Performance Art and Pedestrian Experience: Creating a Sense of Place on the Third Street Promenade

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ABSTRACT

It is well attested that wherever people gather, acrobats, poets, musicians, dancers, and tricksters also appear and perform. Although street performers can be found throughout the entire world, they are curiously shunned in New York City, while Plovidiv, Bulgaria in March 2015 decided to follow other European cities in having auditions or qualifiers for performers in public places. This research adds to scholarship on performance art as a beneficial element in developing a sense of place in urban environments, particularly pedestrian malls. A hundred surveys were collected from Promenade visitors to highlight these connections in a case study of street performance on the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, California. The study argues the presence of street performers are seen by the majority as a beneficial element in a pedestrian mall, resulting in the creation of a sense of place that enhances the attraction, desirability and hence success within a pedestrian mall.

Keywords: sense of place, pedestrian mall, performance art, street performing, street performers, place

SENSE OF PLACE, SHOPPING CENTERS, STREET PERFORMERS

As the cosmopolitan nature of consumer culture continues to grow, the unique features of shopping districts around the world are being lost as local shops are replaced with globally-recognizable brands of retail shops and restaurants. Increasingly, municipal governments are looking for ways to mitigate the homogenizing effect of the global retail franchises and protect the uniqueness of their cities. Pedestrian malls are one feature that can make a distinctive contribution to the life of a city. Street performers contribute significantly to the characteristic sense of place within pedestrian malls. Pedestrian mall audiences experience multi-sense oriented displays
from street performances, whether they are watching authentically-dressed Moroccan belly dancers or ornately-dressed Chinese acrobats, or taking-in incredible synchronization of hip-hop dance groups. When listening to the beat of a drum from a reggae band, for example, the audience hears the music and brush up against other audience members as they jostle for a better view. Pedestrian mall users experience a variety of different emotions as their eyes fixate on the performers’ costumes and movements, feeling awed by their daring feats. The high likelihood for visual, audible and kinetic experiences between street performers and pedestrians creates sense-provoking situations that constitute indelible memories and connections to place.

This article explores the sense of place created with the help of street performers at a specific pedestrian mall in the United States, the Third Street Promenade (Promenade, henceforth) in Santa Monica, California. Using participant observation and survey data, this article examines the interrelationship between street performers and their audiences, showing how their interaction helps to create what Doreen Massey has called an “extroverted sense of place,” a sense of place that is based not on a bounded sense of enclosure from the outside, but focuses rather on the linkages created, viewing place as a locus for networks of relations (Massey 1994). The word “extrovert” evokes the image of a sociable individual who genuinely enjoys engaging with others. Here, the “extrovert” refers to the sensual and emotional connection through visible, extrovert interaction between street performers, audience members, and the Promenade: a network of relations founded on grounded interactions. According to Massey, “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations articulated together at a particular locus” (Massey 1994, 154). Furthermore, for Massey, an extroverted sense of place includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world: “which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (Massey 1994, 154-55). Thus, places do not have boundaries in the traditional sense; a place can be known for their particular linkages to the outside, becoming a part of what characterizes the place. In this manner, street performers contribute to the life of the Promenade, making a linkage and providing a locus to the outside world in the extroverted sense. Excited audience members and passing spectators alike experience a grounding of their time on the Promenade, pause to varying degrees that ground pedestrians’ attachment through the network of interaction and experience. This process of grounding as part of extroverted sense of place making is explored in the findings and discussions below.

Thus far, street performers have received little attention in how they aid in the experience of pedestrian malls from audience members experiences, who are also city residents or tourists who have traveled to see the city. Whether visitors or residents, pedestrian mall users are there to people watch and enjoy the space, but also often to patron the shops and restaurants close by. This article demonstrates how street performers and pedestrians create an intimate sense of place that is relevant to geographic theories of place more widely.

PUBLIC ART IN PEDESTRIAN MALLS

Urban planners and city officials have become concerned with the decline in the sense of community in traditional urban hearths and marketplaces. William Whyte (1980) and Donald Appleyard (1981) pioneered the movement towards “livability” or “sociability” of streets, giving importance to the street environment as a foundation for urban social life. This has resulted in a renewed push for pedestrian malls to improve the social atmosphere of downtowns. Plus, there appears to be a sincere need of many Americans to “participate in the life and
Performance art and pedestrian experience is relevant to developing a sense of place in pedestrian spaces because it provides the opportunity for encounters and intimate experiences. Casey (1997) argues that the best way to experience places is to be intimate with them. He believes this intimacy is acquired through face-to-face encounters with other people along with the landscape of a particular place. These encounters and intimate experiences are part of what makes performance art relevant to developing a sense of place in pedestrian spaces. The large amount of research on factors of success in pedestrian malls focuses on a long list of criteria: seating, lighting, width, length, aesthetics, safety, amenities, maintenance and art as the needed characteristics of successful pedestrian malls (e.g., Susai 2004; Beyard et al. 2001; Loxton 1995; Robertson 1990; Onibokun 1975). Yet, the presence of performance as a form of art and public expression is under-represented and the resulting influence of this human activity on creating a sense of place is rarely included. As Austin says “despite the new scholarship on the rich visual artifacts of urban walls and streets, many long-standing phenomena within this realm have mostly gone unnoticed and unincorporated into these conversations,” including street performing and other forms of expression such as graffiti (Austin 2010, 33). Even when the benefits of art are mentioned, the benefits of performing arts on the streets are rarely discussed. For instance, Loxton (1995) refers to art, like sculptures, in urban spaces as “offer[ing] the opportunity to provide a sense of place,” yet the possibility of less static art forms to provide the same opportunities are rarely included in current literature.

Particularly, street performing is part of the movement of public art “away from the ‘heavy-metal, plop art’ of modernist sculpture” and “instead [it celebrates] the particular realities of ‘ordinary’ people and their ‘everyday’ experiences” (Kwon 2004, 107). Street performing is an expression of both traditional art and pop-culture performed in urban spaces showcasing cities’ cultural complexities. The Promenade is such a showcase, presenting its most entertaining element, street performers, as a window into the cultural landscape of Southern California, Hollywood, pop-culture, and traditional art forms that have found new places within the urban context of Greater Los Angeles. Performance art has the capacity to span the public–private divide because it is, like citizenship, both personal and shared (Vest Hansen 2002). Performances are accessible without restraints based on age, appropriate conduct inside a theater or museum, ability to pay for admission, or the need to seek out a particular location as the arrangement of attractions in the nearby vicinity positions the Promenade at the center of a highly trafficked intersection of locals, transients, young and old.

While geographers have explored dance and other forms of public expression, the research is focused on the dancers’ experience (Merriman 2011; Revill 2004), walkers’ experience (Ingold and Vergunst 2008) or performers’ experience, and their ability to create place (Somdahl-Sands 2006) with little focus on the experience of the audience. Somdahl-Sands’ (2008) work is an exception by highlighting the audiences’ place experience through witnessing performance on a public street that changes the street into a site of citizenship and political communication. This study likewise seeks to add to the discussion on street performers as a form of public expression that creates a sense of place for audiences and communities.
THIRD STREET PROMENADE: SITE AND SITUATION

The Promenade was chosen as the study site for its famous beauty and renown, daily street performers. The Promenade is unique because of its location only a few blocks from Santa Monica Beach and the well-known Santa Monica Pier, which receives hundreds of visitors a day year-round. The Promenade is a diverse cultural landscape because of the eclectic mix of street performers and the volume of visitors from California, other parts of the United States and abroad.

The Promenade was designed to be aesthetically pleasing with low-canopied trees, deep set-backs on buildings taller than two or three stories with hanging banners and attractive light fixtures (Marcus and Francis 1998). The designers also included eight-foot-high topiary dinosaur statues that double as water features, as well as Victorian trolley-styled pavilions that are spaced evenly down the middle of the street like islands, which house small shops, newsstands, and cafes. Existing research on the Promenade emphasizes its distinctness. A number of researchers have pointed to the centrality of street performers, who are drawn to the Promenade because of the large crowds and the festival-like ambiance of the place (Fig. 1). According to Echavaira, it is not uncommon to see 26 to 30 performers at a time on the Promenade (2009). Indeed, street performers have been a feature of the Promenade since the redevelopment of the pedestrian mall in 1965; “Right after the reopening of the Promenade, street performers were drawing audiences in the hundreds” (Hill-Holtzman 1991). The inclusion of the street performers adds a human element of interaction and surprise to an otherwise predictable strip of retail stores. Furthermore, the street performers offer visitors entertainment and “a moment of calm,

Figure 1. A large crowd forms around all side of a performing group during the lunch hour.
the chance to pause and share an experience” (Claflin and Sheridan 1977, 127).

The Promenade hosts a farmers market twice a week where residents of Santa Monica can meet their friends and exchange gossip, take in a street performance, shop for trendy clothing, or catch up on the latest political headliner. By ten in the morning, the Promenade is full of life and activity. The city of Los Angeles and the surrounding areas are not pedestrian-oriented; the Promenade is the exception in the area and represents a haven for pedestrians and is exceedingly popular as a performance space.

Research done by CIC Research, INC (2006) on the Promenade starts to show how valuable street performers may be to the creation of a sense of place by including questions in their surveys focused on the human elements, as well as, specifically about street performers. CIC Research, INC's 2006 report surveyed 400 residents of the Santa Monica area by telephone and 423 individuals intercepted in the downtown Santa Monica area, adjacent streets and Santa Monica Place shopping center. The report focused on why individuals visit the Promenade and downtown. The survey included “street performers” in the options of “like best about Downtown Santa Monica.” The intercepted participants ranked street performers fifth after beach/ocean, atmosphere/ambiance, variety of stores and people (CIC Research, INC 2006, 41). Telephone participants and intercepted participants indicated enjoyment overall from the street performers with 24 percent of telephoned participants getting a great deal and 48 percent some enjoyment from the street performers, with even higher percentages from the intercepted participants (CIC Research, INC 2006, 17). Only eight percent of all intercepted participants reported that street performers provided no enjoyment to their visit (CIC Research, INC 2006, viii). Question 18 is interesting because, as stated earlier, more than half the visitors to the Promenade enjoy the street performers, yet the question asks what “Events and Promotions [are] Desired in the Area?” The top four ranked options concerned entertainment and arguably were fulfilled by the presence of street performers, which was not an option to select in the answer choices. The desired events and promotions included music events/concerts, art/cultural events, street fairs/festivals/carnivals and live entertainment.

**GEOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN PERFORMANCE ART**

The only significant recognition of street performers within urban and retail geography lies within the list of beneficial elements present in pedestrian malls found in Marcus and Francis (1998)’s book *People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space.* This award winning book offering research-based guidelines and recommendations for designing livable and gratifying public spaces. According to Marcus and Francis (1998), the inclusion of public artworks in pedestrian areas create a sense of happiness and enjoyment, inspire play and imagination, and encourage communication amongst spectators. Arguably, however, stereotypical fountains and insipid sculptures lack this type of power. Furthermore, Marcus and Francis ask, “Is the art likely to speak to a large proportion of the public rather than an elite few?” (Marcus and Francis 1998, 82). This question, plus the desire for public art to be inspiring, are answered by performance art. Marcus and Francis do not directly address performing art when discussing shopping centers; instead, they argue that promoting programs such as fairs and seasonal festivals is crucial to the success of pedestrian malls (Marcus and Francis 1998).

The Third Street Promenade is considered as a case study within Marcus and Francis (1998) larger book. Even so, street performers are only discreetly mentioned once within the list of “Successful Features” as “vendors and entertainers as an integral part of the promenade” (Marcus and Francis 1998, 67). Likewise, performing arts/street performing is not explicitly included under either “public
art” or “programs,” listed as important elements of that success. This omission carries over into Marcus and Francis’ final “Design Review Checklist” for Urban Plazas, which includes: size, visual complexity, uses and activities, microclimate, boundaries, subsurfaces, circulation, seating, planting, level changes, public art, fountains, sculpture, paving, food, programs, vendors, information and signs, maintenance and amenities. This is a shortfall as this research provides evidence for the powerful effect of quality performance art on pedestrians’ sense of place, attachment and enjoyment.

Most pedestrian malls discourage street performers in fear of pulling customers away from shopping (Robertson 1990), yet the primary fear of pedestrian malls, emptiness, usually results from the lack of people-attracting features. Pojani’s (2008) article on the success of the Third Street Promenade briefly mentions street performers and their influence in the pedestrian mall. The closing paragraph gives a glimmer of a reference: “the shopping district was simply one piece of an entertainment and dining district, with theaters and its own special form of entertainment” (Pojani 2008, 153). Clearly, the “special form of entertainment” means primarily street performers, although malls also set a stage for people-watching activities between shopping and dining. Both Marcus and Francis (1998) and Beyard et al. (2001) acknowledge this fact by mentioning street performers as a beneficial way to persuade visitors to linger and browse, yet do not discuss street performers in detail.

This paucity of discussion on street performance is surprising, as the “[street performer] is important, not merely because he brings us music on our way to work, but also because he represents the unpredictability and freedom that have been lost in most people’s regimented lives,” (Cohen and Greenwood 1981, 199) a vital characteristic of successful pedestrian malls to many geographers. Twentieth-century art, including modern architecture, is said to have lost its relationship to public and everyday life. Mattila sees this as a problem for architecture as public art form, but “not for those forms of art within which people can choose whether they want to be a part of the audience or not” (Mattila 2002, 134).

On the scale of pedestrian malls, one may question how effectively predictable landscapes of storefronts, hanging flower baskets and sculptures can add to the enjoyment of being in a place. Conversely, these features may drain the landscape of all possible curiosity or nostalgic association.

**STREET PERFORMERS AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

Street performing is a predictable geographical phenomenon. The best performing environment is a public space with substantial foot traffic, high visibility, and far from distractions like noise and traffic to ensure as few interruptions as possible (Campbell 1981). These locations are typically tourist spots, like the Promenade, popular parks, entertainment districts, and urban squares around the world.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett described street performance as “the folk imprint on the built environment,” recognizing its position within the larger urban context (Harrison-Pepper 1990, 195). It is impossible to detach “street performance from the urban environment, for the city exerts a primary influence on both its perception and reception” (Harrison-Pepper 1990, 195). The urban environment is so crucial to street performing that a successful performer can be identified by their “ability to transform city ‘space’ into theater ‘place’” (Harrison-Pepper 1990, xv). Many performers and groups on the Promenade can be credited with outstanding talent based on their ability to carry both large and intimate audiences into their act, causing them almost to forget where they are and why they are there. This temporary pause in the visitor’s primary goal, whether to shop or dine, allows visitors to be more present and involved in the urban community.
GEORAPHIC SCHOLARSHIP REGARDING STREET PERFORMERS

Marcus and Francis (1998) and Beyard et al. (2001) discuss the importance of visitors lingering, watching and strolling along a pedestrian mall. Art, such as sculptures and fountains, is most frequently cited as the way to encourage this type of visitor behavior (e.g., Susai 2004; Beyard et al. 2001; Marcus and Francis 1998; Loxton 1995; Robertson 1990; Onibokun 1975; Wolfe 1962). Yet, performance art, as noted both by Fullerton (2011) and Marcus and Francis (1998) in their case studies of Santa Monica, likewise encourages visitors to linger, observe, and stroll. In addition, performances lead visitors to interact with other visitors and street performers, partake in social contact, create anchors to place, and generate memorable experiences - other important elements noted by Francis (1987), Ford (1994) and Beyard et al. (2001). Some plazas and pedestrian malls are referred to as “sculpture courts” (Marcus and Francis, 1998) because instead of including one public art form, multiple pieces are displayed. Arguably, the Promenade is a living art court; on any given day visitors will encounter diverse art through the medium of performance art.

METHODS

The research for this study included 100 surveys of Promenade users, as well as interviews, and participant observation I collected during site visits from June to September 2010. Convenience sampling was employed, conducting surveys with willing participants based on their availability and disposition to completely the survey. Convenience sampling is frequently used in high traffic pedestrian areas sampling “passers-by,” (e.g., Belza et al. 2017; Birds et al. 2015). However, by selecting participants based on these constraints the sample may not be representative of all visitors of the Promenade. Respondents were equally divided in terms of sex, with 50 female and 50 male respondents. In terms of race and ethnicity, there were 47 Anglo

Figure 2. Basic demographics of the 100 people surveyed for this study. An effort was made to be gain a representative sample of respondents.
respondents, 20 Black respondents, 17 Asian respondents, and 16 Latino respondents (Fig. 2). In terms of residence there was also a diverse mosaic in the sample population as 79 respondents reported living in Southern California; with 27 of the Southern California respondents living 10 miles or less from the Promenade; 30 respondents living 10 to 25 miles away from the Promenade; 14 respondents living 25 to 50 miles away; and lastly, eight respondents living more than 50 miles away from the Promenade.

Survey questions were categorized into four main groups: behavior, attitude, attribute and belief questions (De Vaus 1995). Behavior questions were included to gain insights into participants’ spatial behavior while visiting the Promenade. Questions concerning attitudes were used to expose what participants like or disliked about the street performers as well as what respondent valued about the Promenade and what they wanted to see change in the future. Belief questions were asked to gather participants’ beliefs about the street performers and the Promenade (Mason 2002).

Conducting the survey work on the Promenade was challenging and slow-going. Several organizations frequently use the Promenade to solicit donations because of the area’s high foot traffic. This was an impediment to carrying out the surveys as visitors immediately assumed I was asking for donations or collecting signatures for a petition. As a result, collecting the 100 completed surveys required more than 50 hours of fieldwork.

Each of the surveys collected was coded and cross tabulated in order to analyze the different influences street performers had on visitors’ impressions of the Promenade in relationship to age, gender, ethnicity, and distance from the respondent’s primary residence. The survey takers recorded their most preferred genre of street performing and whether the street performers influenced their decision to come to the Promenade that day. Cross-tabulating these visitor characteristics revealed patterns that were further understood through participant observation.

Participant observation and unstructured interviews were employed, to discover the complexity of experiences and different subtleties in the ways street performers contributed to the unique sense of place on the Promenade. Each field visit to the Promenade lasted between four and six hours, in which surveys were conducted for one hour at a time followed by two hours of observation and note-taking. This allowed for observation of the pedestrians moving through the Promenade and how they used the space and interacted with the street performers.

During participant observation, field notes, photographs and videos were taken on all the performers present during each field visit. Field notes included spatial conduct of the street performers, including patterns of performance places, durations, territorial struggles and group boundaries in daily field notes. This was accomplished mostly by mapping where the street performers positioned themselves, which provided evidence of areas performers evaded and the performance zones they favored, as well as the amount of distance performers wanted from other performers. This showed the spatial restrictions that different performers ascribe, resulting in a richer understanding of street performers’ role in the construction and affirmation of a sense of place in this transitory pedestrian mall. These standardized methods of taking field notes minimized the author’s subjectivity and equalized the attention between all types of performances.

Participant observation was used to complement the survey administration; practices that are part of the field methods described by Emerson et al. (1995). This collection of data added value to the time spent “in the field” and provided a descriptive addition to more controlled and formalized methods. In addition, participant observation provided a deeper immersion into the field site and the specific time period when the research was carried out through involved experience (Kearns 2005). Essentially, using qualitative methods to complement the surveys gained
a broader and more personal appreciation of the linkages between street performers, Promenade visitors, and the subsequent construction of a sense of place.

**FINDINGS**

The findings indicate the majority of visitors who responded to the survey had a very positive perception of the street performers at the Promenade (Fig. 3). Only eighty of 100 participants believed that the Promenade would be less successful without street performers.

From participant observation, it was observed that many of the visitors are mothers with young children because children can dance and enjoy the performances and play in the free and open spaces. The use of the space by women appears to be corroborated by the survey evidence noting 34 women (or 68% of women surveyed) considered street performers to be a *very important* aspect of the Promenade in contrast to only 20 of the men (or 40% of men surveyed) (Fig. 4). Similarly, 32 of the women respondents (or 64% of women surveyed) cited street performers as *very much* enhancing their shopping experience (Fig. 4). The data suggest that women are more likely to choose the Promenade in part because of the street performers, although a more extensive and random sample is needed to establish a statistically significant difference definitively. It would also be interesting to compare these findings with studies of other pedestrian malls to see if there is higher affinity for street performers among female respondents there as well.

Street performers actively engage visitors and pull them into their performances. The pedestrians passing by and other mall users are not always passive spectators like the members of a conventional audience. For some Promenade users, the performers and the bands performing provide a backdrop for other activities, and they rarely pause to appreciate the performances as they shop. Other visitors who do pause to take in a performance become part of the audience, and at times even an active part of the

![Figure 3. Responses to various questions posed of survey takers. Note especially the overwhelming majority cited street performers as a successful contributing factor to the Promenade.](image-url)
performance as some users are pulled in to participate, creating a more lasting impression and effect that engages the thoughts of the audience member long after they walk past. Tourists, locals, and visitors of all ages appreciate the street performers as a crucial part of their shopping experience. Figure 5 shows 91 of 100 participants believing the Promenade would be less enjoyable without street performers. There was also a preference for the street performers among younger respondents: 51 (or 96%) of 18-30-year-olds, 17 (or 89%) of the 31-50-year-olds, and 23 (or 82%) of the age group that is 51 and older.

The majority of the survey respondents were residents of Southern California (39 women and 40 men), and the majority of both female and male respondents were between 18 to 30 years old. According to the survey findings, women traveled further than their male counterparts to come to the Promenade. Of the 50 men interviewed, 34 (or 68%) lived less than 25 miles from the Promenade, while only 23 women (or 46%) lived less than 25 miles away (Fig. 6). There are many possible reasons for this discrepancy not controlled for in this study (e.g., disparity of work schedule flexibility, or percentage of male vs female workers on the Promenade), but the longer distance that women travel suggests women value the space and are willing to travel farther for this particular mix of entertainment and shopping. In the informal interviews conducted during visits to the field site, several mothers with children under the age of eight expressed their appreciation for the Promenade because...
Figure 5. A breakdown by age group of respondents’ enjoyment level based on the Promenade’s street performers. Note the overwhelmingly positive view of street performers’ contribution to bystander experience across all age levels.

Figure 6. Distance of respondents’ homes from the Promenade.
they can shop but also encounter opportuni-
ties for their children to “experience” the
street performances and participate in the
different activities.

**STREET PERFORMERS AS A KEY CHARACTERISTIC OF AN
EXTROVERTED SENSE OF PLACE**

Street performers encouraged direct
participation with pedestrians, while also
providing opportunities for discovery and
adventure for all visitors. This follows Ja-
cobs, Lynch, Appleyard, and others, who
define “good” streets as ones that “[invite]
direct participation, provide opportunities
for discovery and adventure and are locally
controlled and broadly accessible” (Francis
1987, 29). Accepting these characteristics as
crucial elements to creating a sense of place,
this research finds street performers to be
dynamic actors in the place-making process.

The sense of place on the Promenade is
formed by the people who work at the stores,
shop, dine, and stroll and window shop, but
also by those artists who perform. In urban
landscapes, personal relationships are not
frequently fashioned, yet the extroverted
connections formed out of the unexpected
experiences and interactions between street
performers and visitors is a platform for the
creation of a distinctive sense of place. Minar
and Greer (1969, 47) suggest, “the human
contacts on which feelings of commitment
and identity are built most likely to occur
among people sharing the same piece of
ground.”

Street performers are the social link creat-
ing a brief imagined community among those
in attendance (Gruzd et al. 2011; McNeill
2002), though not at the scale of Benedict
Anderson’s (1991) imagined communities.
Dance groups frequently pull children and
adults into their finales, while those perform-
ers with a comedic focus compose jokes on
the spot or make-up lyrics about individual
on-lookers (Fig. 7). Pausing in your stroll
to watch a performance only to then be
verbally brought into the routine can lead
to embarrassment, but for some, it is also
exciting; regardless, the Promenade cannot
be traveled the same way twice, a parallel
to peripatetic sense of place (Adams 2001).
Dancers frequently single out individuals or
entire groups of the audience, causing the
spectators to laugh. When the performers
interact with visitors or ask them to par-
ticipate in their acts, the audience members
turn to each other and exchange a flurry of
emotions. A quick turn to a friend may show
their shock or glee of being called on, further
grounding the experience.

The grounding can be described thusly:
the performances attract the visitors and
grabs their attention and filling them with
enthusiasm, many of whom were initially
detached and indifferent bystanders. At first,
people may show only minimal curiosity or
only mild interest in the spectacles that trans-
pired. As the visitors start to become more
engaged and attentive to the performances,
they catch the spirit of excitement, and they
become more inclined to experience the
performance in a deeper way and become
absorbed (Harrison-Pepper 1990). Street
performing allows for this level of attachment
because it is accessible to everyone and the
experience is more spontaneous and intimate
than a larger, conventionally scheduled and
staged show.

The presence of street performers makes
the Promenade not only a place for retail
consumerism but also a place where there are
multiple cultural expressions through art, as
well as artistic ingenuity. While visitors watch
performers, they frequently lean over and ask
each other questions and comment on the
performance. Harrison-Pepper describes this
process as “…theater for the people and by
the people” (1990, xv). The shared experience
binds visitors together through the involve-
ment and memory of the performances rooted
to the unique location of the Promenade. The
presence of street performers then blankets
the Promenade with nodes to experience an
extroverted sense of place characteristic in
ways fountains and sculptures cannot. The
varied sensations arising from the sound, in-
interactions, and movement create the basis for a “close connection to place” which is likely to be “recalled with great fondness when one thinks back” (Adams 2001, 188).

The word “extrovert” conveys the image of a sociable individual who eagerly enjoys engaging with others. Doreen Massey (1994, 154-56) uses the term “extroverted sense of place” as a reconceptualization of place imagined through networks of relations and connections instead of enforced by boundaries and exclusions. Here I use “extroverted sense of place” not as simply a distinction of place inside or outside boundaries, but emphasizing the social functions and enjoyment needed to classify as an extrovert. In this manner, street performers are seen as a key characteristic in an extroverted sense of place within the wider landscape of the Promenade, that through their many eager communications with visitors enable a sense of place to form. While pause, interaction and personal relations have all been linked to the importance of building a sense of place, in using this idea of an extroverted sense of place, these elements are captured along with the enjoyable engagement through verbal, audible or kinesthetic communication between street performers and pedestrians.

Even without direct communication, the majority of visitors interact with performers while on their visit even if it is clapping from four rows back or humming the tune of a nearby guitarist’s melody as they walk by. Walking is the only mode of transportation down the Promenade, an action once “at the root of a strong and deep sense of place” … “To walk through a place is to become involved in that place with sight, hearing, touch, smell, the kinetic sense called proprioception, and even taste” (Adams 2001, 187-188). This peripatetic sense of place,
whereby walking produces a sense of place, is enhanced by encounters with vibrant street performers that cause pedestrians to pause and participate in even the slightest manner. Visitors become an ephemeral community along with others who have been pulled into each other’s physical comfort zones and connected through their amusement in the street performances; spectators become elements in performers’ acts.

For example, young visitors would frequently be overheard telling each other they “can’t wait to get home to tell mom about this,” or “are you calling [family member or friend] to tell them about that guy [street performer].” From common experience, we know when these stories are shared they will be centered on the place of occurrence. This sharing of experiences is a common way a sense of place is maintained as memories tied to vivid emotional reaction, and linked specifically to the Promenade by language (Tuan 1991). Moreover, discussions about the street performers, both negative and positive, serve to “mediate between environment and behavior” (Tuan 1991, 694). Tuan explains that a conversation about food while at a restaurant shows the influence of the atmosphere on the conversation; thus, if the conversation is about something unhappy, “…in which case the tenor of that conversation will affect the participants’ eating behavior and probably also their attitude to the physical character of the restaurant” (Tuan 1991, 694). The same can be said of the impact of visitors’ behavior, and attitude in the Promenade based on their conversation focused on the performances.

Participant observation revealed some street performers who perform weekly have bonded with various local citizens who frequent the Promenade to watch them. Both elderly and teenage women were observed to frequently visit the Promenade to watch specific performer(s). These relationships reveal an even more significant connection at the local scale between performer and visitor that builds on networks and emotional landscapes. DeeDee, a seventy-one-year-old resident of Santa Monica, regularly visits the Promenade and sits under a tree for shade. Nearby, a musician makes eye contact with her, waves “good morning,” and moves his feet to face her as he continues playing the saxophone. Deliberate interactions between street performers and regular visitors continue to strengthen emotional attachment and meaning to this landscape. The direction a street performer broadcasts their act impacts how visitors, walking on either side of them, experience the performance. Seeing a senior citizen being attended to in a very personal way also impacted other visitors’ experiences. One woman was noted making this connection, looking at both the performer and DeeDee before she sat on a nearby bench to take in both the performance and the relationship. The bench DeeDee routinely sits on becomes a place with a familiar view, the place she knows best on the Promenade. This seat is a “[center] of felt value” (Tuan 1977, 4) created from memory, human-to-human, place-based connection and entertainment that creates an enjoyed, extroverted sense of place.

Likewise, a group of teenage boys was seen sixteen times, on different days, watching a group of seven male hip-hop dancers who frequently draw the largest crowd. The group of teenagers displayed their relationships with the group by making their way past the audience and over to talk with individual dancers under trees during the groups’ breaks. Often, a dancer and teenager would step aside from the group, where the teen took advice on difficult moves. While many never notice these two groups intimately conversing, these mentee sessions show the Promenade and the street performers again as critical elements in the development of personal landscapes of community and sense of place, embedded with memory and emotions.

These conversations create an experience that then becomes a memory and a driving factor that distinguishes the Promenade from other malls in the area. Casey asserts memory is “naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported” (Casey 1987, 186-187). Meaning memories are often created in sync with the creation of places. Cresswell elaborates on
Casey’s statements of place-memory as “the ability of place to make the past come to life in the present and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory” (Cresswell 2004, 87). In this case, the process-forming sense of place is marked by the “sense of attachment” (Arefi 1999, 180) resulting in subsequent visits. This is evident in Figure 3 showing 47 of the 98 respondents indicated that the presence of street performers influenced their decision to visit the Promenade. This is further supported by the same number of respondents (47 of 98) specifying street performers as a reason to choose the Promenade over other malls (Fig. 3).

This research exposed a direct link between the unique sense of place and the street performers on the Promenade. It also agrees with Mason (1992) that “busking can improve the atmosphere of uninspiring modern shopping centers by providing something colorful, lively and out of the ordinary” (Mason 1992, 9). While the Promenade is a pedestrian mall at its core, it offers a break from the monotonous arrangement of buildings within the city through its inclusion of street performers adding a human element that provides interaction and surprise. Street performing, consequently, should be given more attention by geographers when considering beneficial elements in the development of a sense of place in the urban landscapes.

Street performing in the Promenade has evolved under hierarchical self-regulation. New performers have difficulty finding a performance space as the weekly performers have established for themselves the right to perform in certain locations. These weekly performers act as the regulators for the entire talent level and spacing of performances. This results in high-quality performance, with crowds well into the hundreds surrounding performers or performance groups at any given time. The large sizes of the audience reinforce the survey data that the majority of visitors are looking for a unique experience.

Women also reported watching street performers for longer periods of time. Specifically, 35 women (75%) and 21 men (42%) spent more than 16 minutes viewing street performers (Fig. 8). Moreover, 33 women (66%) reported street performers had influenced their decision to visit the Promenade. In contrast, only 16 (32%) men reported being influenced by street performers in that decision-making process (Fig. 9). A similar pattern was recorded in relation to visitors’ response to whether they would select the Promenade over other malls by street performers’ presence. Thus, 38 (76%) women stated they would choose the Promenade over other malls while only 30 men (60%) agreeing (Fig. 9). Accordingly, 32 of the 50 women surveyed also said the presence of street performers very much enhanced their shopping experience. In contrast, 30 of the 50 men said their shopping experience was somewhat enhanced, and only 18 of 50 responded street performers very much enhanced their shopping experience.

**CONCLUSION**

This research was part of a larger project consisting of participatory observation, ethnographic research, and 100 surveys on the street performers of and visitors to the Promenade in Santa Monica, California. This humanistic study expands current knowledge on the creation of a sense of place. The primary question is how much street performers strengthen and/or create a distinctive sense of place. This study also adds to geographic literature on the cultural importance of performance art in urban areas.

This paper contributes to the link between cultural geography topics within the landscape of urban geography through the under-explored relationship between street performers, sense of place, and pedestrian malls. It thus enhances the geographic literature on the influence of street performers in the creation of a sense of place. Furthermore, the findings of this research support and contribute to the geographical literature on the ensemble of features that help create a sense of place in urban spaces.
Figure 8. Time spent watching street performers, broken down by gender.

Figure 9. Difference by gender of the role street performers played in respondents’ decision to visit the Promenade (left two bars) and whether or not they chose to visit the Promenade instead of another mall (right two bars).
This study likewise presents a site and situation in which dance and other forms of public performance influence “the audience” to create meaningful representations of the place that show a pattern of repeated visits and extended stay in place. While geographers have examined many beneficial elements in pedestrian malls, there is a paucity of research on performing art as a beneficial element in creating a distinctive sense of place within pedestrian malls. This study seeks to redress this shortcoming.

The eclectic lineup of street performers seen on the Promenade daily is not only a beneficial element of the Promenade, but it is also a central factor in the distinctive sense of place that sets the pedestrian mall apart from the multitude of shopping areas in Los Angeles County. Therefore, this research demonstrates Cresswell’s process that through intimate experiences with places people acquire a unique sense of place, which transforms space into a meaningful place of memory and attachment (Cresswell 2004).

The street performers attract visitors, distinguish the Promenade, and bring visitors back. After three months of qualitative research on the Promenade, it is clear that street performers should be considered in the development of a sense of place in pedestrian malls and the subsequent benefits of their presence held to a high standard. Limited geographic research has fleetingly cited street performers as a benefit to pedestrian malls. This study argues that street performers are an unquestionable asset to the Promenade and contributing to its present and future success.

Several suggestions emerge from this study of the relationship between street performers, visitors, and the Promenade. These suggestions are contingent on two features of the study: (1) this study is specific to one location, and (2) both the street performers and location are a cultural product of their geographical context. In brief, the first recommendation is that more investigation of the beneficial results of encouraging street performers in pedestrian malls must be undertaken. In addition, this study focused on the street performers and visitors. Consequently, more investigation should be undertaken concerning the merchants and the various business and community groups involved in the mall’s functionality. Interviews would appropriately examine questions explicitly related to the relationship between performance and mall success. Lastly, it would be beneficial to understand further the possibilities of impacting the economic success of a pedestrian mall by including designated space for street performing.

In conclusion, the presence of street performers can be beneficial as performance art, resulting in the creation of a sense of place that enhances the attraction, desirability and hence, success, of a pedestrian mall. This conclusion can be drawn from the positive attitudes expressed by visitors toward street performers gathered in the 100 surveys and from the congruent findings of the participant observation. Moreover, the study speaks to how performance art can initiate pause, create face-to-face interactions, memories and thus help us understand the process of sense of place, the experience of performance art, and place-making.

NOTES

1. Pedestrian malls are important components in the revitalization and redevelopment of American downtowns and redevelopment. Their role in well-being, community building, economic rejuvenation and general potential for greater urban sustainability and livability is worthy of note but outside the scope of this discussion. See Novak (2017), Elliott (2013), and Getz (2012) for recent case studies and reviews of these discussions.

2. CIC Research, INC (2006) conducted Non-academic research for the City of Santa Monica. The goal was to assess why individuals visit the Promenade and downtown area for planning, regulation and development of the high traffic area.
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