

# the place



MAGAZINE



# makers

# and

# takers

### Well, what is Placemaking?

Placemaking is a community-based approach to urban revitalization and the shaping of public spaces. It brings together artists, designers, planners and neighbors in order to create places that help build healthy and vibrant communities.

### ...and what is Placetaking?

Placetaking refers to the processes of gentrification and displacement that so often arise when placemaking projects are implemented. It occurs when these projects pander to the wealthy and privileged, such that the disadvantaged find themselves forced out of their neighborhoods and public spaces.

interviews  
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### Thoughts on Creative Placetaking [PG 34](#)

"The dangers hidden in the blanket use of 'Creative Placemaking' are that its standards reflect and serve the tastes of those who profit unfairly from this system, and that it perpetuates structural inequality by covering over the flaws rather than genuinely working to fix them."

### Interview with Public Good Software [PG 14](#)

"We don't want to become a Big Brother where we own every piece of software that these organizations use. Let's just make it all really simple for it to talk to each other."

### Why Aren't We All Developers By Now [PG 22](#)

"Proving the value of these spaces outside of their direct economic impact on a community is key to maintaining control of the conversation that primarily only values things like dollars being spent and bodies crossing a threshold."

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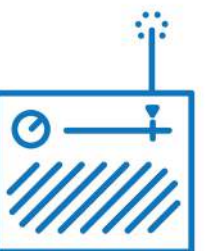
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## Editor's Introduction:

In the early 1960s, several writers began to express their discontent with urban planning projects that were being proposed and implemented throughout post-War America. Authors such as Jane Jacobs, William H. Whyte and Kevin Lynch gave voice to a concern over the way authorities in many cities were attempting to revitalize their urban centers. These writers saw those planning initiatives as in fact deeply inimical to the life of the city, as these projects were developed in a way that paid little heed to the needs and interests of city-dwellers – simply put, they were not created with the city's people in mind.

On the one hand, these initiatives catered in large part to those who were abandoning the city to join the growing (white) suburban population that would rely on the automobile as its primary means of transportation. This meant the construction of huge expressway systems that slashed through cities, forever ruining neighborhoods and displacing residents, all while leaving new structures of division in place. On the other hand, these plans were created in a highly top-down manner, in which public participation played a minimal role and planning power was consolidated in the hands of a few urban policy "experts." Often, this led to the complete wiping out of blighted areas or sections of city deemed to be slums, to be replaced by Modern high-rise structures that only proved to be towers of isolation.

What Jacobs and others had highlighted was the fact that the vibrancy of a city – whatever those many and varied elements are that make urban life a rich and beautiful experience – is intimately related to there being a sense of community and a sense of place. Of course the two feed into one another, as communities need places in order to form and develop, and places need communities to lend them significance and character. In short, a city is made great by the lives of its people, and these lives depend on great places that allow them to connect and create meaning.

Over time, these ideas began to coalesce into a movement known as *placemaking*. It is an approach to urban development that works from the bottom up. It emphasizes community involvement in planning and encompasses all manner of DIY interventions in urban space – neighbors coming together to turn a vacant lot into a community garden, to repurpose decrepit buildings

for community use, to install public seating where there is a lack of it, to make any change, great or small, that improves quality of life for residents. In all of this, community members – the people that actually live in a given neighborhood – should hold rightful place as the experts on what ought to happen in their public space. The hope is that, in this way, our cities become cities for people: cities where residents are naturally encouraged to become involved with one another and to throw themselves into civic life.

More recently, however, the trend in placemaking has been to underline the role that artists and other cultural workers can play in the redevelopment of urban spaces and neighborhoods. As such, placemaking has come to be known as "creative placemaking." The thought here is that artists, gifted in observation, imagination and aesthetic awareness, are particularly well suited for the task of breathing new life into a disused or blighted space. People want places that are beautiful, well designed and aesthetically appealing. Moreover, there is a recognition that the arts and culture play a critical role in developing the social capital that strengthens communities. Exposure to and involvement in the arts encourages a spirit of creative expression that is central to human flourishing. One of the best and most important things about the phenomenon of creative placemaking is that it highlights the value of the arts in society and encourages funding and support for artistic endeavors.

This sounds all well and good, but placemaking is not without its problems. Indeed, the University of Chicago just ran a course on creative placemaking, listing it under the broader subject of "Hot Button Issues in Cultural Policy." Just what makes creative placemaking a "hot button issue?" There are

several contributing factors, but perhaps the most significant revolves around its relation to the process of gentrification, a controversial and much-debated subject in urban planning. The fact is that creative placemaking projects tend to drive these processes of gentrification. We've become familiar by now with the following pattern: artistic and cultural vibrancy spur renewed economic vitality in a neighborhood, which in turn attracts members of the elite, moneyed class, who in turn displace the poor, working class, or minority populations that had occupied these neighborhoods.

What is striking here is that displacement was precisely the issue that the placemaking movement in its nascent stages was attempting to address, yet which it now seems to catalyze. This raises a whole host of important questions. Whose interests are really being served here? Do placemaking projects actually help revitalize struggling neighborhoods and communities, or do they simply remake them to be more palatable for the rich? Does the urban revitalization that creative placemaking projects are meant to effect really address blight and related problems, or does it simply concentrate them and push them further out of sight, exacerbating the problem by reducing awareness of these issues? Are we really placemaking, or are we placetaking? These are serious issues that require critical engagement.

We hope the articles that follow help highlight and address these issues, as well as give you a sense of what placemaking is and what some of the interesting placemaking endeavors are here in Chicago. Finally, and most importantly, we hope it inspires further discussion and careful thought about what is best for the life of our city. ■

## A Placemaking Reading List

Compiled by Kyle Gaffin and Brie McGuire

We put together a list of books and papers that we hope will help serve as an introduction and guide to the subject of placemaking. Many (if not all) of the full-length books on this list do not have “placemaking” as their precise theme, and indeed, many of them were written before the idea of placemaking, much less creative placemaking, really began to cohere into a distinct movement. But they provide a sense for its roots and themes related to it – urban planning, public art, grassroots political dissent, etc. The five papers listed at the end are meant to give the reader an introduction to the most recent trends and issues related to placemaking.

Books:

### 1. Jane Jacobs

**The Death and Life of Great American Cities**

50th Anniversary edition (New York: Random House, 2011).

This lady started it all. Her fight to save Washington Square Park and the vibrant neighborhoods of Greenwich Village and SoHo during the 1950s from the destructive, automobile-centric schemes of the modernist “master builder” Robert Moses prompted her to flesh out her criticisms of the established frameworks for modern city planning. This led to the 1961 publication of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a book that sparked a renaissance in urban thought. Against the top-down, car-crazed, paternalistic, and “slum” gutting visions of mid-century urban theory, Jacobs argued that urban renewal projects ought to be done from the ground up, with real people and real places in mind. Indeed, what makes cities great, she says, are the people that occupy them and the vibrant places they organically create when in community with one another.

### 2. Kevin Lynch

**The Image of the City**

(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1960).

This little text on urban life was significant because the starting point of Lynch’s research was the perceptions that human beings form of the cities and the urban environments that they inhabit. The importance of this attitude is seen when understood in the context in which Lynch wrote - during the time of modernist master visions in which the perceptions and observations of the layperson meant next to nothing. The book is the outcome of a five-year study of these perceptions and the processes by which we form our images of the city. For Lynch, the experience of the city is the more rich when it has a kind of clarity or “legibility” - when we can easily see a place for what it is. And while this bespeaks the importance of a certain order and structure in urban life, Lynch is quick to qualify this by underlining the significance of the role that the perceiver - the citizen - plays in developing this image. Hence, what is needed is not necessarily a stringently fine-tuned order, but an “open-ended order” in which new forms of activity and urban life are allowed to emerge.

### 3. William H. Whyte

**City: Rediscovering the Center**

(New York: Doubleday, 1988)

Whyte, an urban sociologist, undertook what was called the Street Life Project, a sixteen-year long, in-depth study of what happens in the streets of a major city like New York. Whyte and his team spent hours observing, taking photos, and recording film of street life, and analyzing these for various phenomena, particularly the different types of interpersonal interactions that take place in the street. A kindred spirit to Jacobs, Whyte’s work emphasized the overwhelming importance of direct and sustained observation of actual city life in order to understand what a city might need in terms of development or growth, and what sorts of things make for a flourishing public place. Like Jacobs, Whyte often found that the dogmas of contemporary urban orthodoxy were entirely wrongheaded.

### 4. Roberta Gratz

**The Living City**

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989)

Gratz’s text is squarely in line with the ideas and attitudes of the preceding authors in its dismissal of the monstrous top-down urban renewal “projects” that were the mainstay of urban planners at the time. Instead, Gratz argues that more meaningful, effective and lasting change can be accomplished when it begins with citizens operating at the smallest levels of place and moving forward incrementally and organically. This is the central idea of the text, a notion she terms “urban husbandry,” which is the “care, management, and conservation” of the built environment by those that inhabit it and are thus most invested in it. The waste that occurs when sweeping, large-scale plans inevitably fail is avoided when smaller steps are taken. And as these small steps increase in number, radical and effective change occurs.

### 7. Sara M. Evans & Harry C. Boyte

**Free Spaces**

(New York: Harper & Row, 1986)

Evans and Boyte highlight the political importance of those places that bridge the gap between public and private life - much like Oldenburg’s “third places”. They show how many of the oppositional democratic movements in America’s history - abolitionism, women’s liberation, and populist and labor movements - grew from seeds that germinated in these “free spaces,” independent places of voluntary association and communal life in which various forms of dissent could gain a voice. It is the face-to-face association that these spaces provide that catalyzes these democratic movements and encourages a concern for neighbor and community and a recognition of the need for active, participatory citizenship.

### 5. James Howard Kunstler

**The Geography of Nowhere**

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993)

This is Kunstler’s indictment of the American suburban situation and his description of the “crisis of place” in the US. He details the history of the development of the suburbs and gives an overview of the modernist attitude towards urban planning and its problems. He highlights our society’s tendency to create “capitals of unreality” that we fly to in order to escape this crisis - think Disney World or Atlantic City. But Kunstler ends with some prescriptions for how he thinks we might make better places. He highlights the Pattern Language movement championed by Christopher Alexander, which encourages designers, planners, and placemakers to think about the interconnectedness of the different elements that make up one’s built environment, as well as the movement for “pedestrian pockets”, or places where people can meet easily, face-to-face, without having to be closed up in their automobiles to get there.

### 8. Tom Finkelpearl

**Dialogues in Public Art**

(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001)

This collection of interviews touches on a range of issues related to art in public spaces. It begins with a wonderful essay by the author, entitled “The City as Site,” that traces the course of the public art movement in the US and its development into something like what we’ve come to call “placemaking.” The interviewees come from a range of backgrounds, including artists such as Vito Acconci, Maya Lin, and Mierle Ukeles, philosophers and art historians such as Paolo Friere and Douglas Crimp, as well as architects, urban planners, and city workers. The interviews address controversies in public art, discuss the relationship between artists and urban planners, architects, and the art world, and provoke thoughtful questioning of the role that public art can and ought play in our cities and communities.

### 6. Ray Oldenburg

**The Great Good Place**

3rd edition (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1999)

The central idea behind this beautiful little book is that of the “third place” and its essential - but woefully neglected, at least here in America - role in the cultivation of vibrant communities and a thriving public life. Third places (the first being home, the second, work) are those settings of informal public life where one goes to relax, connect with friends, and engage in lively conversation. They are the main hubs of our social life - bars, restaurants, coffee houses, bookstores. Yet the value and viability of these vital spaces have been significantly diminished in post-War America, which tends to place a premium on the suburban life of privacy, the materialism of consumerist society, and the escape and easy entertainment that technology affords. All of these, for Oldenburg, are deeply alienating and contribute to a loss of community and a lack of concern for the common good. The antidote to these ills lies in renewed efforts at making and remaking these “third places.”

### 9. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, & Margit Mayer eds.

**Cities for People, Not for Profit**

(Oxford: Routledge, 2012).

A highly academic text to be sure, the impetus for this collection of essays was the aftereffects of the recent global recession. Hit with economic crises, cities the world over have struggled to come to grips with the attendant destabilization and restructuring. The book presents, in effect, an overview of the “Right to the City,” - a phrase made famous by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in 1968 - its theory and movements, and presents critical essays on many aspects of neoliberal urban theory. Stefan Krätke contributes an essay deconstructing some of the central theses put forward in Richard Florida’s now-famous *The Rise of the Creative Class*, arguing that the “creative cities” ideology tends to get hijacked by an elite “dealer class” that has no intention of respecting the people’s right to their city. Tom Slater’s essay highlights the significant problems of gentrification and displacement that tend to get sugarcoated away. The book should lead us to ask, “What happens when urban social movements - including placemaking - become too taken with economic profit?”

**10. Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia**  
**Tactical Urbanism**

(Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2015)

Hot off the presses, this the book is the brainchild of the duo behind the Street Plans Collaborative, a project based organization that seeks to better cities and towns through various interventions in street life. They are responsible for the growing popularity and importance of the practice known as "tactical urbanism," a method of DIY activism in which small-scale, often temporary interventions are enacted in a public place in order to bring awareness to an issue. The hope is that through these interventions, dialogue about certain issues in public space can more easily be generated. The book explains what tactical urbanism and its ethos are and includes several case studies that highlight best practices.

**3. Ian David Moss**

**Creative Placemaking has an Outcomes Problem**  
(createquity.com, 2012)

This article goes farther in-depth than Gadwa in laying out placemaking's dilemma: how to avoid making claims about the extent of its causal relationship with outcomes it is intrinsically interested in. Moss is not afraid to state the problems with "fuzzy vibrancy" and think about just why it is a problem. Placemaking, he writes, ignores the complexity of economic ecosystems, does not include criteria for project selection based on greater chances for success, and lacks tools for analyzing why certain projects did not work. This is just a sampling of the engaging material in Moss' article, which is certainly worth reading for nuanced and practical ideas about how placemaking can address some of its weaknesses.

**1. Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa**  
**Creative Placemaking**

(2010)

This is the NEA's white paper, written for the Mayors' Institute on City Design, and it has become a defining piece for what placemaking has become in recent years, i.e. "creative" placemaking. Essentially, the paper explains what creative placemaking is and supplies the basic argument for why it is worth pursuing. And the argument is essentially couched in economic terms: artists and those that contribute to the creative economy have a certain skill set that allows them to reimagine and revitalize certain places, and once these places have received this renewal through arts and culture, it begins to attract new business and revitalize the economy. Though we ought to be wary of a purely economic approach to placemaking - and Markusen and Gadwa do underline the fact that the benefits are not purely economic - the paper does highlight the important, transforming role that artists and creatives can play in the life of our communities.

**4. Roberto Bedoya**

**Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging**  
(GIA Reader, 2013).

Bedoya, Executive Director for the Tucson Pima Arts Council, warns of a "blind love" that he sees as encroaching upon the creative placemaking movement. Though perhaps more timely when it was written two years ago, the essay highlights a shortcoming in placemaking discourse that remains an enduring concern. From the author's perspective, creative placemaking initiatives, particularly those with establishment backing, are far too concerned with the spatial aesthetics and the promise of economic benefits of placemaking projects, at the expense of an awareness of the "politics of dis-belonging" that operate at a deep level in American society and that placemaking projects are always at risk of playing into. Creative placemaking ought to have social and spatial justice as a primary focus, highlighting the importance of the cultivation of a politics of belonging. See also "Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City," an essay which highlights methods of "placekeeping" in urban Latino communities as a means to counter gentrification and "the white spatial imaginary."

**2. Anne Gadwa Nicodemus**  
**Fuzzy Vibrancy: Creative placemaking as ascendant US cultural policy**

(Cultural Trends, 2013)

This is Gadwa's introduction to placemaking. She discusses how it differs from how the US has previously gone about arts funding: rapidly gaining attention and importance in the cultural policy world, placemaking has engaged a wider range of stakeholders and has placed greater emphasis on cultural capital and increased arts funding. But the most important feature of placemaking Gadwa addresses is "fuzzy vibrancy," a barrier to placemaking's greater influence in the US. Key placemaking concepts such as "livability" and "vibrancy" - "imprecise," as Gadwa describes them - are under intense scrutiny. NEA and ArtPlace America have differing criteria for successful placemaking projects, but both are "fuzzy" in their own ways. An informative introduction to the placemaking movement and its biggest challenge, overcoming the imprecision of its language about outcomes.

**5. Susan Silberberg**

**Places In the Making: How placemaking builds places and communities**  
(2013)

Published by the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, this paper argues that the activities involved in the making of a place are just as important as the place itself in the formation of healthy communities. That is to say, the creative process that goes into placemaking plays a crucial role in the development of the social capital that the place is meant to foster. Silberberg's thesis, supported by several case studies of recent placemaking projects and urban interventions, is that placemaking projects are the more successful when community members are deeply involved in the implementation and creation of placemaking - when they are themselves their own placemakers - rather than simply being passive recipients of the design visions of some placemaking "expert." When the making is foregrounded, this invests the place with meaning even before the project is completed. Moreover, she argues that the "making" of the place needs to be continually renewed through programming that engages the creative agency of its community.

03 / 20

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# São Paulo: The World's Largest Progressive City Government

by Brian Mier

In June 6, the São Paulo Mayor's Office announced that it hired a group of homeless people for one year to conduct qualitative research on homeless issues and policies. This is just one example of a series of innovations from the first Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) mayoral administration there in over a decade. As the PT party continues to serve as a punching bag in the media it is worth looking at how it governs its cities. This is important because, aside from the occasional article about participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (which was systematically dismantled ten years ago) foreign reporting on cities tends to focus on corruption fetish and violence porn. Outside of the great city of exception, Rio de Janeiro, where most reporting is disproportionately focused, there are scores of places around the Brazil where left city governments have successfully deepened democracy, improved transparency, developed new social technologies and reduced inequality. Most of the best cases have been run by the PT administrations, based on a model of urban governance developed from the bottom up during the transition from dictatorship to democracy. In this article I will use an American concept, the Progressive City model of urban governance, as an analytical starting point. This is meant for the sake of comparison, not to imply that it influenced the Brazilian model.

Urban Planning professor Pierre Clavel coined the term "progressive city model" in the 1980s to describe a group of mayoral administrations in

cities like Burlington, Oakland, Cleveland, Boston and Chicago where aging social movement and civil rights activists garnered enough political power to win elections. In *Activists in City Hall* he defines a progressive city government as one that successfully employs a two-pronged strategy of redistributive programs and popular participation. A progressive city, Clavel says, has a strong social base of neighborhood, housing and human rights activists and labor unions. It has an alternative vision of the city based on equitable development spread throughout the neighborhoods as opposed to the common, growth coalition strategy of focusing investments primarily in downtown business districts. It is marked by administrative innovation and reforms that are undertaken through popular participation. According to Clavel, one of the highlights of participation in progressive city governance was the 1984 Chicago Works Master Development Plan, created collectively with the population through hundreds of neighborhood meetings spread throughout the city. This plan reaffirmed the city government's redistributive functions against the business consensus that the main issue should be growth. At the time Chicago had around 3 million people and it was the largest participatory development plan ever produced (pp 128). As the force of the real estate industry grew, progressives lost power in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the progressive city model faded from view only starting to return recently in cities like Boston, Minneapolis and Seattle.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the equator the neo-fascist dictatorship came to an end and Brazilian social movement and labor activists developed their own, bottom up model for city governance based on similar objectives, with deeper levels of popular participation.

## PT and progressive city governance

During the late 1980s social movements and labor unions staged a series of street protests across the country to push for participatory provisions in the new constitution. A national coalition of urban social movements, unions, professional and academic organizations formed to draft and successfully petition to insert articles 182 and 183 in the 1988 Constitution. These two articles declare that all landless citizens have the right to squat and build on vacant land, that the social use of property overrides the profit motive enabling governments to appropriate empty buildings and convert them to social housing, and that all towns of over 20,000 are required to produce master development plans as the primary tool for guaranteeing social development. As the articles were approved, the coalition named itself the Fórum Nacional de Reforma Urbana (National Urban Reform Forum). The FNRU spent the next 12 years using a joint strategy of legal action and public protests to pressure for ratification of the 2001 Estatuto da Cidade, or Statute of the City, which clearly defines and regulates articles 182 and 183.

The Statute of the Cities is a landmark document in the world struggle for the right to the city. Based on positive experiences in cities like Porto Alegre under mayor Olivio Dutra and São Paulo under Luiza Erundina it mandates use of democracy deepening mechanisms like voluntary councils, social interest zoning and participatory budgeting to guarantee citizens' control over various aspects of public policy. It opens cities' annual budgets to public scrutiny and approval, and guarantees that master plans happen at least every decade with full citizens' participation. Unfortunately, although over 1000 local governments have facilitated master plans, most have also been unable or unwilling to implement them. Most local governments either don't have the technical capacity, ignore the constitutional guidelines outright or try to develop loopholes to minimize participation as much as possible

in favor of top-down real-estate development projects. Rio de Janeiro is the largest example of a local government that has had serious problems producing an implementing a plan that meets constitutional guidelines, and there are hundreds of others. On the other hand there are scores of cases of towns and cities of all sizes across the country where citizen participation in public policies and budgeting has reached levels never before achieved in the so-called "progressive city" governments in the US. Notable cities that have had progressive governments include Recife, Belém, Porto Alegre, and Belo Horizonte. The vast majority of these progressive local governments have been governed by PT mayors although in recent years, their effectiveness has been hampered by technocratic president Dilma Rouseff's bypassing participatory processes while implementing huge, top-down urban development projects like PAC and Minha Casa Minha Vida

This brings us back to São Paulo. Mayor Fernando Haddad was Lula's Education Minister. He took office at the beginning of 2013 and immediately coordinated the largest participatory development plan in World history with ample, voluntary participation from thousands of citizens. During the deliberations, city residents introduced 117 amendments 42 of which were approved as part of the June, 2014 final plan. Using the plan as a guideline, his government has gone on to create a series of innovative policies and spaces for public participation, including:

1. 32 Democratic, voluntary citizens' councils that control public policies and budget lines with highlights including an immigrants' council that actively encourages participation of undocumented workers and a homeless council that actively seeks out street dwellers;
2. Appropriation of 41 vacant, tax scofflaw buildings in the city center for adaptation as housing for homeless families with guaranteed ownership after ten years of residency.
3. Inclusion of gay victims of violence, trans homeless shelter residents and indigenous people as priority for social housing ownership, along with the elderly poor.

4. Activities to reduce automobile dependence such as zoning changes, bike lane construction and construction of new express bus corridors.

5. A program called "with open arms" for crack addicts in the downtown area. Developed through participation of the users themselves, the program provides jobs, food, housing and psychological assistance. To date, 60% of the participants have stopped using crack.

As could be imagined with São Paulo's large white, conservative middle class population, these measures have left Haddad widely hated. He recently polled at 20% and it is questionable at this moment whether he will be reelected. From the left, he's been criticized for refusing dialogue with the Movimento Passe Livre, or free pass movement, for letting a new 20 cent bus fare increase push through and for moving too slowly on public housing construction.

São Paulo, which produces 11% of the National GDP, is a political war zone where former military death squad leaders are regularly elected to public office. It may be hard for Haddad to be re-elected but for now he is in charge of the largest progressive mayoral administration in history, governing a population of 11.8 million in the city proper. As left mayors rise to power in smaller cities around the world like New York and Barcelona, the time is right for sharing knowledge between them. Ethnically diverse, cosmopolitan São Paulo would be a good place for these mayors to look to for inspiration. ■

Originally posted to [www.brasilwire.com](http://www.brasilwire.com) on Tuesday Jun 09, 2015

## Building Tech for Civic Life An Interview with Public Good Software

Jason Kunesh and Dan Ratner formed Public Good Software, Inc. after working the 2012 Obama campaign. At the helm of the tech team for the push to re-elect the President, they ran one of the most successful donation campaigns ever put together. Public Good is an online platform that connects non-profit organizations to donors and volunteers, and helps those organizations maximize their efforts. I met with Jason, the CEO, and Charlie Festa, the Director of Community, to discuss the company and its vision.

Interviewed by Kyle Gaffin

**KG:** What was the impetus for the formation of Public Good and what is its mission?

**JK:** It started for me...boy, I'm trying to think where it started for me. I'm a tech guy, and mostly on the product side. So it's always been my role to figure out how people can use technology, and how to make it more human. And so I'd been doing that - I did it at Orbitz, I did it as part of the founding team of this thing called The Point, which was a collective action that became Groupon. And at the time there was all this crowdfunding stuff going on - Change.org was coming out, Kickstarter came out soon after. There were a bunch of ideas about how you could use technology in this area. I started my own firm and was doing design work, basically UX and ideation, and we were able to do some work around healthcare, with Mayo Clinic and with New York Presbyterian, you know, how do you make healthcare more human? We did One Percent for the Planet, some other stuff like that. I guess we were pretty activist for doing UX work.

In the midst of all this, my younger daughter was born three months premature. And this was when there was all this Obama death panel, Sarah Palin saying they're going to kill your grandparents kind of bullshit - and so I'm watching this, I'm at home with my older daughter, and I get a call from the insurance company, "Hey, you guys filled a form out wrong in the emergency room, and you're going to owe over half a million dollars if you don't get this thing faxed into our office, signed

by a doctor, by five o'clock on Friday"... it's like four-thirty on Friday, so I'm freaking the fuck out. My wife is at the hospital, because we did shifts as our daughter stayed in the NICU for a couple months. I call her, she loses it. A social services worker was there who'd seen this before and helped, got us straightened out - grabbed a doctor, prepared the stuff, got the fax in at like four-fifty-something, and we were fine. But we would have been broke. And we were doing everything right, we had insurance, we were doing everything you're supposed to do - and that really struck me.

Vivian got out of the hospital and she was great, she's our younger one, and I bet 18 months later, she was walking. I take her up to see my folks, and that was the last time I really saw my mom. She had a brain aneurysm and two weeks later we took her off life support. I wrote her obituary, and it really made me think, "What I am going to do with my life?" We had a celebration of life for her - she didn't want a funeral - and about a tenth of our town showed up. It's this little town in Wisconsin of about 12,000 people and there were over 1,000 people. And it's not because my mom was some big prominent figure, she was just this lady who was involved in all this stuff - community garden, quilt club, volunteered at the animal shelter, all this stuff, and she touched all these different people. And the question was, "What does this mean? What does it mean in your own life?" About a year goes by and I'm still kind of asking that question. My firm's going great, but

it's like, is this what's going to be on my obituary? - "Ran a great little firm in Chicago." You know, not bad, but, meh...

Some friends of ours worked at a place called Sandbox, a venture place down the street here, and they would ask me from time to time to come in and do a Design 101 for startups. So I show up for that, and it's actually the Obama re-election campaign. And the pitch was pretty simple: "We're going to lose, because we're going to be outspent - unless we use technology to make our volunteer base and field teams more efficient. If we can give them great tools to make it easier for them to connect and engage with people and easier for them to figure out how they can contribute the most, then we're going to win." And so I said, "Yeah, I'm in." I sold my part of the firm and just basically jumped in with both feet.

It actually felt kinda like walking back to the beginning of my career, I mean, the stuff they had was dated. We're looking at all this and, working in such a compressed time frame, we're like, "O my God, maybe we can buy some stuff, and we'll get this and we'll get that, and we'll kinda plug it all together and we'll make this thing work." And we realized that there was really nothing out there that modeled how communities get involved. The sales force models how you sell to somebody: you're a prospect, then you're a hot lead, and then you're a customer - or I kick you out of the funnel. But that wasn't the job. In a field office the job is, let's talk and figure out what you're good at, let's figure out what we need, and let's figure out that intersection. More importantly, let's figure out what your story is and why you want to get involved, and I'll tell you my story and why I'm involved, and that makes us a community. And then we're going to figure out what we can do together to move that forward. So it's not "up or out," it's, "Where do we put you so that you feel valuable and you want to be there, and you're a positive influence on people around you, where you're a valuable part of the community?" We knew we weren't there to lead with tech, but to augment and support those connections happening.

So we went through that and it feels a little bit like a strange dream. We won. I think I slept maybe 6 hours of the previous 72, and I meet the president and Eric Schmidt, a Google engineer says, "Mr. President, I want to introduce you to the technology leadership that enabled your re-election." Well, that's a pretty good intro. He comes by and he shakes your hand and he hugs you and thanks you. And he did that to everybody in that room, I mean, he hugged 500 people. If I'd been there I would have been making a victory lap around the city or eating pancakes in my hotel suite or something. But he got up and did that and

then went out and continued being president. You just ground out 18 months and you feel like crap and you realize, this guy's been doing it for the past four years, and he's just signed up for four more years of it. And so at the end of it he gave this talk, and we all cried, and he said, "You're our legacy - you're my legacy." And what you do is what's going to impact the country.

Dan was smart, he took a vacation, but I wasn't, I tried to see if we could get all that tech open-sourced and out in the real world, which wasn't going to happen for a variety of reasons, but we saw there was still this big need. Dan had co-founded Sittercity with his wife Genevieve, which was really one of the first sort of social entrepreneurship ventures in tech, and so he saw what it was like to make this kind of marketplace. How do you make babysitting, with all its really human components, feel safe and trustworthy online, so that people can actually feel that connection? And like I said I'd done a lot of stuff with Orbitz and Groupon, and so we came out of this and thought, well you could do this work for the Red Cross or Feeding America and you could have an impact. But they have massive budgets and they're able to buy the best software in the world. On the Obama campaign, we spent 40 million dollars on engineering. Name a non-profit that can do that outside of the few I just mentioned. It's pretty small. So we said, "What if we took the idea of an online marketplace and made this awesome tool set available for any non-profit? What if we can make the best and greatest stuff and make it available to everybody, just in a modern way?" You know, get rid of the contracts, get rid of the bullshit, get rid of the data islands, and charging people by record, and all these ways that software vendors try to nickel and dime organizations. If you can get rid of that and find a business model in there, the market's big enough that if you can address the whole thing, you can still make a super profitable company and you can do it with the purpose of serving a greater mission which is to stop having these organizations worry about how to market the work that they do.

**CF:** It's giving them more time, it's giving them the power to be able to do what they need to do. There are people out there every single day who are dedicating their lives to helping others, they're putting other lives in front of their own and often that gap becomes so big - they get nickel-and-dimed and they don't have the time to do what they can really do to help the community.

**JK:** Yeah, we want to be the team that every non-profit would love to be able to hire, doing stuff like A/B testing and building software and everything, but instead of having to hire us, they can just use the stuff we're building and hopefully we can all learn together. It's crazy to me that non-profits

have to get wrapped up in this whole marketing game where it's trying to quantify impact in this weird, nebulous way and trying to tell a story that will make people care and give money. It's this whole separate set of concerns apart from the actual work they're doing, and that's just really strange to me. So we're trying to help with all of that, not just with the transactional piece of it, but with the idea of a marketplace, finding ways to make it easy for people to engage and find this stuff.

The work Charlie's been doing with the Take Action Button, it's the idea of instead of marketing in the sense of just kind of pray-'n'-spray - with radio ads or billboards or whatever - it's doing it in a targeted, more effective way. Can you connect something to a piece of content, at the end of a Soundcloud piece, or at the end of a Youtube story, or at the end of the article - "Hey, you cared about this enough to go through this whole thing and learn something, here's something more you can do." Now you're mentally ready, you're in a moment where you can take a step. Can we capture you in that moment and say "Hey, there are these organizations working on this in your community, let's make that connection happen." And then the organizations can get together and communicate.

**CF:** Yeah, it's an idea around taking action on a hard news story or something you never really felt you had the ability to address. And you know it's kind of crazy, but one of the things that Jason and Dan were a part of during preliminary research was studying the differences between hard news stories and soft news stories. You see Paul McCartney announces a new tour and it has a million likes and favorites and retweets and you say, "Oh okay, I get it." But then you have something that says, "Six year old shot playing in their front yard," and there are likes and favorites about it as well. Well, the first question you ask yourself is, "Why the hell is somebody liking that?" But then you start to realize, well maybe they're trying to bring awareness to this. They're liking or commenting because they're trying to bring awareness, but at that point you stop - that's it. You could start this conversation online and have this whole complaint fest, or you could actually be delivered to something that shows people are doing good work on the issue.

One of the cool things about Public Good is the fact that, on the one hand, you have a cause, and, on the other, an organization, right? The organization is doing this singular work, and yet they're working on these causes that are part of the bigger picture, the bigger issue that people may have problems with. And you start to see that the average person may not understand that there are organizations in their neighborhood that



are doing this amazing work, even though they have this cause that they support. They had no idea that these people are in their neighborhood, or city, or state doing this work, and it starts to make people realize that maybe that change is actually possible.

**JK:** Yeah, we kind of had this theory of change that came out of the campaign as well. The theory is that people go from cause to community to finding the charity or organization, and then to contributing. You care about something – that’s why we start with the Take Action button, and we start with pretty neutral language – and you find a cause, and then from that cause you might be able to see that there’s this community that’s working on this stuff, and then we help you start to find those organizations. And that’s important, because these organizations, for the most part, don’t do a great job of marketing. You know, Metropolitan Family Services serves 80,000 families in Chicago every year, they’re 150 years old, and nobody knows about them. UCAN, on the North Side, started as an orphanage for Civil War orphans, and they’re still around, they work in nine blighted areas in the South Side, they’re building a huge center in Lawndale and they have massive impact in kids’ lives through this structured mentorship program, but so few know about them. And it’s this kind of invisible stuff that holds this city together, and holds the world together. And people often only know of the real “name-brands” – Greenpeace, or World Wildlife Federation, or others who can really afford that branding. So our thought is that the more we can kind of connect people and have them actually see these organizations doing all this work on the stuff they care about, near them, the more they will be able to say, “Okay, this is an easier way for me to engage on it.” And it’s behavior change. Because so often, you see something, and you get upset and then you just watch a rerun of *Breaking Bad* or you catch the latest *Game of Thrones*, and you say, “Fuck it.”

**KG:** So you target that moment where someone really wants to do something about an issue, and then make it easy for them to understand what can actually be done.

**JK:** Absolutely. Exactly.

**KG:** Walk me through how this would work for a non-profit. Let’s say I’m running a non-profit and I want to use your software, how would I get on board, and what support services would be available to me?

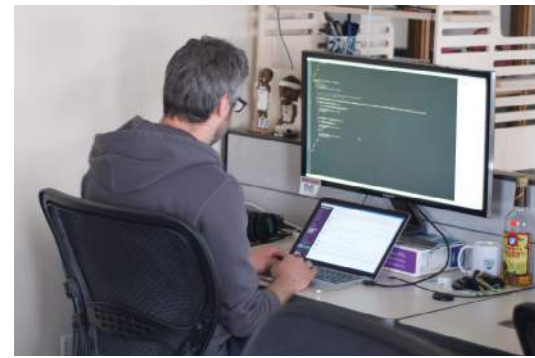
**JK:** You’d find us on our website, [publicgood.com](http://publicgood.com), and sign up there. We have a database of all the non-profits in America, and we would verify you against that database and make sure you are actually from the organization that you say you

represent. You can also just be a group, and we are going to start signing up corporations as well, to have them say, “Hey these are the organizations we support.” But right now we’re trying to focus on getting it right for non-profits. So as soon as that background check is done, they’re automatically fundraising. They can start fundraising right at that moment. And then they can take a few extra steps, like putting in their banking information, because we don’t want to make anything harder for non-profits, that’s kind of our mantra. We’re a benefit corporation, so we have a social mission, and that social mission is to increase the capacity of these public benefit organizations.

We’re really careful that anytime we do something that involves us making money or touching the money of a non-profit, that we are always aligned. There are no contracts, no monthly fees, they own all their own data. They pay the credit card fees if nobody picks them up, but everything else is free. And of course they only pay credit card fees when somebody rings the till. When a transaction occurs and somebody opens their wallet, we say, “Hey, can you pay us, just as you are paying the non-profit?” And most of the time, the users actually pick up our fees, so the non-profit gets all the cash. Right now, with us, the effective cost of fundraising for a non-profit is about five percent. So it’s pretty low, and our goal is to keep guiding it down, to start to shift the cost to other players in the system – foundations and corporations that could start sponsoring processing fees. And then we do weekly webinars where we walk through things with the non-profits. We’re also trying to start to model what success looks like. So once you’ve signed up we can help you with what’s next, with how to run a successful fundraising campaign. There’s a big difference between an unsuccessful and a successful campaign. And it’s all about the way it’s presented and the way the story is told. So we try to help people find their story and tell it better. And Charlie’s been a big part of that, you know, we visit all of our non-profits. And one of the things we consistently hear is, “What are you doing here? I can’t believe you’re here!”

**CF:** Laughs. Yeah, Paypal or Blackbaud have never shown up to someone’s place and said, “Hey, we’re building all kinds of cool stuff, and we just want to talk.” Because we care. I think everybody sitting in this office cares. They might not care about the same thing, but we all care about something going on, and are willing to take that to the next level and actually talk to human beings.

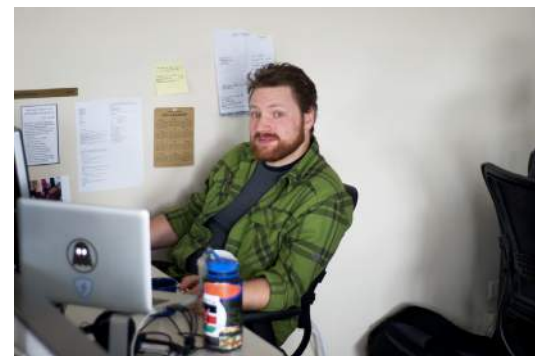
**JK:** We almost kind of feel – and it’s a weird analogy – a bit like Archimedes. Now, the reasons I joined the campaign were two-fold. One was healthcare and the other was the environment, but I’m not a doctor and I not going to invent the



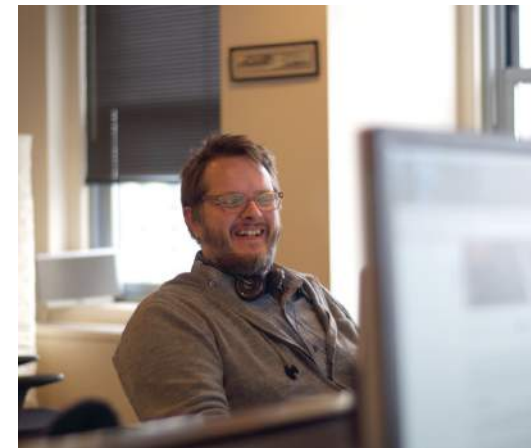
BRIAN BONEBERGER



CHARLIE FESTA



CHRIS GANSEN



AARON SALMON



AMY HEATHER

solar panel. But I know tech, I know how to make it useful for people. And so if we can use that as a lever to really raise the ability of all these organization to do better, then that’s a job well done.

**KG:** You mentioned the Take Action Button. I wonder if there are other ways that your software helps the average person who wants to give, but isn’t sure how best to do that or is just hesitant for whatever reason?

**JK:** We’re going to be transparent with you as an end-user. You are going to own your data as much as the non-profit does. Today, if you give to a non-profit, you get an email receipt, and that’s it. That’s wrong. You should have it as structured data that you can do something with. Whether that’s import it to Turbo Tax or do whatever else you want with it, that’s yours. That’s something you did. And you should know that, it should be transparent. You should know that we’re not going to serve you ads on our website, you should know that we’re not going to remarket your email address like some other social enterprises do so you’re going to start getting direct email from all these non-profits that you’ve never heard of and don’t care about, wasting their money and wasting paper and wasting your time. What’s the good in that?

**CF:** I think definitely one big thing is the verification of organizations on our platform. You know, taking that step.

**JK:** And I think we are going to continue to build on that. We don’t want to compete with Guidestar or Charity Navigator, but we want to start moving more and more to community. So if Charlie’s had a good experience with an organization, he can start talking about it with them on the site, or if he’s had a not so good experience, we can hopefully see the organization responding to it, saying, “Hey we’re going to change the way we’re doing this, let’s actually talk about this.”

When you make a donation to Public Good, we ask why you gave. And it’s a moment for the organization to start to have a conversation with you. “I gave cause I thought it was going to do this.” “Oh okay, well actually, we’re going to do this with it.” Because that can be a problem. With Hurricane Sandy, for example, people gave to the Red Cross and got really angry because the money went to mudslides in Washington. And there are good reasons for that, probably, but the Red Cross didn’t really have a way to discuss that outside of a press release.

**CF:** There’s the most recent story in the Atlantic about the cancer charities, where these dudes in Tennessee raised something like 180 million dollars and maybe a million actually went to charity, just operating phony organizations.

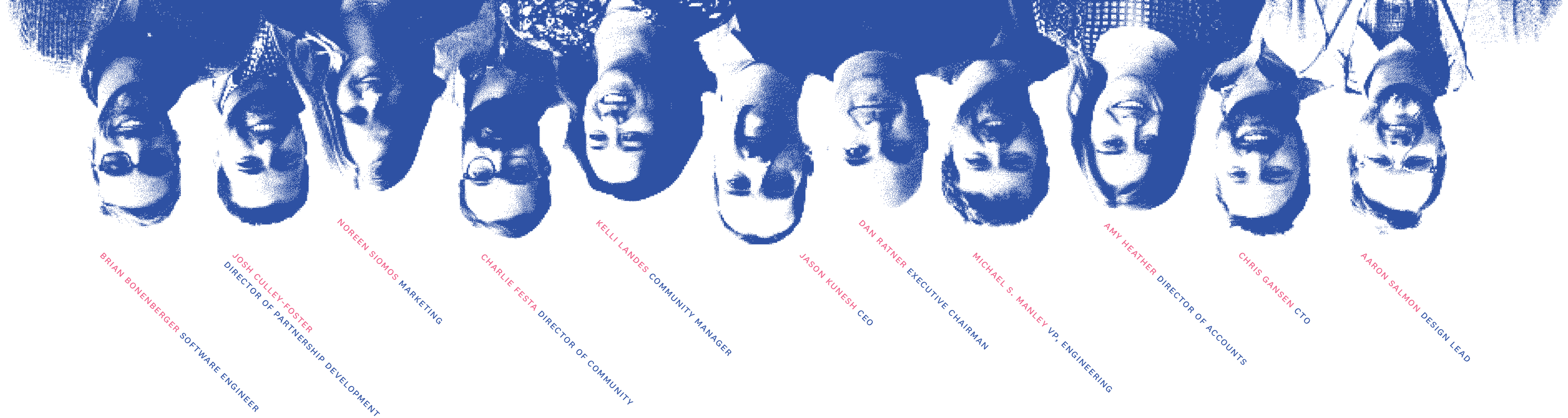
**JK:** We don’t necessarily want to be the gatekeepers of that, but we’re hoping the community can start to sort that out and figure that out. But I think really the biggest thing, with the behavior change we’re trying to make, is helping to show people that there’s value in their civic life or social capital. Which is a thought that we had in the Forties, and it’s kind of drifted away. So now we’re designing this thing called Actions, so we can point you to non-financial stuff that benefits organizations. People take a lot of volunteer work, that’s a big part of it, but it can be other stuff, too. We have an organization, for example, that wants people to turn off their faucet when they brush their teeth, because it saves a gallon of water every time you do it. Well, if everyone in Chicago did that, that’s saving millions of gallons of water per day. So just saying you’re going to do that.

**CF:** Making a pledge, to get people to really start engaging with stuff.

**KG:** So it’s not just helping with financial giving that’s a part of what you do?

**JK:** Yeah, exactly. When we started on the campaign the big thing was data integration. You know, we couldn’t tell if a person had liked us on Facebook, or had given money, or had showed up to an event, or had canvassed, or had voted. We knew maybe some of it, but not all of it, and it was embarrassing. Somebody might have given ten thousand dollars to re-elect the President, and then we’d fire off a three-dollar fundraising e-mail to them immediately after, making them ask, “Oh, why did I do that?” We needed data integration to avoid that, and so when we started here we thought that’s what we were going to do with organizations. But it became clear that the smaller non-profits really needed help with fundraising. And so we said, let’s build what the community needs and what they’re telling us is that they’re paying a lot for fundraising software that doesn’t work well for them, so let’s fix that. But the mission has always been broader. We don’t want to become a Big Brother where we own every piece of software that these organizations use. Let’s just make it all really simple for it to talk to each other.

For 2013, all we did was go around and talk to every different kind of non-profit we could find – hospitals, universities, direct services, advocacy groups, animal shelters, whatever people were doing. And by the first month we started the conversations that guided the whole rest of the year, which mostly had to do with spreadsheets. Everybody had some weird spreadsheet system where they would export their mail contacts over here and then I import them into this thing over here and compare it, and how do you know who your best people are? We’re trying to help answer that question.



**CF:** It's connecting and creating that strong advocate for an organization that they may never have seen, or may never have had, or may never have even known existed. So through those actions and things like that you start to realize that we can connect people to one another. Let's use this machine, this computer, for something good, and let's make those connections happen.

**JK:** There are some similarities with fitness technology, too, with FitBit, for example. You might not know what you did in a given day, but eventually you can see, "Oh, I took this many steps or I need to take more steps." Can you start to track your civic actions like that, and then by tracking them be able to say, "Oh, I really didn't do much, maybe I need to get a nudge?" Maybe even start to do some of this gamification stuff - "Oh Charlie's rocking it, maybe I should rock it, or maybe I should start to hang out with Charlie more and go do some events together." People are ready for it, you know. Why are people in this generation impassioned about making change? It's because the world is not what it should be, and every other generation in America looked forward to a brighter future, and now that's not true. Now we have to create that better future. So let's start putting some infrastructure in place, which, again, the lever we have is tech, so let's start developing tech that helps support people when they do this stuff.

**CF:** And I think this could potentially band people together to create real change. 'Cause I think it's

easy to get jaded over the years. I have, speaking for myself. Politicians don't necessarily have my best interests in mind, and my alderman can only do so much. And it comes to the point where you have to roll up your shirtsleeves and say, "I'm going to contact my neighbors next door and we're going to go out and clean our street, we're going to go out and make our little world better," and hopefully that catches on and makes things better, because you can only complain to your alderman so much. From what I've seen, from just those years of me being cognizant of what's going on around me and of the way things work, it doesn't work for me. I've worked for county complexes, I've worked for things like that, and they're not working for me. But then you realize that there are folks out there that are kicking ass everyday and don't get the attention that they deserve. And they are the ones creating the real change, and yet we look at one person and say, "Well, where is it? Why hasn't the United States or the world changed? 'Cause you promised us that." And you can think like that, but at the end of the day it's up to us and it's up our communities to take action and get shit done, 'cause I'm tired of it, and I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it. Laughs.

Now, I go on that rant, but it really does drive me up the wall, it angers me when you see people going on these rants on Facebook, and today was a perfect example, 'cause some dude posted this rant on the Public Good timeline about President Obama and the Clean Water Act and it gets into

the EPA in the 70s, and the first thing I see today is this email saying, "You've received a notification, somebody posted something on your timeline," and my initial thought is, "Oh shit." Laughs. And as soon as you click on it, you see this rant with all these links going to God knows where - just the URL alone you're like "I'm not clicking that." 'Cause it's total clickbait, and I think a lot of that stuff is ruining these platforms.

**JK:** A couple things related to that. One, this country has gotten a lot angrier with the advent of Fox News, with the idea that somehow you can shout at people, and that that qualifies as discourse, I mean, that's a new thing. It's been twenty years now, so we kind of take it for granted, but that's not normal. Laughs. And second, you know, at the campaign we'd get all these letters and I would read them sometimes. Some of them were heartbreaking, like, "I don't think anyone's ever going to read this but let me tell you my hopes and dreams and what's happening with my family, and the American Dream is going out for me." Right, that's basically the heart of it. And you look at the President and you realize, on the one hand, there's this enormous power. But at the same time, he's immensely constrained. And so there is a lot of power that a state senator, for example, can have, but the state senator can only know about a particular issue if people actually get engaged with it.

**KG:** You mentioned the Atlantic article about these huge scams in online giving, and I think

most people are probably aware that that happens or that that can happen. But I wonder if there are other things that you think people should be aware of in the world of online giving that they may not know?

**JK:** Here's one for you, and this is a crazy thing. You're a non-profit, you get a piece of software. That software doesn't actually deal with your money the right way. For us, we never touch a non-profit's money. It goes through our system, but never does a dime go into our bank account. Now, you guys run a non-profit. Let's say Charlie gives you money, that money goes to you, and there's a separate transaction where we get paid for making that happen - bundled together but separate - we never touch your money. But there are a ton of non-profit vendors out there who totally mangle that, and it matters, because you're going to tell Charlie, "This is tax deductible." But technically, depending on how the money flowed, it may not be. And guess what, if the IRS audits someone, it's not the software vendor, it's you, the non-profit. They're going to come after your non-profit, and the IRS is going to crush you. There's a ton of vendors out there who don't really care, but for us that's not an option. We've spent an extreme amount of time making sure this works the right way, and there are others who do it too, but there are also some new players who don't.

The other thing is that the average cost of fundraising, blended across all the different channels, is over twenty percent. For us, it's about five, in

the worst-case scenario, ten percent. But when you look at the majority of organizations using these older platforms, most of the time their cost of being able to take your money is sometimes fifty or sixty percent of the donation. It's crazy. There are competitors that we're displacing everyday that charge 15,000 to 20,000 dollars per year for a software license, then they charge usage fees on top of that...

**CF:** And then of course you're putting marketing dollars into it, no matter how you look at it, you have ad fees...so if I give you five bucks, what are you really getting out of it at the end of the day?

**JK:** So we're trying to make it the most efficient way for people to give. And again, we're a benefit corporation. If we can make it more efficient and get more dollars to organizations, that's good. Because if you look at the whole deal, there are about 30 billion dollars a year that are given by individuals online. You don't have to take a huge hunk of every transaction. There's enough there to make a successful, vibrant company without squeezing out money from all these other things that don't actually benefit the people that are using this stuff. You can take a really small piece and still make a really good business, and that's our goal. The better that we can be, the more efficient that we can be and the more that we can help these organizations figure this stuff out, the more these transactions are flowing, the more volume goes up and the more we can do.

I think the other big thing with online fundraising is that for the most part these organizations are hamstrung because most people only give the last two months of the year, which is another huge problem. If you can give recurring donations, the better it is for organizations. Because so often, they're sitting there for ten months of the year, paralyzed - "Should I spend? I don't know, what are we going to get in November?" Really?!? That's your decision point in March? It's crazy. I think if people knew that and spread their giving out, it would help a lot more.

**KG:** Why did you pick Chicago to be the home of Public Good?

**CF:** It's the place to be.

**JK:** Yeah, it's the place. So, first, we're Chicagoans. But it's more than that. A lot of people asked us to go to San Francisco, and said, "Why? So we can get on a plane and fly to Chicago or New York or D.C.?" 'Cause that's where all the national non-profits are. It's also the right mix. We didn't want to go out and have to pay people 200,000 dollars a year so they could afford a studio apartment on Knob Hill, the economics just don't work. And then, it's the attitude.

**CF:** Freshwater people.

**JK:** Yeah, why do we have Lincoln Park? We have Lincoln Park because Marshall Field gave it to the city. We have the city that we have because there has been this history of people contributing to the

civic space in Chicago. There's a good mix here of technology and innovation, of civic tech – there's been a history of civic tech here. We just feel it's right. This is our home, and we understand the issues, and there are a bunch of great organizations working on those issues right here. If it's not the headquarters, then it's the number two.

**CF:** It's a great city, there's no doubt about it, it's the place to be. There are great neighborhoods and people are caring. I think it means a great deal to the people who live here, the work that they do, the hard work that's put into the city. You know, I don't think there's a single Chicagoan who doesn't think about what happens here in the city on a daily basis.

**JK:** I'm a big Nelson Algren fan and I just think that we roll up our sleeves and we get shit done. We're authentic, we're hardworking, and we're just going to roll up our sleeves and kick ass. And I'm not saying that people don't work hard in other cities or anything like that, and we'll need to play in other pools, we'll need to do kind of the business-y things that happen both in New York or San Francisco, but just attitudinally ... I don't know, we all care about having good lives, but we're not doing this with some idea of "Let's build this and flip it." Let's build a lasting company that really provides value. Sometimes people claim that the Facebooks, the Twitters, the big ideas don't come out of Chicago, but this can be a big idea that does, it's just not going to take that kind of trajectory in the way it goes. We're going to roll up our sleeves and do good work and get down in the trenches with the people who are using our stuff and really figure out how to make it great for them. Let's just do that. Rinse, lather, repeat.

**KG:** Tell me about some of your success stories so far.

**JK:** It's awesome when somebody comes on the platform and they can immediately turn off something that's been costing them tens of thousands of dollars and they can feel that impact right away – we just allowed you to hire another intern, we just allowed you to run another program – something like that. We've seen some really positive things happen with a couple early adopters that we've been really happy with, like the Environmental Law and Policy Center, they've really pushed us, and, again, we're developing this stuff with the community and they've been really noisy in great ways. NeighborSpace – there's over a hundred community gardens in the city of Chicago and they're all taking their plot fees through us. Those are really small organizations. Then at the same time we're working with the Museum of Science and Industry and the Adler Planetarium just signed up last week. The Take Action Button has really done well. It outperformed our expect-

tations, but we just need to get it out on more and more platforms.

**CF:** Yeah, getting it out not only to news sources, but to bloggers as well. Getting it out there from the smallest scale to the biggest scale. With the Reader we were like, "Oh shit, The Reader, that's awesome," but we want to make it accessible to everyone. I could have a blog and write about clean energy and generate my own thing and drive that issue.

**JK:** Dupage Children's Museum flooded, and they were basically stuck. They're already struggling, and then all of a sudden they're struggling and they just had this terrible flood. Josh and Kelli on our team really helped them not only get the platform up but really said, "Here's how you can do a quick campaign to explain what's happening and get people involved." They've only been on the platform a couple months and they're already one of the biggest fundraisers we've had.

**KG:** What have you found to be the biggest obstacles starting out?

**JK:** There's a bunch. Every time we do something, we're breaking new ground and that makes every single aspect of what we do far tougher. Raising money is far tougher. There are some really visionary people that we've been lucky to work with, but it's taken a lot, and a lot of investors are like, "Well, we have to compost." And it's like, "No!" But you have to understand that there are these two horses that pull the wagon and one is financial. We need to make money so we can keep the lights on and hire people, and our people shouldn't have to wear hairshirts to come to work. It happens a lot in the non-profit sphere, where if you're really good at what you do, you're probably going to have a family, or your parents get older, or you want to buy a vacation home or whatever it is. And you're going to say, "I could work at Google or Facebook and make five times what I'm making here, but I'll still be doing good, I'll write a check." And that's an ok choice but that's not a choice you should have to make, either meaning or money. You should be able to do both.

So we said to our investors, look, we're going to perform as a business and we're going to do a great job, we're going to give you a financial return. But we are going to make decisions based on our ability to deliver value and help non-profits, that's number one. We have to make money doing it, but we have to make sure that that's clear. Because without that mission then it's too tempting to pivot away, especially as a venture capital-backed company, it's too easy to say, "Let's do photosharing," or, "Well, it's kind of easier for us to remarket and sell this data to somebody else." You know, it's easier for us to do all the kind of skeezy things that the larger social

networks do, either to make money on the side or disrespect user privacy or all this other stuff. And we're not going to do that. Because it's not in our values. So let's live those values and let's not just have them as something that's nice to have and that can be kind of you know gotten rid of at some point as we grow. Those are the reasons why we are going to grow, because that's what people want. That's what non-profits want, that's what people want.

On the non-profit side, there's a lot of skepticism, at least initially. It's, "Oh, you guys are just going to get bought by Blackbaud, or you're going to run out of cash, or you're going to do whatever and you're not going to make it." I think now that we've been here for two years and we've had our software out for about eight months, people are starting to see that this actually can work and that it actually is easy. It's coming together.

I think on the consumer side there's still a ton of challenges. People are so used to being beaten down in this space and they're so used to the next flashy thing that doesn't pan out. I do think people are inherently good and have the instinct to trend that way – but it's so hard, there are so many things that get in your way. It's just such a struggle and then, of course, it's not something that people have to do anyway. But when tech works well, it's like a superpower. Take Uber – it's the equivalent of me snapping my fingers and having my magic carpet arrive. It works and it's incredible. And then you look at technology for charitable giving and its terrible – "I wanted to volunteer and now I don't even know where I want to volunteer or why and I have to fill out this big form..." And so I think we're still trying to solve a lot of that and figure out what are the things that people care about.

**CF:** Trying to get as many people involved as possible and have them provide as much feedback as they can. When I was at Threadless, we had this massive community of amazing people, and watching the community form over an eight-year period was awesome on so many levels. But that community helped us, they helped us translate things that we couldn't translate ourselves. They helped us do all this amazing stuff and it helped me realize that if you make someone feel like they're a part of something, it's game on. Because you know what, man? We're here on this earth for a very short amount of time, and we're hurtling through space, and who knows? Who knows about any of the crazy shit that goes on in this galaxy? But at the end of the day, feeling like you're a part of something feels incredibly fucking great. And this machine, this computer, has allowed everyone to get involved, 'cause not everybody likes to get involved in-person. This machine bridges gaps and allows everyone to get involved. You've

just opened the world to people who don't necessarily like going out into the world itself, but yet they still want to participate and they still want to get involved.

**JK:** The other thing, I guess, is how slow the space moves, and that's not necessarily a complaint, it's good that everything doesn't move at light speed. Sometimes change for the sake of change is not positive. But if you look at foundations, for example, foundations have enormous amounts of capital to deploy. They could be the equivalent of venture capitalists in this space. But there's no roadmap and they're used to moving at a very glacial pace, you know, a "five-year plan" that kind of thing. For a startup, five years might as well be an ice age. I do think we're starting to figure out how to build a community with those folks too, because again we don't see this simply as being a relationship between you and a non-profit, but as further developing this whole social entrepreneurship movement that's happening in Chicago. You are not just your relationship with a non-profit, there's your social life, your neighborhood, the place where you work. Media. Corporations. Non-profits. Groups. Schools. Government. They all have a role to play, and so the more we can figure out ways to work with them, the better. But a lot of those groups, as much as they talk about wanting to be innovative, and wanting to be impact investors, and wanting to put their money to work in the non-profit space, and how they're not afraid of failure ... they say it, and they mean it, it's just taking them a long time to actually take action. But we'll get there, I think we're scrappy enough to keep it going, and we'll take them along with us.

**KG:** It seems like most of the organizations you're involved with now are in this area – either in Chicago or the surrounding region. Do you hope to see a stronger national or even international presence?

**JK:** Definitely. This year is all about proving out the model. Getting that to work. Dan and I are both marketplace guys, and so our assumption is always that you want to prove that you can get all the players to the table in one place, and get them all working together really well, and then you can expand that city by city across the nation, and from there, nation to nation. ■

# Why Aren't We All Developers By Now?

by  
Charles  
Vinz

One of the most common narratives in the discussion around artists and the places in which they live and work is the availability of affordable space. This article primarily discusses the discrete issue of space in its physical form, its relation to the functional needs of various artist practices, and real estate. The focus is primarily on projects based in America from the past 30 years, with a quick survey of earlier local historical precedents that hint at a long history of the relationship between artists and real estate.

One of those earlier precedents is Tree Studios, the collection of historic buildings at State and Ohio that was at the center of a discussion around affordable artist space in 2005, when the buildings were preserved and redeveloped after nearly being torn down for a high-rise development. The problem was that the building, originally built in 1894 with the idea of attracting artists from all over the world as a way to keep the momentum of international cultural exchange that had begun with the recent World's Columbian Exhibition, was intended to be used by artists who could not afford market rate spaces. The building's original owners, art patron Judge Lambert Tree and his wife Anna, established bylaws that required its owners to "support working artists." These bylaws were obviously overwritten or unenforced when the city agreed to the new owner's redevelopment plan, as most of the existing occupants were unable to return when the building renovation was completed.

The Three Arts Club at Goethe and Dearborn has followed a similar trajectory. Founded in 1912 by Jane Addams, who raised the funds to build a four-story building that had 100 dorm-style rooms, it was meant to provide affordable live/work space for women in the arts, which it successfully did until 2003. Located in the now-pretty Gold Coast neighborhood, development speculation seemed to be at the root of an organizational implosion that resulted in the closing of the building. While Design Within Reach moved into the newly renovated ground floor of Tree Studios (and has since consolidated with their Lincoln Park megastore), Restoration Hardware is currently building out the ground floor space of Three Arts Club into a showroom of their own.

There are other similarly dated buildings, such as the Fine Arts Building on Michigan Avenue, that still manage to carve out space for artists that is in some way subsidized through bylaws or by commercial tenants, but the value of their locations tends to make their existence difficult to sustain, let alone thrive and grow with the community around it.

## ARTSPACE

Quietly emerging over the past 30 years as one of the national leaders of affordable space development primarily for artists, Artspace has established more than 1,300 affordable live/work units across the United States. This represents approximately \$582 million of investment. Artspace began as an artist-led advocate for artists' space needs, but, like many projects in this discussion, transformed in the late 1980's into a development agency as part of an attempt to preserve and revitalize a historic building that was vacant or underutilized. In this case, it was the Northern Pacific Railway building in Saint Paul, Minnesota that was transformed into 52 units of live/work housing along with commercial and studio spaces. By utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), the spaces were guaranteed to remain affordable for people with qualifying financial status.

Artspace implements a screening process for its residences that allows the property managers to choose residents based on both financial need and artistic merit while still complying with the Fair Housing Act. A survey of cities and neighborhoods in which Artspace has developed properties will quickly reveal that they are not necessarily in areas typically thought of as being under threat of overdevelopment – in the Chicago region, their projects are in Waukegan, Elgin, Garfield Park, and Michigan City, with an upcoming space in Pullman – yet they are nonetheless effective at seeking out local partners that have deep constituencies in the ambient cultural community. These partnerships help to establish a credibility and trust within a wide range of communities, as well as help to ensure that the buildings will sustain a high occupancy rate that will make financing feasible.

While many arguments can be made about the quality of the community and culture that is created around the spaces that have been developed by Artspace, their long-term commitment to preserving affordable space is real. In 2011, their original Northern Pacific Railway project was refinanced, again using LIHTC that guarantee the building remains affordable for at least another 30 years.

## AS220

Not long after Artspace started with their first real estate development projects, a similar one was being established in Providence, Rhode Island by a very different organization called AS220. Beginning in 1985 as a small artist-run space that quickly outgrew its original location, in 1992 they

forged ahead by acquiring a large 21,000 sq ft distressed property that they transformed into collection of spaces for arts organizations and apartment units/studios. From their website:

*AS220 is an artist-run organization committed to providing an unjuried and uncensored forum for the arts. AS220 offers artists opportunities to live, work, exhibit and/or perform in its facilities, which include several rotating gallery spaces, a performance stage, a black-box theater, a print shop, a darkroom and media arts lab, a fabrication and electronics lab, a dance studio, a youth program focusing on youth under state care and in the juvenile detention facilities, four dozen affordable live/work studios for artists, and a bar and restaurant.<sup>1</sup>*

One of the main differences between Artspace and AS220 is the latter's commitment to being an "unjuried and uncensored forum," having a far more nuanced and community-driven approach to deciding who lives, works, and exhibits in their spaces than with Artspace's screening process. Though AS220's programs are supported in part through traditional arts funding models, their overall approach to financial and cultural sustainability is a unique one that can subsist and thrive somewhat independently of those models. An explanation from their website:

*AS220 works within a unique sustainability model that leverages earned income as part of a diverse funding base. A number of our programs, the AS220 Industries: The Community Print Shop, AS220 Labs, and AS220 Media Arts strive to partly or fully fund their daily operations through individual memberships to the facilities, classes, contracted work, the sale of original artworks, and the innovative initiatives of dedicated program leaders and members. Similarly, AS220's Performance Space at 115 Empire St is partially sustained through income from our restaurant, Foo(d), and The Bar at AS220.<sup>2</sup>*

AS220 has grown and expanded at a pace reflective of the needs of the surrounding arts community in Providence, and has brought in a myriad of other operations – small businesses, property management, etc. – into a community arts organization that stemmed from an ambitious artist-run space.

## PROJECT ROW HOUSE

On the heels of AS220 slowly developing its downtown Providence arts enclave, a different version was beginning in the 3rd Ward neighbor-

hood of Houston, Texas. Artist Rick Lowe, along with James Bettison, Bert Long, Jesse Lott, Floyd Newsom, Bert Samples, and George Smith, established what they hoped would be a “positive, creative and transformative presence in this historic community” with “a unique experiment in activating the intersections between art, historic preservation, affordable and innovative housing, community relations and development, neighborhood revitalization, and human empowerment.”

What sets apart a living space for an artist versus a non-artist? “Intention,” the loaded word we find in terms like “intentional community,” is sometimes the only legible difference. Lowe cites intent as the key difference between the way his non-profit and a developer approaches housing. “The intention of a housing developer is generally two-pronged: a housing developer builds a house for someone to live in, that’s the first, and the second is that they want to make money,” Lowe explains. “Those things are valuable and important to us as well. However, what’s more important is that our housing somehow speaks symbolically within the context that it’s embedded.”

The unspoken implication in Lowe’s assessment is that, while a traditional housing developer *wants* to make money in this arrangement, a non-traditional developer still *needs* to make money in order for it to work within the somewhat traditional parameters of financing. Thus, Project Row House spun off a Community Development Corporation called Row House CDC that completed its first affordable housing project in 2004. What is a CDC, and how is it different from a traditional arts nonprofit?

CDCs are nonprofit, community-based organizations focused on revitalizing the areas in which they are located, typically low-income, underserved neighborhoods that have experienced significant disinvestment. While they are most commonly celebrated for developing affordable housing, they are usually involved in a range of initiatives critical to community health such as economic development, sanitation, streetscaping, and neighborhood planning projects, and oftentimes even provide education and social services to neighborhood residents.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of establishing a CDC to work alongside an arts organization can help to distinguish between the different projects and programs each organization takes on. This clarification is especially helpful in seeking funding, whether for financing capital projects or for running arts programming. Since its inception, Row House

CDC has established over 50 units of low-income/affordable housing units, all while Project Row Houses has continued its artist residency, exhibition, and arts education programming.

### POP UP ART LOOP™

The real estate crash of 2008 and the recession that followed resulted in an abundance of vacant space, both commercial and residential. While devastating for some communities, the experience of economic fallout and institutional disinvestment was not a new one for many parts of what are known as “legacy cities” – cities, usually former industrial powerhouses, which have experienced a significant loss of population since their earlier 20th century peaks. Chicago, while not generally included in discussions of legacy cities, experienced a drop in population of 7% from the 2000 to 2010 census. This population decline, as has been well documented, occurred primarily among African Americans. Since Chicago is a city generally segregated by race, these population losses have had a significant, concentrated negative impact in historically African-American community areas.

The real estate crash of 2008 made this phenomenon a reality to many other people outside of these areas, including ones generally considered to be affluent and in high demand, like the Loop in downtown Chicago. Efforts to improve the ailing commercial real estate conditions downtown quickly drew upon the apparently endless creative resources of Chicago’s art community in the form of Pop-Up Art Loop™, a program of the Loop Alliance:

The program, which establishes partnerships between artists and property owners, creates temporary gallery, exhibition and interactive space at no cost to the artist in prime Loop locations...Despite the improving retail economy, which has led to fewer available spaces in the Loop, the program has still proven successful in driving traffic downtown and generating buzz for properties. In 2013, it welcomed international arts partnerships, distinguished artists and record-breaking attendance at its summer gallery walks.<sup>4</sup>

The above statement by Pop-Up Art Loop™ emphasizes the irreverence with which artists and cultural producers are viewed in these scenarios, where the resource of artist labor is exploited under the auspices of receiving temporary rent-free studio/exhibition space. The devaluation of artist labor has been well documented elsewhere, but it is generally considered to be expended in

the studios of well-known artists, arts institutions, and the overall “industrialization” of creative fields, not in the direct marketing and brokerage of underutilized commercial space.

### ARTS & PUBLIC LIFE

The notion of property owners, developers, and chambers of commerce keeping their vacant commercial spaces “warm” with artists until the market heats up enough to demand more profitable rents extends to universities as well. In 2008, The University of Chicago was intent on tearing down the Harper Theater buildings on 53rd Street that it had bought in 2002. Prior to 2008, it began emptying the storefront of their tenants, terminated a contract with Brinshore Development on an adaptive reuse plan, and scaffolding went up around the building.<sup>5</sup>

As this coincided with the 2008 real estate crash, nothing happened until 2010, when the vacant storefronts became the site of Art Here Art Now, a series of pop up galleries that were created in partnership with the Hyde Park Arts Alliance. “We have been looking for ways to attract new audiences to Hyde Park and add to the vitality of the streetscape...We took inspiration from other Chicago neighborhoods like Wicker Park, the Loop, and Pilsen, which have successfully shown how art can function in empty storefronts, adding to neighborhood vitality by activating unused spaces and connecting community to the art-making process,” said Michelle Olson, then Director of External and Government Affairs in the Office of Civic Engagement at the University.<sup>6</sup>

Art Here Art Now existed on a streetscape that included a similar, community-based alternative cultural space called Op-Shop, which was then occupying a recently closed Blockbuster Video store, also property owned by the University. When Op-Shop’s time was up, the Blockbuster building came down and now a high-rise of University offices with national commercial chains on the ground floors stands in its place. In the Harper Theater building, the spaces occupied by Art Here Art Now are filled with a new movie theater, an upscale restaurant and bar, and a national restaurant chain.

Art Here Art Now morphed into Arts and Public Life, an initiative of UChicago Arts that is currently housed in the Arts Incubator in Washington Park, a building that has been restored next to a series of commercial spaces formerly occupied by small businesses and vacant storefronts. All these buildings were purchased by the University, presumably in an effort to make the area around

the CTA Green Line stop more appealing to U of C students and faculty, as well as land-banking for future real estate expansion projects – perhaps, you know, a big library of some sort.

Meanwhile, Op-Shop morphed into the Southside Hub of Production, or SHO P, which was located in Hyde Park’s Fenn House, yet another building available for temporary use until the real estate market came back (Fenn House sold in June 2015 for \$1.05M). SHO P closed after a little over a year, but not before building an impressive array of programming and participation. Unfortunately, without millions of dollars in institutional backing, it wasn’t able to buy the building it was in or simply relocate to the next available abandoned building.

### BUILDING CULTURE

The Harper Theater, the Arts Incubator, and countless other artist-oriented developments are huge wins for architectural preservation, one of the most widely acknowledged indicators of neighborhood vitality and stability. The fact that artist-oriented developments and under-utilized real estate are often so intrinsically tied to one another would lead one to believe that the arts community would have a greater fluency with the nuances of preservation, real estate development, and capital project financing. Or at least that there would be better advocacy for artists and arts organizations having a greater stake in the communities in which they otherwise play a stabilizing and improving role. The projects presented here notwithstanding, this is usually not the case.

While many artist-run spaces thrive on the ephemerality inherent in an informal operation or organization, others have the goal of longer-term presence or institutionalization. In the case of the latter, these organizations can utilize the same tools traditional developers and businesses use to accomplish their own capital-based projects. Perhaps this is something that will result from the current trend of placemaking, with greater funding and visibility for projects that center on artist-oriented developments.

If we see artist spaces as contemporaneous of their economies, we see a model that has moved from traditional arts patronage to self-organized and entrepreneurial, with many iterations in between. Proving the value of these spaces outside of their direct economic impact on a community is key to maintaining control of the conversation that primarily only values things like dollars being spent and bodies crossing a threshold. The more that artists can control this

conversation, the more they will find themselves at the helm of shaping the communities in which they live, work, and thrive. ■

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4. “Pop-Up Art Loop,” <http://loopchicago.com/cla/projects-and-programs/pop-up-art-loop>
5. “Preservation Chicago Unveils The 2009 Chicago’s 7 Most Threatened...The Harper Theater,” [http://www.preservationchicago.org/userfiles/file/1\\_harper\\_theater.pdf](http://www.preservationchicago.org/userfiles/file/1_harper_theater.pdf)
6. Sarah Galer, “Art is happening here and now on Chicago’s South Side,” *UChicagoNews*, 27 September 2010, <http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2010/09/26/art-happening-here-and-now-chicago-s-south-side>.

07 / 20

## Embracing the Long Haul (or, your skin is in the game whether you recognize it or not)

by Nance Klehm

I was hired by one of the many celebrities that got involved in the 2010 earthquake disaster relief in Haiti to work on an ecological sanitation plan for an encampment of 3,000 people. After I came back from Port-Au-Prince, I had many dreams of disaster relief being superimposed onto Chicago and specific visions about how my neighborhood of Little Village would be best re-organized as a more resilient true village. My imagination was fueled by how the Haitians were navigating their devastated landscape and communities. In the midst of so much chaos of critical health issues, displacement, grief and violence, I watched a group of five men spend days in 100-degree heat sorting rubble according to size and restacking the 'grades' into useable piles. After a few days they moved their makeshift tents to camp around it, claiming their new 'materials yard'. It remains as one of the most brilliant things I have seen people do. These Haitians were creating new economies with their natural capital – the waste around them. The Scavengers. And while I have always deeply understood my species' reliance on soil for its food and materials, this small crew of people haunt me still and the witnessing of them blew a hole right through 20 years of thinking and I crunched some numbers.

If every square foot of Chicago's land mass of just under 150,000 acres\* was cultivated (assuming the land was clear of all built structures, people had moved to the suburbs so the entire 150,000 acres of the city was used for intensive farming, the soil was safe and fertile, there was adequate rainfall and there were no droughts, floods, insect

plaques or diseases, there were working teams of people who were very proficient in the combined skill set of: growing-processing-storing-distributing, and everyone converted to strict vegetarianism), the landmass of Chicago would only be able to produce enough food to sustain 18% of its current population.

-

\*Just in case you didn't know...

43,560 sq feet/acre  
1/8 mile x 1/8 mile = 1 block  
1.6 blocks = 1 acre

-

I grew up rural on a 500-acre farm in northern Illinois and am a 5th generation horticulturalist. I have lived, grown, and foraged food and medicine in Chicago for 25 years, and I also currently steward 50 acres of conservation-based farmland in a sea of corn-oats-soy-dairy just west of Rockford, in the southernmost reaches of The Driftless area. Because of this background, I think both in 'acres' and 'watersheds,' and in 'neighborhoods' and 'blocks'. I speak both in 'land' and in 'real estate', reflecting my bicultural understanding of both the rural and the urban.

As an animal and a citizen, I am in an intimate and participatory relationship with my habitat and am building the strength and health of the back and forth between it and myself. I understand where I live as my 'habitat'. In theory, then, the 'context' I inhabit should support me in all my biological and

cultural needs. One of the ways I ensure this is by engaging waste streams, which I see as underappreciated by most humans, and which are the source of 'wealth' in the most practical and true meaning of that word.

Because everything comes into this world hungry and everything flows towards soil.

-

In 2005, Chicago's Department of Environment officially declared all city soil unsafe for food production. Testing for nutrient load and various forms of contamination of specific sites is very costly, and safe, healthy soil is now the most expensive line item of any urban growing operation from backyard to community garden to urban farm. Compost laws in Illinois are stringent about what can be composted and in what amount and where. Relaxing these laws has been the current push and recently Chicago passed its first Compost Ordinance. After a handful of us worked on it for almost four years, this is mostly a good thing, making composting of organic wastes at community gardens, urban food production sites and backyards finally legal, but steep ticketing is also part of the package if the inspectors don't like how we are doing it.

I run a project called: The Ground Rules. The Ground Rules is a community action and research project in Chicago that proposes a timely and highly visible model to re-imagine the waste streams and biological infrastructures of a city. Process-focused and committed to observation,



1.



2.

learning, and productivity, The Ground Rules is a living experiment in rediscovering the wealth we already possess as communities – and in coaxing its re-emergence into new being.

What THE GROUND RULES Does:

1. Run a fee-based organic waste collection service for institutions, organizations, restaurants and other food purveyors.

2. Create top-notch, quality compost to be shared with our garden partners for their food production and our bioremediation projects.

3. Train and educate citizens in:

- building compost systems and composting practices that meet their gardening needs as well as meet City code.
- soil biology-soil structure-soil chemistry
- intermediate and advanced compost technologies
- community bioremediation

We are currently working on 4 soon to be 6 sites in the city of Chicago. Humboldt Park, Logan Square, North Lawndale, Garfield Park, Bridgeport and Ravenswood.

~

So what is Community Bioremediation?

Bioremediation uses living organisms to safely break down, bind or remove harmful substances from soil, water and manmade structures.

Bioremediation looks at the whole system, including the living soil communities, and aims to restore optimum health conditions to people and communities.

Community Bioremediation uses four tools:

- Microbial Remediation
- Mycoremediation
- Phytoremediation
- Community Organizing + Training

Community Bioremediation is necessarily low cost, accessible, participatory and highly effective over time.

Microbial remediation uses bacteria as its tool. Microbial remediation is largely done with compost and compost teas, both of which should contain hundreds of species of bacteria, and, as is nature's game, a large diversity of bacteria wins. In healthy soil, bacteria metabolize nutrients and make them more absorbable by plants, a process known as bioavailability.

Mycoremediation uses fungi as its tool. Fungi are readily found in cooler compost piles, mulch and leaf debris piles, or soils that haven't been disturbed for some time. They network nutrients through the soil through their long carbon threads which also hold water and air, making for a spongy layer. Lignins, complex proteins in wood, are some of their favorite food. Mycoremediation uses fungi to accumulate and metabolize contaminants.

Phytoremediation uses plants to accumulate and then extract heavy metals from the soil. They are localized in the sense that they are located by and locate themselves on their roots. Their roots send signals to the soil in the form of sugars to attract the nutrients carried by bacteria and other microorganisms which, in turn, feed them.

Now for the fourth tool, Community Organizing + Training, otherwise known as 'The Social'. As is no surprise, working with other citizens is the biggest challenge. Bioremediation begins with changing our perceptions and behavior towards ourselves, each other and our environment. It begins with reawakening our connection and accepting our dependence on the ground on which we stand. Community bioremediation calls us to embed skills and necessary infrastructure in our communities through taking the initiative ourselves, together. We need to have dedication over time. This is for the long haul. Which is why we need to conduct earnest and responsible experiments towards this goal of healthy and fertile neighborhoods, because they are our Habitats.

~

Placemaking could start with digging a hole, maybe an ambitious hole behind your apartment building - not to plant a tree or bury your dead cat, which are both placemaking activities, but for the digging itself. Dig it. Dig a hole so you can access what's under this horizontal plane that we walk and drive over, that this city calls 'real estate', and leave this hole open for deeper inspiration, for untapped potential and to allow others to question this other level of public sphere.

And I say all of this to remind you that:  
YOU ARE HERE. ■

1. Cultivating mushrooms for soil remediation.
2. Seeding Little Blue Stem (*Schizachrium scoparium*), a phytoremediator.
3. New Soil Center construction in Garfield Park.
4. Compost bin profile – cover material and finished compost with worms!
5. Digging out compost
6. Wheat is a phytoremediator of cadmium and lead
7. Delivering organic waste to our Logan Square Soil Center



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.

# The Perils of Building Parks on Forgotten Land

by Matt David

Chicago has a long, deep memory of itself, with a running documentary and myth-making machine inside every Chicagoan. Neighborhoods have an identity tied to their place in the city. While a neighborhood is likely to change and move away from its identity, there will always be signifiers reminding us of when Old Town was for artists and not the establishment, when Wicker Park was fraught with danger and not drunkards, and when Pilsen was Bohemia's hub in North America.

Neighborhoods enjoy this idea of identity, but aside from historic sites, individual lots are anonymous. A park is leveled, a business goes in, an old building goes down, an apartment building goes up, a parking lot appears out of nowhere and the march continues. In seemingly no time the entire neighborhood forgets the old and instead champions or disparages the new.

Wicker Park Bocce Club has been able to note this process through the bocce parks they have built on city owned lots in two Chicago neighborhoods. The project began naively; a small collective of young adults hoping to rehabilitate a lot of land in their area that was overrun with waist-high weeds, foundation rubble, and various layers and levels of trash. The initial park can be qualified as a success, but the path bears little resemblance to what the founders of Wicker Park Bocce Club had imagined. The second park has been its own chapter entirely.

Wicker Park Bocce Club's initial park is located on a side street set a stone's throw from one of the neighborhood's most notable intersections. The site sees many passersby each day and few have any recollection of what this little slice of land was before the bocce park. Its shabby appearance annoyed some, but to most it was invisible. To be able to turn it into something, however, Wicker Park Bocce Club had to find out who was responsible for this forgotten lot.

Alicia Harvey, a founding member of Wicker Park Bocce Club, was interning at the 1st Ward Alderman "Proco" Joe Moreno's office at the time. She began by asking anyone that had a free minute about the lot, knowing it had to be owned by somebody. As it turned out, the City of Chicago had owned this blighted lot since the early '80s. In fact, the city currently owns over 13,000 vacant lots, each one inventoried on the city's official website.

So, as luck would have it, Harvey had immediate access to those responsible for the land every day of the week. She took every opportunity to bend the ears of her office mates about the bocce park plans. It didn't take long for the right person to say, "Go ahead. See what you can make of it." That was all the permission they needed. At least, that was the impression.

Wicker Park Bocce Club organized a fundraising event, started the process of transforming the lot

into a park and began to draw attention from the press. Founding member Ben Tudor had drawn up the plans for two side-by-side courts and a list of necessary materials. Turning the city's trash into their own treasure was all that the group could talk about and became a positive focus in their lives. Alex Gara, another founding member, recalls meeting with a city official and having the whole endeavor flipped upside down:

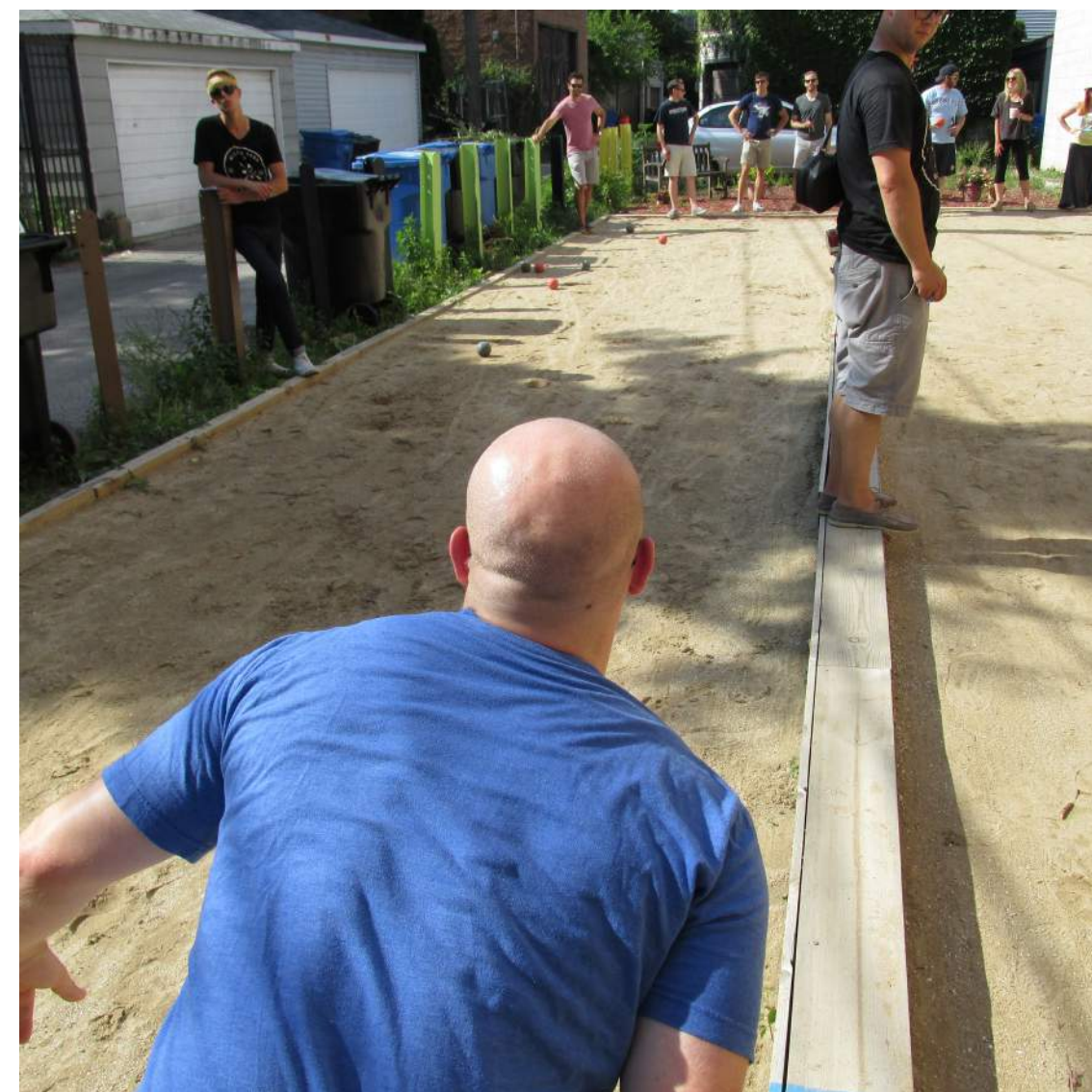
"I often tell the same story of how the angry city official locked me in his office with articles and blog posts about me nailed to his cork-board. It was like a CSI parody: "Who is Alex Gara and just what the hell is he planning to do with our property? What gives him the nerve to think that he can clean up our streets without permits and permission slips?" It was intimidating. It made me want to quit. I specifically recall saying over and over that day, "I'm doing this for the city. For you. This is not about personal gain." They tried to scare us away. And honestly, if we weren't in for about \$15,000 of our own money, we probably would've quit."

"But they didn't entirely slam the door in our face. They said, "Get this signature by Friday. Fax this proposal to that office. Get insured. Get an LLC. Get a fence (we got away without that one). Get workers' comp. Get this other signature by Monday." And we did. Well, Alicia did mostly. But there was certainly a collective chin-up, chest-out attitude that had us see our first park to the end."

The collective that made the first park happen expanded well beyond the three founding members of Wicker Park Bocce Club. The funds raised by the event and the group's own commitments were complimented by some early donations and partnerships with local businesses. Friends with a background in construction pitched in with expertise and others simply offered their time and effort. The neighborhood was paying attention, too. Passersby started craning their necks, then asking what was being built, and then when it would be ready.

The two courts looked odd in the middle of an otherwise barren plot of land. They were essentially large, long sandboxes with wood boards bearing stripes of paint marking the foul lines and a sand-and-crushed-oyster-shell playing surface. It was an improvement upon the weeds and waste, but it was clear more was needed. Flagstone, mulch, rosebushes and baby fir trees went in the ground and were soon joined by a sign, picnic tables and planter boxes. At the beginning of August, there was a party to celebrate the first bocce balls thrown on the new Wicker Park Bocce Club courts.

Two sets of bocce balls were made available for free rental at a nearby bar. By filling out a release



form and leaving a debit/credit card, anyone could go play. In simply walking by the park and collecting these release forms, it was clear that the response to the park had exceeded initial expectations. Reflecting on that first summer with the bocce parks, Gara sees the good, the bad and the drive to move forward.

"We received a letter of approval from the mayor's office and were regularly being updated by city employees on where we stood. The court wasn't beautiful. There was no furniture at first. The wood wasn't treated. Our sign was embarrassing. But right away you could tell that what we were doing meant something – it meant something to the community and it meant something to us."

"We hosted a few small gatherings there and encouraged friends to toss some stones on the weekend. Of course the weather turned before we knew it and we took our time that winter to plot our next moves. I was pretty public about wanting to open more courts on forgotten about property throughout Chicago."

"We were very optimistic in the spring of 2014. We were getting support from all around. The bocce community in Chicago was growing, "begging us for leagues and tournaments and organized events. We were creating relation-

ships with other bocce enthusiasts and even beginning to see value in our passion. The city was behind us now and they had vowed to move more swiftly and less defensively. We picked out a lot in Pilsen and went back to work with shovels and pick axes the next spring."

With Mayor Rahm Emmanuel's office behind their efforts and a park's worth of experience in their pocket, Wicker Park Bocce Club expected to be faced with little more than minor obstacles in their effort to transform another abandoned lot and enhance another neighborhood. Instead, the group was met with harsh resistance. Gara says, "I thought I was doing some good, something with purpose, so you can imagine my surprise when we were met in Pilsen with physical threats, with death threats and lawsuit threats. They were so angry. They were determined to bring us down. We had no idea why."

It's time that I bring myself into the story. As the year passed into 2014 and Wicker Park Bocce Club continued to grow, I graduated from being an extra set of hands to officially being a member of the core team. As a bartender at a new Pilsen restaurant opened by Logan Square restaurateurs, I had learned that Pilsen—regardless of the dominant ethnic demographic—is a working



class neighborhood with a strong identity tied to individuality and the expression of the arts. I wasn't surprised we were being met with resistance. I also hadn't gone through the bureaucratic obstacles of the last bocce park. So, even though I couldn't agree with the strong resistance, I could understand it. Gara's response to it came from a different place.

"The reason I lead with that story about the city giving me shit is not to paint Chicago in a bad light but to give a little perspective on how our trek into Pilsen played out. The hoops we jumped through in Wicker Park gave me a chip on my shoulder that I would most certainly need to get through our new set of problems in Pilsen. Maybe I'm guilty of getting caught up in a sense of self-righteousness. On most mornings, I would've much rather gone out golfing than digging and leveling. Of course, I would've rather spent my money on vacations than on raw materials and business expenses."

"When looking at the past two years, it's funny how I started developing resentment toward people who hadn't gone through what we went through. The least severe reactions were always something like, "We've been trying to turn that into a community garden for years. All of a sudden these assholes from Wicker Park can come here and use our property for personal gain?" Do you know how many times I heard that somebody else was working on turning that lot into something? Thought it was "their" lot. So my reaction started to become, "No you didn't. You may have had the idea but you didn't execute it. Executing it is the hard

part. Don't get angry with us because we were committed." The shit we went through in 2013 was my defense in 2014."

"And it was impossible for me to not get angry back. One neighbor called the cops on us almost every time we stepped foot on the property of OUR lease! He screamed in Alicia's face. He prompted a local alliance of citizens who wildly speculated about how detrimental our bocce court would be for their neighborhood. There was so much misinformation spiraling around and we knew the best thing we could do was ignore it. They accused us of chopping down protected trees, of promoting open containers and public intoxication, of having connections with the Mayor's office, of paying off people to get what we wanted. Of course none of this was true, but we knew better than to engage with them. We also didn't trust ourselves; what we'd say and how we'd react."

Looking back and writing about this, I can't help but think of the Shakespeare quote that all the world's a stage and our age's addendum that none of the actors know their parts. The people resisting our efforts were trying to protect their surroundings. To them we were outsiders aligned with the powers that be, the rich that look at them with greedy eyes, that couldn't possibly understand them or care to engage them.

We wanted to return this lot of land to them by building a bocce court and supplying a set of balls to use for free. That mission hadn't changed. We had learned that the game of bocce can be enjoyed by anyone and saw how it can engage people in a whole new way. To reference another

cliché, bocce levels the playing field. From that core, each bocce park is free to take on its own unique identity reflecting the neighborhood around it. If Pilsen wants there to be a large garden, let there be a large garden.

This perspective only comes with time, though. Gara recalls where the group was by the end of the summer:

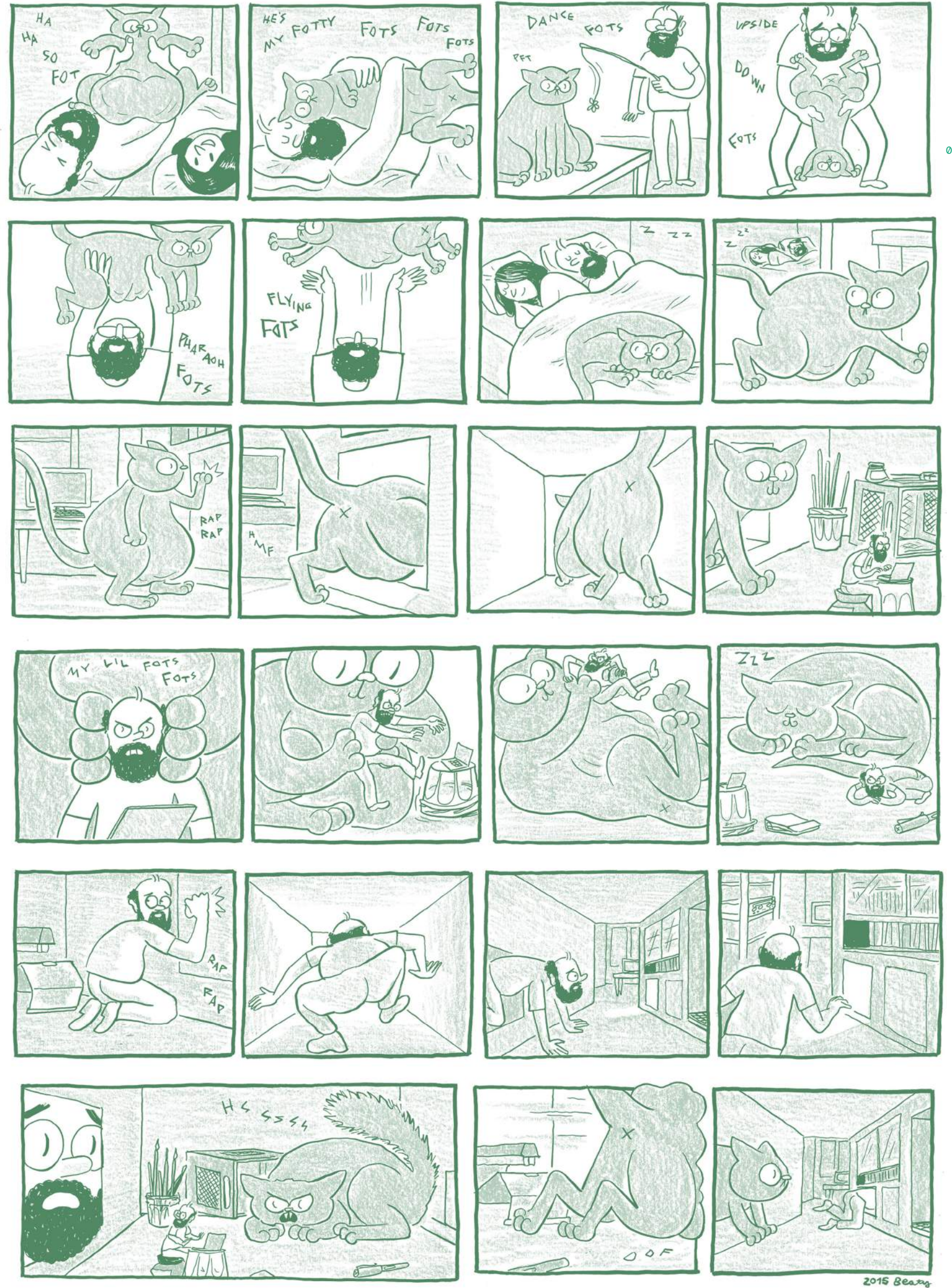
"We were exhausted. We had created so many other exciting opportunities for ourselves and it was extremely difficult to find the energy to get down to Pilsen. We didn't finish the job. We were damn close but fall was looming, we were spread thin, and now I can say we just weren't receiving the fulfillment we were in Wicker Park."

"We were developing a positive relationship with the neighbors directly next to the lot and we used that momentum and a little time-induced healing to finish the job this spring. Maybe all it took was a pretty sign and some flowers but it's 2015 and it kind of feels like last year's pile of problems is behind us. Maybe we'll draw upon our strengths gained last summer and use them to confront our future obstacles—just like we did the year before. It's naive to think I won't be bitching about something by the end of this season but it's experience that has me unconcerned by it. If what we were doing were easy, it wouldn't be special. In our own way, we are affecting a culture. We know that. And that's why no matter what, we can safely say that we are not going anywhere." ■



ALL IMAGES ARE TO BE CREDITED TO MADELINE JULIA SMITH

PHOTOS SHOW THE ORIGINAL WICKER PARK BOCCIE CLUB COURT AT 1944 W. CRYSTAL





1.

10 / 20

# Thoughts on Creative Placetaking

by Sean M. Starowitz & Julia Cole

“Cities are the handiwork of the real estate man” – J.C. Nichols

‘Place’ is a tricky word in the English language. It has so many meanings and connotations that it’s hard to actually get to the semantics of it. Along with words like cool, hip, local, diverse and vibrant, ‘sense of place’ has become an aesthetic approach for architects and planners and a selling point for real-estate agents. The use of ‘sense of place’ as a reductionist aesthetic and approach settles for the feel or look of a location and ignores many other important characteristics. The tourist industry or place-marketing approach is to commercialize the ‘lure of the local’ in our common-dwelling neighborhoods and communities. It should be clear that these aesthetics and exploitative practices can lead to domestic and urban colonialism in a way that propels cultural, social, and economic displacement. This can be done fairly simply and rapidly through speculative real estate practices, the use of the arts as an economic development tool and a lack of city policy and planning. We have to remember that ‘place’ holds historical meaning in both a political and spatial sense: the notion of owning a home or parcel of land, or in the social hierarchy of ‘knowing one’s place’ or ‘a woman’s place’... Place has always been employed as a political tool of control and oppression.

A spirit of Frontier and Manifest Destiny mindsets still haunts Kansas City to this day. J.C. Nichols perfected blockbusting and planned suburban communities in his real estate company from the 1920’s through the 1950’s. His model was so powerful and financially rewarding that it was mimicked in many cities all over the United States. On a national level, Nichols also helped create the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Urban Land Institute, and the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB), all of which helped regulate housing and institutionalized racial and spatial barriers in most American cities after World War II.<sup>2</sup>

The sprawling edge of the city – where it ends – is of great debate in Kansas City. To begin with, the planned community is so regimented that you’re constantly in characterless and timeless place. Then, the edge is hard to identify because there are also three civic centers: Kansas City, MO, Kansas City, KS and Johnson County. This effect was not a part of Nichols’ original master plan. When does the city actually end, and when is a suburb no longer a suburb but a new urban center? The suburbs are struggling to find a new identity and, like the young, artsy professionals living in high-rise lofts downtown, suburban residents are mostly blind to the people and places in the ring of neighborhoods that lie between the city center and the outskirts. The drive-thru experience blurs a traveler’s field of vision. Segregation, blight and poverty can’t be seen at 65 MPH, and the majority of commuters are completely unaware of the extreme act of violence that is effected by the highway system. Highways continue to be the main artery line of vacancy in KC, and mainly on the eastside of town.

Nichols’ ‘innovation’ slowly hollowed out this Midwestern metropolis. In the last ten years we have had the most pro-development city council since the Nichols era. The nostalgic streetcar is returning to downtown for a two-mile stretch. The Baltimore-based Cordish Company’s ‘Civic Center’ known as the KC Power & Light District was completed in 2006. This consumer-driven Disneyland of bars, clubs, and bowling alleys offers a ‘safe and urban’ experience for the subtle cost of furthering class and racial stereotypes via enforcement of a dress code that bans white tees, ball caps and work boots. Meanwhile, one of the most disturbing aspects of the KCP&L District is a large mural reflecting the history of the 18th and Vine Jazz District. The Mural is located 15 blocks west of where the historic district lies and culturally appropriates the history and stories of KC’s African American district in a ‘feel good’ and exploitive way.

This kind of rapid, disinvested development skews all kinds of values. We’ve lost historic homes of

great musicians and Kansas Citians such as Ben Webster, Virgil Thompson and Bennie Moten to the bulldozer. Properties in the east side can be bought for as little as \$900 on the Jackson County Courthouse steps in August of every year. Property values in certain neighborhoods are doubling and at the same time other neighborhoods are still only 50% occupied. Many residents are unaware of their own potential for displacement. The scent of gentrification is in the air. What is a clear path to regeneration rather than gentrification? Cooperation rather than colonization? Are there measures that we can put in place to prevent this type of rapid displacement in our urban core, in a city that has lost density and population? How can Kansas City become the model for sustainable rent, property, and anti-displacement policies that other recovering (mid-sized) post-industrial cities could adopt, much as they once embraced JC Nichols’ ideas for planned suburban communities?

In the fall of 2014, a librarian, an educator, a graphic designer, a storefront designer and two artists (including me) opened a space in Kansas City to play host to difficult conversations that asked these kinds of questions. The Talk Shop is a vehicle for dialogue - hosting public events in which people gather to discuss topics that matter in Kansas City - like education, transit or food issues. The format of the events themselves is varied, including hosted conversations, book clubs, performances, meals, or other types of gatherings that we come up with along the way. The space is only going to be open for one year due to budget and sustainable/practical reasons. We believe that many art community-based spaces suffer over-extended periods on life support.

One of the programs we have started is called the Funeral Parlor: where we put expired ideas to rest. The Funeral Parlor solicits conversation from everyone in attendance to offer a platform for critical dialogue and new vocabularies for contemporary issues. Each event begins with a guest moderator and brief presentation. The parlor then opens to the floor with an open dialogue around the issues, criticisms and concepts of the specific thesis...Thus far we have tackled Car Culture, Creative Class, Pseudo-Tolerance, Social Practice and Creative Placemaking. Humor is a great way to open people’s hearts and minds, and productive antagonism can be a good thing if it promotes a positive way of moving forward. Our aim is that everyone walks away being more informed, and well-versed in a language that can help start a new conversation.

On February 12th, 2015, at the Funeral Parlor, Julia Cole gave a Eulogy for Creative Q. Placemaking. The text, reconfigured for print, is included here:

*When did Creative Placemaking become a term that acquired the everyday status and typicality of John Q. Public and why is it now time to lay this tired phrase to rest?*

*When the archaic term ‘Ms.’ was resurrected by twentieth century feminists – which seemed so awkward at the time – it opened up a new set of possible ways to think about women and the lives they choose to lead. Word choices matter because language can both reveal and conceal values. For example, when someone says ‘I don’t have time for that...’ or ‘We can’t afford to fix that’, they are avoiding saying ‘that’s not a priority for me’, which is a more direct and politically accountable answer.*

2.



1. Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience*, Second Edition. State University of New York, 2014. Pg. 42
2. Further Reading, Richard Rothenstien, *Making of Ferguson*, Economic Policy Institute, *A Class Divided: Race in the City*.

Similarly, the term ‘Creative Placemaking’ conceals an assertion that whichever environment is ‘getting the treatment’ is not already a place that has value (either physically or in terms of its history, cultural roots and so on) – in fact its ‘placeness’ doesn’t even exist and needs to be creatively manufactured. What’s more, this term evolved in an era that has reframed the word ‘creative’ from something material, messy, unpredictable and expansive, into a comfortable and tidy - perhaps quirky - bohemian flavor, used to rebrand something or somewhere and make it more consumable.

Creativity has ultimately been appropriated as a magic glue that can bind together cities and lives – ones that have been propelled into states of alienation by a broken economic system. The dangers hidden in the blanket use of ‘Creative Placemaking’ are that its standards reflect and serve the tastes of those who profit unfairly from this system, and that it perpetuates structural inequality by covering over the flaws rather than genuinely working to fix them.

In these late stages of capitalism, the U.S. is moving into economic production that is increasingly immaterial – knowledge and experience becoming our two primary products<sup>3</sup>. Among the material goods Americans still consume and discard,

that by 2050 two-thirds of the global population will be urban. There’s a growing realization that the atomization of community that has arisen in our systemically reconfigured cities has left its members feeling lonely, abandoned and politically powerless. In the face of this, it can be a comfort to think that the places we inhabit could be creatively remade in a way that will reconnect people to each other and to systems that sustain us. The consent to Creative Placemaking has been pre-manufactured alongside so many efficient, dreary, urban landscapes and lives.

Municipalities (especially in the ‘second tier cities’<sup>5</sup>) have seized on the idea of Creative Placemaking as a way to differentiate their living/working/touristic offerings and drive their economic engines. Even more unfortunately, from my point of view, major arts grant-making bodies have come to claim Creative Placemaking as the path to greater cultural equity.

These goals are not trivial or even undesirable, they are just incomplete - and the chosen means most often deliberately avoid tackling the root causes of the systemic problems they address. Ultimately, the interests served are not those of artists, or really of anyone marginal to money-culture. Many of these grants are, in fact, underwritten by large banks and other kinds of financial



3.

most know almost nothing about their making or disposal. And, though most manual workers were already alienated from meaningful labor by the invention of the production line, many in the white collar world now telecommute, cocoon, specialize, narrow-cast and otherwise increasingly compartmentalize from each other.

According to the United Nations<sup>4</sup>, the majority of people now live in cities, and it is predicted

institutions - which have a primary investment in economic growth, and in consumers who have been tranquilized by any means possible.

So, when we look at the underpinnings of the ‘Creative Placemaking’ movement as an offshoot of Richard Florida’s ‘Creative Class’<sup>6</sup> – that is, as a drive to create a kind of customized franchise, a uniquely hip city that will attract the high level consumers of new kinds of economic produc-

tion (knowledge/data and experience) – a few principles become clear:

1. The presence of artists in the system is a functional one – as ‘Bringers of Quirky’. We are the pioneer machine, opening up the wilderness of industrial decay by doing what we do best – revealing possibility. (My partner and I are part of this process right now, rehabbing an old auto repair shop in the east Crossroads/downtown area, and I know many others who are optimistically participating in regenerative processes).
2. We are also a multi-use tool – kind of a Placemaking Swiss Army Knife. The majority of artists are hopelessly entangled in the system, even if we would prefer not to be. On one end of our practice we feed the cultivated tastes of the acquisitive and educated classes who drive gentrification. On the other end, if we are not very careful, we pacify the dispossessed and disenfranchised through our community engagements. We may be persuaded that we are giving a voice to the voiceless, but often we comfort and patch just enough to extend the systems of internalized control.
3. Once we have done our work, then we’re dispensable. When we have performed the transformation in one part of the city, the ‘creatives’ (who can pay for the real estate whose value we have now increased) move in. These, of course, are the hordes of ‘creative industry’ workers who design, package, brand, and sell data and experience to themselves and others. The artists and their quirky lives get moved on to the next frontier.

4. Any territory that has not yet been prettied up is fair game. Most artists are looking at cheap rents in neighborhoods that have big old buildings (like old warehouses and offices) that will make great studios. Once we have established these outposts, the whole neighborhood is up for grabs. Some slumlords play this game ferociously and with malice, allowing properties to fall into blight so that eventually even the marginalized will be happy to see middle class homesteaders moving in and bringing with them city services that they have been denied: like street lights and sidewalks, storm drains that work, functional public transportation, better schools, grocery stores, lower crime rates, libraries... Soon after that the family homes, mom and pop businesses and tiny restaurants are all swept away in the tide of revitalization.

5. Once the process has begun it is unstoppable – at least within the current framework. Disempowered people, by design, often have no fight left in them. Within a short period of time all vestiges of the poor and needy have been erased from public spaces, neighborhoods and memory, except for a few antique touches retained for the aura of authenticity. The underclass, the gritty realities of



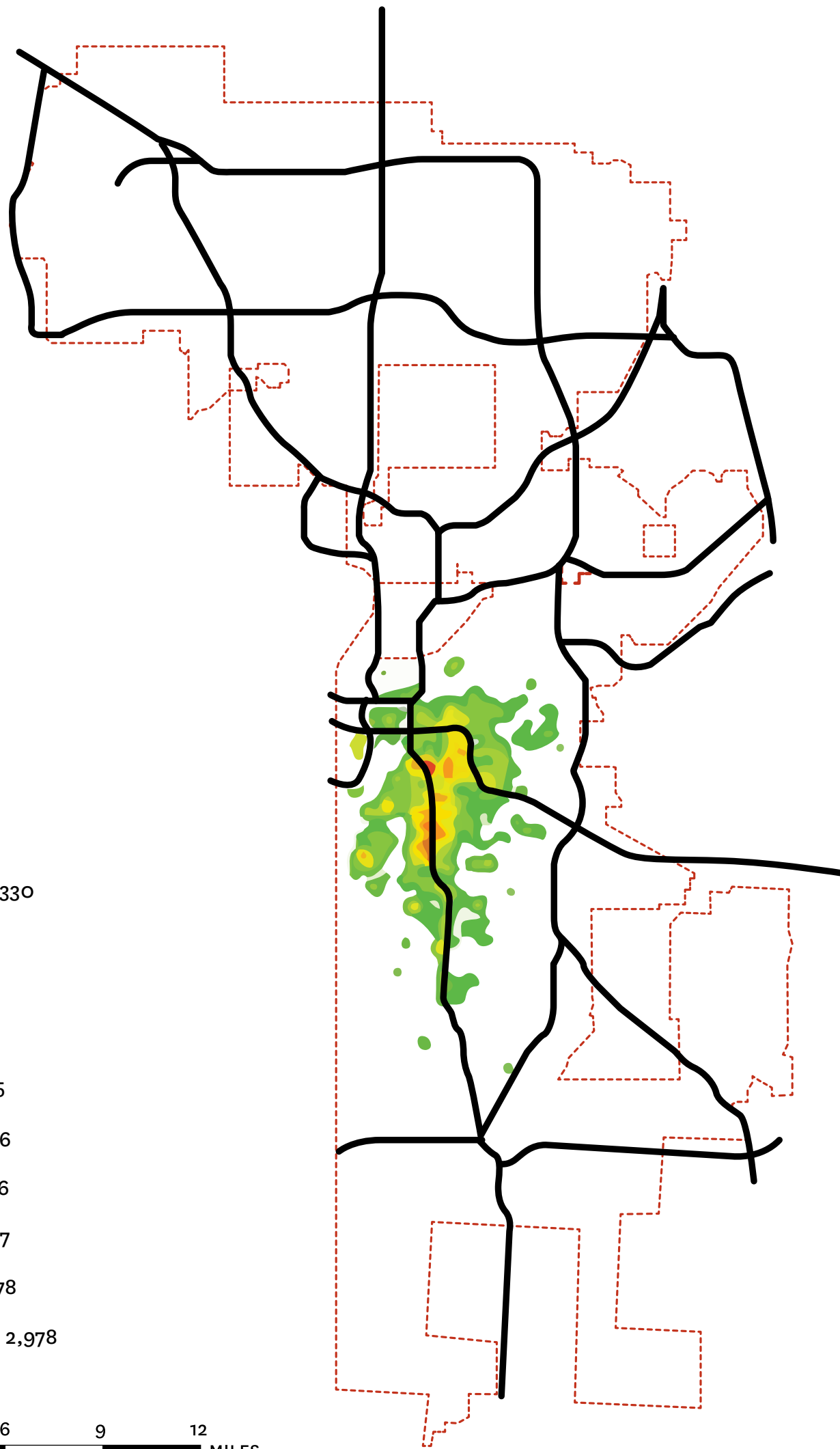
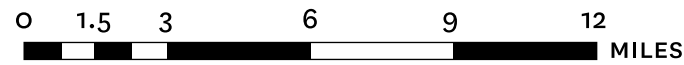
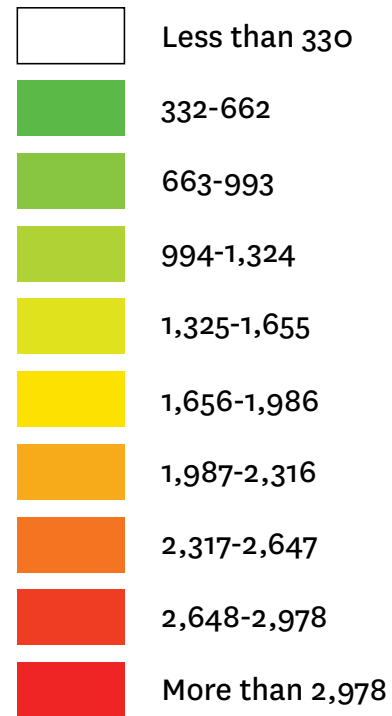
4.

3. [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_201.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm)
4. <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/world-urbanization-prospects-2014.html>
5. as Martha Rosler draws from Alan Blum in her 3-part series ‘Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism’ <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-i/>
6. [http://www.creativeclass.com/richard\\_florida/books/the\\_rise\\_of\\_the\\_creative\\_class](http://www.creativeclass.com/richard_florida/books/the_rise_of_the_creative_class)
1. This on the front of the Power & Light District or to some “Power and White”.
2. Artist-driven regeneration of the West Bottoms is well under way
3. The new/old streetcar line has jump started major gentrification in the River Market district.
4. False decorative facade on a street where business once operated.
5. Artists and their quirky lives are soon moved on to the next frontier

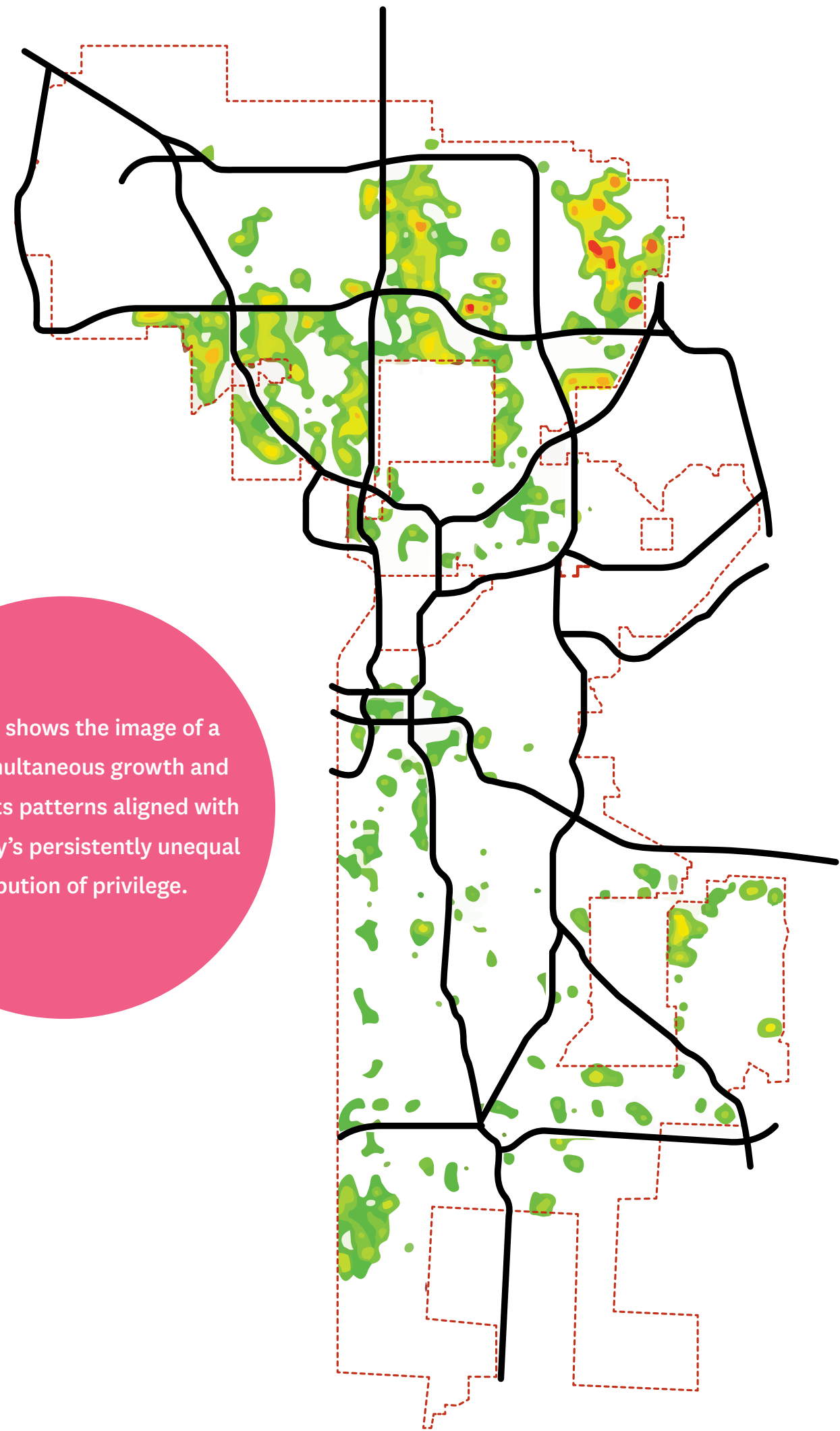


5.

PER SQUARE MILE



This map shows the image of a city in simultaneous growth and collapse, its patterns aligned with Kansas City's persistently unequal distribution of privilege.



contemporary urban life, remain the secrets of our economic system to be carefully hidden from sight.

6. Most embarrassing of all, the poor and disadvantaged have often been lured into compliance with the process of their own erasure by the kind of Creative Placemaking that highlights the authenticity of their cultural heritage or working class roots. The artifice of ethnic flavor or artisanal simplicity, the illusion that art is being made somewhere in the neighborhood, draws the seekers of 'genuine experience' in droves.

This brings me back around to the beginning. Richard Rorty<sup>7</sup> asserts that truths are made not found – that they are a language manufactured by humanity rather than discovered somewhere out there in a mystical cloud. The 'first world' lives inside a truth that capitalism reflects the greatest social good, that its inequalities are necessary, and that success is material. Even if the words 'Creative Placemaking' are buried here today, they will not die as long as the current dominant mode of thinking lives on. They will rise again

and again, because they are a signature code for what Guy Debord identified as 'The Society of the Spectacle'<sup>8</sup> – a cultural evolution in which being becomes having, and having slides into appearing.

Is there no positive side to the process of social engagement by artists? Yes, I believe there are many hopeful strategies and alternative futures. But I think they begin with us examining the language we use, and uncovering the implicit meanings and systemic pressures they encode and conceal. Since language both shapes and limits the way people think – can we not invent better terms that reject business as usual and open up real possibilities for more equitable, imaginative futures?

All those of us who are gathered here today to bid a fond farewell to this most insincere phrase might consider our strategies for the moments when its coffin lid begins to creak open again:

Let's begin by giving the majority of Creative Placemaking endeavors their real name of 'Rebranding Campaigns'.

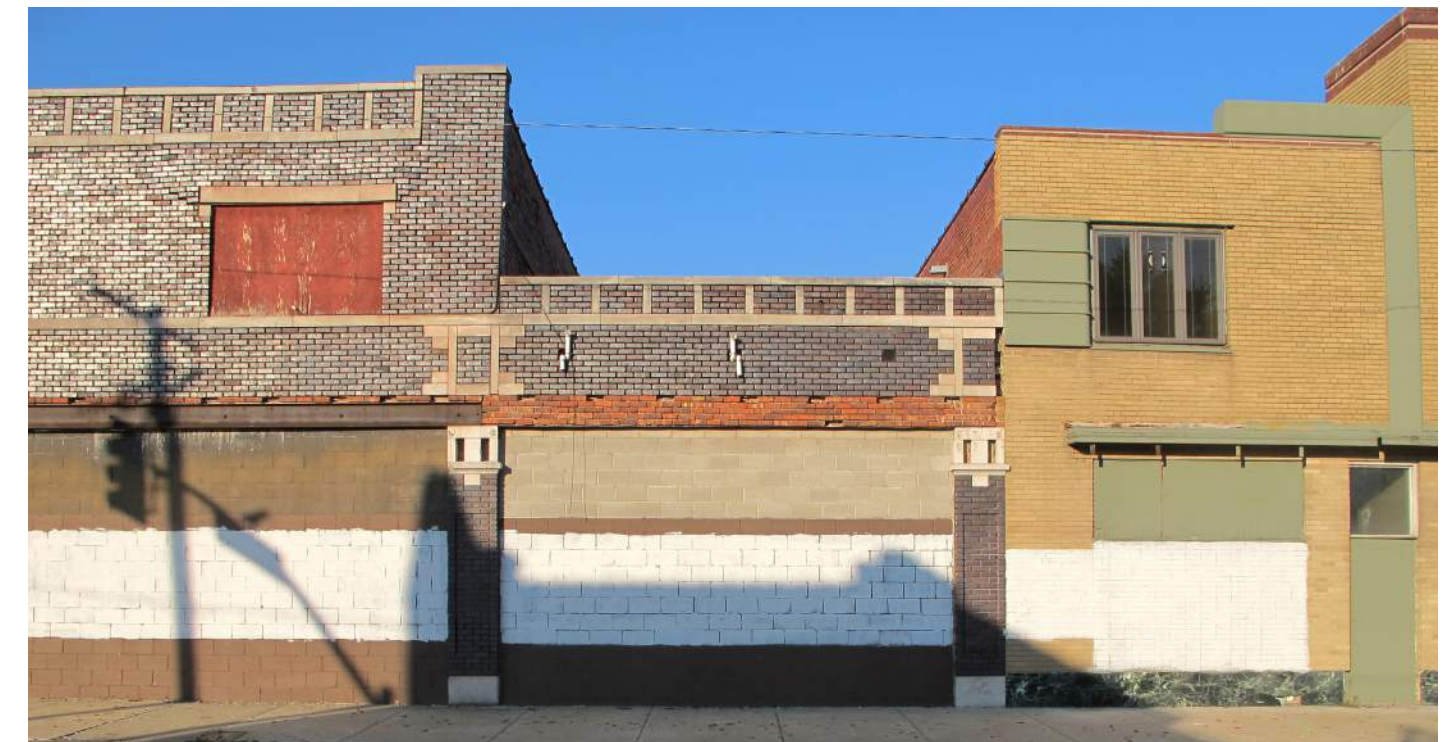
And then let's consider alternative terms like 'Ms.' that disturb the normative, and uncover dissent and oppression rather than conceal it. Let's struggle harder to find words that reflect respect for the diverse assets communities already possess.

Resisting duplicitous terminology is a relatively simple means to raise consciousness in everyday conversation, but it is not necessarily easy to do. Perhaps no single term can ever escape the empty universality of a franchised word. In dumping the label, in refusing its pre-packaged ideas, we may need instead to stumble awkwardly through countless fresh attempts to describe places that are truly alive rather merely 'vibrant'.

Perhaps, honoring such a courageous and inventive spirit, you will raise a glass to this timely demise, and join me in toasting: 'So long, CQP, may you rest forever in a Disney-sunset peace!' ■



6.



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9.

7. in Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, <http://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/philosophy/philosophy-social-science/contingency-irony-and-solidarity>
8. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>
6. New forms of gentrification happening on Main St. where the street car line runs parallel
7. Historic eastside blocks of Woodland Avenue and 39th Street now vacant. Also, is flanked by Highway 71.
8. Photo Credit to Ben Hlavacek, The New Edwardsville, KS. Postcard Series. 2014.
9. A spirit of Frontier and Manifest Destiny mindsets still haunt Kansas City today.

All images courtesy of Julia Cole & Sean M. Starowitz

# Artists, Communities, & Gentrification

## An Interview with Peanut Gallery

Interviewed by Kyle Gaffin

**Peanut Gallery was an exhibition and studio space run by an artist cooperative consisting of Charlie Megna, Kelly Reaves, Jessi Meliza, Ryan Burns, and Brandon Howe. They described themselves as “specializing in showing ambitious new work by local emerging artists and connecting people with one another through workshops, screenings, artist talks and forums. Our goal is to nurture a vibrant, inclusive creative community, while encouraging questioning of established norms and good-spirited mischief.” From 2010 to 2014, they operated a space in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago, at the corner of California Ave. and Augusta Blvd. In the fall of 2014, they were forced to close up that space and move out due to their landlord’s plans to completely “remake” the intersection. “Gentrification got the best of us and we lost our storefront,” they said in a “Hiatus” post on their website. I sat down with them to discuss these changes and the issue of gentrification, the challenges of running a community arts space, and their hopes and plans for what was to be Peanut Gallery’s new location in Logan Square. Whereas their space in Humboldt had a polished, professional gallery feel, the space in Logan Square was in fact an apartment with one room to be converted into exhibition space, with the rest becoming studios and space for socializing. What lent the new space a particular charm was its backyard, which was to serve as the means of entry to the gallery, and which would introduce visitors to a beautiful little garden and a family of chickens on their way in. Everything was coming together for an opening show in May in an exciting new space. Yet some weeks after conducting the interview, I was informed that Peanut Gallery had again lost their space and would no longer be operating as a gallery. There are hopes to to keep the project alive in some way, either with an online presence or as a travelling space.**

Ryan Burns was not present at the time of the interview.

**KG:** How did Peanut Gallery form, and what was your vision for it?

**CM:** It started in a small studio space in Wicker Park, which I shared with a group of other people. Kelly and I started hanging out and painting a bunch in there together, and we just kind of had the idea that since we had the space and we knew a ton of people that were making art that wasn’t showing, we just thought we could have some really good shows. So we just started putting shows together. We started with group shows first, putting calls out for people and then selecting friends that we knew had work that fit with the specific theme of the show. Then Brandon started coming and hanging out there a bunch, and then joined and became a part of the gallery. It just kind of formed from there, and kept going and then we got the bigger space [in Humboldt Park] after that one, and that’s when it really took off and got more serious. And the vision?... You go for it.

**KR:** The vision? I think the vision was always to show what we considered underrepresented artists...I think that’s it. And to be ourselves and have fun about it.

**CM:** Yeah, to have a non-threatening style of gallery or something...something that was very open to everyone...

**BH:** And to show artists that are really working hard. You know, not really trying to have anyone pigeonhole us into one particular style of art or anything like that. Really just, if you’re working hard and you haven’t really had a chance to show your stuff yet...if you’re making good stuff, you’ll get a show.

**CM:** Yeah, kind of like a platform for people to get started to get shows was kind of the idea. And then to just have fun! Laughs.

**KR:** Yeah, a lot of artists were either still in school or just graduated, and a lot of galleries don’t want to give artists shows unless they feel like the work is really finished and polished and really thought out, and I always liked the idea of giving people shows before it’s quite to that stage, to help people work through stuff.

**KG:** It sounds like you had in mind that this would be primarily an exhibition space. But was there programming that you would put on to make it more than just a place for exhibiting new work?

**CM:** One of our big ones was Tuesday night Drawing Nights, and that started just to get people together, to hang out and make stuff, and, you know, to meet people that were in the neighborhood or that were also jmaking similar stuff or had a similar mind about art and the space and everything. And then we’ve done different lectures and we’ve tried doing classes, we’ve tried to do other

programming that’s not just about the exhibition - we’ve always tried to make it something so that you could get people together - it’s really all about the community of people, it always has been. So we’ve tried multiple things, but it’s hard to get people out to a lot of things, too.

**KR:** Yeah, it was about four and a half or five years, so it went on for a while, and I feel like we tried a little bit of everything almost, you know there were a couple performances and just a little bit of everything, really, but the thing that really stuck was Drawing Night, we did it consistently every week the whole time. Especially if the weather was nice, a lot of people would come out, and it was really fun because we could just kind of watch people meet each other.

**JM:** Because they were open drawing nights, that was the time the space was reliably open outside of openings, and, since over half of the gallery space that we had was studio space - the back was all studios - we would essentially also be opening up our studios to share with the neighborhood. And we did have regulars, people who would come in all the time, who are still making work, and going out and developing as artists. But that was probably the main program. That, and we were one of the two spaces that would host this event called Radical Mending, which was popular, and regular, it was every other week, and people would come in and bring clothes to mend, and there was somebody there [Eleanor Ray] - who now owns a business in Humboldt Park as well, she owns the Wasteshed - and that was a very cool thing because that’s still in the neighborhood and that’s still kind of a little slice of what we used to do at the Peanut Gallery as well.

**KG:** Do you feel like those programs helped you to be connected with the surrounding neighborhood and have the gallery be relevant to those who were living there?

**CM:** Yes and no. It was more relevant to younger artists. We had a couple neighborhood kids that would come in regularly and when the school was over there and open at the time, we had a lot of kids from the school that would come in, not necessarily for Drawing Night but they would come in and just hang out, and we would try to push them to draw and make stuff while they were in there hanging out.

**JM:** So there was an elementary school just down the street that was closed in one of the big city closings - Lafayette Elementary - and that closed probably two years ago. So when school would let out a lot of those kids would just come and hang around. Sometimes we’d have stuff for them, sometimes we’d have snacks.

**CM:** The neighborhood was hard over there to get people in, we tried to keep it as open as possible and people would come by and say, “Oh I’m going to come in and drop off my kids,” or “I’m going to come do this or that,” but they never really did that much...I think, you know, it was harder in that neighborhood to get people more open to us being there or something, sometimes.

**KG:** Why do you think that was?

**CM:** I mean, it’s just a group of white kids hanging out, so...You know we tried to do events, we did some Palestinian film screenings, and we tried to do things like that to try to bring more people in and be like, “It’s not...you know, come in and hang out and you’ll like it.” But it’s hard to bring people in, especially if they aren’t making art or aren’t that interested in it, it’s hard to get them to come in. But a lot of the local dudes, like the kind of like “banger-y” guys, loved a lot of the shows and would come in for all those and hang out. I guess that stuff did bring a lot of those guys in - not always the best dudes, but they’d come in and hang out and liked a lot of the work and we talked a lot about it. There were a bunch of regulars that were neighborhood kids. So we tried a little bit, as much as I think we could, as many ideas as we could!

**BH:** One thing that was difficult was that a lot of neighborhood people seemed like they wanted to be able to come by and just put stuff up, but that’s just not how it was working. We were actually scheduling shows and people were applying for shows, and you know, you can’t just put stuff up. You can put stuff in the bathroom... we had art in the bathroom.... So we encouraged them to come work there, but I wonder if that was a deterrent for people sometimes.

**CM:** Yeah, I think the idea of what a gallery is different in different areas and to different people.

**KR:** It’s tricky because we tried to walk the line and be a little bit of everything to everyone, but at the same time you’re kind of being exclusionary to everyone at the same time, too, you know?

**JM:** And the gallery moved in at kind of a weird, super-transitional time of the neighborhood. The neighborhood was already very much in transition before the gallery got there. So, when I was working at the Knockbox, we went from - like, the entire clientele changed over at least twice. It started off with a lot of people coming in because that was the only place they could get internet, so we had a lot of kids, again, from the neighborhood. It was right around that first change-over that the gallery opened, when we started seeing more people coming in with strollers and, like, younger couples, and people seeing the neighborhood as starting to be a good place to buy

property again, so kind of in that upswing - in 2010 - and that was really when people started buying up property in Humboldt Park again. So, I would say that it wasn't just the gallery that was having that kind of identity crisis. Right before the gallery opened, there were a lot of people who moved from that area. So it is still a really weird transitional time for that corner and that part of the neighborhood, from rentals or homes that people have owned for like 25 years to people buying and gutting places, and more and more very quickly. The gangs moved over a few blocks. The super specific street-by-street, house-by-house outer workings were all totally in motion. People that you would see all the time just weren't out anymore.

**KG:** So what you've been describing, that's basically what gentrification has looked like in Humboldt Park?

**KR:** Yeah, and everywhere!

**KG:** Sure. What do you see as positives and negatives about those shifts?

**CM:** I think it depends on how it happens. Humboldt's a weird one, 'cause it jumped. Like, there was no transition from like smaller stores or cafes - I mean, it had Knockbox, and that was basically it, but it didn't have ... over here in Logan it's been a slow transition of a couple boutique shops or smaller shops and smaller cafes...

**KR:** ...little independent businesses starting their first thing...

**CM:** ...yeah, whereas out by Humboldt, there are independent business owners, but it's all very high-end everything. It jumped from that mid-range price level, to just totally not available to a lot of people that lived there and even a lot of the people that are gentrifying the area - it's still not even in their grasp. So that's a weird one, how it jumped. But sorry, I think I kinda lost track of your question...you're asking how it's beneficial or not so beneficial?

**KG:** Yeah, I mean, in some ways, those changes, like a decrease in gang violence, these are good things...

**JM:** I wouldn't call it a decrease in gang violence, by any description.

**KG:** Okay, just a shift?

**JM:** It just literally moved three blocks down. That's not a decrease, it's still bloody, there are still things that happen. There are people who get to live in Humboldt Park and who get to pretend like that doesn't happen because they're not within it. It's still absolutely a huge thing. There's still...I mean, it's East Humboldt now, but that's

not very far. And that's something that's going to continue to get pushed into further and further areas that have issues. So, I'm not blind to the idea of gentrification [being a positive thing], but the way that gentrification has happened in that particular part of Humboldt Park, it started with people living there and acknowledging that there are things happening that are not necessarily safe, to now, people going in and thinking it's a cute place to buy a house and just ignoring the fact that there are, like, people dying of heroin overdoses an alley over. So, in terms of what's positive about it...

**CM:** It's nice to be able to go to the park again. I guess gentrification can - I mean that's a specific area - I guess in other areas there are ways that certain businesses, certain spaces can do more beneficial stuff for the neighborhood, you know when you start opening grocery stores in certain areas and start doing shit like that, you know, it can be beneficial...I mean, there's probably a middle ground, where there's good and bad all around.

**JM:** Yeah, where suddenly a post-office becomes more serviceable. And I really do think that Peanut Gallery and Knockbox were those transitional spaces, and they're gone now.

**KR:** Sacrificial lambs!

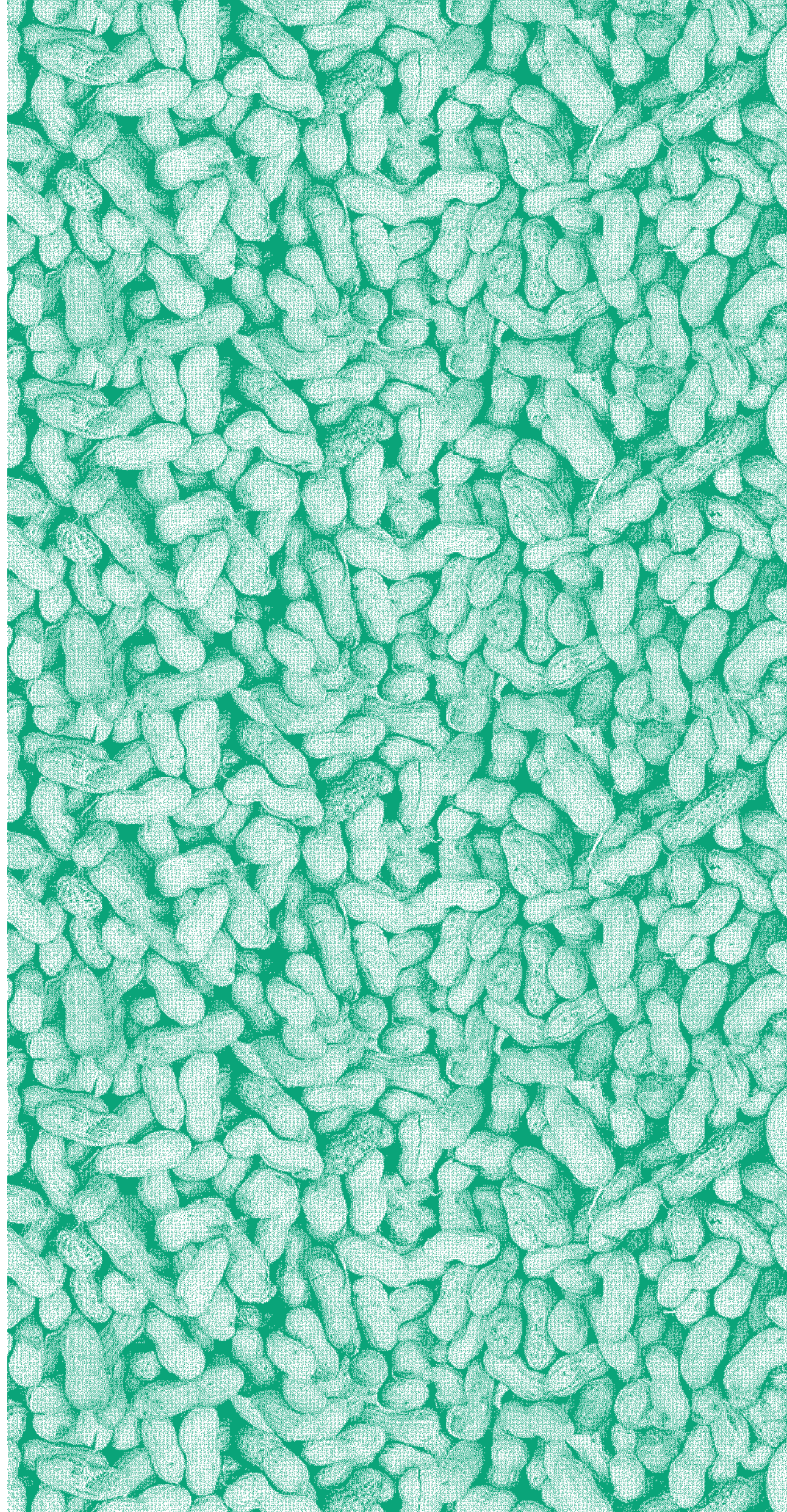
**JM:** No really! And, fair enough, we made it safe for people to spend a million dollars on a building. Us being there gave people that idea, "Oh, it's the young, artsy part of town." Yeah, sure. Fine. But, whereas we were providing a space where you don't have to be of a certain income bracket to partake in it, and to enjoy it - we were a place that had open doors, and we occupied that space and we didn't charge people any money to enjoy that space, or to also not have the windows get broken, if we're like, gonna, like, talk broken window theory or whatever - and now, all of those places are empty, but they're going to be crazy high-end and expensive in two months, three months, whenever they open.

**KR:** Yeah, as far as I can see, as a homeowner in a rough neighborhood, I feel like gentrification is good for people who own, and community business owners if they own their building, and probably not so good for everyone else. It's simple, but I like thinking of things simply.

**KG:** So you do see Peanut Gallery as being part of this process of gentrification?

**CM:** Oh yeah. I mean, you can't deny it.

**JM:** Yeah, this is in, like, textbooks about how things are gentrified. I mean, not Peanut Gallery, but "the arts."



**CM:** So its how we can at least do something somewhat positive, I think, is kind of what we try to do more. And, yeah, having a free space where people can come in and it doesn't cost you anything to enjoy the space.

**JM:** And this was something we talked about very openly while taking in that space - "How do we make this friendly to the neighborhood?"

**CM:** We know we're taking part in this, but how can we at least do something that's, you know, somewhat beneficial, or at least that's a space for the people to come to hang out or enjoy or something, something that's not just some place that they can't go. Laughs.

**KG:** Yeah, how do you think artists can be more conscientious about their role in that process?

**JM:** Squat. Don't pay rent. Don't buy a house. Don't sell your art. Laughs.

**CM:** Yeah, I don't know, it's tough. I think there are certain artists that are pretty socially conscious, that try to do a lot of stuff that engages those issues I guess, but I don't know.

**KR:** I think Jessi did a pretty good job of summing it up.

**JM:** Laughs. You know, it's part of the process and artists absolutely take a part in that process, but it's also a part of a much larger socio-political system that has been in the works since the very first instance of white flight towards the suburbs, and artists crashing in the Lower East Side. It just happens. There are things that you can do, but you'll drive yourself crazy if you feel like you're the one person who can stop it. Not a good answer, but...

**KR:** The only thing I can think of is in my neighborhood, I feel like it's gentrifying more gracefully because the art, actually, the art is kind of secret. You can't see the art from the street. What you can see is farmer's markets, and other food-related things, and food is more universal than art. So, I don't know, it's happening much more gracefully than just like, "Contemporary Art Gallery!! All of a sudden!" Well, and another problem is language barriers. 'Cause when I lived in West Logan, I would have liked to have known my neighbors, but we didn't speak the same language.

**CM:** I don't know, I got to know mine, and we don't really. They speak very little English, and I speak very little Spanish. We trade food and we have cookouts. I don't know, I mean, they're older, so they're not going to come over and hang out in my apartment, and like, drink with me, you know? I hang out with them as much as I can, as much as makes sense for us to hang out together. And we've been here [in Logan Square] for a long time,

too, I guess. We've established ourselves.

**JM:** So I think that's something that's important, the transience that sort of takes place in young artist's lives. If you're always uprooting and moving somewhere else, that doesn't really give you the opportunity to...establish.

**CM:** Yeah, I think you really do have to ground down and establish yourself to show that you really do want to do something for the neighborhood. It took years for the dudes a couple houses down to like me, 'cause they were not about me for a long time. And I understood, where I was like, yeah, you see people come and go and just flip these houses, and it's young art kids having parties all the time, and you were raised in that house - it's like, yeah, I get it. So once I'd been here after three or four years, they finally kind of started talking to me and hanging out. But I knew that - I was like, "Just give me some time, I'm not doing that stuff, I'm really trying to have a place here." So yeah, establishing yourself somewhere, showing that you're not just gonna be there and then fly out when it's not fun anymore. When it gets tough, when people set your car on fire.

**JM:** Make sure you're not just trashing the place enough to justify a gut rehab. Laughs.

**KG:** Is there anything else that you feel like you learned from your experience in Humboldt Park?

**JM:** Business promises are hard to make.

**CM:** Yeah. We learned a lot for the gallery's sake...

**BH:** I think - and this is partly going back to the point about being conscientious - but being in a situation like that and trying to do something for the community, there really needs to be some kind of element of programming - a lot of time and effort put into trying to work with the community. And for it to be accessible to them financially speaking, which means basically that you're doing it for free or very little money. And that whole system is just very challenging, and I think we had this idea that we wanted to do all this stuff and it's, like, getting grants and there's all these certain roadblocks in place to make that more difficult than it sounds in theory. But, I don't know, having a system where there's some way to have the community involved with it, not just witnessing it. 'Cause I feel like a lot of the younger kids and people in the neighborhood that we met, they wanted to do stuff, but we felt like we had to tell them to, you know, write a proposal and propose a show?...That's very different than, "Come in and make work and we'll show it," you know or, have classes and things like that. And then we all had to work full-time to pay rent, and we had to pay a lot of rent there, and half the time we didn't even have time to be there 'cause we were working just

to pay for the space. So it's this weird kind of ... you're doing it, but then there are just constantly these things that are making it more challenging. And that's not to say that it's not attainable, but that was just a learning experience for me, of seeing the reality of what it takes to do something like that.

**KR:** Also I think just something as simple as, going back to your question about what to do to reach out more and assimilate, is something as simple as putting signage up, like a sign on the door with a schedule and hours and stuff like that, cause a lot of apartment galleries, just a lot of different arts spaces, you wouldn't even know they're in the building. So a sign can go a long way, I think. People walking by start to notice, and then they walk in when they see the sign.

**JM:** Now, those are all really weird and different questions with what's going to happen now that we're in Logan Square. It's a different space altogether.

**KG:** Sure. What do you think will be different?

**CM:** It's gonna be a different vibe altogether, it's going to change up and kinda fit more with our attitude, I think - that's how it feels. We are kinda more DIY - we worked hard, we worked jobs to do the space, we were doing it because we loved it, not because we were trying to make money or

we thought it was, you know, a feasible full-time job or anything. So this kinda fits, I think it gives people a better idea of what we are about, where it's like, "Here's our space, we're gonna have shows and it's not...." That other space had large windows and looked like a really professional space, and we're not necessarily the most professional people, that's part of what part of Peanut Gallery is.

**BH:** And that's not to downplay what we're doing.

**CM:** Yeah, we take what we do very seriously, but we also understand the ridiculousness of art, and, like, "having an arts space." And if you take it too seriously, then it's just another stuffy...arts space. Which is what we really don't want, that was the whole thing, of not wanting to be that. So this place, kinda, I think, can help us do that more, or encapsulates that more. People will get that vibe more, hopefully.

**BH:** It will be interesting too - I'm just thinking in terms of the element of foot traffic we had going by - there was this complaint I heard a lot, like, "Oh, you're never open," and there was this expectation that we should be open all the time and doing all this stuff 'cause we had that space. But it just wasn't possible. Whereas here it just makes more sense that there's not going to be people walking by all the time wondering why the hell we're not open, and they're going to come

here when they know it's time to come here, and see the work, and that'll be different.

**KR:** Yeah, there will be less of that expectation that it actually has to be a business.

**JM:** And we're not a business, we're actually under the non-profit umbrella.

**CM:** Yeah, people didn't seem to get that this isn't our job. We do this 'cause we love it.

**JM:** And I think Drawing Night is gonna be a different beast, too, 'cause this is more like inviting someone into your home and having a social gathering where people are drawing and people are talking, as opposed to at the gallery space, where I think people had the expectations of more of it being like those Drink-n-Draw's that you buy on Groupon, you know? Not everybody, but there were definitely people who thought it was gonna be more like, an instructional... but that's not Drawing Night. Drawing Night is just open... hang time.

**CM:** It's a way to get to show people what you're working on, there's critiques going on, all sorts of conversations going on...

**KR:** Or if you just didn't want to be at home alone, but you didn't want to spend money at a bar, it's a nice thing to do. I liked that aspect, where people could just hang out, they didn't have to work on

something. Yeah, I'm excited about the gallery being way - the exhibition space - being way smaller, because I think that it'll force the artists to think harder about what they put in.

**KG:** Yeah, I'm excited to see what happens here in the next little bit.

**CM:** Yeah, it's gonna be sweet. There's a spare bedroom in there, and that's going to be the gallery. And then this will be split, each of these rooms will be split kinda into two spaces, with partitions.

**JM:** And it's going to continue to be an "enter through the back" sort of a thing.

**KG:** Meet the chickens.

**JM:** You have to meet the chickens. That's a crucial element, that's a crucial part of the journey.

**KR:** I'm excited about having outdoor space, 'cause there wasn't any in the old space and sometimes it's so hard to force yourself to sit in the studio, you know, when it's so nice out and you've got a park right there.

**CM:** And for shows, I feel like people will be more inclined to show up just 'cause you can say, "Oh, it's that house that I can hang out in the yard, and usually there are vegetables everywhere, and plants, and the chickens." So it's, I don't know, it's not as like ... not "stuck up," but not as ... I

don't know, some people, even good friends of mine who just aren't artists, it's really hard to get them to come to the gallery. They don't like going to galleries, they're not used to that feeling of a gallery in a space like the one we had. But they'll come to a spot like this, I know, and hang out, because it's a little more comfortable.

**BH:** I think it will be interesting, too, to see what it's like witnessing people viewing the work, and to see how people interact with the work. When you've got a big space that's all indoors and there's no where really to hang out, it gets packed, you can't see the work...it's this experience of going to galleries that I find frustrating a lot, where you go and it's just this social thing really, and you're not even really looking at the work, and no one's really looking at the work, 'cause they're just talking to each other. So I'm curious to see here if there will be people coming in and having a very focused viewing of the work, and then you just go hang out outside, or in this space.

**KG:** Yeah, I think it's really awesome, this idea of an art gallery that's also a place that people will want to come to, just to hang out. Because I feel like that's pretty rare, most galleries I feel like are actually pretty intimidating in a lot of ways.

**BH:** Yeah, that was kind of always our angle.

**CM:** Yeah, even when we had the space in Wicker

Park, the whole idea was, "Get people to come hang out." That was the main goal. That it can be a place that's not just for "these people," you know, whatever your ideas of a gallery are. It can be a cool spot. I grew up working at a skate shop all my life, and they were really influential in everything that I did, and they used to have a back room that was a café-style room where everyone would meet up and hang out, all the time, all day long. And I always thought that that was something super important to the community, for that group of people, who were the skateboarders in that neighborhood - you met so many people you would have never met, and it was just 'cause they had this tiny little room and everyone would just hang out there, and hangouts, for me, are very, I think they're really important, and they're harder to come by. It's hard to get everyone together in a comfortable place, not just ...

**JM:** ...not just an event space, a series of meetings.

**CM:** My goal is, I want people to just - be coming over. I want to have an open-door policy, where people just come over, and they're here, you know, I wanna come home from work, and just like, fuckin' random people are here. We just want a good hang place where people are excited to come and not feel weird about the gallery...and they can cook food...and they can steal eggs! ■



## Power and the Placemakers

by Krisann Rehbein

As a strategy for increasing livability and spurring economic growth, cities across the United States have pinned their hopes on the so-called creative class. The presence of artists and other broadly defined “creatives” is seen by many civic leaders as a key ingredient in 21st century urban transformation. In cities across the Midwest from Chicago, to Milwaukee, to Detroit, there has been an emphasis on luring young talent and creating festival-like spaces in dense, downtown areas to provide 24/7 entertainment. From artist lofts to micro-apartments, these strategies are part of the 21st century development toolkit.

What happens when people try to apply these strategies to spur development in their own neighborhoods? Can residents impact their community through grassroots creative placemaking?

In South Shore, a neighborhood on the far south-east side of Chicago, residents have rallied around their artists and embraced creative placemaking and all of its techniques but the area is still plagued by scores of vacant storefronts. Sometimes, you can do everything right but not get the outcome you intended. Of course, the playing field is uneven. The story of South Shore points to a few gaps in the creative placemaking narrative.

I had the opportunity to partner with an amazing group of residents and activists from South Shore for three years as they worked to transform their neighborhood, work that continues today. A few years ago, I was running community-based programs for the Chicago Architecture Foundation and created a pilot program to train people to give tours in their neighborhood. Our efforts focused on identifying and celebrating assets and creating tours to improve perceptions of both visitors and residents. In total, we worked with three neighborhoods - South Shore, Bronzeville, and

Chatham - but in South Shore we found the model community partner.

In 2010, after my first meeting with the Executive Director of the South Shore Chamber of Commerce, she pulled together twenty residents and stakeholders to help create the tour. Together, we identified sites of significance, created a route, and trained docents. We created an architectural tour and people came. Relationships were formed through the work of creating our architectural tour. Visions were shared. And many, many projects were spurred as a result.

The tour created a focal point and gave people something to rally around. One of the tour guides organized residents on her block to welcome tourists with hot chocolate, apple juice and homemade baked goods. They clean up their block for tours. They proudly display signs on their porch, hand-crafted by the docent’s husband, that say “It’s a Shore thing”. A sense of community was created.

The tours turned out to be the perfect conduit for channeling the residents’ energy. The focus on architecture and culture offered something concrete with outcomes focused on changing perceptions and celebrating the positive. The

strategy engaged a broad range of homeowners from retired professionals to real estate agents who otherwise might not become involved in community activism.

After coming together around a common, cultural goal, residents continued to work together on many initiatives that fall roughly under the banner of “creative placemaking.” The South Shore Chamber, in partnership with the Chicago Architecture Foundation, launched a vacant storefront art show that ran for three years. In its first year, the show was traditional and basic, with art displayed in vacant shop windows. By its third year, a curator was hired and eleven new, large-scale murals were commissioned for the commercial streets in the area.

In collaboration with the South Shore Chamber, he Black United Fund (BUFI), and the Chicago Public Schools, CAF created a summer internship for local teens to transform a vacant storefront along 71st Street into a tourism center to highlight stories from the community and serve as a launching point for events.

The local Special Service Area, or SSA, sponsored a competition to design a new bike rack which

was then fabricated and installed on the commercial corridors in the neighborhood. A student from a local middle-school had the winning design. I worked to host an event for artists and collectors to discuss the impact of arts on the community.

The docents, energized by their shared vision and momentum, organized several events and activities in the public sphere. A local business owner founded a community “think tank,” hosting salon-style events out of a perfume shop. Other members took over a lot across the street from their already vibrant community garden and planted a hospitality table constructed of floorboards from the gym of the recently demolished brutalist South Shore High School. The table hosts picnics and community planning charrettes, and serves as a hub for a summer gardening program for teenage eco ambassadors.

The community also has support from CAF to bring in more visitors. For three years running, the Chicago Architecture Foundation has featured the community as part of Open House Chicago. Thousands of people have visited the community through the event, and every year, someone purchases a unit in a pre-war co-op as a result of visiting for the first time. Through each of these efforts, perceptions are changed, residents are energized and more positive activity bubbles up.

Artists have been central to this effort. For example, prominent photographer and Ted Senior Fellow, Jon Lowenstein, opened an experimental photography center to show work and gather artists and residents in his South Shore co-op building. He hosted three events in the center’s incubation period. From that, a partnership grew with public art and community engagement project See Potential. Several photographers from the neighborhood have participated. Artist Faheem Majeed worked with the Chamber to get permissions to construct an installation as part of his Shacks and Shanties project. The community started to rally around the role that artists can play in neighborhood transformation.

These efforts have not gone unrecognized. The City of Chicago selected South Shore (along with South Chicago) to be one of four select focus neighborhoods for Chicago Artist Month in 2013. In 2014, South Shore was designated as “neighborhood of the year” by Neighborhoods USA, a national not-for-profit that helps strengthen community organizations.

Yet, the changes that many hoped to see have not completely materialized.

As all the community rallied, more bad news about businesses on the commercial corridors came. Urban Partnership Bank closed. Dominicks closed, and the store on 71st Street remains the only location in the city that has not reopened under new ownership. It sits vacant as a symbol. When it opened, the entire shopping complex was celebrated as a feat of financing and planning set to energize the critical intersection of 71st and Jeffrey. Now that once vibrant intersection is full of vacant buildings.

These vacancies spurred a grassroots call to action. Residents circulated petitions and held public conversations in a local cafe to discuss what kind of grocer they wanted to recruit to South Shore. A group called the Planning Coalition started an outdoor farmer’s market, in collaboration with Real Men Charities and the Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Living. It moved inside for the winter, making South Shore one of only a handful of neighborhoods in the city to have a year-round market.

Other residents created their own tour of 71st street as the neighborhood’s “Main Street” in an effort to call attention to the potential and save the existing building stock. A preservation campaign aimed at saving the iconic Jeffrey Theater building facade formed. The relationships built and skills honed were applied to this effort.

They are winning the battles, but not the war.

Creative Placemaking in South Shore has captured the imagination of the residents and activists, but the city hasn’t caught on. Even with the activities,

and with all the artist involvement, this kind of urban transformation still requires money, the cooperation of property owners, and political leadership. No one with political power is presenting a comprehensive vision for the community. Building owners haven’t warmed to the idea that artists will improve their property values.

Many vacant and derelict buildings that line the commercial corridor are owned by absentee landlords. Residents tell stories of trying to buy or rent buildings with storefronts only to be met with silence, or to find that the buildings’ owners are merely speculating on the property, uninterested in any development that precedes rising property values. In many cases, owners would rather let a building sit boarded up, vacant, and derelict, than rent it to a burgeoning artist.

A vibrant arts scene enhances city life. However, the narrow focus on the role of artists and creatives to transform our cities mask the most crucial components necessary for change: money and power. Artists can’t transform our neighborhoods if no one will let them. ■

# Getting There: Placemaking & Public Transportation

by Kyle Gaffin

Early on in the 1992 preface to her pioneering *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs makes the following remark: “In a kind of shorthand, we can speak of foot people and car people. This book was instantly understood by foot people, both actual and wishful.” By introducing her text in this way, Jacobs draws our attention first of all to a topic that, interestingly, is in some sense peripheral to the subject of place – clearly, what she has in view here is not so much where people go but how they get around. Yet this should not come as too much of a surprise, as the question of place is intrinsically related to that of accessibility. A place means nothing if it is not accessible. This is why a significant portion of the literature on “human-centric” urban planning and the subject of place has as a focus not only the places that we make but also the means by which we get to and from those places. The character of the spaces that we use, occupy and enjoy is important, but so are the networks of mobility and access that exist around them and connect us to them and to one another.

Thus, if we want to think about place, we also need to think about how we get there. This prompts reflection on the systems of transportation this city offers us to get to where we want to go.

Now, the basic thrust of much of this literature on place is the centrality of face-to-face, interpersonal interactions between human beings and the communities that form out of these interactions. In other words, what makes a space a “place” is the fact that it fosters and promotes the development of community. A place is a “place” when it is a place for *people*. And this is why the city is the ultimate site for placemaking, as its density puts people in unavoidable proximity with one another. So if we want to approach the subject of transportation from something like the standpoint of placemaking, then the following question inevitably presents itself: “Which modes of transportation help the development of these interactions, this community-building, and which ones hinder it?”

The comment from Jacobs quoted above sets up an opposition between two basic ways of getting around – one relies on the automobile, while the other prefers a more natural means of transportation, our own two feet. In a sense, then, her thinking about place, the city, and the vitality of urban life began with seeing cars and people as being in some way at odds – let’s not forget that

Jacobs’ work on city life came out of her opposition to Robert Moses’ plans to build an expressway through her neighborhood. In the above quote, then, Jacobs was clearly trying to single out the automobile and the attendant “car culture” as a problem for the city.

Why should we see these two – cars and people – as being in some way opposed to one another? There are, of course, statistics that could be cited on the millions of people who die or are injured each year in traffic accidents. More broadly, however, there is the observation that cars tend to hinder pedestrian activity in general. As a city becomes more automobile-centric, its streets tend to become more and more designed for the machine and less and less welcoming to the person on foot. As traffic volume increases, roads become more dangerous and less available for the development of a vibrant street life. But this is precisely what makes city life so attractive! Streets are the veins and arteries of any city. Knowing that one can simply walk out the door, and, just by going for a stroll, encounter a wide variety of opportunity and human expression is what makes life in the city amazing. A walkable city is a livable, vibrant city.

But there is, I think, a more fundamental reason for seeing the car as a problematic means of transportation, at least as pertains to what we are discussing here. If the attitude of placemaking is essentially community-oriented, then it is fundamentally directed towards the public, towards being deeply involved in the physical and social worlds we share. But the automobile is singular,

as a mode of common transportation, in that it is the only one that is decidedly private. We retain the protection of four walls as we drive around; closed off, we need not address a single human being while travelling. There is a certain degree of distance from our surroundings that exists while driving, and it can tend not only to be isolating, but also to encourage a certain degree of indifference towards those surroundings and the people we would otherwise encounter in them.

On the other hand, pedestrianism and its related modes of transportation – specifically, public transit options and cycling – all move us while keeping us in contact with those with whom we share the city. One is open to the public when getting around in these ways, in a way that simply does not happen when driving a car. There is clearly a more direct encounter with the city and its people when walking and using mass transit are one’s primary means of getting around. Moreover, as the poor and less privileged in our society tend to rely on public transportation to get where they need to go, its use, one hopes, encourages a greater awareness of the social ills and inequalities that exist in the city. This is not to say that, in riding the “L”, all sorts of community-building interactions are happening – for the most part they are not. But what is retained here at least is the necessary condition for these interactions to occur – namely, proximity. Thus, since the automobile tends not only to decrease the walkability of a city, but also to diminish one’s sense for the public, the placemaker’s city is one in which the automobile ought to play a minimal role, and public transportation ought to be a priority.

But why does this matter for *our* city, for Chicago? As the city of the mid-West, it seems that Chicago also occupies a kind of middle ground when it comes to how it moves. Though somewhat dated, a 2009 commuting report put together by the Cen-

sus Bureau shows that the percentage of workers who commute using public transit here in Chicago was a little more than one third of what it was in New York, a city with a huge and intricate system of public transportation that means one can easily get by without a car. On the other hand, transit commuting in Chicago was only about twice what it is in Los Angeles, a city where one needs an automobile to get virtually anywhere, such that a car is basically a necessity for life there.<sup>2</sup> I point this out because I think it illustrates the fact that Chicago is straddling the fence between being a viable transit city and being a car city, and may in fact lean further towards the latter. One can get around the city by using the CTA, but having a car makes it a whole lot easier. It only takes a few miserable experiences of being horribly late for work or an appointment due to long waits for buses or bad transfer luck (of course, this is all the more hateful in the brutal cold of winter) to find the purchase of a car an almost irresistible option. And not only is the CTA bus system unreliable and inefficient, but the “L” rail system serves only portions of the city and always requires a trip downtown to make any transfer. These factors all combine to make travel by CTA a less and less appealing option for many. But the system doesn’t necessarily have to remain as it is, and I think we should be concerned that public transportation becomes a more desirable option, or at least remains a viable one, such that our city does not become more consumed with the car than it already is.

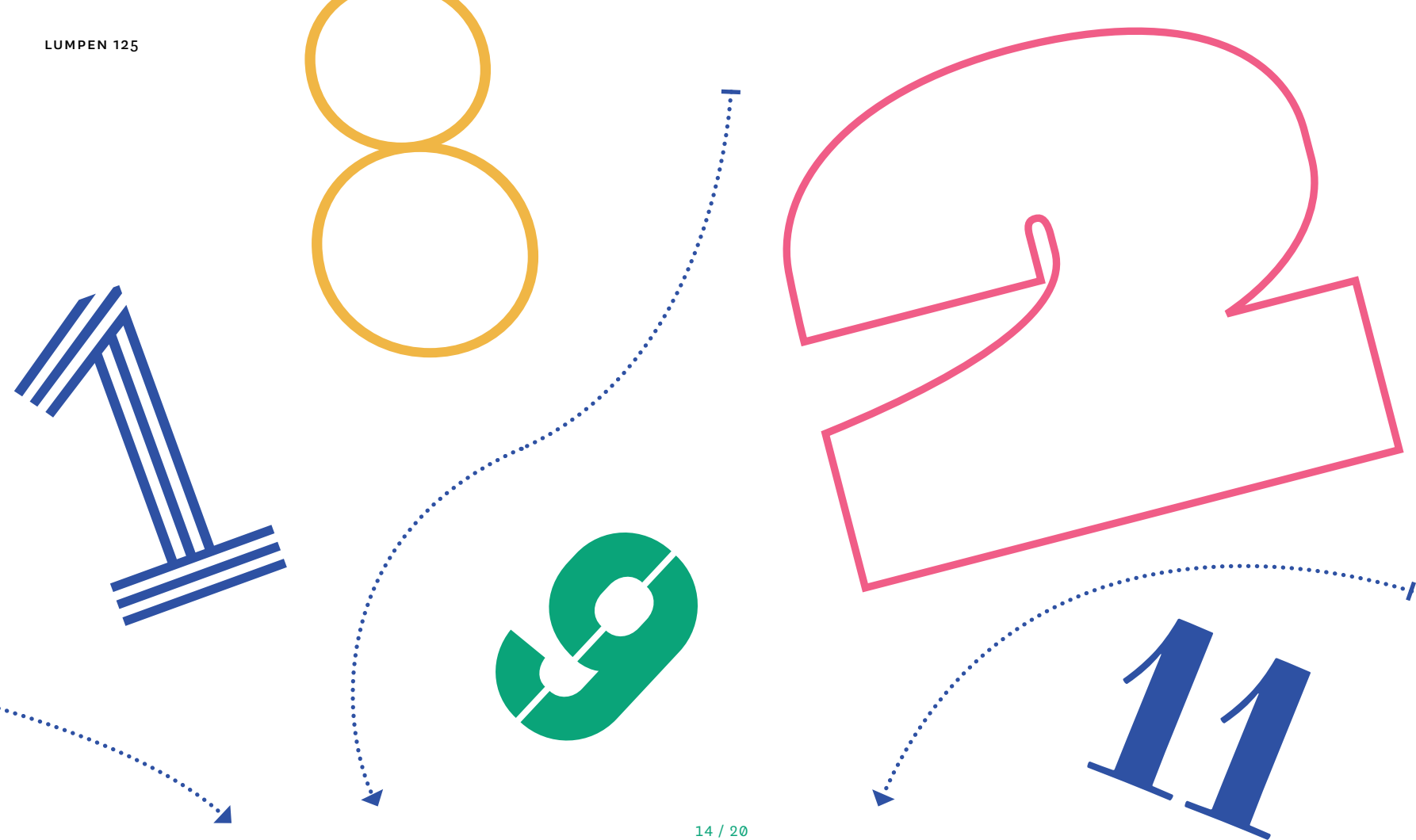
Obviously, this means advocating for an increase in CTA service and maximization in its efficiency. What might that entail? First, increasing “L” service to more parts of the city by putting in more lines and more stops would be an important step in this regard, as that would provide fast, reliable transit to more of the city. There is an issue of spatial justice here as well, as huge portions of the West and South Sides are greatly underserved. Freedom of mobility plays a part in everyone’s being able to exercise an equal right to the city. Second, putting in lines that do not follow the downtown-centric hub-and-spoke model would greatly benefit the system. Not every one needs to go downtown, and I do wonder if the current model may tend to inhibit the growth of areas outside of that central business district. A fuller and more equitable distribution of rail service throughout

the city may stimulate growth in now-underserved areas. Third, putting more buses on the streets in order to decrease wait times seems necessary in order to strengthen that part of the transit system that currently serves most of the city.

This is an important issue at the present moment because our newly elected governor has made clear in his recent budget proposal that public transportation is not a priority for him. Indeed, under the current proposal, regional transit systems would see a reported \$130 million budget cut, with the CTA taking the brunt of that hit, losing some \$105 million. Admittedly, this does represent less than a tenth of the CTA’s budget, but that is still a significant loss that would undoubtedly weaken its operating capacity.<sup>3</sup> And what is particularly discouraging is that this comes at time when it seems that some gains have been made for our public transportation system and other alternative modes of transportation. Whatever one thinks of our current mayor, he has initiated several projects to improve the infrastructure of the CTA and make biking and walking safer.<sup>4</sup> And promising campaigns such as Transit Future, led by the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Active Transportation Alliance, have shown us ways in which an expanded and more efficient transit system might be possible.<sup>5</sup> Let’s hope we don’t lose whatever ground has been gained in seeking systems of transportation that serve the city and its people well, and make for a more livable, vibrant city.

Here is one final thought on placemaking and public transportation. I think those interested in placemaking ought to care about the health of our public transit system for this last reason: that the system itself presents the opportunity for a placemaking project. The “L” is already one of the most iconic elements of our city, and its infrastructure can provide a rich, if unassuming, space for public art interventions, for spontaneous performance, and for civic engagement. It has the potential to become a place, even if we are just using it to get us somewhere else. ■

1. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 50th anniversary ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2011), xxii.
2. Brian McKenzie and Melanie Rapino, “Commuting in the United States: 2009,” United States Census Bureau, September 2011, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acs-15.pdf>
3. Jon Hillekvitch, “CTA, Pace brace for Rauner’s proposed \$130 million cuts,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 February 2015, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-rauner-budget-transit-met-0219-20150218-story.html>
4. John Greenfield, “Other Issues Aside, It Was a Good Election for Transportation,” *Streetsblog Chicago*, 8 April 2015, <http://chi.streetsblog.org/2015/04/08/other-issues-aside-it-was-a-good-election-for-transportation/>
5. [transitfuture.org](http://transitfuture.org)



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# 10 of Chicago's Placemakers...plus one

Here are a few things related to placemaking going on in the city.  
Not by any means an exhaustive list.

by Kyle Gaffin



3

5

11

10

## 001 . Theaster Gates

We could list individually all the many projects and spaces that Gates, one of Chicago's most well known artists, has founded or is involved with, but that would take up quite a bit of space. Gates made his name by taking his fine arts practice and applying it to the remaking of public places, in the name of revitalizing the South Side. He is the founder of the non-profit Rebuild Foundation, which operates the Dorchester Ave Projects and Stony Island Arts Bank, and Director of Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago. The University's Place Lab was also his brainchild.

[THEASTERGATES.COM](http://THEASTERGATES.COM)

## 002 . The Experimental Station

Located at 6100 S Blackstone Ave near Jackson Park, the Experimental Station is committed to building an "independent cultural infrastructure on the South Side of Chicago." The Station runs a bike shop, operates the 61st Farmers Market, and hosts the Invisible Institute, as well as many arts and culture events. Artist Dan Peterman is a founder and director.

[EXPERIMENTALSTATION.ORG](http://EXPERIMENTALSTATION.ORG)

## 003 . Faheem Majeed

Majeed, who directed the South Side Community Arts Center for some time, has developed a body of work incorporating elements of creative placemaking that focuses on how communities are developed and how spaces become meaningful to those communities. Some important projects are his Floating Museum, with Jeremiah Hulsebos-Spofford, and Shacks & Shanties. He's got a show up at the MCA until August 16.

[FAHEEMMAJEED.COM](http://FAHEEMMAJEED.COM)

## 04 . NeighborSpace

NeighborSpace is a non-profit urban land trust in Chicago (the only one, in fact) that helps neighborhoods sustain the life of their community gardens. They provide support services such as insurance, water access, and protection for potential development. Also check out the related Chicago Community Gardeners Association.

[NEIGHBOR-SPACE.ORG](http://NEIGHBOR-SPACE.ORG) / [CHICAGOCOMMUNITYGARDENS.ORG](http://CHICAGOCOMMUNITYGARDENS.ORG)

## 05 . Chicago Public Art Group

The CPAG works to connect artists with urban planners, architects, and communities to bring art to public places. It began as the Chicago Mural Group in 1971 and has since expanded from there, bringing murals, mosaics, and sculpture to the public life of the city. The CPAG places an emphasis on community involvement in the projects they support.

[CPAG.NET](http://CPAG.NET)

## 06 . 96 Acres

The force behind this project is Maria Gaspar who was named last year's Chicagoan of the Year for art. From the project's website: "96 Acres is a series of community-engaged, site-responsive art projects that address the impact of the Cook County Jail on Chicago's West Side. We aim to generate alternative narratives reflecting on power, and to present creative projects that reflect the community's vision of transformation."

[96ACRES.ORG](http://96ACRES.ORG)

## 07 . Chicago Loop Alliance

This is the organization behind Pop-up Art Loop and Activate, two programs in which artists take over streets and spaces downtown for temporary art interventions. The CLA also commissions public art projects downtown and runs programming in various spaces downtown, such as Pritzker Park.

[LOOPCHICAGO.COM](http://LOOPCHICAGO.COM)

## 08 . Chicago's Critical Mass

Perhaps not a placemaking project per se, Chicago's Critical Mass is a large bike event occurring on a monthly basis that aims to highlight the presence of cycling in the city as an alternative means of transportation. They publish a zine! The Derailleur.

[WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/CHICAGOCRITICALMASS](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/CHICAGOCRITICALMASS)

## 09 . Jane's Walk Chicago

From the organization's national website: "Jane's Walk is a movement of free, citizen-led walking tours inspired by Jane Jacobs. The walks get people to tell stories about their communities, explore their cities, and connect with neighbors." The Chicago chapter has been operating since 2013 leading tours throughout the city.

[JANESWALKCHICAGO.NET](http://JANESWALKCHICAGO.NET)

## 010 . The 606

This is the city's newest public space project, just recently unveiled. An old elevated train line was turned into a park and trail space that stretches along Bloomingdale Ave, between Ashland and Ridgeway. The reworking of a disused remnant of the city's industrial past into open green space for public use is great for the Northwest side, we're just not entirely sure in what ways. Undoubtedly, it will prove to be a realtor's wet dream.

[THE606.ORG](http://THE606.ORG)

## 011 . And then ...

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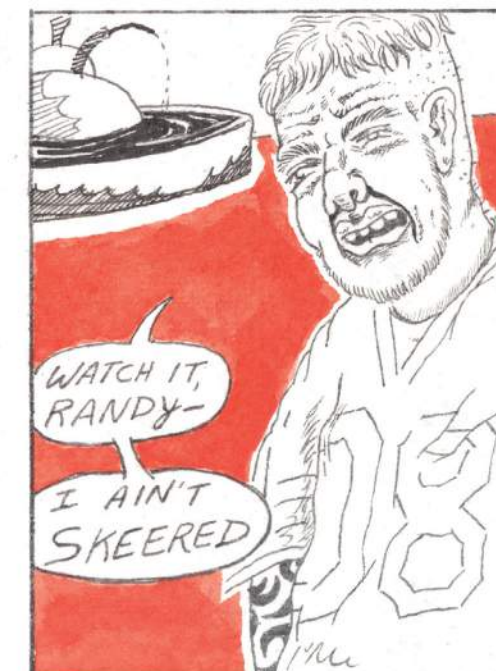
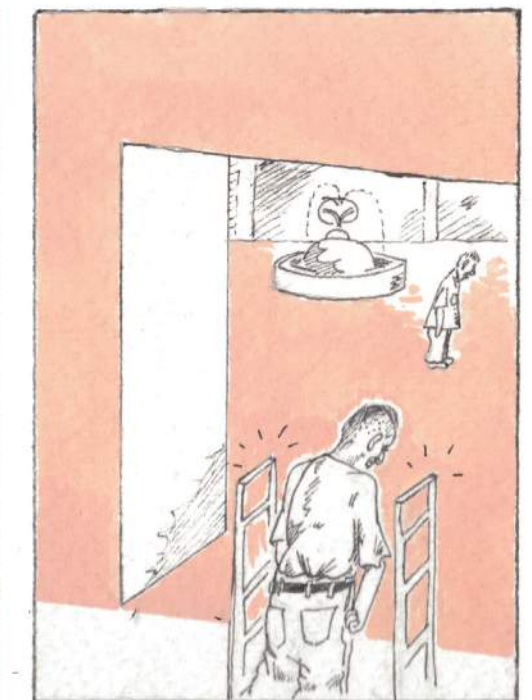
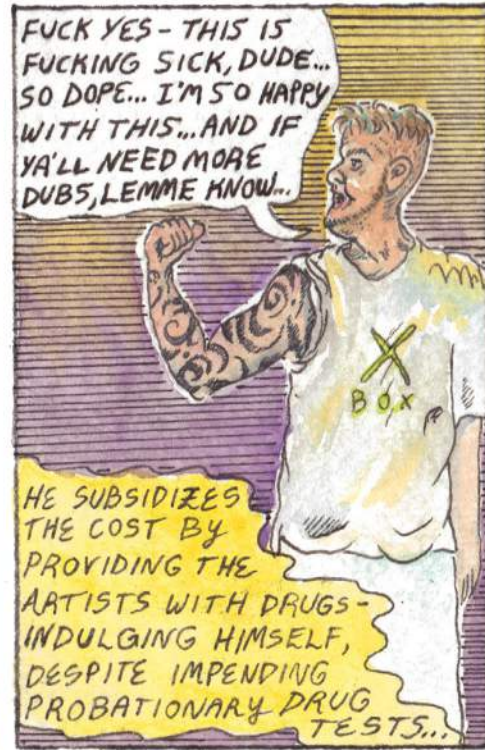
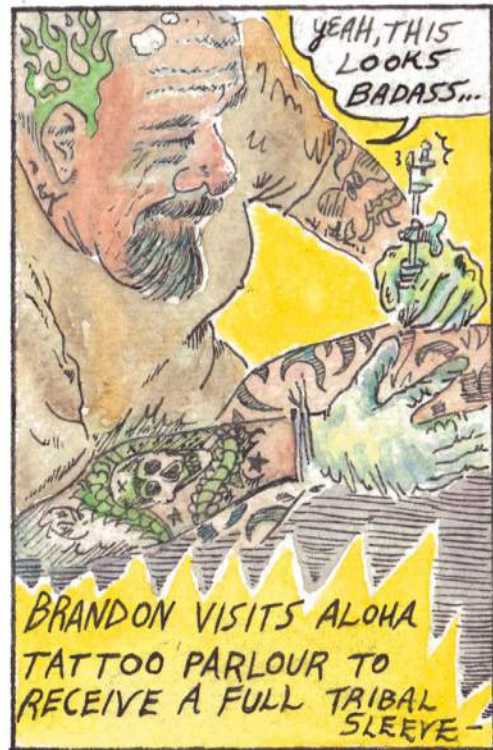
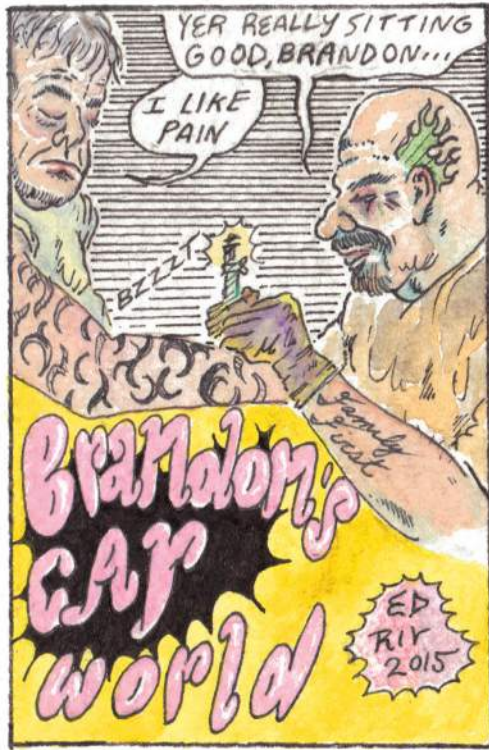
pale wheat ale with rooibos tea



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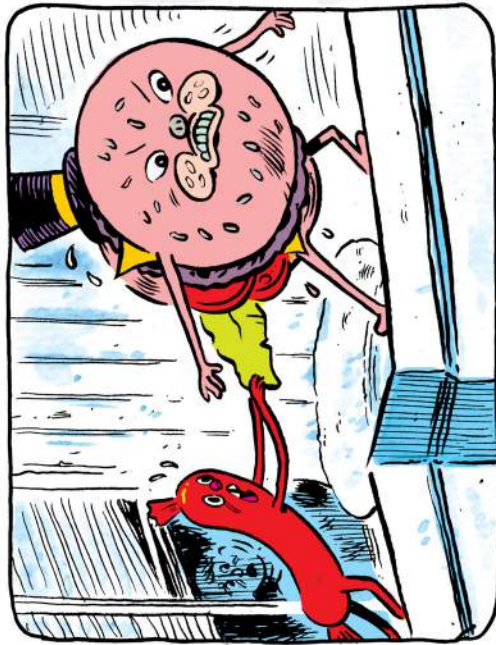




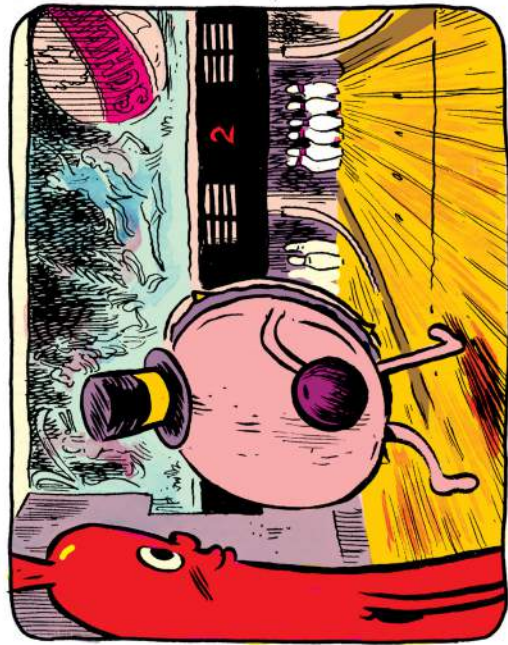


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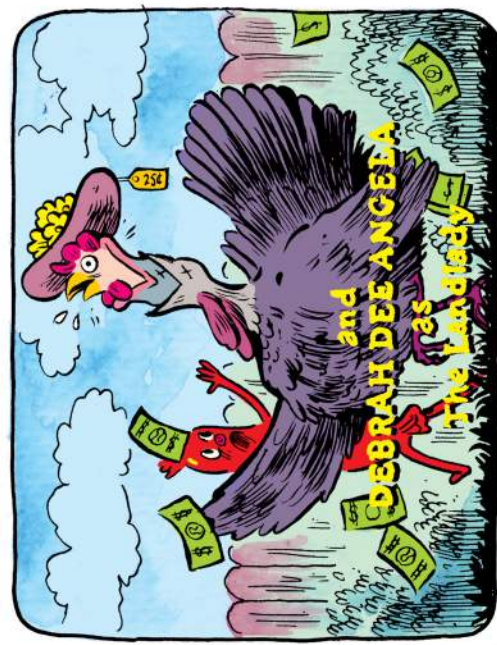




And let some chump shoulder all the blame!



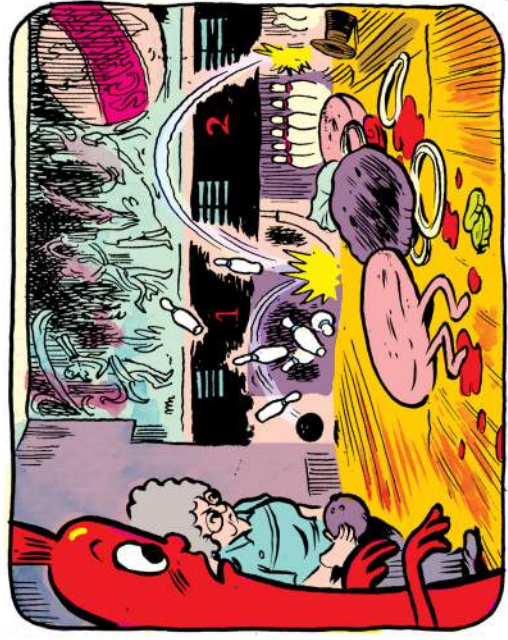
When your back is against the griddle



Let them all see who's laughin' last!



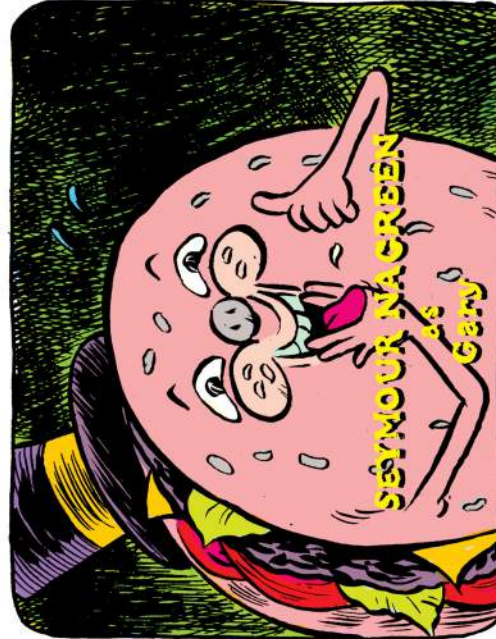
Slow down! Duh-duh-dumb!



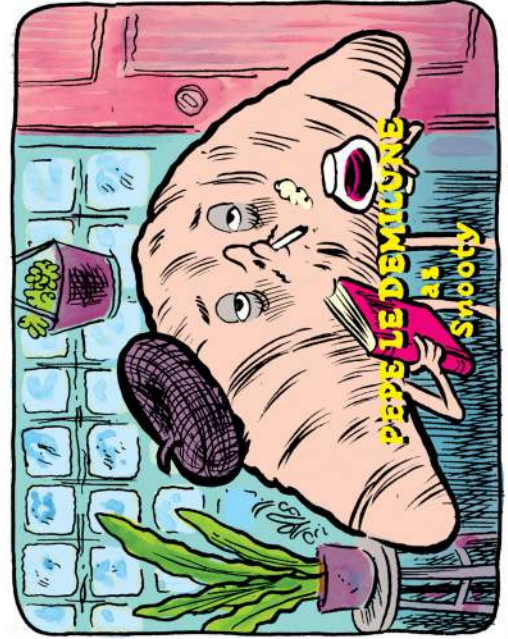
Stay focused and forget the past!



Duh-duh-dumb!



Life's too short! Duh-duh-dumb!



Call to arms and go out guns blazin'!



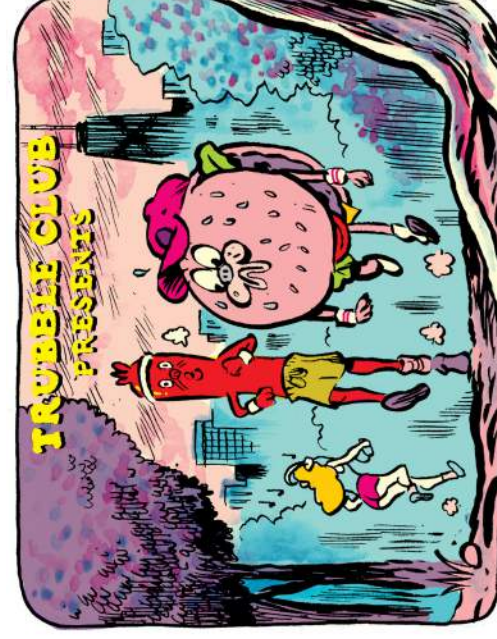
Life's too short!



You gotta put'cher best foot forward!



Right in front of the other guy!



Man up! C'mon, get a grip on things!



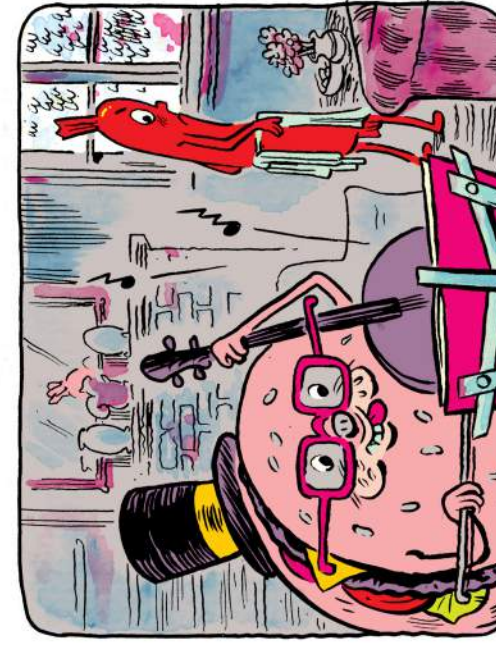
Shove it right in their stupid eyes!



Slow down! Duh-duh-dumb!



Duh-duh-dumb!



Why don'tcha stop and smell the roses?



While the world is engulfed in flames?



Chin up man! Look on the brighter side!



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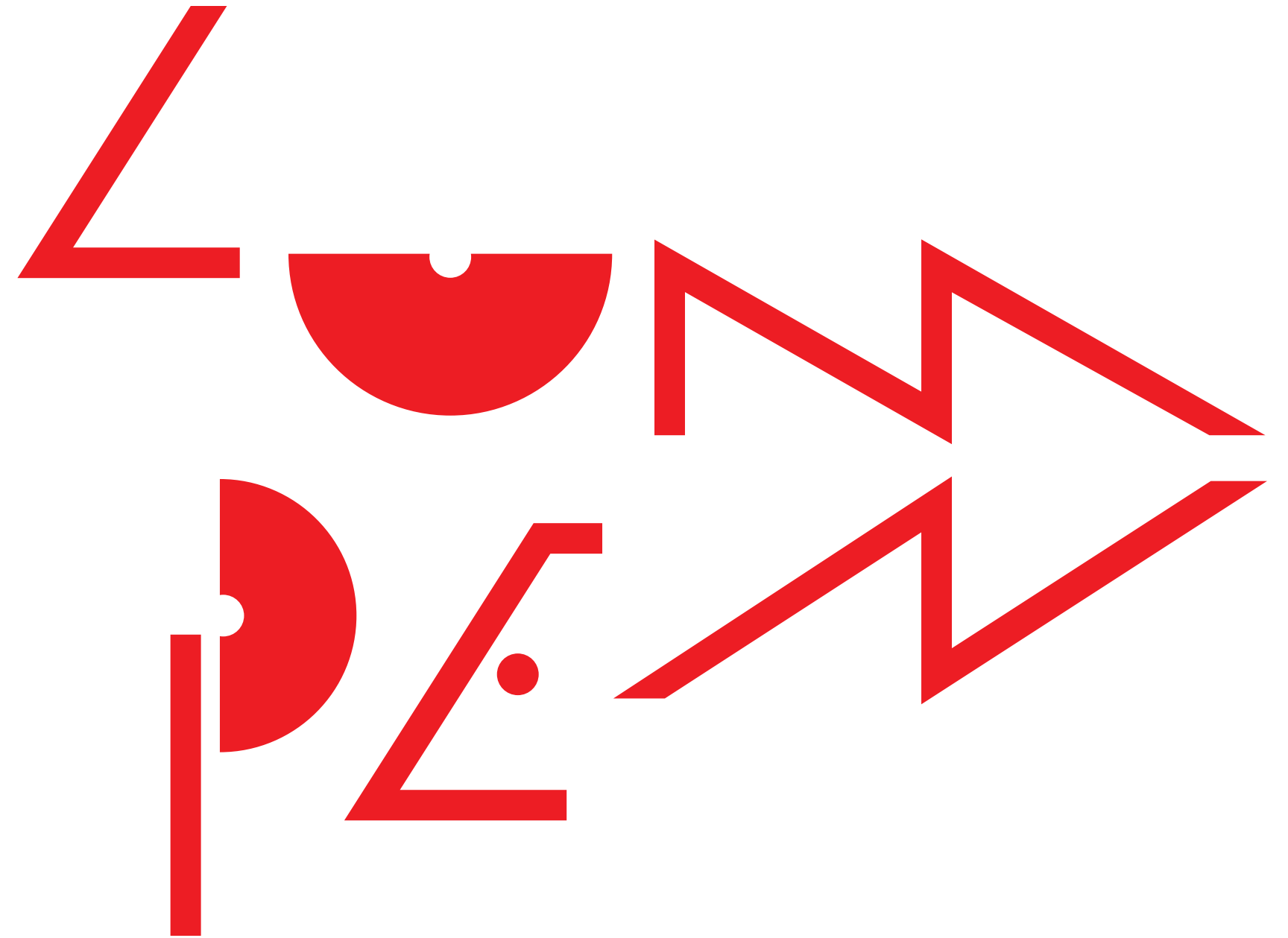
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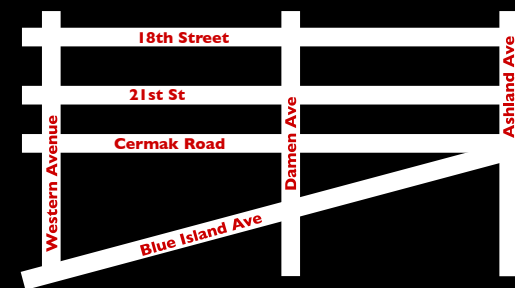


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| <b>Cobalt Studio</b><br>1950 W 21st St                | <b>HUSart Design Collective</b><br>1800 W 21st St        |
| <b>Hector Duarte Studio</b><br>1900 W Cullerton       | <b>The Barrel, Chicago</b><br>2015 S Damen Ave           |
| <b>Colibri Studio &amp; Gallery</b><br>2032 W 18th St | <b>Diez y Ocho</b><br>2000 W 18th St                     |
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| <b>Pilsen Art House</b><br>1756 W 19th St             |  |



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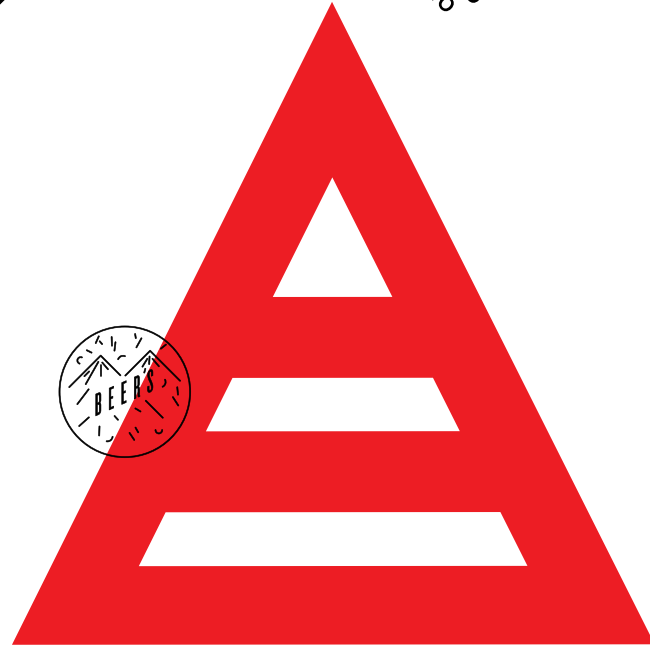
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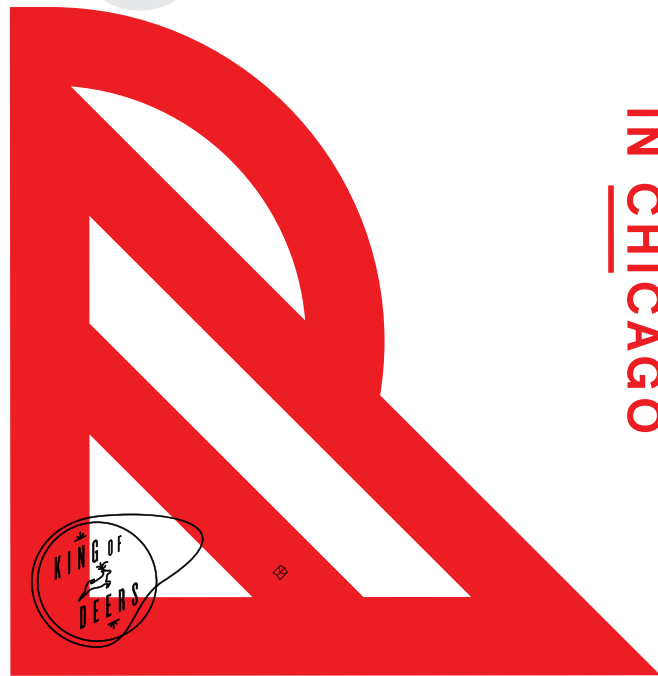
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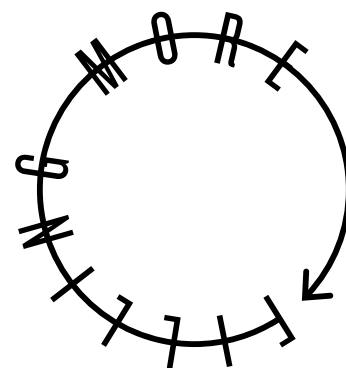
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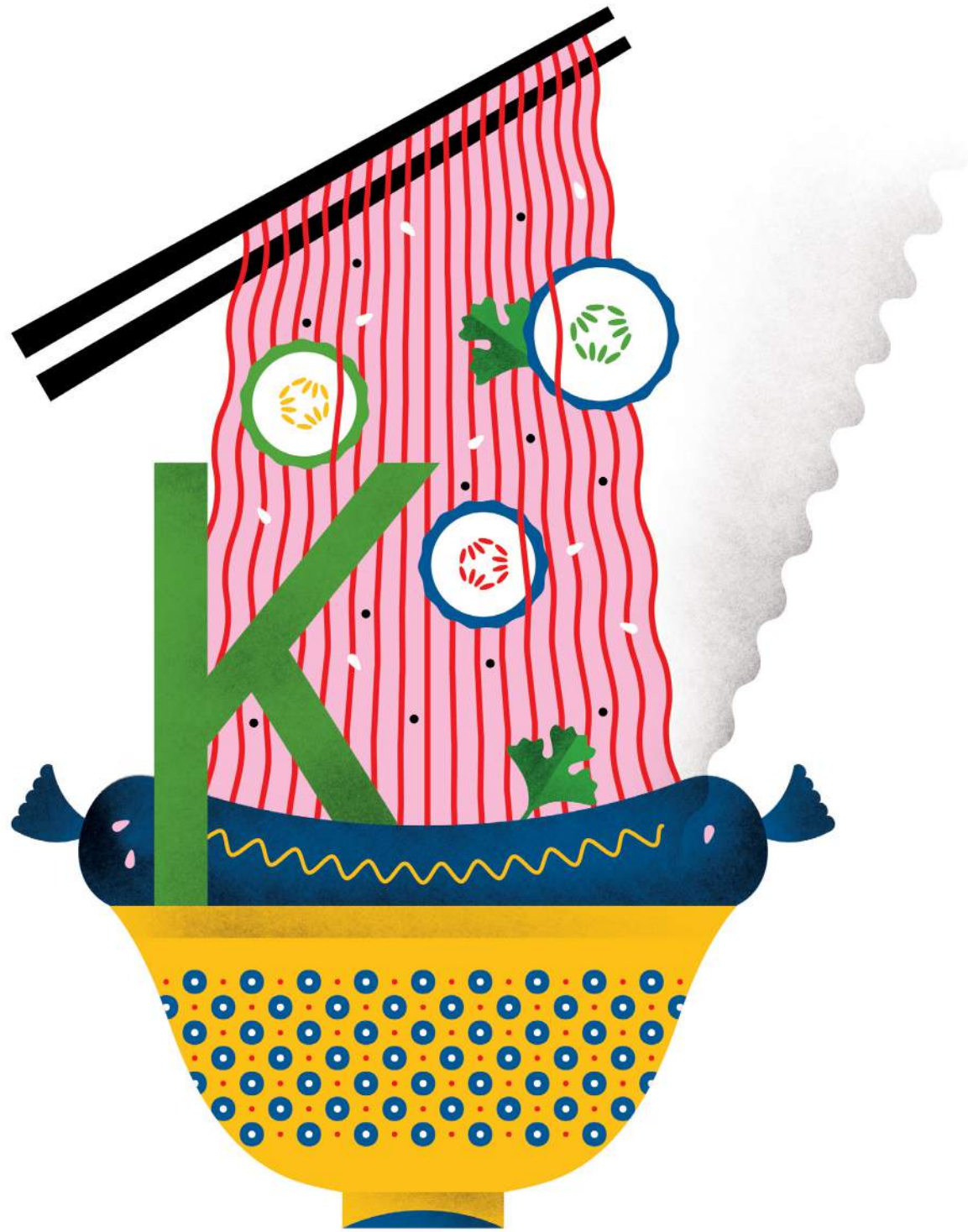
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