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Critical Placemaking: towards a more critical engagement for participatory design in the urban environment

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This paper offers a framework for design research that invites civic participation in the construction of place, and aims to reignite the conversation Nigel Cross raised in 1971 as a part of the first proceeding of the Design Research Society, calling on a need for user participation and intentional boundary-crossing. The need for new methods is no more evident than in the field øf urban design. As global populations are migrating at unprecedented rates, new and different ideas and cultures are integrating and colliding at a high velocity. Additionally, the digital tools we use to understand and navigate urban environments as physical place, cultural space and social territory offer a new "place" and opportunities to rethink the role of the planner and designer in the process. This paper introduces the basis for novel forms of participatory design research that build on elements of placemaking, participatory design, co-creation and critical action to engage in a mutually critical and evaluative process between designers and users through the mapping process.

critical placemaking, participatory design, mapping, community engagement

1 Introduction

A note about terminology: We use the term designer generally to include traditional design disciplines as well as architect and/or urban designer. We also use the term policymaker to reference what would generally be thought of as the "client" in a traditional design engagement, which might include governments, institutions, organizations or companies. Likewise, we use the term person to include users, citizens or anyone who is affected by the intervention that the design process might affect. Additionally, we use the term map to mean geospatial representations of place as well as abstract visualizations. The history of the map as a marker of place has informed this choice. Finally, we are reinterpreting the idea of placemaking, and place, to include environments that are not necessarily physical, but might be digital, social, cognitive or otherwise.

In the 1971 introduction to the Design Research Society Conference Proceedings on Design Participation, "Here Comes Everyman" Nigel Cross made the call for designers to involve users in an

explicit partnership in the design process. Cross argued for a change in the handing down of policies and designs to users who had little to no say in the plan that subsequently dictated their lives. "Every development" Cross argued, "seems to hold as many threats of harmful side effective as it holds promises for the enhancement of society" (p. 11). Cross, along with most of the contributors to the conference and proceedings, posited a similar view. Since that time, the idea of user-centered and participatory design has been central to much of design research and practice. Yet too many existing practice-based research methods serve to reinforce existing assumptions and cherry-pick answers from the participatory process to support a preordained agenda, rather than using the research process to expose assumptions driving the project and author alternative forms of engagement and design intervention. The concepts in this article are not novel in their fundamental theory, but explore how new contexts might shape alternative interpretations and applications that catalyze designers to challenge their own bias informing design action and engage in a more open-ended and discursive process. We adamantly challenge the idea that participatory design usurps the designer's pivotal and critical ability to use their perspective as both insider and outsider to balance the needs of many different stakeholders. Additionally, we reject the idea that grassroots participatory design necessitates the abolition of a design expertise. Instead, through critical placemaking, we posit that the design process is essential in navigating and integrating the myriad agendas that drive urban planning decisions. While not neutral, designers occupy a crucial role to include perspectives from people who are not traditionally a part of the urban development conversation and to use their ability for visual translation to mediate debate and negotiations in real and meaningful ways.

2   What is Critical Placemaking?

Historically tied to the physical environment, and seeded by well-known urbanists like William H. Whyte and Jane Jacobs, placemaking focuses on the ways that urban environments manage and shape human experience. In her book, *The Power of Place*, Winnifred Gallagher (2007) argues the impact of place on our human psyche. "Just as the world around us affects our behavior, our thoughts, emotions, and actions affect our surroundings" (p. 19). Gallagher discerns some fundamental components of place including light, climate, energies (both traditional and anomalies) and sacred-ness. Gallagher extends the idea of place to include concepts of people as place (i.e. parenting and emotional connection to others). Today as we fluidly navigate social and physical space through diverse digital platforms that frame or augment our embedded personal experiences, the dimensions of place must expand beyond the physical world and into the virtual one. Therefore, critical placemaking is not solely concerned with our experience of the built and natural environment, but must also necessarily engage the digital environments that mediate them. In extending the idea of the physical manifestation of place—neighborhood, home, community—and the concepts of city that Kevin Lynch (1960) posed in *The Image of the City*—namely, that of edges, nodes, paths and landmarks—into the social and political forces influencing and constructing physical place, we suggest a model for design research and critical discourse that engages designers, users and policymakers in fundamental conversation about the meaning of place and its importance to different people with different experiences. Lynch himself understood the city as a metaphor, stating that "Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all." (p. 2) It is an evolution of this "composite," which Lynch referred to as the *Image of the City*, that critical placemaking aims to co-create. Building on James Corner's (1999) call for the agency of the map to "inaugurate new grounds upon the hidden traces of a living context" (p. 214), we seek to leverage the power of visualizations to "emancipate potentials, enrich experiences and diversify worlds" (p. 213). While the map might not be central to all iterations of critical placemaking, we see it as a particularly powerful analytic, synthetic and formative tool in a number of way which we will describe in more detail in the

mediating section of this paper. In essence, the map as a cultural symbol of truth and reality, coupled with its ability to iteratively reframe and redefine that truth, has the potential to activate public discourse in way that other visual or textual mediums cannot.

To expand the voices defining the dimensions of place and composing the composite images of place, it is essential for critical placemaking to author tools which engage a diverse cross section of the community and contextualize of those voices within the complex interplays precipitating place. Traditional concepts of placemaking encourage a community-based approach to urban design and architecture. More recently, creative placemaking has built on these general concepts by advocating for the inclusion of creative practices that help citizens and users feel more connected to their community and environment. While these are valuable for activating urban environments, we believe that there is another facet to placemaking that can encourage ownership and critical questioning of the historical, physical, social, political and economic components that contribute to the contemporary environment. The role of the designer in grounding community engagement within a broader context necessitates illuminating the complexity of the environment. Without this framing and contextualization, placemaking remains an incomplete tool for engagement in the planning process and builds a participatory process reliant on naive assumptions and conclusions. To combat this we argue for a perspective of placemaking that encourages criticality, agency and activism on the part of the designers and the communities with whom they work through visualizing the diverse dimensions of place. Within the tradition of a community-based approach to designing public (physical or digital) spaces, critical placemaking looks beyond shifting demographics and emphasizes *how and why* development of the built environment influences the social fabric of the city and vice versa.

In traditional participatory design practices, people are engaged as a way to figure out how best to address a particular problem, but more often than not citizens are not included in an iterative question seeking and problem definition processes eliminating their ability to question the assumed issue at hand. David Hammond, one of the grassroots organizers of The Highline in New York City, exemplifies this conundrum when reflecting on the process by which the Friends of the Highline engaged communities in the planning process. "Instead of asking what the design should look like, I wish we'd asked, 'What can we do for you?' People have bigger problems than design" (Bliss, 2017). Hammond's response was directly related to the unforeseen success of the public park—which has directly led to over 8 million visitors and $1 billion in tax revenue and indirectly to the potential for gentrification that often follows restoration projects like this one. Alternatively, critical placemaking encourages the evaluation and transparency of needs and wants on the part of both the designer/planner and the community member. By provoking reflection throughout the process, critical placemaking seeks to challenge the assumptions that designers and community members might hold about what is valuable and necessary for successful design and urban development.
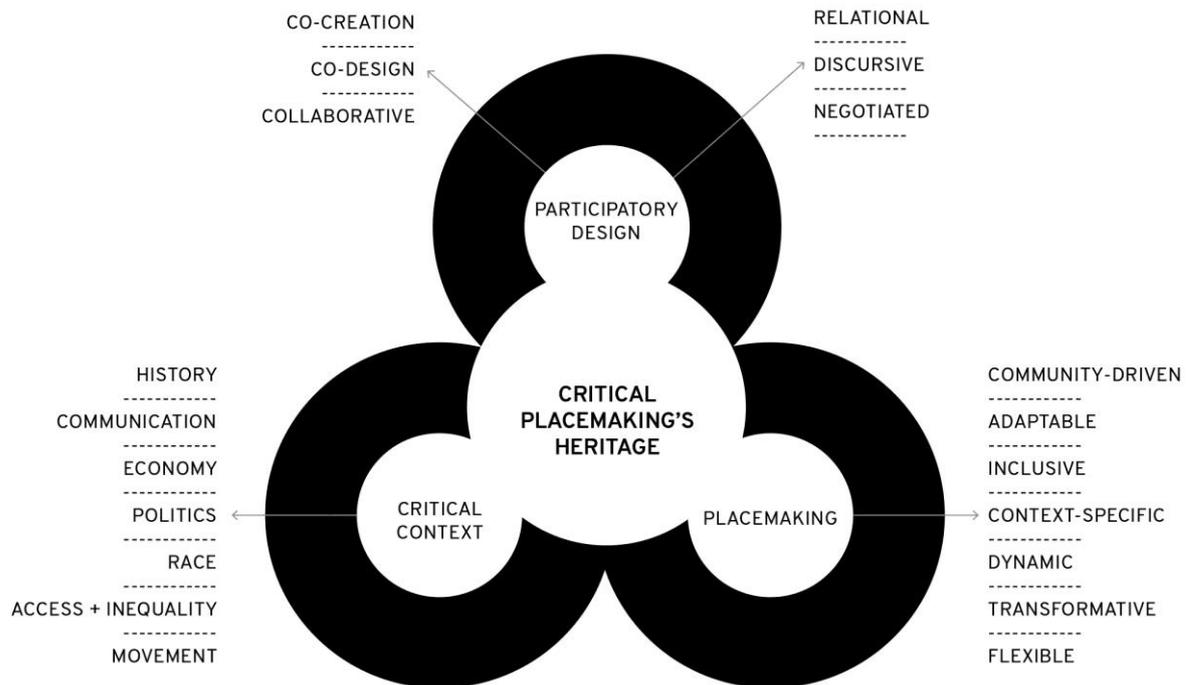
Figure 1 The heritage of critical placemaking builds on a legacy of participatory methodologies in architecture and design.

3 Critical Placemaking as Mediator

Critical placemaking has emerged from its placemaking predecessor(s) through the necessity to not only balance the needs of the citizens, but also to navigate and negotiate those needs as they interface with public policy, special interests and economic barriers. Possibly one of the most important aspects of placemaking is the very acknowledgment that design operates within a larger and incredibly complex system where the stakes and stakeholders are not always aligned. As such, critical placemaking as mediator has three distinct aspects to it: (1) The designer as mediator capitalizes on the the dual roles of the designer as both insider and outsider to help negotiate and spark discourse. (2) The design process as mediator is grounded in an open-ended iterative process where by citizens and designers can actively contribute to the continual negotiation and construction of meaning as well as contextualize decisions within a wider pool of knowledge and experience. (3) Design research tools and artifacts as mediators (such as the map) allow "truths" on which design action might be based to be confronted, challenged, or modified. The potential for mediation at each of these levels is not new, but the designer has not always used the research process as a conditional tool for negotiating, mediating or building up the necessary expertise. By reframing the position of the designer (and their process and tools) as mediator rather than facilitator, we open design research up to inaugurate new possibilities in designed environments, and give equal agency to the role of the designer in the discursive process. Critical placemaking sees opportunities for design as a mediating tool to create bridges between users and the authorities (whether governmental or private interest) who are influencing their everyday lived experience—in many ways controlling, or at least regulating access to needs that enhance daily life. Ultimately, we see it as a tool for connecting and prompting informed and prolonged discussions that provoke reflection and reaction to the social, political and economic forces that underpin conditions for design intervention.

As with other types of placemaking, the concern that critical placemaking might become trivialized and overly simplified on the one hand, or unnecessarily cumbersome on the other, is real. Critical placemaking, as a mediating tool, necessitates a deep and prolonged engagement that regards the design and research development process as iterative, ecological and ever changing. This primes a

sort of anthropological experience whereby the designer is charged with bringing together diverse voices and experts to unpack the complex relationships between our built environment, social territories, governing policies and economic flows. As Laura Gatt and Tim Ingold (2013) argue in *From Description to Correspondence, Design in Real Time* "…design is part and parcel of the very process of dwelling. And it is, by the same token, about the ongoing creation of the kinds of environments in which dwelling can occur. What, then, can it mean to design things in a world that is perpetually under construction by way of the activities of its inhabitants…design is not so much about innovation as it is about improvisation" (p. 145). Gatt and Ingold argue that because design is a future-thinking activity it can never be definite or finished, but must build into its process and proposal a very interactive nature, not just of the process of design, but of the process of living. By the same token, as tools of mediation design research methods must challenge assumptions about what is visible and invisible, and what is fixed and negotiable.

We see visualization—specifically mapping—as an especially powerful tool for this mediation because of the tangible nature of the map, the process of translation embedded within its creation, and its inherent connection to place. We believe that mapping as an analytical, synthetic and formative process is essential in the translation of research and data into critical visualization and propositional tools. These benefits are not just for the viewer of the map, but also for the creator as they engage in a fluctuation between the activity of encoding and decoding; constructing and deconstructing. As James Corner (1999) argues in *The Agency of Mapping*, the map's" agency lies in neither reproduction nor imposition but rather in uncovering realities previously unseen or unimagined, even across seemingly exhausted grounds" (p. 213). As a mediating tool for critical placemaking, we see the process of visualization as an important connector between different perspectives and stakeholders. Through the qualities inherent in the map itself—specifically, scale, orientation and framing the map forces a discussion of inclusion and exclusion that can confront larger issues of value, priorities and impacts (Allen and Queen, 2015). "Tools borrowed from geography are critical assets to advance mapping beyond the analysis of isolated project components and into the synthesis of both process and outcomes for generative research—research that is beyond a verbal activity." (Allen and Queen, 2015, p. 82) In their seminal work, Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha use the mapping process as an iterative and performative activity to interrogate the relationship between landscape and culture. Studying such seemingly different places as the Mississippi Delta, Bangalore and Mumbai, they use the map as a way to explore the intertwined relationships between environment, behavior, vernacular development patterns, cultural perspective and environmental policy. The outcome of their work—exhibitions and published books like *Mississippi Floods*, *Bangalore Traverse* and *Soak*—challenge the singularity of the map as a record of fact, and instead present them as a series of haptic artifacts which record the negotiations between physical and non-physical elements in the landscape. Their research process through mapping operates to expand the dimensions of place, illuminate change and the cycles fluctuation as inherent to the landscape, and expose how different culture perceptions and values influence our perspective of the landscape and dictate how we inhabit it.

4   The Democracy of Critical Placemaking

Democratic principles inherently rely on open access and participation by those who are directly or indirectly affected by the policies of governance. In urban planning (and design in general) this might mean access to the context and scope of the project, the plans being projected, the underlying analysis that is driving the planning process, the proposals being presented or a host of other pieces of information. Many democratic principles are visible in architecture and design today, informing strategies such as tactical urbanism, everyday urbanism, participatory design, public interest design and even participatory placemaking. All of these variations necessitate what Thomas Ermacora and Lucy Bullivant (2016) characterize as a re-coding of the roles and expectations between people, planners and policymakers. "'Recoding' anchors and stabilises growth, and supports local relationships, respecting and rewarding communities for their creativity and staying power" (p. 10).

Through varying degrees and types of public participation, placemaking and its various offshoots emphasize a design process that is ideologically equalizing, democratic and accessible. Arguments that this grassroots approach has in many ways undermined the value of the designer as an expert able to balance (or at least consider) multiple stakeholder positions and weigh costs and benefits of an issue are real. "Privileging the grassroots over plannerly authority and expertise meant a loss of professional agency. In rejecting the muscular interventionism of the Burnham-Moses sort, planners in the 1960s identified instead with the victims of urban renewal. New mechanisms were devised to empower ordinary citizens to guide the planning process" (Campanella, 2011). As a democratic process, critical placemaking does not try to erase the expertise of the designer or planner, instead it reframes and redefines what expertise means and how it is gathered. In their 2000 article, "Implacing Architecture into the Practice of Placemaking" for *The Journal of Architectural Education*, Linda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley suggest a similar transformation necessary in architectural education and practice. "If we acknowledge the real complexities and contradictions inherent in each site of intervention, seeing differences and similarities, we would be required to continually negotiate meaning and position—including where we as "experts" are located" (p. 131).

In his essay, *The Right to the City*, David Harvey (2003) argues that "The right to the city is…far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization" (p. 1). If we consider the city as analogous to many different forms of spaces for community and interaction—which we do—then the argument that Harvey makes can extend beyond the physical space and into all spaces in which we engage in a collective interaction. As a response to Harvey's call, critical placemaking, like its predecessors, advocates for a democratized process whereby users, designers and policymakers act as partners in the discovery and advocacy process. Through critical placemaking, we are particularly interested in a democratization process that is discursive, whereby users can engage more deeply with the social, philosophical, and ideological history that is underpinning the plan for design action. Through articulating this historical knowledge, critical placemaking can expose many of the underlying practice-based assumptions motivating a project and empower informed citizens to actively participate in all levels of a project from project definition to evaluating its long-term success. Critical Placemaking as a democratic tool also places diversity and access at the center of the research process. Rather than including people in a controlled participatory experience, critical placemaking takes conversations and prompts out into the public sphere to be encountered by people who are not primed or conditioned to respond. The data artist Jer Thorp's *Map Room* emphasizes this democratic process by using the map as a negotiated tool for understanding, explaining and representing the city. Initiated in St. Louis, Missouri the *Map Room* was set up to allow visitors to create a large 10' x 10' map that revealed their everyday experience and perception of the city. These maps were then overlaid through projection with historical maps that showed demographic data, urban planning information and environmental shifts as a comparison. Through this process, visitors could evaluate how their perception evolved from or contradicted the official and historical records of the city.

5   Critical Placemaking as Laboratory

The inclusion of citizens in the creative and planning process is predominant in critical placemaking, but doing so in a meaningful way necessitates a reframing of the type of "information" designers and planners are hoping to retain from these engagements. It also entails (or precludes) a fundamental shift from the objective of participatory design research as a mechanism to develop and refine design interventions towards a more experimental, flexible approach. We see critical placemaking and its powerful methods of mediation as an opportunity to experiment in new forms of participatory design, research and discourse. Traditional motivations for participatory design have argued for engaging in these practices so that "planning decisions by specialists should be made with

the participation of the end-user to minimize uncertainty as far as possible" (Thomas, 2016, p.1). This viewpoint still belies what we would argue is a fundamental fallacy that uncertainty (and resulting instability or change) is the enemy. Rather we wonder what we might gain by embracing uncertainty as a learning tool. By using the critical placemaking process as a sort of laboratory experience whereby different conditions are compared against "controls", we aim to more fully and deeply understand the root causes of issues and to engage in a more open-ended design research process. These types of experiments are core to any participatory process, but are by and large a by-product of the participatory experience, rather than being central to it.

Theories of ecological design and systems thinking offer alternatives to traditional masterplan approaches to urban design. Rather than starting with the goal of a singular, controlled outcome, ecological systems theory embraces the idea of change and evolution as core to its principles of discovery and proposition. In an article for *Places Journal,* the landscape architect Chris Reed (2014) argues that, "The past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of ecological ideas and ecological thinking in discussions of urbanism, society, culture and design…Increasingly these concepts are seen as useful heuristics for decision-making in many fields, and as models or metaphors for cultural production, particularly in the design arts." (Reed and Lester, 2014) In Reed's argument, the Sciences, Humanities and Design have all expanded their understanding of natural and built environments to emphasize growth, change, adaptability and flexibility. Critical placemaking builds on these concepts by also considering the social, economic and political dimensions and implications of design action. In this setting the map lends itself to exploration with the potential to visualizes interconnectedness and change in a very real, tangible way. Through dynamic and speculative interactions, maps have the potential to show the implications of action (design or otherwise) throughout a system. The map then can become a feedback loop within the design process to test ideas with immediate adjustment and flexibility. Digital, open-source platforms provide a particularly rich environment in which to explore some of these ideas. After the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, Open Street Map, the WikiMapping platform, was used to reconstruct the island when no visible markers existed on the ground. This has indirectly led to the Humanitarian OpenStreetmap Team (HOT) that uses collaborative mapping, and open source data sharing to provide maps to aid workers around the world. As an ongoing project, the maps are constantly updated based on experiences of those "on the ground" and so become living documents of human experience as much as traditional denotation.

6   Critical Placemaking Case Study

A project that we are currently working on, entitled *(in)Tangible Boundaries: A People's History Exploring the Political, Social and Physical Forces Shaping Urban Development* seeks to test some of these approaches to critical placemaking. The primary assumption driving this project is that with a deeper understanding of the social and political dimensions manifest in the physical environment, we can facilitate a collective critical placemaking process which has the power to create meaningful dialogue about a city's future. By highlighting the constantly evolving relationship between intangible social, political and economic forces and the tangible physical landscape, this project underscores how urban development both shapes and is shaped.

Too often in design and planning, history is understood as a part of the past—commemorated, preserved or abandoned. Alternatively, *(in)Tangible Boundaries* aims to make historical understanding a working asset that is integrated and used as a transformational tool for imagining and planning for the future. While to some this might seem a semantic difference, we see this differentiation as substantial, with history becoming an integral part of the current urban fabric—having the potential to engage communities in activities of critical reflection and action that move beyond the traditional methods of participatory design and planning that have preceded it. There is also much criticism in the urban renewal application of current concepts of placemaking and participatory design, citing the gentrification and displacement that so often accompanies these revitalization projects. Addressing this critique is a central component to *(in)Tangible Boundaries*, and so motivation lies in sparking debate and discourse on the historical social, political and

economic forces that have contributed to the current landscape, in addition to how that landscape might or should change in the future. To seed, as Rem Koolhaas (1995) has suggested, an approach to urban design that "will no longer be obsessed with the city but with the manipulation of infrastructure for endless intensifications and diversifications, shortcuts and redistributions – the reinvention of psychological space." (p. 969)

Similar issues arise in the development of theories of public history, especially in relation to historic preservation and urban revitalization. In *Beyond Preservation*, Andrew Hurley (2010) suggests that the evolution of public history has moved beyond the preservation of a single building or entire districts, to considering "the entire urban terrain and all of its component parts" which includes "a complex web of social relations that evolved over time" (p. 39). He further argues that "[c]onceptualizing space as a perpetual object of social production and contestation thus provided a powerful antidote to the preservationist flaw of freezing the built environment in time" (p. 40). Dolores Hayden (1995) pointed out in *The Power of Place* more than 20 years ago, "Today, debates about the built environment, history and culture take place in a much more contested terrain of race, gender and class, set against long-term economic and environmental problems…" (p. 6). Hayden further argues that urban space and public history should be reframed not solely as inclusion of differences in race, ethnicity and gender into public history, but aimed at finding common human experiences that have individual and diverse episodes within them. To encourage participation and a genuine connection with these episodes necessitates the development of what Michael Frisch (1990) defined as a "shared authority" with opportunities for community members to actively engage in the collection, dissemination and correlation of historical narratives and contemporary events.

A preliminary exhibit attached to this project used student maps and research posters as prompts to discuss the social, cultural, political and physical implications of urban development in Raleigh, North Carolina. As a Southern U.S. city, issues of economic and racial segregation permeate the its history of its urban development. Mapping issues of education access, for instance, shows a clear and common disadvantage for certain citizens throughout the history of Raleigh's urbanization. Whether explicitly or implicitly realized, the location and value of housing disadvantages some students from attending schools that are better and closer. Once you see that trend as part of a larger continuum of disadvantage, a relationship emerges between policies and actions taken and how different levels of privilege manifest in the physical environment where people live. This preliminary exhibition also indicated the power of the map as a discursive tool. We found that the 'authority' of the map being used to tell alternative stories to the official ones that citizens are usually exposed held powerful, energizing and engaging potential. By making the tacit explicit, the map provided a critical tool in the construction of knowledge. Many people at the exhibit inquired about getting more involved in the project, and especially since many of them were visitors who had "wandered in off the street" we considered that a provocation for continued work.

Through this project, we are considering how these different manifestations of the map can serve as primary interfaces which allow users to navigate communities as complex social and physical terrains composed of collective histories, personal accounts, historic photographs and archival documents situated within the more typical dimensions of space and time to discover meaningful interactions in the current landscape and speculate on their influence for future scenarios. (Figure 2) The map provides the project with a provocative framework through which to explore the "shared authority" of writing a community's history. Through a participatory platform (tangible and digital) that encourages user generated content, the map interface will inherently employ multiple authors, empowering diverse voices to contribute to and interpret the information at hand. In *Design for Information*, Isabella Meirelles (2013) builds on the historical and contemporary research of Jacques Bertin, Donald Norman and others in arguing that "[v]isualizations of information can be considered cognitive artifacts, in that they can complement and strengthen mental abilities" (p. 12). Through the cross-disciplinary work of this project we aim to develop a system which is both interpretive and propositional to solicit visions of *what might be* that is grounded in a deep understanding of *what is* and *what was*.
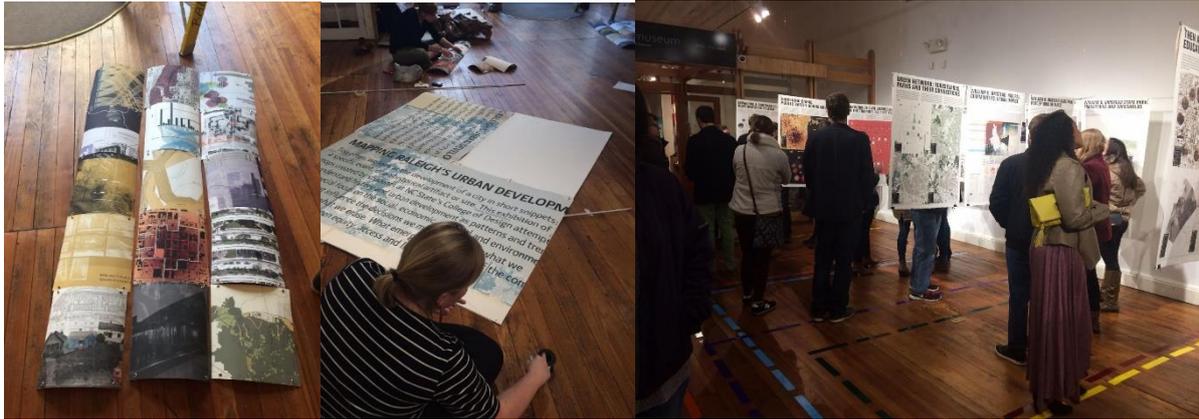
Figure 2 Mapping Raleigh's Urban Development Exhibition, February 2017

Because people do not always have the tools, information or language to participate in the planning process in a similar way—but they do have an individual and collective experience that they can share—a key part of critical placemaking, then, is devising ways to capture that variety of experience, and use the map as a prompt, a mediator, and a data collection tool. The current project, *(in)Tangible Boundaries* also aims to do that through a series of distributed prompts and "sites" for dialogue. The primary goals of the current iteration of this project are three-fold. First, this project aims to augment and overlay current methods for studying patterns of urban development (historic maps, aerial photographs, GIS datasets, infrastructural investment records and zoning policy) with everyday citizen's knowledge and personal narratives to capture and more deeply reflect how the social and physical dimensions of place are intertwined. Second, this project aims to illuminate the legacy of political and economic policy in the built environment by paying special attention to how these tools have had long lasting, often unintended, consequences dividing and segregating our physical and social spaces. Third, this project aims to provoke how policies under consideration today might impact the future form of the city.

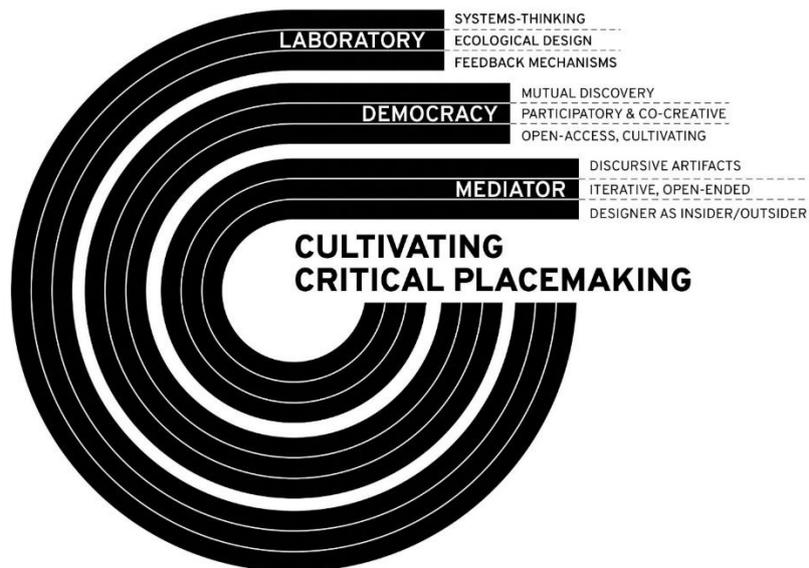## 7   Conclusion: Critical Placemaking as Cultivator

Figure 3 Cultivating Critical Placemaking

Within critical placemaking there is no assumption of physical intervention, and much like in participatory design, the designer, user and policymaker are engaged in mutual discovery and

sharing. Even when physical intervention is involved, critical placemaking proposes moving away from the primary goal of a singular, isolated object (exhibit) or a space (a city park, building) to designing for a civic conversation through platforms, systems and communities that allow co-research and co-creative processes which construct meaningful relationships through a diversity of voices providing agency to all involved. At its core, critical placemaking privileges interaction and conversation through mediated design interactions. This discourse might involve the social, political, economic and historical contexts under which design and change is necessary (or not). In their article, *Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design*, Liz Sanders and Pieter Stappers (2008) argue that "participation in the design process, as it is practiced today, is focused more on the exploration and identification of presumably positive future opportunities than it is on the identification and amelioration of adverse consequences" (p. 8). Critical placemaking seeks to prompt discourse focused on these ideas of the consequences of design action. Additionally, critical placemaking seeks to unpack how the activity and outcomes of the act of designing (i.e. what is created) could be used to provoke a deeper, more engaged and interesting discourse. Essential to the sustainability of these engagement platforms is the inclusion of dynamic feedback mechanisms which allow for evolving forms of interaction to emerge overtime. As ongoing dialogue catalysts, these mechanisms have the potential to grow, expand and change as the ideas and values connected to place do. (Figure 3) While critical placemaking is in many ways an extension of many of its participatory predecessors, we think that it holds value in extending the research methods for urban design and sited interventions in a number of key ways: (1) by using design itself–specifically mapping and visualization—as a mediating tool to facilitate and provoke critical conversations and negotiations between all stakeholders in the process; (2) challenging existing definitions of democratized design, and placing diversity and access at the center of public participation in the design and research process ; (3) challenging the assumptions of the designer through this mediated process, whereby the goals of the design process are more open-ended and experimental in nature and design is seen as "seeding futures" rather than being conclusive in nature; and (4) a rethinking of the engagement process as nurturing cultivation over action and intervention. As the field of design research continues to evolve, and as we continue to consider how people and users can be integrated and collaborated within the design process, we hope that critical placemaking provides an opportunity for deeper engagement whereby a multitude of voices can engage and provide critical discourse on not just design intervention, but also design impact.

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