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Change and Memory on the Fresno Fulton Mall

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Abstract

Revitalization of the Fresno, CA Fulton Mall serves as an anthropological case study centering on a discussion of changing urban forms. The creation and maintenance of community as it pertains to open urban space is central to my argument that context and place-making matter when confronting urban change at the street level, querying the role public space plays in 21st Century urban areas. I ask what do preservation efforts really seek to save in a rapidly changing region like California's greater Central Valley? What do such preservation efforts say about the role of citizens in their community at the local level and how their participation in the urban revitalization process include hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990) of cultural meaning that reinforce and counter the discourse of a dominant local planning regime? Through ethnographic research and an intimate and empirically-grounded understanding of place, I showcase the different negotiations of space and self that community groups and local government entities develop, even as they seek to both revitalize and preserve the character of the Fulton Mall through political dialogue and community mobilization.

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Introduction

Planted decades ago, the Fulton Mall's leafy trees once offered respite from the California Central Valley's intense heat. Seats under overgrown arbors and benches styled in Mid-Century Modernism's distinct blocks and squares tempted passersby walking the open pedestrian mall, but few sat down. For the last decade, the Mall has felt empty and of another era. What little activity stirred by food carts and Latino clothing stores stood in contrast to the empty buildings labeled with a red X warning the Fresno Fire Department that, in the event of a fire, there was no need to save this building. Few would miss it, and many were expecting its demise (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The Fulton Mall, Fresno, California, in 2009. Source: KVPR Valley Public Radio, http://kvpr.org/post/fresno-leaders-expect-fulton-mall-work-soon-despite-delay

The Fulton Mall's history lives large in the local imaginary as a site that once fostered social cohesion, economic activity and embodied the aesthetics of modernity. The Mall is currently host to a major, and controversial, construction project as part of recent efforts to enliven the faltering downtown of Fresno, CA. A revival of interest and action begs several questions concerning the symbolic and lived importance of the Mall: What does the redevelopment of this site mean to the pluralistic community of Fresnans in relation to the idea of the Fulton Mall historically, socially, politically? How have attempts to redesign and redefine the Mall's use reflect a larger social project concerning who gets acknowledged by city leadership, and finally, how does citizen opposition feed into ideas about history and community development? Here I argue that the political discussion and action engendered by proposed changes to the Fulton Mall are really a contestation of urban identity, negotiated and moderated through the application of social memory. Through this development, the social

memory of a public site is highlighted in direct contrast to the larger forces of a postmodern movement to manufacture space first, community second. This is evidenced by the ways in which discourse has been shaped by the proposed changes, the perpetuating ideas that fuel a particular and historical social memory of place, and the goals for the site that change the character and identity of the Fulton Mall as it stood as a crystallization of its 1960s genesis (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Drawing from original plans by Victor Gruen and Associates, 1963.
Source: http://esotericsurvey.blogspot.com/2014/02/fulton-mall-its-looking-bleak.html

This theoretical discussion serves as the beginnings of a diachronic ethnographic project to discuss this controversy of development, and inserts memory as a mechanism of study to discuss the phenomenological elements that go into place-making. For myself, a native of Fresno, who has been gone for over a decade, this project presents a challenge in the division between emic and etic approaches to anthropological study as well as in my understanding of the struggles of local government in a community that I barely remember. Simultaneously, the place-memory of home still retains meaning for me, especially in the older areas like the Fulton Mall that were untouched by urban redevelopment. It becomes my task to walk a precarious line of intimacy and distant appraisal, a role that Marx Arax understands as a "messy affair," part of returning home:

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> The stakes always seemed higher [in Fresno] then when I was writing about L.A. The reasons were obvious in one respect—it was my home—and yet I sensed a deeper explanation that had to do with how we as a society related to place… It has been a messy affair, but I am still here, trying to put my finger on this place. (Arax 27).

The Fulton Mall as Place and Space

The six city blocks of pedestrian walkway, cut into thirds by the heavy traffic of Fresno and Tulare Streets, are lined by grand buildings that once held the high-end shopping sites that favor North Fresno and its conservative, suburban sibling, nearby Clovis, CA. Most of these multistory buildings, formerly banks, shops and department stores, have hung boards over their large street level windows. Few businesses remain active, though stores often blast music through their open doors to attract customers. These customers are a mix of Latino families, white collar office workers from nearby governmental agencies, and homeless people, though it is almost empty except for the homeless after 2pm on most weekdays. At over 40 feet wide, the Mall's pavement was striped with wave-like indentations that were meant to evoke the naturalism of the space as something unusual in its surrounding urban environment. Tall trees offer welcoming shade, as Fresno consistently gets triple digit heat from May to September. Walking down the space, pedestrians could encounter benches with shade, intermittently run fountains (Fig. 3), sculptures, as well as raised seating and greenery every 100 feet. It is a resoundingly quiet space, despite nearby street noise and scattered music. The Mall has become a place where one can find oneself entirely alone in a major city for several city blocks.

Fig. 3. Empty water fountains on the Fulton Mall, November 2014. Source: Photo by Dorie Dakin Perez.

The semi-abandoned feel of the downtown Fulton Mall—envisioned by Victor Gruen and Associates as one of the first open pedestrian malls in 1960s North America—is by design and by default. "Owing to a series of planning decisions by Fresno's city government, the Mall did not remain the locus of major retail business in Fresno, however, it remains a welcome oasis reserved for pedestrians in the heart of downtown Fresno, and…has played a vital role in the development of Fresno's social history" (Downtown Fresno Partnership). Recent local art exhibits, community meetings and governmental action have all led to one conclusion: Fresno's forgotten Fulton Mall has had something of a moment in the regional cultural landscape, even as its space is under construction for a new purpose. The Fulton Mall will soon be the Fulton Corridor, where cars will pass where walkers once stood in attempt to manifest the benefits of economic revitalization. This swift rise in attention addresses several variables—years of neglect act as cultural forgetting that has allowed urban decay to happen while the commercial districts and new housing developments of the city have moved towards the northernmost boundary of the city along the San Joaquin River. Both governmental and community-based efforts to revitalize the area have gained traction, via planning projects and cultural events aimed at revamping the downtown's underdeveloped cultural arts scene. And efforts to revitalize the downtowns of urban communities have the advancing momentum of a global trend towards the energetic vitality of pre-World War Two urban life, densely zoned to contain multipurpose, multi-use buildings and carless by design. The Fulton Mall stands at the intersection of these forces, a spurring of its revitalization in search of economic activity despite a history of political and social abandonment.

This particular site is understudied, and I attempt to fill a lacuna of theoretical analysis regarding the redevelopment of public urban space, incorporating the innovative use of social memory as a tool of political and civic engagement. The Fulton Mall is positioned as a meaningful site of social memory of Fresno, and the struggle to redevelop and revitalize the Mall is part of a larger urban impetus to repurpose and access public sites by populations often competing with each other for meaning. Government intervention has and continues to use memory as a way to control the popular image of the city (Villa 26) by reifying the site's history and purpose, leading to various different definitions of "community" and "space" (Lefebvre 45), and ways in which citizens can participate in the process of place-making. I hope to add to the theorization of the power of memory in the creation of space by way of case study, of which the Fresno Fulton Mall is a prime example; here, the contention of memory and utilization of place come together as elements in the urban planning process, privileging ideas of the future by utilizing social memory as a product and process from the past. In his 2001 poem "Street Scene on the Fulton Mall," Gary Soto writes of the decay of the once-vibrant space- "The curb was painted red - blood of a sorrowful brother? I imagined him knocked down and getting up, not god-like, but with the stamina of a burro… Between buildings, the best years long gone." More positive memories reside in the hagiography of wishful editorials and nostalgic commentary from those who resist proposals of redevelopment for an ideational past. Svetlana Boym writes

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"thus places in the city are not merely architectural metaphors; they are also screen memories for urban dwellers, projections of contested remembrances" (Boym 77). Ruth Gadebusch writes in *Community Alliance* of the Fulton Mall's origins:

> Once upon a time, Fresno had vision. It was going to save its downtown. A civic planner was hired and a downtown street was turned into an exciting mall. Dedicated citizens raised money and graced that mall with carefully selected art. It was a showcase recognized far and wide. We came. We saw. We shopped. We boasted.

The forgetting implied in the reification of the Mall's development (Moore) is similar to the theoretical work of Paul Connerton in which he highlights the forgetting of history that urban renewal fosters as part of its temporal fluidity. By commodifying spaces and erasing the relationship of labor to materiality, a temporal forgetting (Connerton 2009: 10), is modernity's ace in the hole. His idea of spatial topography and place memory as indicators of a socially inscribed site of power evoked the ways in which Villa's open spaces in the *barrio* act as places to reproduce resistance. Social memory, here the memories of a downtown project and an age of economic prosperity, counters this forgetting as a pause in the construction of official history by larger forces using the carefully-shaped past to inform the present.

Fig. 4. "The Visit" by Clement Renzi. Photo: Downtown Fresno Partnership, 2010. http://downtownfresno.org/

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The physical space of the Mall is historicized and specific, creating an environment ripe with social meaning. Memorials were found in its 26 pieces of public art (Fig. 4) and in the aesthetic spatialization of the Mall itself, invoking a socialized memorialization that feeds into the national, or here local, historical narrative (Anderson 25). A raised platform in the "free speech" area of the main plaza commemorates a struggle to allow pre-First World War members of the International Workers of the World (Fresno Downtown Coalition 2) movement a space for political protest. Local promoters and festivals are held in the mall as the "heart" of the city's downtown, all parties ignoring the nearly 60% vacancy rate and slow trickle of pedestrian traffic that constitutes the area's life force. The landscape greenery and verdant assemblage, designed by well-esteemed landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, serves as a *de facto* memorial to mid-century modern sensibilities and popular architectural design of the era. While the vision of the Mall itself rests in the celebrated genius of architect Victor Gruen, it is the use of natural greenery that makes the Mall, a place concerned with commerce, into a park by default. This memory work in a social milieu is best theorized by Paul Connerton as place-memory and the locus, where city streets act as visible signposts of memorialization that shapes the phenomenology of our physical built environment. It is particularly appropriate that the spatial memory of place is of Fresno's forgotten downtown, and the walking tours offered by competing groups (Fig. 5) serves as discursive memory-work that adds to the textualization and relevance of the newfound interest in Fresno's neglected urban spaces.

Fig. 5. Walking tour on the Fulton Mall, January 2016. Source: Photo by Dorie Dakin Perez.

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Economic Marginalization and Racialization of the Mall

The aesthetic logic of the Mall is countered by a changing public utilizing its space—the racialization of space and division of city areas are based on encoded color lines (Massey). As white flight has affected all urban areas due to the rise in cheap suburban housing and the de-industrialization of urban centers became desolate places to live and work, white shoppers have abandoned the Fulton Mall. In their wake have come different commercial operations, with goods for a changing consumer base that skews toward a Latino audience, further alienating older white shoppers from the offerings on the Mall. "Whites and Asians were present on the Mall in fewer numbers and African Americans and Latinos in greater numbers than their presence in the Fresno County population" (Delcore, Mullooly, and Visser 9). Luftenberg's, a bridal store with nearly 70 years of operation and brand development in the region, left in 2013, seen by many as the final nail in the coffin that was the Mall's original identity as a mainstream place of White consumerism. Latino families strolling down the walkways much like Low's (1998) discussion of Latin American urban plazas. To this particular population, the Mall is a site of social interaction, and less a place of consumerism. Many opponents of the current revamp have concluded that the proposed changes are meant to attract a certain kind of consumer—young, middle-class (read: white) and single—who would not be part of the current population who utilizes the Mall in its present iteration.

Over time, the Mall has also become a physical memorial to the economic marginalization of the greater Fresno Downtown area that is situated in the triangle of urban density that lies between Highways 180, 41 and 99, respectively. This economic marginalization echoes nationally, where capital flight to suburban areas outside the urban core concentrates poverty and neglect near the civic buildings of the inner city (Massey; Sugrue). A discussion of urban issues seems disjointed given the Fresno area's rural environs - the Central Valley region in which it is centered is "big agriculture" country, where mass-produced fruits, vegetables, nuts and livestock (Arax 27) are supply the global market. In rural areas, the largely contained space and few common areas allows for limited social cohesion - by acting as an urban center in the rural space that is the Central Valley, Fresno remains the central meeting point for social, political and economic activity. A culture of racial and economic division, often stratified together as the legacy of race relations created by White settlement, Latino and Asian migration, and Native American marginalization has set the stage for a spatial division of city neighborhoods that remains mostly unchanged. The older areas, including the downtown area where the Fulton Mall is located, struggle economically, often working as an alternative economy to the revenue-generating subdivisions and central shopping districts situated in outlying areas.

Fig. 6. Trees on the Fulton Mall, Source: Photo by Tim Davis, 2007. Cultural Heritage Landscape, http://tclf.org/landscapes/fulton-mall

Current civic leadership argues that the Mall was an attempt to capture the suburban experience in an urban setting, writing in the 2011 Fulton Corridor Plan that "[The] singular goal was to replicate the suburban shopping experience being built on bare dirt just beyond the edges of Fresno and cities across America." An economic argument is made that the site was purely capitalistic in nature, making any claims to a park-like space (Fig. 6) or place of civic engagement a reification that, in the eyes of city leadership, came about purely by accident. The prophesied economic boost is central to the interpretation and recent engagement in the Mall's revitalization, circling back to its beginnings:

> Business leaders and the City reacted boldly by trying to give the public more of the suburban experience they seemed to crave. They hired a famous planner of shopping malls and a leading up and coming landscape architect to install the nation's second pedestrian mall on Fulton in 1964. They invested heavily in sculptures, fountains, and other public art. They even recast the street grid and constructed garages with thousands of parking stalls. (Moule and Polyzoides 5).

The creation of infrastructure would soon be moot, given the movement away from downtown that started almost immediately after the Mall was opened. After the initial flurry of activity at its opening in 1964, investment in the commercial district trickled to a halt, and the site became, over the years, closer to an urban park. The minimal economic activity—Latino jewelry shops, discount clothing stores and lunch places—is a far cry from the visions of prosperity that lingered in Victor Gruen's imagination.

The economic disempowerment and political isolation in the urban area of downtown Fresno serves as a test of local citizen activism. The city is named as by many as complicit in the site's demise - "(…) the mall is something the City of Fresno no longer wants to be responsible for" (Tokmakian). The push to commoditize a space is something not unknown, deconstructed in *Barrio Logos* (Villa 15) as something cannibalistic, the "super-urbanization of America. The

urban giants being created are not 'communities' in any real sense… this process is in fact destroying what does remain of human communities." Villa's work concerns the cultural aesthetics and expression of resistance of the Chicano community in the *barrios* of Los Angeles, a more culturally-specific argument for the production of space as a culturally-centered place. Villa writes of the "creative destruction" that is urban morphology, as "Chicanos in the central-city barrios repeatedly defended their use-value orientations to place against the exchange-driven imperatives of the urban growth machine" (Villa 17). The change in consumer habits on the Fulton Mall reflects a changing community, increasingly one of color, with fewer resources to counter external attempts to change its use value by the northern centers of economic power that have settled on Shaw Avenue and Riverpark.

Harold Tokmakian, the former head of Fresno's Regional Planning Department, adds an important perspective, noting that the Fulton Mall's environs were only partly completed to designer Gruen's specifications. The Mall was to have three major components (Tokmakian): a park-like atmosphere surrounded by accessible freeways, commercial outlets and housing. Vertical, dense housing was never added, leaving the Mall as a liminal space between park and shopping district. The emphasis on centralization, of city growth as dense and situated in a tight nexus surrounding a prosperous downtown was undermined by ongoing development to the north, ignoring the tenets of the 1964 General Plan that took its core values from Gruen's density manifesto. "This policy led to the virtual abandonment of downtown as a major retail center" (Tokmakian). Mark Arax (2009) wrote of this local culture of development. "In Fresno, the Planning Department was renamed the Development Department…This [culture of suburban growth] is why Fresno had one of the lowest park-to-people ratios in the nation and why downtown had become a roost for pigeons" (Arax 31). Suburban development, in turn, has become Fresno's default position over the years, decentralizing the city into the postmodern topography of sprawl that Edward Soja (1989) cautioned against.

Social memory as both a tool and an outcome in the urban planning process and community emplacement surrounding the revitalization of the Fulton Mall is discursive, specific and shapes the futurist plans for a modern overhaul of its shape and purpose. As previously claimed, this is evidenced by the official and countering rhetoric used to inform proposed changes, the particulars of the history and memory of the space itself and the economic and cultural goals of future proposals to revitalize the Mall.

Different Visions: The Park versus the Commercial District

Collective memory serves as a normative social space, ideationally created to inform us about what matters and why in society by streamlining individual memory with cultural values. Social memory often counters the claims of ruling regimes, eager to codify history into convenient narrative. Here, the idea and act of forgetting is implicit to plans of revitalization by city leadership eager to develop the area, yet remain challenged due to the Mall's

default memorialization into a *de facto* city park. "The Mall has become an urban park that provides a tree-filled place of refuge from the fumes and noise of vehicular traffic. Properly maintained and promoted, it can become a destination point with cafés and art galleries" (Fresno Downtown Coalition). This competing vision of a place where social interaction happens, rather than where commercial activity is centered is the sticking point that leaves many community leaders and members at an ideological impasse. The drift away from the original intention of the Mall as commercial property to one that is utilized as publicly-oriented space is where utility and memory collide. This opposition is succinctly described in Peter F. Cannavo's *The Working Landscape* (2007):

> We can found places - i.e., create new places or significantly change existing ones - or we can preserve places - i.e. refrain from altering places or perhaps maintain them according to some notion of their defining character. Often we think of these two activities as fundamentally opposed: founding promotes change and preservation promotes stability. (Cannavo 3).

The push by community groups, and later refusal by the city administration, to have the Fulton Mall be nationally recognized and listed in the Register of Historic Places is indicative of the use of social memory as both an outgrowth and a tool in this particular urban planning process. The proposal to be recognized as sufficiently important by a leading body of historical recognition, and thus, limit the changes to the space that would devalue the Mall's history and place in the regional imagination was led by a group of citizens outside of City Hall. The application for inclusion to the nationally-recognized body of American sites of historical significance is explicit in its use of social memory as valid proof of local significance, as "The relationship between memorials and forgetting is reciprocal: the threat of forgetting begets memorials and the construction of memorials begets forgetting" (Connerton 2009: 29). What didn't get discussed in both the 2010 application to the National Register and in subsequent proposals for redevelopment by the City starting in the Fall of 2013 is the role of forgetting often cited as "discard[ing] the obligation to remember" that Ricoeur (46) says is part of the ethics of the historiographical operation; memorials "(…) permit only some things to be remembered… by exclusion" (Connerton 1989: 29). Thus, the differing conceptions of the utility of the Mall, as a potentially lucrative commercial district or as historically significant urban parkland, cater to different constituencies with competing ideas about the value of the space. This difference is expressed most vividly in how memory informs that valued existence as either one of economic opportunity or of historical meaning.

The rhetoric used by both sides is reminiscent of the political ideologies that inform their cause. "Every great city has a great downtown" is the tagline of the futurist planners of the Fresno Downtown Partnership (and a previous iteration of sorts, the merchant-based Downtown Fresno Association), espousing what they see as a potential center of economic activity. A 2013 campaign, complete with a well-produced video and city-wide lawn sign giveaway, used the hopeful phrase "I believe in Downtown" to evoke feelings of

place-making and community tied to redevelopment. The more emotional calls to "remember" and "preserve" the past are the tools of the groups in resistance to such visions, echoing Villa's (230) claim that emotional sentiments are best used by those in the minority. "In these struggles, the persistence and power of memory is crucial, becoming simultaneously effective - as practically informing history in the politics of community defense - and affective - as emotionally orienting story in the politics of textual representation" (Villa 235). Villa cites Willa Cather's "city of fact" and "city of feelings" as two sides of the same coin of use of memory in the imaginings of a city by its citizens and leaders. The list of facts noted in ethnographic interviews with revitalizationists have no bearing on the emotional nostalgia expressed by preservationists. Underarticulated, in the process of the Fulton Mall's revision, are the real and abstract idea of place creating competing sides. The energies of both, looking backwards and forwards, inform their meanings of place.

To End Pedestrianization: Drivers on the Mall

Much like the production of space into a social actor (Lefebvre 8), the groundwork that is the march of modernity's forgetfulness has been occurring in Fresno since the mid-2000s. The Fulton Corridor Plan created at the behest of Mayor Ashley Swearinger in 2011 has identified zoning changes and specific places of revitalization along the Fulton Mall, citing the lack of drivability of the Mall as a major hindrance to commercial development and use. The centrality of access to the Mall by cars would ensure a steady stream of visitors and consumers (Fig. 7), the document argues, as a way to generate much-needed city tax revenue and reinvigorate the area's business district. Detractors to the plan argue that cars would qualitatively change the character of what they see as an urban park first, commercial operation second, and cite the original plans that closed off traffic on Fulton Street as proof of limited success.

Fig. 7. A rendering of Fulton Street, to be completed in 2017. Source: Fulton Corridor Specific Plan, City of Fresno. Source: http://www.fresno.gov/Government/MayorsOffice/DowntownRevitalization/FresnoDowntownPlans/FultonCorridor.htm.

Current urban development debates about the primacy of the pedestrian are also relevant to the revitalization of the Mall. Global planning trends toward a "walkable city", where density is key to social interaction and cohesion while also serving to counteract public health concerns of cities past. "In a relatively compact, mixed-use neighborhood, shopping is not just consumption. Rather, shopping helps foster social interaction between neighbors... a shared sense of community might arise… enriched with a variety of meanings" (Cannavo 107).

The current urban planning emphasis on an ideation of place so different from the car culture that is inherent to 20th century California, from which Fresno takes its cues, is profound. This type of futurism is reiterated by Benedict Anderson, who wrote that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." (Anderson 1982: 6). The visions of economic prosperity, commercial investment and the nearly $313 million economic output envisioned by the urban planners contracted by the City of Fresno leave the *de facto* use of the Fulton Mall as a parkland and public meeting area out of the realm of possibility. The public use of private land on the Mall, now lightly policed due to small crowds, would change as more restrictions would be placed on activity. Setha Low writes that William H. Whyte, influential urban planner of New York City, saw the decline of park land and sites of interaction as "a threat to urban civility" (Low 5). Car culture facilitates the "postmodern geographies" (Soja) of 20th Century sprawl, continued into the 21st century here by the "submergence of the power of central places," (Soja 234) that are typically places of pedestrian navigation. Cars would add more consumers on the Mall, but limit the social interaction that local community groups pushing for preservation, rather than revitalization efforts, feel is necessary and historically-defined as the central character of the Mall. Spatial theory and projected gain are subject to the realities of empirical analysis, here furnished by the Institute of Public Anthropology on the California State University, Fresno campus. Observations of pedestrians far exceeded the expectations of researchers and of those citizens they interviewed: "Seventy five public guesses at pedestrian numbers during the count period were, in general, dramatically less than the number counted. The median daily guess was about eight times lower than the actual count. (Delcore, Mullooly, and Visser 9). The City-sponsored survey also interviewed 157 people about their place of residence and reason for being on the Mall, obtaining data that shows the localized use of the Mall by downtown residents and the disparate uses that the Mall encourages. Researchers wrote of a perception problem of the Mall as envisioned as abandoned, yet empirical data showed its daily utility in the lives of many Fresnans. The study argued for more comparative data - older retail centers like Fig Garden and the central Tower business district were listed as comparative - to get a sense of larger patterns of use, "however, one thing is clear: there are far more pedestrians using the Fulton Mall than public perception would indicate." (Delcore, Mullooly and Visser 5).

The proposals made public, three of varied change to the Mall in increasing car accessibility, and the most car-friendly (and ultimately successful) plan was backed by the highly visible Downtown Fresno Partnership. These

efforts are legitimized by a $16 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation bent on revitalizing its inner cities, awaiting local approval despite ongoing public outcry about a violation of the integrity of space. The announcement for the federal grant awarded to Fresno in the Fall of 2013 privileged complete renewal, rather than preservation, as "restoration of the street grid will allow the revitalization of the City's downtown core, setting up downtown Fresno and the region for success with connections to the new bus route and a planned high-speed rail station" (Department of Transportation).

It is to be noted that the proposals have passed multiple milestones of public comment and political approval, and are considered by a majority of citizens as the best option for the underutilized space. Efforts to further privatize an already privately-owned space that has served as public open area for decades remains contentious, especially as privatization often counters a public's sense of place. According to Cannavo (107) "as public spaces decline, the landscape becomes characterized by an exaggerated private domain: shopping malls, private clubs and gated communities. Our basic public space, the street, is given over to the car and its accommodation."

The rise in car culture has been documented as limiting social cohesion and political participation (Peterson) while the *faux* private spaces speak to Bachelard's ideation of the private space, seen as gendered by Connerton (2009) in relation to a masculine public sphere, as a desire to feel comforted by the trappings of home and middle class life. This strange amalgamation of internal dialectics - home, privacy, community emplacement, safety - meet uncomfortably with the external economic forces that make a city rethink current mores of urban planning to meet, in desperation, the possibilities of the future. The dialectics of change and resistance surrounding the Fulton Mall as a place of community creation, both ideational and *de facto*, are worthy of in-depth study, for the manifestation of policy reflects the social memory and values that makes a society into a community. Much like the Hegelian idea of history as continuous waves of ideological thesis, antithesis, then synthesis, the turn of urban planning policy to one of creation, then destruction begs a synthesis. This meeting in the middle of both sides, one weighted with the privileges of greater public support and the financial backing of federal grant money and the other a persistent scrappy resistance to communal upheaval, is unexpected. Yet an increasing utilization of social memory of place has risen in the rhetoric of resistance, reminding us of the weight such memory-work plays in the construction of communities.

Conclusion

The political maneuvering over the fate of the Fulton Mall, undoubtedly, reflects the larger restructuring of the local Central Valley economy over the course of its short history, and the attempts by local government to respond to economic pressures that draw lines in the sand around every urban downtown in search of shoppers, businesses and capital investment. Economic concerns

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often speak the loudest to those in power, unable to shake the growth ideology (Sugrue 15) of urban governance that sets cities in competition with one another. Connerton's place-memory (2009: 10), and the persistence of social memory that contains different values of place and history, remain powerful despite efforts to override their symbolic force. Theoretically, the Fulton Mall seems caught between the forces of economic growth and social memory, into what Soja called third space, simultaneously ideational and physical, responsive to competing pressures yet unresolved by none.

In addition to regional history, the underlying racial and economic coding that informs the utilization and creation of space for particular populations—struggling downtown denizens versus future well-heeled consumers from the North- is an important element within this larger discussion of place-making. Alienation of one set of consumers to lure the economic investment of another group of consumers speaks to the ideation of the Fulton Mall as a commercial space, subject to economic rule. The role the Mall plays as parkland is effectively ignored by revisionists, and becomes the emotional plea that informs the vision of the Mall as a social site by preservationists. The activism by community groups bent on resisting growth is reiterated by the civic engagement that happens within the Mall itself, as the center for political protest that happens due to the dearth of public space and parkland within city limits. The points of contention concerning the utility of the Mall's space, the role it could potentially play as an economic hub and the presence of cars on walkways long reserved for pedestrians that counter global trends of smart growth, I argue, are ultimately about the social memory and forgetting of place. By placing the Mall within its historicized context in the regional landscape as a place of social interaction, the so-called "heart of the city" (Moore), the role of active citizen that such memory and shared experience engender becomes more pressing and materialized into community resistance. Social memory and forgetting is a tool and an outgrowth of this process, informing and a byproduct of revitalization efforts via the visions of future and past that all sides employ.

Fig. 8. Mural of Fresno author William Saroyan in central Fresno. Source: Photo by Dorie Dakin Perez

By acknowledging the role that social memory and forgetting has played in the overarching conversation regarding the Mall's revitalization, an allowance

is created for the deepening of cultural knowledge and meaning of place that is the Fulton Mall. The heart of the city is given full symbolic measure—"I Believe in Downtown" (Fig. 8) —and competing ideas of place are highlighted as attempts to utilize or influence this memory-work, making preservation of its meaning all the more important to the cultural landscape in which Fresno is situated.

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