

Moving beyond creative placemaking: the micropublic of a social practice placemaking project

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Abstract

This paper will offer a deeper understanding of coalitions and micropublics in creative placemaking by offering an alternative arts-based placemaking practice (as defined by the National Endowment for the Arts, Markusen and Gadwa 2010) of social practice placemaking (SPPM). This paper is concerned with the co-option of arts into placemaking as a practice of limited public engagement and agency and offers SPPM as a practice that challenges the binary and linear notion of authorship and audience (Kwon 2004, Whybrow 2011) found in creative placemaking.

SPPM creates a situated micropublic constituency of an 'urban creative' (Klanten and Hübner 2010) assemblage of artists, community members and urban professionals working in equanimity that engenders deeper feelings of place attachment in the collaborative group, which in turn affects notions of civic participation and individual and community identification.

It will present research findings of global SPPM fieldwork case studies with specific focus on Big Car, Indianapolis. Findings from this case study address issues who may form a placemaking coalition; how these coalitions may operate; ethical concerns of creative and social practice placemaking; these practices as a means of cultural expression; and their relative impact on minority socio-cultural groups.

This paper will disrupt the creative placemaking (CPM) term as one misused in the placemaking sector; from a vernacular aspect, commonly to mean *any* placemaking with *any* arts component in it; and on a policy level, as a placemaking approach that uses the arts in placemaking to economic ends. The paper will posit that a type of placemaking the author refers to as social practice placemaking (SPPM) accords more closely with Amin's (2002) micropublic agency, here 'moving beyond' the CPM terminology and understanding as defined by the National Endowment for the Arts (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). This paper will offer a deeper understanding of coalitions and micropublics in CPM by offering an alternative arts-based placemaking practice of SPPM. This paper is concerned with the co-option of arts into placemaking as a practice of limited public engagement and agency and offers SPPM as a practice that challenges the binary and linear notion of authorship and audience (Kwon 2004, Whybrow 2011) found in CPM. The paper will present the findings in relation to coalitions, micropublics and the social space everyday encounters of SPPM practice of a research case study, Big Car¹ in Indianapolis, USA.

Creative placemaking – definition

The operative understanding of CPM that will be used in this paper is that promulgated by National Endowment for the Arts² (NEA) as defined by Markusen and Gadwa in their 2010 white paper:

"In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local businesses viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire and be inspired" (Markusen and Gadwa 2010 p3)

This concept of CPM presupposes a placemaking with a creative seam running through it, enacted by participative coalitions between public, private, non-profit, for-profit and/or grassroots agents, that effect the creative industries in their local context. There is in this, a strong regard given to economic development, as much as to the ways in which communities can use the arts to help shape their social and material built environment circumstances. This definition has shaped the funding criteria and agenda of the US-nationwide placemaking programme, ArtPlace America³, the 'ten-year collaboration that exists to position art and culture as a core sector of comprehensive community planning and development in order to help strengthen the social, physical, and economic fabric of communities' (ibid). Whilst this perception of CPM may have a level of recognition within the sector globally, it has become clear in the course of this research that not all use it to mean the same phenomenon; rather, whilst a large proportion of placemaking will have a creative element and an economic development intent, there is a large body of activity that uses the arts in a different mode and to a different purpose. It is this extension of the creative in CPM that is the concern of this paper.

¹ Big Car: <http://www.bigcar.org/>.

² National Endowment for the Arts: <http://arts.gov/>.

³ ArtPlace America: <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/>.

Amin's micropublics

Amin introduces and defines the term 'micropublic' in his 2002 paper, *Ethnicity and the multicultural city*. His observations began from the pace of the city street where he saw people in constant movement with little connection between them (Amin 2002 p79). From this, he reasoned that a physical proximity to another is not enough to create a connection; rather 'spaces of interdependence' need to be created in order to engender an intercultural understanding (Valentine 2014 p85). Amin's 'micropublics of everyday social contact and encounter' include, for example but not exhaustively, hobby interest clubs, communal gardens and youth centres. These activity and spatial sites create opportunity for 'intercultural intermingling' as they involve negotiations of the everyday that cross boundaries of difference – 'banal transgressions' as they are termed (Amin 2002). In these microspaces of shared social space, people from diverse backgrounds are forced into an inter-cultural dialogue around the common project, a dialogue that involves negotiation and breaking out of habitual patterns of self and interaction, to learn new ways of being and relating and in some instances, transcending cultural boundaries (Amin 2002, Ho 2011 pp604-605). As Sandercock (2003) states, micropublic spaces have the capacity to be sites 'of not only cultural exchange, but also cultural destabilisation and transformation' (in Valentine 2014 p86), where the disruption of familiar patterns creates possibilities for new alliances and attachments to form across ethnic boundaries. Those that form these intercultural coalitions around a purposed activity will change from one micropublic to another, but will include the same categories of people, including artists, local residents, local and possibly also national funders, local sponsors for example; will be largely drawn from the non-profit sector, with no expectation of profit to be ever made.

The notion of micropublics has proved useful to this research project by way of its founding on practices of the everyday and negotiations of difference at the local level, both intra-group negotiations and the negotiations of that group with local administrative structures. As Amin states, this thinking does not privilege either the bottom-up nor the top-down processes of urban politics – and in the case of this research, placemaking – but rather, 'It is intended to privilege everyday enactment as the central site of identity and attitude formation' (Amin 2002 p11). This paper will now provide a contextualisation of SPPM in regards to micropublics.

Social practice placemaking and the micropublic

The research project defines social practice placemaking as comprising a cluster of co-produced, relational creative practices that employ a social practice arts approach to social, cultural and material urban issues. SPPM often side-steps formal masterplans and zoning (Bishop and Williams 2012 p215) and is driven by community issues; and created by architects, artists, urbanists, working outside of strict professional boundaries (Zeiger 2011) with members of a local community in a polylogic process with a focus on the relation between subject, object, and space.

This assemblage of artists, community members and urban professionals creates a situated micropublic constituency in SPPM of an 'urban creative' (Klanten and Hübner 2010) working in equanimity. The 'non-artist' urban creative may have no formal training but 'funds' (Dewey 1958) the process by bringing another relative expertise, from their lived experience, in total, forming an expertise assemblage (Tait 2011 p282). For some practitioners and also theorists such as

Schneekloth and Shibley (2000) and Roberts (2009), any expert appropriation of placemaking renders it redundant as it then becomes an exclusory process and effectively creates and maintains barriers to assemblaged, collaborative practice through silos of knowledge, which work contra to effective SPPM. Whilst the SPPM micropublic may coalesce around an activity, these projects take place in, and claim as their own 'pseudo-public spaces of liminal space' (Grodach 2010 p475) and in 'non-sites' (Patrick 2011 p65), calling into question what is public space and what can occur in it. Space here is both the field and basis of action, the 'situated multiplicity' as Amin sees it (2008 p8), both an interaction of material object as well as a relation of Deleuze and Guattari's (2002) rhizomatic exchanges. In this sense, SPPM is as much about a co-operational social structure (Riley 2013), as much a critical spatial practice (Rendell 2006) as material change in the urban form: the SPPM artwork presents itself as the object and site of experiencing as well as the means to start a process of reflection and tactical response. This is Kwon's 'art as public spaces' in the public interest (2004 p60), a broader critical spatial practice of art being a 'doing' of work and a contextual performance, manifested via an engagement with the multifarious urban lived experience (Rendell 2006, Whybrow 2011 pp25-26).

SPPM goes beyond the top-down 'I manage, you participate' model of a participatory creative process (Saxena 2011 p31) describes. It is instead a co-produced practice informed by Bourriaud's relational art which is concerned with human interactions and social context, and situated in the urban, acts at a social interstice of the everyday (Bourriaud 1998 in Bishop 2006). A co-produced practice SPPM goes beyond a prosaic and token 'pseudo-participation' (Petrescu 2006) to a horizontal, collaborative process with a deeper level of engagement with who traditionally would have been thought of as the participants; the term 'participant' is effectively dissolved and the function of the creative process is in the collective endeavour itself (Brown 2012, Critical Art Ensemble 1998, Grodach 2010, Kravagna 2012, McGonagle 2007, Tait 2011). Here the artwork is created by the community in and for their place (Cleveland 2001 p18) and on their terms (Gablik 1992, Kaprow in Kelly 1993/2003 p xviii) and the endeavour is one that facilitates the negotiation of the personal, social and political of the individual and the collective in space (Petrescu 2006 p83). This then is a performative artform, an assemblage of a practice 'in the doing' (Hannah 2009), the co-producing urban creatives forming an interconnected 'live body' as (Rounthwaite 2011) that articulates community voice and the process becomes the practice, an "approach not an output" (Hoskins 1999 p287).

The outcomes of SPPM can be seen as akin to those of the transformation that Amin (2002) talks of, but here cultural as well as spatial and material. The role of art here is to draw attention to issues and encourage reflexive reassessment via new thinking and then doing, acting thus as a catalyst for social change (Brown 2012 p10, Murray 2012 pp256-257) through community coalition building (Kwon 2004) leading directly to community conscientization, developing a community level critical awareness of lived experience and place, challenging the notion, and perhaps also their self-perception, of citizens as passive rather than active (Bishop 2006, Colombo et al 2001, Kastner 1996, McGonagle 2007, Reiss 2007, Sorenson 2009, Yoon 2009). The urban creative micropublic in SPPM creates a situated feeling of place attachment in the group, which in turn has critical spatial outcomes (Rendell 2006) using art as a tool to question and explore social problems and dominant power relations and is both involved in and disruptive of the everyday (Pinder 2008).

Big Car Collaborative, Indianapolis

The paper will now turn to the case study example of Big Car Collaborative (sic, Big Car), as an example of a practice that could ostensibly be termed CPM, as a coalition of public and private organisations; but that extends beyond the NEA definition, and in some instances, sidesteps it completely, to an SPPM one, informed by social practice art and working towards social and cultural ends first and foremost, and often exclusively in an artist-led regeneration.

Big Car is 'an artist-led non-profit social practice/public art organization and collective'⁴. It has been operational for ten years and now has a fulltime staff of six and Board of 13, and a number of project staff and ad hoc partners. Its mission statement is to bring 'art to people and people to art, sparking creativity in lives to transform communities' (ibid). Big Car is supported by a substantial list of funders and sponsors, from the Indianapolis local scene and also drawn nationally, including funding from city administrations, from arts funders such as Andy Warhol Foundation and from, on a project basis, the Lilly pharmaceutical company for example. It is based in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, a city with a 2013 population of 843,393⁵, making it the 13th largest city in the USA⁶. It is also the USA's ninth poorest city⁷, and has a creative class share of the population of 33 per cent, in the bottom ten for the USA (Florida 2012 p251). Over its ten years Big Car has worked across Indianapolis, with a number of bases, with a mix of fixed sites as well as durational projects in off-site locations.

The Big Car example is one that in accordance with Amin's (2002) thinking on micropublics, challenging the implicit binary and linear notion of authorship and audience (Kwon 2004, Whybrow 2011) found in CPM. It is also a challenge to CPM as part of the 'cultural industries' as its SPPM projects do not have a fiscal goal at the core of their intent, nor will have a fiscal outcome necessarily. The organisations artistic references include Kaprow and the Situationists and it describes its art and placemaking practice as that of social practice.

SPPM to CPM– Fountain Square and the south side

It was repeatedly stated by interview respondents that Big Car was, to paraphrase many interviewees, 'instrumental in turning Fountain Square around'. Fountain Square is an area to the south of downtown, that ten years ago was perceived as being dilapidated. Big Car's first residence was at the converted factory, the Murphy building, and from this base it began a middle-term tenure of arts programming that resulted in, over time, other creatives and funders coalescing around it. Fountain Square is now thought of as a 'hipster' area of the city with a large proportion of artists and the creative industries and micro food and brewing companies and improved services and transit infrastructure. From this base also, Big Car started to reach out to other partners and areas in the city, moving from the Murphy building to the west side, to create the Service Centre⁸, a community

⁴ Big Car 'about': <http://www.bigcar.org/aboutus/>.

⁵ United States Census Bureau: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/18/1836003.html>.

⁶ United States Census Bureau: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

⁷ CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/media/americas-11-poorest-cities/4/>.

⁸ Service Center: <https://vimeo.com/56601035>.

and arts hub, an area where it continues to have a presence in the form of sound art gallery ListenHear⁹ and the Showroom on Lafayette Square.

Big Car's current largest venue-based undertaking is further out of the city south side, in the Garfield Park area. It has acquired, with a Community Development Trust grant, a 12,000 sq ft and two-storey former tyre factory, given the working title of 'The Tube' for this reason. This building is being renovated into meeting and office workspaces, exhibition and performance space, and substantial maker and fabrication workshops, all for Big Car and community use. It has also bought an adjacent former laundry store which it will relocate the ListenHear sound art project and use as a base for its forthcoming radio station. It is about to complete on a deal with a developer, together with its own funding, to purchase circa ten houses on the surrounding Cruft and Nelson streets to turn into permanent and rotation artist residencies; a second 30,000 sq ft factory next to The Tube, planned exclusively as exhibition space; and is in talks with the city administration about funding community co-produced traffic calming measures along the arterial route from downtown, Shelby Street.

Big Car is undertaking this 'artist-led regeneration' to culturally and materially develop the south side corridor through its long-term artistic, organisational and economic investment. Whilst news of the acquisitions has led some locals and developers to reconsider this area as one of property investment and worthwhile for home improvement on Cruft and Nelson streets, the long-term and residential commitment of the creative micropublic that comprises Big Car may act against regeneration effects; it is Big Car's intention to work with those people and businesses resident to improve their cultural and material lived experience and to keep them locally resident, not for them to become priced out of the area. Through this 'dedicated presence and the encouragement of creativity' (Big Car interviewee) and through its creative programming, 'we'll be able to see the area's assets as well' (Big Car interviewee). It is this process of building an arts-based infrastructure and ecology that has already started to galvanise south side residents into a micropublic around arts and place. In contrast to many short-term or pop-up placemaking interventions, Big Car's SPPM practice accords again here with micropublic theory, putting emphasis on local meeting spaces of regular engagement where there is a shared stake, involvement heightened by face to face contact. (Hall 2012 p54). Therefore, there is scope here – and has been seen in previous Big Car projects – for that micropublic coalescing around cultural activity to distance themselves from the life-world of their lived experience to critically reflect on the forces that shape their existence (Kester 2004). This has a cumulative effect – as one makes a change and transitions from participant to collaborator, it will affect the group habitus and will begin to affect change in others, as multiplicitous process of assemblage (Tait 2011 pp285-286) or bricolaged as equal members in a process as practitioner and theorist (Petrescu 2006).

Operationally in its projects, delivery is at the hyperlocal level and Big Car engages with the micropublic at the neighbourhood, block or street level, with an aim also to break the boundaries neighbourhood homogenous cultural expression in Indianapolis and encouraging people to travel intra-city. Big Car is facilitative of incorporating multiple viewpoints and responsive and interactive learning environments, engendering a collective action by residents appropriating neighbourhood by socio-spatial, discursive practices and shaping it in own image. Its SPPM practice is akin to Debord's (1957, in Bishop 2006) constructed situations where experimental and juxtaposed activity is used to

⁹ ListenHear: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Listen-Hear/1019844324696664?fref=ts>.

create spectacle and the material setting engendering a different behaviour and where, as Kwon states it, the artists involved acting as 'social agents' (Kwon 2004 p106). Big Car, as a collaborative, forms an umbrella micropublic of urban creatives – comprised of the Big Car artist cohort as well as in the demographic of the community - that works across a city and is trying to get people to cross from one district to another, drawing together people of all backgrounds to promote and perpetuate creativity, invigorate public places and support better neighbourhoods. Big Car's activity over its ten years has turned away from the established art and public spaces of Indianapolis, to instead foreground third spaces and invested in local spaces as alternative public terrains.

The bricolage that can be seen in local projects has had an impact, over time, on Indianapolis. It was also repeatedly reported in the data collection that Indianapolis has a 'fraught' sense of place based on a 'long term memory of how each little place used to be' (interviewee), with compounding barriered neighbourhood territories of homogenous cultural expression; Big Car, by dissolving the barrier between Fountain Square and downtown initially, and its aims along similar lines with south side and its other projects, is acting to counter this, creating a networked micropublic of creative collaborators across city neighbourhoods. What can be seen in the development of Big Car is its pivotal – though not sole – role as a driver of creative infrastructure and the creation of contemporaneous arts ecology in Indianapolis. It can be seen to have transformed the socio-political characteristics of Indianapolis and is a significant co-creator of a micropublic that in this instance spans a creative city-wide sector. In its project activity across the city, Big Car has 'artist-led work in each location' and forms an urban creative group composed of artists, residents' demographics of groups, board and volunteer and sponsor supporters.

Thus, in this case study, we also see, in relation to micropublics and placemaking, learning in who may form a placemaking coalition; how these coalitions may operate; issues of access and power; who is denied access; where projects take place in the cityscape; the arts as a rejoinder to gentrification; the subverting of authorship and audience; and SPPM as a means of cultural expression.

Micropublic and the extension of CPM

With its focus on the arts process in SPPM, the research can also add this knowledge to micropublic thinking; there is a particularity to the agency of the social practice art in SPPM that engenders transformation. The art intervention is purposed to disrupt the habitual of the everyday urban functioning, and in the avant-garde tradition, making the familiar unfamiliar (Highmore 2002 in Farr 2008 p84, Kester 2004) and vice versa (Amin 2008), an 'aesthetic dislocation' which is a 'catalytic agent' for reflection (Kester 2004 p84). The outcome of this is a transformation of the habitual behavioural dispositions of habitus thus changing normative perceptions and attitudes (Painter 2000). By situating the arts practice in a critical urban discourse, and as a critical site-specific artform, the SPPM performative practice incorporates context as critique of the artwork but also attempts to intervene functionally in the site via the artwork. Thus, this research has viewed SPPM art interventions as a way in to questioning the everyday, finding out what people desire to change, and working towards making that change real; the arts process as performative helps people discover this and then, through material testing, bring about change. SPPM is a working through of social difference with people discarding aspects of this in the task of the common endeavour. This

has a spatial aspect too; whilst the local is invested in, territories become permeable rather than fixed through the collaboration in shared projects that are of the everyday, and as can be seen with Big Car in particular, the 'accumulations of a number of micropublics allow individuals to navigate within and across the territories of the city' (Hall 2012 p18). Aspects of transformation can be seen too. Big Car projects both show that involvement in the projects is firstly a reflexive exercise and then from this, transformative, based on a sense of empowerment to be able to decision-make and act for themselves as individuals and as a community (Bishop 2006, Cornwall 2008 p273, Kester 2004).

The research findings also problematize some aspects of micropublic thinking, principally here around the self-identification of the grassroots – and in turn, presents this conscientization as key in transformation. Whilst Amin states that micropublic's privileging of the everyday as the site of encounter, identity formation and transformation, the bottom-up/top-down binary effectively dissolved, the research has uncovered a non-oppositional, non-defensive articulation of a grassroots identity. Whilst Amin does not see the micropublic in terms of a grassroots versus macro opposition, interviewees across the case studies have self-identified with their activity as grassroots and this being a positive attribute, a separate spatiality and the location of transformational potential. Mozes sees the grassroots as being the 'driving force for change in the city' (2011 p11) and this research points in this direction. SPPM is a micro-spatial urban practice (Iveson 2013 p941) that is challenging the status quo and which hold the 'potential for democratic participation in the appropriation and production of urban space' (Pinder 2008 p733). This bottom-up urban engagement that places the citizen at the root of urban change which, seen through a Lefebvrian lens, is a way of illuminating the complex ways in which actors exercise their emancipatory and critical awareness (Papastergiadis 1998 in Farr 2008 p70) being the start of a self-replicating culturally democratic process (Yoon 2009, Puype 2004, Cleveland 2001).

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My research is concerned with the art practice and process in placemaking, focusing on that led-by artists and communities.

As such, these projects are creative placemaking ones, but my research has called for a problematizing of this as a term as I have found it inadequate to describe the activity that I am seeing.

This paper will, through an example from an organisation that I have case studied in Indianapolis, and through the lens of Amin's micropublics thinking, show a particular form of placemaking that has surfaced in my research, that which I term social practice placemaking, one that is a co-produced and place-led artform.

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local businesses viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire and be inspired” (Markusen and Gadwa 2010 b p3)

This is the NEA ‘understanding’ of creative placemaking, something that has come to be used as a ‘definition’ globally, but in my research of the creative in placemaking, I found it too broad a definition. The economic imperative was also problematic in that this was not found a prime concern for many.

Importantly too, the term has come globally in the vernacular of placemaking, to mean ANY placemaking with art in it.

But whilst the term CPM may have a level of recognition within the sector globally, it has become clear in the course of this research that not all use it to mean the same thing; rather, whilst a large proportion, if not all, of placemaking will have a creative element and an economic development intent, there is a large body of placemaking activity that uses the arts in a different mode and to a different purpose.

Micropublic thinking

- Spaces of interdependence
- Intercultural mingling
- Banal transgressions
(Amin 2002)
- Cultural exchange,
destabilisation and
transformation
(Sandercock 2003)
- Privileging of everyday
(Amin 2002)

So to bring in now Amin's micropublic thinking, it was seeing CPM through this lens that was one of the factors in me identifying a different form of creative placemaking.

The key points in this regard are:

Firstly, that a micropublic is created in 'spaces of interdependence'; put simply, where people can rub shoulders with one another in a common endeavour, and from this interaction comes an intercultural understanding

This negotiation of the everyday that happens in these spaces crosses boundaries of difference and involves the breaking out of habitual patterns of self and interaction

And, keenly for any social practice work, as Sandercock (2003) states, micropublic spaces have the capacity to be sites 'of not only cultural exchange, but also cultural destabilisation and transformation'

SOCIAL PRACTICE PLACEMAKING

In my research then, finding the CPM definition lacking when it came to describe and analyse the projects I have been case studying, I created the term social practice placemaking...

"Before I started this, if you'd've asked me what art was, I would've just shrugged my shoulders, or said something like 'it's what you see on gallery walls', but I get it now, I see it, the art is in what we're doing. This is art."

(Homebaked participant, Liverpool, 2013)



This is a relational placemaking undertaken by artists informed by social practice art, but that has a built environment concern, and is driven by community issues and the community on their terms, co-produced by artists, urbanists, with members of a local community in a polylogic process with a focus on the relation between subject, object, and space.

Its is 'place-led' rather than of 'making-place', i.e. it is a practice that works embedded within place, rather than imposing from without and the endeavour is one that facilitates the negotiation of the personal, social and political of the individual and the collective in space.

...facets or approaches and intents that I have seen as having different weighting across other creative placemakings.

“...it is possible for participation to be seen as an open process, filled with democratic possibility, drawing together on an equal basis amateurs and professional artists, people with a range of skills and experience, who congregate and collaborate, shifting their previously fixed positions, becoming alternately producers and spectators, viewers and evaluators” (Hope 2010 p69)

This assemblage of artists, community members and urban professionals creates a situated micropublic constituency in SPPM of an ‘urban creative’ (Klanten and Hübner 2010) working in equanimity. The ‘non-artist’ urban creative may have no formal training but ‘funds’ (Dewey 1958) the process by bringing another relative expertism, from their lived experience.

For some practitioners and also theorists, any expert appropriation of placemaking – as can be seen in any top-down placemaking and as such, in much CPM - renders it redundant as it then becomes an exclusory process and effectively creates and maintains barriers to collaborative practice through silos of knowledge, which work contra to any notion of a micropublic.

The role of art here is to draw attention to issues and encourage reflexive reassessment via new thinking and then doing, acting thus as a catalyst for social change through community coalition building leading directly to community conscientization, developing a community level critical awareness of lived experience and place.



To put this into some kind of context, on to the Big Car case study...

'As an artist-operated grassroots nonprofit arts organization and collective, Big Car Collaborative sparks artistic ideas and initiatives that help strengthen communities. As a group of artists and creative thinkers working together, we explore – through public and social practice art – the notions of people and place that connect us all. We enjoy collaborating with artists and all people from our local communities in Indiana and from around the world'

Big Car is an artist-led non-profit social practice/public art organization and collective'.

It has been operational for ten years and now has a fulltime staff of six and Board of 13, and a number of project staff and ad hoc partners and a portfolio of city, State and national funders from across the arts and social justice and community-building.



It is based in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

A city of just under 900,000; is the 13th largest city in the US; but also the 9th poorest; with a low creative class percentile of 33 per cent, placing it in the bottom 10 in the US.

Over its 10 years Big Car has worked across Indianapolis, with a number of bases, with a mix of fixed sites as well as durational projects in off-site locations.

The organisations artistic references include Kaprow and the Situationists for example, and it describes its placemaking practice as that of social practice art.

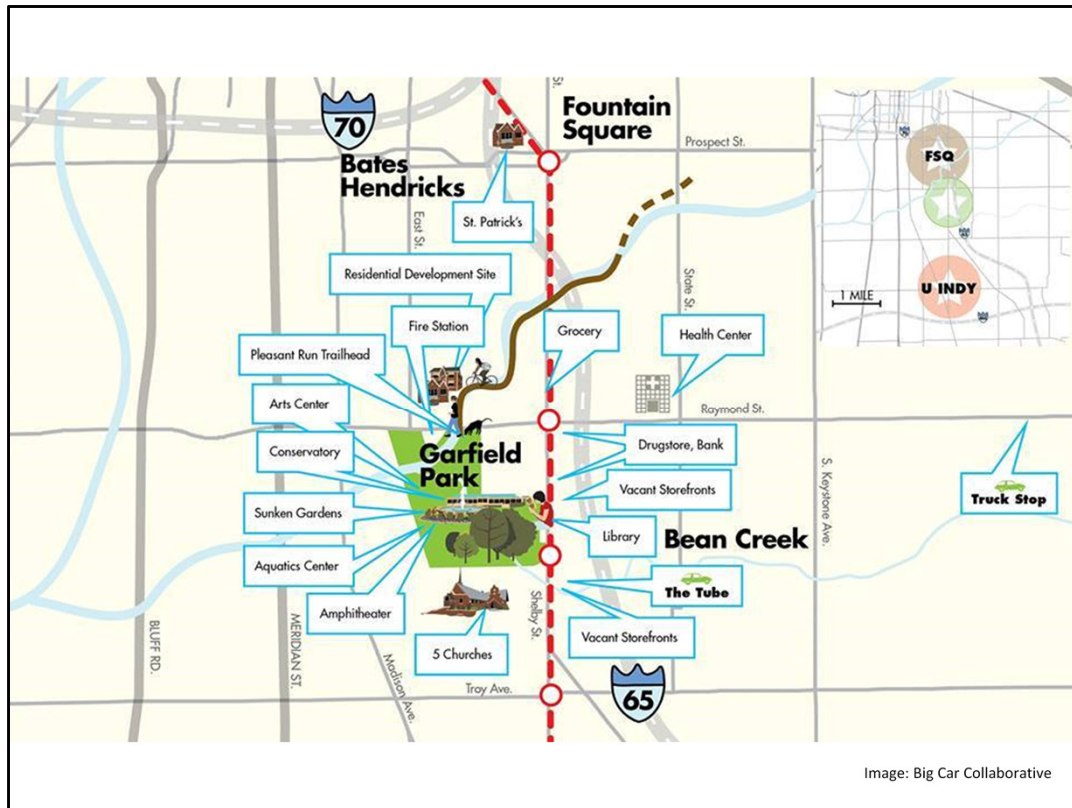
‘Big Car brings art to people and people to art, sparking creativity in lives to transform communities’

The Big Car example is one that in accordance with Amin’s thinking on micropublics, challenging the implicit binary and linear notion of authorship and audience found in much of what I was seeing in ‘conventionally’ termed CPM.

It is also a challenge to CPM as part of the ‘cultural industries’ as its SPPM projects do not have a fiscal goal at the core of their intent, nor will have a fiscal outcome necessarily – or rather whilst it won’t aim to drive footfall to a retail area for example, it works through art practice to build community capacity and skills which in turn will have an economic benefit to individuals and the community as a whole.



The example I will give here is of a major capital project on the southside of Indianapolis, that goes by the working title of 'The Tube', named after the main building that was a tyre tube factory.



And is placed further out of the city in the Garfield Park area.



Image: Big Car Collaborative

Big Car has bought, with a Community Development Trust grant, a vacant store, a 12,000 sq ft and a 30,000 sq ft two-storey factories and is in the process of buying ten houses in the surrounding streets.



The factory buildings are being renovated into meeting and office workspaces, exhibition and performance space, and substantial maker and fabrication workshops, all for Big Car and community use.



The store will house a sound art space and be used to house its forthcoming radio station.



The houses are being purchased through a mix of developer, investor and its own funds, to turn into permanent and rotation artist residencies; all but one of the houses are either vacant or for sale, and worth around \$10-20K; the house that is occupied, Big Car will become landlord of, at the will of the current owner-occupier.



Big Car 'Option A' proposed Shelby Street hardscape upgrades Image: Big Car

Big Car, Better Block Image: Big Car



and Big Car is in talks with the city administration about funding community co-produced traffic calming measures along the arterial route from downtown, Shelby Street.

This project is a huge undertaking for Big Car and for the city and ostensibly is a creative placemaking one.

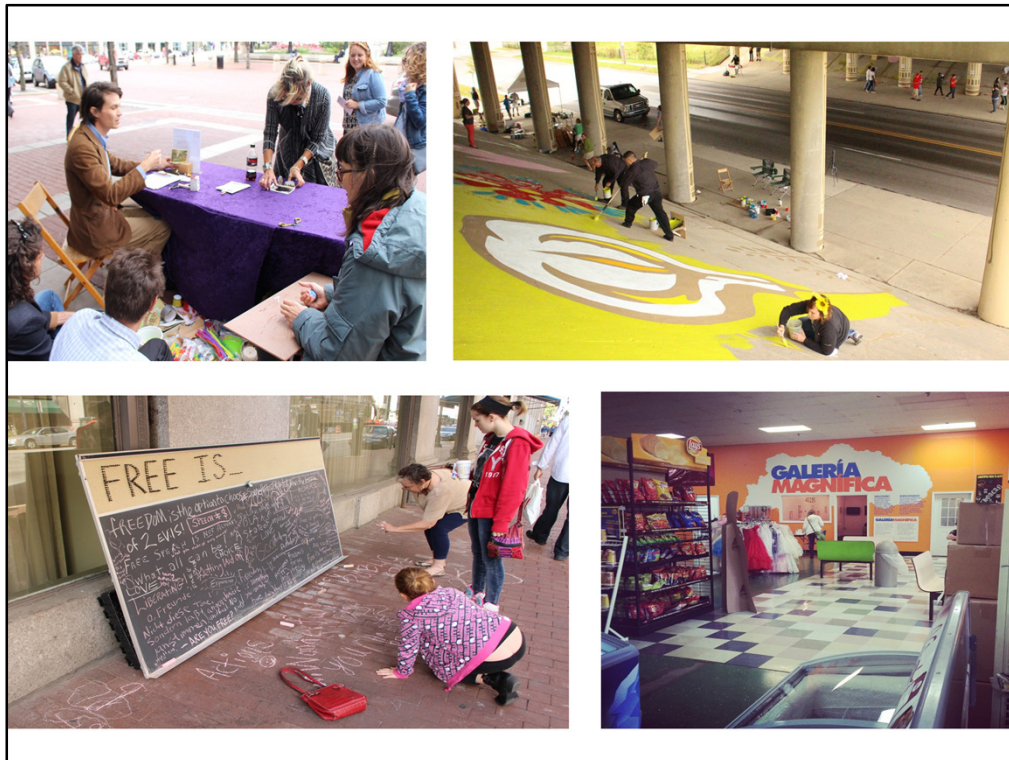
However, what I am seeing is a social practice 'artist-led regeneration'; the regeneration process is being devised with the community and to keep the community in place, with the aim being to culturally, materially and economically develop the south side corridor through its long-term artistic, organisational and capital investment.

*'dedicated presence and the encouragement
of creativity'*

'we'll be able to see the area's assets as well'

(Big Car interviewees)

Through its presence and programming, this process of building an arts-based infrastructure and ecology has already started to galvanise southside residents into a micropublic around art and place.



In contrast to many short-term or tactical creative placemaking interventions, Big Car's SPPM practice accords again here with micropublic theory by putting emphasis on local meeting spaces of regular engagement where there is a shared stake, involvement heightened by face to face contact and which has transformational outcomes:

Firstly, in the galvanising of groups of urban creatives around SPPM, I have witnessed the community distance themselves from the life-world of their lived experience to critically reflect on the forces that shape their existence. The art intervention is purposed to disrupt the habitual of the everyday urban functioning making the familiar unfamiliar and vice versa, as Amin also sees in the agency in the micropublic, the artwork being an 'aesthetic dislocation' which is a 'catalytic agent' for reflection.

Secondly, Big Car, as a collaborative, forms a networked micropublic of creative collaborators that works across the city to promote and perpetuate creativity, invigorate public places and support better neighbourhoods. Big Car's activity turned away from the established art and public spaces of Indianapolis, to instead foreground third spaces and invest in local spaces as alternative public terrains.



Duty Free Ranger, part of Art in Odd Places Indianapolis, Oct 2015, brought to Indianapolis by Big Car

So to conclude, research with Big Car, has shown to me that a social practice approach to placemaking engenders a micropublic around the art practice and place, and as an embedded practice, is a transformative experience, experientially and materially;

thus the research has viewed SPPM art interventions as a way in to questioning the everyday, finding out what people desire to change, and working towards making that change real;

the arts process as performative helps people discover this and then, through material testing, bring about change,

and it is this that is at the core of extending the understanding of 'creative' placemaking as one of many modes of creativity with different agencies, throughputs and outcomes.

