

IDEAS CITY 2015: The Invisible City



Varick Shute • May 27, 2015



This week, the New Museum's biannual IDEAS CITY Festival comes back to the Lower East Side, with more than a hundred happenings over the next three days organized to explore the future of cities "with culture as a driving force."

This year's theme, **The Invisible City**, prompts participants to "explore questions of transparency and surveillance, citizenship and representation, expression and suppression, participation and dissent, and the enduring quest for visibility in the city."

The conference is bookended with two impressive keynote addresses. Law professor and activist **Lawrence Lessig**, known for advocating for reform in such vexed areas as intellectual copyright law and government corruption, kicks off the festival on Thursday morning with "Seeing Through the Noise."



The rest of the Thursday conference is dedicated to panel discussions, interspersed with screenings of short videos. "Hope and Unrest in the Invisible City" looks at power structures and protest in the public realm, exploring how the disenfranchised find voice and what role art serves in advancing social justice.



Pitching the City

On Friday at 7pm, Architizer and the Municipal Art Society are offering a platform for five teams to pitch their ideas for "the next best urban idea," to be voted on by the audience. Three of the five finalists in "Pitching the City" have proposals for New York City: the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative, a community-based cooperative financing initiative to allow individuals to join lobbies of midtown office towers;

Also on Friday night — in fact, all night Friday night — the festival is hosting "A Performative Conference in Nine Acts," in which "the invisible undercurrents of urban life will come alive through spoken word, dance battles, hot-air balloon performances, and immersive video and sound installations."



Ideas City 2013

On Saturday afternoon, IDEAS CITY takes over the Bowery (and Stanton St., Rivington St., and Sara D. Roosevelt Park) for its **Street Program**. Booths, tours, games, activities, and workshops have been organized by an assortment of cultural and community groups:

BOOTHS

The NYC Department of Design and Construction will use the festival to bring attention to the difficulties of **navigating the city for visually impaired pedestrians**. An exhibition will present design strategies from Cooper Union students and the Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities for **wayfinding through construction zones**.

A stretch of **food vendors** will be available for hungry visitors, but one booth will offer an unusual tasting opportunity: **edible smog**. The Finnish Cultural Institute, the Center for Genomic Gastronomy, and Edible Geography will serve up "edible smog meringues from different cities and eras," whipping egg foam with air harvested from polluted areas.



L-R: (1) Wayfinding, courtesy of The Cooper Union School of Architecture 2015; (2) ArtBuilt Mobile Studios; (3) Smog Tasting performance in Bangalore, India, 2011, courtesy of The Center for Genomic Gastronomy

Also visit other Omnibus friends:

- Two Bridges Neighborhood Council and WiFi-NY will present information about their **energy and communications network, Beyond the Grid**, which we explored in depth last year
- NCCD-NY and El Puente will host "**Underground Justice**," a series of workshops, presentations, and performances to "explore how **racial and spatial (in)visibility** is being challenged by artists across the five boroughs"
- the Genspace Citizen Science Biotech Lab will lead a **hands-on bacteria printing workshop** to help visitors learn about **New York City's microbiome**
- Balmori Associates and the Drawing Center will create a **space of calm and contemplation** in the midst of the festival with their **Meditation Room: Horizon**
- ArtHome will demonstrate its **Mobile Studios, moveable homes for artists**, social service providers, or anyone who needs a small transportable space

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

The Institute for Aesthetics, which "promotes sport as an artistic practice" through the invention of new sports and the performance of sport as art, is taking over the Sara D. Roosevelt Park's basketball courts for an all-day **Mayan Ball Game Tournament**. The Mayan Ball Game, which "mashes the ancient Mesoamerican sport with New York City street basketball," promises to be "fun, absurd, and competitive." Expect half-time shows, trophies, and prizes.

Just north of the ball game, look for the **boxing ring**, where students from around the city will mentally glove up for a **Youth Debate Tournament** hosted by the **New York City Urban Debate League**.

The Technoculture, Art and Games Resource Center (TAG), Gina Haraszti, and Pierson Browne are bringing a **hacked version of MINECRAFT**, the wildly popular video game that lets players build worlds block by block. **MINECRAFT** asks, "what if Minecraft, rather than portraying a world of vast possibility and scant consequence, could be altered to focus on the opposite?"



L-R: (1) Cooper Square Committee Tenants' Rights Walking Tour, May 2014, photo by Josh Barndt; (2) Bowery Mission; (3) City Sensing bike tour, photo by Ben Tudhope

TOURS

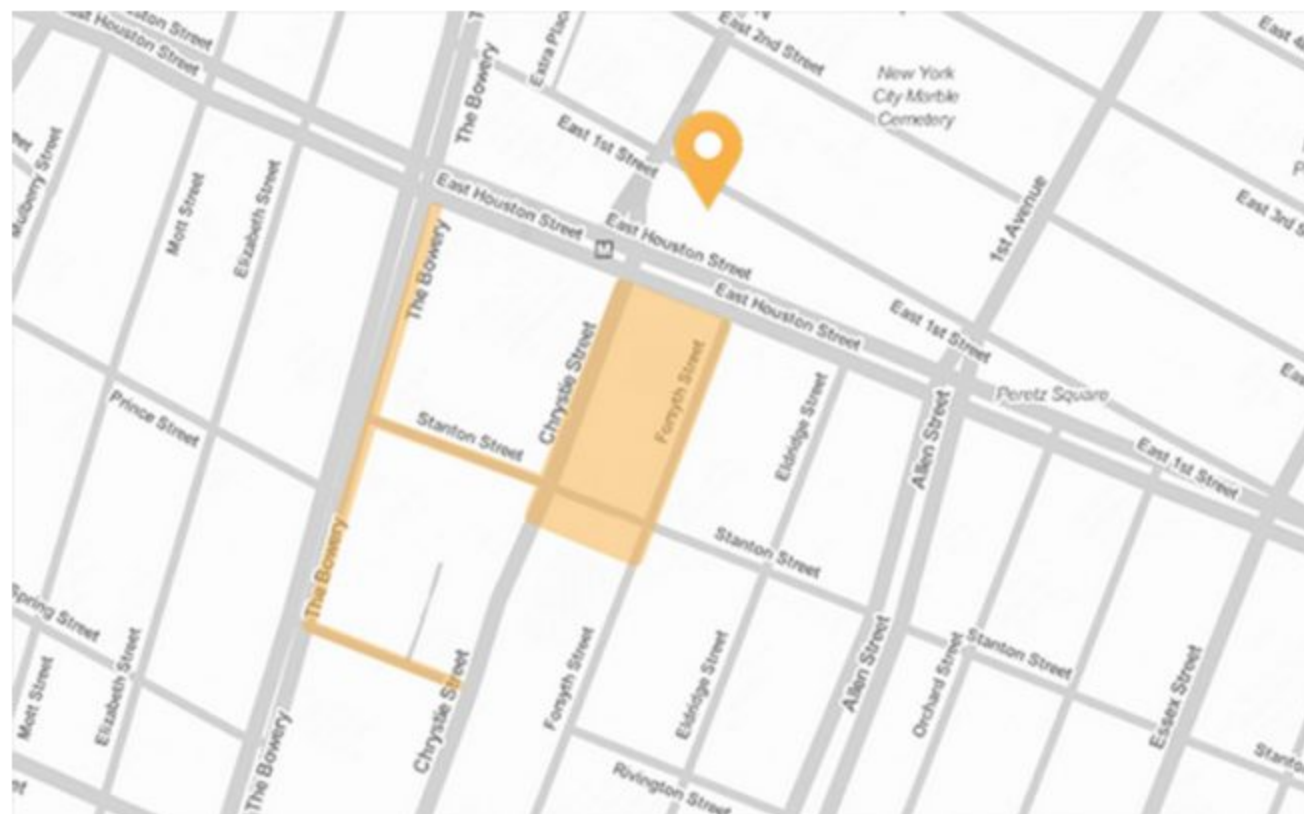
A number of local organizations will lead tours of the area during the festival, encouraging visitors to see the neighborhood from new perspectives or offering access to spaces usually kept behind closed doors.

The Manny Cantor Center and artist Laura Nova have organized "Moving Stories," a series of **senior citizen-led walking tours of the Lower East Side** that are the culmination of a series of storytelling workshops. The walks are meant to encourage intergenerational connection and acknowledge the vibrancy and historical memory of an often-invisible population.

If you enjoyed today's Omnibus feature, "Tune In: Soundscapes of New York," join FABnyc for a series of **Sound Walks**, in which artists will lead blindfolded participants around the Lower East Side to experience and better appreciate the varied sounds of the city.

Other neighborhood explorations include:

- a **Tenants' Rights Walking Tour** by the Cooper Square Committee, which readers may remember from **this walking tour** last year
- New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) **tours of First Houses**, the oldest public housing development in the city, and Meltzer Towers senior housing
- "**What Do We Do With Our Land?**", a series of self-guided audio tours on the history of neglected spaces by **596 Acres**, Deborah Berke Partners
- a look inside the **Bowery Mission**, which will open its doors to visitors during the festival
- tours of the Lower East Side **from a pigeon's perspective** (for more on pigeons in the city, look back at our interview with Colin Jerolmack, "**Explicit Trespassers**")
- a "**City Sensing**" **bike tour** led by team acronym: NYU ITP, NYU CUSP, and MIT DUSP
- **Destination: Avenue D**, an arts tour led by the Lower Eastside Girls Club



All lectures and panel discussions will also be livestreamed on the IDEAS CITY website. Find more information and purchase tickets at ideas-city.org.