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Editors’ note

There is no doubt that in urban circles, and wider, placemaking is having its moment. It is talked about and delivered by planners and policy makers, artists, architects, activists and communities across the globe. We have Project for Public Spaces’ international cohort of placemakers, Placemaking Leadership Council. We have conferences the world over taking placemaking as their theme. We have multiple academic papers and media articles on placemaking. We have city authority’s worldwide naming and adopting placemaking approaches in their strategic plans.

Placemaking is grounded specifically in the work of such urban heavyweights as Jan Gehl1, Holly Whyte2, Jane Jacobs3, Kevin Lynch4 and Gordon Cullen5, and theorists such as Lefebvre6, de Certeau7 and Bourriaud8, all of whom are referenced frequently in contemporary texts (and in this issue) and projects. A read however of placemaking pedagogy and project descriptions, it would seem sometimes that there as many different definitions of placemaking as there are placemakers.

Now then is the time – with longevity, depth, breadth and variety of placemakings - to take a critical look at what placemaking is, what it does, and what economic, social, cultural and environmental claims are made of it. This issue of EDGEcondition aims to be part of that critical placemaking discourse. Reflecting the global nature of the placemaking sector, this issue is international, with articles from Japan, USA, China, UK, Israel, Canada, Australia and Germany. The issue starts with conversations on the definition, ethos and practices of placemaking and then moves on to show various forms of placemaking, from the ‘top-down’ to the ‘bottom-up’, to explore just how many different placemaking practices there are and the diverse actors involved in them and resulting outcomes.

This issue is by no means a definitive answer to ‘the placemaking question’, but it is a part of a conversation the placemaking sector, its ‘professional’ and ‘non-professional’ constituents need to be having, to understand placemaking better and to communicate it more effectively outside of our sector.

Cara and Gem

Reference:

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When I started studying architecture 11 years ago, I was fascinated with this profession which combines art and science to shape the interaction between people and their surroundings. The ability to observe and plan vast spaces while being aware of every tiny detail was what drew me in from the get-go. Indeed, as architects we can design whatever we desire. However, until our design is realized, we are forced to rely on engineers and other professionals that control and modify our plans. This reality stands in complete contrast with Gropius’s vision of architecture and indeed with the title itself. The word ‘architect’ derives from the Greek Arkhitekton, meaning ‘chief builder’ or ‘master builder.’ It would seem therefore, that we as architects must act according to the traditional ways, master the building techniques of today and push the envelope towards the architecture of tomorrow. Here I will present a few examples of how digital fabrication techniques and machinery could change the way we teach and implement architecture.

First I must explain what Digital Fabrication is. It is the process of realizing a computer designed model into a physical product using computer controlled machines. It is part of The Third Industrial Revolution, which is supposed to unlock the potential of every person to dream, design and fabricate their own customized products using ‘Information Age’ technologies. This all sounds simple and magical, and we wish one could simply click ‘Control Print’ and have the product in few seconds, but it is not yet that easy. The most prominent way to master these skills is through practice in Makerspaces or Fablabs (Fabrication Laboratories). These workshops are equipped with computer controlled machines such as milling machines, 3D printers, laser cutters and many more, allowing both the design professional and the layman to create almost anything.

Frank Gehry is considered to be one of the first architects who understood this new technology’s potential and embraced it to find solutions to fulfill his designs. Gehry Technologies and similar companies such as Design to Production and ARUP analyze architects’ complex designs and provide fabrication solutions to make the building process feasible technically, while also taking in consideration budget issues. For this advice to be used, architects must then re-design the CAD model to fit to the fabrication process. Gehry’s works proves that becoming familiar with the manufacturing process could enable architects to design quicker and more cost efficient designs for projects.

Gramazio and Kohler’s research at The ETH Zurich offers yet another window into the ability of digital fabrication to change the face of architecture. They build structures made out of traditional materials only, with a technical skill that would be impossible for human builders to reach. They achieve this precision by using parametric design as well as robots and machines designed and programmed by them. Gramazio and Kohler’s work shows us how controlling the use of digital fabrication machinery could help architects build in ways that are considered now days “impossible”.

Achim Menges in his work reflects the important relationship that exists between fabrication and materials. His research groups at Stuttgart University are trying to create materials that mimic biological systems. This is being done using
materials and digital fabrication tools that were modified specifically for this purpose. Material development and architecture have always worked together. Material, a research group of architecture students from Iaac, Barcelona, developed a new additive manufacturing method using a special 3D printing material and method they created. This material doesn’t require support material which is 3D printing’s version of scaffolding. This new method opens a new horizon of printing designs that stretch down the sides of walls or free standing buildings. The cases of Achim Menges and “Mazerial” stress the potential hidden in giving architects the chance to engineer their own materials. So where do things stand now? Academic institutes are starting to open their own fabrication laboratories, giving students a taste of fabrication services. In my view this is not enough. Makerspaces and Fablabs should be used regularly to make architecture students into makers themselves. Our approach at the design school at COLMAN is to make these technologies part of the student’s tool box as early as their first year of the bachelor’s degree. Similar to how the use of pencil and paper is perceived in most architecture and design faculties today. They study and operate fabrication machines by themselves, learning their advantages and limits. They also use them to test materials for their later use. Alongside the examples above, there is also a pedagogical benefit to the use of Digital Fabrication in an architects’ curriculum.

I believe in learning by creating in a project based method. When you make things by yourself you do not only learn how to design for fabrication, how to design new fabrication methods or how to create new materials, you also feel more connected to the work and end product. Looking at my students work made it apparent that through fabrication they became more dedicated to their project, rather than just putting it down as a blueprint. When you build with your own hands you feel the architecture, see all the issues and find solutions on your own. Since you feel connected to your design, no one else can or wants to solve the design issues more than you.

One of the most interesting projects we have created was an Extreme Make over project in the community centre close to the lab, a project that demonstrated how architecture students learn by creating and involving the community.

To conclude, the democratization of the manufacturing process with digital fabrication lets us take back control of our space and work. We should minimize our dependence on external factors and professionals and embrace this ‘third industrial revolution’. My experience tells me we must embrace FabLabs and Makerspace in order to once again bring Architecture to its golden age, when architects were the building masters trained and skilled enough to deal with their challenges. As Martin Grupius put it: “The building is the ultimate goal of all fine art.” Let’s take architecture back to its glory days. With today’s craft tools we can disruptive innovate and redefine building. We only need to understand where the world stands now to decide what direction we want it to go.

From
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The first design steps in my practice always start with a reading of the context, and, whenever this happens, we realize that a proper perception of the place just comes while sketching it, while putting on paper its values, both natural and man-made, through hand-drawing.

It is actually renown among architects that the best way to know a place or a building is to sketch it. Every time you perform that simple act you discover details you hadn’t noticed before.

It’s perhaps not so well known that the relationship between the perceptive values of a place and the ability of man to understand it is primarily physical rather than just visual. The act of drawing is both visual and physical, as Juhani Pallasmaa has deeply disserted in the recent years, but the relationship between the phisicality of a place and man’s ability to understand it goes far beyond the very act of drawing.

The term ‘drawing’ derives from the proto Germanic ‘dragan’, which means to pull, and in particular to pull an object in a place, exactly like when we pull a pencil on paper. The equal term in Neo-Latin languages derives instead from the Latin ‘designare’, which means to mark with a sign, to choose through a mark. Today we also say design, from designare, with the same meaning of choosing between different possibilities.

The first architectural marks in history were stones and timbers, that, pulled to the right place could mark it with the sign of man and make it a chosen place. Thus it’s the making of things that makes us understand, feel the identity of a place and feel it as ‘ours’. The understanding of the natural environment does not precede building: it’s the very act of building that makes us completely understand a location, that makes us feel it as ‘our place in the world’, and comprehend its realm among our deepest psychological experiences.

These latter concepts have been first and systematically investigated by Christian Norberg-Shulz in his ‘Genius Loci’, where the author has developed a complete theory of a phenomenology of architecture related to the concept of place. This theory is also an architectural explanation of Heidegger’s writings on the inhabiting, through which the philosopher expresses the idea that man’s fundamental need is to experience his existence as meaningful. The act of settling, says Norberg-Schulz, is not just the making of a physical refuge, but the act of entering an existential dimension and need, from which man finds his place in the world. Architecture is the existential foothold of man.

Placemaking is thus an ancestral experience, through which man identifies himself as belonging to a greater whole that constitutes an understandable realm and thus that let man himself experience his acts as meaningful. Is every later experience of place a repetition of this primeval emotion, related to our mood and to what we are performing? Related also to our level of...
understanding of the place and of our role in it? What is the role of place regarding our self-awareness?

Architecture is a framework of meaning, the physical structure of our minds in the world. Building is for bodies. Architecture for souls. Buildings and architecture should be inseparable, as our beings are. The role of rite is attributed to architecture from the beginning of time. The most ancient architecture of history is Göbleki Tepe, a stone-age sanctuary up to twelve thousand years old, made before the invention of agriculture. The most important lesson that Göbleki Tepe tells us, says K. Schmidt, its discoverer, is that “First came the temple, then the city”. First came architecture, then building.

It is difficult to operate with these concepts today, after so many decades of urban sprawl. Architecture seems a lost art, at least regarding common building. The spontaneous quality of vernacular settlements seems almost anymore reachable. Nevertheless a re-appropriation of historical approaches to design could be the only way out alienation and a good way to take back man to feel the place he lives in as his own so to experience life as meaningful.

I like to define what I try to do with my practice as an act of disclosing. Both with new buildings or on existing ones, both in natural or urban places. Disclosing means designing something that enhances the existing quality of a place, or, paraphrasing Kahn’s sentence ‘what a building wants to be’, disclosing means, through the act of building, revealing what a place wants to be.

When architecture realizes itself it gives us “an instant of beauty”, wherein we perceive a place as a complete whole. In this moment we lose the perception of ourselves, while at the same time our feelings get enhanced, thus architecture is revealed to us as a world in itself, a world complete.

When this happens we feel the genius loci, the spirit of the place, and what we call placemaking happens. When this happens, adds Peter Zumthor, our observation embraces a presentiment of the entire world, because there is nothing that cannot be understood.

There are no fixed recipes to start again to disclose places. Within my practice I have nevertheless discovered that you begin having a design strategy directed to placemaking, instead to designing ‘objects’, when it’s placemaking that you care for. It’s also an act of humility, a way to say something with your surroundings and not to them. This act is very similar to what Robert Venturi calls inflection, i.e. a design device not strictly related to the single building but to a greater urban whole, with the building becoming de facto part of it. As I have already and better detailed in the article published on [link to article], my design method uses paths near to critical regionalism, to the use of local/natural materials, to shape a proper atmosphere for each function of the building/place and to reinvigorate the civic values of the site.

An approach like this can favour the appropriation of the place in personal and collective memory and ease both the conscious and unconscious perception of it as a part of personal experience; it can foster relationships and social interaction as well as casual encounters.

Everybody knows that climbing to a high point with a great view gives pleasure. The reason, as here explained, is that a panorama gives knowledge, and with knowledge self-awareness and thus meaning. Good architecture can act exactly like that panorama, and tell us that our lives are meaningful.

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THE EVOLUTION OF PLACEMAKING

WHAT'S NEXT?

Place making. Placemaking. Place Making. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But what exactly is place making and how can it help create, enhance and manage places that are attractive and meaningful to people?

Strangely, considering the current trend toward place making across a wide array of community, economic and design professions, defining place making has not been high on the agenda. Like a mirage it can change to reflect the desire of the viewer, and this is why it is so attractive to so many. Today most would agree that place making is about delivering at least one, but up to all three, of these key objectives: local identity, community participation and economic revitalisation. It is perhaps then not a coincidence that these objectives reflect the history of place making as well as its evolution.

Any consideration of place making begins with an understanding of what place is and why it is valued as an objective. Place can define a location, a personal relationship to an environment or act as a re-presentation of the spirit of the land and our unspoken communion with it. In the simplest terms ‘place is a space that has a distinct character’.

As its most complex it embodies the essence of a location, its community, spiritual beliefs, stories, history and aspirations. Norberg-Schulz defines the genius loci as what a thing or place is and also what it wants to be and reflects the focus of the first era of place making; that is, delivering place character, identity or meaning.

The second key period in history for place makers occurred in the mid 20th century, centred in New York and the work of community activist Jane Jacobs and urbanist William Whyte. This period really represents the birth of contemporary place making. It catalysed a move from the macro planning of cities via infrastructure oriented development to the micro environments of communal activity and relationships. From the professional to the personal,
whether that was the community activism led by Jacobs to save Manhattan’s unique villages or Whyte’s commitment to creating urban public spaces that allowed for social interaction – the focus of this period was on community participation, both in planning and activation of public spaces.

At the turn of the new century professional place making was still on the edge, not widely known, understood or utilised. However, many of the tenets of place making; collaboration, the experience economy, re-localisation movement were gaining greater acceptance. Then in late 2008 came the tipping point; a global financial crisis that, on the back of the increase in internet shopping, changes in consumer values and increased competition after a decade of development, has fundamentally changed the way our urban centres function. The result has been that many of our main streets, mixed use developments and even malls have been left with gaping vacancies, a degraded public realm and in turn less people spending time in them.

This is where the promise of place making really has come into its own; a relatively low cost process that involves people in ensuring the economic sustainability or revitalisation of their own places. A process that aims to share responsibility, build connections between people and their places and of course, build and sustain local economies. The third era of place making had truly begun.

In 2010 the Knight Soul of the Community research was released and what for many had been intuitive now became definitive. Place attachment, how loyal a person was to their place was a direct result of three factors: how welcoming the place was to a diversity of people, aesthetics; the look and feel of the place and lastly social activities; what the place offered in terms of opportunities to connect with other people. This was the research place makers had been waiting for; it provided the evidence to prove that connecting people to their places was real – and more importantly for many critics, that there was a measurable economic benefit. The place attachment research had revealed one other ground breaking piece of data; that places where there were higher levels of attachment also had high levels of GDP growth and economic resilience. Put simply, people who were connected to their places were more likely to shop locally and support their fellow community members in their businesses.

In Australia, the economic benefit of place making has been a key driver behind the growth of the profession and the uptake of its principles across a range of disciplines. Defined in the simplest terms the key objective of most place making projects today is about creating places that people want to spend time and money in; whether that be meeting friends, buying a coffee, attending a festival or purchasing a new home.

At Place Partners our definition of place making is ‘the collaborative process of creating, enhancing and managing people focussed places that reflect and respect the unique qualities of each location.’ This definition aims to be both a process diagram for our work and a synthesis of place making history, theory and best practice. It considers the uniqueness of each location, the values and aspirations of the community and it does not discount the economic rationale behind many of our projects. In fact understanding the value proposition of any place making work is fundamental, whether the goal is economic, social, cultural or physical improvements.

The key defining aspect of what we call strategic place making, particularly in the built environment arena, is that the real benefits come from the process not a product. This is a massive shift for an industry primarily focussed on delivering product and one that it is still struggling with. Recently Ingo Kumic authored an online article where he discussed two Melbourne projects both with theaim of activating underutilised public spaces. Each ended up delivering ‘pop up’ community facilities, and both were well used and enthusiastically supported. The difference was one went through an engagement process where the community was involved in determining the outcome and one did not. Kumic poses a question fundamental to the next era of place makers:

“If one were to look at images of both events then neither would appear to be demonstrably different from the other. And yet, nothing could be further from the truth. The differences do not lie in the technical resolution of the pop-up itself but rather in its political resolution. The former failed to build a sustainable network of community and therefore benefactors resulting in Council having to finance the ‘pop-up’ into perpetuity.”

The risks inherent in product versus process focussed place making are substantial. While ‘pop ups’ and other similar urban trends are transplantable they are not always sustainable. ‘Quick wins’ are attractive, particularly to governments; relatively easy to deliver, low cost, and they show that something is happening. But, they can also be a waste of precious resources, a way to avoid actual engagement and a distraction from the main game, that is, providing a tactical stepping stone to long term solutions, particularly to structural or systems based problems. Let us all be careful that we don’t head down that road, the back lash to ‘place wash’ is another risk not worth taking.

In summary, place making today is a relatively unstructured practice, defined more by the individuals that coin the term than any universally understood definition. In the beginning it was about valuing the distinctive attributes of a location, then about adding the participation of the local community in both decision and place making. Over the last decade it has further evolved to include the economic benefits of both creating unique places and engaging communities to build feelings of ownership and belonging. These are all valuable and valued attributes of the unique process we think of as place making.

References:
1 Norberg-Schulz, C, 1980, Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture, Rizzoli, New York
3 King, TF 2003, Places that Count: Traditional Cultural Properties in Cultural Resource Management, Rowman Altamira

Build a sustainable what?!!
PLACEFAKING & DISSOLUSIONMENT IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY

The industrial city is long gone and what is left in its wake is a city apparently in a state of self-induced comatoso: the product of too many eggs being placed in the placemaking basket-case. Placemaking is anti-urban. Not only does it produce highly homogenised and one-dimensional cities it does so in the triumphalist name of unadulterated consumerism: it actively produces an urban ethos in a self-consciously consumerist guise. It lauds a version of the city pre-determined by an economic orthodoxy and worse: a version of the city pre-determined by an entrepreneurial city; a city that desperately needed filling. All cities were obliged to address this issue is dealt with on places that are in fact deeply multi-faceted and hence unable to be conceived of in the same way. "...product marketing is a reductionist practice that constantly boils everything down, simplifies and reduces. This is not an appropriate way to deal with the vast experiential range that the deep identity of a place represents... product marketing deals with inanimate objects, as opposed to dynamic, evolving and difficult ideas" (p. 53).

Furthermore as Murray goes on to point out, this version of the city is also deeply divisive as it is most often founded upon a vision of the past that bears no resemblance to peoples’ current lived experience. It is in fact an historical imaginary. The contemporary city has for far too long rested on its laurels and the architectural profession has effectively been complicit in this process: accepting the colour of cultural money whilst tending to avoid a more fundamental introspection as to what that money might mean for the broader articulation of the city. Architecture is from this point of view both the dawn and the porthole of the post-industrial society. It is the primary vehicle by which the principles of placemaking have been actualised and by which the arguably empty ambitions of the consumer society have been materialised. Architecture has been used and abused for its deeply powerful semiotic value as a seller, it has become little more than a propagator of the fake. Architecture has social power, but also it has very little social meaning.

The placemaking agenda is all about reproducing a dominant orthodoxy in which the city comes to be perceived as an entity defined from without rather than how it feels from within. This issue is dealt with particularly effectively in the work of Richard Williams (2004) who argues that the contemporary city increasingly constructed as a visual tableau to be touristically consumed. From this point of view efforts at regeneration, symbolised by new art galleries and starchitectural interventions of various descriptions are, in England at least, themselves nothing than symbolic solutions to urban decline. Such ‘solutions’ serve only to reiterate the lines of exclusion upon which the city is written. According to Williams, the regenerated city has been aestheticised according to the needs and impositions of ‘bourgeois taste’. In this respect the effort to place-make through architecture is itself purely rhetorical. Architecture is there to serve a function; it screams from the rooftops about how regenerated a city has become and yet the reality of that regeneration is almost inevitably partial, class-defined and exclusive in its ramifications.

Placemaking then is thus better described as a process of place-faking. No place is made or enhanced in the hands of the marketer. The marketer deconstructs and formulates place and the end product is a city diluted. As Sharon Zukin (1998) suggested the more cities seek to be unique the more they end up being pretty much alike. Any effort to manufacture a “unique” city is entirely self-deluded. The tale of twenty-first century placemaking tells us less about what it means to live and feel part of a place, and more about the disillusionment of the architectural profession and its inability to make a genuine difference in a world it can no longer reasonably aspire to define.

References:
Placemaking concerns itself with the planning, design and management of the built environment and pertains to being focused on the desire to create ‘place’. However, there is an inherent paradox associated with placemaking; ‘place’ cannot be made. ‘Place’ is a physical pre-existing construct, formed over a period of time with the term ‘sense of place’ relating to the perceived importance of the place to a society or culture. A ‘sense of place’ is in essence the result of social and cultural interaction with a space. Further, ‘place’, or more specifically ‘sense of place’, is a socio-geographic, not an architectural term and as such has no spatial meaning. Therefore, the notion that ‘place’ can be designed, or directed, is unattainable. Fundamentally, the production of the built environment can, and should, only concern itself with the production or exposure of ‘space’, which when primed by strategies for engagement can be culturally appropriated, and over time can transcend into ‘place’.

Urbanism and urbanity are large-scale long-term enterprises, they are costly, rigid and do not react well to change. Given that the production of the built environment constitutes a major capital outlay, urbanism is defined by the need for success, where returns are secured and exposure to risk is limited. The result is that all too often the market yields to caution with space production replicating a reflective facsimile of a desirable precedent/culture, raising questions of authenticity and value.

The question is how do we create, or expose space and prime it for social and cultural appropriation in order that it evolves with time a sense of place, enshrined with meaning and authenticity?

This process already happens through the informal use of voids - existing residual and undervalued urban fabric and space between cycles. Voids have a history of harbouring temporal uses and creative production. However, this manifestation of culture is fragile and therefore transient, time and again yielding to the process of redevelopment.
# Acupuncture Urbanism

## 4.5 Proposals Map

This illustrates some possible locations for the proposed 'acupuncture urbanism' interventions.

### Events and Celebrations
- Entertaining the kids
- Street party
- Encourage Street Performers
- Hitchcock Film Festival
- Alternative Bus tours
- Podcast tours
- www.wowownwalthamstow.co.uk
- East 17 temporary art pavilion

### Business Boosting
- Alternative Local Markets
- Street vendor guides
- Market stall to start up business
- Idea stall
- Pop-up shops and uses
- Car Park Uses
- Technology Mile

### Quick Public Space Wins
- Naked streets
- Reclaiming residual space
- Temporary Cultural squatting
- Tessellated Furniture
- Railway Gardens
- Temporary Bus Stops
- Release Semi-Public space
- Experiment with the market layout

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Aerial Photography Data © The GeoInformation Group (2010)
Reliant upon residual buildings and spaces, they are displaced through commodification, a subsequent uplift in values and the resultant redevelopment. Equally, when a space or building is deemed a future opportunity the marketing of which is at odds with the current character of an area, it is often actively isolated and fortified in order to prohibit any unauthorised appropriation – both physically and ideologically.

Neither of these situations are ideal, for either users, custodians, or owners: users have either no or little certainty of their tenure or are denied premises, whilst building owners can miss out on the benefits of paying tenants or the indelible equity of the marketable creativity and kudos they may generate.

Void Formalisation and Iterative Trialling are two strategic tools which have the potential to make this a fairer and more equitable process for all: seeding culture and breeding ecosystems, supporting and nurturing emergent business and communities, whilst safeguarding future redevelopment potential and increasing exposure for buildings and their owners.

Void Formalisation is the creation, or safeguarding, of voids in time and space for cultural appropriation, positive social interaction, experimentation, commentary and providing emergent cultures with spaces to flourish. This is signified by the pop-up (ephemeral urbanity) movement, where creative enterprises are included and nourished on equity whilst the building owner benefits through the exposure and associated kudos generated by the creative activity. Void Formalisation offers the potential for a more egalitarian form of engagement, which in itself can inform future regeneration strategies. Iterative Trialling is a process relating to the creation of a temporal testbed to pilot and evaluate different strategies, uses, and interventions at differing times, set within boundaries and a framework of rules. These are then evaluated before formalising into long-term regeneration strategies, or not. It offers user driven opportunities for seeding new, and emergent space, with social and cultural programmes.

In Walthamstow Town Centre Masterplan, (previous page) we developed what we refer to as Acupuncture Urbanism, which can be summarised as a desire to amplify an area’s unique qualities and culture through trialling. A series of ephemeral small-scale interventions - suitable spatial and cultural activities - were suggested for specific situations. Suggested interventions ranged from happenings, to policy amendments, to cultural inhabitation of residual space, to temporary reconfiguring of the highway network. These interventions were conceived as being low or free cost and were not expected to require public funding. Designed as a series of positive hints, suggestive of a self-seeding bottom up culture that will arise through a culture of allowance.

Key to the successful utilisation of these tools is the understanding and mapping of an area, its cultural significance, nuances and existing latent qualities. This informs the creation of a spatial framework, which encapsulates wider regeneration aspirations, whilst maximising opportunities and benefits for all and builds upon, and nurtures unique local assets. These strategic tools promote an egalitarian form of engagement, which increase the likelihood of delivering authenticity, safeguarding future-place, offering greater certainty and return upon investment in longer-term space production; ultimately de-risking the process for all and providing communities with the means to participate in steering the evolution of their place.
DEEPER, SLOWER, RICHER:  
A SLOW INTERVENTION TOWARDS RESILIENT PLACES

by Anita McKeown
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Independent itinerant artist, researcher and curator

As an itinerant artist - geographically, genre and discipline - I recognise the benefits of a lighter quicker cheaper intervention. Indeed intervention has been my modus operandi for many years. The potential of the intervention has been championed within urban design (Landry 2005; Pinder 2005; Mau 2004) and with recent incorporation and promotion within placemaking perhaps a re-consideration is necessary. With the emergence of Creative Placemaking (Landesman 2009), a sub-field of placemaking and the latest remix of a policy platform for arts/ regeneration, arts-led interventions within spatial planning and urban design are an attractive proposition given the current financial climate.

The promotion of Lighter Quicker Cheaper (LQC) interventions, a term coined by Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management, UK1, is a 'lower risk and lower cost approach, 'capitalising on the creative energy of the community' (PPS 2012). In a cash-tight, risk-averse climate, the need for cost effective action encouraging resourcefulness and resilience is undeniable. The concept of LQC, although intended to refer to an alternative to capital-intensive large-scale developments, has an underlying message that could be misinterpreted or manipulated, exacerbating unsustainable practices. LQC, as an interventionist approach has a lot of potential when considered as part of placemaking's evolution towards more ephemeral open-sourced citizen-led processes of placemaking, welcoming multiple actors and encouraging agency.

As a pop-up approach to placemaking, ignoring the consequences and responsibilities of an intervention could serve to translate into a lighter, quicker, cheaper, altogether unwanted outcome. If the full life cycle of the intervention is not considered, any intervention could be lighter in environmental and social justice, quicker in building an unsustainable outlook and cheaper only in economic terms. There is also the potential for exploitation by local authorities or developers to minimise their input, or cut corners through the exploitation of an interventional sweat equity, the big society as state subsidy, with citizens subsidising municipal/developer responsibilities to ‘places in transition’ (PPS 2014). Although seemingly an agile response, the ethical and philosophical implications are no different to large-scale actions despite their temporary nature.

LQC was perceived as a ‘revolutionary, low-cost, high-impact strategy to development’ (PPS 2013b; MacIver 2010) - development not re-generation rings some bells. There is common consensus that to be considered regeneration there should be benefits for all involved integrating social, environmental and economic action for improvement across all three conditions. In response to the current climate, agile inclusive responses are a necessary part of a portfolio of responses necessitating strategies for long-term change, integrating equity for all, including the larger ecosystem. Dynamic responses working across local and global scales, even if interventional, require a critical thinking through and a full life-cycle analysis, even if their life-cycle is short. Public art as an early stage LQC intervention, often enhancements and design details e.g. benches, sculpture or landscaping, considered as art-as-public-spaces (Kwon 2004:60) could benefit from engagement with contemporary arts debates.

A third phase of public art, art-in-the-public-interest (Kwon 2004:60) could realise a greater potential and value for the arts within placemaking practices. However, there are issues with this approach also; questions of ‘what publics’ and ‘in whose interests’ cannot be ignored. Fred Burrell, a housing advocate, has commented on a disconnection between artistic practice and the way other citizens may imagine a location. Rather than artistic colonisation or developing artists’ playgrounds, Burrell sees a place for artists in placemaking, involved in the struggles and not just the ‘production of interesting things’ (RTC 2014). Artists working within this arena must develop an awareness and sensitivity of the material and economic struggles (Burrell 2014) perpetuated by the ‘politics of belonging and disbelonging’ (Bedoya 2014). A move towards a Creative Placemaking LQC intervention mindful of development vs. a generative equitable socio-cultural ecology has potential to integrate the benefits of an agile response for localised concerns.

Deeper, slower, richer
My own engagement with these ideas has been to explore the potential of permaculture design principles within a situated arts practice. Within a situated practice, it is the dynamics of the situation, beyond a physical ‘site-specific’ response, that motivates and influences the artwork. Permaculture conventionally

1 1
used as a land-based system for growing food is an ecological design system, non-formulaic and transferable. With an in-built ethos addressing social, environmental and economic capital, equity and belonging are fore fronted before any intervention in implemented. As an itinerant artist, even in your own post-code, frameworks that forefront ethical practice and help manage chaos are very useful. Since 2008, I have been trialing permaculture design principles as a tool for artistic practice within artist’s residencies in distinct socio-economic, political and cultural settings, in London, New Mexico and Dublin. Its potential to create a ‘slow’ intervention that builds micro-ecologies around art projects as a way to develop legacies has shown some merit.

In 2013 I was selected as the first artist in residence at the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument; the Bureau of Land Management. The residency, a situated intervention within the monument’s 245,000 acres in Taos County, allowed for an immersive structured improvisation and a chance to trial permaculture’s design principles further. Building on engagement from an earlier 2011 New Mexico residency, the permacultural design principles identified opportunities to respond to an increasingly worsening situation systemically;

- **NM - 50th in the USA for food security with 20% of the population unsure of their next meal source, 30% of this figure represents children;**
- **Year on year food bank increases;**
- **NM occurrence of type 2 diabetes / obesity higher than national statistics;**
- **Approx. 50 commercial crops produced in New Mexico are exported.**

The Ice Cream Olympics, 2013, implemented permaculture design tools as a way to engage with a localised situation by playfully exploring local food culture and the bio-cultural diversity of the monument, through the participatory making of ice cream using local ingredients.

Over the course of the residency, a series of nutrition-led educational workshops, discussions, public laboratories, local events and hikes raised awareness of the area’s available food; wild and cultivated. Expert and amateur localised knowledge was gathered, re-mixed, and re-presented, harnessing valuable often over-looked knowledge cultures, developing a micro-ecology around the project. Moving beyond monumental practices towards legacies, embryonic resilience through arts-led eco-literacy was further developed and implemented after the initial intervention through on-going educational projects and local employment. Culminating in 2013’s public Olympiad, the residency format increased NeoRio’s reach to its largest audience yet; 875 people over the lifetime of the project with legacies still on-going.

Those within the placemaking field are acknowledging Creative Placemaking’s abrupt rise and take-up yet do not fully engage with or embrace the existing approach (Bedoya 2013; Mehta 2012; PPS 2013). While acknowledging the emergence of Creative Placemaking, placemaking practitioners are critical of ‘the rise of the “creative” modifier as an exclusive approach particularly to those who may not feel themselves creative. They have also stated that ‘privileged of one type of activity over others seems to be the source of many of the recent questions around who benefits, and who is allowed at the table’ (PPS 2013). As a slow intervention, the ICO, with the other residencies goes some way to evidence the potential for deeper slower richer non-physical approach to Creative Placemaking, harnessing a creative modifier. Increasingly, social practice artists are entering the conversation, intervening in systems and moving away from static approaches to public art that can exacerbate the concerns of Bedoya, Mehta and Kent.

Creative Placemaking is being re-imagined as a situated networked co-production, through ephemeral practices as deeper, slower, richer interventions. 4

1Urban Space Management is a commercial development organisation that is recognised for the economic development of neglected or under-utilised spaces using cost-effective methods. Their projects include the introduction and development of Container City, cultural / micro industry workspaces, Farmer’s Markets and Artists work / sell venues.

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Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity


May 13, 2013
With a background in human geography and urban regeneration, the phrase ‘placemaking’ is one that has become ingrained in my vocabulary over the years. So much so that it’s easy to forget that this simple little word can elicit utter confusion from those not involved in the built environment professions that EDGEcondition engages. In researching the role of urban festivals in the (re)formation of city identities, I’ve had the chance to interrogate this theory of placemaking, to consider it within a broader landscape of urban regeneration, alongside city branding. At this stage (post-full PhD draft, pre-submission), it remains an intriguing mystery: favoured buzzword of the post-industrial landscape of New Labour, evocative of a drive towards people-centred approaches to the building of a new urbanity in the face of distinct economic restructuring, yet also redolent of some kind of empty promise.
One thing that can be said for placemaking is its power and endurance, whether in name specifically or simply in the everyday activities of local councils and a variety of other bodies who work towards forging distinct identities for their towns and cities. For the city of Manchester, placemaking has been high on the agenda for two decades or more, with the City Council focusing upon amongst other strategies – the benefits of co-opting culture and cultural events into the fabric of their urban regeneration initiatives. Included within this has been the Manchester International Festival (MIF), a biennial series of events comprised of specially commissioned works from local, national and international artists across a variety of platforms. Established in 2007 and forming part of the brand ‘ethos’ of Original Modern, it was an idea formulated by the former Factory Records and Joy Division artist Peter Saville alongside the Council. In researching MIF, I spent 15 months within the Festival’s offices, exploring its connection with the city, and the ways in which such cultural events can inform the representation of a city’s identity: the ways in which an arts festival can be seen as part of a process of placemaking.

A key question that emerged again and again over the course of this time period was whether this kind of identity formation was placemaking, or simply an exercise in place-marketing? Are the two distinctly different, or merely varied angles of the same process? And does this distinction make any discernible difference to the processes at work within culture-led urban regeneration? The way in which Manchester’s promotion is executed, through the likes of the Original Modern ethos and events such as MIF, suggests a commitment to placemaking through a belief on the part of local decision-makers in the widespread benefits of such strategies and activities. However, there have been past assertions that Manchester’s contemporary development involves a displacement of “underlying social and economic problems” tallying with the idea that much urban regeneration activity leads to cities of ‘sanitised streets’. What this in-depth and first-hand look at MIF showed was a great belief held by those connected with the Festival in the power of culture to affect the way in which a city is viewed, rather than a feeling that this and other exercises in culture-led regeneration may contribute to the kind of displacement warned of by Peck and Ward. In speaking to a range of individuals working both within the Festival and with other organisations (such as the Council or the city’s arm’s length marketing agency) MIF was positioned by some as enhancing Manchester’s reputation by contributing to a previously lacking art and culture scene. Others spoke of the Festival’s outreach programme, MIF Creative and its events such as 2013’s exercise in urban farming (The Biospheric Project) as helping “subtly change your recognition and your perception of what’s happening in the city”. It is this keenly felt comment from a Festival employee, however, that may sum up the role that cultural events can play in the field of placemaking: “I see my role […] as educating people who have a very set opinion of a Manchester that doesn’t exist anymore”. There will always be questions to be asked around the reality of the currently existing city. Whose city is it that gets to be the one represented through placemaking? Who has the power to construct these images of the city, to do the ‘educating’ of those with an ‘outdated’ perception of a rapidly changing post-industrial landscape? Concerns remain over whether placemaking focused around such a thing as a ‘brand ethos’, as in the case of Manchester, leans too far towards place-marketing, perhaps neglecting areas such as community benefit. Despite these complex questions, however, a brief look at Manchester’s utilisation of cultural events shows that, whether used for broad-reaching placemaking initiatives or tourism and investment-focused branding and marketing, culture can be a key facet in shaping the ways in which our cities are both perceived and enjoyed.
There are many occasions where you notice things in your surroundings, and consider how they could be improved. The local park missing its swings, a deteriorating high street or new housing that is disconnected from its surroundings. What do you do when you identify these things? Where can you go to discuss, challenge and propose any changes?

When you have a problem with your health, whether that be something that needs to be improved, removed or added, you go to the doctors where your concern is discussed and an initial assessment is made. Possible next steps may include an immediate medicinal solution, and/or further tests and investigations which may lead to further treatment, or attention from a specialist.

The doctor - the general practitioner, is the common ground in this detailed process of observation, response, proposition, action and evaluation. They are part of a public service that considers, assesses, communicates, collaborates, recommends, reviews, revisits, evaluates and cares for your health. They are in constant communication with other professionals in this process. They are the custodians of your health and they are always there.

We care about our health, and have a framework that serves this. What if we had the same level of care, attention and commitment to the assessment and action for the places we live, work and spend time in, with a framework that serves this?

Our current placemaking processes produce a rather disjointed and inaccessible city, focused on regulation and enforcement rather than strategy and proposition. With finite resources, a limited skills base, tight deadlines and budgets to be met, any overview or dialogue about who, what, where,
when and how is limited and our places and placemaking processes are poorer for it.

Placemaking requires commitment, with leadership, skill, and process that supports informed outcomes. A new framework must be found to nurture this.

Underlying this framework must be a shared belief in the value of good places, and how this value can be translated into action. Design is the tool that can allow this to happen. It should be the basis for understanding how places should be made and remade.

The public sector - those charged with providing services that benefit all - have a role to act upon such a shared belief and support it. But their position brings financial and political challenges to the placemaking process. A skilled placemaking workforce is required that can hold strong to the underlying belief and design process of placemaking, whilst identifying how to steer the complexities of this economical and political environment.

This workforce should include all professions involved in placemaking, not just the big three. It should work collaboratively across departments, and with more understanding budgets and sign off processes that support the nature of the work rather than the nature of a generalised local government project.

The workforce needs positioned in the public sector, so it is not just seen as an additional ‘nice’ group of designer types that make things pretty, which is sadly often the case. It needs a position that represents the importance of what it does and what it stands for.

An interesting model of this can be found in the New York’s Mayors Office. In 2006, the Office for Long-term Planning and Sustainability was created by local law, meaning it remains no matter who is in office. The office coordinates with all other city agencies to develop, implement, and track the progress of PlaNYC, the city plan, and other issues of infrastructure and the environment which cut across multiple city departments. They are a valued and respected part of the Mayor’s Office, and the glue between many different agencies and professions involved in placemaking in New York.

There have been models of this sort of workforce in the UK too - the Design Research Unit, London County Council and the Greater London Council’s in-house architecture department and more recently Design for London to name a few. But to date, none have stood the test of time.

Leadership is another important ingredient in the process. A leader brings commitment (politically timed or not), accountability and a decision making position which is required to steer through the various tensions and multifaceted agendas of placemaking in the city. Like a general practitioner, this leader should have a solid knowledge base of what they are leading, and be the fulcrum for all those involved in project.
The London Jubilee Line Extension project had a notable design leadership and delivery model. Delivered between 1990 and 1999, it continues to be positively thought of in terms of its design and impact in the city. It was lead by chief architect Roland Paoletti, who was in charge of the entire design team, had full control of budgets and worked collaboratively with all professions involved in the project.

"The inside story of Paoletti’s career is more remarkable, proving that enduring public architecture at its best depends on a balance of personal strength, technical gumption, steadfast collaboration and a sharp sense of opportunity and tactics.”

*From Guardian*

Another key element is that of ‘skill’. Despite the numerous professions involved in placemaking, we still seem to be short on one. Strategy. Without the ability to skilfully strategise for the city and its people, responding to its weaknesses and opportunities, so many areas remain untouched. With notable exceptions, we are missing the knowledge, skill and manpower that can sustain the time required to place-make, a situation likened to having an operating theatre with lay-surgeons. These missing skills are at the heart of the MA Cities course at the Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, and the course flyer illustrates that alongside design skills there are many others required to be effective agents of urban change.

It provides a local source of information and interaction for previous, proposed and potential ideas for a place. It provides the common ground for an open framework of placemaking between the users, makers, observers, legislators and custodians to create good places, and good cities.

There is a gold mine of placemaking waiting to be tapped into. It requires a culture that values good places, with a public place making process, skilled custodians and accountable leaders.

It needs a common ground.
The city isn't a collection of bollards, of fine differentiation of purpose distinguished by paving surfaces, of elegant benches and bits of considered art. It's not the iconic buildings and the spaces between them. It's not cycling infrastructure, pedestrian-friendly streets, tramways and road engineering. We know all of this; and yet, in the urbanist mission to make better places, they're still too often the focus. That's because the big shiny things, with their passing semblance of permanence, make us think we've finished something and reached a conclusion. We want to get to the end of things. But who really believes that a single one of the iconic buildings built in London in the last twenty years will last as long as St Paul's Cathedral? And St Paul's is just a newcomer in the timeline of British building that takes us back to Avebury.

Placemakers do understand that permanent buildings and the neat row of bollards outside them aren't the only solution. Certainly, the ones that can quote Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford and Francis Tibbalds do. Placemakers have learnt to talk of liminal spaces, of tactical urbanism, of the smart city, and urban acupuncture. I don't believe they really understand it all, though.

The fundamental idea underpinning the writings of Jacobs, Mumford and Tibbalds is put best by William Shakespeare. He said 'What is the city but the people?' and if you get that, you can leave the longer books on the shelf.

And because of those people, the city isn’t neat and tidy, and it doesn’t have an end. Every time I catch the train from Margate into St Pancras, I look at the jumble of cranes across the skyline. ‘Perhaps they’ve nearly finished,’ I think to myself, ‘perhaps London is nearly built.’ But it isn’t, and won’t ever be, because the people inside it are endless and changing.
They keep moving the goalposts, shifting the bollards, rocking the foundations.

The rise of cycling in London has shown that people change the way they move, and made us rethink roads. The rebirth of the High Street has shown that people change the way they shop, and now Tesco are shutting stores. The reinvention of the office has shown that people change the way they work, and now we’re turning empty industrial buildings into coworking spaces. And as the city is nothing but the flow of changing people, impermanence, uncertainty and the temporary are always going to be there. We should treasure those attributes at least as much, if not more, than the things we think we’ve finished. Midsummer’s Day has special magic because it comes just once a year. The travelling circus is beautiful because it comes, goes and leaves nothing behind.

And impermanence is why I still love the pop up. I’m not in love with the word, and I’m certainly not in love with the idea that this is ‘meanwhile’, a blip on the way back to the same old High Street we had in 2008. But I’m in love with what people do with spaces when they’re given freedom, autonomy and opportunity.

The pop up is nothing new, so don’t worry that it’s a passing fad. Theatre companies used to pop up in pubs, as actors staged plays in the courtyards of inns. Then they built wooden Os. And on the night of 29 December 1598, Shakespeare’s players took down the Curtain theatre, carried it across the river, and rebuilt it roughly where The Globe stands today. Shakespeare was a pop up master, because he understood that the play’s the thing, not the building.

You can see that spirit across the world today, from Newcastle, New South Wales to Detroit. You can see it in Coventry, where Talking Birds have hijacked interesting spaces for art since 1992 and where Theatre Absolute run a theatre in a former fish and chip shop.

You can see it in Leeds, where East Street Arts started converting buildings into art studios before realising they could do it anywhere. They have around seventy buildings scattered across the country now.

You can see it in Stoke On Trent, where the former Spode factory hosts exhibitions, events and the British Ceramics Biennial and a shop in the city centre has become art space Room With A Brew.

You can see it at coworking space and pop up gallery Workshop 34 in Sittingbourne, Kent – a successor to similar Workshops in Shoreham by Sea and South Kilburn.

All of these projects care less about the building, more about the people that use them. They’re all, to some degree, acting out the idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, eluding formal structures of control and happening because people come together and give each other the authority to do things. They all happen when people say ‘yes’ to each other.

And if you really want to build people-centred towns and cities, ‘yes’ is the answer. It’ll be messy and mixed up, chaotic and out of your control, and it won’t be neatly engineered. But it’ll live, breath and be good fun. So stop worrying and learn to love the pop up.
PHOTO ESSAY

STREET ART WALKING

by

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ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF SIMONE SHERIDAN

Closed Beauty
Image taken from inside Book Tower in Detroit, Michigan in 2013, on a private guided tour. The office building is a 36-story skyscraper that stands empty since the late 2000’s.

Post-Industrial Canvas
Image taken within the (former) Packard Plant on a photo exploration tour with a friend in 2013.
Nature Taking Back
The Former Jolly Roger in Newcastle, Australia became a wasteland of concrete mixed with overgrown wild plants before being completely cleared in 2014. Image taken in 2013.

The Broken Window
This photo was taken in 2009 from outside the Former Empire Hotel in Newcastle, Australia. The site has since been cleared but remains undeveloped and boarded up.
If These Bricks Could Talk

I learned many things about the Packard Plant and its colourful history from being a magnificent car manufacturing plant to the empty graffiti soaked concrete jungle it had become 2013. I am positive there would be so many amazingly terrifying tales to be told by these walls.

Once Was Norton Street

Norton Street in Leichhardt was once famous for being a bustling ‘Little Italy’ of Sydney. Today, many shops lay dormant with mailing waiting to be opened by a tenant who is long gone.
Ears Up

As Director of This Is Not Art Festival in 2010, I wanted to create a visual difference to the areas near festival venues, whilst also uplifting blank public spaces. This artwork by Sydney Artist, Ears, was part of a public art tour ‘WalkARTbout’ curated by Carli Hyland.

Marble Alley

This laneway become an overlooked space after the department store David Jones left as a tenant, leaving the three story building empty and the laneways less used. Graffiti tags began to litter the area so Street Art Walking worked with a Keo Match, Mike Watt and Sindy Sinn whom created the concept of ‘Marble Alley’ featuring a group of characters playing marbles down the back lane.
The Reading Nook

This little archway was sitting blank and waiting for one of Mike Watt’s characters to take reading solace away from the city. This Former Masonic Hall lays dormant in the main CBD of Newcastle, Australia. This project was completed in 2013.

Painting Hunter Street Mall

This artwork was completed in 2011 as the first official Street Art Walking mural with local Newcastle, Australia artists Umpel and Ben Foster. This project was the catalyst to really move forward in the direction of changing public spaces with visual art. You can see a great video here by Umpel of the creation day.
Jazz Hands

This mural was a community project conceived with Sculptor and Place Maker Mark Aylward who lives in Wickham of Newcastle, Australia whom contacted myself to work on finding artists to create a mural for Beresford Lane. Street Art Walking worked with artists Umpel, Cogs and Lance Johnson.

Renew Newcastle Spring Walking Tour 2011

Image taken at a Renew Newcastle walking tour held in Spring of 2011. Hundreds of people flocked to Hunter Street Mall for a guided tour of creative spaces which activate empty retail and office spaces in Newcastle, Australia.
**BUTLERS WHARF**

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IMAGES COURTESY OF
CONRAN AND PARTNERS

The best review of Butlers Wharf to date is still the Architects’ Journal issue of 16 May 1990. Dan Cruikshank and Catherine Slessor comprehensively covered the development just before the early ’90s recession kicked in. It looked at projects by Michael Squire, Allies and Morrison, Michael Hopkins and Julian Wickham, as well as Conran Roche, who were both master-planners for the estate and architects for some of the buildings. Cruickshank concludes “…the potential exists to create something which might just turn out to be as messy, urban and vital as a piece of real city”.

Even though in economic terms the recession lasted not much over a year it was, in reality, deep and messy. Butlers Wharf was half way through its transformation. Not a good point for the banks to pull the plug on funding, especially because the vision created by Terence Conran and Fred Roche was bold, ambitious and relied on sites being developed concurrently – the plan was too complex and costly for the nervous money men and so they called in their loan. After receivership a revised, less ambitious plan was developed and the site was completed in the mid-90s, missing some of the flair of the original idea.

In 1981, Sir Terence Conran and his architectural practice Conran Roche (now Conran and Partners) put forward a bid for mixed-use redevelopment which won approval from the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC). The corporation was a Thatcherite quango set up to regenerate London’s docklands by removing powers from the Labour controlled boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark. The boroughs wanted to keep traditional employment in the area and fought against the gentrification.

Vital to the masterplan was moving the Design Museum to Shad Thames from its basement space known as the Boilerhouse Project at the V&A, which took place in 1989. This gave an early cultural use which brought thousands in to the little known area.

Most people enter the area by walking under Tower Bridge, arriving from the river front to the west, straight in to an extraordinary bridged street. Pevsner writes of Shad Thames: “The most dramatic industrial street surviving in London. The towering warehouses and lattice wrought-iron bridges crossing at all heights still remain much in their Victorian state. Doré has immortalized the Dante-cum-Piranesi appearance of such areas…”

The Butlers Wharf Building, which takes up the north side of Shad Thames, gives its name to the area. In the 19th Century this reach of the Thames, the
Pool of London, accounted for much of the wealth, growth and prominence of London. Once known as the larder of London, the streets and alleys you see today are a clear memory of the area's rich history. The name is possibly a corruption of 'St John at Thames', a reference to the period when the area was settled by an Order of the Knights Templar in the 12th century, or rather more prosaically could have been to do with the about of Shad (River Herring) landed here. The LDDC notes, in its history of the area, "This is the largest and most densely packed group of Victorian warehouses left in London, its sheer size was unusual even at the time: lightermen did not like working there because bridges between buildings meant they had to take their loaded barrows much further back from the shore than usual".

Goods from around the world arrived here, and old photographs show warehouses stacked with sacks of grain and boxes of tea. After the Second World War trade began to decline with the final ship arriving in 1972. Container ports built further east for granted that we can stroll along the river from Butlers Wharf to the Royal Festival Hall. You couldn't do this is the '80s without a series of detours inland. Now if anybody asks me what I tell them to walk the South Bank – Tate Modern, Borough Market, Shakespeare's Globe, the OXO Tower; the GLA building and some spectacular views across the river.

"We changed the South Bank… Tate Modern would never have put itself into Bankside if it hadn't seen the success of Butler's Wharf and our little Design Museum."

(Terence Conran, Telegraph, 3 Sep 2010)

It's hard to believe now that when work started at Butlers Wharf it was unknown. Cab drivers didn't know it – dockers didn’t take many cabs, I guess. It's now very established as a place. Maybe a bit elitist – property values are sky high. But surrounding areas to the south and east are changing – Bermondsey Spa, a major regeneration scheme, is just down the road. The Design Museum’s move to west London will see the area change again – though Zaha Hadid’s purchase of the building at Butlers Wharf for her archive and for architectural exhibitions at least retains a cultural use in the area.

It undoubtedly has what architects and designers yearn to create: a sense of place. The existing historic street pattern undoubtedly helps. Without the early ‘90s recession there would have been bigger bolder new architecture. Conran Roche's proposed riverside HQ for Logica was intended as a contemporary take on the linked buildings of the area and would have provided a significant landmark. Overall, most of the work by Conran and others is ageing well and Butlers Wharf remains an exemplar of urban regeneration.
A dramatic collision of new and old Chongqing — a 100-year-old cotton factory neighboring a 1000-year-old riverfront town called Ciqikou, boarded by a piece of half-finished elevated motorway - that was built ten years ago but is soon to be decommissioned. The site sits on the Jialingjian River at the high water level, 20m above the lowest level, and a new highway will soon run along the river cutting Ciqikou, and the site, from the water.

In September 2014 we were invited to compete through a six-week design competition, for a 3.4 billion RMB mix use development on this 6Ha site in central China.

THE BRIEF
The site is split into two plots that should be developed with different uses — that adjacent to Ciqikou as 50,000msq of retail and commercial, and the other as 200,000m² of residential. The brief asks for a fully illustrated design proposal for these areas as well as 150,000msq of underground parking garages. No further breakdown is given.

Half the site is designated as a conservation area where the only rule is that no building should exceed 30m in height. On the other half the required floor areas result in residential towers of between 30-50 stories. The project is called ‘Shaci Plaza’, and the brief requires that a 30,000m² elevated plaza should extend from the site and incorporate the highway. After being shortlisted, we were provided with some reference sketches of a large shopping mall like building next to Ciqikou anchoring a plaza. The overarching vision is of a place that “the Chinese think is Western, Westerner’s think is Chinese, the young feel is fashionable, and the old feel is nostalgic”.

LEARNING FROM CIQIKOU
We rejected the idea of a plaza as an out of scale gesture that would create a harsh barrier between the new development and Ciqikou. Instead, we proposed a harbor that would rediscover the historic relationship between the city and the water, drawing people from the elevated infrastructure down to the river.

Instead of defending against floods, Ciqikou fearlessly embraces the changing water level of the river. During the dry
season, the exposed riverbed becomes a beach for thousands of locals whereas annual flooding during the rainy season forces people to pack up their shop and leave for a week or two before returning when the river subsides. This makes the Ciqikou riverfront heaven for micro businesses including restaurant boats, BBQ stalls and home-made fairground rides that inhabit the floodable landscape.

There is no reason why new development can’t engage with the changing water levels in a similar way through a combination of permanent and temporary activities. On top of the new highway, we proposed a slopped public space that joins the retail district with Ciqikou. A series of floating pontoons would become piers to the riverbed in the dry season, and define basins filled with boats at other times.

RETAI NING A COMMON MEMORY
On the plot adjacent to Ciqikou we proposed a low-rise high-density solution that would break the strict Chinese sunlight and fire regulations. A network of small-scale streets, lanes and alleys reference the historic environment in their scale and orientation. Layers of terraces and courtyards navigate the complex typography and characterize the new retail environment. The architectural language is neither fake historic or futuristic, both common solutions to similar sites adjacent to historic places in China.

Instead we proposed buildings that were traditional in their scale and materials but modern in form and concept. Some existing factory buildings as well as most of the 100-year old mature trees are retained providing historic memory and maturity. Factories became workshops that encourage making along side selling. The decommissioned highway would become a high-level landscape that forms part of a loop linking the site and Ciqikou into the wider city structure. A memory of China’s recent explosive growth can also sit comfortably in the new vision. Residential towers are placed furthest from Ciqikou and are organised as an inward looking but non-gated compound with well-considered streetscape. The towers are designed with a common language but not uniform to form a natural skyline. Two large courtyard blocks in the center of the plan introduce an intermediate height and re-define the four lane road between the two plots as a street.

REALITY
The factory was already being demolished before the competition was over. We came second. The winning scheme demonstrates an extraordinary lack of sophistication in its relationship with the historic environment. Images of giant curvaceous blobs and a Ferris Wheel were released to the press only to be quickly withdrawn when the people cried out for their history.
AUTHORITARIAN PUBLIC SPACE:

THE CREATIVE PLACE-MAKING OF SINGAPORE'S SPEAKER'S CORNER

by Jason Luger

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IMAGES COURTESY OF JASON LUGER

Singapore's Speaker's Corner in Hong Lim Park, is a designated space in central Singapore for free expression. Yet it is a self-contained place, regulated and censored; gatherings and protests must abide by certain rules and regulations and large protests must pre-register. Despite these restrictions, Hong Lim Park has emerged as a focal point for cultural activism and is a rare spot in Singapore where large groups (numbering in the thousands) can assemble (peacefully) to voice critical opinions.

This is the closest thing Singapore has to a central square, a place for various publics to gather materially and interact. Comparisons to ‘pop up’ revolutionary squares, such as Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park or Cairo’s Tahrir, are difficult: Hong Lim Park is officially designated as protest space, conveniently demarcated (and monitored). Its landscaped lawn is devoid of people (at least it was on most days I walked through it), and protests cannot be spontaneous: they must be pre-approved. Several signposts around the park denote what is and is not permitted: any activity that is seen to be against racial or religious harmony is forbidden (and this is a grey area, constantly evolving in Singapore’s ongoing moral and cultural conversation).

On a research walk in December, 2012, I came across the Really, Really, Free Market taking place on International Human Rights Day. This was an arts-activist event sponsored by the group OutPost, along with a wide group of tangentially-related activists: migrants’ workers’ groups shared space with an anti-rape display; there were opportunities to trade books, clothes, or other items; there was a display set up with the faces of all those detained in Singapore’s history under anti-Marxist laws.

This is the type of activity that can occur in Hong Lim Park. But there’s a catch: Hong Lim Park is the only space in Singapore where such a gathering is permitted; the ‘Free Market’ has to be registered and approved by State authorities; and the themes expressed cannot violate strict guidelines or step across the ‘out of bounds’ markers.

Therefore, the ‘Free Market’ is both a protest of joined-up collaboration, and a protest of circumstance. These groups have to come together at the same time, in the same space (because there simply are no other spaces). In many contexts, gathering in a park on a Sunday without a stated cause or cohesive message would not be read as ‘resistance’. In Singapore, though, simply showing
up has an element of subversion. Perhaps Creswell’s (1996) version of transgression is a more apt word to apply: the idea that showing up and assembling at the ‘Free Market’ is a display of geographical deviancy, but does not directly challenge the State, and therefore will not be able to result in any specific change. Hong Lim Park is a tense space in that it is both a space of possibility that does not exist elsewhere in Singapore, and also a highly limiting, restricted space: it is a pan-opticon, as Foucault (1995) may have called it, monitored and controlled by authorities. Dissent is focused within safe boundaries, allowed at Speaker’s Corner because it is not permitted elsewhere, where it might be more disruptive. Still, the scale of activism enabled outside at Hong Lim Park has the ability to gain attention – both within and outside of Singapore – that has become large and visible international Pride movements, each summer, coinciding with the potential to induce change than those within. The potential for Hong Lim Park to allow transformative cultural activism is illustrated in the example of Pink Dot, a gay rights gathering (protest?) held each summer, coinciding with the international Pride movements, that has become large and visible enough to generate a loud debate within Singapore – and this debate has prompted authorities to revisit anti-gay legislation. During Pink Dot there are talks at Speaker’s Corner, but the big event is an aerial photograph of thousands of people wearing pink and holding pink umbrellas which resembles a giant pink dot. It is Singapore’s version of Pride acting as a symbolic replacement, a chance for the gay community and allies to represent themselves by simply being present in place.

Pink Dot has steadily grown since its early years, and it was estimated that around 26,000 people gathered in 2014. It is rare in Singapore that civil rights events gather so many people together, and thus, international headlines have been made: Western newspapers chronicled Pink Dot as its broader symbolism of the cultural battles waged within Singapore. Furthermore, papers have made connections between Singapore’s debate over gay rights and similar debates being played out in the United States and elsewhere in the world where efforts are underway to either reinforce or break down anti-gay laws. In a word, Pink Dot has set into motion a ‘showdown’ between conservative and progressive voices in Singapore.

What is missing from Speaker’s Corner is a sense of joined-up cohesiveness and a unified mission or cause, as was the case in Paternoster Square for the ‘Occupy London’ encampment, when I used to walk around the site during my lunch break at King’s College London. Nor are there permanent displays or placards that help to define and set the tone for the park, as is often the case outside of British Parliament, or the United States Capitol in Washington. It is very ad-hoc and pop-up, which raises questions about how transformative, and how emancipatory, the space can actually be: real protest and social action takes time, and must acquire a sense of permanence.

It is not necessary to sign up, register, or self-identify with any particular group or cause to take part in a pop up event held at Hong Lim Park, such as the Really, Really Free Market. The only stipulations are the rules posted at either end of the park – and for more political gatherings, such as protests and party-rallies, non-residents are strictly prohibited from joining. If there are coalitions that form in these places, they are largely unplanned, spur of the moment, and temporary – groups disband, literally, as the afternoon monsoon rains begin.

These are thus contained gatherings: possible only where and when they do not overstep the ‘out of bounds’ markers and do not present an actual, disruptive threat. In this sense, they are also co-opted by the State. Adding to the complexity is that there is always a degree of self-censorship at public events and in the public realm in Singapore – people may be less eager to add their names to a list-serve or petition even if there are no consequences for doing so.

Therefore, what is possible is only a representation of resistance, not the sort of joined-up, disruptive action that Soja (2010) and Harvey (2012) argue is necessary in the seeking of social justice and reclamation of the ‘commons’. In summary, Hong Lim Park and Speaker’s Corner have many limitations. Yet it allows a scale, centrality and visibility for gatherings and activism not possible elsewhere in Singapore and thus represents an opening: it has the capability to induce a nationwide discussion, generate international headlines, and to force the political elite to reconsider their policies.

References:
Detroit is a city that invites ideas for its revival and re-establishment. Every day, it seems, we receive advice and plans for how to ‘save’ our city. As a Detroit native who has been working on issues of revitalization in Detroit for more than a decade, I’m thankful we continue to invite new ideas and, most importantly, new energy for the work. Many of the ideas proposed are about placemaking in this city rampant with vacant places. While I welcome the new ideas, I’m hopeful that we can start 2015 mindful of some key knowledge.

When a city puts its distinctiveness on display, has a deep understanding of its differences and can spin economic vibrancy out of difference, it has a real advantage. One of Detroit’s great advantages is that it attracts people with ideas. I believe that’s because Detroit has its own unique magnetism. In other words, Detroit has soul. Motor City. Motown. “Detroit Hustles Harder.”

But how does Detroit make this distinctiveness a true advantage. At Knight Foundation, we ask ourselves three questions as we approach investments in Detroit and in all communities:

• Will this decision increase the supply of talent for the city?
• Will this decision increase the quality of this place?

Talent. In order to grow our economy and continue to build our city, we must develop, attract and retain talented people. Detroit must grow its population of college-educated talent. The percentage of college graduates in a metropolitan area’s population explains 58 percent of its success (measuring success by per capita income). A population with higher educational attainment serves the entire community, particularly benefiting those who don’t have that attainment. The earnings of the average high school graduate increase about 7 percent as the share of college graduates in a city increases by 10 percent. Detroit has been lagging on this important asset and must take advantage of renewed investment and renewed attention to invite more talented individuals with a college degree to stay in or to choose our city. In my own experience, I can attest that Detroit provides a uniquely robust environment for success when a talented and passionate individual knocks on its door.

Opportunity. There is no denying that Detroit is a city with an unacceptably high poverty rate. If the ZIP code of your birth determines your destiny, then Detroit’s children are largely born already behind. We need to change this prognosis to reflect another truth. Children’s futures are brighter when they grow up in economically integrated neighborhoods. Detroit must
be at the forefront of providing pathways to opportunity for its residents. Education is a part of the answer, but building better neighborhoods, where economic and social opportunity are abundant and equitably available, is also part of the answer. This challenge – the challenge of growing economically integrated neighborhoods – is one that Knight Foundation takes seriously, together with many partners.

Place. Over the past four decades, there has been a steady increase in the relative preference of young adults (ages 25 to 34) for close-in neighborhoods – that’s the Central Business District in metropolitan areas and the 3-mile radius around it. In fact, college-educated young adults are more than twice as likely to live in these close-in neighborhoods compared to other Americans. This trend just keeps accelerating.

And now, jobs are following them. Since the recession, in major metro areas, all of the new jobs have been created in America’s core cities. That’s a complete reversal of what was happening before the recession. Here in Detroit we’ve seen several major corporations relocate from suburban office parks to the heart of the city, echoing this national trend.

It’s also true that since the recession, housing prices in America’s most walkable neighborhoods – the ones with higher Walk Scores and that have more daily destinations nearby – have recovered far more quickly than housing in neighborhoods where you have to drive to get to everything. Although Detroit’s housing market lags many others, we have also seen our walkable neighborhoods come back faster. Many city partners are working on some key commercial districts (e.g., West Village, 7 Mile/Livernois, Vernor Highway) to enhance existing small businesses and re-enliven the walkable experience.

In Detroit and other communities, it is often perceived that building place (i.e., placemaking) is only for newcomers or only for the elite. It’s my hope -- and Knight Foundation’s hope -- that Detroit finds a way to be more inclusive in our placemaking. It starts with valuing our existing assets.

Detroit is home to a longstanding and renewed artistic community garnering international attention. The Knight Arts Challenge has recognized more than 100 winners in the last two years spanning all fields of the arts. Notable to Detroit, much of the art takes advantage of inexpensive housing, open land, an emerging food and agriculture community, and Detroit’s rich cultural heritage.

Detroit is home to the unexpected – including remarkable natural beauty.
Pheasant, coyote, falcons, beavers and eagles have all been sighted within city limits recently. Nothing beats the view of the city from Detroit’s 2.5-mile-long, 982-acre island park in the Detroit River between the United States and Canada, Belle Isle. In addition, the city boasts other unique parks including Rouge Park, Palmer Park, downtown’s Campus Martius Park and a robust and evolving greenways system.

Where does Detroit still lag?

• Our transit system – two inadequate and underperforming bus systems and a circling PeopleMover – is woefully behind (but showing small signs of improvement). 2016 will witness the opening of a streetcar line serving the center city.

• We offer wide, flat streets for biking but are just at the beginning of building a true bicycling infrastructure. But don’t tell that to the folks of Detroit’s Slow Roll.

• To say we’re lacking density is an understatement. We’re a city built primarily of single-family homes spread across 139 square miles. In our greater downtown area, the density is approximately 5,000 people per square mile. In comparison, Philadelphia’s center city boasts approximately 20,000 people per square mile. Current real estate development activity is almost entirely focused on multi-unit, multi-story apartment buildings in Detroit’s greater downtown in response to robust demand for this type of density.

• Public safety and the public lighting crucial to it are deficient. As the city emerges from bankruptcy, improving these crucial public services is Job One and early signs show improvement.

• We are failing Detroit’s children. Our school system -- made up of public, private and charter schools -- consistently ranks at the bottom of national assessments. Despite many efforts, there is still a long way to go to serve Detroit’s children.

Good places play a critical role in the economic mobility that is at the heart of the American Dream. Detroit is a place that has made significant strides in reestablishing its economic strength. As a place, its magnetic pull has brought newcomers, retained natives and inspired those who once lived here but moved away, to return. All of the steps underway to improve talent, opportunity and place, are starting to show signs of promise. And progress needs to be swift because, at the heart of all the ideas and change, there are people’s futures on the line here. I, for one, am optimistic about our city’s future, because of the distinctive strides we’ve made in the present.
The making and keeping of places in Northern Ireland will be subject to major change from 1st April 2013; more changes will occur a year later. For the first time in over forty years, District Councils will have responsibilities for planning and regeneration.

In preparation, MAG, the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment, was invited by the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure to liaise with the District Councils. The brief included recognition of overriding government and departmental priorities to promote equality, planning and regeneration, and therefore more affordable places to live.

MAG determined not to tell councils how it could advise on planning and regeneration but to show them some placemaking using civic stewardship, defined by the Social Capital Group in Cambridge, Massachusetts as active caring for people and places, using techniques of action learning, connecting and aligning.

Civic stewardship assumes a lack of resources and “doing more with what we’ve got” became the sub-text of our reports.

MAG showed that small changes in use of places can improve them immediately and establish briefing for major changes that occur when development is proposed. Work always began with a town centre walk. Council representatives highlighted the issues. MAG listened. We borrowed cafe chairs and tables - for later visits we brought our own. One of MAG’s expert advisors commented:

“I guess as an architect and knowing the wider context I was amazed by the potential of simple intervention of an activity into an existing space that was under-utilised. I was very impressed by the simple beauty of what a chair can do! These areas don’t need so much strategic infrastructure projects to regenerate them, but a little thought on their actual use.”

Feargal Harron, architect
MAG Expert Advisor
October 2013

Some officers ‘got it’ immediately, introducing the techniques with enthusiasm and developing new abilities – spotting opportunities, recognising and supporting leadership from unexpected quarters – often from beyond usually tapped resources.

Others were cautious, but willing to try new ideas, doing unusual things in unexpected places, learning from different experiences.

Connecting talents with local needs and offers included joint working with various disciplines, organically changing leadership, supporting creativity and encouraging curiosity about different approaches.

Identifying passionate communities of interest was the biggest revelation. In one town we discovered 400 such communities. 100 were arts groups. With council support, they produced a town centre festival with 150 events. Music, drama, painting, poetry and literature thrived, generating wealth through activity, helping to improve conditions for all.

During study visits, we found groups’ activities are enhanced when they use unexpected places, such as streets and squares, which are in turn improved by the activities; the places become ‘animated’. Local people may not previously have encountered these activities or organisations and may see opportunities to join in, further improving the places in a sustainable way, developing skills, including people socially and equally while creating economic opportunities to help to relieve poverty and impoverishment.

Civic stewardship techniques include some really simple activities which are not naïve but elegant – just sitting down, talking and listening to people in town centres, for example, creating “somewhere to sit” which is adaptable to the weather. Further successes include planting and gardening with people, connecting existing projects and places, including children using vacant open spaces for play and learning, organised by childcare providers.

Appreciating and understanding people’s interests and connecting them to places to improve how we use them now can provide the briefing for change when investment is being considered.

Public sector investment requires evaluation. HM Treasury Green Book carefully read, invites consideration: radical options; activities as well as projects; early consultation; pilot projects; varied timescales; built-in flexibility; and recurrent as well as capital expenditure.

The Project for Public Spaces in New York asserts that the success of a place is 80% due to its management yet public authorities can spend 100% of the budget on design and construction, ignoring the Green Book’s guidance.

Physical projects become viable when accompanied by a programme for use – a stewardship programme – which has been proven to be sustainable by committed users of existing places, avoiding investment in projects whose expectations are too high because they are just ‘physical’, having been briefed, designed and built with insufficient evidence and without programming. They are bikes without riders, televisions without broadcasting, computers without software.

We found public infrastructure underused or abused due to lack of programming rather than poor design or construction. Reprogrammed, such public places can quickly come alive as the community assets they were always intended to be, at minimum cost.

Developing programming into action, notices can deal with bookings for events and activities, including links to websites available 24/7 to facilitate individuals, groups and organisations.

Public authorities see insurance and audits as obstacles to public use. However, groups can have public liability insurance cover for an annual fee equivalent to about £2 - £4 per week, but owners and managers need to know this and help users to arrange it.

Audits can impose unrealistic and inhibiting requirements, which should be re-examined where they affect positive uses of places.
An inspiring story of both people and place, Govan is very much part of Glasgow; yet it is distinct and psychologically distanced from the city. Subsumed by the city of Glasgow in 1912, a powerful story of protest and strength of character is engrained in its making.

Govan’s independent spirit, and cultural identity are at the centre of vibrant efforts to enhance the fortunes and regeneration of the area. Heritage and renewal have been embraced. However, after years of post-industrial neglect the challenges are complex. Short sighted procurement policies, and planning decisions taken at the expense of local desires, have fuelled social, political, and physical barriers visible in derelict, and contested space. Govan has survived the recession; BAE systems are still producing ships, and the empowerment of local grassroots initiatives have strengthened regeneration projects.

With such rich history, the notion of place needs no making here. A focus has been placed on identifying assets to attract visitors, storytelling, and the ability of cultural tourism, to help reconnect physically and emotionally with the area.

The Central Govan Action Plan has almost completed a 10-year programme of improvements to housing, the public realm, and historic buildings. This holistic approach has been recognized in Govan receiving the 2014 RTPI Silver Jubilee Cup award for planning excellence, whilst social enterprises such as Fablevision continue to drive transformative projects.

Social and economic repair will take time. A bridge across the water would be a further positive action forming a connection to Partick and the West End of the city. The story of land and people at Water Row at the heart of Govan still awaits proper acknowledgement and appropriate development to avoid being led by house builder’s or developer’s projections. The vast expansive dry docks still lie vacant, a potential landscape threatened by private interests and the removal of the current ecosystem that has taken hold in years of absent activity.

This photo story attempts to show elements of an underlying physical and emotional essence to the area.

‘Taransay Street’

In the seventies, community focused architects began to put in place a realisation of the value of tenement housing. The role of local housing associations began to flourish thanks to this tenement rehabilitation program starting in close proximity to the Govan Fairfield shipyard.
‘The Graving Docks’

Landscape holds so many clues to its future development. The Graving Docks in Govan, is a momentous and inspirational landscape. Lying abandoned in the hands of private developers, it offers vast potential as an urban gateway into Govan; a celebration of landscape, maritime history and renewal.

‘A Silent Anchor’

This landscape of industrial memories could be instrumental in reconnecting Govan’s raison d’être with Glasgow and the river. Housing development could be integrated with public open space, heritage assets, sculpture, community facilities, and natural landscape.
‘Govan’s Everyday Spectacle’

Zaha Hadid’s Riverside museum fronts the River Clyde overlooking Govan. Boldly enclosing the story of manufacturing and transport, its relationship with Govan and the Clyde offers a lasting opportunity for renewal, already helping establish a ferry crossing and forming cultural ties within Govan.

‘New Housing’

Contemporary architectural forms, both generic and individual, jostle for presence amongst the rich tapestry of streets from which Govan can be traced.
Members of the Scottish Show People’s community have a strong attachment to Govan, their way of life needs to be represented, and protected within the area, yet they have been repeatedly ignored and isolated from the land and community they serve. Proposals to see a museum or permanent expression of their culture at the heart of Govan are ongoing.

Water Row, where history, routes and rivers converge. Short sighted development plans, and consultation over the city council’s plans to use the site as a car park, have been strongly contested. The site needs to reinterpret Govan’s ancient significance as a place of democracy and power, that became the beating heart of shipbuilding. Transparency and dialogue is required, not just plans for houses.
‘A Place That Once Was Here’

Recalling the old cottages that lined Water Row and dealing with themes of memory, and attachment to place, this collaborative project was illuminated on November 5th 2012. Highlighting questions over treatment of land and local culture, it has since taken on new meanings, as a feature in the magnificent Govan Fair.

‘Govan Assembly’

Sculpture by Matt Baker

“This is the right time for Govan to become a place of power in Glasgow. It will only happen if enough people make it happen. This is our challenge and responsibility.”
Quoting public artist Matt Baker and following his involvement in Govan: “the artworks are seen not as endpoints, but rather that the physical sculptures should be seen as tools for continuing the momentum of change and growth in a place.”

‘About Us, Without Us’

A unique public art event as part of Glasgow’s International Festival of Visual Art celebrated Govan’s connection to the water, obsolete communication techniques, and sense of place.
‘Here Comes The Govan Fair’

People await the Govan Fair procession.

‘The Shipwright & The Engineer’

Sculptures flank the entrance of Govan’s Fairfield shipyard building. Responsible for many of the finest ships built on the Clyde, the iconic building has recently been restored and finely refurbished into a heritage centre and business facility, providing a huge cultural asset to Govan and symbolizing the importance of heritage in enabling a brighter future.
Perhaps one of the most visible urban trends of recent years has been the rise and ubiquity of temporary urbanism. From pop-ups to parklets, temporary interventions on the urban landscape have appeared in cities all around the world. Broadly, they are “planned from the outset to be impermanent... [and] seek to derive unique qualities from the idea of temporality”. While the temporary use of space in cities is nothing new, what is particularly novel about the current period is the proliferation and sheer diversity of these interventions. What was once an approach largely confined to activists, community groups and artists is now deeply embedded in the strategies of marketing agencies, multi-national corporations and real estate developers.

The fetishisation of all things temporary has also not escaped the attention of city governments pursuing placemaking strategies. This piece focuses on Bristol, a regional city in south west England, which has used ‘placemaking through temporary use’ to kick-start the regeneration of a ‘lifeless’ part of the city. It discusses how the city government harnessed the energy of community and arts organisations involved in temporary use activity to establish a new destination in the zone called Creative Common.

It also reflects on what lessons can be learnt about placemaking collaborations between large hierarchical institutions and more agile grassroots groups.

In 2011 a vast area of vacant and derelict land surrounding Bristol’s main railway station was designated as the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone. This marked the beginning of a 25-year scheme to regenerate the area and turn it into a hub for creative, hi-tech and low-carbon industries. However, this was a part of the city where few people lived or worked and even fewer visited. This problem was recognised by the coalition of governance bodies and businesses directing the vision for the zone. They determined that the area needed a new identity as an active and creative part of Bristol – to make the space a place.

This strategy resulted in a range of placemaking initiatives launching across the zone in an effort to attract investment and establish the area as a new destination in the city. One such initiative was to animate the zone by introducing temporary use activity onto an empty plot of land where development had stalled due to the economic recession. Bristol City Council chaired a series of meetings to determine what temporary use activity would take place. They invited a range of stakeholders to take part, including architects, temporary use experts, social enterprises and arts organisations. Following a series of intense discussions, a ‘top-down’ retail model was rejected in favour of a proposal from a coalition of arts and community organisations for a ‘grassroots-led’ model called Creative Common.

Creative Common was a two year placemaking project (2012-2013) that provided a big-top events space with a seasonal programme of cultural activity. The site also hosted public art, outdoor games and a pop-up bar and restaurant. One of the lead organisations behind Creative Common was The Invisible Circus, an arts organisation with its roots in squatting and activism. Since 2007, The Invisible Circus have built a reputation for transforming derelict buildings in Bristol into spaces for creative work and performance. The council and the other institutional partners that were funding the project were keen to tap into the expertise, networks and energy of these grassroots organisations, while also seeking to maintain a degree of control. Creative Common was therefore an unusual placemaking collaboration where top-down met bottom-up and this resulted in a series of tensions.

Creative Common represented a space where large hierarchical public sector bodies interacted with much smaller and more fluid grassroots organisations. At an organisational level, the groups worked at different paces, rhythms and spoke ‘different languages’. This was a point of frustration for many of the groups. There were specific problems around the release of funding and there were difficulties communicating with the council’s departmental ‘silos’ such as planning and licencing. These tensions were particularly prevalent during the early stages when lease, licensing and funding arrangements were being negotiated. Such measures placed restrictions on the kinds of cultural activities that could take place at Creative Common, which only compounded antagonism within the collaboration.

Furthermore, each partner organisation held different priorities and understandings of ‘value’. This resulted in tensions not only between the institutions and the grassroots but also within the grassroots organisations themselves. For example, one community organisation withdrew from the project and, within The Invisible Circus, several members saw their involvement in Creative Common as conflicting with the core values of the group. While a diverse set of stakeholders within these placemaking collaborations do have the potential to yield
The purpose of this piece was not to assess the impact of placemaking using temporary use (for a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of Creative Common please click here). Rather, it has highlighted some of the process-orientated challenges which may emerge when city governments choose to work with grassroots organisations on temporary placemaking projects. These collaborations present new opportunities for community and arts organisations, but they also expose them to new demands and risks. The experience of Creative Common’s first year shows that these organisations, and the city governments themselves, often lack the adequate expertise to coordinate these collaborations effectively. If the placemaking strategies of city governments are seeking to harness the energy and agility of grassroots communities, particularly those involved in temporary spatial practices, then what Creative Common demonstrates is the need for brokers who can move between these two worlds and facilitate this collaboration.

References
I saw concrete giants sleeping.
I saw glass towers shimmering.
I saw car parks reach to their gods.
I saw the vehicular pilgrimage.

I saw heritage turn charcoal.
I saw graffitii illuminate.
I saw potential furious and dirty.
I saw the Croydon I have come to know.

by

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As poetic and intriguing as this picture of Croydon may sound it is sadly not one shared by the majority. A great deal of place-making and place-butcherings has befallen Croydon since I first started exploring the town as a young man, and now as a slightly older young man working within the world of architecture I continue to see the town physically evolving. There are many spaces and experiences that make Croydon individual in the sense of place-making, and the aforementioned narrations of the town’s character are just some that have survived or mutated in order to adapt to Croydon’s hostile placemaking attitude.

Sitting muscular within London’s southern suburb, Croydon has a unique setting in that it essentially acts as an urban bridge between one of the most bustling cities in the world and the surrounding rural cushion. Cultures and kids, as well as politics and architecture clash frequently in this town and it seems that Croydon has always been wrestling with its identity, both physically and mentally. So it comes as no surprise that lengthy discussion regarding the town’s recognition as a ‘place’ to be celebrated rather than a ‘space’ to be socially quarried comes to the surface often.

The main issue it seems is that spaces in Croydon are frequently misinterpreted, and visitors often mention the pronounced greyness and deceptive corners of the town, but miss the potential for beauty behind this mask. In response I elucidate to the town’s honesty of character spoken through these spaces, and how these spaces are the innocent spatial children of the monstrous infrastructure projects that haunt vast expanses of the town. Unavoidable urban scars you could argue, that the town must choose to either heal and celebrate or bury.

The littered flyovers, underpasses and bridges are all products of Croydon’s infrastructural dissecting and as they intertwine and embrace all sorts of bespoke spaces are framed and places painted. Encouraged by the instinct to utilise these crooked and forgotten volumes nestled between the bypasses and tram lines; school football pitches, public greens, graffiti murals, favourite skate spots and quiet seating areas have all taken advantage of these invaluable opportunities. Similar to the joy of unearthing a favorite old toy found at the back of a wardrobe, in a town plagued with haste and suspicion these spaces offer both moments of function and reflection.

As a result of living amongst these stale spaces for so much time, micro communities, urban mushroom farming and hidden gig venues are just some of the dreams beginning to be realised, and Turf Projects; a young Croydon-based artistic collective is one such group that is also tackling this new placemaking challenge.

Assembled from the imagination of a mix of young people with a broad scope of aesthetic and artistic skills, I have had the exciting adventure thus far of being involved with Turf Projects’ Croydon placemaking antics, seeing the Putt-Putt #1 and #2 events, installations, public displays, or however you wish to title them, blossom in the bitterest of Croydon’s spaces.

The idea behind the Putt-Putt projects was both collaborative and interactive, using the fun activity of crazy golf and combining it with local distinction to transform spaces that were once avoided into places of mister and character. Inspired by individual faculty such as contemporary art, architecture and cartoon strips the various parties invited to design one of the crazy golf holes gave the project a collaborative artistic feel. At the same time the temporary nature of the space and the curious nature of the user provided an interactive experience that transformed what was once a transitional space into a place for distraction.

Part of the enchantment in this experimental place was the enlightening realisation that this playful friend was not to stay forever; that it would deconstruct and be but a memory of an eagle putt or a slice into a nearby drain. The wailing desperate for spatial manipulation. Like throwing pebbles into a pond, the rippling effect of multiple placemaking projects could have a magnitude of positive effects on the town; spaces that Croydon has always been striving to connect to each other gifting much needed love to the urban grain. Instead what Croydon is
facing is the devilish opposite, a heavyweight boxer’s right-hook of placemaking developments are on the horizon of a scale and mass I feel not sympathetic for the town.

An advancing series of developments are proposed to gradually flower in Croydon over the following decade, and the placemaking effects these will have are of a vastly different genre to what was seen from Putt-Putt. Shopping malls and residential towers mimicking scenes from the Judge Dredd films are just some of Croydon’s anticipated new residents and the scale of these developments brings an inevitable sense of place that is inflexible and often numb.

With such a mouth watering parade for development in Croydon there is a real risk that these new residents will physically bully much of the placemaking opportunity away from small projects like Putt-Putt. Instead these developments will ultimately rely on their boisterous presence to be a type of placemaking that dominates the landscape and its own vanity will restrict what placemaking achievements can be curated from smaller forces such as Turf Projects. These developments need to be certain that their design and orientation does not lead them to physically turn their backs on the surrounding built environment, creating spaces that are inaccessible to both human and art.

In spite of this ominous outlook there are some willing to march forward, and with spirited characters and a wide variety of expertise I have no doubt that Turf Projects will continue to thrive and inspire creative spatial use in the future. Perhaps even with the birth of a third Putt-Putt project. Additionally there are the many sparks of ideas and infant start-ups which are appearing in and around the centre of Croydon that now face a battle for attention with the large scale developments, but would undoubtedly weave a more effective place-making tapestry.

However, in the face of the previously mentioned developments it is not a placemaking battle that Croydon faces but increasingly a placemaking understanding between the David and the Goliath of unique spatial experiences that each form can bring. Only time and persistence will truly tell, and I can only hope that one day in the near future I will be able to stand at the base of an idealised Le Corbusian residential block, whilst playing a crazy golf hole that was both dreamt of and constructed by the minds of an inspired and collaborative Croydon community.
CHEERFUL PLACEMAKING SIGNS HAUNT MUCH OF WEST CROYDON by TOM WINTER
This is a story about how an idea for a linear park in Toronto, Canada came to be, how it grew into a community vision and how it has started on the long road to actually maybe happening.

**The Green Line Idea**

In the fall of 2011, I attended a community consultation with Toronto Parks Department staff and Davenport Neighbourhood Association members on an upgrade to a park in a transmission-line corridor. Although I welcome any park investments—in this case it was $20,000 for some benches and replanting—I was frustrated by the lack of vision for the entire length of the corridor. This is where the idea of the Green Line was born.

The Green Line imagines a five kilometre long linear park within a transmission-line corridor that bisects midtown Toronto. This piece of electricity infrastructure has the potential to be a pedestrian and cycling link as well as a public space and recreational area for the many neighbourhoods it connects. The Green Line passes through areas with less than one-fifth of the park space of the rest of Toronto, and there is no other available land for green space in this part of the city.

The corridor is owned by Hydro One, a public utility who already has licensed nine parcels to the City of Toronto to use as park space. As it stands, the corridor is well used by local residents and includes splash pads, sports fields, allotment gardens, parking lots and children’s playgrounds, but many of the spaces are in poor condition and the corridor does not currently provide a continuous connection due to fences, steep grade changes and eight rail underpasses along its length.
The Green Line Competition
I was able to see the potential for the transmission-line corridor, but I wanted others in the community to share this enthusiasm. Working with the Davenport Neighbourhood Association my firm, Workshop Architecture, branded the corridor the “Green Line” and created accompanying graphics with Backyard Design. We applied to arts grants and approached businesses to support a project to re-imagine this space. With funding in hand, we launched the Green Line Ideas Competition in December 2012. The competition invited artists, designers and community members to contribute to a vision for the public use of the corridor. We created the brief in consultation with our neighbourhood association and other community groups, City departments and Hydro One.

As designers at Workshop Architecture, we could have drafted our own concept for the Green Line. Instead, we ran a competition because we wanted people to see a range of ideas not just our own thoughts. The purpose of a design ideas competition is to generate several options for improving a place, to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking, to spark debate and generate public interest. For the competition we encouraged both bold ideas and practical solutions for both the electricity corridor and the adjacent streets and sidewalks. We received 77 responses from around the world—from Turkey, Korea and Australia as well as many Canadian submissions. The submissions helped to generate local interest, they ranged from the poetic (creating a butterfly highway) to sustainable (using the corridor for natural stormwater management, food production and wildlife habitats). Many submissions celebrated electricity, in the very place where it makes a visible mark across the city. Together the competition entries demonstrated the phenomenal potential for the Green Line. The entries are archived at [here](#).
The ideas proposed for the competition were not intended to be built, not even the competition winners who were selected by a jury of prominent Toronto-based urban thinkers. The Green Line ideas were instead used to start a dialogue about the corridor’s future between the decision-makers (politicians, land owners and regulators) and the people who live, work or study nearby.

We announced the winners in May 2013 at a free community barbeque in a Green Line park. The afternoon started with a walk of the Green Line as part of the annual Jane’s Walk program. Three City Councillors, local Members of Parliament and Provincial Parliament came along. They saw firsthand how hard it was for cyclists and mom’s with strollers to cross the intersections along the way. That day they vowed to get funding to install pedestrian and cycle bridges at the underpasses.

300 people came out to the Green Line event where there were drop-in workshops and an outdoor exhibit of competition entries. The proposals were hung on weatherproof boards on the park fence for the entire month. Alongside the entries we also displayed large-format photos documenting the “Green Line” which we had commissioned from Mark Kasumovic – an artist who has a vision of the power grid “as an endless modernist sculpture.”

**The Green Line’s Future**

In order to push the idea along after the design competition, I’ve been working with Toronto Park People, an independent charity that works with communities to improve Toronto’s parks. The charity received project funding from TD Bank and helped to form “Friends of the Green Line,” a group of local people interested in advocating for the project. Park People and other community partners have hosted events in the Green Line: the Reading Line event had people cycle the corridor and stop to listen to readings from local authors, a pumpkin parade by Davenport Neighbourhood Association brought families together to compare Halloween jack o’ lantern designs, and theatre company Small Wooden Shoe held a puppet show in the Green Line during Toronto’s Fringe Festival.

The dialogue has started in earnest with the community on the future of the space and it continues. From the example of other places where infrastructure corridors have been successfully re-purposed as linear public spaces—like New York’s High Line, Chicago’s 606 and Atlanta’s BeltLine, we know that inspiring the community to get behind the Green Line vision is an important first step in making these projects a reality.

The Green Line concept has really taken off amongst community members and the media. The attention on the potential of this space has helped produce forward momentum at Toronto City Hall. In 2014, City Council directed City staff to look into negotiating licensing agreements to transform the remaining parcels of land along the Green Line into park spaces. Council also approved allowing development planning tools such as density bonus funds and park levies collected on nearby developments to go towards the Green Line—a crucial source of funding and a vote of confidence in the Green Line vision.

And so the story continues and the end is not yet in sight but I already feel like I have my happy ending—nothing has been constructed but the area has already been reframed through discussion and engagement. On more than one occasion, people I’ve met for the first time have told me proudly that they live near the Green Line. I like to think the linear park already exists in people’s minds, now we are just working on improving it.
ADAPTIVE CITIES: CO-CREATING SPACES BEYOND AUSTERITY

The way in which local policy has been understood and the role of urban development projects have left a complex map of underutilized infrastructure, public facilities without financial support, failed housing developments, unfinished industrial developments and urban vacant lots for example. Climbing out of this crisis from a local policy perspective means finding ways to activate and convert these passives into public assets. The current state of permanent paralysis and widespread budget cuts which have led to a landscape of urban vacant lots, buildings and public facilities without economic and social bottom lines. The party is over and thinking cities as hardware –just build it and things will happen- has come to an end.

From an adaptive approach, cities should avoid keeping these assets out of work and expelling any alternative use to the one they were planned for. But this requires changing the mindset, regulations adapted to the new conditions and a new possibilities of using these sites, buildings and public facilities in the meantime: infrastructures, public facilities, public spaces, empty shops, new urban developments, unused roofs in residential and public buildings, etc.

In all these situations, hierarchical and formalistic understanding of planning and urban policies offers definitive and permanent solutions: keep out, close, stop, interdict... Planning for permanent circumstances and definitive solutions is what makes us feel secure even though we know cities are more and more complex and always changing systems. This way of thinking in which outputs from public policies -not process- were the core of urban action and is the kind of framework that supported the massive obsession with buildings and infrastructures. If there was a material/physical output expected, everything was legitimate. However, in current economic constraints, even when social needs are higher, cities must keep offering solutions using flexible formulas and transitional planning, and give importance to social, collaborative and grassroots processes now that big investment cannot be part of the agenda. It will be time for the imagination. It will be time for limited resources but more creative action, time for case-by-case solutions instead of pretentious long-term planning. Over the years there is an accumulated wealth of experience and knowledge on how to address tactical interventions in cities with a more adaptive, suitable, creative and participatory approach. It is a matter of raising the shutters and tearing down the fences, exploring and testing to see if there is something that can be done on those sites and buildings apart from waiting for better times to come.

This implies a mix of uncertainty, austerity, insecurity and temporality as the landscape for re-imagining the city. These conditions are present, to greater or lesser extent, in Western cities as newcomers after the financial crisis and its subsequent impact on urban development. As institutions try to understand how to face these new conditions, a wide experience of practices and appropriation projects, developed sometimes as outsiders in the previous economic stage, appear as an adequate response to give social value to neglected plots and facilities.

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This paper takes a collaborative project between art and architecture praxis ‘public works’ and performance company 30Bird. It will look at hosting as a methodology for making places within the city, where its citizens are given a platform to have a voice. This ongoing research hypothesizes if hospitable platforms and acts can define places where commitment and trust is made over time. Learning from hospitable platforms and acts, ‘public works’ is currently involved in long-term projects where citizen’s recognition for self-organization and governance can be endorsed.

The project called ‘my club’ does not fit comfortably within a distinct discipline but sits within participatory art, performance, installation and urban thinking. It is exactly this freedom of the project away from its disciplinary boundaries that enables it to commit to its context, its politics and sociability. It can focus its efforts in place making rather than compliance to disciplinary values and modes of operation. I will not describe this project through its formal aesthetic but rather through the process of it, as a place of hosting and its hospitable acts in the city.

Derrida talks about the rights and duties of hospitality having always existed across the family, civil society and the state and these are the spaces one needs to occupy or work with in complex place making. In many ‘public works’ projects taking the role of the host rather than an architect, urbanist or artist portrays a different self-image to the local citizen. The generosity of hosting without wanting anything back, but rather providing a place to meet, talk and build trust is the key factor in acting hospitably in the city.

In order to understand conditions of hospitality one needs to understand its laws of invitation. A hospitable act requires a guest. In the context of the city the guest is a ‘stranger’. A hospitable act as a way of engaging with a stranger is in itself a complex structure which primarily requires: a) a place b) an invitation c) several strangers

In this short text I will not talk about the complex institutional depths of invitation and its threshold conditions or the social conditions of the ‘stranger’ but rather focus on the place of hosting and its spatiality in relation to the project ‘my club’.

‘my club’ ran from 2010 - 2012 always connected to a citywide festival and always in a different location:

‘my club’ was situated in the main public park in Southend in 2010 and took the form of a ‘tea room’ as a place of hosting. (See fig 1)

In 2011 ‘my club’ was situated in the main public square in Southend and took the form of a living room as a place of hosting and making.

In 2012 it was situated in Watford high street as a place that performed hospitable acts rather than hosting itself. (See fig 3) Each one of these situations created a very different hospitable condition, each very much related to the condition of hosting, as well as the spatiality of the truck and the context it was situated in the city.

In this article I will concentrate on the ‘tea rooms’ in Priory Park as part of the Polish festival in Southend. The ‘tea room’ on the flat bed of an antique Bedford Truck, a reference to the Polish exodus of the 1940s from Siberia to Iran, where the Poles were hosted for
three years, was a defined space with a clear enclosure. Due to its semi private and elevated condition the ‘tea room’ became a place a guest/stranger had to be invited. It was the place where the guests through accepting the invitation to ascend, accept the laws of engagement: to sit around a table, drink tea and talk about the story of the exodus then about Southend and their life within it. They discussed what they desired to change.

Once the act of hosting which was intimate ended, the ‘tea room’ opened up, to the wider public. Key ideas written on the notice board on its wall made the place look outward, communicating thoughts of its previous guests to potential new ones. Although its wall actively working, the empty space of hosting posed as a theatre set waiting to perform.

The ‘tea room’ opening itself up to the public realm as described above gave articulation to the place in front of the truck on the ground floor. The place at the ground floor was unconditional; it was where informal encounters with strangers took place. This place was, where people met for the first time, hung out, chatted, and engaged with the content on the table. This content varied from historical references to the exodus to material about the city and its public places. The use of small printed materials on the table rather than large images as in an exhibition meant that people sat around and engaged at a much more intimate level than
passive spectators. The intimacy of the conversations made the rather open space in front of the truck feel like a contained room rather than an undefined expanse of public space.

At the ground level at this unconditional space, it was best to observe the situation. Over time collective interests form and it is these collective interests that bring a group of people together under a common interest. Due to the context of the Polish festival, gaining common ground was much easier than in the public space of the city, where interests are dispirit. In the city hospitable place and hospitable acts would require months before true common interests are gained.

In ‘public works’ our current methodology in placemaking is to create platforms to host citizens over a 2-3 year period. These platforms as described consist of:

1- Conditional semi public places of hosting,
2- Unconditional places, hosting strangers to find common interest
3- Threshold between the conditional and unconditional where citizen empowerment can evolve

The threshold between the conditional place of hosting and the unconditional place of meeting a stranger, where one gathers common interest is where citizen commitment can start. This threshold is a deep space, which is both fragile and precarious. It is a space that needs understanding; it is a space where laws of invitation are practiced. It is a place that can lead to resilient citizens within a city.
My parents have a caravan in Budle Bay. It is an older style site of around twenty vans on the North East coast of Northumberland. Looking out to sea, the front window frames the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. As a child, the island was a picture populated by memories of day trips. Of the beaches, the castle and the pub. In 2013 I was invited by Newcastle University to undertake research on the island as part of an interdisciplinary knowledge exchange partnership exploring the role of art and music in rural development. After living in the North West for many years, I was pleased to come home to undertake the research. The island has a population of around 120. A place of historic and environmental significance, multiple management agendas are coordinated by the Holy Island Partnership (HIP). Initially, like other ‘management’ professionals, I made day trips coordinated with the tide timetable. At a community group meeting convened by HIP, I introduced myself as a conduit to the university and asked if residents would be interested in exploring the possibilities of art. After some discussion, workshops were suggested as a good way to get people together, share skills and explore the island from the island’s perspective. To undertake the work residents tell me I need to get to know the place. More
than making professional visits, they tell me I need to be there: to stay ‘across the tide’.

During regular residential trips I am told about the complexities of land ownership; about being overrun by visitors; that there are two ‘badies’ – the council and Natural England; feeling crowded; feeling open; the birds; the land; the tide. How the tide governs the island. A barman tells me that tourists regularly ask how they cope when the tide comes in and they can’t get off. He laughs: ‘We tell them that they are looking at it the wrong way, when the tide comes in, you can’t get on! We are left in peace, the way we like it’. One hot Saturday the gift shop owner suggests I go for a walk. I trace the parameter of the island looking for places I had been told about. I got burnt. ‘You’ve been marked’ said the owner of the B&B I was staying with. Rather than being on the island as a ‘professional’, my ethnographic field notes trace me deeper in it. My experience of the island becomes enlivened. No longer a picture to view, and more than a platform for the work of managers. I notice the island at work. In crossing the tide, I become part of its workings. One member of the steering group tells me that she would be interested in dance classes. She thinks the teenage girls on the island might be too. She suggests I meet their families.

I am told about a community archive group. I talk to members about ways of archiving. We talk about recording the island in sounds. Other residents are interested in drawing and painting. There used to be an art group, but not anymore. Drawing on conversations with steering group members and other residents, five artists were invited to develop three-hour workshop sessions: to ‘map the island’ from the island’s perspective. 25 three-hour workshops were held over the summer: photography, dance, performance, sonic mapping, and drawing and painting. 20 out of 120 residents took part. I also participated. John Dewey (1934) suggests that it is common to recognise that ‘physical’ (outer) materials such as paint, stone and plastic are altered through art, but that we do not readily account for the change in our (inner) ‘human’ materials. I try to account for my inner alterations. I take film footage, I write about my experience. Touching sticks, touching flesh. Hands. Feet. Hearing the sea, the sand, breathing.

As a regular short-term resident, I worked amidst everyday practice: between the land, the people, the birds, the wind, the tide, rocks, stone, salt. I had a sense of multiplicity as part of a network of human and non-human associations. The community, not set apart from the beach or shingle, but acting together, in living. As a participant in the workshops my ‘living room’ unfolds. I am taken further in amidst a ‘meshwork’ (Ingold 2011) of relationships. Rather than engaging residents to think about the landscape development plans, the workshops engage us with landscape through doing, with. Our knowledge grows together through our engagement with sand, salt, the sea, the tide and other beings.

At the end of the workshops, the documentation and work produced was presented in an exhibition. After packing up, with sadness, I say my goodbyes. As I open the car door, a teenage boy from a family who I had been closely involved shouted: Julie, will you come back as you? Pierced by this question, my research continues to consider: How to articulate the intimacies of art practice? How to account for the alterations produced in ourselves? How to translate these knowledge shifts between academics, professionals and community contexts?

Based on a paper given at Royal Geographical Society 2015 conference.

References:
Koalition der Freien Szene (KFS, Coalition of the Independent Scene), founded in early 2012, brings together Berlin-based artists from a variety of artistic genres: dance, drama, performance, visual arts, music, literature and poetry. Its principle political goal is to sustain the diverse and internationally renowned production of contemporary art in Berlin. Their common claims were condensed into a ten-Point-Plan in March 2012, suggesting to re-organize cultural funding mechanisms for Berlin’s artists.

In the context of introducing a ‘City Tax’, a charge levied on tourist overnight stays and implemented in 2014, KFS requested to invest parts of the generated ‘fresh money’ into the cultural landscape; more precisely into independent cultural projects and initiatives, which currently receive only 5 per cent of the Cultural Budget. KFS related their claims to reform and expanded support for the independent art scene with the argument that Berlin’s cultural richness is one of the main attractions for tourism. Thus, the City Tax appeared to offer a solution to the dilemma of the arts in Berlin, producing great symbolic and material capital in and for the city, but at the same time being an arts scene increasingly endangered by the effects of upscaling, rising rents and an increasing scarcity of available free (inner-city) space.
KFS’s Campaign – A Fleeting Protest

In August and September 2013, KFS launched their first political campaign displaying a variety of communicative and spatial strategies, including an artistic intervention in front of Berlin’s Philharmonic Orchestra, an online black-screen-strike; temporary video projections on cultural institutions; and, as final event, a protest march. The group, disseminating two slogans: Firstly, ‘Fleeting Protest’ (spirit is more video projections, and Geist was visible on placards and in disseminated two slogans: Firstly, a protest march. The group institutions; and, as final event, an online intervention in front of Berlin’s strategies, including an artistic campaign displaying a variety in August and September 2013, Fleeting Protest displayed the group’s (part of) ‘the Spirit’, without further specifying which or what kind of spirit is referred to, while at the same time distancing itself from ‘the Capital’ which in the widest sense can be understood as the art market and the commodification of artistic products (or artistic work in general). The dichotomy between ‘Them/the Capital and ‘Us/the Spirit enables Berlin’s artists to form loose identifications with ‘the Spirit’, ‘the Capital’ building a sort of constitutive outside. I argue that KFS’s choice of protest strategies and symbols strikingly illustrates and supports their second slogan. Furthermore, these mediums of protest display the group’s underlying understanding of s( )p(l)ace.

II. Temporarily Appropriating City Surface; KFS used video projections of their logo to temporarily highlight the presence of KFS and tag the cityscape with their claims. Projecting their logos and slogans onto known cultural institutions that receive institutional funding from the Senate for Cultural Affairs, KFS used place as an ephemeral resource, conducting a quiet and transitory occupation of space which is far from being aggressive, shocking or violent.

II. Blackening the Web: Over the course of four weeks, over 250 participating independent cultural initiatives blackened their websites. This not only cut off the public’s access to information concerning the cultural offer from the independent scene, but also demonstrated KFS’s extension of protest into the digital sphere. This temporary, notably voluntary withdrawal stressed what the disappearance and/or loss of the independence scene would virtually look like. Interestingly, exactly this measure increased the visibility of KFS, as it created a lot of media attention.

III. Firefighting For Endangered Spaces: Throughout the whole campaign, KFS used a fire truck, the Freespace Berlin Mobile, to tour the city to those places ‘where it is burning’, i.e. cultural and creative hotspots facing closure or eviction. This mobile vehicle, initially intended to create a physical meeting point for information about KFS’s claims, became one of the most memorable symbols associated with KFS. For example, when the truck parked in front of City Parliament during the meetings of the Cultural Committee, silently marking the no-protest-zone in front of Parliament, it nonetheless demonstrated the physical presence of KFS and their claims. Overall, KFS’s protest has temporarily disturbed the visual representation of the city by subtly tagging the cityscape with their logos and slogans. The group has established itself as a tangible, addressable actor even though they cannot and do not want to be located geographically. KFS is and remains a little bit all over Berlin. This addressability which escapes the logic of representation also becomes manifest in their understanding of legitimation: none of the spokespersons is formally elected, their legitimation arises “qua activity”, as Knoch points out: “I like the expression of a porte-parole, somebody who carries our claims in front of her”. Furthermore, KFS has started to re-negotiate both material and virtual space. The former is explicitly targeted in the Ten-Point-Plan, requesting a re-definition of property politics (Liegenschaftspolitik), as the increasing scarcity of available (inner-city) space for cultural production and presentation has politicized the usage and availability of space in general, calling into question who uses inner-city space for what purposes and how to deal with the increase of upscale usages in the city center. In addition to the transitory campaign, KFS’s demands remain existent in a concrete catalogue of demands, a document whose form, logic and language respond to that of the politico-administrative realm more directly.

The interruption of KFS’s success story took place in November 2013, when the final Budget Proposal contained a modified phrasing of the deployment of the City Tax and declared that only ‘surplus income’, generated beyond the expected 25MEuros, would be spent on independent cultural projects. In short, the 2014/2015 Budget passed without granting the independent scene additional funding from the City Tax. After this period of creating a high visibility for KFS as political actor, the group continues their work on a less visible path, following a concentrated approach to discuss their claims with the new State Secretary for Culture Tim Renner. As the final Budget Proposal 2016/2017 will be submitted for discussion in fall 2015, KFS thinks about another campaign: “Maybe next time”, Knoch reflects, “we have to work with stones, with engravings, with durable paint – things that leave marks.” What forms of expression will be taken up this time to demonstrate how culture shapes the city, remains for us to be seen.
Breathing a bit of life back into the blocks
CULTURAL PLACE MAKING IN THE INNER CITY

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Balsall Heath is an inner city area of Birmingham, UK. It is a place with a rich history that figures in various ways in the cultural and political imaginary of the city. Notable for its diversity, Balsall Heath has welcomed a range of migrant communities, with Yemeni groups settling in the 1940s followed by Pakistani and Syhlet Bengalis arriving from the mid-1950s. More recent arrivals are migrants from Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia who establish themselves alongside the long-term and enduring presence of Irish and Caribbean groups.

Identified by the City Council as a priority neighbourhood for attention and intervention through a number of mechanisms, Balsall Heath records some of the highest levels of social and environmental deprivation in the UK.

In addition to these characteristics, this is a place that has attracted attention on a number of occasions, often focussed on a range of irruptions resulting from social and cultural conflicts. For instance, in the 1990s, Balsall Heath's reputation as a red-light district led to a well-publicised mobilisation by some community members to protest against prostitutes working on the streets and from houses in the area (Hubbard 2002). More recently, its schools have been the object of a wider investigation into an alleged take-over plot to provide a fundamentalist education in schools with a largely Islamic student body.

Alongside its multiple deprivations, such instances draw attention to the manner in which the sphere of culture in Balsall Heath is an object of policy attention from a number of agencies, including the City Council. Predicated on a ‘deficit model’ of cultural activity, the neighbourhood has witnessed the importation of a wealth of arts programmes. These have sought to engage the disadvantaged and ‘hard-to-reach’ in creative activities and with a number of purposes, not least of all in seeking to enhance community and a sense of place (for a summary of this kind of policy approach, see: Jancovich & Bianchini, 2013; Bell & Oakley, 2014).

In light of this framework, it should be noted that with its cheap rents and property, Balsall Heath has been a home to the City’s bohemians and indeed has historical associations with the surrealist movement while the local Moseley School of Art nurtured a wealth of creative talent. Thus, while policy and the projects it authorizes might assume to enculture this place, there is much that emerges organically that aids in creative placemaking. Such work draws from and gives Balsall Heath its distinctive character, not always recognizable within the terms of conventional aesthetic directives and expectations. That said, the often overt ‘othering’ of this place in public policy and in it wider representations from without is something to which one needs to be reflexively resistant.

A signal figure, whose work and activity is instructive in dealing with such issues and in the cultural making of place here, is the artist Mohammed Ali. Under the umbrella title of Aerosol Arabic and through the auspices of the organization Soul City Arts which he founded, Ali’s aim is to establish a permanent space for creative activity in and by the local community while welcoming those from across the city and further afield to participate.

Ali’s artistic practice evinces this commitment and generous sensibility. It takes its stylistic cue from the style of graffiti street art and its associations with hip-hop culture. This is art that emerges from public space and which is best presented there in the form of large-scale murals that sat initially amidst the streets he grew up in and lately have been installed around the world. Whether in New York, Chicago, Toronto, Melbourne, Dubai or elsewhere, Ali’s work is produced with reference to the specificity of each locality and the particular character he discovers there and enlists from collaborators in each community.

Ali describes his work in terms of ‘Art bursting outside of the gallery spaces’; it is ‘accessible, an art form for the people’. The Aerosol Arabic website cites descriptions of his approach as one ‘challenging the oft-heard term “clash of civilisations” with his fusion of street-art and Islamic script, along with conscious messages that speak to people of different faith traditions’.

Art
This ethos is evident in the work Ali has produced in the area of Balsall Heath and its neighbouring areas of Small Heath, Sparkbrook and Moseley. This work draws on these places in its aesthetic statement and in its presence on the walls of each area adds to the nature of place and variety of cultural possibilities. In one video statement he ponders the colourful nature and imagery any public work, officially sanctioned or otherwise, suggesting that ‘surely that does have an impact on the way we think, the way we feel’. Certainly, he champions the value of his own murals as ‘breathing a bit of life back into the breeze blocks’ of the built environment which both shelters, nurtures and perhaps limits in turn.

Reproduced below, for instance are images of a mural at the junction of Ladypool and Highgate Roads, right at the heart of the Balsall Heath area.

The signifiers of this mural speak to the transmutations of place, of how this operates at a number of physical and cultural levels, between the infrastructure of built environment and the ‘structures of feeling’ of everyday life. The vibrant palette expresses Ali’s ideas about the life-affirming impact of and attention grabbing aspects of public art.

The mural has a personal dimension for him in referencing the local BSA factory where, like many other post-war migrants, the offer of work brought his own father from Pakistan to Birmingham, to aid in the maintenance of industrial production. In its current form, the Birmingham Small Arms Company (or BSA), barely compare with its heyday as an industrial giant but the company acknowledges its heritage, and in so doing indicates its signification for many in Balsall Heath, other neighbourhoods and communities understood in a variety of ways:

‘The story is not entirely one of steady progress and expansion; there is drama and excitement too. And because BSA has served its country more directly than most private concerns, its story is also part of Britain’s history.’

The placing of Ali’s imposing and unmissable ‘canvas’ around a derelict industrial site and scrapyard in part disguises yet offers a contrapuntal comment on what has been lost in the nature of contemporary work.

Yet what has been lost have given way in turn to new types of endeavour in the area. For some, this comes in the form of the service industry, as the labour represented by BSA has given way to the restaurant and other enterprises.

Even while some physical spaces remain relatively untouched, soundscapes, smells and the essential rhythms of life may be added to or alter as a result of migration. For instance, perhaps as a direct result of a demographic shift many public houses – a traditional focus point for certain kinds of community activity - have closed and given way to new uses and users. Balsall Heath’s Ladypool Road is central to an area that is marketed by city agents as the ‘Balti Triangle’ in recognition of the high concentration of restaurants there serving South Asian cuisine. Alongside the many fabric and fashion businesses servicing the cultural dispositions of the migrant community (See:
Sardar, 2012), such features evince the manner in which migration remakes place. Nonetheless, there in the mural, alongside the dome of the mosque and minaret (are they here, or glimpsed as memories from another home?), is the high street vegetable stall that still services all of the community, even if some of its offer appears relatively new to UK shores and tastes. And there too, is an ornate, spouted pot, reminding spectators of that most traditional of ‘English’ habits imported with Empire and shared now between cultures: tea drinking.

Here Ali espouses a relatively benign view of the rub of faiths and cultures (although of course, the BSA’s products hint at a troubling history servicing the conquest of Empire). Yet, as the instances of cultural conflict cited above suggest, placemaking can be a fraught process involving questions of rights, expression, belonging and conformity. This fraught quality is certainly one often acknowledged directly by Ali in his work, such as the rush of images and voices of the multimedia Conflict of Silence.

As culture plays a part in placemaking, Ali’s work suggests how to speak to issues arising while contributing to a sense of place, aesthetically, enhancing while commenting on it. It emerges organically and sensitively from the locations in which it is produced and in this instance, is all the more compelling for its personal dimensions. How and where are these aspects seen and heard by policy makers and by the communities to whom they are is directed? The value and signification of such works in a wider sense of place are matters undergoing further investigation.

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This article emerges from work conducted under the auspices of the AHRC-funded project Cultural Intermediation and the Creative Economy.
Urban vacant spaces have somehow become synonymous with the idea of informal appropriation as a widely applied tactic in reclaiming unused land, and, increasingly, as a new approach for community-driven urban redevelopment. The reclamation of vacant land as territories range from subversive actions that are conventionally pushed to hidden places in the city, to widely accepted and appreciated interventions of the so-called creative class, who enjoy the regulatory freedom of these spaces.

While this trend has long been established in the European and North American contexts, Tokyo is not widely known for temporary activations such as gardens, galleries, bars and ski schools, and so far only very urban voids have been activated. The recent publication Tokyo Void—Possibilities in Absence uncovers that out of the roughly 180 observed urban voids only a handful support innovative temporary uses. We suggest that one reason lies in the contrast of these spaces to other places: Tokyo’s urban voids are typically very small. As a consequence, vacant sites remain largely hidden and unnoticed. What might be more important are notions of ownership and the cultural practice of respect for property that defies informal appropriation tactics used in European cities.

Nevertheless innovative practices emerge, that could be used to redefine a notion of placemaking. In the following paragraphs we briefly outline two exemplary projects.

Kasu Harappa Ondi is a rental vacant space located in the quiet neighborhood of Yanaka—a beautiful area of low-rise residential housing, shops, and temples. With fifty-three square meters, Ondi represents one of the vacant spaces that are so ubiquitous in Tokyo, and blends itself so well into the surrounding context that one could pass it without even recognizing its rather unusual setup. Only a thin rope indicates the demarcation line between public and private, and with its graveled surface, cleared of any major vegetation, we could easily misread the site as ordinary vacant space waiting for development or as parking lot for the residents living nearby.

Since its inception in 2006, Ondi hosts events almost every weekend during the year. The increasing interest among ordinary Tokyotimes, who host and participate in these events, not only demonstrates the popularity of this project but also signifies a new trend in the utilization of vacant spaces.
reflects the immense potential of alternative practices as inspiration for creative action and bringing people together. Ondi realizes its vision of a lively and engaging neighborhood and provides a viable activation strategy appropriate to Tokyo’s urban and cultural condition. Architect Toshiyuki Makizumi owns and manages the space through a simple booking system of email and a quick meeting to discuss details and requirements.

In addition to the innovation of place making processes in the specific context of Tokyo, Ondi opens discussions about the physical qualities and materiality of Tokyo’s vacant spaces. The project name plays with the association surrounding the words harappa and Ondi. The first word refers to the state of vacancy while the latter translates as ‘sound of soil’ and indicates an appreciation of the natural beauty and material quality of vacant sites. A Butoh dance performance, held on site in the summer of 2009, exemplified this quality of depth and openness in the unsealed surface. During the performance, the strangeness of light and shadow reflected in wet dirt met with the often absurd and extreme expressions of Butoh and created an experiential quality of the play that could hardly have been achieved on a conventional theater stage. It is precisely these material qualities that offer real momentum for unpredictable, serendipitous activity and experiences in Tokyo—a city dominated by concrete and asphalt.

On a different scale, Tokyo Picnic Club (TPC) vividly engages the idea of active outdoor recreation in the metropolis. Through their picnic events, the group explores the conditions that enable picnics in Tokyo and offers a striking critique of contemporary parks in the city. The picnic is a powerful metaphor for engaged use of outdoor space as social medium. It requires preparation, thought, creativity, the idea of a location, and social connectedness. TPC even goes so far as to critique Tokyo’s ubiquitous convenience: instant food and unsustainable packaging. For their events, they do not allow plastic sheets to sit on and all food has to be homemade. TPC is always searching for new places where they can hold their picnics. While they have never used a public park for their events, they have used a variety of vacant sites. What Tokyo Picnic Club might teach us is that the shift in the perception and use of public space sits within the user. The user brings desires for social interaction and leisure outdoors, and the space needs to function as a medium that allows multiple flexible uses. These ideas also refer back to the possibilities urban voids possess, the capacity to operate as non-programmed spaces that could fulfill alternative functions of public space.

Considering Tokyo’s urban voids part of a continuous landscape system, these spaces can be regarded a palimpsest of interference and noninterference, a live laboratory of occupations in Tokyo. This capacity is astounding and should be considered a powerful tool to read Tokyo as an ecosystem. In abstracting the notion of ecology and using this in considering urban systems, it will be possible to uncover layer upon layer of diverse and connected socio-economic and environmental entities. Even small and dispersed spaces are connected by climatic conditions, water flows, topography and sub-cultures, neighborhood identities.

Urban voids hold a seductive promise: to make the city, to occupy spaces, to define endless possibilities. However, operating outside a formal commissioning process, seeing a possibility is one step, action in context the next. Ondi in Yanaka could be parking space as countless others, here vision and individual ownership allowed the events that inspired others in turn. The contextual aspects of culture, socio-economic dynamics form the framework for all informal and formal actions. In that sense referring back to a 100-year old tradition of picnic and a simple rental system might change Tokyo and the idea of place making.
On September 28, 2014, Hongkongers took back their streets. Unhappy with the Hong Kong government's proposal for democratic reforms, people flooded the streets. They were greeted by tear gas, which encouraged even more sympathizers to join them. By the end of the night, large sections of Hong Kong’s central districts had been barricaded and occupied by protesters. The police retreated. For the next 79 days, a new city emerged, defined by protest zones in three important neighbourhoods: Causeway Bay, a major shopping hub; Admiralty, an office district that is also home to the city’s new government headquarters; and Mongkok, a roiling melting pot with a seedy reputation.

I have lived in Hong Kong for nearly seven years, but I was away for the tumultuous first few weeks of the demonstrations, which came to be known as the Umbrella Revolution. By the time I returned, the occupied areas had become entrenched. When I first visited the Admiralty site, located on a normally traffic-clogged artery called Harcourt Road, I was astonished to see it had become a self-organized tent city that some people were calling Umbrella Square. Volunteer carpenters used scrap furniture and bamboo rods to create staircases across highway barriers. There were libraries, study desks, stages. Art was everywhere: street scenes and portraits of activists were taped to walls and fences, not to mention the many political cartoons denouncing Beijing and the Hong Kong government. On one edge of the government headquarters, a curving concrete staircase was covered in messages of multi-coloured Post-It messages of support. It was called the Lennon Wall after the late Liverpudlian peacenik.

If Admiralty was personified by middle-class students and office workers, Mongkok was its chain-
smoking working-class cousin. The atmosphere was edgier but the diverse mix of people made it more vital; passers-by stopped to read posters and chat with protesters. The Mongkok site extended down Nathan Road, a major artery that had been liberated from the diesel fumes that normally cloud its air. There was a makeshift altar to Kwan Yu, the Chinese god of war, which attracted worshippers who planted fresh incense throughout the day. Just a few metres away, a group of Catholic protesters had built a shrine that came to be known as St. Francis’ Chapel on the Street.

Hong Kong is one of the world’s most densely populated cities, but there is a shortage of good public space. Public parks are burdened by restrictions: no kite flying, no music playing, no dogs. Less than 10 percent of the population owns a car, yet pedestrians are treated as second-class citizens, forced onto narrow sidewalks hemmed in by metal fences, with few trees, benches or places to linger comfortably. Air pollution grows worse by the year. Yet life thrives between the cracks of this oppressive façade. The unforgiving nature of Hong Kong’s urban environment has forced its people to improvise: back alley gatherings on household furniture, market stalls expanded with styrofoam boxes and umbrella awnings. When people flooded the streets
to protest on September 28, there was no obvious destination – no Tahrir Square, no Gezi Park. So Hongkongers did what they knew how to do best: they made their own civic space.

In its final months, Occupy Hong Kong was not just a protest for democracy – it was an exercise in democratic placemaking. In some way, big or small, there was an answer to everything that is wrong with Hong Kong’s urban environment. Air pollution declined by 80 percent in Admiralty after cars were banished from the roads. Freed from traffic, the streets were filled with people who developed a community; even anti-Occupy people had their own corner in Mongkok where they gathered and swapped conspiracy theories about CIA involvement in the protest. Next to the Lennon Wall, an entire roadside planter full of bushes was replaced by an organic farm growing seasonal vegetables. For anyone who had ever dreamed of a friendlier, more democratic and more equitable Hong Kong, Occupy was a kind of paradise.

It was bound to be short-lived. After initial attempts to clear the occupied zones by force resulted in failure, the government relied on a number of third parties, including bus and taxi companies, to file suit against the protesters in court, claiming the road closures had affected their business. Mongkok was cleared on November 25 and 26; as the police sprayed protesters with liquid tear gas, one activist reportedly knelt before the St. Francis Chapel, performed the sign of the cross and sprinted away with the crucifix. Admiralty was cleared on December 11 and Causeway Bay four days later.

The clearance had an air of vengefulness about it. Banners were destroyed; libraries were demolished. The farm that had been planted at Admiralty was uprooted; a few days later, the government’s Secretary for Security, Lai Tung-kwok, fumed in the Legislative Council that protesters had “turned over the soil in roadside planters for planting,” seemingly unaware of the irony of his complaint. If Occupy could be seen as form of placemaking, the clearance was the attempted elimination of place: once the tents and posters and gathering places had been cleared away, Umbrella Square was once again a funnel for traffic and nothing more. In the days after the clearance, I began to see Hong Kong’s polluted, traffic-clogged streets as a form of social repression. Free thought cannot survive in a city of dead spaces.

It seems the protesters were less cynical than me. After the occupied areas were cleared, government officials encouraged the public to spend money in local businesses. Protesters responded by organizing pro-democracy “shopping trips” that seemed to flummox the government, which employed its best doublespeak in decrying them as a form of “mobile occupation”. Police tied themselves into knots trying to explain that the public was allowed to shop, but not if they were carrying yellow umbrellas or chanting pro-democracy slogans.

It also turned out that the new places invented during Occupy weren’t so ephemeral after all. Though the posters were removed from the Lennon Wall on December 11, people returned and again to mount pro-democracy artwork, only to have it removed by police or government cleaners. It became a game of cat and mouse that ended when the police detained a 14-year-old girl for drawing a chalk flower on the wall. After they placed her in a children’s home and applied to have her father stripped of custody, the public outcry was intense. Activists began staging “mobile Lennon Walls” by decorating themselves in pro-democracy Post-It notes. The police eventually relented and declared they would not prevent anyone from drawing on the Lennon Wall, unless specifically asked to do so by the city’s parks department, which manages the site.

Place is an invention, a stage play that requires the belief and commitment of its actors. Before Occupy, the Lennon Wall was a non-descript staircase that went nowhere in particular. Now it is a site of symbolic resistance against an unaccountable government, a symbol so potent, the authorities went to extreme lengths to keep sticky notes and chalk drawings off a bare concrete wall. One of the greatest and most unexpected legacies of the Umbrella Movement has been the creation of new places that are nowhere in particular. Now it is a non-descript staircase that went nowhere in particular. Now it is a site of symbolic resistance against an unaccountable government, a symbol so potent, the authorities went to extreme lengths to keep sticky notes and chalk drawings off a bare concrete wall. One of the greatest and most unexpected legacies of the Umbrella Movement has been the creation of new places that are nowhere in particular.

Images of this time by Christopher DeWolf can be found here.
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