

# **Making Space**

Dylan Box

Art & Design Integrative Project

Class of 2012

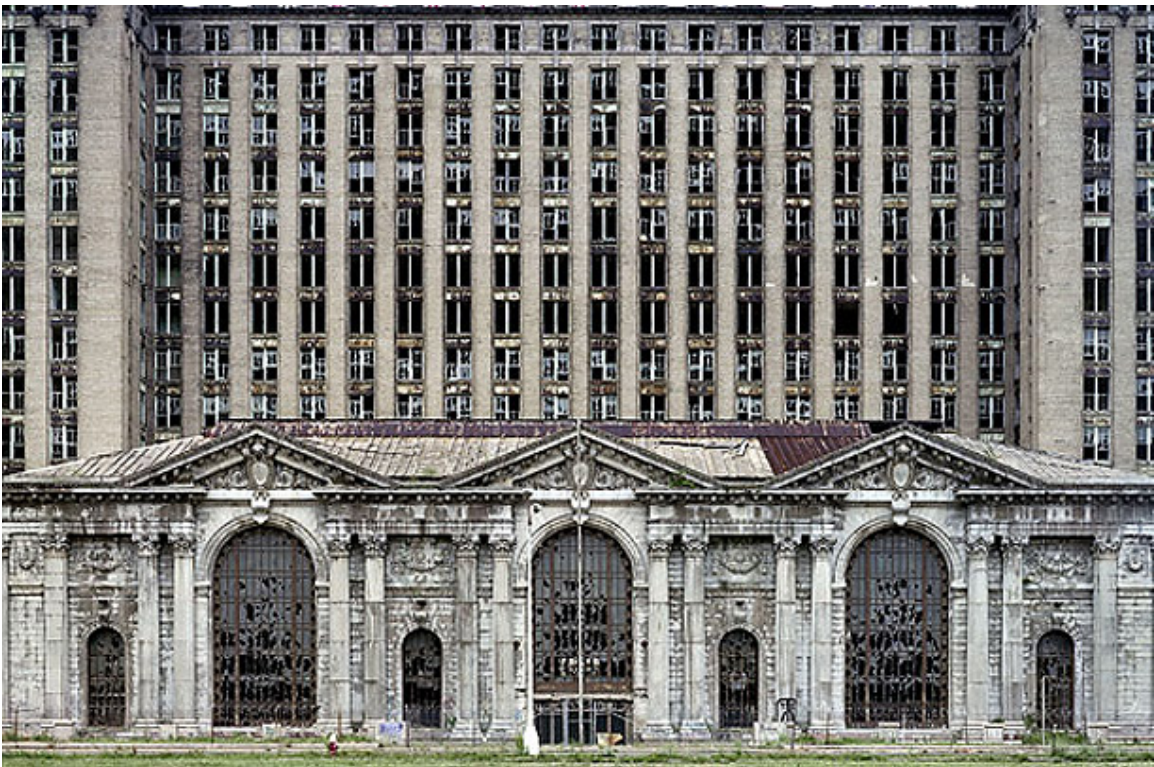
*Introduction:*

Detroit is a city that faces a great deal of negative press. Touted as a “City in Ruin,” an evaporating population and a shrinking tax base have pushed Detroit closer toward possible bankruptcy. As a result, communities and neighborhoods are slowly becoming isolated from municipal services, jobs, healthy food, and each other. However, Detroit is also a city of remarkable opportunity. It is through the use of existing local resources and space that communities and neighborhoods can move toward self-support and sustainability with increased connection and shared spirit. Through an increase in local cohesion, each individual is better off than they are isolated, fulfilled by a social contract of shared value and investment.

“Making Space” focuses on building community spaces and the designed objects that inhabit and define the space. The project addresses a variety of issues from the benefits of growing and strengthening communities, reflecting shared interest and values, the use of limited resources for design, and the vision and future for Detroit as a city.

*Contextual Discussion:*

With the decline of the American industrial sector, and more specifically the American automotive industry, Detroit is facing an exodus of citizens. 237,500 residents have left the city in the past decade, reducing the population by 25% (Seelye, 2011). It is a city that faces deep financial troubles with a diminishing tax base, and a struggling city government on the verge of bankruptcy (Neavling, 2011)(Bankruptcy, 2011). Abandoned is an apt word to describe the 713,777 citizens still living with decreased governmental services, without access to jobs and sometimes even emergency support (Dowie, 2009).



*Cover of Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre's Ruins of Detroit, the Michigan Central Station*



### *Katrina Furniture Project*

However, many designers, artists, and organizers have created projects that help build community through intelligent spaces and programs, instead of relishing in the so-called “Ruins of Detroit” as many artists and photographers have done (Leary, 2011). Working in New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, students from the University of Texas created the *Katrina Furniture Project* to organize workshops and a network of craftspeople to teach, build, and create furniture from the scrap wood that littered the ninth ward following the storm. The *Katrina Furniture Project*

shows the potential that skill sharing can have on bringing together a community, through shared purpose (Hamilton, 2007).

Community cohesion is especially important in a location like Detroit, where neighborhoods are increasingly isolated with poor busing systems, and a decline in municipal services. Design Researchers Ezio Manzini and François Jégou studied the organic creation of “multiservice centers” of workspaces and social centers that help “empower” a community with shared resources through their work in the “Sustainable Everyday Project.” Part of their research showed that community sharing and organization networks can save both time and money for individuals, they can also improve quality of life by cultivating communities that share skills, resources and needs (Jégou). Many such programs like the Atlanta Community ToolBank help save users money by providing repair tools and volunteers so that users have access to more tools than they would normally have on their own (Steffen). In Detroit, community space can be as simple as a café. The Urban Network Cyber Café, set up by Yusef Shakur, is a space that provides internet access, events, and philanthropy to Zone 8, one of the most struggling districts in Detroit. Yusef, a one time “street thug” and inmate, organized the space from the ground up with no budget, with only a desire to “restore the neighbor back to the ‘hood.” The space not only provides a place for locals to meet and organize, but it also puts together back-to-school supply giveaways and block party activities to encourage community cohesion. The space represents a way that Detroit is already beginning to self-organize, bringing down crime, educating, and raising quality of life in some of the hardest neighborhoods in the city (Shakur, 2012).



*D-Town Farms in Detroit*

For many community organizations in Detroit, the activity provided is secondary to the purpose of building relationships within a neighborhood. At places like D-Town Farms, promoting healthy eating and teaching gardening practices are important in teaching wholesome lifestyles and connecting people with the earth, but growing food is merely the vessel for conversations to occur. The farms become a rallying point, a location of collective investment through labor and “community

mobilization,” where neighbors all have a stake. Through this stake comes a reason to care for each other and for the well being of the community. Suddenly, people are no longer islands, and through collective action and support, everyone rises together (Goodman, 2010).

*Creative Work:*

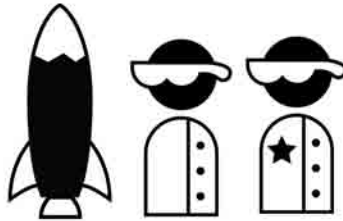
The Mt. Elliott Makerspace is one of the many community organizations about Detroit providing an important service to the community. The space, located in the basement of The Church of the Messiah, located on the east side of the city, is an open workshop aimed at teaching kids electronics, digital media, bike and computer repair, and creative thinking. The space is currently in the process of setting up a woodshop to expand their possible projects. “Making Space” supports the construction of the Mt. Elliott workshop through the design of a woodshop cabinet and workbench, and the design of the graphic identity for the Mt.Elliott Makerspace and Makerspaces in the Detroit area. The project will live in both a gallery setting, and will live well after in the Mt. Elliott Makerspace as a permanent part of the shop.



mt.elliott**makerspace**

*Mt.Elliott Makerspace Logo*

**this tool requires**



**supervision**

*Supervision Safety Sign*



Branding and signage for the space is an important aspect of keeping a shop safe and organized. Because the primary users of the space will be grade school to high school students, safety and access are a great concern. The branding of the space is constructed in a way that references classic safety sign branding, with icons and symbols representing specific shop hazards, while also bringing an element of character and styling that separates the Mt. Elliott branding from that of a standardized safety sign. This wit and humor of the signs coupled with the boldness of message provides an element of play with the concern for safety. Instead of lecturing Makerspace users, the signs play to the attitude of the students working, reminding them of the importance of safety without deterring them from creating.



*Concentration Icons*

Icons were also designed for each of the Makerspace concentrations. Each icon has elements that imply related, but far-fetched and humorous activities and objects within the concentration.



*Cabinet in Gallery Installation*

The physical part of the project, the cabinet and workbench, was built out of locally sourced and reclaimed lumber from the Church of the Messiah and local housing. The cabinet countertop was built from laminated dimensional lumber in a “butcher-block” style from a deconstructed house in Hamtramck, and plywood is

sourced from unused shelving systems in the Church's storage. The use of limited and local resources is important to the concept of local action causing local change. Here, there is no reliance on external resources, and the community action is created from a locally empowered and motivated force. The limited pallet of materials only adds to the design and social challenge of the neighborhood environment; a form must come from what resource is available locally.



### *Tabletop and Style Guides*

Finally, the element of education brings the project full circle. Like all community spaces, the woodshop is the mode through which relationships and investment in the space is created. Students will be taught woodworking skills on projects ranging from boxes for project storage and organization, to the

construction of the workbenches and furniture pieces in the space. Allowing Makerspace users to work on the actual construction of the furniture and space gives them personal stake in the shop itself. Whenever they re-enter the space, they can be reminded that they had a hand in constructing the elements that create the space. Investment through labor is a powerful force, and it keeps people engaged within the community project.

### *Conclusion*

Building communities is part fostering shared commitment and part building shared resources. While the portion of object building and designing only accounts for part of the impact, the effort to build community space, resources, skills, and attachment is the main intention of "Making Space." Most importantly is to provide long-lasting support for communities by creating and fostering self-sustaining space. The project represents a way to work *with* communities and not *for* communities, by using design to add value and add investment potential of community members. The project operates as a service for the community, rather than a grandstand for the designer. Here, design is the method that increases access and excitement for members; it connects them to the space. The project shows how creative spaces can build and strengthen relationships, and impact personal growth and quality of life through the cohesion of communities.

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