Figure 1. Elsewhere museum, 2011 (photo courtesy of Elsewhere)

Places Already Made:

Reflections on Elsewhere's South Elm Projects

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Suggested Citation

Abstract

This article explores the challenges, opportunities and evolving politics of creative placemaking through conversation with George Scheer, Director of Elsewhere museum in Greensboro, NC. The article will use Elsewhere's ArtPlace America initiative, South Elm Projects, as a lens to examine and consider recent efforts by museums, foundations, and municipal governments to use placemaking as a tool for economic and social impact. In particular, the article questions whether creative placemaking is an ethical or equitable framework for social change. Has is it evolved into a platform for "philanthropic gentrification," or a neocolonial attempt to dispossess or displace local communities? Or can creative placemaking be used to re-imagine public commons and urban wilds in advance of and with development? Scheer shares critical insights and examples that highlight Elsewhere's approach to creative placemaking in the American South.

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The Norfolk Southern Railway still runs through the heart of downtown Greensboro, North Carolina with the same vigor it once had when completed in the mid-19th century. To the north of the tracks is the more affluent and mostly White neighborhood of Fisher Park, and to the south the predominantly African American neighborhoods of Old Asheboro and Southside. The trains were and still are the lifeblood of the city, but also represent lingering racial divides that echo the city's long civil rights history.

Greensboro, like many urban centers throughout the U.S., is experimenting with revitalization efforts that infuse cultural infrastructure into the rebuilding of its downtown.

Just a few blocks from where the railroad intersects with downtown Greensboro is Elsewhere, a living museum and artist residency program that invites artists from around the world to create site-specific projects from the contents of a former thrift store. Established in 2003, Elsewhere has evolved into an alternative art space and community hub that is regularly invited to participate and lead public initiatives around the city. In 2014, Elsewhere received an ArtPlace America grant to fund South Elm Projects, a series of "14 artscaping commissions," activating underutilized alleyways and greenspaces in Greensboro's South Elm neighborhood. Elsewhere describes the project as a way to further civic engagement, and a means to re-imagine public commons and urban wilds in advance of and with development.

Greensboro, like many urban centers throughout the U.S., is experimenting with revitalization efforts that infuse cultural infrastructure into the rebuilding of its downtown. However, urban planners, foundations and municipalities have recognized these efforts are often unsuccessful without an inclusive visioning process and set of tactics that are long-term and engaged. The idea of placemaking, with roots in the work of Jane Jacobs (1961), William H. Whyte (2001) and community based movements around the world, attempts to reflect this desire, offering more human-centered approaches to re-imagining the use, function, and accessibility of public and private spaces.

While the concept of placemaking is now a fairly accepted, "creative placemaking" is a more recent interpretation, emphasizing the work of artists, designers and creatives who develop cultural activities that strategically shape the physical and social character of a place (NEA, 2010). These efforts vary widely from site to site, from public sculptures and community-based collaborations, to mural and oral history projects, to music, art or dance festivals and still others.

Many cultural critics and planners know the formula of creative placemaking fairly well: bring in some artists to create attractions that increase the "vitality" and livability of a place, and this will bring a certain cultural relevance and economic impact. Although there are some indicators that this can benefit certain communities, scholars like Sarah Wilbur (2015) point out, placemaking is often appropriated as a "neoliberal cultural development agenda", as a form of neocolonialism, or "philanthropic route to gentrification" (p. 97). Others like Roberto Bedoya (2012) argue arts-based placemaking initiatives have historically ignored issues of race, poverty, and the social dynamics of place, instead privileging forms of urban revitalization "generated by dominant white ideology" (as cited in Webb, 2013, p. 37). These concerns

Figure 2. Elsewhere facade, 2012 (photo by Lucia Carroll)

reiterate what Grant Kester (1995) refers to as "aesthetic evangelism," describing the ways in which artists are increasingly positioned as "transhistorical shamans" to restore some kind of social bond with a disenfranchised community (p. 9).

Wilbur argues what is often overlooked in these arrangements are issues of temporality, and a consideration of how placemaking is a performative and embodied experience. For Wilbur in particular, the performance of placemaking is integral to both the political and cultural contingencies and conditions produced and maintained through a public project. The idea that a place can be "made" assumes a particular erasure of histories and in so doing becomes a dangerous game of dispossessing or excluding the voices of already marginalized communities affected by systemic forms of social, cultural, and economic oppression.

As a former curator at the museum, I was curious how Elsewhere was positioning itself around the idea of creative placemaking. In many ways, Elsewhere is an outlier in the cultural landscape of the American South, an experimental art space that challenges artists to work with a collection of 20th Century cultural surplus as both a material and concept for contemporary art making. How does Elsewhere's vision and ethos interpret creative placemaking? And more importantly, is placemaking an ethical or equitable framework to engage local communities, especially in the context of Greensboro where considerations of

race and class are critical to the city's future? To address some of these questions I sat down with Executive Director George Scheer to discuss the recent implementation of South Elm Projects as a lens for interrogating the politics of creative placemaking.

In Conversation: South Elm Projects

Since its founding in 2003, Elsewhere has invited artists to experiment with practices that some would consider forms of creative placemaking -- from theater productions and happenings, to site-specific installations, sound art, public dinners and immersive projects that continually respond to Elsewhere's collection of thrift and surplus material. However, South Elm Projects deviates slightly from the typical Elsewhere artist residency, challenging artists to work alongside neighborhood partners to create public art works that inspire civic action and grassroots creativity. In considering this, I wanted to speak with Elsewhere's Director George Scheer to better understand the organization's approach to placemaking, while also discussing some of the broader implications this method may have for public art and cultural programming in the U.S.

The questions explored here emerged organically through a conversation with Scheer at my home in Brooklyn, New York. Although there was no prearranged list of inquiries, I did express with Scheer beforehand that I was interested in focusing on the socio-economic and political dimensions of creative placemaking in relationship to South Elm Projects. I was

Figure 3. South Elm Projects, planning map (graphic by Mitchell Oliver

particularly interested in what practices were found to be successful or ineffective, and how the organization negotiated issues of equity and social justice throughout the planning and implementation of the program. The following is a documentation of our exchange.

Scheer is the co-founder and current Director of Elsewhere, a not for profit organization he started with collaborator Stephanie Sherman in 2003. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Performance and Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and has a background in critical theory, writing, and political communication. Scheer is also the grandson of Sylvia Gray who was the proprietress and original owner of the space that now houses Elsewhere's museum and residency program. To begin our conversation I asked Scheer to discuss the vision for the South Elm Projects and to provide some background and context on the program.

The vision for South Elm Projects was to highlight the creative character of our neighborhood, increase walkability, and through artistic projects stitch together hubs of interest and different cultural sectors in advance of and with development.

The vision for South Elm Projects was to highlight the creative character of our neighborhood, increase walkability, and through artistic projects stitch together hubs of interest and different cultural sectors in advance of and with development. South Elm Projects took on a precise geography, between the railroad tracks on South Elm Street, and Bragg Street (site of the incoming Greenway and edge of the Business Improvement District) in downtown Greensboro. Within this geography are numerous intersecting communities and neighborhoods all in transition. Buildings that had been vacant for 30 years now have new owners, new businesses are popping up and many are being closed. There is $200 million in development happening at a small intersection, where historic African American neighborhoods are intersecting with new infill developments, churches and the city's Greenway. South Elm Projects is a lot about asking: how do artists help direct the cultural infrastructure of this city as it evolves over the next 20 years? (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

There were over a dozen artists and groups commissioned to participate in the project. How were artists selected and what kinds of projects did they develop in Greensboro?

Through an open call, national nominations, and working with a local team of business owners and community activists, as well as local curators and artists, we selected 12 artist projects and groups to commission for projects. We selected works within 4 general categories based on what we were seeing in submissions and media people in our community we're excited about: ecological responses, painting/murals, historical/political investigations, and performative happenings. So we commissioned Agustina Woodgate to paint a large-scale hopscotch on the sidewalks throughout the neighborhood, Chat Travesio to create a mobile performance stage and bleachers for pop-up performances around the neighborhood, Camp Little Hope to create a field guide of the neighborhood investigating it's social, political, and environmental geographies, Chloë Bass to create historic plaques for buildings regarding the everyday people living and working in our neighborhood, Heather Hart to create an outdoor picnic pavilion providing conversational infrastructure for critical issues of race and development, and the Greensboro Permaculture Guild to create a community garden that connects Elsewhere alley with new co-working and entrepreneurship space.

The tactics were mixed. We aimed to disrupt people's everyday experience in our section of downtown, to use ecological infrastructures to create relationships between businesses and creative centers, to activate alleys and underutilized spaces, and to create places for difficult conversations at a site of impending development. Each project had different effects that became present in how they were produced, so it's both the intention of the work and how they unfolded that will have reverberating effect on our community. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Intentionality is a crucial factor in placemaking, and is in many ways connected to Elsewhere's evolution from a former thrift store to an international artist residency program and museum. While the mission of the organization has changed over time, there has always been an intention to preserve Sylvia's collection and to invite artists to reimagine the possibility of these materials in creative ways, from sculptures and installations to media-based works and performances. How do you feel Elsewhere's culture of reuse and "making do" informed the vision of South Elm Projects?

What would it be if every place just carefully evolved. What if histories and experiences of a people in a place weren't violently disrupted and broken, subordinated, and

displaced. What if the time of lingering was taken seriously as a way of telling our stories of divestment, not only the story of reinvestment. What if transitions were soft and our architecture was integral to the way people operate in community and move around within public space?

Elsewhere has tried to develop that way, letting artists layer their work, one upon the other, using the same set of things that were amassed through a history of different businesses run by Sylvia Gray [proprietress and owner] in her building. We look to the objects as resources full of potential, and we begin our discovery in making art with what is already present, allowing for many interpretations and multiple other explorations. We look at some areas of our neighborhood in the same way--their character can be preserved and extended at once, and made accessible.

I think we pass imperceptibly through many places in our cities with a blindness and ignorance that can be violent, disruptive, racist, and profitable.

George Perec (2008) talks in *Species of Spaces* about his experience with Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water, where walking from the forest into the courtyard and into the house was a seamless experience. I think we pass imperceptibly through many places in our cities with a blindness and ignorance that can be violent, disruptive, racist, and profitable. When people talk about a place as derelict they probably have never really spent time there and are implicitly making a judgment about people who are there. So when developers or other parties invest in those derelict places the choices they make don't always acknowledge the people and the architecture of the place, except to hold some awning or parapet as a token of an erased past, the spoils of the developer-colonialist. So what if we didn't do this development thing in this way, and instead allowed a certain level of autonomy and self-determination in our communities? Or went into the development process seeking many different voices, especially those present in that place, regardless of what financial investment they have to make, and moreover because they have social investment in the place.

South Elm Projects attempts to think openly and critically about place, about how it works, about what people's experiences are inside our museum and on our streets. We invited artists to look closely at the overlooked spaces and make visible (when appropriate) places that aren't visible and tell the stories of places that haven't yet been told. As a museum occupying a store with a long history on our street, we assisted artists

and our neighbors to connect. We worked hard to bring different neighbors into the
process, to partner them with artists for a valuable and meaningful experience. We
worked to tell stories that haven't been told, but we also worked to have the right people
telling their own stories so that ours wouldn't threaten to obscure the stories of a place.
(G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Relationship building, as you mention here, is crucial to placemaking or any kind of public
project involving people and a physical site. Art critic and scholar Grant Kester (2011)
describes this as a dialogic process that unfolds with a particular audience or environment.
However, Kester and others like Tom Finkelpearl (2013) or Lucy Lippard (1998) warn that
relationships and authentic communication can be difficult to cultivate between long-time
residents and artists coming in from the outside. This is even more complicated when public
art includes some level of participation with an audience. How were you navigating these
issues of participation and relationship building, and were there any examples of challenges
faced by artists as they began to work in Greensboro?

There were some really special and challenging moments. Agustina, for one, discovered
in her hopskotch project that the sidewalks were politicized spaces, they were
boundaries between different socio economic sectors, and they became lines of
performativity in the interaction of people who directly boarder those spaces--shop
owners, building owners, commercial space attendants, people experiencing
homelessness.

The hopskotch project was a continuation of her work in Buenos Aires, where she
painted over 1500 hopskotch squares in different neighborhoods of the city. the squares
move from drainpipe to drainpipe, and so in a way use the city's water infrastructure to
move around. In South Elm the map was fairly contained. The squares began at the drain
underneath the train tracks because that was a beginning for Greensboro. They unfold
down the 500 Elm Street block and pop up in front of Elsewhere, continue along the
length of our building and then to Lee Street (a state owned road that caused some
problems), Bragg Street, and Arlington Street where they run the length of the block,
past Faith Beloved Church. In total about 2,000 squares.

The project is an illustration, it's a way of sketching or marking out the project area and
extended neighborhood of South Elm. It's a downtown game that some people are
playing all the time when they are downtown. It is a way of marking territory and also
connecting spaces that otherwise aren't often connected. I think it is also a political and

Figure 4. Agustina Woodgate, Hopscotch, 2015, paint (photo by Mitchell Oliver)

playful gesture, an artistic illustration, and artistic map-making project done as public artwork.

However it is also just a conversation starter between an artist and a community; Blue at the taxi stand, Robert at his bread/flour castle, Carlton in front of Coe Grocers, Evan and William who are starting a boutique local denim shop, and Reverend Nelson and the Scales brothers in front of Faith Beloved. Everywhere Agustina lay down paint, people would talk to her or yell at her. When she put paint on Lee Street the city planning department flipped out because it was a state road. There was a day of phone calls on our end letting everyone know that it was okay and we wouldn't "step out of line again!" When she put paint in front of Eric Robert's castle, a revitalized bread and flour mill, he came out and yelled that the sidewalk was his right of way, and that she had to have his permission, that he owned the sidewalk! His outburst threatened the whole project because he called the city. When Robert confronted her, Agustina just went across the single lane road to the sidewalk in front of Blue's yellow taxi dispatch office and started to paint, and he pulled a chair onto the sidewalk and talked with her. This isn't a story about asking for permission, it's about the relative expression of entitlement,

empowerment, and personality in public space. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

There were several other projects that really activated the streets of Greensboro. I had a chance to experience Carmen Papalia's non-visual walking tours (*Blind Field Shuttle*), which at first, I have to admit I was skeptical of. There was something about a partially blind artist leading a "blind walking tour" that seemed maybe too obvious. But after the experience, my entire understanding of downtown Greensboro had shifted. It was so interesting how a small and intimate moment of encounter with Carmen, took on this political dimension as we navigated public spaces around Greensboro.

Carmen led several tours throughout the few weeks he was in residence at Elsewhere, asking each group to close their eyes and walk together along predetermined routes within downtown Greensboro. The simple act of walking with eyes closed, engaging the city through touch, and walking together in a group was incredibly transformative. I think it was something about the way Carmen framed the walks as a critique of accessibility, and kind of collaborative sensorial cartography that made it interesting. I had walked those streets for years, but was able to feel, hear, smell and sense something entirely different.

Figure 5. Carmen Papalia, Blind Field Shuttle, 2015, sightless, individually led group tours through downtown Greensboro (photo by Mitchell Oliver)

I will admit, we did create a spectacle in some sense at intersections and crosswalks. I could feel (and sometimes I cheated and peeked) groups of people leering at us and wondering why this long line of people was slowly meandering through the city with their eyes closed. I think it provoked moments of pause and contemplation, maybe a consideration of able-bodiedness that would not have otherwise occurred. Did you have the same kind of experience?

Carmen offered some special moments, and I think performative gestures that transform the way people look are important curatorially. The walks were also taken by the city planning department and one a city councilperson. But Carmen also took Elsewhere's interns and artists on walks. I think with better planning and understanding of the artist's process we could have more correctly connected the artists with a better curated group of South Elm neighbors. That said, the city planning department, Action Greensboro's--an economic development agency--staff, and a city councilperson, was a good start. In a way, Carmen's project was intended to be transformative at a human level and this specificity around public people, city people, neighborhood people; all these classifications real and curatorially imagined, were not what he as an artist wanted to focus on.

Figure 6. Carmen Papalia, Blind Field Shuttle, 2015 (photo by Zachary L. Breazeale)

I mention this, because working with artists in public space and around placemaking projects has a different host of contextual and socio-political contingencies that inform the project. How these concepts are translated and engaged through the artist's work is important, but they might also get in the way of an artist's practice. Placemaking can politically and socially impact the kind of work an artist is making in a way that is disruptive or even untrue to the artist practice. This is a challenge we run into when working with socially engaged artists in public or placemaking projects. At the same time, Carmen's project was beautiful because it took those in power, those making decisions about the economic resources and experiences and landscapes of our community and asked them to literally see (and figuratively not

see) the city. It's disruptive, personal, exposed, spectacle, all in one. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Right, and this points to a question of impact and experience. What is the value of an ephemeral gesture in relation to a large public sculpture or new building. Brick and mortar projects often garner greater attention because there is an assumption that this kind of materiality will spur community building and further development (Webb, 2013; Bedoya, 2012). However, the impacts of placemaking can often be more subtle. Intimate and immersive encounters like Carmen's project may actually help reposition one's accountability and perception of a place through a meaningful experience or memory formed.

Chloë Bass' project touches on this in some ways. She created a series of plaques that highlight the everyday histories of people living in Greensboro and then affix them to buildings downtown. You may encounter them in passing, or may never know they are there. But what about this gesture constitutes placemaking?

Chloë's project, entitled *We Walk the World Two by Two*, composes the third chapter of her *Book of Everyday Instruction*. For this project Chloë hosted interviews with people in the South Elm Neighborhood who shared particular relationships to a particular place in downtown. Each interview was approximately two hours long, and from them she created a forty word statement that was engraved on a bronze plated plaque placed on the building. I think her project explores how the personal and interpersonal are also public, that they share a history, and are made up of everyday gestures (even if they appear monumental). Her plaques also treat the place as a space for telling stories in relationship to the environment.

So much of the South Elm neighborhood is in transition. Stores and businesses are changing over along with residents, customers, and audiences. Part of South Elm Projects was to capture the creativity and people currently present in our neighborhood. Placemaking is most disastrous when it ignores, actively displaces, and/or whitewashes the people and stories of a place. Development will erase these stories even if it doesn't manage to displace people. These plaques capture a moment of personality and memory drawn from a space and makes them historical. It also critiques our understanding of the historical, the implicit reduction of a singular person's role in a historic moment. Historic plaques lay claim to and also obscure the way history has made a place come to be. All of this is at play in Chloë's work, and it will be interesting to see what happens over time when these people leave their buildings, when areas develop, when personalities move on, and when new people who don't know the everyday history of

this place inhabit a transformed downtown Greensboro. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)
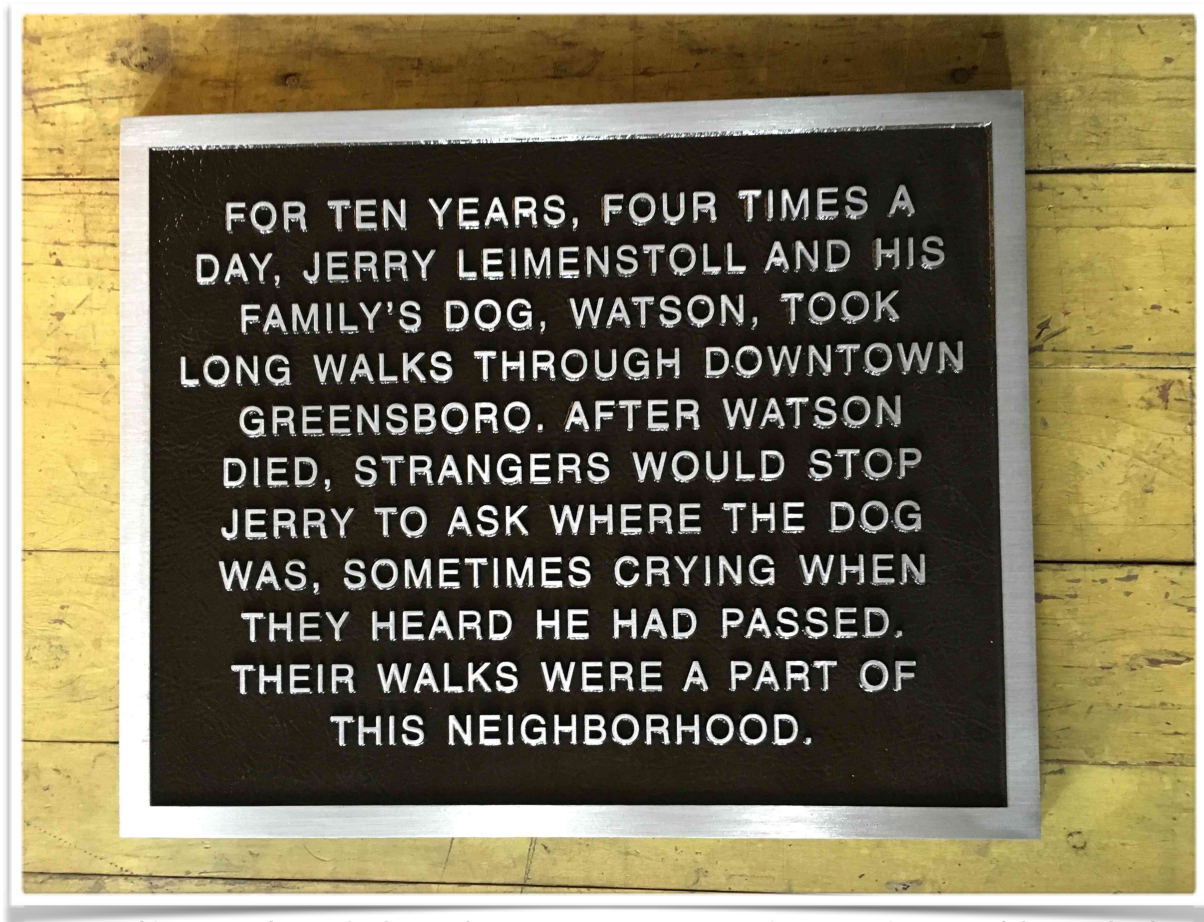

Figure 7. Chloe Bass, The Book of Everyday Instruction, 2015, Cast aluminum plaques with bronze finish and audio (photo by Chloe Bass)

This play with historical narrative and challenging the discourse of development is interesting. In many ways creative placemaking attempts to articulate or make visible the historical, cultural and social character of a place, but this is often obscured or co-opted by the lure of economic speculation. This process can be incredibly racialized, as Roberto Bedoya (2012) discusses, and informed by urban planning strategies that attempt to erase or remove the culture and histories of minority communities. Do you feel as though this is happening in Greensboro? Is the city going through a process of gentrification, and is South Elm Projects resisting or bringing attention to this?

Yes, Greensboro is gentrifying, but it doesn't have to be a process of displacement nor a process of increased disempowerment. Because this is Greensboro, NC, a place of enormous civil rights legacy and action, a place struggling with 30+ years of post-

industrial economic decline. South Elm Projects aims to capture an image of a place in transition, to forward a more sociable way for future cultural and economic engagement, and situate in this development conversations on the importance of equity, new models, and platforms for community engagement. Through place-based art we can exhibit what an intersectional (or at least intersecting) community look likes. It's high hopes for a series of curated public art projects, but we have to begin with these goals in mind. Again, a very tall order. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

The economics of placemaking are complicated to say the least. Sara Wilbur (2013) explains placemaking often "functions as shorthand for economic development and casts participating artists as custodians of capitalist excess" (p. 97). The NEA and ArtPlace America have attempted to codify this into "vibrancy indicators" or a vitality index including broad categories like quality of life, cultural activity, and economic impact. Do you feel placemaking is too entrenched in the game of economic growth or the guise of entrepreneurial advancement as a form of cultural development?

Different games are being played at different levels. At the position of a single arts center or downtown festival this focus on economic impact, or using something like the ArtPlace/NEA vitality index is a little suspect. But if we don't produce a matrix of economic impact on a larger scale then we can't remix the relationships arts has within a broader ecology of social and economic interests. Placemaking is a mechanics for changing the way that our society revolves around culture, and there is a way in which the placement of art into other fields can disrupt the older political infrastructures and policies that can only be changed by disrupting the position of culture in society. So it would, I think, be a mistake to not take seriously, and in the most radical fashion possible, the intrinsic role that art and culture more generally play in the production of socio-economic normatives. That said, thinking of art in its economic relationship to place should not be about the amount spent by every gallery visitor in the restaurant next door. Rather, about how culture and consumption are being interrelated in a persons' vision of place and place's vision of itself. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Perhaps this has something to do with reassessing the kinds of variables and metrics used to measure the "success" or "impact" of a cultural ecosystem. Ian David Moss (2012) notes the vibrancy index or indicators used in the past by the NEA and ArtPlace are not necessarily grounded in any kind of theoretical framework, and are often not able to clearly discern the role arts play in economic development. These indicators often gloss over issues of social

equity and gentrification. Considering this, do you feel there are issues in how we assess and measure the impacts of placemaking? And how do we assert a different set of value structures for how art infuses the fabric of a place, and how places inform creative activity? Is this simply about acknowledging what already exists, instead of constantly creating something "new" or "innovative"?

> First, does art have an intrinsic value that isn't economic and may not even be social? Has placemaking co-opted the social values of art and re-inserted them in economic infrastructures of place? Is there a new form of assessment for socially engaged art that would better help us understand its intrinsic value?
>
> I don't think it is placemaking and the economic impetus that got us into this aesthetic evangelism. I think it's art's social turn in general that got us as artists into a tricky place where we are going into communities not our own, with money given to us from those outside the community with the expectation that there should be measurable impacts in those communities. This is happening in all social sectors, criminal justice, food equity, housing, health, and education. The entire non-profit infrastructure often sustains itself by maintaining and sustaining communities at risk rather than developing platforms for the community's own effort to stabilize and transform itself. The entire structure of non-profit funding has a skewed relationship to equity because those we are responsible to are not the same as those who we are responsible for. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

The ethical imperative of placemaking has a great deal to do with both an organization and individual's willingness and capacity to attend to the root causes of social inequity. This can of course be a challenge, especially when funders or organizations make an assumption that a place is inherently downtrodden and filled with "at-risk" communities, and that art can somehow fix a situation within a narrow time frame. In many ways art can be effective at making issues of social or economic equity visible, but ultimately institutionalized forms of oppression take decades if not generations to dismantle and address. So it is really complicated and dangerous. However, there are effective models to counter a trend of either ignoring or neglecting the socio-political implications of placemaking. I am thinking of worker cooperatives, and barter or solidarity economies.

> Yes, and I do think that we can exhibit different models in our communities like co-shares, co-opts, start up incubators, public gathering spaces, participatory budgeting programs, and others.

Perhaps one of the most glaring problems with the way creative placemaking has manifest not only in art but in sociology, politics and political science, philanthropy, activism, everywhere, is that we think of a singular place in the way we think about a singular space or geography. In any single place there are a myriad of ways, habits and relations that form, many of which are invisible to the others. Place cannot be a singular subject any more than a zipcode offers a homogenous demographic. The place of a home or the place of commerce, or a downtown, or the stoop or porch, each of these have a more general set of abstract relationships that we have formed in our understanding. But when you start talking about someone's home or someone's porch, or a stoop in your neighborhood, or the walk you take to get to your downtown, these gestures become habituated performances and those are integral to understanding a place. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

The language of place and space is important here. Human geographers and thinkers like Yi-Fu Tuan (2001), Wendell Berry (2010), Georges Perec (2008) and others offer very different conceptions of what a place is, versus an often more abstract understanding of space. In the NEA white paper *Creative Placemaking*, Anna Markusen (2010) directly refers to creative places as "cultural industry crucibles where people, ideas, and organizations come together, generating new products, industries, jobs, and American exports" (p. 5). How does Elsewhere understand the idea of place versus space, especially in relationship to this economic emphasis that Markusen alludes to here? What languages do you think are essential to explore, or maybe re-imagine?

At Elsewhere we used to use the term "Splace" as a way to combine these two related concepts. I think either way you position yourself, space and place is a dialectic of familiarity. How related to, or relatable are we, in our position to others, the environment, the spaces we inhabit, and the people we engage with. A place is something that we are integrally a part of, a space is a more abstract environmental construct in which "the social," whatever that is to the community constructing it, situates itself. Perhaps we went the wrong way in art by forming all these "art spaces" in which we reproduced the traditional and commercialized gallery space by creating yet another form of "alternative space," where in we could place work out of context. Now we are chasing this idea of place along with so many other fields, and it requires a whole set of other talents and resources from artists and arts organizers. When we create within a framework of place we are creating with context--a particular, imbedded, inhabited history, lived language and environment. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

In closing, what do you feel was missing from South Elm Projects and how does Elsewhere move forward and build momentum from these efforts?

There is a lot missing still from the projects -- the interpersonal experiences, the interviews with artists and neighbors, the everyday encounters, the official encounters, the meetings with neighbors, the explaining what we were doing over and over again, the moments of distrust and ignorance--warranted and unwarranted. In here lies the impact of the project. If Elsewhere's mission is to build a more collaborative culture, then how we managed to move culture in our city and for whom we moved it hopefully something we will always be discovering. However, at a simple level, Elsewhere is more a part of certain conversations in our city around development and equity than we were when we started. This is a change in our organization's culture and "cultures" within the city. However, our impact on these conversations is, like everything else, its going to continue to evolve, and the true impact of Elsewhere's role in the community and neighborhood is also going to evolve. (G. Scheer, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

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Some In-Conclusions: Belonging and Cultural Stewardship

Elsewhere's South Elm Projects offers a glimpse into the emerging field of creative placemaking and highlights some of the complex challenges and opportunities for artistic collaborations in the public sphere. Issues of time and long-term commitment, of equity and social justice, economics and relationship building were key concerns expressed throughout my conversation with Scheer. In many ways, Elsewhere's approach to creative placemaking focuses on the pre-existing assets and histories of Greensboro, rather than relying on a deficit-based model that pathologizes a particular set of conditions for artists to "fix." The commissioned works, from Papalia's *Blind Field Shuttle* to Woodgate's *hopskotch* and Bass' historic plaques, leverage cultural and ecological infrastructures already in place while also

bringing attention to the overlooked and forgotten stories and histories of Greensboro. However, as Scheer admits, there is still a lot missing from these projects, and will require ongoing engagement and a continued re-examination of the language, politics, and practices of place-based art.

Despite a collection of examples to consider here, the "real" impacts of placemaking remain elusive. This is due in part to the nebulous forms of assessment commonly used in the field, which continue to quantify the value of participatory public artworks in terms of tangible economic or social impacts (eg. number of dollars generated or people in attendance). Placemaking projects are often messy and complicated, and rely on a kind of accountability and trust that emerges over time between artists, communities, and the places they collaborate with. This can be difficult to measure quantitatively and places doubt on the effectiveness of more experimental, ephemeral, or site-specific activations that deviate from what is commonly accepted as "good" public art or "effective" community development.

Scheer's assertion that "placemaking is a mechanics for changing the way that our society revolves around culture...," is perhaps idealistic in this sense and requires a kind of resistance to the developer-colonialist paradigm that continues to dominate high profile public art projects in cities across the country. Placemaking efforts disguised as a vehicle economic revitalization not only compromise the integrity and intentionality of an artist's vision, but also ignore larger socio-cultural issues and systems that privilege particular geographies and/ or communities. As Roberto Bedoya (2012) points out, this is related deeply to issues of power and belonging. If left unexamined, the best intentions to "vitalize" a neighborhood can have serious consequences and further displace already marginalized communities. In thinking through the politics and practices of placemaking, we need to as Patricia Webb (2013) explains, "first acknowledge our legacy of place-taking" before we can set out to make any kind of measurable social impact or change (p. 38). This is a "tall order," as Scheer remarks, but a requirement nevertheless.

Although South Elm Projects was successful in some regards, the true test of the initiative's "impact" is linked to the quality and types of relationships maintained, how the cultural infrastructure created through the project leads to further collaborations and opportunities, and how the project articulates both a historic and present concern for issues of equity and inclusion across the region. This requires the cultivation of what Bedoya (2012) refers to as "cultural stewardship," and also a willingness to experiment and make long-term investments that are culturally responsive and can evolve alongside the changing needs of communities and the places they call home.

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About the Author
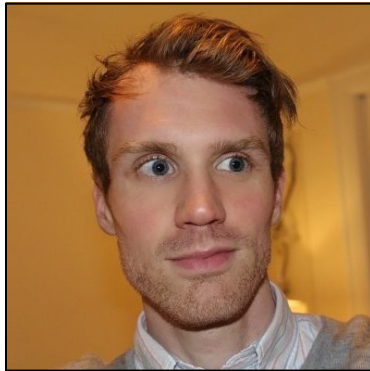
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