Introduction

Making in contemporary perception is related to the act of producing small objects, machines or apps without the help of professionals. If one expands the definition, making can also relate to defining places as well as making things happen. This essay explores the notion of making places at different scales. The first part of this essay offers an exploration of what encompasses place and the making of it while the second part discusses the Placemaking movement and how it reflects a culture of making.

Place-a definition (Introduction)

In the age of the maker movement, focus lies on the generation and production of small objects, machines and apps, produced by individuals often without much outside help. The idea of professional and individual craft and making is of course not new — it is undergoing a comeback, valuing the pleasure of a problem solved or an object produced with one’s own hands. While the building of machines, objects and software certainly might prove satisfying, the making (and land improvements) of our physical environment might be exponentially more important. While general perception might reserve the design of our built environment to urban planners, architects and builders, people have always been involved on a domestic and a neighborhood scale as active citizens. However, making is not limited to dealing with objects or spaces but can be expanded to place. This essay will explore tools with which place is made and lay out the principles of the “placemaking” movement currently present in many of our urban environments.

The term place has been coined around 1200, “space, dimensional extent, room, area,” from Old French place “place, spot” and directly from Medieval Latin plana “place, spot,” from Latin platea “courtyard, open space; broad way, avenue,” from Greek platia (hodos) “broad (way),” fem. of platys “broad” (see plaice (n.)). [1] It extent, room, area,” from Old French place “place, spot” and currently present in many of our urban environments.

The Marker

The physical layers of place cannot be separated from the immaterial layers of interpretation, memory and experience. Physical place typically remains stable, whereas the immaterial components are highly diverse, individual and constantly evolving. Man makes places and can go through circles of use and abandonment. Natural place might be more permanent. While the definition of “place” and “out of place” if they don’t fit a certain context. Discussions within the fields of architecture and urbanism usually expand beyond the physicality of space that is separated from the vast natural world to contain also experiences and interpretations, thus combining human narrative and physical environment. Place is spatial and temporal and exists in so-called reality in representations and in people’s minds.

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Phenomenological approaches, such as the exploration of the famous Genius Loci or spirit of place by Christian Norberg-Schulz related the intrinsic nature of certain places to expressions of human culture. According to him, “by the means of the building the place... gets ‘extension and delimitation’.” [2] Attaching character to every place, defined by material and formal configuration, Norberg-Schulz acknowledges the inclusion of country, region, landscape and buildings into his definition. [3] He acknowledges changes to the notion of place in 1986 that have since become even more profound: “The concept of ‘place’ has recently been given much attention by those who discuss problems of urban design and architecture. In the past, it was meaningful to describe the human environment in terms of stable places, such as house, city and country. Today, however, we tend to free ourselves from these structures in order to live a more mobile life. The technical means of communication liberate us from the direct physical contact with others, and the modern means of transportation allow an ever increasing number of persons to move about.” [4] He also issues a warning that shows the impact of place on architecture: “When place is abolished, however, we simultaneously abolish architecture.” [5] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, writes: “When successful, architecture allows for participation in meaningful action, conveying to the participant an understanding of his or her place in the world.” Therefore architecture not only can bring out the cultural conditions of a society by inhabiting and building out a place in a certain region, it also ‘places’ us, assigning meaning and providing integration.

Making

Most of us not only continuously make things and make things happen (food, writings, organizational efforts, drawings, etc.) but we also frequently define places (our homes’ interiors, workplace and work surfaces, trains, cars, etc.). We shape our living and work spaces within buildings and in yards or gardens outside of them. We temporarily impact the urban realm or even the rural expanse by the way we inhabit those areas, as well. We argue that the mechanisms of making place are part of a larger, ongoing movement that suggests a trend to actively engage with the real world, complemented by a strong shift of work, education and life into the virtual world of computers and smart phones – phenomena that span from the more dehumanization of an area to the object and the act of artmaking, thus articulating contemporary culture or placemaking within the urban context.

The Making of “Place”–Elements:

The Marker

“Place” exists without humans and can be found in nature and landscape such as memorable valleys and beaches, types of vegetation and geological features or individual trees or rocks. These characteristics define place in powerful and captivating ways, distinguishing one area from another or forming regional identities. For the purpose of this exploration we will look at how man made interventions create places for humans to use. Elements found in nature or implemented by humans define and articulate a specific spot that becomes recognizable, starts acting as a ritual or gathering spot. These elements tell stories in stone or wood, defining a small spot in the endless cosmos or recording observations related to celestial configurations and rhythms. Early humans erected upright large rocks as markers and further functions we can only speculate about as the ones in Carnac, at Stonehenge or on the Easter Islands.

The Marker

Japanese Stone Marker in Kyoto, Japan (Left)

Tori Gate, Kyoto, Japan (Right)
A manmade marker can relate to a ritual procession accompanied by a sequence of shrines along pilgrimage roads or might identify a remarkable site (spring, mountain top, valley, shaped rock) and ritual evolves around it. In Japanese tradition, a marker can also be taken from its natural environment in order to create a place elsewhere. The prototype of such a space may be a stone or a post. Detached from its original surroundings, it receives a definite place, character, by being erected or positioned. As a result the stone expresses more than its original and natural accidental form. Wishes are projected into matter, making spirit out of stone. In other words, the stone is space for spirit. It is animated by a meaning projected by human beings. [6]

Festivals and ritual events shape cultural identity and document social structures. They become imprinted in built places. For example, in Ancient Egypt, the Opet Festival celebrated the fertility of the gods. Statues of Amon and his family were carried in boats on a complex itinerary between the temples of Karnak and Luxor, along which all stations were manifested architecturally as paths or shrines accompanying the route and its activities. Martin Heidegger explains how a marker is involved in generating place: “The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream.” [7] Only the bridge makes it obvious that the banks lay across from each other, it gathers the passage, marks two points and links to a larger network of connections. These connections are links between places of commerce and culture – the bridge articulates the nature of things, it is symbol and thing. [8] The marker in the city can be a monument or memorial carrying information about a past event or a personality of importance – it marks a place and creates a reference beyond the physical area.

The Fence as (sacred) enclosure

The above-mentioned marker, a pole, rock or sculpture articulates a place that does not necessarily include an area. It is merely a location from which rituals, activities and memories are recorded or will emerge. As humans turned from hunting and gathering as their food source to settling and cultivating crops and cattle, defined enclosures, marked portions of space start playing an important role. Vertical surfaces or arrangements of poles were added to their environment to mark property, develop agriculture (cultivating crops in fields), keep cattle in captivity and identify spiritual places to connect to beyond their earthly existence. In contrast to the animal pens for agriculture, early ritual sites were defined by a temenos, a piece of land separated from common uses and dedicated as a sanctuary frequently occupied by festivals and events. Many theorists see in these early enclosures the origins of architecture: Gottfried Semper describes how these precedents of architectural walls were woven from grass or reeds and only late in history transformed into stone, maintaining their formal principles:

It may be that climatic influences and other circumstances suffice to explain this cultural-historical phenomenon, and that the normal, universally valid course of civilization cannot necessarily be deduced from this, but it is certain that the beginning of building coincides with the beginning of textiles. The wall is the architectural element that formally represents and makes visible enclosed space as such, absolutely, as it were, without reference to secondary concepts. We might see the pen–the fence of interwoven and tied sticks and branches–as the earliest partition produced by the human hand, as the most original vertical spatial enclosure invented by man, whose completion required a technique that nature, so to speak, placed in the hands of man. [9]

The enclosure articulates a void and acts as a three dimensional boundary thus creating inhabitable and measurable space dedicating it to a specific use that is distinct from open landscape or common land. Low enclosures in contemporary cities act as boundaries defining property ownership or separating different use patterns from each other.

![Shinkyo Bridge across Daiya River, Nikko, Japan](image1.png)

![Wall and fence enclosure of historic cemetery, Ipswich, MA](image2.png)

![Picnic Blanket creating “dining space” outdoors](image3.png)
The Blanket becoming a Square

The image of Carlo Scarpa: Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy

Shauna Gillies-Smith and Lisa Roth

The Persians built platforms or stages to worship their king, medieval cities articulated large voids through durable pavements for markets, military parades and citizens’ gatherings. If one simply puts down a picnic blanket on a meadow or a towel on the beach, a place is made – specific to a certain activity and in no need of vertical elements.

When outdoor areas are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur. When outdoor areas are of high quality, necessary activities take place with approximately the same frequency – though they clearly tend to take a longer time, because the physical conditions are better. In addition, however, a wide range of optional activities will also occur because place and situation now invite people to top, sit, eat, play, and so on. In streets and city spaces of poor quality only the bare minimum of activity takes place. People hurry home. In a good environment; a completely different, broad spectrum of human activities is possible [12].

Placemaking through the Maker Movement

The interaction of the maker movement and placemaking exists at a number of levels. We see the connective tissue occur at the following nodes:

- Interdisciplinary approach
- Multi-disciplinary contributions
- Social interaction
- Linkage with the solo movement
- Pop-up culture

Interdisciplinary Approach

The interdisciplinary approach of placemaking combines the talents and strengths of varied professional design backgrounds, stakeholders and constituencies, including but not limited to neighborhood residents, architects, landscape architects, planners, artists and public officials who work together to create great public places, to turn space into place [10], as defined by the co-chairs of the Placemaking Network of the Boston Society of Architects. Creative innovators and leaders know to look for cross- fertilization by working across individual knowledge bases. Cross-disciplinary relationships and collaborative focus are necessary to meet and overcome challenges in complex urban settings, while initiatives within communities or at the local level help to make the power of more long-term sustainable impact.

Multi-disciplinary Contributions

Often temporary at the outset, the energy and impetus of small-scale action can lead to changes in perception and long-term improvements. Typically, problem solving lies at the heart of making. Creative innovators, such as Judy Baca/Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), Rick Lowe/Project Row Houses, Mike Reynolds and Anthony Garcia/Tactical Urbanism, Matthew Passmore, John Bela and Blaine Merker/Rebar, and many other innovative thinkers in the ‘activism’ league have proven time and again that a new approach and the depth of knowledge about a particular place can achieve positive outcomes. Thus, these thought leaders have contributed significantly to the enduring onslaught of challenges to civic life.

Social Interaction

Placemaking always takes into account the social aspect or how and by whom our public places are successful in their public use and acceptance. The foundations for the social aspects or use of public places were laid by the empirical research of architects Jan Gehl and William ‘Holly’ Whyte. The former for the first time investigated the psychological impacts of public places on people. [11] Gehl defined that optional and resultant social activities occur in public space, particularly on plazas and sidewalks, if the physical environment is of high quality.

Offering a comfortable environment that provides amenities such as dining options, seating, and other communal space, and is designed to encourage people to spend more time in the area, can occur without investing time and funds in transportation. Artist communities have traditionally served this need.

In Boston MA, close to downtown at the northern edge of South Boston, Fort Point has been home to a well-established arts community since the 1970s. Initially, artists moved into the empty warehouses of the Boston Wharf Company following a destructive fire at the Mattress Factory, another artist building in Jamaica Plain, whose artists were displaced. The Fort Point Arts Community (FPAC) was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1980, allowing artists and creatives to organize and speak with a unified voice.

The artists developed a pop-up culture during the 1980s and 1990s long before the term was invented, particularly during the Boston Museum of Fine Arts’ exhibitions under the direction of artist Jerry Beck, when abandoned railroad cars from the harbor’s past shipping days provided ample space for infectious art installations that were seen by the hundreds who made the pilgrimage on weekend nights to an area back then considered bleak and dangerous.

Since then, much has changed. With major infrastructure development of the last 20 years, such as the 90 and 19 construction, and the construction of the Federal Courthouse, and the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, the Seaport District is now one of the country’s hottest real estate markets.

The Fort Point Arts Community spearheaded A Fort Point Vision for Public Art, a neighborhood-wide initiative to commission annually, funded by and organized in partnership with the neighborhood. Floating art in Fort Point Channel’s Art Basin is generally formally juried and permitted installations, such as railings offered siting opportunities. Today’s pop-ups of Fort Point are generally formally juried and permitted installations, such as temporary interventions along the sidewalks and in nooks throughout the neighborhood. Organizing art in Fort Point is a part-time job. A Fort Point Vision is commissioned annually, funded by and organized in partnership with the non-profit Friends of Fort Point Channel (see Fort Point channel selection).

Combining a National Outlook with Small Local Action

The digital revolution has created ideal conditions for grassroots efforts, boundaryless communication as well as dissemination of concepts and projects. This has simplified the process of making. The generally quick and easy to-manufacture social interaction, William Whyte’s findings are identical. In 1971, he recorded the life of a series of plazas in Manhattan. Together with a group of students, they visited to observe habits during peak and quiet times, and interviewed users about their habits and preferences. In addition, time-lapse cameras recorded daily patterns [11]. While the term placemaking was not coined until the 1990s, Gehl, Whyte, as well as Kevin Lynch today are considered the field’s key early research theorists. Placemaking and the maker movement benefit from understanding these foundations, when creating, activating and programming successful public places.

Linkage with the Solo Movement

The solo movement, i.e. the growing trend to individual proprietorship rather than corpora employment, drives technological and creative innovation, particularly in the creative community. Equally, a much greater proportion of social interaction takes place in public places as singles and small families make up the majority of today’s households. With the urban dweller’s sophistication and consciousness regarding the physical condition and offerings of our public environment continuously rising, greater expectations and demands are placed on the quality of life. Greater and greater numbers of makers actively engage in the experiment of activating or improving our built environment to make it more attractive, social and livable.

Pop-up Culture

In line with the maker movement’s self-reliance and proactive, individual action, the case studies selected for this study present initiatives intentionally increasing the potential for greater, more long-term sustainable impact.

One can see the beginnings of an architecture in the initial temporary niceties. Platforms and stages to worship their king, medieval cities articulated large voids through durable pavements for markets, military parades and citizens’ gatherings. If one simply puts down a picnic blanket on a meadow or a towel on the beach, a place is made – specific to a certain activity and in no need of vertical elements.
What are some of the success stories with national recognition and noted local impacts? The applications of Tactical Urbanism or the international PARKing Day project were both launched as small-scale alternatives to existing adverse conditions.

Tactical Urbanism

Urban planners Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, co-founders of the parkingday.org website.

The methodology has been spreading like wildfire. Across the U.S., non-profits and makers are employing Tactical Urbanism. In Memphis TN, the Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team organized a symposium in 2012 to promote and educate the city's creatives on the topic. With a $1 million Bloomberg Philanthropies grant in hand, they implemented a series of measures. The 25 SQUARE public art initiative was launched in partnership with Christina Lanzl and her team of UrbanArt Commission (UrbanArt) across 25 square blocks of three select neighborhoods that had been suffering from decades of neglect: Binghampton, Soulsville and the emerging Crosstown/ Klondike area.

Community engagement and organization was a key aspect of the 25SQ Public Art Initiative. Together with three lead artists who were also residents of their respective neighborhoods, UrbanArt organized charrettes in the three areas to solicit ideas for place-specific narratives and locations. Those meetings were the departure point for the recruitment of additional team artists as well as community volunteers of all ages. Collaborative painted murals and mosaics of recycled glass and porcelain were executed on a series of buildings or painted on plywood panels that were mounted on buildings and fences (see photos by the author).

Conclusion

While a lot more discussion is necessary to offer an exhaustive overview of the meaning of place in past and present and its relation to the urban environment, this essay serves as an introduction to the idea of place being spatially and temporarily generated not only by professionals but also by the “makers” of the 21st century who succeed all over the globe in placemaking. Placemaking initiatives and the maker movement have found a convergence in benefiting local communities, either through temporary activation or projects that become neighborhood mainstays. A key characteristic is the spirit of sharing and open-source production, often generating remarkable impact through contributions of resources, labor, expertise, or funding. Small, local initiatives—whether of a temporary or more long-term nature—can have significant impacts on the success of bringing places back to life or to create stimulating activities for the community.
From page 16. "Making with Expressive Gesture" Interview with Janet Echelman
1. Rilke. Rainer Maria. Letters To A Young Poet, 1929.


From page 55. Touloukian Touloukian, Inc. Photo

Image Reference
From Page 55. Lawrence Earley

From page 57. "Making, Remaking, and the Authenticity of the Argo" Peter Greenberg, Assistant Professor.
6. www.plimoth.org
7. www.plimoth.org

From page 57. Perspective by Wilhelm Viggo von Moltke, 1941-1942. Columbia University’s Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library

From page 57. Columbia University’s Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library

From page 57. Ezra Stoller ESTO


From Page 59. The Argol (ca. 1500-1530), painting by Lorenzo Costa https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/81/Lorenzo_Costa_001.jpg


From Page 61. Ash Street Construction Site. Photograph by author.


From page 70. "Placemaking/Making Place” Anne-Catrin Schultz, Assistant Professor, PhD.
3. Ibid. p. 15.
4. Ibid. p. 27.
5. Ibid. p. 59.

8. Ibid.


13. This research led to the publication of William H. Whyte’s The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces [New York: Doubleday, 1980].


Image Reference

From page 71. Japanese Stone Marker in Kyoto, Japan [Photo by Robert Clocker]

From page 71. Tori Gate, Kyoto, Japan [Photo by Robert Clocker]

From page 72. Shinkyo Bridge across Daiya River, Nikko, Japan [Photo by Robert Clocker]

From page 73. Split rail fencing, Virginia, USA https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cd/Fence1web.jpg

From page 73. Wall and fence enclosure of historic cemetery, Ipswich, MA [Photo by Robert Clocker]

From page 73. Picnic Blanket creating “dining space” outdoors, https://violetbriana.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/picnic.jpg

From page 74. Carlo Scarpa. Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy; space defined by horizontal concrete and stone terrace [Photo by Anne-Catrin Schultz]

From page 75. Temporary intervention in conjunction with A Fort Point Vision for Public Art: Over The Pavement ... The Beach at 250 A Street, Boston MA, referencing the French student uprising of the 1960s by Shauna Gillies-Smith and Lisa Roth, 2002. Two tons of sand from Central Artery construction, tree trunks for seating [Photo by Kathy Chapman]

From page 75. Temporary intervention in conjunction with A Fort Point Vision for Public Art: Fed Yarn Wrapping on the A Street overpass railing on Summer Street, Boston MA, by Leslie Clark, 2002 [Photo by Kathy Chapman]

From page 75. Fort Point Channel Floating Art, 2015: Who Wears Wool highlighting the wool trade in historic Fort Point, Boston MA, by Hilary Zelson during launch. The sheep are constructed of packing peanuts and Styrofoam. (Photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 75. Fort Point Arts Community Temporary Public Art, spring 2015: Bright Side of the Road II, alley adjacent to 347 Congress Street at the intersection of A Street, Boston MA, by Claudia Rawaschere and Michael Moss (Photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 76. PARKing Day installation by ADD Inc. on September 18, 2015, a parklet complete with a bicycle chain inspired fence in front of the Boston Fire Museum at 344 Congress Street, Boston MA (Photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 76. PARKing Day installation promoting outdoor activities by the Riverfront Development Corporation on September 21, 2012. Sixteen teams of artists, community groups, and businesses temporarily transformed metered parking spaces along Peabody Place in downtown Memphis TN into public parks. (Photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 77. 25SQ participatory art panel painting at the Stax to the Max festival in South Memphis TN, led by artists Darlene Newman and Cat Normoyle on April 28, 2013. (photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 77. 25SQ participatory art panel painting at Binghampton Paint Day on the grounds of Caritas Village in Memphis TN, led by artist Frank D. Robinson [pictured] on May 31, 2014 (photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 77. 25SQ inspirational, participatory art panel installation at Binghamton Park, one of a series of neighborhood locations in Memphis TN by Frank D. Robinson [pictured] (photo by Christina Lanzl)

From page 77. Tennessee Brewery tactical urbanism intervention, a partnership of the Mayor’s Innovation Delivery Team and Memphis Heritage during summer 2014 (photo by Christina Lanzl)