Healing Place:
a comparative study of creative spatial interventions
as catalysts for reconstructing community identity

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Abstract

This thesis investigates attempts to remediate, reclaim and transform community identity, by using spatial and artistic interventions to ‘heal’ place. I examine definitions of ‘place’ and reasons for and issues around the exclusion and breakdown of communities. I postulate that the breakdown of spatial structure has implications for the breakdown of social structure and community identity. Having established a set of criteria for interventions that ‘heal’ place, I then investigate and compare three case examples where a spatial/cultural project has attempted to rebuild community identity. In conclusion I discuss where and when this type of intervention may be appropriate, and argue for the potential of specific, grassroots initiatives, and collaborative approaches, to inform current debates in theory and practice.
Biography

I was born in Birmingham on 25th June, 1977, and grew up in Oxford. I have a Degree in Architecture from University College London and a Diploma in Architecture from Oxford Brookes University. Between studying for these I spent 5 years working for RAP, a participatory youth arts organisation, from which a case example in this study is taken. Since completing my diploma, I have worked in an architectural practice, and am now practicing as a freelance artist and educator, specialising in public art.
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Introduction: creative spatial interventions as catalysts for changing community identity

With increasing urbanization, cities show the scars of ongoing or recent conflict and violence, or spatially reflect exclusion and segregation. Development practice addresses the healing of places where conflict or violence has taken place, or is an ongoing problem, in a number of ways. Reconstruction projects usually focus on economic reconstruction and physical rebuilding, while reconciliation projects usually focus on social and legal issues. (Simpson, 1997; Winton, 2004).

The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the possibilities for the role of artists and architects as ‘healers’ of community identity, through the communities relationship with ‘place’, and therefore for art and culture as tools for social inclusion and regeneration. My premise is that there is a link between spatial structure and social structure. Community identity is revealed in the fabric of the city, and therefore creative spatial interventions can create new relationships and networks, which create a sense of belonging and a stronger communal identity.

I first examine the context for this investigation, evaluating current research into ideas of ‘place’ and ‘space’ in different literatures. I then identify and establish links between poverty/social exclusion and the spatial structure of the city, evaluating current research and thinking on urban violence and post-conflict development. At this stage I define the type of intervention I want to examine, establish a series of research questions, and describe possible criteria for success, and pitfalls that may occur.

Having established a contextual framework, I examine three case examples, one in which I participated and two others as comparative studies, using the criteria and questions to identify and examine practice, and analyse why and how these examples were successful in ‘healing place’. I then compare the examples, and draw from these comparisons a series of pertinent issues for practitioners. I conclude by considering the possibilities for defining appropriate settings for this type of intervention, and by setting my study in the context of recent thinking on the changing role of artists and architects (as healers) in development practice.
Chapter 1: Discovering Place: literature review, roadmap and methodology

This chapter is a roadmap: I lay out the context, research aims and criteria, and methodology. I aim to provide the reader with the theoretical tools and directions needed to explore the three case studies that follow.

1.1 Lost in Space: definitions of, and myths about ‘Place’ and ‘Space’ in urban theory

It is important to discuss the terms of reference used in this dissertation, as ‘space’ and ‘place’ have a multiplicity of meanings. While exploring these theoretical territories from an architectural angle, one inevitably crosses into other literatures. There is evidence of a clear shift both in the nature of debates (in architecture), and its relationships with other disciplines. (Leach, 1997) In the past ten years, architectural theory has indeed shown receptiveness to cross-cutting cultural theory, linking architecture with fields such as geography, anthropology and philosophy.

Recent research texts in architectural theory, such as *The Unknown City* (Borden et al, 2001), have investigated the meaning of space and specificity of place. They combine architectural thinking based on the spatial theories of Lefebvre, with anthropological and geographical theory, to explore conceptualisations such as psychogeography. One of the reviewers of *The Unknown City* pointed out the emergent “new movement in urban studies”, one that offers an “anti-formalist, post-structuralist, even Situationist perspective for understanding the city”. The authors acknowledge the debt of contemporary thought to the Situationist movement.

The theory of psychogeography, our psychological response to and relationship with (mainly urban) space, evolved from the writings of the Situationists in the 1950s. The Situationists believed that “capitalism had turned all relationships transactional, and that life had been reduced to a "spectacle"” (Marshall, 2000). Their response was to create “situations” which would “disrupt the ordinary and normal in order to jolt people out of their customary ways of thinking and acting” (ibid.). Their ideas recontextualise the importance of our surroundings from a functional or purely aesthetic experience to a more perceptual one: citizens read the city
every day; walls literally spell out ‘exclusion’; derelict buildings indicate despair and hopelessness; but shiny office blocks can create alienation too. This reading influences and politicizes contemporary thinkers and practitioners in urban settings, to imagine and practice new tactics which “encourage a critique of daily life”. (Borden et al, 2001)

In *Tristes Topiques*, Levi-Strauss (1976, cited in Blundell-Jones, 1985) writes of how the Bororo tribe, once persuaded by the Salesian missionaries to abandon their traditional village plan,

soon lost any feeling for tradition; it was as if their social and religious systems...were too complex to exist without the pattern which was embodied in the plan of the village and of which their awareness was constantly being refreshed by everyday activities.

The current return to examining a phenomenological view of architecture and space, that is, “space as lived experience”, revisits this connection, territory also explored by writers such as Bachelard, Heidigger and Lefebvre, who seek to “reclaim an ontological dimension to the built environment.” (Leach, 1997) In another cross-cutting discourse, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) has used Heideggers’ theories to develop the idea of *taskscapes*, a term used to describe the different uses to which man puts his environment, within a temporal context. Ingold uses *taskscapes* as an alternative to *landscapes*, in the context of rural/ethnographic lifestyles, but this idea could equally be applied to cities.

In ‘For Space’, the geographer Doreen Massey (2005) sets out to challenge the division between *place* as grounded and real and *space* as abstract and unreal. She points out the fundamental mobility of things and argues against sanctification of the local. Instead she argues for an understanding of the specificity of space, and for space as the dimension of multiplicity. In this context *place* is the moment of intersection between people, in space, and with space. It is these interdependent relationships between people and space that create a sense of belonging. Recent work by Massey and Rose (2003) defines public space as only existing when social interaction becomes active; when individuals have to negotiate social differences in order to engage with each other. Therefore place is defined largely by relationships, not the spatial dimension.
I want to investigate how spatial interventions can create these intersections, can spark new symbiotic interdependencies between people and space, which create a sense of belonging, and build societal/community identity. Development practitioners recognize this notion of the blurred boundaries between community and place; Hamdi (2004) refers to it as “the soft city of dreams, expectations and hidden networks about which Raban talks.”

In today’s cities, societal structures of exclusion and segregation are spatially embedded; “occupation, segregation and exclusion on every level are conceptualized in streets and neighbourhoods, types of buildings, individual buildings and even parts of buildings.” (Zukin, 1996) Through the relatively recent concept of Space Syntax, poverty and social exclusion are linked with the spatial structure of the physical form of the city (Vaughan et al, 2005a). Space Syntax attempts to treat built environments as systems of space, trying to bring to light their underlying patterns and structure (Hillier, 1998); for example Booths’ maps of Victorian London, with houses coloured according to income levels. (Vaughan, 2005b)

1.2 Darkness on the Edge of town: Urban violence, Exclusion and Identity

In defining where ‘healing’ interventions may be appropriate, one can identify two main typologies of place. Firstly, post-conflict settings where a community has recently emerged from war or civil war/terrorism, (eg. Cape Town, South Africa, where one case examples is set) and secondly, urban settings where there are ongoing issues of violence and insecurity. (eg. Detroit, USA, where another case example is set). In fact, Simpson (1997) argues that in many cases the differentiation of “post-conflict” is a false label. He cites the slide from political to criminal violence, and highlights the impact of mismanaged transitions from conflict. He argues economic reconstruction needs to work in tandem with social reconstruction, to prevent a reoccurrence of violence.

Therefore, there will be similarities between these settings, for example insecurity, loss of identity, exclusion for some groups, inter-community conflict (Du Plessis, 1999). However, it is also important to recognize that there will be differences, for example issues of memorialization, and the need for large-scale reconstruction, in the case of post-conflict settings. While post-conflict settings in a sense offer up opportunities by their chaotic...
nature (Du Plessis, 1999), urban violence settings have entrenched problems which are difficult to intervene in. I want to contextualise both in a spatial framework, and examine how urbanization, through spatial structures, has entrenched exclusion and affected identity.

The growth of urbanization, first in ‘developed’ countries, and since the mid-20th century especially in ‘developing’ countries, has brought associated problems. Individuals migrating from rural areas or from other countries often end up in sink estates, slums and ghettos where poverty is ingrained in the very architecture. (Zukin, 1996; Vaughan, 2005b) While they may be escaping damaged physical settings and social structures, they have to negotiate complex new sets of societal and spatial rules. Forced removal, for example in South Africa under apartheid, creates an instant influx of new residents occupying peri-urban extensions of the city, with no sense of belonging. The clearance of slum areas can lead to similar problems as social structures are lost in faceless estates. These are by no means new phenomena, as Booth’s work reveals (Vaughan, 2005b), but by tracing their history and outcomes, a familiar pattern emerges, of spatial exclusion and poverty leading to societal breakdown and urban violence.

Definitions of violence extend to psychological hurt, material deprivation and symbolic disadvantage. (Moser, 2004) Exclusion and inequality can be seen as forms of “structural violence”, that is, “violence built into the structure of society, showing as unequal power and consequently unequal life changes.” This has been shown to relate significantly to “reactive violence”, that is, violence in reaction to violence. (Moser, 2004; Winton, 2004) While economic inequality is the primary measure of deprivation, inequality entrenched in the spatial structure of society can increase and contribute to the factors that cause reactive violence.

New estates, or informal settlements, both often built on the peripheries of a city, remove diversity: of uses and spaces, and of communities. This removes the possibility of interactions between different strata of city. Hillier (1988, cited in Vaughan, 2005b) states that the effect of modern housing estates on the segmentation of the poor from the life of the city is to create an exaggerated presence of locals, without “the leavening of strangers as found in ordinary streets”.

There is a compelling argument that space plays a crucial role in the construction of youth identities. (Miles, 2003) Young people growing up in state built sink estates may develop anti-social identities, carrying out violence against property. The mainly urban nature of violence against property can be explained in part by the ‘disorganization’ argument; that “urban dwellers are no longer effectively integrated into a community” (Gilbert and Gugler, 1992). Those growing up in informal self-created settlements/slum areas may for different reasons become part of criminal gangs, joining a pecking order of territorial control, and gaining an (albeit anti-social) spatial and social identity. These identities can be factors in violent and criminal behaviour, feelings of alienation, prostitution, terrorism, and gang/turf war. (Simpson, 1997; Winton, 2004) Awareness of the complexity of identity is vital when approaching these issues, as those causing violence may vandalise any spatial interventions they do not feel a sense of ownership for.

1.3 Healing Place: spatial interventions, public art and development practice

Approaches to tackling urban violence vary widely. Current practice includes Criminal justice and public health interventions, conflict transformation approaches, urban renewal, community security initiatives, and building of social capital. (Moser, 2004) Post-conflict development is a huge and complex field, but key initiatives include peace-building, reconstruction and reconciliation. (Junne, 2006b) Innovative interventions are a growth industry, with recent recognition of the need for more holistic approaches. (Moser, 2004) Visible transformations, which create new interactions, could have a role to play in breaking down the barriers of exclusion and inequality, building new identities, and therefore reducing violence.

In situations of urban violence and conflict, artists often look at the effects of the conflict both on the community and on the urban fabric, and respond to this with site specific works. (Burnham, 1998) Artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena suggests that public artists are “border crossers, cultural negotiators and community healers”. (Lacy, 1995) These processes are more likely to be defined as “public” or “community” art than as development practice, but they have crosscutting impacts on the social and spatial.
“Community” is a contested term, part of the development mythology, which often leads to incorrect assumptions. (Till, 1998, Hamdi, 2004) While the “community architecture” movement of the 1960s-80s thought that spatial solutions could cure societies ills, current thinking debunks this myth. (Till, 1998; Blundell-Jones et al, 2005) Till argues that the former movements’ refusal to operate critically (i.e. to resist dominant social and economic structures) meant that in the long run they were part of the problem. He calls for an “architecture of the impure community”, explicitly linking architecture with the political, and the realities of social construction, “towards a transformative model” of practice.

One example of this is Junne’s (2006a,b) theory of an ‘Architecture of Peace’, which could contribute to reconciliation after violent civil conflicts. He asks whether physical reconstruction can make “a broader contribution to peace, mutual understanding and recognition, to intensification of exchange, and to a common identification”. He recognises that by providing a support system in a community, through sensitive reconstruction, ‘bonding’ social capital (relationships within groups) can be a springboard to ‘bridging’ social capital (relationships between groups) (Junne, 2006b).

By weaving together ideas from public art practice, development practice and architectural theory we can create a theoretical context for ‘healing place’, and begin to imagine practical applications.

1.4 Mapping a route: Research questions and criteria for success

The aim of this study is to test my case examples against the criteria established and research questions to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions
- draw conclusions which help understand best contexts for interventions (when are they appropriate?)
- understand the key issues that arise through this type of practice
- understand where this practice sits in terms of current theory (Development/architecture)
- draw any implications for current theory and practice (Development/architecture)
In order to draw relevant material from the three main case examples, I have developed a series of research questions:

- What sort of architectural and aesthetic interventions can best be used to strengthen place and identity? (*genius loci*)
- What are optimal interventions that can best preserve the specificity of existing places? (*reappropriation* of space)
- How do these interventions alter interactions and create new opportunities? (*transactions*)
- Can a link be established between strategic spatial interventions and improved social or community relations? (*healing place*)

There are many different literatures which offer criteria for success, but the closest to my specific interest in healing place are Junne’s (2006a) list of ‘dimensions’ for an ‘architecture of peace’. As these are mainly architecturally based, I have adapted my criteria to make more explicit linkages between the social and spatial, and to fit within a development practice framework. My premise is that without addressing these criteria, the project will not be, or may be only partially, successful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junne’s criteria</th>
<th>My criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>functions of design</td>
<td>= creation of <em>transactions</em>; new networks, and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timing of construction</td>
<td>= temporality of project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific location, former use of site</td>
<td>= memorialization and cultural context – <em>genius loci</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process of decision making</td>
<td>= participation, power and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction method</td>
<td>= building skills, increasing social capital; connecting practitioners (those who plan and those who do)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific usage</td>
<td>= creating a safe space: for a ‘treatment period’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbolism of material, semiotics of aesthetics</td>
<td>= giving the place a new visual identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbolism of signage</td>
<td>= promoting a point of view, provoking attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= “leaven in the community”-strangers on the streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= fostering a sense of belonging and identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Table of criteria for ‘Healing Place’ interventions. By author, and using criteria from Junne, G (2006a)
In testing these ideas, it is vital to examine the possible pitfalls practitioners may encounter. As the problem with architecture and art is that so much of it is ‘value-free’ (Miles, 1997), if it is to be ‘value-added’ it needs to engage with critical debate and not just advocate solutions.

**Cure-all? or sticking plaster?**

In post-conflict situations, there are often more pressing issues of repairing housing and infrastructure, restoring the economy to rebuild livelihoods, and providing treatment to those in need. In these situations, a spatial/artistic intervention can have a ‘healing’ role as it can reinstate people’s sense of identity and belonging. (Hasic and Roberts, 1999) However, these interventions need to take place as part of a holistic approach, not just as a ‘sticking plaster’. In Beirut, (until the recent Israeli bombardment), the reconstruction process was led by the private development company Solidere. They promoted the metaphor of ‘city as heart’, with the reconstruction as “some kind of surgical operation on a diseased body” (Charlesworth, 2002). While the downtown area was totally demolished and rebuilt, most of the rest of the city and the country was ignored, indeed the rebuilding program has “only accelerated historic tensions”. (Ibid.) Isolated improvements may just push problems elsewhere.

**Miracle healing: or hiding the reality of the problem?**

Another danger is promoting ‘miracle healing’, or believing that because the external appearance is improved, social realities are too. Beirut City centre has become “a stage set for tourists wanting to see the miracle of post-war Beirut”, an irony as there are still squatters in Southern Beirut, not far from the pastiche of the past of the new downtown. (Charlesworth, 2002). The demolition of the inner city fabric has lead to a development that is “devoid of memory, and a middle-eastern version of Canary Wharf” (Stewart, 1991 cited in Charlesworth, 2002). As Gingell (2000) writes in the British context, Canary Wharf and Docklands are similar examples of sentimental gentrification: a nostalgia for the past without encountering present realities, where “newcomers dwell imaginatively in that past they no longer live with”.
Raw wounds: memories and appropriateness

Negotiating the complexities of memory in a post-conflict situation needs delicacy. There is an increasing recognition of the role that art can play alongside architecture in transforming spaces of memory, but sensitivity must be used. The Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, South Africa, located on the site of the former Old Fort Prison Complex, held painful memories for many as a site of oppression, torture and humiliation. Through “We the People”, a public participation programme, facilitators conducted workshops in which ex-prisoners remembered the spaces and reclaimed the dignity that they lost in the Old Fort. (Constitution Hill website, 2006) In other places, inadequate memorialization processes have re-opened ‘raw wounds’, instead of healing. The controversial Eisenmann memorial in Berlin to Jewish victims of the Holocaust has generated opposition from Jewish groups, who say it is inappropriate, and that money would be better spent on upkeep of concentration camps, many of which are crumbling. (McCathie, 2003; Frontline website, 2005)

Plastic surgery: good art or good works?

Art for healing can encounter different challenges; as Raven (1993) discusses, art “created to cause a social change for the better…makes it neither politically effective nor good art.” There is a danger in describing ‘healing’ attempts as art, precisely because audiences and participants expectations may then be raised. The difficulty is to establish effective criteria for measuring success. Projects evaluated as art or architecture face different criteria to those evaluated as development practice.

Treatment period: Sustainability and temporality

The healing process is like a ‘treatment period’. It may only be needed or appropriate as a temporary intervention. It needs to be seen in context of the political environment of the time, the wider society, and a historical point of view. People can become entrenched in memory; spatial projects need to move them on, using a visual language which enables looking forward.
Western medicine? Cultural contexts

Careful reading of the cultural context is necessary if true representation is to take place. This is made more difficult by the multiplicities of cultural contexts which exist in cities: “no single view of public space and the art that occupies it will work in a metropolis of multiple perspectives.” (Baca, 1995) Detroit’s controversial sculpture ‘The Fist’, by the artist Robert Graham, “became the focus for a debate about appropriate methods of memorialization, and on a deeper level about racial ideology and racial tensions in urban America.” (Graves, 1992)

Alternative therapy? Power and control of the process

The issue of who controls the process of re/construction, of healing, in fact of memory, is a current debate in public art practice (Gingell, 2000; Miles, 1997). Gingell debates whether public art can be anything other than a “mask for commercial exploitation”, when artists are hired by private developers. Artists have the potential to challenge this, but must make a difficult choice about their complicity in projects. In Beirut, developers dictate projects, with complicit architects in their service, without any participatory process. (Charlesworth, 2002) Recent Beirut contemporary art has challenged this; artists collective Heartland have used the public domain to present their anti-propaganda, while other artists such as Lamia Joriege and Walid Raad make works that question who controls the domain of public space. (Wilson-Goldie, 2006) However, grassroots projects are often seen as too radical, which can make them difficult to sustain. (Landry, 2000)

1.6 Setting the Compass: Methodology

Originally my intention was to focus on case examples in cities where a recent conflict had taken place. However, due to a lack of available literature on such interventions, and also through re-considering my own experiences in practice, I changed the emphasis. Instead I chose three different settings, where exclusion, poverty and crime/violence affect particular societal groups using different starting points and modes of practice.

At the core of all three case examples is a building, an initially unused or derelict place which is ‘healed’ by an intervention, brought back to life. The
transformation of the building attracts networks (‘a leavening of strangers’), and initiates art projects or public art works to be carried out in the local area. It is my premise that through these tactics, community members build new relationships and new identities, engendering a process of healing that may be temporary but has ongoing effects on the people and the place.

In selecting the case examples, I considered how successful the projects had been/are, and how much literature was available on them. I felt it was important to carry out primary research to give my study a more informed approach, and I therefore decide to feature The Rap Yard, a project on which I worked. This project was a microcosm of using ordinary processes in different ways, to build identity. As I continue to practice in public and community arts, I had the benefit of a few years hindsight in evaluating the project. I have extensive direct experience of the project and good access to potential interviewees who were involved in the process. I conducted in depth face to face interviews with several co-workers, volunteers and stakeholders, as well as drawing on my own memories. (See Interview transcripts in Appendix)

I wanted to create a balance between the examples, in order to evaluate effectiveness and draw conclusions. I therefore chose to use the District Six Museum (Cape Town) as I had recently visited it and felt I understood the context well, and as a contrast The Heidelberg Project, in Detroit. This balance reflects emerging debate in post-colonial urban theory which argues for an opening up of scholarly divisions between poorer cities and cities in wealthier contexts (Robinson, 2006), by placing Cape Town, a city undergoing political transformation, in comparison with two cities in the ‘developed’ world.

In selecting the case examples I have therefore attempted to create a variety of contexts. The Rap Yard was a semi-public project, aimed at a specific sector of the community (while still potentially accessible by others). The Heidelberg Project is fully public and the District Six Museum is centered on a memorial and heritage focus. The District 6 Museum is in a developing country, in a city where urban violence, fear and insecurity are increasing problems. (Moser, 2004; Du Plessis, 1999) Heidelberg came from a grassroots, artist-led initiative, in an urban ghetto where poverty and violence are massive problems, and has become a globalised phenomenon.
Chapter 2: Healing Place: The Heidelberg Project reimagines the streetscape

“Most big cities do have the same problems as Detroit, and in some cases they’re worse. But you come here, and you get the feeling that this, this is what the end of the road looks like.” (Herron, 2005)

Detroit is a declining city in a developed country, and as such is of interest for comparative purposes for several reasons; it contrasts with Cape Town, a city of a similar size in a developing country which is upwardly mobile, and with Oxford, a smaller city in a developed country. It also contrasts in origins, although there are similarities in the current problems of urban poverty and violence between all three cities, at different levels. The scale of the problems of exclusion, violence, and poverty are massive in Detroit.

In the past 60 years, Detroit has gone from being one of Americas economic success stories, a boomtown whose car industry brought thousands of immigrants to its streets, to an abandoned city of vacant lots, poverty, racism and joblessness. Since 1950, Detroit has lost nearly 500,000 people and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Over 10,000 houses lie uninhabited; over 60,000 lots lie empty; “whole sections of the city are eerily apocalyptic”(Sugrue, 1996). As Jerry Herron (2005) writes in “I’m so bad, I party in Detroit”, the city has become a mecca for derelictophiles, tourists seeking to be moved by the ultimate in wasted space. It has been termed “America’s first Third World City” (Chafets, 1990 cited in Oswalt, 2005)

Although problems of racism and segregation go back to the 1920s, they have been exacerbated by these trends, as the white middle class moved out to the suburbs, and the black former working class were left in what became inner city ghettos. “Residence in the inner city became a self perpetuating stigma.” (Sugrue, 1996) The completeness of segregation seemed almost a ‘natural’ occurrence, with many white observers viewing visible poverty and deterioration as signs of moral deficiency in the black population, rather than the result of structural economic inequalities. (Ibid.)

The correlation between spatial exclusion and the loss of community values and identity has lead to massive problems with crime, drug use and family breakdown. The city’s literal dividing line, the 8 mile stretch of road made famous by the rapper Eminem in the film 8 Mile (2002), keeps the safe white
suburbs separate from the mainly black inner city ghettos notorious for guns and drugs, where youth identity is strongly associated with criminal activity. “What hope remains in the city comes from the continued efforts of city residents to resist the debilitating effects of poverty, racial tension and industrial decline.” (Sugrue, 1996)

As Tyree Guyton grew up in Heidelberg Street, Detroit, he witnessed the decay, family after family leaving in the face of rising poverty and crime, and abandoned houses becoming crack dens. “Since 1960 the Heidelberg area has lost 71.7% of it's housing stock. This averages out to 47 units per month over a forty-year period. If the pace of demolition that was maintained from 1970-2000 continues the last house in the Heidelberg area will be demolished during the spring of 2014.” (Heidelberg website, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Housing Units</th>
<th>Vacant Housing Units</th>
<th>% Housing lost since last Census</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2,521</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>233</td>
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<td>9396</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2,303</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>6847</td>
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<td>1069</td>
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<td>449</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>1832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total housing units lost since 1960 = 1,875

Figure 2: Table of Housing Loss in Heidelberg district, 1950-2000. (Heidelberg, 2005) Figures based on research conducted by Heidelberg Legal Counsel and derived from U. S. Census statistics.

2.1 Rebuilding identity: healing a neighbourhood

After attending art school, in 1986, Guyton was inspired by his grandfather Sam Mackay, a house painter and 'outsider artist', to begin transforming first his own house and then others in the street with a combination of paint and assemblage, using found materials. (Figure 3) From the outset, his project provoked both strong positive and negative reactions. Art critics saw the power of his work as an “outsider artist” and he became a media sensation.
almost overnight. In the documentary film “Come Unto Me: The Faces of Tyree Guyton”, director Nicole Cattell was drawn to his work as “a bridge between African Americans in Detroit and white residents in the suburbs. Tyree was defying what the world would expect from an African-American man growing up in a blighted inner-city neighborhood.” (Manno, 2002)

Supporters saw his project as healing the local community, and representing a wider healing process of cultural intercommunication. Claims for success include: promoting cultural exchange and tolerance by attracting visitors from around the world (over 275,000 visitors annually- at one point, the third most visited attraction in the city); positively affecting children whose surroundings are infested with drugs, prostitution, gangs and crime; Discouraging crime by developing a sense of community and ownership; and investing in the future by hosting art programs at a nearby school. (Heidelberg website, 2005)

Interestingly, several of the major successes listed involve engaging young people. Guyton sees working with local children as a vital part of his artwork, (Arens, 2005) (Figure 4) and this has brought with it added benefits, including a degree of protection for the project by the local community. This is similar to the Rap Yard project in Oxford, which through engaging local young people and volunteers, became a ‘safe’ area, watched out for by those who otherwise could destroy. In this sense it is also functioning as a means of tackling crime, as Guyton observes:

See that house over there?  That was a crack house...After the first three police raids, it opened right up again. After the fourth raid we couldn't stand it anymore. So we went over and painted the place. Pink, blue, yellow, white and purple dots and squared all over it. (Figure 5) Up there on the roof we stuck a baby doll and that bright blue inner tube, and on the porch we put a doghouse with a watchdog inside...Now all day long people drive by and stop to stare at the place...Believe me, in front of an audience like that, nobody's going to sell crack out of that house anymore. (Heidelberg website, 2005)

An Art News writer commented, “Guyton's Heidelberg Project has attracted so much notice that some of the drug dealers and prostitutes using the vacant houses and lots in the area have been frightened off.” (Heidelberg website, 2005).
2.2 Defining identity: reappropriating visual culture

The power of Guyton’s work has been held to alleviate the ‘visual pollution’ of Detroit: “Our neighborhoods, our towns, our cities can inspire or depress us. The Heidelberg Project confronts the issue of visual literacy and pollution directly." (Austin, 2005) The project also acts as an intermediary to bring outside money into the community, thereby directly addressing the issues of poverty and crime in the area. Guyton has provided a ‘way in’ for wealthy donors to help the urban poor, in a similar way to which the District Six Museum has provided a route for international donors to contribute to rebuilding the new South Africa.

As well as social and artistic recognition, Guyton’s work has been recognised in academic circles in the US as an example of the way Kongo visual culture survived American slavery. (Hall, 1993) His work certainly references African American slave culture; in his installation “Soles of the Most High”, (Figure 6) for which he threw hundreds of pairs of shoes into the branches of a tree, he is drawing on a story of his grandfather Sam Mackey, that when black slaves were lynched, “you couldn’t see the people, but you could see the soles of their shoes” (Moffat and Nasar, 2004).

Another visual reference to slave culture is to the bottle trees of the Southern states. Jackson (1990) noted how the tree sculptures in The Polka-Dot Tree resembled “the "bottle trees" of the Southeastern United States in which artists of African-American heritage adorn living trees with bottles, vessels, and other objects to invoke the dead and ask protection for the living.” Jackson also compares Guyton’s visual style to jazz: “(he) frequently combines polka-dots and stripes and uses unexpected color combinations to create a visual syncopation” similar to “the musical improvisations of jazz.” Beardsley (1995) compares Guyton’s visual elements to the “familiar devices of African American yard shows”. He sees Guyton’s work as ‘cultural self-affirmation’, resisting a cultural mainstream which excludes marginalized groups.

However, not all Detroit citizens like Guyton’s work. Some neighbours in Heidelberg, and Detroit councillors, complained bitterly about the impact of the project on their property values, leading to several of the works being demolished in 1991 (Guyton later rebuilt them). In academic circles a
debate has also raged over the true qualities of the work, and whether it can be seen as ‘art’, despite its social or political intentions.

2.3 Outsider Art or Social Activism? Making Transactions in the Art World

In “Public Art Goes Kitsch”, Hall (1993) analyses recent public art in Detroit, including Guyton’s interventions, in the contextual framework of postmodernism. He claims that “the new public art may simply have evolved into a panstylistic form of kitsch”, in which systems of imitation “displace meanings and transform syntaxes”; or in other words, create bogus ‘art’ in order to get a message across. This idea of transference comes from our dominant visual culture, he argues, in which ideas, strategies and technologies are constantly being appropriated and put to different purposes than the one for which it was created. In Guyton’s case, Hall (1993) critiques his work as replicating a form of assemblage now at least half a century old…In its orthodoxy, his expression is neutralized both by internal flaccidity and by the external social forces determined to exploit its familiarity and malleability. …A stroll down Heidelberg Street (despite the rawness of Detroit’s East Side) recalls a stroll down the main street of Disneyland. Guyton, like Disney, delights, entertains and beguiles with his fantasy facades.

While Hall recognises Guyton’s triumphs as a social/political activist, he determines that artistically Guyton is doomed; his work bearing “the mark of kitsch”. In the same volume, Raven (1993) discusses the dichotomy between the intention of art to create change, and the subsequent value of the artwork created.

Perhaps it is not possible to objectively critique a project such as Guyton’s as “public art”; as an urban intervention, it is a success. In 2004, the project was awarded an EDRA Places Award, an award set up by the journal Places and the Environmental Design Research Association that recognizes excellence in environmental design research and practice today, and highlights the relationships between people and places-based research and design. The Places jury comments remarked on the ‘provocation’ the project has engendered, and also how the artist brings another kind of definition to place, “changing the perception of that place to the outside”. (Moffat and Nasar, 2004)
Because artists don’t set out to produce solutions, they can “think outside the box” and therefore provoke discussion over what sort of regeneration a place can aspire to. (Vaughan Williams, 2005) while Guyton did not set out regenerate Detroit, his works have provoked an ongoing dialogue that changes over time, creating new interactions, for example by bringing art critics to downtown Detroit. This in itself culturally enriches and offers up new opportunities for the area and the city. Although a temporary change, it is a transition which engenders healing, by providing a space for encounter. In this sense it is similar to my other case examples, which all draw different people to a place, creating opportunities for healing and change, creating “social energy” (Hamdi, 2004).

Perhaps Hall’s perception of the project as ‘kitsch’ rather than ‘art’ reveals more about the author than the artist. If the intention of the artist is to use a certain type of intervention as a provocation, surely the inventiveness, the originality lies in this, rather than in the precise medium he has chosen to use? The fact that Guyton works on the street he grew up on, perhaps entails that he is taken less seriously by the ‘art world’. He is demanding that rather than go visit a comfortable, known gallery space, the visitors must come to a dangerous and unknown territory not currently charted on the art world map. There is a snobbishness to professional art circles which seems to encourage the perception that the more ‘internationally’ one works, the more important one is, and the more ‘locally’ one works, the more one gets wrapped up in ‘community arts’, which cannot be taken seriously as contemporary art. This can similarly affect ethnic minority arts, which can be pigeonholed rather than considered on their own account (Baca, 1995), and architecture, which must also be ‘on the map’ of important destinations if is to be taken seriously.

I think this work is particularly interesting and successful precisely because it is provocative, temporary, and uncommissioned. Effectively Guyton is saying, I am a development practitioner, I am putting a standpipe in my neighbourhood, and people will come, and through people, the neighbourhood will be transformed. It’s the networks he is creating that are doing the work; the young people, the volunteers, the artists, the art critics, the city officials, and the funders. Again this is the problem with these type of projects being critiqued through one framework, in this case of ‘Public
Art’. However because Guyton has not set himself up as an NGO, and done an impact survey on the area, and consulted local residents, his work is not seen as development practice.

Whether the Heidelberg project is or isn’t art, its provocative stance has brought thousands to the unvisited streets of Detroit, sparked debate in art journals, and begun the process of giving the young people in one of Americas most deprived and excluded communities a sense of identity and pride, (Figure 7) an identity which rather than promoting drugs, guns and ‘bling’, promotes social gains, movement, and mobility. As Beardsley (1999) writes, “Call me a Pollyanna, but if art is valuable at least in part as the inspiration for communication across the frontiers of class and race, then Guytons work is fabulously successful.” The spatial implications of Guytons’ work are encouraging formerly divided racial groups to step back across the dividing line, the 8 mile road of separation, and wonder together at one mans creation.

Figure 7: Number House (1995), partly designed to help children learn their numbers. Heidelberg project archive.
Chapter 3: Remembering Place: District Six and the creation of memorial space

“District Six imbued its residents with a deep sense of place and belonging”
(Le Grange, 1996)

In 1950, the National Party Government, in pursuit of its policy of Apartheid in South Africa, passed the ‘Group Areas Act’. This made it possible for them to legally force residents of racially mixed communities out of those areas into new, racially segregated districts. (Figure 8) (Western, 1981; Bohlin, 1998) District Six, an area of some 3700 buildings on approximately 104 hectares of central Cape Town with a multi-ethnic community, thriving businesses, and a strong cultural scene, was one of the first areas to be fragmented and devastated. 55,000-65,000 residents were ordered to move out, some to hastily erected shacks on the edge of town, some into council type housing, and whole streets were flattened. By the 1980s very little was left of the area; only a few incongruous public buildings were still standing. District Six was not the only area subject to this treatment, but became the most high profile because it was the largest and most publicly visible area close to the city centre. And the housing was demolished, but not redeveloped, whereas in most other areas it was either bought up by private developers and improved for whites or developed as business premises (Bohlin, 1998).

Meanwhile, residents were moved out to Cape Flats area, where they were dispersed, and encountered violence and insecurity (which remain to this day). The Coloured people, who had a strong identification with D6 as ‘place of origin’, had lost a symbol of their identity, one which had associations going back 7 generations to the emancipation of the slaves. The “sacred space” of the city centre had become a white place. (Western, 1981) Pre-Apartheid, Western notes the interesting symmetry between the social and spatial structures: the continuum of pigmentation matched the continuum of extensive areas of residential mixing; “one is one’s address”. When areas became ‘whites only’, those who could, became legally speaking, “white”.

The campaign to reinstate the land began soon after the first removals, and culminated in a conference in 1989 with academics, activists and artists,
which lead to the decision to form the District Six Museum Foundation (Minty, 2006). This body’s aim was to keep the memory of District Six alive, as well as to honour all those who had been affected by forced removals. After the fall of Apartheid in 1994, the Foundation worked with former residents and artists to create a temporary exhibition in a number of sites around the city; one of these, in a former Methodist church in the old District Six site, became what is now the permanent District Six museum (Figure 9), as a volunteer force of former residents refused to let the exhibition close. 10 years on, it is an award winning community museum. (Eager, 2005)

3.1 Preserving Kanala: the genius loci of District six

“You can take the people out of the heart of District Six, but you’ll never take District Six out of the heart of the people” (resident, quoted in Western, 1981)

The level of artistic, academic and community interest generated by the District Six Museum and other initiatives is reflective of the perceived symbolic importance of the site in South Africa today. District Six has always been a place in which, and over which, struggles have been fought: “fights which have ploughed deep furrows into the South African landscape, and from which have grown cultural and social practices…clearly the use to which District Six, in all its aspects, is to be put is of significance far beyond its size.”(Mostert, 1992 cited in Layne, 1997)

This idea of place as mirror, of place as sign, has lead to what some perceive as the ‘mythologizing’ of the true nature of the district. While former residents like Roderick Sauls (Le Grange, 1996) recall that “All the religions were there. They all shared something”, and former resident Vincent Kolbe claims: “the rainbow nation? District Six lived it!”(Eager, 2005), these views present “simplifications of or selections of more complex histories”(Eager, 2005). What is certain is that the District had a wide cross section of race, class and religion, became known for its cosmopolitan culture, and as a hotbed of political activism. These factors combined to give District Six its nickname kanaladorp derived from the Malay word kanala, meaning sharing or generosity- “to help one another”. (Western, 1981; Eager, 2005) (Figure 10)
The idea of *kanala* could be equated with what has been termed *genius loci*: the spirit of the place. Thompson (2003) argues that for landscape architects, the values of character, local distinctiveness and ecosystem are the most resonant. He proposes that *genius loci* “might be the keystone that can lock trivalent design together”- trivalent design being the three overlapping fields of value: the aesthetic, the social and the environmental. Since this strongly echoes with the idea of healing place, I want to examine how effectively the District Six initiatives preserve the *kanala*, or *genius loci*, of District Six.

Spatially, the district was a successful example of “Urban Place”, where “the street was the place of work, of buying and selling, the place of interacting and meeting, and the stage set of civic and cultural ceremonies.”(Le Grange, 1996) The grid layout of the streets created a “fine grained city structure” with a “choice of pedestrian routes”. (Figure 11) The streets combined domestic and public life, and became a playground where children would interact. In effect the spatial layout provided endless opportunities for interaction, encouraging mixing between the diverse occupants and users. The spatial approach was also crucial to the success of the Museum: it appropriated a former site of resistance (the building was previously used as a meeting place for banned Anti-*Apartheid* meetings); and it was positioned at a strategic interface between District Six and the city centre. (Bohlin, 1998)

In 1997, the artist Kevin Brand curated the first District Six Public Sculpture festival, on the site of the former District. Brand brought together artists, museum staff, and former residents, to work on collaborative projects using memories of the former district. (Soudien and Meyer 1997) The festival appeared as over 90 works of sculpture and installation spread around the site, ranging from large scale to small scale, from conceptual to figurative works. (Figure 12)

As a temporary project, it … successfully engaged with the effect of *Apartheid* planning on communities and with the memory of people and place. It the process, it raised again the complex questions around the history of Cape Town and the effects of forced removals on all people in the city- Black and White. (Minty, 2006)

In taking on this role, the Sculpture festival fitted an established precedent of using culture as a form of social activism. Since the 1970s, artists and
community groups had been using cultural projects and dialogue to challenge the government and build resistance: “the use of culture as a form of social activism was promoted heavily”. (Minty, 2006) Spatial projects began to emerge; communities began building ‘peoples parks’ in townships. The roots of culture as a tool of resistance could be traced further back to traditions created by Coloured residents of District Six to find meaning and build community, such as the Coon Carnival (Minty, 2006; Western, 1981). This parallels with the Heidelberg Project, which uses symbols of slave oppression to recapture and reclaim identity.

Therefore, the use of public art, including performance, fits the cultural context of the place, and preserves the kanala by using tools which ex-residents could engage with. Roderick Sauls piece, Moettie My Vi’giette (Don’t forget me) paid tribute to the symbolism of the banning of the Coon Carnival from District Six. (Figure 13) Pieces of the work, blown by the winds and creating violent sounds, “added to the pathos” (Soudien and Meyer 1997) experienced by former residents visiting the festival. By daring to recolonise the site, the artists works could interact with the true environment of the place, the kanala, whereas inside a gallery they would have been static pieces, dislocated from the temporal and environmental.

3.2 Preserving the specific: how can temporal interventions reappropriate permanent places?

The District Six Museum and its outreach projects have further similarities to the Heidelberg Project. Both use art and culture to draw in visitors, are run by locals or former locals, have a strong educational ethos, and impact strongly on outsider’s views of the city. But while The Heidelberg Project was mainly initiated by one person, the Museum was the result of a collaboration between many people, giving it a formality and strength which has allowed the Foundation to achieve not only its short term goals but also longer term aim of enabling former residents to return to live in the district.

The exhibits in the Museum itself include a display of street signs rescued from the now destroyed streets, a huge map (figure 14) which was created by former residents with artists, as well as photographs and displays showing what life was like in the District. The museum, which has a growing Oral history archive and many texts of memories on display, giving visitors are
given an insight into what it was like to live under *Apartheid*, and how its legacies continue to affect people’s lives.

The challenge facing the District Six Foundation, as families begin to return to the area, is how to use this strong sense of collection and exploration of memory in the context of the permanent site, the ‘Return’ of the former residents. A memorialisation exercise has been examined and proposals have been made to set aside space for a ‘Memory Park’ as well as sites of public gathering. In developing these sites and creating physical memorials, “the District Six sculpture project would become an important project to revisit.” (Minty, 2006) The project was progressive in artists involving community members in the formation and creation of the art works, and in the art works themselves, which were a far cry from the monumental *Apartheid* era realist sculptures, and bore familiarity with contemporary public art in the UK, Europe and USA.

The difficulty facing the designers, planners and artists of this new precinct lies in forming a new language, one which contains elements of the old, but finds new ways to talk to the residents, many of whose children and grandchildren will not remember the places they refer to. The danger of slipping into expected forms of public art, and architecture, which will lose their relevance after only one generation, is coupled with the need for artists in the new South Africa to make a deliberate statement of intent in their work. As Bohlin (1998) recognizes, political contestation lies at heart of construction of notions of belonging.

It seems that the challenge now for the Museum, that of how to professionalize and ensure sustainability while not losing their connection with the community (Eager, 2005), is echoed by the problems facing the use of, and identity of the physical space. A project that started as a temporary installation, now a permanent display, and offered the opportunity to create a series of permanent memorials and public art works, is at a fragile point in its journey. It could be the very temporary nature of the works created for the sculpture festival that made them so powerful, as memory itself is temporal. Is there an effective way these ideas can be translated into permanent works, without losing their meaning and power? Discourse on these issues is poor in South Africa today, according to Minty (2006):
Many art works have specific resonance only in time: with South Africa so in flux, passing interventions speak to the time in which they are made. Even when erased, especially when documented or written about, the debate they spark continues...before new ideologies are inscribed into an already scarred landscape, (they) are a valuable space for reimaginings.

3.3 Symbolic healing: collaborations to reclaim place

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul” (Simone Weil, in Bedford and Murinik, 1997)

The deserted site of the former district can be seen both negatively, as a giant wound, and positively, as a symbol of Apartheid’s ultimate futility and inefficiency. (Figure 15) The site is known as “salted earth”: a reference to the emotion carried in the land, and the protests which made it impossible to sell. (Bohlin, 1998; Bedford and Murinik, 1997) Bastea (2004) suggests that “going back to a place of the past may be the best way we have to take ourselves back in time.” By remembering, the former residents can begin the process of healing. “Few places have better credentials as a healing symbol for a new and reconciled South Africa.” (Jeppie and Soudien, 1990, cited in Bohlin, 1998)

The Sculpture project healed in several ways. It “provided spaces within which to grieve and to find strength and solace”: for example, architect Jos Thorne, created Ba Gua, a place for rest and contemplation. (Figure 16) (Bedford and Murinik, 1997). It reclaimed the “salted earth”: Andrew Porters swings brought children’s laughter back, symbolising the triumph of human spirit. By creating new interactions, a new identity for the place was being born. The artists were in a sense recreating the interactions that Apartheid destroyed. Through participation, a sense of protection over the site was instigated, which will be vital in successfully reinstating it to residents. For example, Trull and Perolds’ Timeline enlisted help from homeless, who once having been drawn into the process, took personal interest in protecting those works from vandalism.

The District Six Museum’s participatory approach and interactive exhibitions have made the District Six community (both imagined and real, past and present) visible. While engagement is limited in one sense, exclusive to those who ‘belong’ to the former territory, it is also inclusive: it
offers a “forum for healing” for all who suffered under Apartheid (including the perpetrators). Vicarious memories present the possibility for transmission of feelings of belonging, so others identify with a certain group. (Bohlin, 1998) These vicarious memories extend beyond the borders of the city to become a symbol of the possibility of equality and justice, of healing, for the nation and the world.
Chapter 4: Dynamic Place: The Rap Yard – a visible space for youth

“The Cowley road isn’t Oxford, it’s South London without the glamour.”
Michael Dibdin’s *Dirty Tricks* (Horan, 1999)

In the 1920s, William Morris’s rapidly expanding car production factory was changing the face of East Oxford. Morris Motors covered a large area of Cowley, bringing migrant families from Wales and Scotland to town for the high wages, and prompting the city council to build large estates to house them. The area beyond Magdalen Bridge became termed ‘Motopolis’ by Betjeman; “indistinguishable from Swindon, Neasden or Tooting Bec”. (Horan, 1999) The city was rapidly changing from a university town to an industrial town, where thousands of working class families found “decent pay, and a new self confidence”.

The Cowley Road itself, which became the main arterial route between the city centre and the Cowley works, was mainly built in the late Victorian period by the initiatives of the Cowley Fathers, an Anglican religious community based in the area. For factory workers like Arthur Exell, arriving in Oxford from Wales, the Cowley Road was a place to find digs and to socialise, despite the racism of many local residents against the Welsh. Later on, Arthur became involved with Trade Unionism and left-wing politics, and joined the local Communist party, “which had rooms on the Cowley Road” (Exell, 1981). This tradition of acceptance and space for radical activism has continued to this day.

Cowley Road today is the sort of “urban village street one finds on the run into West London or in the centre of Birmingham or Manchester, a double row where leases change hands often and shops are left empty.” (Horan, 1999) (Figure 17) It has a very mixed, multi-ethnic community and residents ranging from those living in social housing to middle-class families, as well as some distinctive Oxford features; University residences and publishers. By 1999, the area of East Oxford had been earmarked for regeneration, as part of the governments Single Regeneration Budget initiative.

The Rap Yard was a 3-year project on Cowley Road, which started with the transformation of a derelict shop, and contributed to transforming a street. It was part of, and reflected, a moment of physical and social transition for
East Oxford from neglected area to recognised and celebrated cultural place. Through their involvement with the project, workers, volunteers and other community members formed a community based on the values and practice of the organisation. For this chapter, I interviewed key participants, exploring their views of the spatial and social impacts of the project.

4.1 Underground transformations: Putting ideas into action

In 1999 I was working for Right Angle Productions (RAP), a small, not-for-profit organization based in Oxford. Nick Lunch (2006), who founded RAP in 1996, recalls that:

The RAP project grew organically from a idealistic vision: to challenge … incorrect stereotypes held by young people in UK and in certain developing countries about how “the other half” live, and to do this through …video exchanges. The need for funding led me down an unexpected journey: Agenda 21, so RAP became focused on being a catalyst …for kids carrying out local environmental action and finding a positive role for themselves in their communities.

Therefore, RAP started addressing the need to empower young people (especially those from ‘marginalised’ groups), using the methodology of participatory video (Figure 18), as well as other participatory tools, which had mostly been adapted from development practices (Robertson and Shaw, 1997). RAP went on to develop a working process which included other artistic tools such as mural painting and performance, with an ethos of community regeneration and identity building. (See Appendix: Project Delivery Model) Nick Lunch (2006) recalls: “There was a strong feedback loop happening in the early days, really learning by doing, and a fresh naivete to our approach … which enabled us to be quite anarchic and innovative.”

Our premises, however, an industrial unit on a residential side street, were far from perfect:

The Magdalen road place was awful, it had no windows, it had no prominence in the community, it had no heating... We invited one group of children there, but every other group we worked with, we couldn’t bring them there... It was just full of junk and computers, and cold, we were sitting there with gloves on. (Ahmed, 2006)
Having completed a degree in architecture, I was interested in regeneration, and was excited about the possibility of using this project to test my skills, knowledge and initiative. I was inspired by projects which re-used derelict buildings as cultural spaces. I researched possible new premises, and got excited by the idea of a derelict building on the Cowley Road, which had been an Underground House music shop and was subsequently squatted for ‘free parties’ for a few years, before it became too run down. Since East Oxford had recently won a bid to the government for a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and we decided to propose that RAP should lease the derelict shop, and use a grant from the SRB to transform the space into a base for our organisation.

It took a year of discussions with our management committee, the SRB committee, and the landlords, to get the lease. My colleagues supported me as they felt the move would be a very positive step.

The biggest aim of having it was to be able to offer a drop-in to local young people. So they could actually walk past and see us, to be much more physical…The biggest change we were expecting to see was that we’d actually attract young people off the streets. (Ahmed, 2006)

Our intention was to become a more visible presence in our community, to raise our profile, and attract a new clientele of young people. We were in the process of contracting with Oxfam as part of their Millennium project, On the line. This had already increased our funding and allowed us to grow very quickly. We felt it was important to have a public presence which reflected our ambition and status as an organisation.

East Oxford Action (the organisation set up to distribute SRB funds) recognised the need for more youth facilities and provision in the area, identified by consultation work we and others had done, and approved our funding application. East Oxford Action worker Andy Davice (2006) recalled that “it was attractive to East Oxford Action because it was a combination of physical regeneration of a derelict building, with a

Figure 19: Getting into the building, Dec 1999. Photo: Elise Ahmed
community based project, which dealt with young people, so it hit several targets in one go.” (see Appendix: East Oxford Action Newsletter)

My colleague Elise Ahmed and myself became project managers, and the first stage when we entered the building in December 1999 was to clear out the debris. (Figure 19) We had a team of volunteers who worked full time with us to help do any non-professional jobs, such as clearing rubbish, cleaning floorboards and windows, plastering, painting and sorting out the garden.

I remember when we first got in there, it had been a squat for so long, it was really rough, no staircase, falling to pieces, not a loved building. (Wallis, 2006)

I’ll never forget the first day we broke in there to start work. It was absolutely filthy. It was certainly uninhabitable, and so unhygienic, it was disgusting. (Mirza, 2006)

There were carrier bags of excrement everywhere, and cans and bottles of urine, it was disgusting. The floor was so damp from urine that it had to be ripped out, the whole floor. (Young, 2006) (Figure 20)

We hired one of our volunteers, Paul Young (2006), who was also a builder; he brought in other builders, electricians, plumbers, often at a reduced rate. As he recalls: “we got it done nearly in budget. Considering the prices of what it would have cost on normal jobs, it would have been 3 or 4 times over budget.” The willingness of people to help was vital to our success.

The community rallied round, everyone wanted to know what was going on, and people asked if we wanted any builders, they were knocking on the door. But you and I had no idea really, I mean you had your architecture background, but apart from that we had no idea what were doing, we just did it.” (Ahmed, 2006)

This idea of the informality and spontaneity of the process belies the constant meetings, lists, and plans we were making on a daily basis, in my recollection, but does convey the spirit of the process and our determination to succeed despite barriers. As Hamdi (2004) discusses, getting the right level of spontaneity in practice is vital, because of the way problems and opportunities appear and disappear.
4.2 Underground Transactions: informal working in the local economy 1999-2003

The impact of transforming the building and afterwards, of being based there, was that we were immediately part of a much wider network, as curious passers-by stopped to ask us what was happening. Spatially, people seemed to be drawn into the building, partly intrigued by the lack of goods on sale, despite the shop-like appearance. While we were open to making ‘social transactions’, we were not going out of our way to create these situations; rather it was a serendipitous effect of the transformation of the building.

There was some confusion over the new identity; in a sense it had retained its ‘underground’ image, despite going through a physical transformation, and this had both positive and negative outcomes.

Because it had been a squat, and when people saw that it was done up but it was still quite alternative, people were confused and thought they could just come in and hang out, and didn’t realise that it was a youth centre for young people, but because we hadn’t done it through the County Council it wasn’t all slick and shiny (Ahmed, 2006)

The actual use of the space, the process of transforming it from derelict squat to our base, had given many local people the opportunity to volunteer, and once we had finished the works they wanted to continue being involved. We had effectively pushed the youth issue into the public eye, but we had become almost too visible.

On the other hand, these transactions and interactions meant we were well supported and advocated for on many levels. Local authority officers approved and offered more funding, and local graffiti artists approved and made sure our front window wasn’t trashed. Volunteer Imran Mirza (2006) was aware of how his connections gave the project protection:

I remember the local ‘crew’...Because I used to know (them) when I was much younger, they’d see me going in and out of the building and they’d stop me and say. “What goes on here?” so I’d tell them, and then after that I think they had this sense of, oh that’s a good thing. A number times, people
have said, Oh we never had anything like this when we were young and we wish we had. So I think people around tended to feel a bit like, oh we’ve got to protect this, this is quite a precious thing.

We also involved young offenders in our projects, and the Rap Yard was used for several reparation projects. (Figure 21) Both the Heidelberg project and District 6 had similar effects; by involving local community members in the process of creation, their networks promoted the building as place that needed to be protected. The building also made the area feel safer by providing a high level of foot traffic in and around the building. Like the Heidelberg project, by bringing people into an area that was seen as unsafe and unattractive, we immediately started to transform it.

Through the structure of our organization\(^2\) we were able to be open, and to operate an ‘open-door’ policy, so that the spatial openness and lack of boundaries encouraged an open network of users and visitors, breaking down boundaries between different groups. Our international work meant “there were so many different people from different countries, from abroad, that came and worked in the Rap Yard.” (Young, 2006) We provided a place for people from all walks of life to meet:

You had young people, the mayor, the press, residents, volunteers, different organisations using that space, the management committee, parents, teachers, youth workers, other organisations who were linked or doing projects or were interested in the work, it was really alive with people. (Wallis, 2006)

Volunteer Imran Mirza (2006) says, “the fact that it was non-statutory…gave it that free-form approach which meant that people weren’t restricted”. This enabled him to mix with a wide cross section of people: “I certainly built relations with other local organisations like the youth service and Fusion Arts. That really helped particularly in setting up a project later on, when I was working for Connexions... Those links were just invaluable.”

The ‘alternative’ identity of the building re-emerged through our links with activist groups. RAP’s values had allowed workers to be quite radical in our stance on several occasions; for example doing a video project with kids
about the arms trade. Several RAP workers (myself included) were strongly linked to political or environmental activism, and through these links, the Rap Yard also became a hub of information. “People would leave leaflets there, quite often. People felt it was an information hub. Leaflets for demonstrations, for environmental events, all sorts really” (Mirza, 2006)

Another arena for transactions were our screenings; our ‘product’ primarily being videos. We initiated the video projects, or responded to requests; for example a parent might phone us to say there was a lack of facilities for youth in their area, could we do a video project about it? At our screenings, we would then invite decision-makers (local councillors, the Lord Mayor, funders and other professionals), so that they could see the message the young people had made. About 3 or 4 times a year we would turn the Rap Yard into a cinema space, and open the doors to the community. (Figure 22) These were also opportunities for people entirely unconnected to the project to enter our networks:

I remember meeting a local pharmacist there, who was just interested. She was from the Middle East, and she was just wondering what it was all about. She got a leaflet from the screening and afterwards she was full of praise for the project. (Mirza, 2006)

And for unlikely meetings to occur:

You’d get parents from estates coming along because their children were involved, you’d get professionals, local dignitaries, there was no rule to it. (Mirza, 2006)

4.3 Healing the Place: Making people visible

This was in a sense the ‘healing’ process that the Rap Yard enabled. Through changing a physical space, through the mechanism of labour, skills, presence, and participation, people were able to establish ‘social transactions’; new partnerships and interactions which went on to impact the community and continue the process of ‘healing’. (Figure 23)

This is similar to the process which both the District Six Museum and the Heidelberg Project use to ‘heal’ their communities. ‘Network Governance’, an idea put forward by Turnbull (2002, cited in Hamdi, 2004), defined as
mutual engagement based on participation and social entrepreneurship, releases ‘social energy’, that is a desire to serve the community or a commitment to common interests. “This energy enables local people to develop skills, self-confidence, business experience and employability”. (Edwards, 2001 cited in Hamdi, 2004)

What was particularly important was that from the word go, young people were involved in the process. One of our volunteers on the building work was a local 16-year old called Steven Fuller, who had been coming to the Rap Yard for some time. (Figure 24) He became very involved with the work, and continued to volunteer with our drop-in sessions afterwards. Other Rap Club members helped to paint the walls and create the garden. By providing a visible space for young people, RAP was challenging stereotypes and trying to change perceptions of local youth:

To begin with you were getting people coming in who were visibly the stereotype, you know hoodie type young guys,… But I hope what RAP did through staying there, it evidenced that it wasn’t violent, that these people just wanted … an opportunity to a space like anyone else wanted. …Just having a building that opens its doors, its physical doors, can affect how people think about their relationship to those people. …Because we’re such a visual culture and we judge through image, the physical space can impact on how we see things. It was subtle…but I think it might have changed some people’s perceptions. (Wallis, 2006)

Paul Young (2006) describes the Rap Yard as a home from home for young people: “week in week out, they know they can go there, if they are having a hard time at home with family, they can get away and come there for a few hours, relax”. This provided a vital ‘letting off steam’ function for families, as parents and kids could have time out safely, rather than anger spilling out onto the streets.

The Rap Yard was clearly a space for young people, with the downstairs opened out into a large space for drop-ins and projects (figure 25), as well as hosting our IT centre, and a kitchen. “You had computer terminals in a line, they had weird desks with bits that pulled out, and cupboards that came in and out, the space broken up in many different ways, and murals and thing hanging. It felt like a playground- an adult playground as well as a young people’s playground.” (Wallis, 2006)
By creating a “community of place” for local young people, a space where they felt safe and that they belonged, which was in the public eye, we opened up new transactions between generations. These encouraged professionals to see the opportunities of working with young people, rather than the threat they posed. The young people were presented with positive and aspirational role models in the shape of workers, volunteers and other community members. RAP’s work was all about making young people visible through video, through environmental action, through The Rap Yard. We provided possibilities for new identities for young people, building their inclusion in society, and spatially representing this by taking over a shop, offering an alternative to the prevalent youth culture of conspicuous consumption.

4.4 Reappropriating the underground: an aesthetic for a time and a place (sign of the times?)

Cowley Road had been regarded for at least 20 years as a sort of ‘no go’ area by people in other parts of Oxford. Despite having a strong artistic community and being a haven for those in pursuit of alternative lifestyles, it had gained a reputation as a run down, neglected area with junkies and drunks hanging around on the street.

The Cowley road starts at the roundabout, the Plain, and then you journey up, there’d be some nice cafes, up to Tescos,…and then it would start to get a bit rough, and if you felt like a really nice Bangladeshi curry you might pop to Aziz, but for me it was like that was the end of the civilized road and then you got the poorer area. I think what RAP did was start to transform that quite strongly. (Wallis, 2006)

The street was a haven for drug users and had an unkempt, uncared for look. However, there were positive aspects which local residents were keen to conserve, including the diversity of shops, the multi-culturalism of the users, and the creative use of space. The building itself, while being seen as a ‘negative’ presence on the street, had a certain cache as the site of a former record shop and squat, which hosted free parties.

Like the District Six Museum building, 220 Cowley Road was ideally positioned both as a former ‘site of resistance/counter-culture’ and spatially, right in the centre of the run-down strip, and opposite the small park adjacent.
to Manzil Way, which was notorious for drug-users and was earmarked for regeneration. RAP took advantage of the genius loci, the ‘spirit of the place’, and reappropriated its signs and symbols, using the visual aesthetic of alternative culture and activism, to promote regeneration and youth culture. The building itself was bright, colourful, with posters and displays in the window and a huge graffiti mural up the side: “it was very different from anything else. You had the butchers, and the restaurants, and suddenly RAP! with these mad posters, funky words on the window, and mad colours” (Wallis, 2006). (Figure 26)

Soon after completing the building, RAP embarked on a mural project with local graffiti artists and children. We created a series of murals on walls up and down the Cowley Road. This immediately identified and signified the impact we were having on the community. (Figure 27 and 28)

I think that sparked off quite a bit of use of colour down that whole stretch, … and now Cowley road just looks absolutely unique. People associate it with young people, being there, … it’s brightened the area up. (Mirza, 2006)

At a moment when the SRB was bringing £3 million into the area, we were creating an immediate change in identity, which reflected the aspiration to change the face and feeling of the street.

Standing opposite Manzil Way (the park earmarked for regeneration), with drunks still knocking on our door, we marked a shift in the atmosphere. While we stood for the old, alternative Cowley Road, we also stood for change, for vitality and for a reappropriation of the underground. I do not mean that we intended to use the graffiti aesthetic to secretly promote gentrification, but rather that we wanted to promote the idea of a creative cultural community, which took pride in itself. By using an aesthetic that stood for lawlessness and illegality, and negotiating with authorities to give it legality, we were taking advantage of intersection between time and space, between the old Cowley Road and the new Cowley Road.

By creating opportunities and space for creativity in East Oxford, we helped initiate a flowering of public art that continues to this day, which many people describe as ‘the visual legacy of RAP’. (Figures 29-31)
All these murals...just started spreading out from The Rap Yard, and even though the Rap Yard itself is now a really dull estate agent, and everything on the building itself has been painted over, the ripples are still moving down the Cowley Road. (Davice, 2006)

The strong sense of creative culture has been promoted by bodies such as Oxford Inspires, when applying to be a European Capital of Culture. It has given a badge to the area, and strengthened community identity. In this sense The Rap Yard, though no longer there, can claim a similar impact to my other case examples, which have both given a cultural ‘badge’ to a place.

4.5 Public vs. Private space: The Rap Yard closes its doors

In 2003 both Elise Ahmed and myself felt we had run out of steam. It had been an exhausting and exhilarating 3 years, but the demands of the place had outgrown our energies: “It was all too much, We realised that without us, it wasn’t sustainable, which is no way for any organization to run.” (Ahmed, 2006) For 3 years we had been the ‘face’ of The Rap Yard, and our management committee decided that without us it would not be possible to sustain the building, as funding was a real problem. They decided to downsize, and leave the building.

It was a contentious and difficult decision, and many of the young people in particular found it hard to accept that they were losing both their youth workers and their youth centre. Many volunteers felt upset that the building they had contributed to was to be abandoned, and that the space of the Rap Yard was to be lost to the community. The Management Committee had to deal with a lot of anger, but recognised that the balance between delivery and sustainability had tipped too far one way, and the organization was no longer sustainable in its current form.

The place

After RAP left, a local campaign group squatted the building, giving it a new identity as a ‘social centre’ for activists (Figure 32), continuing the genius loci of the building as ‘alternative’: “(it was) because it had been RAP that it became that, because it was shown to be a community space for the people,
where you’re challenging things that are inequal.” (Wallis, 2006) Even though the new squatters attempted to use the language of regeneration, they lacked legitimacy and were soon evicted, after which the building became an Estate Agent dealing with rentals. (Figure 33)

Many saw this as the inevitable slide towards gentrification: “it’s a sad shift, but a classic one, … you get the estate agents, and there’ll be more bistros, a few chain bars.” (Wallis, 2006) However it also marked the upward mobility, the aspirations of residents to put Cowley Road on the map as a successful place. What was spatially interesting about this shift was twofold; firstly, the nature of the building changed. The floors and staircase were partitioned off, making it feel much more closed, and the building was repainted and fitted out: “The colours were very powerful, whereas now it’s very calm and business-like, it’s whitewashed. The memory of the building is whitewashed.” (Wallis, 2006)

Secondly, whilst RAP had been dealing (in a socially entrepreneurial sense) with space as a common good, the new users of the building are dealing with space as a private property. This links back to Lefebvres (1991) “abstract space”, space as commodity, at once concrete and abstract, homogenized and fragmented - the space of capitalism.

This seems to echo the balance between freedom and order, and public and private, that was occurring in the community at the time. The regeneration process was creating a more ordered society, removing elements of disorder, but it was important to the community to retain some of the sense of freedom to pursue your own values that gave the Cowley Road its genius loci and drew people there in the first place. The Rap Yard may have gone, but its legacy reminds those using the street today of the “anarchic heart” (Davice, 2006) of the community.

The people

The lasting impact of the project is on the networks, relationships and opportunities created by and for the people involved. Several referred to the idea of ‘family’:
It made me feel more connected to where I lived, and it gave me a family. (Wallis, 2006)

I felt a sense of belonging. Rap Yard was like a little family. (Young, 2006)

This indicates the strength of the bonds people made; both to people and place. The people involved also gained new skills, leading to new career choices for many. Their participation empowered them to feel that they can make a difference in their community, or pursue a project they feel is important. Through the ongoing need to get funds for the Rap Yard, many were involved with income generation projects, which gave them entrepreneurial skills.

Effectively we were creating a “community of practice” through the process of transforming the building. (Capra, 2002) While we set out to create a “community of place”, where young people could be made visible and have a space, this was temporary; whereas the networks and bonds, and values formed through the practice continue.4 “A lot of people have now moved off into their own projects and their own worlds and they’ve taken that learning and those skills.” (Wallis, 2006)

The Rap Yard did not have the staying power of the District 6 Museum, or the achieve the level of notoriety of the Heidelberg Project, but then ‘healing’ can perhaps not be seen as a finite state, but as an ongoing process, or a stage in a process. Spatial interventions are only ever temporary, but their very power lies in this; they provoke change, and provoke people to change. The visual legacy of RAP continues to provoke an alternative view of what regeneration should be about: celebrating community and local uniqueness, and embodying different social structures and possibilities. (Clifford and King, 1993; De Carlo, 2005)

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4 for details of what interviewees are doing now, see Appendix 1: Interview transcripts.
5. Conclusion

How much, and how, have projects like those examined here had a “healing” impact on their locality? Have they been appropriate responses to social exclusion? I will now reassess the implications of these projects, according to my original research questions, using the criteria discussed. I will then consider how they fit into a wider context of development theory and practice. None of these projects could be held up as a ‘cure-all’, or processes that could alone reshape urban localities; there are problems and weaknesses in all of them, but all have interesting implications.

5.1 Strengthening Place: re-appropriating space to build identity

All the case examples described have successfully used an existing aesthetic of social activism to establish their visual presence, and used architectural interventions (‘making-over’ existing buildings) to strengthen the identity of the place. In the case of the District Six Museum and the Heidelberg Project, the buildings and aesthetics used have directly celebrated an authentic cultural heritage, which further builds community and place identity. Similarly, The Rap Yard used a local aesthetic to celebrate a more general view of the area. However, whilst the use of these visual languages is seen as a positive one by the community, I would argue that these projects must remain socially active in order to remain spatially present, as it is the actions (and interactions) that create the place. (Massey and Rose, 2003; Ingold, 2000) The visual legacy of the Rap Yard does continue, despite the social role no longer being fulfilled, but this is mainly because networks started by the project remain in the area; the nature of the interventions has changed in character.

The question of sustainability is a difficult one. In order to sustain their spatial presence, projects must establish funding and support, often from sources outside the community. In doing so, they provoke claims of ‘selling out’ and ‘professionalising’ (in the case of District Six Museum), thereby losing their connection to the community who helped establish them in the first place, or adding new types of responsibility and connection. Therefore ‘mainstreaming’, while it can create more opportunities and a longer-term benefit for the community, carries with it challenges of negotiating how this is done. On the other hand, if they remain entrenched at grass-roots level,
they can face problems in getting recognition and sustaining funding. (Landry, 2000), and the project may vanish altogether, like The Rap Yard, or face a precarious future, like the Heidelberg project.

The issue of temporality needs to be carefully considered. We tend to want to see spatial interventions as permanent, but perhaps instead should see them as the aesthetic of particular time, referencing the Situationists’ idea of ‘situations’ which disrupt the ordinary (Marshall, 2002). As Minty (2005) writes, “many art works have specific resonance only in time…passing interventions speak to the time in which they are made. Even when erased, especially when documented or written about, the debate they spark continues.” Spatial interventions can only be seen as part of a process of healing, not as a permanent solution to problems.

5.2 Specifying Place: defining and maintaining the spirit of the place

As discussed, all these case examples have to some degree retained the aesthetic of the cultural context they inhabit, thereby preserving genius loci of area. In the case of the District Six Museum and Sculpture project, the ‘blank canvas’ of the site was particularly evocative for all involved. The strongly established role of the District Six Foundation, in collating memories and artifacts, gave those creating and inhabiting the space a unique means to reinterpret the site, while preserving its authenticity. In Cape Town, there was also a precedent of the use of culture and art as a form of social activism, coming out of the Apartheid era. (Minty, 2005) This gave the Foundation a legitimate reason to use visual and spatial tools to preserve and emphasize the identity of the place. On the other hand, it also gives those creating new permanent public art works and architecture for the site the challenge of developing a visual language which has relevance for future generations. Therefore, to interpret a strong cultural context as a good starting point for building community identity may be a red herring; it can contain caveats, which hold practitioners back from originality and authenticity in their work.

The use of a visual aesthetic, which played on the spirit of the place as a centre for counter-culture, was a benefit for The Rap Yard. It enabled the project to engage diverse groups, and create a stronger expression of community identity through its visual legacy. However this association with
radicality made it difficult to gain legitimate recognition as a professional ‘youth work’ organisation. It also lead to a dominant aesthetic of graffiti art in the area, which to some extent precludes other forms of expression, and can be seen to ‘tag’ Cowley Road with a label which is not entirely representative. As shops and businesses in the Road become more upwardly mobile, those admiring the artwork may be doing so for its cache of cool, rather than understanding the social agenda which produced it.

For the Heidelberg Project, the fact that it is an individual artists’ interpretation of the genius loci has created issues, as not everyone in Guyton’s neighbourhood sees his work as representative of their community. This has lead to several of his works being bulldozed. But his intention to provoke, using ‘art as social action’ (Lacy, 1995; Burnham, 1998), has reached a wider audience and is gaining support, so his work may contribute to maintaining Detroit’s remaining inner city housing stock, and its community alongside.

5.3 Healing Place: improving social and community relations through place-based action

As discussed in Chapter One, urban violence can be traced partly to spatial exclusion, and these projects have, intentionally or not, addressed this to some degree. The very presence in an area of a building which many people use can have the effect of making the area feel safer. The District Six Museum and Sculpture project has had a specific healing role in dealing with former residents’ memories, and providing a safe place for these to collect and be exhibited.

Furthermore, through engaging young people, those committing the crimes may offer a degree of protection to the project, which can extend to the local area. These projects encourage alternative, more positive youth identities, both in making their presence visible, and by giving them alternative ways to engage with their community. This can be through environmental and artistic projects (RAP, and Heidelberg), or by giving them insight into their cultural heritage (District Six). In the context of development theory, this building of identity offers alternatives to young people who otherwise may get involved in gangs/anti-social behaviour. (Simpson, 1997; Winton, 2004).
However, while this has benefits for the young people and the community, using culture as social activism can lead to work being critiqued as lacking a serious artistic dimension and therefore losing status. (Burnham, 1998) Because of his participatory practice, Guyton has faced criticism of his artwork, and been labelled an ‘outsider’ or ‘community artist’. The District Six Museum and Sculpture Project has avoided this by running a distinct educational program, whereas art works in the Sculpture Festival were mostly non-participatory. This shows the difficulties faced by artists (and architects) attempting socially motivated projects, as they face criticism from an art world still informed by modernist ideals of ‘pure’ art. (Gablik, 1991)

5.4 A Place for Transactions: new interactions, opportunities, and networks

Through attracting different users, and visitors, these projects bring investment into an area, increasing its value and building community worth. Through making visual statements, the projects attract new sorts of ‘strangers to the streets’ providing possibilities for new interactions and for existing community members to spread their horizons (Hillier, 1988 cited in Vaughan, 2005b). The visual statements are often provocative, encouraging debate and putting the place ‘on the map’, giving it an importance which translates to social and economic benefits. Often the projects’ success lies in its spatial openness and lack of boundaries, as in the Rap Yard, where the building echoed the values of the organization (although it was too successful, so workers were overburdened.) Those who maintain involvement with the project develop new skills, increasing social capital, and becoming part of a “community of practice”. (Capra, 2002)

These projects work in an underground economy, exchanging ‘gifts’ of time, presence, skills, and participation, which have no commodity value. (Beardsley, 1995) This avoids the dilemma of artists “becoming handmaidens to service economy” (King, 1996). The value of these projects, in working outside art and architecture conventions, is that they can take independent stances, and be provocative. In a sense they return to the Situationist view that “capitalism had turned all relationships transactional”, and use similar tactics to challenge commodification of these transactions. The District Six Sculptures are “offerings rather than dogmas” (Bedford and Murinik, 1997), and many used found materials. The Rap Yard had an ethos of “Do what u can with what u got” (Figure 34), and Guyton recycles found materials.
materials to create his installations. This conscious anti-consumerism suggests a connection with an ecological imperative. (Gablik, 1991)

5.5 The Medicine Cabinet: When are these type of interventions appropriate: Implications for theory and practice

I have shown that a different approach to healing in the context of urban violence and post-conflict development can be the use of spatial and artistic interventions. By re-interpreting spatial theory alongside social geography and anthropology, in the context of development practice, we can lay the groundwork for a framework for typologies of projects. This has a precedent in Junnes (2006a) ‘architecture of peace’.

I have recognised through examining case studies what the likely criteria for success are for such projects, and what pitfalls may occur. While this type of intervention must work in tandem with other interventions (Simpson, 1997), it is vital as part of a holistic approach to conflict resolution and prevention. I have also defined key criteria which must be in place; these include issues of temporality, power/control, participation, cultural contexts and memorialization to name a few. In working on place-based projects, knowledge of the philosophy of place should inform practice. Understanding concepts like genius loci enables the practitioner to better reflect community identity.

Reasons for failure can include lack of relevance to a place, and failure to carefully examine the criteria discussed above. It is vital to understand the cultural context; organisers of a refugee women’s group hired The Rap Yard, but found no one turned up because the place was too visible. There are other contexts where it will not be possible to even consider or match the criteria. Where basic infrastructure is dangerous, it would be difficult to create a safe place. Where there is a strong resentment of ‘outsiders’, a ‘stranger in the streets’ may be unwelcome. In some societies, visual approaches may not be relevant. In others memories may be too raw and painful to work with. Architects tend to want to use spatial approaches and artists to use visual ones, but there may be contexts where they need to take on different roles, as observers, facilitators, documentors.
We can also speculate the most likely arenas for success: these could be in post-conflict situations where there is strong community motivation to rebuild and explore memory and identity (District Six); in urban settings where a certain community feels spatially excluded and ignored (Heidelberg), and in urban settings where derelict buildings affect community identity (The Rap Yard). One aspect I feel strongly about is that these interventions are not restricted to practice in developing, or developed countries; in fact, they break down such divisions of definition and encourage debates as part of a post-colonial urban theory. (Robinson, 2006)

The significance of the grassroots/artist initiated approach of my case studies, together with analysis by Gingell (2000), Cotterell (2005), Powell (2006), and Charlesworth (2002) among others, implies that interventions are successful because they are not imposed by developers, but work outside the dominant political and commercial hierarchy, and are therefore free to challenge and provoke. This “bottoms up” approach also resonates with the ‘emergence’ debate (Hamdi, 2004); and the call for homebru: locally generated imaginations about how to improve the city (Pieterse, 2006; Robinson, 2006). Tactics used in countries in transition from violence could inform debates in the developed world, potentially transforming debates on participation and urban development in urban and architectural theory. (Blundell-Jones et al, 2005; Borden et al, 2001)

Despite good intentions, most architects do not have the freedom of artists to work outside conventional systems, and yet “architecture…produces concrete images of what the physical environment could be like if the structure of society were different.” (De Carlo, 2005) How can architects become “angels with dirty faces” (Till, 1998) opening up dialogues between user and architect, between the fantasy and the real, so that building and using become part of same process? Petrescu (2005) suggests that architects need to become “mediators not masters”, taking on a role as “urban curator” (Bunschoten, 2004) between clients, institutions, and users. But this implies a removal into the realm of theory, a realm that often discards the politics of the everyday. Through my case studies, I identified that success was built on knowledge of local specificities, and hands-on production of interventions. The practitioners could be seen as ‘cosmopolitan localists’, who “cherish a particular place, yet at the same time know about the relativity of all places.” (Sachs, 1999, Manzini, 2005, Bello, 2005) Therefore, subverting Till’s
‘angels with dirty faces’ I suggest that we need ‘angels who get their hands dirty’. In order to heal place, architects need to know place, and to physically produce place, as well as maintaining wider dialogues.

Existing literature on healing place tends to focus on specifics within disciplines (public art, architecture, social geography, and development). There is a growing awareness amongst practitioners of the need for collaboration and cross-fertilization. (Murray, 2005; Gablik, 1991) By using my case examples to link the social and spatial, and make a comparative study of the possibilities for these type of interventions, I have contributed to the argument for a more unified approach, in theory and practice. With the recent recognition of the need for more holistic approaches in tackling urban violence (Moser, 2004), we need fora, both in education and professional practice, which are multi-disciplinary- artists and geographers, sociologists and architects- to define values, and develop new modes of thinking and practice.
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Other books, websites and projects that inspired me:

Books:


Davis, Mike (1990) *City of Quartz: Excavating the future in Los Angeles*, Verso


Websites/Projects:

Architects for Peace: http://www.architectsforpeace.org/

Architecture for Humanity: http://www.architectureforhumanity.org

Banco de Ideasz, Cuba: http://utenti.quipo.it/bancoideasz/BIZ.htm

Callejon de Hamel by artist Salvador Gonzalez (Havana, Cuba)

Centre for Land Use Interpretation: http://www.clui.org/

Community Arts Network (CAN): http://www.communityarts.net/

Community Built Association, USA: communitybuilt.com/

Creative exchange: http://www.creativexchange.org/

Displacements project, by Marie-Ange Bordas: http://www.displacements.info

Global Ideas Bank, http://www.globalideasbank.org/site/home/

Greenmuseum: http://www.greenmuseum.org/

Hiroshima Museum: http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/top_e.html

Muf art and architecture (London): http://www.muf.co.uk/

New Belfast Arts: http://www.newbelfastarts.org/

Project for Public Spaces: http://www.pps.org

Public works art/architecture collective: http://www.publicworksgroup.net


Space Syntax Laboratory: http://www.spacesyntax.org/

St Elmos Village, LA: www.stelmovillage.org/

The City Beautification Ensemble, Toronto, Canada: http://www.beautification.ca/

The International Network for Urban Research and Action: http://www.inura.org

Transgressive Architecture: http://www.transgressivearchitecture.org

Graffiti on Reform St, District Six. Photo by Jan Greshoff. (Le Grange, 1996)