

# **Making a Scene: Place-Making Imagination, Artistic Production, and Narratives in Urban Space**

## **Bruce B. Janz**

### **Imag(in)ing Place**

My thoughts start from a deliberate misreading of the conference title. “Imaging Place” slides easily, perhaps too easily, into “Imagining Place”, by adding just two letters, “in”, and hypostatizes into “Place-Making Imagination”. Imag(in)ing place – inserted as a minor note, hardly anything. Imagination produces images, we might think, and so the misreading is slight at best, and well within the spirit of the conference. But we should not slide too easily here. This small addition, this interruption into imaging, may suggest more than appears on the surface. “In”, as a preposition, suggests a move toward the center, a move “inward”. If we are in the room, we are bounded by the walls; if we are part of the “in” group, we are not, at least, on the outs; if we are “in love”, we are, perhaps dominated and infused by love. But “in” as a prefix, that’s different – it is “in”discreet, “in”temperate, and possibly even “in”hospitable. In other words, “in” not only moves inward, but it negates, it even moves outward. “Intemperate” suggests a move away from a civilized and balanced center. “Interminable” suggests a move beyond temporal boundaries, if not outside of one’s patience. In, in short, inscribes a tension. Inserted into a word, we don’t quite know whether it is intentional, a verbal interloper, or even at all interesting. But there could hardly be a better word to start with, when place is concerned.

Just word play? After Derrida, how can it “just” be word play anymore, and anyway, why is play such a bad thing? And yet, the word play always moves us toward something else, something that allows a little light to shine in, if that does not suggest a

metaphysics of presence too much (all this 80's talk...). It is worth remembering that the play was always about responsibility, that is, recognizing one's debts and duties. This little slippage between image and imagine provides a starting point for thinking about place, how we understand it, how (or whether) it matters, and perhaps most importantly, what happens at the edges of incommensurable modes of place-making.

The image has a long history, of course. We might, following Aristotle, equate it with the "phantasm", the mental process that we share with animals, the ability to apprehend an immediate sensory experience and make a mental image of it. A phantasm based on sensation is something humans share with animals, while a phantasm based on reason is imagination. We might, of course, follow Augustine, and connect the image with the source of all images, the "imago Dei", the image of God stamped on us. The image, then, classically, is a "phantasia". We, of course, think of "fantasy" very differently. Imagination, on the other hand, is a resolutely human characteristic, a specific kind of image. It enables us to assemble given contents of the mind into something new, and makes available what is not yet present. Animals do not have imagination, on this classic account. They have mental images, but they do not reassemble them into something that does not exist.

We might also think of image and imagination as two sides of a coin, or more accurately, as the external and internal aspects of representation. The philosophical tradition, of course, doesn't make this distinction; if the image is the "phantasy", the mental content that we share with animals, and the imagination is a uniquely human characteristic, we have a difference of kind, not aspect.

So, far from merely being extensions of each other, there is every reason to see image and imagination as separate, perhaps in aspect, perhaps in kind. At the very least, they classically are assigned to different beings with different capabilities. The point here is not to work out in any exhaustive way the Aristotelian understanding of the soul, but rather to open the door to the possibility that what is usually taken as an obvious extension, between image and imagination, might in fact exist in some tension.

Image, imagine. Linked by the presence and absence of “in”. Phantasy and imagination. Perhaps just plays with binary oppositions. But there are more binaries to pile on before we are done. Umberto Eco once said of *Casablanca* that “the clichés were having a ball”. The movie succeeded not because it avoided clichés, but because it reveled in them. Perhaps the same can be true of binaries, those discredited products of Cartesian thought. In what follows, I want to explore modes of place-making, rooted in the dwelling, that is, the memory and desire of imagination, and the scene, the exchange and interplay of image.

### **Dwelling and the Rural**

Much place-talk in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century relies on Heidegger’s later work on dwelling. It is worth noting, then, that scenes and dwellings start from very different places, when it comes to place. Note that we can map the distinction in several ways – civilization/wilderness, city/country, urban/rural. These binaries sometimes seem to be interchangeable, but they are not. The urban/rural is the one that is of interest here. A scene is an urban construct (even when it is performed in the country), whereas Heidegger’s dwelling always bears the implication of the rural (even when it is

performed in a city setting). Place, in most recent discourse, has followed Heidegger's lead, and has always had the hint of building, finding, losing, or yearning for home. Freud and Heidegger both speak of the *unheimlich*, usually translated as the "uncanny", but perhaps better understood as the "un-homely".

Heidegger inquires about dwelling in a number of places, notably "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "The Question Concerning Technology". Dwelling is integrally tied to building, in the sense that true building is an expression of dwelling. True building does not enframe space instrumentally, but allows a set of possibilities to be manifest. To build a bridge across a river, for instance, is different from damming the river. The dam turns the river into "standing reserve", that is, electric power (in this case) that is abstract and can be used in any way. At the same time, our mode of dwelling is reduced to power-users, that is, purely instrumental. The bridge, on the other hand, allows human settlement to collect on either side. The river is not reduced to one use, but continues to be a river in the broadest sense.

Dwelling as place-making tends to proceed from some established and intelligible senses of dwelling, such as home, region, locale, tribe, or nation. While dwelling is ontologically rooted, it is expressed through these existing forms of spatial arrangement because these have a history of standing in for place. Imagining place as dwelling usually means imagining place as home, region, nation, and so forth, and equating identity with those bounded and rooted spaces. These dwelling spaces are like the bridge over the river, in that they make a set of possibilities available, and resist turning place into standing reserve. A region, for instance establishes a set of customs and practices, and in doing so suggests options. A completely unbound and unrooted space, in the sense of a

space with no frame, is not a free space at all, much less a space in which imagination can find its place, but rather a space in which action and creation are arbitrary. Imagination requires the combination of existing meaningful concepts, so creation of place *ex nihilo* cannot be imagined.

Lyotard offers an elegy to dwelling in his essay “*Domus* and the Megalopolis”. (Lyotard 1988: 191-204) The domus, or the domestic space, is characterized for him by rhythm and stories. Rhythm is wisdom, and also service, which is “given and returned without any contract”. It is also “a community of work”, which is rooted in stories, because the common work of the domus is the domus itself, that is, the repetition of its own stories through work, through the domestication of time. The domus is where memory is located, both in narratives and “in the body’s mannerisms”. And, the domus “gives the untameable a chance to appear,” (196) although in fact “[t]he undominated, the untamed, in early times concealed in the *domus*, is unleashed in the *homo politicus* and *economicus*...” (197)

What disrupts the domus, in Lyotard’s view? The megalopolis. The megalopolis is not merely cityspace, but it is

Much more complete, much more capable of programming, of neutralizing the event and storing it, of mediating what happens, of conserving what has happened. Including, of course, and first of all, the untameable, the uncontrolled domestic remainder. End of tragedy, flexibility, permissiveness. The control is no longer territorialized or historicized. It is computerized. (198-199)

In other words, it is not cityspace that threatens the domus, but the “monad” of techno-science. The untameable is neglected. The need for “writing, childhood, [and] pain” disappear. Lyotard is almost sarcastic about the result of the death of the domus:

To think consists in contributing to the amelioration of the big monad. It is that which is obsessively demanded of us. You must think in a communicable way. Make culture. ... To success is to process. Improve performances. It's a domestication, if you will, but with no *domus*. A physics with no god-nature. An economy in which everything is taken, nothing received. And so necessarily, an illiteracy. The respect and lack of respect of severe and serene reading of the text, of writing with regard to language, this vast and still unexplored house, the indispensable comings and goings in the maze of its inhabited, always deserted rooms – the big monad doesn't give a damn about all this. It just goes and builds. Promotion. (199-200)

This is the price, for Lyotard, of the megalopolis, of techno-science. But his elegy is more mournful than angry. “Domesticity is over, and probably it never existed, except as a dream of the old child awakening and destroying it on awakening.” (201) The loss of this particular type of dwelling is not complete; the *domus* can represent the loss as tragedy. But the *domus* is more likely to be pressed into service by the big monad – Nazi Germany did just that. The issue is, what must one do, under these conditions? Lyotard's answer: “at least in the ghetto we shall go on. As far as it is possible. Thinking, writing, is, in our sense, to bear witness for the secret timbre...Let us at least bear witness, and again, and for no-one, to thinking as disaster, nomadism, difference, and redundancy.” (203)

Almost a romantic impulse, and from the most unexpected of writers. But perhaps the real question is, is he really right about the corrosive effect of place-making within techno-science? If he is, then a great many digital projects must necessarily undermine place, even in the effort to create or represent it. I think, though, that Lyotard's account is somewhat premature, in the sense that he proceeds from a Heideggerian understanding of place. The story can be told in other words, starting from Lyotard's point of the failure of place – starting from the scene.

### **Scenes and the Urban**

The scene is something that, in one way or another, a host of theorists have tried to unpack. Arguably, the scene is built into early expressions of modernity in writers such as Baudelaire, Proust, and Wilde. Scenes are not merely sociological entities, nor are they the result of subjective will. They are not mobs or crowds; indeed, scenes don't necessarily point to large gatherings at all, although they do seem to require spatial proximity, whether material or virtual. As with most terms (e.g., place, space, text), we have colloquial and technical senses, and the first may bear the trace of the second. We have "street scenes", which are not the same as the "jazz scene", or the "gay scene". Scenes are not merely social groups organized around charismatic figures (are churches which have charismatic preachers scenes?), although there may be charismatic figures involved (surely Studio 54 was a scene, and one which had its share of charismatic figures such as Andy Warhol and Bianca Jagger).

The scene, it should be noted, is a visual term that has its roots in painting. Scenes are framed. They bear the narrative traces and visual logic that has come down through

landscape painting. There are internal frames for scenes – ways of telling who’s in and who’s out, and more importantly, what space is bounded for territorialization and reterritorialization to occur. Scenes bear stable markers – some are quite stable (e.g., Miami Beach’s club scene) since the nature of the scene requires platial markers.

The connection to the landscape bears some thought. Lyotard contrasts landscape with place, finding it wanting:

Infinity: inexhaustible resources are required if there is to be any landscape. ‘A palace is not worth living in if you know its every room’, writes Lampedusa. A burrow is like that palace: habitable because it is uninhabitable.

The opposite of a place. If place is cognate with destination...Landscape as a place without a destiny. (Lyotard 183)

Landscape, then, is a scene, in Lyotard’s sense the opposite of place, but perhaps he is too hasty in his dismissal. Perhaps it is too narrow to identify place only with destination – we shall see presently about this. In any case, he is surely correct to say that landscape is a place without a destiny. The scene, like the landscape, is a wholly conventional mode of place.

There are other roots for the notion of the scene. Children and others “make a scene” in public, embarrassing those who know them. We have scenes in movies and plays; indeed, this is where the term comes from. It was the theatre itself, the stage and the building, before it became what was on the stage. Later, the connection could be seen in the term “mise-en-scène”, the staging of a play. The scene eventually becomes indistinguishable from its place, but perhaps more importantly, it makes available a set of possibilities.

There's something quaint about the use of the term, something 50's or 60's, something perhaps more hopeful and more aware of its own ephemerality. More playful, less prone to being reduced to patterns of consumption. More important than its quaintness, though, is its mode of operation. Alan Blum has a "grammar" of scene as a social phenomenon. This grammar has several characteristics. The scene is regular (there is meaningful recurrence), extensive (it is both apart from and part of the city), mortal (that is, temporally limited), collective (having a sense of solidarity), theatrical (engaging in social ceremony), transgressive (always in danger of exposure to "polite" society), and prone to spectacle without being reducible to it. Blum describes the effect of this as follows:

The scene's fusion of art and commodity, of pleasure and function, reaffirms the two sided nature of its engagement, as both a way of doing business and as an exciting departure from the routines of doing business, making pleasure functional and functional relations pleasurable. In this way, the scene imitates the economy of the city through its functional methods of association and classification while *at the very same time* travestyng this functionality by investing togetherness with the excitement of its contagiousness. The scene – never a community in the sense of finality – is a work in progress where being with or among others is a constantly evolving open question that brings to view the intimacy of social life as an unending problem to solve. (188)

Blum's analysis draws on Gadamer, Arendt, and others, which may seem to place him in the Heideggerian tradition. In fact, though, the scene that is described in textual terms is not just a variant on dwelling (which we will address momentarily). Its

ephemerality and transgressive nature already differentiate it from the sense of place implied by dwelling, and its resistance to the transcendental further suggests that the scene stands at a distance from hermeneutics. It facilitates association, and in doing so creates and maintains place, while teetering on the edge of parody at all times. Scenes from the past (that is, scenes that existed in the past) are the easiest targets for parody (the *Austin Powers* movies traded on this constantly), as they require belief and commitment, while simultaneously requiring a knowing sensibility.

The scenic mode of place-making is the imaging of place (despite the fact that, ironically, Alan Blum's book in which he discusses the scene is titled *The Imaginative Structure of the City*). It is quintessentially an urban form of placemaking, which is not to say that other forms are not possible within city space (more on this later). But the scene does not depend on romantic references to nature or tradition, much less transcendence. It creates its place from the ground up, as an intensity, or a difference based on degree.

When thinking about place, it is perhaps noteworthy that theorists of intensities such as Deleuze and Guattari are more inclined to use auditory metaphors than visual ones, despite the fact that the idea of the "scene" is visually based. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are described biologically in *A Thousand Plateaus* as established by an animal's movement, and inscribed by its song or sound. Practice looks more like music than it does like visual organization, for them, and they effectively tie time to space in this way. The scene, then, if we can imagine them thinking in these terms (and I don't think it is too far to take the notion of "intensities" as scenic in some sense), moves from its visual traces to its auditory, perhaps more layered, biological manifestation.

Scenes, as we think of them, often displace. If the gay scene exists in a particular place, entrée to the place either requires engagement with the shifting rules of the scene, or taking on the temporary status of the tourist or visitor. Some scenes can maintain this externally performative element (they are in some sense all internally performative, that is, a set of actions that bring about a reality, and further, they may also be performances as well). The external performativity, though, generally reinforces boundaries, rather than making them permeable. Tourists might come to see a Gay Days parade, but they are being entertained, and they are not being asked back to the club.

But the parade itself may not, in fact, be a scene at all. It may be the performance of a scene, a re-packaging of the scene as commodity. And this is always the danger of this form of urban place-making. Its trade in signifiers means that it always risks commodification, that is, the situation in which trade is the end in itself. The problem with commodification is not the act of trade in itself, or even the implied desire, but the reductive instrumentality of all exchange. Whereas the scene is deliberate about creating the space in which intensities can occur, the corrupted form of the scene attempts to codify and market those intensities without ever turning the act of exchange back onto the desire that underlies the instrumentality of the exchange.

I am relating the scene to the image, to imaging place, and to the urban form of place-making. These are not equivalences, but mutually supportive concepts. In other words, while there is nothing necessary that makes a scene urban, in fact, most scenes are urban. This is significant as we turn to a second mode of place-making, one which engages imagination rather than imaging, and one which is rooted in the rural rather than the urban.

## **Imag(in)ing Place**

Dwellings and scenes are not merely two modes or types of place-making. They resist and undermine each other, judged from each's own point of view. The dwelling is, for Heidegger, corrupted to the extent that the urban is allowed to flourish. It remains as a desire within human existence, but he has several ways to dismiss the urban – in “The Origin of the Work of Art”, it is focusing only on “utensils”; in “The Question Concerning Technology”, it is the tendency to turn the rural into “standing reserve”, thus rendering it (and ourselves) aspects of instrumental reason. The scene, for Heidegger, would not be read as playful creation, much less as deterritorializing and reterritorializing, but as the exertion of abstract will and reason over reality. He would, in fact, see the scene as always having a memory of dwelling within it, since human existence can never become totally instrumental, but to focus on the scene would be to focus on a corrupted form of place. The rural, then, is true place, which the urban has only a dim memory of, and imagination, the ability to use reason to assemble place, trumps the image, that which is exchanged, which tends toward commodification. Put another way, rural, imaginary place is arboreal, rooted in tradition, community, and so forth, and is seen as superior to the rhizomatic scene. And, the aesthetic of dwelling tends toward some version (or parody) of transcendence, at the extreme illustrated by the imaginary places of Thomas Kinkade, Trisha Romance and other hyper-romantic artists.

The scenic mode of place-making, on the other hand, resists the seeming nostalgia of the dwelling. It tends to see the dwelling as the mode of place appropriate for a forgotten age, and one, furthermore, which tends to cover over difference. Place that is

based on dwelling tends to the static rather than the dynamic, the reactionary rather than the progressive, the apolitical rather than the politically engaged, and the uncritical rather than the reflective. Scenic, urban place, on the other hand, does not dichotomize place into authentic and inauthentic, but rather coalesces into various forms of differential access, defined fluidly (or perhaps better, viscously, as the changes have some sticking power, and are not totally in arbitrary flux), and known only through engagement with the scene. As with dwelling, there is a kind of hermeneutical circle involved in the scene. In the case of dwelling, the circle exists between the parts and the whole; in the case of the scene, the circle exists between the inside and outside, as those engaged within the scene define the place by a set of actions which themselves have unintended consequences, and which risk changing or disrupting the scene, even producing new scenes. The scene, after all is necessarily temporally limited, and its limitations come in part from the fact that they can become stale, or put another way, lacking in creative drive. They become this way, perhaps ironically, as they take on aspects of the ideal of dwelling – coherence, stability, predictability. Just as the scene is the corruption of dwelling, then, dwelling is the exhaustion of the scene, dynamism come to rest.

Despite the mutually resistant nature of these two modes of place-making (or perhaps more accurately, the sense that each serves as the limit or failure of the other), it is noteworthy that the scene and the dwelling are often inscribed onto each other. We can see a movement through modernism, from the civilized/wilderness distinction, to the city/country distinction, to the urban rural distinction. That is, the function of the city initially was to hold back the onslaught of wilderness, to be a kind of island of civilization within the sea of barbarity. From there, as industrialism rises, the distinction

becomes between the city and the country, that is, between the site of production and the site of consumption, or the site of resource extraction and the site of resource assembly. Finally, the distinction moves to the urban and the rural, as the sites of production and consumption become blurred, and as our ways of understanding place start becoming less compartmentalized. With the spread of digital information, scenic place inevitably becomes inscribed on dwelling place as it becomes appropriated in the form of ritual, habitus, and communal meaning. Of course, none of these categories are pure, nor is there a teleological or even sequential move here. In some sense they co-exist, and the distinctions do not remain stable. As was mentioned earlier, the urban mode of place-making (the scene) may well be inscribed in either the city or the country, and the same is true for the rural mode (dwelling). However, my point here is to focus on the final distinction, and map onto it the dwelling and the scene as modes of place-making in the rural and the urban.

If the scene and the dwelling serve as each other's limit or failure, how is it that these two are written upon each other? Clearly, both the city and the country come already equipped with the urban and the rural, that is, the scene and the dwelling (or, the image and imagination). It is more clearly seen in the city, as we try to find and construct modes of dwelling that echo the rural. On a larger scale, there is new urbanism, for instance, which imprints the rural onto the urban. For many, it functions as memory, for others as imagination, but perhaps it is more to the point to say that it functions as fantasy. In any case, the imprint of the rural is clear. But it did not begin with new urbanism. The suburb was an earlier imprint of the rural onto the urban, in terms of the imag(in)ing of place. It was evident in the names of streets, in the myriad references and

nods to small town life, in the parks and green spaces. To have no reference to the rural was to be a failure as a city, because dwelling could not be imagined.

And yet, the city was urban as well. It was the location of the scene. Its mode of place-making was not dwelling; even those places that presented dwelling as place-making within the city (for example, Ray Oldenburg's "great good places", third spaces between the public and the private) must maintain that dwelling by either withdrawing from the urban space (ethnic communities often do this), or end up trading the rootedness of dwelling for the dynamic nature of the scene. The veneer of dwelling may continue, but those great good places may end up being the consumable hook that brings people into specific kinds of scenes, if only to engage dwelling ironically. Lifestyle stores such as Starbucks find themselves in this contradictory mode of place-making, at once attempting to provide dwelling and scenic place. Their popularity attest to the fact that they have navigated those contradictions, although it is notable that the dwelling-place nature always must include the pull of the new (a scene motif), sometimes awkwardly.

It is time to introduce another vector in this analysis: art. Heidegger says little about art and dwelling together, but he does have a great deal to say about each of them separately. Art, we find in his "Origin of the Work of Art", is "real within an artwork". In German the word is "wirklichkeit", which is derived from "wirken", or "to work, to be active, to yield effects." Art shows for a kind of reality that is not the same as that of "utensils", even if it is utensils (such as the peasant's shoes that Van Gogh painted) that are being depicted. The point of art is to show the reality of those shoes.

The scene has its own mode of artistic place-making. Art is not the expression of human creativity, but our mode of making place. Deleuze and Guattari's argument is that animals, too, have art (musicality), which establishes their territoriality and their reterritorialization. The biological mode of place-making is artistic, and that includes the artistic engagement of animals. But humans have intensities of a particular sort, and those human intensities can be thought of as the scene. Scenes do not strive for reality in Heidegger's sense. There is nothing real about urban scenes in their pure sense; they are rather performance opportunities, staged stages. It is not that there is a different kind of art, but a different mode of art. One could image artistic productions that emerge from dwelling as assembled scenes. One could, on the other hand, imagine scenes in a human sense, that is, in Heidegger's mode of dwelling. Each, in other words, could be assembled out of the other, each could subsume the other artistically.

The necessity of the aesthetic can be seen in another feature of the intensity between the dwelling and the scene – the fact that the dwelling is not reducible to the private, and the scene is not reducible to the public. The traditional binary between private and public merely divides space based on concerns and commitments. Dwellings, on the other hand, may be found in large groups, and manifest on the public stage, while scenes might be experienced based on very intimate grounds. The issue here is not that we have another sense of the private and public, but rather that the intensity between dwelling and scene cannot be reasoned out. Both of these describe a mode of place-making, both are necessary, each is the limit of the other, and together they cannot be overcome in some dialectical *Aufhebung*. What is left is aesthetics, that is, the recognition that this tension must be the occasion for creation.

## **Fault Lines and Implications**

Imaging and imagining place: two modes, each the limit of the other, each the negation of the other, each pressing the other into service. The intensity produced between these two is evident in various projects that represent place, such as those at this conference.

Several things are noteworthy in projects that deal in place. First, place can never be treated as an object of analysis and representation apart from those who engage in its analysis and representation, nor can it be treated as a subjective expression. That should be apparent from both the modes of place-making discussed here, which resist both of these Cartesian poles. That means that each mode has implications for identity, in different ways perhaps. It also means that projects which are framed as modes of personal expression are not that instrumental.

Second, each project will tend to draw on one or the other of these modes of place-making, and will tend to use the vocabulary and strategies of that mode. The other mode may be denied, but it will exist as a shadow, a potential critique to too deliberate ways of conceiving place.

Third, the modes of place-making themselves are presented at a meta-level as components of a new place. We are faced with a series of presentations on imaging place, at a conference about digital media and place. These become the layers of a new place, a scene, certainly, and possibly, some might hope, also a dwelling, as human meaning emerges and as the technologies allow us to represent not only overlooked forms of

dwelling (e.g., women's experience, small town experience), but also enable us to metaphorically move from those uncovered dwellings to our own.

The digital projects that are under consideration at this conference fall into a few different types. Some attempt to find those overlooked places. Some attempt to construct a new language or a new platform in which place can be articulated. In other cases, the technology acts as the conditions for the possibility of a scene, by overturning and subverting existing prescriptive uses and enabling complicity in technological resistance.

But the real question in this analysis is this: in our imag(in)ing of place, what are the fault lines of modes of place-making that must be realized? When does imagination slide towards fantasy? When does image slide towards commodification? Fantasy and commodification are not names for things, but modes of understanding things. They are well-scripted narratives that may uncover, but more likely serve to obscure place by allowing it to become the same as other narratives of the same sort. When does dwelling turn into Celebration (Disney's new urbanist project), and can our narrative about Celebration be made problematic and new? Only if we give up the idea that Celebration lies in a continuous tradition with all other desired dwellings, those which served to comfort and at the same time resist real difference. Celebration could be made new by making it a scene.

On the other hand, in Orlando there is a place called Church Street, which has been redeveloped several times over the past two decades, always in an attempt to make it a scene. But that scene has easily and quickly fallen into its corrupted form, the commodity. And as a commodity, it has failed to become a scene, and therefore failed as a commodity as well. This, too, needs to be made problematic and new, and it will not

happen merely by reasserting the logic of the scene. It will happen by trying to imagine what dwelling might look like in that place. Not as a nostalgic new urbanist project, but as something else, as a place that does not assume that everything can be standing reserve.

Another example: the mall. The mall, like the airport, has sometimes been seen as a non-place (cf. Marc Auge). But that non-place is not the failure of the scene, and is different from Edward Relph's concept of "placelessness", which is the failure of dwelling. The mall may well be a scene, and this becomes obvious if one considers the different experiences of different aged users of the mall. As a place of commercial activity, the mall stands as the antithesis of dwelling for those whose imagination begins with the rural. However, the mall can also be a scene, and it is a scene to those who want it to be one, who do not bear the cultural memory of the rural. For adults, it lacks dwelling; for teenagers, it is a scene, or at least the promise of one. For adults, the mall is merely the failure of dwelling, the opposite of fantasy; for teenagers, the mall is the site of a scene which, at worst, can slide into commodification. The West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Alberta is a provocative example of a place which is a simulacrum of dwelling (the entire small town is echoes within its walls, including entertainment (a water park, a skating rink, an amusement park), worship, commerce, and habitation), and is simultaneously a scene (or better, the site of shifting scenes), a place where social borders can be drawn based on activities or interests, and in which signifiers can circulate, combine, transgress the accepted norms of society, and finally exhaust themselves.

These examples are meant to be written onto the projects we have before us at this conference. Every artistic place-making is also a risk. There is a chance that fantasy and commodification will take over. Indeed, more than a chance – perhaps an inevitability, and that fact may lead us to suspect that we should rely on existing versions of place, ones that have been tried and found true. But this, too, has risk – the risk of superficiality and banality.

In the end, it is worth realizing that place is not a text, at least not in the traditional sense of textuality. It does not yield its meaning either through a hermeneutics of trust or a hermeneutics of suspicion. The model of reading, as applied to place, has limits, and being em-placed must mean something more than decipherment. It must mean creation.

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Bruce Janz is Associate Professor of Humanities in the Department of Philosophy at UCF. He works in contemporary continental philosophy, cultural theory, African philosophy, interdisciplinarity, and issues associated with place and space across many disciplines. He maintains the website Research on Place and Space  
<http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/place/home.html>