycle accident that we passed, coming out of the parking lot, for instance.

THE DEVELOPMENT

Participant: In your narrative, there were some moments which stood out. When you think about development on the land. That was a really wonderful moment. It seems like the people who own these plots just wait until the prices raise more. I just read a story about a super tall skyscraper in Seattle, over a thousand feet. It is said that the developers are billionaires. But they claim that they are activating the city and do ground floor retail. But literally, three quarters of the building is for billionaires. I think that developers just do the same thing. They just go after this super wealthy contingent that doesn't represent the majority. That is really bad for the community.

WS: With the history that we know of Phoenix, and we know very little, the development is one of the things we wanted to touch on. What is success and progress in the city? When businesses begin to pop up, this is good thing, but at what point does it make it inaccessible to the people who have always lived there? When we look at an empty lot, it isn't an empty lot, there is a lot underneath it.

Participant: "Nothing is there, so a business won't thrive, so I won't start a grocery store, or a healthy restaurant" or something like that. I think that this kind of language is interesting to hear, because it continues to be perpetuated. It is a kind of vicious circle, why bring economy that can be useful to probably a hundred thousand people that live south of Grand Street?

Participant: Did somebody tell you that south of the rails used to be an area called The Duce? Did you know that? It was a thriving but terrible neighborhood filled with hobos and low rent flophouses, but thriving. It was erased to build the stadium. They displaced hundreds of people to do that. And sanitized it. But there used to be something there. The old-timers remember it.

WS: We encountered it countless times in the history of Phoenix from its founding to its present, that there has always been the story of development, that both targets and a defines who a desired resident of Phoenix is, and isn't. This has been clear through abundance of large scale developments that have occurred in the downtown and surrounding areas over time. And this has been a pretty corrupt, racist evolution of the city. Maybe you have noticed that we have barely mentioned the Hohokam: "In the beginning of the city there was a vast expanse of red earth, tumbleweed and nothingness..."

THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY

WS: Phoenix has an incredibly skewed history. It seems to be a hypothetical group of people that the city is serving. That's what we wanted to present in the introduction: "We want to welcome our guests of the city, you are what makes this city great! And we also want to thank our locals for coming by." The city, through different gestures, has opened itself for a hypothetical, nonetheless, a very specific population. At the same time it's pushing another certain population out, ostracised from the city itself. There is a clear identity in the notion of growth and success, infinite growth, and we see it in the downtown and through living here.

The City of Phoenix is working more for developers, property owners and outside investments than it is for the general public. Or to use the city's own term, the common good. This is a huge, and I have a problem with that.

Participant: So, I assume this was an art project, and it is not necessary for local history to be emphasized. They claim Phoenix is new, but it isn't new! This was a city where, 700 years ago, there were many many more people living than there were a hundred years ago even. There was a

component that was very politically incorrect about how you started with one person coming from the civil war, that clued me off that there was something missed here.

FB: Yeah we totally agree! What we are trying to do is kind of reverse psychology. We're trying to mimic the way that the city officially represents itself, and to ridicule it in that way. Because obviously there was a civilization here before and we find it so strange that never is that evident and everything is portrayed as new, that there was nothing and now there is development and now there is business. This is the kind of narrative that we were trying to mock, by doing exactly the same, but doing it over the top so you notice there is something fishy.

WS: An interesting part of this area is, the whole "fifteenth years ago there was nothing" shtick. It's the same phrase that the Ambassador tour guide used, "The whole south end of downtown is full of potential, there is nothing there, it's just waiting to developed." This is a vulgar statement, because it isn't difficult to see that there are neighborhoods surrounding the south side. So if someone sees land in this way, that's insane! Fifteen years ago, if you told the people of this neighborhood that this will become the most expensive area in Phoenix, and if you would tell them that there are land speculators sitting on empty lots waiting to sell them for the right price, they'd have a hard time believing you! This is where our absurd take on reality comes from. In a certain way we were going in this project with an apocalyptic view. A city plagued by amnesia, that forgot its past. And this pacifying quality of simply accepting this set of ideas.

Participant: You are tapping into something about how new is represented in the west. But more drastically in Phoenix. Jason, I don't know how you feel about it as a native but for the many, many people who come from other places it's not so important. They're coming here for lifestyle, so history falls to the side.

THE RESIDENTS AND RESORT CULTURE

Participant: People from other parts of the United States or the world come to Phoenix, because, let me say this, they speak about “The Four C’s” or “The Five C’s.” Have you heard about this? The Four C’s were the original term, and that was referencing Cattle, Citrus, Cotton, and Copper. So those were industrial or agricultural reasons why there was settlement by Anglo Americans, from places in Europe, and also from China. The fifth C is Climate, and that’s what’s driven development here, probably the last 50 or 60 years. People could come and have a nice environment to live in, certain people, but that also comes at the cost of how we get energy or how we get our water.

Once you’re here, it is important to be nice and to have a lifestyle, as opposed to other core values that could be articulated. So you did tap into something that’s emphasized in the resort culture. People have enough food and space and swimming pools and things.

THE TOUR AS A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

Participant: So I am balancing some criticisms I have, trying to understand that with that authoritative voice, you kind of did a social experiment too. I’m impressed by that. You could put certain things in there that are plausible and implausible but you could also slip in some very loaded information and get it past many people.

In a sense what you did is provocative. There’s something really missing here, and who’s responsibility is that? Well I’m here. And there are other people here that are willing to care about this neighborhood. You are showing a gap, a cultural absence that we have. At every corner there isn’t a marker or a story and there isn’t a tradition about knowing about this place. I want to caution you, there are people that I know and they would be offended by your tour, in a way that I’m not. Because I’m from another place in the United States. If you gave this tour to Latinos, or Native Americans they might be laughing or thinking it’s a comedy routine.

THE CITY FOUNDATION AND OTHER ETHNICITIES

Participant: You are touching on some very controversial issues too. And how people acknowledge their identity. So if it's in the interest of people today to point at one person, Jack Swilling, that's good enough, that will work for a narrative. I do feel strongly about the tour, because there is actual history here. Not that far from here is where Cesar Chavez organized.

RV: I think the most obvious flub was about the canal system. Because I think it's pretty well known how technologically advanced the water system of the Hohokam society was, and how surprising it is that today's canals still rest on these ancient systems that have been in existence over the past 700 years.

Participant: Did you see a picture of this area of 30 years ago? There were homes there. And they were joining neighborhoods. It was an area where children grew up in the past.

Again, I want to bring the attention to the more interesting voices of Phoenix. There is a man called George, who works at Safeway here to keep himself busy in his retirement, a very well educated man who grew up in south Phoenix. I was talking to him and he told me this: When he was young there was segregation in Phoenix. There was a separate place for Latinos and African Americans and they couldn't drive at a certain time to where we are now, law enforcement would pull them over and tell them to go back to south Phoenix. That's what he said so that's history of the area too. This was supposed to be one community at a time. About 30 years ago, the home values went down and people moved and the houses were easy to purchase. There wasn't a sense to preserve architecture from 70 or 80 or 90 years ago. And there was a dispute about whether it could serve as a regular home, or if it could be torn down, if it was something of value to be preserved. Those empty lots show that the developers prevailed. And they build new things and they might be more economically valuable.

I am happy that there are now these apartment complexes here because there are more people in the neighborhood. With that comes some safety and liveliness and all these things we know like coffee shops and bars

that serve local brews. So those are maybe good things but it used to be a neighborhood for grandparents and parents and children, when Phoenix was much smaller.

What does it say about our society, that the area wasn't preserved? Some of the home design used to be a lot better than, for example, in the suburbs. There are houses there that are a lot less energy efficient. They are not situated or designed in a way that they are appropriate for desert weather. The trade off is that the houses in the suburbs have cheap water and cheap electricity but they are far away, so you have to drive to the city. The homes in this area were better in the design conditions and people could walk to work. Did you know that there used to be a street car system here in the 20s?

WS: This is interesting. A Native American friend of ours clarified at one point, "listen, there's nothing wrong with living in this region, it's a totally viable place to live. It's how you live here." Thus struck me, because a short while before I had heard something about how a previous civilization had fled the unbearable living conditions, which of course we would later debunk. But it was really fascinating how he framed it, how this is such a viable place to live, and that with an intelligent system of canals, water preservation, and adapted agriculture you can sustain a true agrarian society easily. But it's how this city does grow, and how it doesn't limit itself in anyway or take any reservations about growing, its population, or energy and water usage, it really borderlines insanity.

Participant: The river did run there, until it was dammed, so it was dammed for water conservation to focus on agricultural and other needs, but there was a running river that was here. Today, young people just assume that it's a dry river bed, but there was kind of a functioning system, and that was greatly changed.

WS: For smaller populations, for people who were working with the land as opposed to on top of the land.

Participant: I've seen my downtown grow up. Maybe ten years ago you would come here at 8PM and it was a ghost town. There was nothing going on and just now it has started to become a cultural center for the city, a lot of art, people doing things like this. There is communication going

on. In every place I live, I always make it a point to go around and talk to all my neighbors, because I grew up in the suburbs where I saw people coming home from work, their garage door going up, they pull in and I would never even know who they were. In the morning I would have my coffee and I would hear the garage door go up and they would leave, so I only knew them by face, I would never know anybody personally. So now I try to make it a point to reach out to people who are around me.

Participant: Phoenix is not all that cracked up. I know you are only here for a certain period of time, but for people who might stay here longer, there are challenges also here, and the tourist culture can kind of gloss over that. I'll give you one example, for the ones come from Germany, you might not know this but the death penalty is instituted here in Phoenix, and if you want, you can go to the court and observe a case where someone is being tried by the state and are attempting to put them to death. That might shock you as coming from Germany, but any person can go and watch that in a building just down this street. It is not something that you may have been aware of or may have even occurred to you, but there are social justice challenges here that continue, along with the plight of undocumented workers or the homeless. Only two years ago would someone in his situation be eligible to go on state health insurance, whereas in Germany, they've had access to medical care since the Second World War. But it took that long in this society to have access to one final last health insurance if you are a single man without a dependent child. So that's not the image they want to project of course as a resort culture, but that's here too. It may not occur to people who are passing through.

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Design for a Living World Students,

At the end of yesterday's performance, you wanted audience and participation feedback. During that time, I was still processing experience for myself as a fellow artist and a community member. Now that I have had time to digest your performance, I want to share my constructive criticism.

There were many successful parts to the performance. The office, signage, marketing (approaching people on the street to join the tour) and costumes were well done. All of these props were playful but powerful. The recorded narrator gave the impression of a forced authority that allowed participants to listen to the stories. The choice of music and the clear directions you gave on the tour, at times taking us through uncomfortable places like planters, small alley openings and j-walking across streets worked to show us the parts of Roosevelt that are not always seen. The themes you touched on: the desert, the built city, demolition and rebuilding, water use, climate, social disparity and homelessness, ideas of commercialization being equated to a city's success, artist community, political influence, opposing political ideologies etc. were very well chosen for the downtown phoenix community and Arizona in general. The time we spend on the tour and the number of stops was also very thoughtful. The climb up the stairs and to the edge of the parking lot, to oversee the city at sunset, made the experience feel epic and inspiring. The tour performance itself was interesting and engaging.

Now for the criticism:

If the mocking tone and fictionalization of our community was meant to insult your participants, you succeeded. The more I reflect as on why you would choose to insult the community you were trying to understand, the more confused I become about the nature of the project and what you wanted to say.

Personally, I felt more saddened and surprised, rather than insulted. It felt as though your group had a preconceived idea of what Phoenix would be, and not finding what you expected, decided to criticize rather than understand or connect.

When I first started the tour, I thought it was a great way to approach our arts district. A walking tour can bring understanding to a place that is otherwise unseen.

I was thinking, "WOW, these students have really hit on something." Using oral history, a tradition used by Native Americans, Pioneers, Cowboy Poets who have all influenced the place we occupy, the story of Roosevelt Row and its many layers could be told.

For a few minutes, I thought you had made a truthful, though exaggerated walking tour of our community. As you started to weave together stories about people and the past, I thought we might be hearing a narrative history touching on the complex and unflattering truths of our downtown. A realistic criticism of the big issue here presented through the eyes of a group of artists that can see their surroundings without the veil of home.

I was thinking of the potential for this kind of oral history. The community could continue the tour. The recording could become a self-guided walking tour or podcast. Our community would have a powerful tool to use in the future to tell a story and reflect in order to create change and address real issues.

As the tour continued, however, the narrative started to feel like a mockery. With the narration, you seemed to turn your backs on a place, community, and people that were reaching out to you for 6 weeks. The tour itself has all the makings of a very influential project. Instead I felt that the narrative ignored and isolate the community that you wanted to find.

As members of the community talked to each other after the tour we told true stories about Roosevelt Row that were strange and uncomfortable. Within each of your themes, you could have found fascinating stories, told to you from a local community member that would have made this tour truly unique and long lasting. Truth really is stranger than fiction.

Though I liked that the tour showed us parts of Roosevelt Row that we don't see, I did not like the moments you tried to make a forced feeling of danger. It was not necessary. The times you herded us rather than guiding us, specifically making us feel like we did not have a choice to leave or talk. The homeless reenactment was unneeded. You could have talked about homelessness to address the issue. By staging an actor, you seemed to make fun of the homeless. Locking the door during our discussion, made me feel as though I were not free to leave. I did not feel like I could really have a discussion, as you did not sit down with us in the circle, and seemed to argue with the group rather than listen.

The full experience felt as though you had an agenda you wanted to place upon Phoenix. It felt like you saw only what you wanted to see. From your feedback, it sounded as though choosing this narrative early in your stay, and that it colored the rest of your experiences in Phoenix. It sounds like you resisted connecting with people and community around you, because you had already dismissed their being a community in general.

I hope that this feedback, like the feedback you got after the tour has been helpful. I am interested in the discussion your class will have about this experience. I hope that through reflection you can assist our community as well as yourselves. It would be interesting to read some of the challenges you faced while trying to find a community here and what you feel was missing for you and your group. I hope that through reflection and analysis you would still be able to make a social change.

I am happy to talk with you again in person before you leave. Please let me know if you would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Rossi

Dear Rossi,

Thank you for your e-mail. The Tour has raised discussions and reflections and we are sorry to hear that you found the tour insulting. We had quite different responses, and yours will stay one of them.

The Tour sets out to trigger emotional responses from the participants creating the context for reactions and deeper discussions. We are grateful that you took some time to respond.

The Tour has succeeded to build connections with local community, many of whom stayed in touch after the tour, including Jason (who has been recently evicted, and is in effect living on the street), Paul (a historian living in the neighborhood), Steve who took us on his own tour yesterday, Namgay who invited us for Thanksgiving, Millica who invited to show us around Tempe, and others who have been part of our process. Two different groups of students who were on the tour interviewed the class. Below is an e-mail of Shiloh, Gregory Sale's student who left early on Sunday, where she explains why she left, maybe of interest for you.

The narrative is based on research on Phoenix's subject matters that we find important, the history (erasure of history), sustainability of natural resources (water) and human resources (development and relationship between residents and government).

want,

Best,

The Class *Design for the Living World*

Hello Charlotte!

I am so glad you emailed me.

I really wanted to discuss the conversation last night with the group and explain the reasons why I left. Basically I was listening to people who spoke about how “nice” Phoenix actually is, there was a lot of posturing and statements made that were alienating to anyone who didn’t agree the Phoenix is a utopia.

I thought that the people who were speaking were all from a specific demographic and spoke in a way that negated other opinions. I do not think that the conversation was going somewhere productive and chose not to speak because the part of the audience who was committed to proving to you outsiders that everything is great here outside of the corporations moving in to take away our precious food and coffee joints. It was short sided and self-congratulatory and it did not seem to me like the people who were speaking wanted to address actual issues.

I think your piece was very successful and proof of that was evident through what I heard and in me walking out. I would love to talk to you more about it.

Best,
Shiloh