Redeveloping Remains: Encounters with Middletown’s City-As-Archive

by

Louisa McFadden Winchell
Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of the Environment and with Departmental Honors in English

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2018
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction 1

1. Outtimely Matter: Filling in the Southmayd House 8

2. Reappearing Remains: Caring for the Legacy of Redevelopment Activists 37

3. People and Parking Lots: Unbundling the Automobile Landscape 63

Works Cited 94

Works Consulted 99

Figures 100
Acknowledgements

I am grateful first to my advisor, Courtney Weiss Smith, who has devoted hours every week for the past year reading and editing my emerging drafts, searching for new theoretical sources on my behalf, and talking me through my various encounters with Middletown’s redevelopment archives. I am grateful also to Debby Shapiro, who has tethered me to Middletown’s present and past and who has pointed me to many archival sources in and out of the Historical Society. Thank you to Leith Johnson for meeting with me at every major stage of my research process and for directing me to the city and state’s various archives, and to Debra and Nancy for helping me decipher the legislative materials of the CT State Library. Thank you to those who taught me to think and write in ways I have foregrounded in this thesis: Professors Lois Brown, Stephanie Weiner, Lisa Cohen, Shellae Versey, and Kim Diver.

Thank you to everyone who spoke with me about this project or pointed me toward someone else – Jessie Cohen, Catherine Johnson, Jennifer Alexander, Jan Cunningham, Janie Aiken, Claudia Center, Gerry Daley, Joseph Siry, Pete Bozzo, Marguerite Nguyen, Stéphanie Ponsavady, Nancy Shapiro, Allen Ramsey, William Pinch, Jesse Nasta, Grady Faulkner, Barry Chernoff, Valerie Marinelli, Bill Vasiliou, Michael Cubeta, Rob Rosenthal, to everyone I have bothered at the Town Hall’s various offices, and numerous others. Thank you especially to those who shared their personal experiences of the redeveloping city – Isabelle Bozzo, Alberta Scruggs, Reverend Earlene Grant, Evelyn Farbman, Betsy Morgan, Jim Pestana, Stephen Dyson, Bob Cubeta, and Mark Masselli.

Thank you to Matt for working with me on the first version of this project and for answering all of my last minute calls this month. Thank you to Josephine for being my companion this year, for measuring the Southmayd House and making its floor plan, and for so carefully reading and listening to my various drafts. Thank you finally to Peter and Lily for taking the time to read this thesis in its entirety, for catching its many typos, and for offering your thoughtful feedback. Thank you Liz, Ruby, Mariel, and Sophie for talking with me and not talking with me about this project.

This thesis is for all of Middletown’s archival caretakers – many of whom appear in these pages, and many who don’t.
Introduction

This project began when a box of aerial photos taken sometime in the 1920s was found in a closet of Middletown, Connecticut’s City Hall Municipal Building. (Figure 1). In a GIS class at the time, I was assigned the task of digitally stitching a collection of these images together, covering a mile-long segment of the city’s downtown area. The process included clicking a point on a particular photo, and then identifying and clicking the same point on a satellite map of the present day. It was a grueling job, full of accidental clicks, misplaced points, and warped images. But once I got the hang of it, to my delight, the downtown of the twenties began to materialize on the screen. As I moved from the historic overhead to the contemporary one, I could see that, although the urban fabric was held together by many of the same streets, a highway had appeared between Main Street and the river, and the interior of each waterfront block had changed dramatically. Rows and rows of houses had been replaced by longer, more contiguous buildings framing rectangular planes of asphalt.

Redevelopment – destroying, disguising, rehabilitating, preserving, reconfiguring, and constructing the materials of the city – left a number of archives in its wake. I have spent this past year digging in these archives, trying to feel them around their edges, to open them up, and to imagine how, by what acts, they have come into their present configurations. In my search for what I call the remains of the
redevelopment, I first found the documentary record left in the city’s traditional archives: the Middlesex Historical Society, the Middletown Room of the Russell Library, and Wesleyan University’s Archives and Special Collections. The redevelopment archive held in the Historical Society, a colonial building preserved during the redevelopment, includes fourteen boxes of newspaper clippings, meeting minutes, housing appraisal records, and photographs received when the Redevelopment Commission folded in 1984. Four of these boxes carry three decades worth of daily newspaper clippings pertaining to the redevelopment that were cut out and glued, by hand, onto white sheets of paper.

Many of the stories I draw attention to here come from these boxes. Nevertheless, as numerous city residents informed me, when a story I found in the paper misaligned with their recollections, “the newspaper didn’t know anything more – about preservation, about community action – than you do!” Furthermore, many of the articles I cite here were written by a single author: Sherman Beinhorn, who was chair of the Redevelopment Agency’s Housing Commission in the late sixties and likely had personal and political reasons to include, and exclude, information from his writing. As Jacques Derrida suggests in *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*, there is “no archive without outside” – no archive without exclusions (Derrida 11). An investigation of the documentary archive, therefore, must involve an interrogation of its singular form, an interrogation that shakes apart its limits, borders, and distinctions (5). The documentary archive of the redevelopment was not only shaped by one news reporter or one archivist, but by every person, object, and technology that brought it into and kept it in material form. Librarians, researchers, and volunteers have marked
these archives with many impressions, which are in their own right archival. In turn, I have confronted every object of the documentary archive as if it points outward, to remains not enclosed, which remain elsewhere, or which remain differently.

As I made contact with the city landscape that emerged from the redevelopment – the most obvious “outside” of the documentary archive – I found its materials bound by similar limitations to those I found inside the documentary archive. The houses, parking lots, and shopping strips that filled the downtown area took the place of and could only gesture toward the materials that had been taken off the landscape, and which were otherwise rendered invisible. As a result, I had to be creative as I retraced the stories, objects, people, and agencies of the redeveloping city. I had to redefine what the city-as-archive was, challenge its temporality, physicality, and singularity, and conceive of new ways to make contact with it.

The title of this thesis, “Redeveloping Remains,” points to its two major concerns. First, I encounter three sets of archival remains from the redevelopment period. I decipher what they say and what they are made of. Second, I interrogate these remains, each of which poses the questions: what counts as an archive? Who or what gets to decide? How do people and things, matter and agency construct, appear in, and operate within the city’s various remains? As such, I “redevelop” what “remains” can be, allowing me new points of access to them. The redevelopment archive, I determine, includes matter that was rendered out of the documentary archive. It holds, also, the acts of the redevelopment that remained not as matter but as echoes, reappearances, and engagements. Lastly, I discover the city’s material remains as networks of hybrid, interconnected actors.
I turn now to the story of the documentary record. For the first half of the twentieth century, the waterfront neighborhoods lining the space between the river and Main Street were inhabited mainly by working-class European immigrant and African American individuals and families, many of whom had come to Middletown to work in the city’s manufacturing factories and brownstone quarries. In the early 1950s, the state paved Route 9 along the contour of the river, demolishing a portion of the residential area and slicing the remainder from the riverbank. From then into the 1980s, Middletown, like many of the nation’s cities, acquired a number of federal grants from the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949 to undertake rigorous redevelopment projects focused on the downtown area, the emerging “Central Business District.”

The chapters of this thesis orbit around two redevelopment projects in particular, which together displaced over a thousand people: the Center Street Redevelopment Project of 1954 to 1965, which merged the two blocks from Court Street to College Street into one, and the Metro South Redevelopment Project of 1965 to 1984, which spilled southward and westward from the borders of its predecessor, crossing Main Street and altering a more expansive section of the city’s downtown.

My first chapter explores the relationship between material agency and human agency in the colonial Southmayd House, which had, up until the city’s second redevelopment project, served as a home for centuries of city residents. In the mid-1970s, when the house was slated for demolition, the city’s newly formed Greater Middletown Preservation Trust identified the house as a valuable relic from the colonial era, picked it up from its position in the redevelopment zone, and moved it across the street where it was restored to its “authentic” colonial version. Around the
same time, Wesleyan archaeology professor Stephen Dyson conducted excavations of the house’s colonial materials, which were stored in Wesleyan’s Archaeology Collections.

In this chapter, I argue that human agents manipulated the matter of the Southmayd House and the archaeological remains unearthed around it to produce a progressive conception of time, a conception that was ultimately undercut by the agency of the matter in question, matter that invariably revealed its position in this temporal construction. Remains, understood here as singular and nonhuman, and agents, understood as singular and human, exerted agency upon one another, resulting in a house that was manipulated into an “authentic” colonial structure, and a set of archaeological objects that were reassembled to tell the story of a singular colonial family. Once marked “obsolete,” however, these objects undercut the progression of time they were enlisted to support, asserting their own untimeliness. Even so, the untimely remains could only hearken to traces of past materials – materials that were removed from the house, written out of time, and which appeared only partially, in flickers.

In my second chapter, I determine that documentary and material remains only partially record the agency of two redevelopment activists: Idella Howell and Reba Moses, who were advocates of the city’s South End neighborhood, a primarily black community targeted during the city’s second redevelopment project. These women, I find, marked archives of many kinds, which disclose and disguise the actors who left an imprint. Moses and Howell’s legacy of activism, advocacy and community service remains not only in matter and text, but in reappearances,
fragments, oral and embodied memories. As a result, I invert textual and physical remains as I do in my first chapter, foregrounding the negative space that surrounds them. In this case, however, I look not for lost matter but for the human agency that brought the pre-archived event, the event of documentation, and the archival encounter into being. I argue that acts of archival care continue to conjure, alter, and re-member agency-as-remains. Remains, I argue, exist as agency, agency as remains.

In my final chapter, I turn back to the city’s first redevelopment project, the Center Street Project, which replaced a two-block neighborhood with a Sears and a parking garage. Today, the crumbling Parking Arcade is slated for demolition and will soon be replaced by a new garage. As the structure falls apart and a number of human and nonhuman actors swarm around it, fixing it, reacting to its limitations, planning for its destruction, I turn back to the moment of its creation. These two moments of assemblage and disassemblage show that the garage is composed of and embedded within a network of players. When I open up the redevelopment archive of the Parking Arcade, it reveals even more unique compositions of human and nonhuman actors, each composed of their own set of infinitely nested actors that reveal themselves as they engage with material forms. These actors participated in marking the neighborhood that preceded the garage as “blighted” as they transformed the urban landscape to accommodate the automobile.

Although the actors of the Parking Arcade and the redeveloping city were varied and complexly intertwined, they each carried distinct logics that contributed toward the change occurring on the landscape. A traffic circulation “loop road” plan that was never implemented absorbed layers of actors that could have propelled it into
materiality: actors carrying distinct aims that together morphed into a warped, amorphous disregard for human beings who did not contribute to the automobility system. The rhetoric of the redevelopment plan was also an actor of its own, which pointed toward the myths of “human” and “nonhuman” essentiality and agent singularity so crucial to propelling the redevelopment forward. Throughout, I work to untangle the seemingly complete entity of the documentary redevelopment archive, composed by its own set of players. Instead, my archive becomes the actor traces that shaped the present matter on the landscape and the record of the redevelopment, traces that come in and out of focus.

Over the past year of writing and researching, I have walked through parking lots, houses, cemeteries, and archives and spoken to a number of Middletown’s community members who had varying stakes in, relationships to, and memories of the redevelopment. Nevertheless, new voices and objects arose often and unexpectedly, threatening or affirming my arguments, spinning my project into new directions. Still, there are so many people I have not spoken to and sites I have not encountered. It is with extreme hesitation that I leave the archives behind and offer this thesis as my yearlong engagement with the redevelopment’s remains at and not at my disposal. It is my hope that its theories and stories get picked up, unraveled, and reshaped in future investigations of this period in Middletown’s history.
1. Outtimely Matter: Filling in the Southmayd House

The Southmayd House is a beige, two-story, wood-paneled colonial structure on Main Street in Middletown, Connecticut. (Figure 2). Originally built in 1747 and restored to its original version in 1977, it has gridded windowpanes arranged neatly around a small brownstone stoop leading to a dark green door. On either side of the top stair, there are two pillars, each about six inches in diameter, holding up an angular archway garnished with trapezoidal pieces of wood. A light bulb hangs from a wire over the doorway, and directly above, a center chimney pokes out of the black roof. A narrow green lawn unravels before the house, holding a white picket fence and an ovular sign that hangs from a wooden frame. The sign reads, *Jozus, Milardo & Thomasson Attorneys at Law*. A stillness hangs over the structure. The whole image looks like it could be sliced perfectly, symmetrically, in half.

I start with the house as it is now, just a fifteen-minute walk from Wesleyan University’s college campus. For the first couple years I lived in Middletown as a student, I don’t think I noticed it. Few people seem to. Nowadays, I stand beneath the west-facing windows of the city’s Inn, placed right across the street. I watch the people passing along the wide sidewalk: a couple immersed in a heated discussion, a woman climbing into her white SUV, parked at one of the city’s infinite meters.
Sometimes, they glance up for a moment, but they never stop. And why would they? People grow accustomed to odd, untimely protrusions on the city landscape.

The Southmayd House has stood on Main Street since it was wheeled over from its original site a block away one Wednesday afternoon in June. To the great dissatisfaction of Middletown’s drivers, the house-moving process was “torturously slow” (Beinhorn, “Old House”). In several grainy black and white photos from the local newspaper, a collection of people stand, sit, and squat around the structure, which looks as though it is hovering over Main Street. (Figure 3). The house, in these images, is nearly stripped of paint. There are no pillars, no trapezoidal garnishes, no gridded windowpanes, and no chimney. In one photo, the back wall of the house has been stripped away, revealing its fleshy interior. In another, the ground gapes open in the foreground, lined somewhat haphazardly with a foundation of wood panels in preparation for the house’s arrival. Just behind the structure, the viewer can see the barren lot where the house stood that morning, and for the 230 years prior. (Figure 4).

The move happened in the midst of Middletown’s lengthy Metro South Redevelopment Project, which sought to revitalize the downtown area by replacing five blocks of residential housing with a modern shopping district and abundant parking lots. By the mid-1970s, the city had already spent a tedious decade negotiating with multiple developers and citizens groups, trying to implement the changes it had first conceived of years before. The Southmayd House, then at 87 William Street was purchased from its last owner, Patricia Geores, in 1975, along with all the buildings that surrounded it.
Fearful of redevelopment’s impending destruction of the city’s historic structures, a group of Wesleyan professors and Middletown residents created the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust. Developer John Reynolds, the Trust’s founder and driving force, made it his mission to place the Southmayd House and two other colonial structures side by side on Main Street. In the summer of 1977, Reynolds moved the house and assembled the new historic district, which, he hoped, would keep Middletown’s past alive upon the city landscape. In order to afford its restoration, which he paid for largely out of pocket, Reynolds sold the house as office space to a plastic surgeon and a law firm. That same summer, before and after the house’s move, Wesleyan Professor Stephen Dyson conducted an archaeological dig of the house premises, unveiling material evidence of the city’s Southmayd family. During the excavations, Dyson and his students found a number of materials deemed relevant to the time period of interest – the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries – which they organized and preserved in Wesleyan’s Archaeology Collections, where they remain today (De Armond 15). Meanwhile, the Redevelopment Agency pressed forward on its demolition and reconstruction plans. The residential block that once held the Southmayd House was built over with a drug store, parking lot, and hi-rise condominium building.

The house and its land were preserved and excavated precisely because they were determined to be sites of the past. In fact, many of the details I have been able to acquire about the Southmayd House’s early history were compiled in documents produced by the Preservation Trust, Professor Dyson, or Wesleyan’s archaeology students – all held in the city’s traditional archives. The period of redevelopment
brought the colonial history of the house back into the public imagination and onto
the city’s record. But the more I meditate on the city’s attention to and revival of the
Southmayd House during the redevelopment period, the more peculiar it becomes.
The house and its materials were allegedly used to reveal and reinforce the city’s
“history.” Nevertheless, the matter of the house – that which survives in the
traditional archive and that which does not – reveals a much more complex, untimely
story.

According to the preservation and archaeological documents I have found, sea
captain William Southmayd built his home in 1747 on the south side of William
Street. He had purchased the land almost twenty years before, thirty years after
English colonialists had first settled in Middletown (Reynolds 2). He married
Mehitable Dwight in 1727, and together they had six children, Anna, Allyn, William,
Giles, Partridge Samuel, and Timothy. Southmayd died before the house was
constructed, so his widow had to pay for its completion with funds from his estate.
Around 1800 the house was changed to reflect a Federal Style: the front exterior of
the house was adjusted to fit five windows, and the columned entrance porch was
added, along with two one-story back wings (4).

Three generations of the Southmayd family lived in the house until 1825,
when it was sold to rising Middletown manufacturer Lot D. Vansand (De Armond
15). In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Middletown was a thriving shipping port,
and many families built their houses and earned their fortunes on the city’s
waterfront. The Southmayds were a mercantile family, so they were likely of a lower
class than some of their neighbors. Nonetheless, they feature prominently in
Middletown’s historic records for over two centuries. By the redevelopment period, the Southmayds – and their house – were perceived as an essential part of the city’s auspicious origin story.

By the early twentieth century, when Vansand bought the house, the city had turned toward a manufacturing economy and the waterfront neighborhood had grown increasingly polluted. Wealthier families moved away from the river and up the hill, closer to Wesleyan University. Meanwhile, working-class immigrant and African American families who came to Middletown to work in the manufacturing industry began living in the houses by the waterfront (Dyson, Material Culture 362). Italian and Polish immigrants inhabited the William Street houses throughout the twentieth century as the neighborhood steadily declined in property value (Bozzo). (Figures 5, 6).

The house history left by the preservation and excavation documentary sources stops here. In April of 1975, Patricia A. Geores of the Cubeta family sold the house to the City of Middletown, and in June of 1977, the house, previously composed of four residential units, was “stripped to a shell” and moved to Main Street. Shortly thereafter, its southwest wing was moved and reattached, but the “unsalvageable” northwest wing had to be reconstructed at the Main Street site. The exterior and main rooms of the interior were then restored to their “approximate condition at a time just after the Federal Style alterations were incorporated into its front façade” and the house was protected under an architectural covenant in the deed (Reynolds 5). This house, according to the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust’s Survey of Historical and Architectural Resources published in 1979, was “a unique
survival from the colonial period,” and a “major contributor to the redevelopment-improvement of the south end of Main Street” (Greater Middletown 161-162). It was used by the city and the Preservation Trust to demonstrate that “a structure worthy of preservation may be saved as a reminder of our heritage, while at the same time continuing to have a useful economic life” (Reynolds 7). Today, the house continues to be used as office space, though it is currently for sale by its present owners, a law firm.

Using excavation reports, preservation records, newspaper articles, city planning documents, directories, maps, and photographs from the redevelopment period, I explore the simultaneous processes of the redevelopment, the preservation movement, and the archaeological excavation of the Southmayd House. These three interconnected processes, all operating upon the house and its materials, reconfigured the landscape of the city in order to construct a progressive conception of time. This production reinforced a singular history centered upon the colonial Southmayd family: a history that wrote a vast number of Middletown’s immigrant citizens and house residents out.

In his book *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, materialist scholar Jonathan Gil Harris argues that current studies of material culture – engaging with objects as textual, storied beings – neglect to account for conceptions of time in their analyses. Objects are treated as if they are part of one moment of time; nevertheless, he presses, an object never occupies a singular moment but is instead shaped by several times. “It is perhaps time” then, Harris asserts, “to question the notion of time, particularly when it is applied to material culture” (2). What, he asks, “is the time of
the thing?” (2). In an attempt to answer his own questions, Harris coins the term “untimely matter,” matter composed of objects that are marked by many times and produce many conceptions of time – objects that are out of time with themselves (4). Harris thinks of objects as both polychronic and multitemporal. An object’s polychronicity refers to the way it occupies several distinct periods of time, while its multitemporality denotes the ways in which it is physically and imaginatively reworked to construct a particular organization of time (13). Polytemporal and multitemporal analyses confront the ways matter is manipulated to produce conceptions of time as well as the ways matter – “untimely matter” – resists these same conceptions. Matter, conceived of in this way, is an agent of time.

While Harris focuses his analysis on textual bodies found in the time of Shakespeare, I find his term useful in my investigations of Middletown’s period of redevelopment. The project of redevelopment was deeply concerned with reconstructing urban organizations of matter in order to bring the city into a “better” and more advanced condition. It relied upon a linear framework of time, founded upon the notion that the future could overwrite the present. The time of redevelopment, then, was a time of material and temporal manipulation. It was also a “time” that problematized itself. What is the time of the redeveloping city that is constantly being lived in, worked in, developed, demolished and reconfigured? How can one pin down the “time” of a process (redevelopment), a place (Middletown), or its various materials?

Harris uses a framework he calls “supersession” to assist him in his endeavor. “Supersession” begins with the seemingly linear progression from past to present to
future, a progression that is then subjugated by matter declared obsolete and thus brought back into the present. I understand Harris’ “supersession” in two parts. First, he writes, “supersession appears to guarantee a punctual progression from before to after, from early to late, from past to present” (Harris 29). Supersession operates under the guise of two-dimensional progression that relies upon the existence of obsolete – or superseded – matter. Obsolete matter figures centrally here, as the foundation upon which functional, “present” matter sits, propelling the notion that the past moves into the present and the present moves into the future, a temporal structure I denote here as a constructed “progressive temporality.” Constructions of progressive temporality infuse matter with the notion of “past” and thus with “obsolescence.”

Yet, Harris continues, complicating supersession’s unassuming guise, “forward temporal momentum is dependent on the untimely survival of what it supersedes” (29). Present in the contemporary world but stripped of contemporary value, superseded, obsolete matter survives its own supersession, calling into question the progressive notion of time it is warped to facilitate. The very process of manipulating matter to denote temporal progression draws attention to the overwritten materials that enable this constructed temporality, imbuing matter with agency. As untimely matter, material objects subvert the progression they are enlisted to construct. They are dual agents of linearity and untimeliness.

In conversation with Harris, I would like to press even more firmly upon the notion of “untimely matter.” Harris accounts for matter infused with falsified temporal meanings that call their position on a progressive timescale into question and reveal their participation in the constructions of history. But what about matter
that has been written out of time and space altogether, erased at the expense of these
temporal constructions? These materials are not just untimely: they are outtimely.
Untimely matter remains present on the city landscape and within the city’s archives,
however warped it has become to support a progressive conception of time and to
deny the continuous manifestations of particular, nonlinear historic patterns.
Outtimely matter, often, cannot be seen or felt in any concrete sense. Its presence –
and more often its absence – can be deciphered only around the borders of untimely
matter. It remains elusive, echoing people, places, and histories that have been
uprooted, displaced, or buried. Outtimely matter, while momentarily tangible,
inevitably slips from grasp.

In her essay “Venus in Two Acts,” African American studies scholar Saidiya
Hartman meditates upon the archive of Atlantic slavery, illustrating the inner, often
violent processes that construct the archive and the histories held within it. She
positions herself upon the archive’s silent, empty spaces, attempting to conjure the
histories that have been left out by describing the conditions that determine and
dictate their absence. I think of the urban landscape in a similar way: as an archive
that preserves and denies the materials of history. Hartman writes:

    Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a
    requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise […]
    which is] always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint[s] at and
    embod[ies] aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and
    antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man. (12)

Outtimely matter is both the “untimely matter” that Harris describes and the “black
noise” Hartman draws attention to. In line with Hartman, I argue that full
attentiveness to, and respect of, the gaps and silences of the archive requires,
ultimately, a refusal to fill them in. Outtimely matter is out of time, and in most cases, it cannot be brought back in. A full analysis of outtimely matter, then, is always, necessarily, partial. Traces of “black noise” – and outtimely matter – are forsaken by the constructed force of progressive time and thus resistant to it. As with untimely matter, outtimely matter calls attention to structural manipulations of time and actually threatens to break them down. In this way, outtimely matter exhibits agency against the forces that have cast it away.

When John Reynolds restored the Southmayd House to its colonial version it was labeled obsolete, marking the surrounding, emerging landscape as modern and new. Nevertheless, there were other structures, with their own histories, that did not survive the demolitions. It seems that there was a strategic marking of “obsolescence” during the redevelopment. The city not only used “obsolete” materials to denote linear time, but also to determine which histories would be recorded upon the city landscape. Obsolescence, then, can be understood as a privileging act – the lack of which erases the outtimely. Obsolescence places matter in time – in the past, in progressive time. Its undercurrents, simultaneously, place other matter out of time. Yet, just as obsolescence fails the project of progressive time it purports to sustain, obsolescence also fails the project of singular histories. Obsolete matter, becoming untimely, hearkens to lost matter, the outtimely.

The push for mid-century redevelopment nationwide relied upon a narrative of temporal progression. For the length of the 1970s, Middletown’s Redevelopment Agency hoped to replace the five blocks of “tenements” couched between Main Street and the river with a row of modern shopping strips and parking lots, “the city of the
future.” In the “Urban Renewal Plan,” developed by the city in 1969, the first objective listed was “to remove substandard and obsolete structures, and eliminate blighting influences and environmental deficiencies” (Urban Renewal Plan 1). This first, foundational goal of the redevelopment project marked a whole section of the city’s structures “obsolete.” The waterfront neighborhood, the city argued, had already fallen beneath the standard of the modern era and thus needed to be eradicated.

Six years after the first Metro South Urban Renewal Plan was written, the city put together a revision. The first goal stated in Middletown’s 1975 Amended Plan of Development was “to preserve, protect, and enhance the historical, cultural, and natural features of the community, and to preserve those elements that set the desirable and unique character of Middletown” (v.). In the six years since the initial redevelopment plan was written, the Redevelopment Agency had forged an alliance with the newly created Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, whose goals appeared at the forefront of the city’s revised plan. This new statement absorbed the one that preceded it: “to remove substandard and obsolete structures.” Instead of explicitly acknowledging the removals that would take place, however, the city reoriented its rhetoric around the narrative of preservation. Colonial structures, the plan suggested, were essential components of the city landscape. Their presence would “preserve” the “desirable and unique character of Middletown.” The Southmayd House, valued for its aesthetic embodiment of the past, was marked as one of these decorative features of the city landscape and became a privileged site of obsolescence.
Standing beside two other colonial structures pulled from other areas of the city, the house participated in creating “a street façade reminiscent of Middletown in the late 18th and early 19th centuries” (Reynolds 2). A 1979 article from the “Home” section of the Hartford Courant, titled “Early American Gems Saved From Wrecker,” shows an image of the three transplanted structures. The caption reads, “the restored colonials, survivors of the redeveloper’s demolition plan, stand proudly on Middletown’s lower Main Street” (Ficks). These houses, called “survivors,” had evaded and outlived the destruction of redevelopment. Nevertheless, these houses did not escape the project of redevelopment. In fact, they became central to it. As Harris suggests in his formulation of supersession, the presence of the “obsolete” Southmayd House upon the city landscape marked the “progression” taking place around it. Across the street, on the block where the house once stood, a hi-rise condominium rose from the ground, paved over with asphalt. This was the land of the present, marked in contrast to the historic structures of the past.

The Southmayd House was deemed “obsolete,” specifically, as a home. It was not obsolete as office space, or as a city relic, but it could no longer be lived in. By denying the house as a home, physically moving it through space and reconfiguring the space within, the house became “historical” rather than “vernacular.” Nonetheless, its vernacular structure remained, exuding its precarious and untimely position within the historic district of Main Street. I use the term “vernacular,” borrowed from architecture’s material studies, to think about the original architectural purpose of the Southmayd House, a purpose from which it had been severed but which nonetheless remained. Vernacular housing typically reflects the cultural trends
of its present region, and is shaped by a variety of people and forces that change it over time. Architecturally reconfiguring the Southmayd House, the Preservation Society imposed the restoration of a static “original” structure upon the house’s vernacular tradition, and with it the static time period of the “Federal Style.” Nevertheless, the house was no longer the house of the Southmayd family. After the restoration process, it was hardly associated with the Southmayds at all. It became a face, a relic, a life-sized diorama of the late eighteenth century, stamped with a blue seal that read *The National Register of Historic Places: Historic District Property*. A property report from 2010 sent to me by the house’s real estate agent reads, on the front page, “Office Building Available for Sale,” “Join the Downtown Renaissance in Downtown Middletown,” and “Historically Rehabilitated Federal Colonial” (Trevor Davis Commercial Real Estate, LLC). The table of ownership history included in the report only goes back to 1991, when Jozus Milardo & Tomasson, the first owners after the rehabilitation, negotiated a sale that kept the house within the company.

The house was not only restored to its original version, but also adapted to accommodate the house’s new tenants. Documentation of the restoration developed by the Preservation Trust quotes one of the new tenants, Dr. John Borkowski, a specialist in plastic and reconstructive surgery, who said, “the layout of the rooms allows me to separate the business end from patient care…it provides relaxing, homey surroundings for my patients different from the sterile atmosphere found in many medical buildings” (Reynolds 6). Once labeled obsolete, the house, ultimately, could not be subjugated to its idyllic colonial form without calling its temporal position and production into question. Touching many times and styles – preserved,
vernacular, colonial, and office architectural traditions – the house revealed its untimeliness.

I was able to get in touch with the current real estate agent, who invited me to nose around the house’s interior. (Figure 7). I asked Middletown architect and town planner Catherine Johnson to accompany me, and together we walked through the rooms, which were still furnished by the law firm that had put the house up for sale. Although we had to come through the back door of the house, we moved immediately to the front entranceway, facing the green “triple run center stairway” that led up to the second floor, the same way all the house’s residents would have entered. We walked around the wide center chimney on the opposite side of the stair, through the main rooms constructed with raised paneling, and stopped in front of one of the house’s six fireplaces. Johnson exclaimed. A rusted iron bar, holding a rusting iron pot swung out from inside the fireplace. How many years had the cooking apparatus survived – could it date to the nineteenth century? She asked, turning around. “This would have been the cooking area,” she said. “I don’t buy that this was here,” she continued, pointing to the second stairway by the back of the house. “It would have made the kitchen too small” (C. Johnson). I followed her through the two wings on either side of the structure, Johnson stating what she thought each room may have been: pantry, cold storage, parlor, office, bedroom, bedroom, bedroom. People slept everywhere, she said. Anything could have been a bedroom. Upstairs, there was a room decorated with blue trim and flower engravings. “Isn’t that cute,” Johnson smiled. “This must have been the master bedroom.” She wrapped her hand around the door. “Do you see how thin this is?” She asked. “Hardly more than an inch thick.
They don’t make doors like this anymore,” Johnson said with the shake of her head (C. Johnson). Her comment points to a major thrust behind the preservation movement in Middletown. The house was deemed valuable precisely on account of the original architectural tradition it recalled, in which people held a personal, artisanal relationship to the homes they built and lived in.

As Johnson imagined the lives of the house’s colonial citizens, hazy traces of the many individuals and families who lived within the house over the past two centuries hovered around the untimely structure, all but completely erased. The house, categorically, temporally, and spatially manipulated by its removal and restoration, sealed these realities from the public and from the social fabric of the city. Who were the people who once lived here? How did they gather as individuals and families? Prior to the redevelopment and restoration, the house had been product of its contemporary cultures. It was a repository of values, holding material traces of the waves of immigrant families who had come to Middletown over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, shaping the waterfront neighborhood. It reverberated the patterns of their daily lives, their possessions and activities, their spatial and psychological relationships. The Redevelopment Agency and Preservation Trust suggested that this house was a relic of the colonial past that could exist in the city’s present, eliminating these histories. Nevertheless, I argue that we cannot simply move from “then” to “now.” The difficulty I have in retracting the materials and the inhabitants that lived in the house over the past century is telling. This is what happens when matter is manipulated to tell a particular story, when matter is written out of time.
When the house was “restored” to its “authentic” version, a sheathing of asbestos siding was removed to reveal the its original clapboards; layers of floors were stripped, uncovering the old wide floorboards; and plasterboard panels were peeled away from the original raised wall paneling (Reynolds 4). Layers of architectural evidence pointing to the house’s twentieth century residents disappeared. At the same time, Reynolds added many new features to best represent the house’s “approximate condition at a time just after the Federal Style alterations were incorporated”: a shingle roof, replacement clapboards, a reproduction of the front double leaf door, hand wrought hardware, window casings and cornices, and moldings under the roofline (5). While some of the new materials were now obvious – a smoke alarm, a heavy metal fire door, most were harder to pin down. Looking through the house’s windowpanes, Johnson could tell that some were original, and some were replacements, based upon how the light travelled through them (C. Johnson). Each replacement material marked the absence of that which preceded it. Following the redevelopment, the spaces filled by the new materials, sharpened by the traces and stories of those who lived in the neighborhood, remained as ghostly, outtimely materials of the Southmayd House. 

A large room beside the Town Clerk’s office in the Middletown City Hall is filled with shelves of grey indices holding the deed information for the city’s homes and buildings. I spent hours in this room, flipping to the pages where the house at 87 William Street was bought or sold, and constructing a timeline of owners dating to the mid-1800s. Once the dates stretched earlier than the 1960s, I moved to a basement room, turning through even larger grantee and grantor indices, all bound in a
decaying blue or yellow fabric. Back at the Middlesex Historical Society, I traced the people who lived in the house across the same years, documented in a shelf of city directories dating to the early 1900s. About every five years from 1915 onward, at least one new person was listed as living in the house, which seemed to be partitioned into multiple units by the time the Redevelopment Agency acquired it. From 1945 to 1975, the house was owned by or rented to members of the Cubeta family. One tenant worked as a meat cutter, another as a machine operator, another as a clerk. Others worked at Cubeta’s Fruiter, likely a family business a half-block over on Main Street.

In the midst of my research, I received an email from Debby Shapiro, the director of the Middlesex Historic Society. She had been looking through the 1973 city directories – which we had been doing together the day before, trying to pinpoint the year the Southmayd House was last lived in – and noticed that one of her volunteers was listed as living in the house right next door. When Shapiro got in touch with him, he told her that his wife, Isabelle Bozzo, had actually grown up in the house at 81 William Street in the fifties. Her mother’s parents, the Rogalas, had bought the house when they arrived in Middletown from Poland in the 1920s, and Bozzo’s parents had continued to live there to raise their two daughters. In 1973, the year Shapiro had seen Bozzo’s husband listed in the city directory, the couple had moved back to Middletown to live in Bozzo’s parents’ house for the brief period before the redevelopment. When they came back, Bozzo later told me, not much had changed. There were some new faces, but most belonged to new generations of the same families (Bozzo).
I met Isabelle Bozzo in her kitchen one town over. After inviting me to sit down, she pulled out a hand-drawn map that she had made of the William Street neighborhood she grew up in. (Figure 8). She had labeled each house by the name of the family she remembered living there, and shared what she remembered of each one. The people on William Street were mainly Polish and Italian immigrants, she said, but “each house on William Street was entirely different from the next house on William Street” (Bozzo). They each had their own particular architecture.

I asked Bozzo about the neighboring “Cubeta House” and she responded: “My grandfather grew grapes…on a grape vine. The guy next door grew grapes. But they never really talked to each other, you know. They probably wouldn’t be able to converse anyway. One spoke Italian and one spoke Polish. My grandparents would not learn to speak English…The kids didn’t play together. There were boys and girls on that side, and everyone kept to themselves. This is how it was back then. If you didn’t speak the language there was no way to communicate” (Bozzo). The “Cubeta House,” Bozzo recalled, “was a two-family,” contradicting a Preservation Trust record I had found, which said the house had four units (Bozzo, Reynolds 2). “It had entrance in front, entrance in back. It had a porch in the back…They had a wood-type shingles…They had the upstairs apartment, or apartments actually. I think there was two apartments up there…It was nothing exceptional. No worse than others, probably no better either” (Bozzo). Bozzo pulled out a photo of the house she had grown up in, given to her mother by a secretary from the Redevelopment Agency. A sliver of the Southmayd House could be seen just off to the right, its roof dusted in snow. Later, I found another picture of the Southmayd House on William Street in an appraisal.
record held at the Middlesex Historical Society, the Rogala house hiding behind a tree to the left (87-89 William Street; Rogala House). (Figure 9).

But when it came to the redevelopment of the neighborhood, I asked Bozzo, was it hard for you and your parents to leave? She shook her head quickly. “I think they were glad because they were always there, you know…I don’t think anybody was against it…I think it worked out very well for a lot of people” (Bozzo). The Redevelopment Agency, she said, gave an allotment to everyone who had to move, and the largest allotments went toward the people who owned their homes. Bozzo and her husband, who rented from her parents, got two thousand dollars. “I don’t think my mother and father had to pay a penny for their new home,” she told me (Bozzo).

At the end of our conversation, when I asked her if there was anything more she wanted to say, she replied: “It was very cramped, cramped living…We were poor…It was a poor neighborhood” (Bozzo) “When you go back,” she spoke slowly, “you can’t, can’t dwell on the past. The past is gone. But you should’ve had some nice memories of it too” (Bozzo). It seemed that Bozzo was unsure whether she had “nice memories” of the neighborhood. At the end of our conversation, she repeated something she has said throughout. “I don’t really miss any of the old neighborhood. I didn’t go anywhere anyway” (Bozzo). It was different back then, she said over and over. It was a different time.

I found it fitting that Bozzo’s story of William Street was positioned just off-center of the Southmayd House. Her story only touched the Cubeta family who lived to her left, but contributed to a broader picture of the neighborhood, filling in the vacant spaces of the city archive. The “time” to which Bozzo referred congealed
momentarily at her round kitchen table, held together by the details of her stories, which surrounded and contextualized the vestige of the untimely Southmayd House. Bozzo’s stories slipped along the muddy textures of outtimely matter, gesturing far beyond the Southmayd House, to Poland, the place from which her grandfather had come, to New York, where she imagined he had arrived, to Middletown, where he had settled. The William Street neighborhood was a home for many across the twentieth century, but it was a home that gestured back to another place: a place that shifted in the imagination of its inhabitants, passing along through the many generations of Middletown’s families.

The Cubeta story, which remained, for me, largely unrecovered, held its own shifting geographies and temporalities that were imbued upon the house. The Southmayd House was not strictly a Middletown house, or a colonial house, as its post-restoration condition suggested. It was a house belonging to and lived in by generations of Italian immigrants. It was at once a stepping-stone, a momentary place, and it was also a family home and family estate for several generations of Cubetas. For the length of the twentieth century, the house was also a site of environmental and economic poverty, poverty reinforced by the “development” of the city’s auspicious manufacturing industry of the nineteenth century. Although this poverty was ostensibly demolished and “erased” from William Street and four other city blocks during the redevelopment period, it was retracted from the Southmayd House, which was restored to its colonial version and placed out of class, place, and time. This retraction resulted from the privileging force of obsolescence. A colonial home used as modern office space, the house commanded attention to its dealings with multiple
times and its production of a fabricated progressive temporality complicit with the redevelopment effort. In turn, the house gestured to its gaps, silences, and erasures – its outtimely matter.

The Southmayd pearlware uncovered by Professor Dyson was marked obsolete, like the house, to reinforce the redevelopment project of progressive time and to flatten the longer history of the Southmayd house, upholding the mid-1700s and early 1800s as the city’s single period of historical interest. Both politically and physically, the redevelopment process enabled Dyson’s archaeological excavations. When I spoke with Dyson on the phone, he remembered collaborating with the Redevelopment Agency, who let him know when excavations of particular historic houses would be possible. In his chapter “Material Culture, Social Structure, and Changing Values” published in 1982, Dyson wrote that the redevelopment “leveled a whole quarter, one which had developed during a single period and which could provide a cross section of the archaeological remains for an important phase of New England urban development” (Material Culture 362). The “leveling” that Dyson discussed did not simply apply to the physical process of demolishing buildings and breaking up the land. The last people living in the Southmayd House had moved out by 1975, two years before the excavation, and the elimination of people living upon the “whole quarter” enabled the upheaval of the archeological digs. The excavations Dyson conducted reinforced the notion that the Southmayd House and its excavated objects were “obsolete,” no longer an active part of the city landscape, but materials from Middletown’s elegant past as a leader in the shipping industry. Once unearthed,
these objects were removed from the land, catalogued, and brought to Wesleyan University for storage and analysis. (Figure 10).

However, like the Southmayd House, the pearlware excavated from the Southmayd site – material samples from an early phase of New England “development” – called attention to, and thus subverted, the progressive time they were enlisted to construct. In an article about the excavation process and findings, Dyson stated: “the work has helped to raise a community’s consciousness about its own past and hopefully will enhance the desire to preserve that past” (Material Culture 55). These household objects, once intimate parts of the home and the Southmayd family culture, appeared amidst the process of leveling and rebuilding, and, in turn, interrupted the forward-moving tempo of the redeveloping city. They told a new story about the house’s original family, materially and conceptually reoriented the “past” in the “present,” and pointed their efforts toward the future: a time idealized as a period of assembled truth, in which the “pre-development” past would be understood as the romanticized time from which the city had departed.

One set of the Southmayd teacups, white chinoiserie painted with blue images, depicts a woman wearing a long, simple dress and apron, holding a basket in one arm and the hand of a young boy in the other. The boy faces to his left, extending a hand to feed a goat, and behind him a cow kneels to the ground, facing the viewer. A collection of small houses clustered around a larger building with a steeple fills the background. In his chapter, Dyson writes: “In this increasingly industrial and commercial world, people were already seeking to escape in their minds to an exotic place or to a fast-disappearing, traditional, rustic paradise” (Material Culture 377).
The pearlware objects, purchased and used by the Southmayd family in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, embodied the cultural desire to turn away – to imaginatively undo – the socially, structurally, and environmentally decrepit city. Products of Middletown’s “origin” period, they constructed, and then looked back to, an imagined point of departure, a foreign time and place in which the city was not yet corrupted by industry. The “fast-disappearing, traditional, rustic paradise” that the objects envisioned, however, was entirely elusive. In fact, the very image of this paradise was a product of the commercialized landscape from which its users sought reprieve.

The teacups, as such, propelled the industrial world, the culture of desire, and their various structural manifestations. Operating within the “original” moment of Middletown’s settlement and development, they denoted the early nineteenth century city’s nostalgia for its imagined pre-development past. The teacups were not preserved as a largely aesthetic representation of the city’s ambiguously labeled past, as I argue the Southmayd House was. Subject to academic analysis, they were reassembled and employed by Dyson tell a story about the Southmayd family specifically: their wealth, the city’s shipping prosperity, the original community of colonial houses, and the specific cultural and technological trends of which they were a part. Although he found material dating to more recent years, Dyson only published information on materials of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, privileging this period as the single time of interest. As such, Dyson’s analysis of the teacups revealed their participation in the constructions of progressive time and their untimeliness.
Strikingly, there were parallels in redevelopment’s image of the colonial “past” and the teacups’ image of their own pre-development landscape. Following the redevelopment, the house became a museum-like relic sitting upon the city landscape. The teacups, too, were removed from their context and placed in the archaeology collections at Wesleyan. Both were not so much lived (in or with) as they were preserved and curated to produce a sense of nostalgia for a lost, obsolete past. Like the image upon the teacups, the façade of the Southmayd House was a product of its commercialized context, and the public identity the city attempted to achieve during the redevelopment. It was not a coincidence that the Inn at Middletown was constructed across the street from the colonial houses. As a historic structure, the Southmayd House was a display beheld by visitors perhaps more than local inhabitants. Its seemingly fixed architectural elements shaped its identity as a city relic, marking the region’s auspicious origin as a colonial shipping port. Both the pearlware and the house commodified nostalgia for a lost past, and as it was commodified, this concept of lost time imbued itself in the public imagination only to be commodified again: an untimely cycle that continuously reproduced itself. The teacups, as such, not only called their own untimeliness into question; they actually drew attention to the cyclical processes of development and redevelopment that enabled their excavation, implicating a larger, spiraling process of untimeliness that continued through to and beyond Middletown’s redevelopment project.

The teacup that I unwrapped from its Styrofoam casing and placed delicately on the table of Wesleyan’s Archaeology Collections had been glued together as best as possible. The pieces, it seemed, were large enough to identify their relation to each
other and stitch together their original form. Still, a yellowing crack penetrated the blue image, connecting two larger holes, denoting the outtimely fissures of untimely matter. The teacups were found in the deep layers of the soil because their contemporary users had thrown them away in the backyard trash. “All written records are to a certain degree filtered,” Dyson told me in a conversation over the phone, “and this is people’s garbage. It reveals them in a rather different way” (Dyson). The cracks in the pearlware, marks of the Southmayd family’s disposal of the pearlware object, revealed that the Southmayds had once again marked the present by turning away from the past. In this case, the “past” was not denoted in an image on the surface of the teacup, but in the disposal of the teacup, a disposal that marked matter, at least momentarily, out of time. Dyson’s excavations brought this matter back into time, but still, other materials remained out.

Throughout the twentieth century, the house and its surroundings were shaped by the inhabitants who participated in building, decorating, or arranging their home. The Archaeology Department at Wesleyan now has a “special things” drawer filled with the “odd finds” of the Dyson excavation. Many of these objects came from the surface layer of the soil, and were, as a result, harder to date or contextualize. “In a backyard, it was very rare that we found nice, orderly stratigraphy. Because backyards are always being churned up, people are putting gardens in there, digging cesspits, or digging wells – whatever it is,” Dyson remembered. In layers two to three feet deep, dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dyson and his students found window glass, coins, bricks, bottles, bones, a pipe, four brown bone buttons, the top of a pair of dentures, and a pair of rusted, crumbling metal scissors –
all placed in Wesleyan’s archaeology collections. However, in recovering these and other historical features, the excavators had to disrupt the modern features. Once the top layer of soil was disturbed, there was no context with which to date the materials embedded within it – those dating to the more contemporary period preceding the redevelopment. Archaeology is, fundamentally, a destructive science. Once removed from the land, Dyson’s archaeological materials lost the context that layered and complicated their histories. After Dyson’s excavations, the layers of soil would soon be dismembered once again, churned and flattened to make way for a new parking lot.

I can imagine that the top layer of soil, much like the layers below it, would have revealed mostly nails, pieces of wood, and glass. Many nails were recovered in the deeper layers, and many were not preserved. They were deemed unessential parts of the archeological practice of reconstructing the Southmayd past. However, the nails in the top and lower layers were signs of the structure falling apart or being put back together over time. They were indicators that the house was lived in and worn down by people and the environment. One year, Bozzo told me, there may have been “a porch on the back because that way you could hang your clothes on the lines” (Bozzo). Another year, someone may have constructed a new addition to the house, or placed a number on the front door. After the redevelopment, scattered in the backfill soil and used to close up Dyson’s pits, these outtimely materials ostensibly remained in the soil covered with the new parking lot. The materials that did not appear in the archaeology or documentary archive were thus more pressing, more elusive, than the ones that did. Nonetheless, the untimely materials, in their very
untimeliness, beckoned to the gaping hole of the outtimely, asserting their presence in their absence.

When I told Bozzo about the archaeological excavations that had taken place at the Cubeta house in the midst of redevelopment, just two years after her family had moved away, she replied: “Wow, that’s interesting. Wow. See because, even my grandparents’ generation, they wouldn’t remember any of that because it was prior to them – prior to them being here” (Bozzo). At first, I was puzzled by her response. The excavations conducted by Professor Stephen Dyson had taken place after her family and the Cubetas had moved out of their respective houses, in the summer of 1977. What she meant, I realized a moment later, was that the objects unearthed by Professor Dyson and his students preceded the period in which her family had lived on William Street. “They wouldn’t remember any of that,” she asserted (Bozzo). The odd temporal positioning of her phrase was indicative of the strange chronology embodied by the excavation process and the Southmayd materials it uncovered. The pearlware, which garnered the most attention in Dyson’s analysis, belonged to a time disjointed from the time inhabited by the Rogala and Cubeta families. Without knowing about this colonial history, three generations of William Street residents had lived atop what would later be determined to be a crucial cross section of archaeological material. Less than a decade after the last inhabitants moved away, however, a temporal inversion took place. The William Street neighborhood was wiped from the city landscape while the Southmayd House, as well as the colonial materials beneath it, were preserved. In the years that followed the redevelopment, people walked or drove across the parking lot where the Rogala and Cubeta houses
had once stood. Did they know who had been here? Facilitated by the construction of the parking lot, the memory of the longstanding immigrant neighborhood slipped from public memory.

I have attempted to find and make contact with the borders of these outtimely spaces – to gather the verbal and material stories and the questions to which they gesture. In line with Hartman, I have imagined a flipping of the city-as-archive, envisioning not what the city has let me see, but the materials beneath, behind, around. When I have found these outtimely traces, faded and fragmented, I have left them as such, knowing they are whole and embodied but knowing I cannot recover them. Working against the erasures of the city-as-archive requires full attention to the partiality of partial evidence, bringing outtimely matter, however slightly, into focus.

On one occasion, I walked around the back corner of the Southmayd House and sat down on a small, crooked bench, facing the back of the structure. The air conditioning unit by the side of the house revved up, humming over the faint sounds of the street. After spending so much time watching the face of the house, I had a new, intimate position. From the side, I could see the house’s stone foundation, its grey air conditioning boxes, its outcropping basement door. Paint peeled from the house’s backside, touched by the weathering forces of time. I looked toward the street, just over the fence to my right, where I could see the northern wing of the Inn at Middletown, another converted colonial structure, blocking my view of the original Southmayd House site. Day after day, the new structures were sinking into the ground, into the physical and historical memory of Middletown.
Several months later, I was able to track down an email address for Bob Cubeta, who grew up in the house from 1945 to 1966. In response to my inquiry, he wrote:

My Dad and Uncles used to make homemade wine in the cellar. There was a huge fireplace in the basement that had wrought iron hooks and a swinging arm for pots to cook over the fire. Also, there was a dutch oven and a smoke room behind the fireplace. It was a very happy house. It wrapped around you and kept you safe. The holidays and birthday parties were always so special. Up in the attic there was a ladder that went to a skylight that opened. From there you could see all the way down the river to the Connecticut State Hospital. I am so glad that they saved it and restored it. I live in Vermont now, but every once in a while I manage to drive down and have a look at it. (Cubeta)
2. Reappearing Remains: Caring for the Legacy of Redevelopment Activists

New York City, 1969. A group of people have travelled from Middletown, Connecticut to New York City to meet with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. One of them is Middletown’s Redevelopment Agency Director, Joseph Haze. Accompanying the group are three women, representatives of the South End Family Association, a group formed to advocate for the displaced residents of Middletown’s South End neighborhood, which the city planned to raze to make room for blocky retail buildings and parking lots. The women are leading figures of the South End’s black community: Idella Howell, Reba Moses, and Moses’ sister Rosalie Rolle. Maybe – I’m speculating now – they sit quietly on the side of the room as the day’s procedure commences. Various men come to the front to speak into the microphone and debate the low-income housing programs that ought to be implemented in Middletown. Someone sits across from the women on the other side of the room, typing up the meeting minutes, which will get filed later that day or week, and which are likely enclosed in a box in the basement of a HUD building, or perhaps a more traditional archive.

I imagine that, after a couple hours go by, the women start to look at one another, raise their eyebrows. They wonder why, after travelling all this way, no one has asked them to speak. If they are asked to speak, they will say that the residents of
the South End neighborhood, a third of whom are people of color, need more transparency from the redevelopment agency. They will say that housing options are especially limited for large families, and for those above the income limit of low-rent public housing (“Neighborhood Assn.”). Eventually, someone announces that the group is about to break for lunch, but still no one has asked the women to speak. Maybe Howell places her feet flat on the ground abruptly, as if she is about to stand up and say something. Maybe Moses catches this, and places a hand on Howell’s arm gently.

This is what I imagine, based on what little I know about Moses and Howell from the redevelopment’s documentary archive. This chapter is about why I know so little, about my attempt to grapple with this. In the pages that come, I think of the agencies of individual people as an archive. I examine how Moses and Howell, activists working before, during, and after the city’s redevelopment, marked the various archives of the city: the textual archive, the physical landscape of the city, and the embodied lives of individuals and families. I interrogate how these markings are differently legible, how visible marks overshadow the less visible, more ephemeral marks. I explore how each mark, as a remain, discloses and disguises the stories and agencies of the women who made them. The scant remains of the women in the traditional archive, I determine, was not simply a result of their work as primarily action-oriented, but a result of the archival technologies, politics, and institutions that surrounded them – many of which sought to propel the redevelopment they resisted forward. Because documents are a result of these constraining technologies, and because they fail to account for actions-as-remains, I de-center the documents of the
redevelopment archive, imagining instead the events that contextualize them, the
events of their archivization. I understand the objects of the landscape as remains and,
departing from visual material altogether, embodied experiences as remains. I argue
that what one does does not disappear, that acts of advocacy remain and reappear as
archival marks regardless of the physical objects they endow.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore different practices of care, or
engagement with, the archives left by Howell and Moses. I consider how practices of
care within and through these archives allow for reappearances of the advocacy acts
with which they engage, challenging the documentary archive’s suggestion that acts
disappear and material remains. These archival practices are archival marks
themselves, together forming a moving, shifting archive of acts.

How do we archive acts of advocacy, particularly those that are extended
sequences practiced by a person or group of people over a span of time? What would
such an archive look like? This is not just a question of preservation methods, but a
matter of reconceiving what counts as “archival.” Traditional archives, since Foucault
and Derrida, have been associated with scriptural knowledge and state control. Peggy
Phelan, in her 1993 book Unmarked, thus asserts that “[p]erformance cannot be
saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of
representations of representations” (Roms 35). Phelan categorizes performance as
“ephemeral” in contrast to documentation, and declares performance to be a critical
force in a culture based on the “principle of reproduction” (35). For her, performance
and archiving are at odds with one another, and performance is all the more
politically potent for it. A lengthy debate on performance documentation has arisen
from Phelan’s book, particularly among performance scholars who have expanded understandings of performance archives and archives as performance, and who define “performance” as acts of everyday life and culture. In her essay “Performance Remains,” Rebecca Schneider argues that to think of performance as “disappearance,” the antithesis of “saving,” we fail to recognize other ways of knowing, remembering, or writing history “that may be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently” (101).

While typically disallowed within the traditional archive, performances of history, in the forms of oral storytelling, live recitation, and repeated gesture are, Schneider argues, practices of telling and writing history. In this chapter, I deal with oral memories of many forms: those that are taped and transcribed by myself or others, those that are embedded within academic work, and those that are preserved within other oral memories. In line with Schneider, I consider oral memories, even those that are not documented by traditional archival practices, archives in their own right. Recorded materials, Schneider argues, are “constituted anew, recorded, and ‘saved’ in the name of identicality,” reinforcing the notion of performance as something that, if not documented, disappears (103). Nevertheless, she argues, oral testimonies and the acts they recall remain even if they are not recorded. In order to carry this notion that recording and documenting holds something as it loses grasp of something else, I work in the shadow of Julie Louise Bacon, who in her essay, “Unstable Archives: Languages and Myths of the Visible,” demonstrates a need to foreground the “event of the document” over the document itself (88). This allows me
to emphasize the partiality of archival materials and to inundate “the document” with oral and embodied memories, and my own questions and speculations.

**The Mark of the Advocate**

I begin again with the story I have traced across the physical documents of the archive, the objects – a student paper, a collection of newspaper clippings, a set of transcribed oral histories, a landscape object – where Moses or Howell left an imprint. Sometimes, where necessary, I include information from oral testimonies I have documented myself to fill out the gaps in my initial understanding. I do this mostly with regard to the Community Action for Greater Middletown, an anti-poverty organization of which both women were a part throughout the redevelopment. The CAGM was funded by federal grants emerging from Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” from the mid-sixties to the early nineties and was almost entirely run by local residents (Farbman). Nevertheless, there is minimal documentary information about it. I did not know until someone told me, for instance, that Howell was executive director of the CAGM for almost three decades, and the first woman to run an anti-poverty organization in Connecticut.

From 1965 to 1984, Middletown undertook its Metro South Redevelopment project, which displaced a 125-acre neighborhood of about 600 families, 200 of whom were people of color (Agency Gets Relocation Information). Many of the city’s low-income black families were relocated to the city’s three public housing apartments: Maplewood Terrace, Traverse Square, and Long River Village. With the exception of Traverse Square, these projects were located at least a mile away from the waterfront district – which had previously been a hub of local residences,
businesses, and grocery stores – posing a particular problem for residents without cars. People above the income limits of the public housing apartments found it difficult to find homes owned by landlords or realtors willing to rent or sell to black citizens. Although owners of black businesses were compensated financially, many could not reopen their stores after the redevelopment without the support of the previously concentrated black community and the low rent of the South End.

Throughout this process, the South End Family Association, composed mainly of individuals on the precipice of displacement, became the advocating voice of the South End neighborhood. Moses, Howell, and Rolle, all former residents of the neighborhood, were prominent members of this organization. Howell and Moses continued to lead the local anti-poverty movement through the Community Action for Greater Middletown into the mid-90s. Rolle, although she was the president of the South End Family Organization, was less involved in the CAGM than the other two and seems to have slipped from the archives at my disposal.

These women, and the South End Family Association of which they were a part, felt that the Redevelopment Agency was targeting their neighborhood in the South End of Middletown, which had become largely dilapidated on account of years of city neglect (Beinhorn, “Townspeople”). In 1987, Wesleyan senior Claudia Center interviewed Howell and Moses for her paper “Urban Renewal and Citizens’ Groups in Middletown, Connecticut.” In the paper, she quoted Howell as saying “there was the feeling… that redevelopment only happened in black areas” (Center 20). Howell and Moses understood the redevelopment effort as an attempt to keep the black community away from Main Street and felt that, in moving people to housing
projects, the city was trying to keep the black community segregated from the rest of
the city (Center 18-19). They were concerned, also, with the city’s treatment of its
displaced black citizens. During the city’s first redevelopment project, the Center
Street Project, the city failed to secure housing for displaced residents and put up a
cluster of tents – “tent city” – in a local baseball field. No one used these tents, as
citizens turned instead to local churches and friends, but the city’s disregard for the
displaced individuals was deeply felt. In the late sixties, during the next
redevelopment project, residents of the South End neighborhood frequently came
home to find threatening eviction notices, again intimidating them to move out before
they had a place to move into (Center 15).

The South End Family Association wanted more information on the
Redevelopment Agency’s plans. What was going to replace the houses that were torn
down? Why couldn’t new houses replace the old ones? The organization argued for
residential-reuse, more relocation money, compensation done by formula rather than
a case-by-case basis, later eviction dates, and, perhaps most importantly, scattered
low-income housing instead of housing projects (Center 20). They did not want
“another Long River Village,” referring to the city’s first 190-unit housing project
isolated a mile west of the city’s downtown (“South End Group”). Nevertheless, in
January of 1968, the developer Carabetta Enterprises planned to construct two low-
income housing developments, a 200 unit low-income site on Bartholomew Road and
a 150-unit site for the elderly on Newfield Street. The South End Neighborhood
Association found the site, three miles away, too far from downtown and disapproved
of the concentrated number of low-income units. Bartholomew Road residents, who
feared the project would decrease their property values, also resisted the plan, which was ultimately not implemented (‘Plan’). The Bartholomew Road residents, whose resistance was rooted in racist and classist ideologies, were able to deter the Redevelopment Agency when the South End Family Association, the voice of the people who would have had to live in the apartments, could not. In the early 1970s, the Maplewood Terrace and Traverse Square public housing apartments were constructed, to the dissatisfaction of Family Association (Center 21).

Throughout this period, Howell and Moses appeared sporadically in the newspaper. I saw them in May of 1967, at a demonstration-turned-conversation in front of the Town Hall where Howell described the discrimination black residents experienced in the housing market (‘Probe City’). They, or at least Howell, lead tours six months later on a chilly November afternoon, showing residents from other parts of the city the living conditions in the redevelopment’s “target areas,” most of which were inhabited by black individuals and families. (Figure 11). As she walked down Union Street, Howell told what was likely a largely white group following her – among them the Mayor Kenneth Dooley, who, to the excitement of the newspaper, had never seen these homes up close – that many of the real estate agencies refused to show houses to people of color, or showed them “only at night.” She said, also, that Middletown’s black citizens had trouble finding jobs in the city except as house-workers and janitors, and that many employers did not allow them equal employment opportunities (Ryan). I found Moses and Howell again, perhaps, hidden in a crowd of 100 people, mostly women from the South End, on an August night in 1969 at a hearing in the new town hall building (Beinhorn, “Townspeople”). Howell seemed to
make the paper more than Moses, perhaps on account of her more boisterous personality, or her willingness to speak with the press.

During the redevelopment, even when they could not incite concrete changes, the South End Family Association sought to remain engaged with the demolition and relocation processes. In April 1969, Howell and Moses joined the Project Area Committees, formed by the Redevelopment Agency in response to an appeal by black citizens to involve at least 28 residents in relocation, rehabilitation and staging phases of the redevelopment. Residents were selected by the mayor “on the basis of the respect they command[ed] for their community they represent[ed] and the depth of their commitment to the improvement of community life in Middletown” (Beinhorn, “Agency Moves”). The women and their affiliates argued for the same things on and off the committees, committees that included the voices of black residents but did not satisfy Howell and Moses’ desire to see black participation on the policy-making level (Beinhorn, “Agency Moves”). Ultimately, both women were removed from the PAC on a technicality of which I have not found a record. Eventually, the Redevelopment Agency sought to increase black representation on the policy-making level, but in her interview with Claudia Center, Moses claimed that neither John “Buck” Davis nor William Sneed was able to represent the concerns of the black community, for reasons not disclosed in Center’s paper (Center 22).

In April of 1974, after Howell and Moses were removed from the committee, Redevelopment Commissioner William Sneed, one of the only black members of the Redevelopment Agency, filed a complaint against the Agency for systematically failing to give at least a quarter million dollars in compensation to sixty black
residents displaced from the South End ("Delay"; Beinhorn, “Sneed, Renewal”).

According to Sneed, black residents were not fully informed of their rights and their entitlement to up to four thousand dollars in rent differential assistance. They were also, he claimed, made to wait unnecessarily for property compensation (Beinhorn, “Mayor”; Center). Sneed demanded an official investigation by HUD, during which Democratic councilmen launched a campaign to discharge him for admitting he authorized a payment to a tenant despite knowing that it was faulty (Beinhorn, “Mayor”). HUD, in a separate report, charged the Redevelopment Agency with “serious deficiency” for its poor records on relocated residents, though it did not sustain Sneed’s accusations. Six months later, Sneed was removed from the Redevelopment Commission (Beinhorn, “Sneed Protest”). It is possible that Moses’ distrust of William Sneed was related to this incident, but I can’t know for sure. It strikes me that Sneed’s campaign would have aligned with Howell and Moses’ activism, and that his removal from the Redevelopment Agency affirmed their understanding that the Agency operated on racist intentions and outcomes. It couldn’t have been a coincidence that the one black member of the Redevelopment Agency was targeted in this way. Several partial stories rise to the surface of the archive, but I cannot necessarily draw a line across them. Instead, I’ll let them bob beside one another, and wait for another one to bubble up.

In their conversation with Claudia Center in 1987, the women asserted that their demands as part of the South End Family Association had been largely ignored by the Redevelopment Agency. The Agency would agree to look into an issue – such as supporting scattered housing – and then authorize the construction of a housing
project. For instance, the South End Family Association had asked the Redevelopment Agency to let them know in advance when the Maplewood Terrace Apartments would be ready for tenants. The Association hoped to spray the furniture coming from the South End for roaches, a problem exacerbated by the neighborhood’s proximity to the city dump. However, against the women’s request, the Agency dropped off keys to the South End without notice, and roaches were transported, with the furniture, to the new apartments (Center 22).

Nevertheless, through the Community Action for Greater Middletown, founded in the mid-1960s, the women were able to support the low-income black residents of the city. Part of the federal money acquired by the CAGM was used to give people, many of whom were displaced by the redevelopment, five thousand dollars to put a down payment on a new house (Grant). The CAGM helped people purchase and move furniture as they transitioned into these new houses, and established neighborhood offices at each public housing apartment complex, where many other residents had relocated, to serve as a liaison between the residents and the city government. By the late 1970s, in the later phase of the redevelopment, Howell was able to acquire land from the Redevelopment Agency to construct a new building for the CAGM, which would serve, in part, as a day care center (“Care Center Revised”; “Day Care Center”). In 1993, the year Howell retired, the CAGM annual report – sent to me by Jim Pestana, who began working at the organization in 1981 – listed thirteen programs supporting youth, families, adults, the elderly, and the homeless, spanning across educational advocacy, nutritional care, and emergency sheltering. The report holds a dedication to Howell on the second page:
A true leader has the courage to lead people where others may not follow. You led us past fear and ignorance to a place where your dreams and convictions made us better people living in a better community. (1993 Annual Report)

Moses was also a founding member of the city’s Community Health Center in 1972, which began as a free clinic that evolved into a non-profit organization caring for over a hundred thousand people in 206 sites across Connecticut.

This is the story on the books, in the traditional archive. Nevertheless, despite the many ways they impacted the city of Middletown, Moses and Howell were also denied by and overshadowed within the documentary archive of the redevelopment. Almost every single day from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Middletown Press published an article on the redevelopment, articles that were cut out and glued by hand onto pages filed at the Middlesex Historical Society. The newspaper, as an archival technology, was nonetheless engineered to catch certain material and leave other material out. While their names were sometimes mentioned in the newspapers, they were more often subsumed within broader descriptions of the South End Family Association and the CAGM, or depicted in the shadows of the men with whom they were working. Highly active black community members and advocates Reverend William Davage and South End Family Association president James “Cup” Moody received much more attention from the press than both Moses and Howell, despite their comparable activism efforts. When an article depicted meetings held by the South End Family Organization, it gave the impression that the Redevelopment Agency was working in collaboration with the group. Nevertheless, based on Howell and Moses’ interviews with Claudia Center, it is clear that the Redevelopment
Agency often did not take the voices of the South End into account. The scarcity of their paper trail stands in stark contrast to the prevalence of Moses and Howell’s legacy in the public consciousness, revealing the failures of the documentary archive to record activism and other acts of agency, particularly those that went against the efforts of the city’s redevelopment. What more happened at the events described by the newspaper? In the event of the recording? Who was there? Who spoke to whom? As a singular archival object, the newspaper story preserves its own integrity more than the stories and voices it claims to represent.

Consider the moment at the HUD office in New York, which I imagined at the beginning of this chapter. Two decades after the incident, Moses and Howell told Claudia Center that the HUD meeting was the most disturbing event they experienced during their time advocating for the residents of the South End. A federal statute required “community participation” in urban renewal decisions, the women continued, and Director Haze and HUD had used them to fulfill the requirement. No one actually wanted to hear their opinions or concerns, however – nor did anyone record them (Center 21).

Because of Center’s paper, I have documentation of Moses and Howell’s account of the event but do not have access to the other paper archives that likely emerged from it, documenting the women’s presence: meeting minutes, or a stamp confirming their “community participation.” Even if these objects do exist, since Howell and Moses were never asked to speak, their words were never imprinted upon them. The paper archive, which failed to hold the embodied experience of these women at the HUD meeting, allowed the Redevelopment Agency and HUD to check
the “community participation” box with an event that in fact suppressed this participation. The documentary archive, in its very structure, denied the community participation it purported to reinforce. The visible archive eliminated that which could not be visible, and stood, deceptively and exploitatively, in the place of the embodied event. The women’s elimination from the archive was not simply a product of their work as primarily performative, but also a product of the archival technologies, politics, and institutions that surrounded them. Denied from the documentary archive, they were not only denied voice during the redevelopment period, but in the history of the redevelopment as well.

Howell’s insistence upon naming the CAGM day care center after herself, and both women’s participation in the interviews conducted by Claudia Center, indicates their desire to be held in the visible, documentary archive – their sense that such a recording would not be granted to them by the archiving powers of the city and was imperative for preserving the future legacy of their work. Howell, Center wrote, regretted “that the Family Association did not keep records, and the fact that when she got mad in meetings she reacted by walking out” (20). Not taking records is different from exiting a space, but both, by way of the documentary archive, result in disappearance. Nevertheless, perhaps the act of not recording, or of leaving the meeting, holds archival significance itself. Howell’s exits were acts of protest resisting, perhaps, the failure of city officials to account for her presence.

Howell and Moses’ mark endures most strongly in their acts, particularly their acts of engagement with Middletown’s people, which is to say, the least documentary of archives. They maintained personal connections as part of their advocacy and
community work so that they could ensure that people had access to the resources available by way of the South End Family Association and later the CAGM. Earlene Grant, who worked with Howell and Moses at the CAGM in the late 60s, bought her first house after she was encouraged in a very “convincing” conversation with Howell (Grant). Jim Pestana, who worked as a day care teacher at the CAGM, became a grant writer at the urging of Howell, and now serves as the Director of Quality Assurance at the CRT. I can imagine that there are many examples just like these, but still, there are only a few on my record. The archive of acts is slippery like this, hard to pin down all at once.

On my way from the Historical Society back to Wesleyan’s campus, I walked up William Street, where Howell’s day care still stands at the intersection of Hamlin Street, labeled by a sign in her name. (Figure 12). This building is a documentary mark left by the redevelopment activist, asserting Howell’s legacy in the city. It suggests, upon first glance, that Idella W. Howell was an important figure who had something to do with the development of the “Child Development Center,” that she and this project were endorsed by the Redevelopment Agency, which held control over the city’s downtown land in the latter half of the century, and that she was associated and aligned with the values of the Community Renewal Team. Nevertheless, I press against the legibility of this marker, revealing the ways that it in fact disguises the work, and the agency, of Idella Howell. Instead of focusing on the sign, I wish to foreground the many events of the sign – the acts and agencies that placed it, and continue to engage with its placement, on the city landscape.
According to the newspaper record, in October of 1979 a ten-month schedule had been implemented to develop plans, acquire land from the Redevelopment Agency, and complete the construction of the day care (“Care Center”; “Agency”).

The process was funded by federal grants given to the CAGM, but Howell also raised some of the money herself, at “raising of the sign” ceremonies held at the construction site (“Day Care Center”). At the time, the YMCA and the Church of the Holy Trinity each served 75 children, but each group had a large waiting list. At the new center, 120 children would be enrolled (“Day Care Center”). Carolyn Hatcher, another leader at the CAGM, described the organization’s “Head Start” program, which later became the day care center, in her oral history, recorded in 1976 and held at the Russell Library’s “Middletown Room.” Hatcher emphasized that the impact of the day care extended beyond the building itself, into the relationships the CAGM held with the children, their parents, and other community members of Middletown.

The program was shaped, again and again, by parent meetings, Policy Board Meetings, and the many people who attended them (Hatcher). The day care, the building, and the sign can never be conceived as singular, isolated archival marks, but as products of agents and agencies, many of which I do not have access to, but some of which I do. The archive of acts is revelatory like this, reappearing between the cracks.

What neither newspapers nor the documentation of Hatcher’s oral history revealed was that building a day care center housing expanded child development programs for pre-school-aged children was one of Howell’s passion projects as executive director of the CAGM. Reverend Earlene Grant remembered: “She told me,
‘I’m gonna build a daycare program. I’m gonna have a building, and I’m gonna name it after myself.’ I said, ‘buildings only get named after dead people’ and she said, ‘Well, I’m gonna be the first live person who has a building named after me.’ That’s what she wanted and she got it before she passed. She got the land and got it built” (Grant). When I mention the building to Evelyn Farbman, who also worked at the CAGM, a smile crept upon her face. “And then she named it after herself!” she exclaimed (Farbman). On the phone with Jim Pestana, I asked about it again: “Oh, I know the story of Idella and the Day Care,” he replied (Pestana). Alberta Scruggs, Howell’s 101 year old sister, said seeing the sign “gives [her] a good feeling, ‘cus, you know, ‘cus.” She paused. “She earned it.” Scruggs chuckled. I have a feeling there’s more to the story than I’m getting. There’s some kind of inside joke, or charm to this story that those who knew Howell are in on – some quality to her persistence, her passion, that made that daycare building possible. What were the events of the sign to which Grant, Pestana, Farban, and Scruggs allude? I imagine Howell dreaming of and preparing her future day care center, her conversations at the CAGM and with the Redevelopment Agency. I imagine her raising the first sign, a different one than that which stands now, and fundraising the last chunk of money she needed to go forward with the project. I imagine her work in the CAGM offices within the building, her relationship to the teachers, families, and children of the day care.

By 1999 the CAGM was absorbed by the Community Renewal Team, which, based out of Hartford and spanning across many Connecticut towns, did not have the same local roots, and local priorities, held by the CAGM. “It was quite different then than what the CRT is now,” Reverend Earlene Grant mused. The CRT is “not a
community thing or a people thing…it started out to be for the people… everybody knew ‘Dell’” (Grant). The sign, a visible remainder from the redevelopment, while it memorializes Howell’s advocacy efforts, denies us the scenes of her work: what she was like as an activist, a boss, a friend. It suggests that Howell’s work was in line with the efforts of the Redevelopment Agency, when a long and more tenuous relationship had actually taken place. It denies us her relationship with the CAGM, whose name is now replaced on the sign by that of the “Community Renewal Team,” and suggests that the work of the CRT is what she hoped it would be, when in fact it may not be.

I pressed the doorbell of the CRT building, and the unit manager kindly let me in. I told her that I was writing a paper about Idella Howell and the development of the day care, and asked if she could show me around, or tell me anything about Howell. Behind her, I noticed a wall full of awards the center had received in the past ten years, and a couple photographs of groups posing in front of the building. In one, people stand in front of a different “Idella W. Howell” sign, framed with wood panels painted in blue. In another a group of children stand in front of a different building, holding a hand-drawn sign that reads: “THANK YOU C.A.G.M.” The unit manager said she didn’t know anything about Howell or the photos, which I quickly inquired about, but she was happy to show me around. She had only worked as unit manager of the center for a few years, she told me, and she operated two other centers as well. We walked down the long yellow hallway and she pulled open four heavy doors so I could see the classrooms inside. It was naptime, and all of the kids were sleeping. When we got back to the office, she rifled through a couple of photo albums she
found in a cabinet, to see if she could find anything about Howell, but the photos didn’t look old enough to her, and she didn’t recognize anyone in them anyway (Hinz).

What does Howell’s name on the sign mean, if the people within the building don’t know who she was? Whenever I spoke with someone outside the daycare about Howell, they almost always alluded to her name on the sign – “have you seen it?” they asked, as though it were evidence of Howell’s impact on the city. Nevertheless, inside the daycare, “Idella Howell” was nothing more than a label, a hollow shell that could be emptied out and replaced with something new. The building, it seems, is the opposite of an archive. It denotes precisely what is retained by documentary means – a name – and what is not – a legacy, a body of acts.

**Who Cares for Activist Remains?**

Heike Roms, in her essay “Archiving Legacies: Who Cares for Performance remains?” draws attention to the individuals who perform acts of archiving: a collection of engagements that become an archive themselves. Documentary practices, Roms writes, are typically focused on singular pieces of work, whereas archival practices center on a body of work produced by an artist or group of artists over a span of time. She, like I, works with the legacies of a generation (in her case, of performers; in mine, of community advocates) that is slowly disappearing, “lending greater urgency to the question of what remains when not just performance but also the performer herself is no longer present and her body is replaced by her body of work” (Roms 38).
Roms argues that entering into the archive allows us to find new points of access to “the text” – which she expands to mean the act or event of a performance or experience. This becomes especially essential, I believe, when these “texts” – these physical acts of agency – are no longer accessible but are nonetheless a continuing presence in the social fabrics with which they were once engaged. While we cannot conjure the lost performance, or its precise position within this past social realm, we can examine how scholars, archivists, community and family members engage with physical and ephemeral archival remains. This continuous engagement is an archive of its own, and entering such an archive of acts allows us to explore the past “performance’s” continuous presence in our own performative encounter with it. The archive is a site of potentially inexhaustible re-engagement, particularly, I would add, as it is always shifting. The archive, as I will show here, is never the same, and every engagement with the archive is a mark – an archive – of its own.

In each section of her chapter, Roms asks, “who cares for performance archives?” and envisions different archival caretakers and scenes of caretaking. Roms’ “care” is twofold, and points to the fact or act of desiring, needing, and relying upon archival remains as well as the practice of handling and feeling for the remains. I believe that she sees these two meanings as intertwined; both taking from and giving to the archive leave a mark, another archive, upon it. I reproduce Roms’ method here, and consider all the points of care that uphold the archive of performative agency. I work with the archival materials at my disposal to gesture toward the scenes, the archiving events, through which they have passed. In the spirit of Schneider, I consider these practices of re-engagement “messy and eruptive reappearance[s …]
challenging, via the performative trace, any neat antinomy between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence – the ritual repetitions that mark performance as simultaneously indiscreet, non-original, relentlessly citational, and remaining” (103).

My encounter with Moses and Howell began with a student paper, written in 1987 by Wesleyan University senior Claudia Center, whose process of interviewing these people, and assembling their stories into a paper left the most comprehensive recording of their redevelopment advocacy work I have encountered. The singularity of this piece of student work suggests the importance of documentation and student research, particularly in places, like Middletown, and subjects, like community activism and service, which otherwise get minimal scholarly attention. Center’s paper is also one of the few documents about the redevelopment that discusses its racist undertones. She described how the Italian community in the waterfront area had obtained increasing political power during the redevelopment, likely ensuring fair compensation for Italian homeowners, and offering employment opportunities to local Italian developers, builder, architects, and workers. She emphasized, based on conversations with Stephen Dyson and Common Council member Max Corvo, that many of these homeowners did not even live in the waterfront area by the time of the redevelopment, but had moved out to the suburbs and rented out their previous homes to black renters, who were not entitled to low-income housing and rent assistance money for reasons she did not include (Center 14).

The accessibility of Center’s paper also points to the traditional archive’s privileging of written and academic work over other, more ephemeral, embodied
forms. Now that Moses and Howell are no longer alive, and many of the people with whom they lived and worked have disappeared as well, my encounters with them are no longer with the “original” subjects or performances, but with their reappearances, iterations, echoes: of which this paper is one. Center’s paper is, most importantly, one of the only records of Moses and Howell’s redevelopment advocacy work that cites their own words, and can be traced to the events of Center’s conversations with them, conversations that were in their own right archival – even beyond Center’s documentation of them.

Somehow, the school’s Special Collections must have gotten ahold of Center’s paper. Maybe the university archivists took a copy of every final paper written by seniors at the end of the year, or the student’s professor suggested that she give it to the archive. A professional archivist must have received the paper, filed it, and guarded it the “Middletown Collection,” from which it has been taken out a periodically by other students beginning research on the city’s redevelopment history.

I went into Special Collections in the fall of 2017 looking for material on the Middletown redevelopment, where I wrote my name and my research topic on a sign-in sheet. The next time I wanted to look at the paper, I searched the archive’s online database, and downloaded the PDF to my computer desktop. I travelled down to the Middlesex Historical Society on Middletown’s Main Street and searched through boxes of newspaper clippings, searching for any trace of these women and the South End Family Association.

Later, I wanted to know how many others had touched the document since its arrival in the archive, but when I asked Leith Johnson, the current university archivist,
he said he could not show me the call slips recording who has taken out this paper and when. Confidentiality of research, he said, was a basic library principle. And even if he were to look, he continued, the documents were filed chronologically, not by item, so it would be a long search (L. Johnson). The documentary archive, through this confidentiality principle and organizational method, hides its own record of archival care, of the events and agencies surrounding its documents.

Archivists, however, help to fill in the gaps of the documentary record. They remember how a particular document is used over time, and point the researcher to people to contact, places to visit, materials to access. Debby Shapiro, who is not trained as a professional archivist but who is nonetheless the executive director of the Middlesex Historical Society, has lived in Middletown for the majority of her adult life. She has pointed me to numerous contacts whose words have filled and informed this chapter and thesis. “I don’t know some things, but I do know who to ask,” she told me (Shapiro). “I’m known for it” (Shapiro). Who was it that brought Center in contact with Howell and Moses? What were the words, phone calls, house calls, exchanged to facilitate their meeting?

When I emailed the current board members of the Community Renewal Team, which absorbed the CAGM in 1999, I was able to track down a number of people who worked under Moses and Howell. Many described the two women, who worked in collaboration for many years, as antitheses of one another. Howell was loud, brash, and strong-willed – a tall woman. She kept track of everything, and whenever she felt that some bureaucratic injustice had occurred, she would jump in the car and march into the state offices in Hartford (Grant). Moses, according to Evelyn Farbman, who
wrote grants for the CAGM in the late seventies, was much smaller, “more quiet, serious, warm, motherly in a ‘boy you don’t mess with Reba Moses’ way” (Farbman). Both women nonetheless held a lot in common, and were good friends (Scruggs).

“They were powerhouses,” Farbman recalled (Farbman). “You knew they cared about you,” Reverend Earlene Grant remembered. “They taught you a lot” (Grant).

The community – the collective consciousness – is an embodied archive that makes room for, and preserves, the material of embodied life, of memory. Howell and Moses left an archival mark upon the community consciousness, and the practice of remembering these women, of engaging with the archive they left – silently, aloud, solitarily, in communion – is its own archival mark. Mark Masselli, who co-founded the city’s Community Health Center in 1972 with Reba Moses, remembered:

I’m nineteen and walking through [her] neighborhood, and [Moses is] on the porch of that church and said ‘what are you doing here?’ and I say ‘oh I’m hanging up posters, because I have a project’ and she said, ‘well you come and sit and talk to me.’ We would become lifelong friends…[She was] a fierce person to come about. A diminutive woman with an incredibly well anchored and balanced understanding of who she was, so she was never intimidated. She dragged me into many police stations where she became a strong and clarion voice for justice…Even after retirement, [she] was someone whose counsel was widely sought in the African American community, and certainly in the ‘majority’ community… Her voice was always bending toward justice and freedom for people. (Masselli)

Masselli, as leading figure in the free healthcare movement in Connecticut, continues to carry the memory, and the legacy, of Moses’ work in his day-to-day efforts.

During our phone call, Reverend Earlene Grant recalled a day when Howell invited her up to her office and said, “I need someone to head the weatherization program” (Grant). Grant, having no idea what weatherization was, did not feel that she could take the job, which would require organizing a whole crew of people to
ensure the city’s houses were fuel-efficient. Howell, who had just figured out that the federal government was withholding bonuses because the CAGM’s weatherization program was not up to par, handed Grant a thick notebook she had put together with all of the weatherization information from the HUD office in Hartford. Grant, still hesitant, worried that the crew wouldn’t listen to her. Howell prompted her along nonetheless. “Well, anyway,” Grant remembered, “I took on her persona – the Idella Howell persona, and we did a good job. She was behind me and she let [the crew] know” (Grant). Howell’s mark, the mark of her persona, was embodied and reenacted by Grant. This act was not simply an archive of Howell, but of the space between the two women: one of their many points of contact during and after Howell’s lifetime.

Howell’s sister Alberta Scruggs, unlike everyone else I spoke with, told me she didn’t know much about Howell’s work with the CAGM: “she didn’t talk to me about it, because,” she laughed, “she ran it, she was the head of it. Don’t you see her name down there? She didn’t have no time, and I didn’t bother her. Her job was, you know, and she was on the go all the time” (Scruggs). “After she retired, it didn’t last…it just…” She gestured, with both her hands, as if showing something caving in. “It went out of business after that,” she says. Howell, according to her sister, was the CAGM; her actions kept the CAGM afloat. Howell “was always busy…she was always…” Unable to finish her sentence, Scruggs held her hands out before her and wiggled her fingers intently (Scruggs). She shrugged, and chuckled. You know what I mean, she seemed to suggest. Her 101-year-old memory was foggy, she said. The exact details were too much to conjure or to say out loud to me, but her gesture, her
hands outstretched, signified the abundance, the enormity, of her sister’s actions in Middletown.

What I have traced here is not simply a chorus of voices, which I intend to bring into the documentary archive. Instead, I am trying to emphasize how I have made contact with the remains of Moses and Howell, and how these remains remain outside of the documentary archive. As I mark events and ongoing practices of archival care, I find that what I determine to be the “mark” of the advocate and the archival “engagement” with this mark begin to blur. Moses and Howell left an impression upon the documentary archive, the landscape, and the public consciousness, but it is through the engagement of the student, the community member, and the professional archivist that these impressions deepen, merge, iterate. Moses and Howell are held in documents, landscapes, oral memory and embodied experience for their own acts, agencies, voices, personalities, dreams, and for their relationships with others. While the documentary archive denounces the value of agency as an archival remain, the qualities and events of the oral, embodied archive matter, as they attract, hold, preserve the performances of a person’s life, allowing them to reappear, in story, in re-embodiments, in gestures, of the present day. Moses and Howell are memorialized every time they are written about, thought about, spoken about – and these moments of recalling are, in their own right, archival.
3. People and Parking Lots: Unbundling the Automobile Landscape

I walked into Middletown’s Mid-Town Parking Arcade on a rainy day in April, bypassing a sign at the entrance that read, “Lower Lot Closed Until Further Notice.” With the exception of a few police cars parking along the structure’s edge, the garage appeared to be empty. I walked diagonally across the asphalt, through the concrete pillars, over scattered pieces of trash, cutting over the vacant parking slots. Water permeated the structure, streaming from holes in the garage ceiling onto small piles of crumbled debris. The Parking Arcade was built in 1965 during the city’s first redevelopment project, the Center Street Project, atop a two-block area that previously housed a compact neighborhood of at least 146 individuals and families and 57 businesses (Raymond & May Associates). Today, after months of shifting signs that made the garage available for anyone, for police parking, for no one, the city had finally declared the garage closed. Right now, chairman of the Economic Development Committee Gerry Daley told me, the city was trying to attract private developers to replace this garage, slated for demolition in a couple months (Daley). The garage, in its process of disassemblage, on the brink of disappearance, hearkens to the moment of its construction – the city’s redevelopment of the mid-60s. What does the Parking Arcade, as a remain of the redevelopment, suggest about how Middletown retains and erases its landscapes? If I turn back the clock, what people,
objects, stories would emerge out of the concrete? By what means would they reveal themselves? Would they tell me how they came to become a parking garage? How they hid themselves within it? The questions feel urgent; what I can access of the Parking Arcade today I will lose in just a short time. (Figure 13).

From the top level of the garage, facing east, I looked over the autoshop building and the highway toward the river. Turning around, now facing Main Street, the municipal police department rose above me where the Sears department store, constructed with the Parking Arcade in 1965, stood until it was torn down in the early 1990s. Around the same time, the city removed the northern half of the original garage to make room for the new Superior Court Parking Garage, which was then connected to the Parking Arcade. Given the seemingly clear cut transformation from the Center Street neighborhood to the first redeveloped block of the “Central Business District,” it seemed at first obvious to me that the redevelopment in Middletown privileged nonhumans – cars, parking lots – over human residents, many of whom were displaced from their homes without adequate resources to relocate. In this chapter, once again, I envision the city as an archive, and use this archive to trace the teams of humans and nonhumans who shaped and were shaped by the redevelopment.

The city-as-archive, I argue, does not exist as an enclosed material thing, but as a composition of many, many hybrid human and nonhuman actors – called “actants” – that reveal and conceal the many human and nonhuman actors of the redeveloping city. A seemingly singular remain of the redevelopment, like the Parking Arcade, is in fact composed of many actants that envisioned it, built it, and kept themselves concealed within its material form. The Parking Arcade, and the land
upon which it is built, have taken many different forms, which I seek to identify not as solid materials, but as the configurations that hold these visible “materials” together. Once I have, to the best of my ability, specified what these actants are and how they relate to one another, I interrogate when and by what means they reveal themselves and explore the stakes of this transition. Often, I find that individual actants are visible right before or after they get absorbed within greater entities. The very moment a new form materializes, its actants disappear, and the very moment the form disintegrates, its actants appear once again. Actants, I argue, are not passive subjects in the delineation of materials, remains, and archives: they are always working to disguise agency under the guise of materiality. As such, I attempt to mark, with as much precision I can, the specific logics and agencies of individual redevelopment actants that participated in producing the city-as-archive I encounter today.

**The Parking Arcade**

In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida argues: “there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside” (11). In Middletown’s city-as-archive, some things, like parking garages, highways, cars, are rendered visible, while others, like tightly-knit pedestrian neighborhoods, are rendered invisible. Remains are rendered visible or invisible by the archival technologies that bring matter into being. Derrida writes: “the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event”
(17). The technologies of the archive, the archive as technology, shapes matter as it materializes (Derrida 8, 15). A parking garage in the city-as-archive is a parking garage not simply in its physical form, but because it can be traced back to a set of dealings that delineate the material “parking garage,” and everything that “parking garage” stands for, as a singular concrete entity. At the same time, Derrida writes, the archive works to disguise its own dealings. “It never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement” (Derrida 10). The city-as-archive hides any consciousness that it participates in the construction of a “parking garage”; it hides any consciousness of its agency at all.

I linger, in this chapter, on Derrida’s claim that “archival meaning [and matter] is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives” (18). These structures not only include mechanical technologies – like the printing press – but also systemic technologies, like the state. What are the forces that shape the material remains in the city-as-archive – that bring matter into being? What are they made of? Can I make contact with them – these forces that work to disguise themselves – and if so, how? A science of the archive – and thus a science of the city-as-archive, Derrida suggests, necessitates an interrogation of its technologies: the forces that render it – falsely – unquestionably whole.

I begin my investigation of the redeveloping city-as-archive by deciphering what its archiving technologies are and what they are made of. The redevelopment period was characterized by the onset of a particularly prolific technology: that of the car, its infrastructures and cultures, is people and parking lots. This technology or set
of technologies, what sociologist John Urry calls the “system of automobility,” can be understood, by Derrida’s terms, as the shaping technology of the redeveloping city-as-archive. The automobility system, Urry writes:

‘unbundled’ territorialities of home, work, business and leisure that historically were closely integrated, and fragmented social practices in shared public spaces…Automobility divides workplaces from homes, producing lengthy commutes into and across the city. It splits homes and business districts, undermining local retail outlets to which one might have walked or cycled, eroding town-centres, non-car pathways and public spaces. (28)

The automobility system exerted prolific agency over the materials of the city and brought new materials into being: neighborhoods were broken up and stretched out into new systems of highways, suburbs, and parking lots. Automobility brought the car into being not only as a car, but as a “car”: a “system of these fluid interconnections…materialized in stable form” (26). The car, struck with new meanings and new powers, filled the city-as-archive. Without the system of automobility, there could be no “car,” “highway,” “parking lot,” or “city of the future” – each a material entity and a sign for the many forces that compose it. Still, if I am to understand, as Derrida suggests, the archiving of the city-as-archive, I need to know: what is this technology of the archive made of? How do I track its acts?

According to Urry, automobility is composed of six major components, each of which “involves autonomous humans combined with machines with capacity for autonomous movement along the paths, lanes, streets and routeways of one society after another” (26).1

1 The automobility system is composed of six components that together “generate and reproduce the ‘specific character of domination’ that it exercises” (Urry 25). These components include first, the manufactured object of the car and the car industry; second, the car as the major item of individual consumption after housing that gives status to its owner and user through its sign values of speed, security, freedom, and so on; third, the complex made up of technical and social
Bruno Latour, in his article “On Technical Mediation – Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy,” argues that all seemingly enclosed entities are made up of humans and nonhumans that form collectives. In fact, he writes, there are no pure “humans” or “nonhumans,” “subjects” and “objects” at all. Instead, he opts for the term “actant,” which he uses to describe hybrid human and nonhuman actors, which are always mutually acting, responsible, intertwined, hybrid entities that take many different roles and have many different goals or functions. In these pages, I use this term “actant” to mean, first, a part of a network or many networks, Second, an actant is a network of its own, holding a nested web of actants that are neither a product of purely local interactions, sited in homogenous time and space, but also of past actors that have been “shifted, translated, delegated or displaced” onto actants that are still present (Latour 50). Third, an actant has its own agency, logics, goals and functions that interact with those of other actants. Since an actant is always composed of more actants, however, its logics are always a product of the combination of goals, aims, and agencies that have brought it into being. By Latour’s paradigm, there is no one to one correspondence between the technologies of the city-as-archive and the materials within it, as neither, according to Latour, is an enclosed entity. Automobility, which I determine to be the technology of the city-as-archive, is hybrid, as is the redeveloping city-as-archive it produces and manipulates.

relationships with other industries such as retail centers and car maintenance shops; fourth, the ‘quasi-private’ mobility that dominates other forms of mobility such as walking and biking; fifth, the culture that sustains major discourses of the “good life” and “what is necessary for an appropriate citizenship of mobility;” and sixth, the “most important cause of environmental resource-use” resulting from the extraordinary amount of material, space, and power used to sustain car manufacturing, infrastructure, and maintenance, and to remediate its many global political and environmental consequences (26).
As I drive up the now one-way College Street along the Arcade’s southern border, past the signs and cones and parking attendants redirecting drivers away from the garage, I wish to render the system of automobility and the city-as-archive inside out, examining instead the specific actants involved in transforming a neighborhood into a Parking Arcade. It is difficult to see the swarming interactions among, exchanges between, and reconfigurations of them, however, because actants are subject to “blackboxing,” Latour explains, “a process that makes the joint production of actors and artifacts entirely opaque” (“On Technical Mediation” 36). When I look at the city’s Parking Arcade, I do not see all the humans and nonhumans who went into the assemblage of each individual part: the plans, people, yards of concrete. Nor do I see everything that went into that plans, people, and yards of concrete, or the ways each was translated into new meanings and matter, meanings and matter then translated into a parking garage. Instead, the Parking Arcade appears to me as a “black box”: a seemingly impermeable, unquestionable, singular material object. My task, as I confront this and other black boxes, is to identify all the actants that have participated in its present existence. I use Latour’s terms “black box,” “collective,” “group,” and “network” interchangeably to denote all configurations of actants that appear as complete entities: as institutions, neighborhoods, plans, parking lots.

Confronting the material remains of the redevelopment, I look not only for the actants embedded within a perceived material whole. I also attempt to discern the specific qualities of actants that render them visible to me. When actants succeed at delineating a seemingly enclosed entity, they render this entity visible as they become invisible. There is, then, a kind of inverse relationship between material visibility and
actant visibility. Nevertheless, actants do, Latour argues, leave traces. This inverse relationship has exceptions. These traces include the movements of group makers, group talkers, and group holders that speak for and define the group. Traces are also left when, in the formation of a group, an actant withdraws a boundary from one group and redraws it around another, which involves designating the initial group “as being empty, archaic, dangerous, obsolete, and so on. So for every group to be defined, a list of anti-groups is set up as well” (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 32).

The very lines or categorizations that mark new groups or old groups, delineating unproblematic definitions of these groups, are traces of their own. Traces of actants abound, as group delineation, according to Latour is the “constant task of the actors themselves.” The actants that compose a group work to enclose it, and this process of marking in, as with any archival practice, also mark out. Actants render actants visible when they speak for the collective, or when they are added or subtracted from a collective. Actants render actants invisible when they absorb or are absorbed by the whole. Actants are double agents of their own visibility and invisibility; they are also double agents of archival visibility and invisibility.

The period of redevelopment, characterized by the destruction and construction of political, textual, archival, and landscape entities oriented around the automobile, is rich with traces of actants entering or exiting a collective. These movements in and out importantly render actants momentarily visible, allowing me not only to identify the actant and to see its interaction with other actants, but also to trace its line of actancy even farther back into the past – to see what other actants exist within it. When actants become visible, I can attempt to decipher their logics. I
argue, particularly, that the actants of the redeveloping city held distinct but nonetheless pervasive agencies that privileged consumers and people in cars over human residents of the waterfront neighborhood. I argue also, that the rhetoric of redevelopment plans and press participated in divulging myths of human and nonhuman essentiality, indicating a one-to-one correspondence between agent and outcome – “expressways pay,” or department stores make jobs. These myths, which run counter to everything I will argue here, were a crucial force in propelling the Middletown redevelopment forward and inciting actions that disregarded the lives of the city’s downtown inhabitants.

Importantly, I have mostly been able to mark the actants that appear in the redevelopment’s documentary archive: listed in a plan, a summary, or some other documentation of the Parking Arcade development. The documentary archive is its own black box shrouded as “what we know” about the redevelopment. Most of these documentary materials exist because a group-spokesperson, an actant or collection of actants, has produced them. Often, in this case, they are created by those affiliated with the redevelopment effort. As we must understand actants amidst their constant attempt to delineate the boundaries of their blackbox, and to enclose themselves within it, we must understand the documents that divulge them as a representation of actancy, which is always, inevitably, partial.

I begin this chapter oriented around the Parking Arcade because it serves as archival evidence of the city’s reorientation around the automobile during the redevelopment. This reorientation cannot be mapped with a single line, as in: the city wanted to transform the landscape to accommodate more cars and commerce and so
an automobile landscape emerged. Instead, this reorientation was orchestrated by many different actants, each of which held distinct positions, powers, logics, and influences that together produced the gnarled no-so-material Parking Arcade. Many of these actants are listed in redevelopment plans and newspaper clippings: the Redevelopment Agency, the mayor and other city officials, The River Valley Development Corporation that developed the Sears, and Atwood-Collins, who developed the garage – each of which was made up of many more actants.

A photo taken in 1965 shows five construction workers standing around an enormous, cleanly cut T-shaped slab of concrete, hovering on its way down to lock in beside other, nearly identical pieces of the Parking Arcade. (Figure 14). A man in the foreground points his arm to the right, gesturing likely to the person operating the crane that holds the concrete in the air, a person and a machine that don’t appear in the image but who are nonetheless there. The photograph shows how the garage was assembled, but what about the individual pieces of concrete? What steps, what people, what things became these enormous T-shaped entities, soon forgotten within the larger entity of the Parking Arcade?

Once the Arcade, composed of people, plans, hundreds of yards of concrete and 600 painted stalls, was “enclosed” as a material entity in April of 1965, more and more actants were pulled into play, reaching toward the city’s envisioned future. The garage’s position just off Route 9, the Redevelopment Agency hoped, would place the Sears store within, and make it competitive with, a larger network of state commercial districts between Hartford and Old Saybrook. At first, the city and Atwood-Collins, the Parking Arcade developer, gave Sears shoppers and patrons of
other local businesses validated parking for one hour. Within a couple months, however, it became clear that most shoppers were uninterested in parking at the new facility. By August Atwood-Collins, determined that he would be unable to pay the city the $50,000 annual lease for the garage, resulting in months of negotiations regarding who would run the garage and how much parking would cost. The mayor, the manager of the Chamber of Commerce Retail Trade Bureau, the police chief, representatives from the Consumer Sales for the Sears department, the Public Works Director, the Redevelopment Director, the Sears project architect, 42 firms in the Riverview Center, and numerous others worked to incite consumer usage of the parking garage (“Garage”; Hambrick; Pekkanen).

Each actant had a distinct stake in the project. Parkers wanted an easy, obvious, cheap place to park; the city, while it was running the garage, wanted to make a profit from the parking; meanwhile, the merchants of the new “Riverview Center” wanted to accommodate their shoppers with free parking, which would increase their commercial revenue (“Under Used Garage”). The various negotiators experimented with offering parkers validation tickets covering varying lengths of time, using new signs, shifting the traffic directionality of the surrounding streets, altering the cost of parking in the garage and Main Street, and even placing a person in front of the garage to explain the validation and parking procedure to incoming drivers. There’s another elegant black-and-white photo of the garage held in the Historical Society, showing this person in the booth and a large cardboard sign reading “GARAGE OPEN” propped in front of the garage entrance, which is labeled
with the words “IN” and “OUT.” (Figure 15). Over the top floor of the garage, I can see the word “SEARS.”

Still, parkers complained that the garage would close simply because an attendant was absent. They avoided the parking garage in favor of Main Street’s diagonal parking slots, slots that were actants too, declaring the garage’s perpendicular spots difficult to back out of (“Garage”). In each attempt to bring the garage into its “final form,” actants reached for more actants, more people, stores, signs, roads, traffic regulations. Meanwhile, the bustling parking garage – the solid, predictable entity anticipated by many of the project’s players – remained an illusion, just out of reach. Even though the Parking Arcade existed in material form, its anticipated forms and meanings – parkers and profits – did not.

All of the people, objects, and texts that led up to this point, all seeking to execute a different “project” translated, by the garage’s second Christmas season, into a largely empty Sears lot. I draw this equation in its simplified form to show how meaning is translated into seemingly singular material objects, and to indicate how matter traces back to more materials with more meanings. In this story of the failing Parking Arcade, there is no one to one correlation between intention and outcome. Actants, each with their own goals and logics, lean against each other and point, in their combination, toward unpredictable, shifting material results that differ starkly from actant intentions (Beinhorn, “First Renewal”).

Over time, however, new combinations of actants, translated into a garage that appeared to be an “essential” component of the city landscape. The people who lived in, worked in, and shopped in Middletown knew where the garage was, how to enter
and exit, how to pay for it. Business owners relied upon the garage’s integration in the cultural and automobile landscape, as their consumers not only held a relationship to their store, but to the garage where they would park on their way to the store. This set of connections – consumer, car, highway, garage, store – became streamlined to the point that it was not recognized at all, and actants disappeared from consciousness. The only reason I am able to identify it here is because I have come into contact, via redevelopment plan and press, with the moments before this streamlining happened. I have come into contact, also, with the moments after this streamlining fell apart – when, once again, actant traces became deep and dark.

Today, Pamela Steele, owner of a small knitting supplies store near the lot tells a Channel 30 news reporter that business has suffered since the garage closed – a closing that is itself an actant (Lank and Susanin). Without the garage, the translation from consumer, car, highway, garage, store, business falls apart and a new translation appears in its place: consumer, car, highway, no garage, no store, no business.

As translations from actants to matter occur, we are at risk of losing contact with the traces that enabled this equation. How do we redraw the lines of these past configurations? We rely upon the actants that marked the garage obsolete, that spoke for it, that moved away from it. It matters, in other words, what groups these actants form, what they appear to be, what they say they are, and what translate into. My investigation, as I have shown already, is focused not only on uncovering what the actants of the parking garage are and how they interact, but also on discovering the chasm between the agency they exert and what they, in their combination, become. In the mid-60s, when actants formed the Parking Arcade – drawing together the
meanings and materials – they also formed the “anti-group” of the Center Street neighborhood as well. This anti-group formation not only included “unbundling” the physical neighborhood that preceded the garage, but designating this neighborhood as “blighted.” As with all group formations, this anti-group categorization disguised the multiplicity of actants embedded in the neighborhood. In this case, the neighborhood “project area” appeared to be purchased, removed, and replaced in one swoop. What people, things, connections composed the Center Street neighborhood? How were its physical materials reoriented to accommodate the components of the automobility system? I know only what the visible actants show me.

The project’s Final Report: Community Renewal Program published in 1964, just before the Parking Arcade was constructed, stated that 146 people were displaced by the project, in addition to 1 car wash, 1 electric supply store, 4 grocery stores, 1 shoe store, 2 jewelry stores, 1 insurance agency, 1 artist, 1 washing machine, 1 photo studio, 2 hardware stores, 2 clothing stores, the Republican Town Committee Office, the Central Labor Union, 5 industrial businesses, 1 retail cosmetics business, 1 shoe repair business, 1 paint store, 1 house painter, 1 second hand furniture store, 2 plumbing supply stores, 1 aluminum windows retail store, 1 attorney, 2 moving and storage companies, 1 retail auto parts store, 3 grilles, 1 rooming house, 1 news shop, 1 dancing studio, 2 drug stores, 1 real estate agency, 1 doctor, 1 bottle shop, 1 dentist, 1 C.P.A., 2 furniture sales, 1 machinery storage company, the Water Department, the Middletown Manufacturing Association, 1 retail poultry store, 1 lunch room, and 1 furnished apartment (9). It’s striking to imagine all of these units fitting into two
blocks that have held, since the redevelopment, a much shorter list of people and businesses. (Figure 16).

Today, a singular plaque stands on a raised walkway where Center Street used to be, and reads “This site commemorates the graphic location of Center Street. A street that will never fade from our memories.” It is accompanied by three panels developed by the Historical Society, each summarizing the downtown of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The “Middletown in the 1900s” panel includes a mid-century image of Main Street, packed with cars. Before this time, the waterfront neighborhood had had very few cars: it was a neighborhood in which connections between the automobile, its cultures and landscapes had not yet strengthened, pulling apart other actant connections. In his oral history held at the Historical Society, Vincent Amato, who grew up in the North End of the city and whose father had a small plumbing and heating store on Main Street recalled:

In the 30s and 40s, almost nobody had automobile. There were millions of automobiles in the country. In a place like Middletown, all the people lived downtown, except the farmers, and around the downtown, you could walked to work or used trolley cars. (Amato)

Isabelle Bozzo, raised on William Street in the late 40s, begrudgingly remembers walking up the hill to school every day. Nobody in her family drove, she told me. Her grandfather walked to The Foundry factory every day, making glass lanterns. Her father, working at another nearby factory, made door stops, can openers, and other “odds and ends” (Bozzo). Everybody except the farmers, as Amato says, lived downtown. Of course, this is not true, but Amato’s description denotes what Middletown citizens understood about their neighborhood, the blackboxed entity of the downtown described as a place without cars. The city was held together by
houses, trolley cars, factories, and pedestrian movements. The lines of connection were endless, and would by the middle of the century, be “unbundled,” transformed by the actants of the automobility system. During the redevelopment the city acquired all the houses in the two-block area, tore them down, turning the land into a single parcel. They then divided this parcel into big chunks, which sold to developers who designed and built large boxy buildings for large companies, and a parking garage. The redeveloped land was constructed in conjunction with, and became a piece of, a sprawling infrastructural system of highways. This is not to say that there were fewer people or things where there had once been more. After the redevelopment, the number of actants who participated in the development of the land continued to grow and grow, hidden within the sparse material enclosures that replaced the neighborhood: the Sears, the parking garage, and the autobody shop.

The construction of the garage necessitated the elimination of people from the city block between College and Court Streets, not simply to make physical space for the garage, but to make space for the forms of the automobility system, which relied upon the sprawling lives of human beings – lives that demand daily usage of the car (Beinhorn, “Decision”). The ‘unbundling’ of the neighborhood and bundling of the Parking Arcade privileged residents who had cars, allowing them to enjoy the so-called freedoms of the automobility system to which the entire city was being reoriented. A map published in a 1964 summary report of the redevelopment showed where white and non-white residents were displaced from Center Street. (Figure 17). The map revealed that “non-white” families were more often pushed further from the center of town, suggesting that the unbundling of the neighborhood was most taxing
for residents of color (Raymond & May Associates 10). Many low-income residents of color who were forced to move from the waterfront area were placed in public housing apartments two miles from the city center, which was particularly debilitating for those who didn’t have cars (Center 21). Whereas having or not having a car made minimal difference in a neighborhood stocked with grocery stores, houses, factories and businesses, it made all the difference after the redevelopment.

When I asked Bozzo if she ever went back to the neighborhood of her youth, she responded: “There’s not too much to walk around now. I mean you’re kinda cut off at Sumner Street…because past that you’re going into the highway…So there’s really not that much to see” (Bozzo). She’s right, the landscape was completely transformed to accommodate automobile movement and, as a result, deter the walking that occurred so frequently under a century before. But when I pressed Bozzo to tell me more about her opinions on the redevelopment, she replied: “I think that the highway was a good thing going through. We needed something [to get to] the Hartford area and then afterwards to the malls…We needed all that, so what can I say” (Bozzo). She exclaimed, “I use the new roads too!” (Bozzo). Some waterfront residents, like Bozzo, transitioned smoothly out of the neighborhood, into a place and a lifestyle that more likely necessitated use of a car – a car that they had the resources to acquire.

The Center Street neighborhood, this place without cars, was designated by the actant-spokespeople, mainly the forces of the redevelopment, as “blighted” – a designation that was essential to the composition of a new group: that of the “Parking Arcade.” In early phases of the Center Street Project, the city compiled an extensive
number of surveys, whose records were combined into an assessment of the neighborhood’s “existing or incipient blight,” a term that was then translated into the action of demolishing a neighborhood and constructing the Parking Arcade (Raymond & May Associates 18). The project’s Final Report offers a list of these documents and their uses, showing how each text was translated into a new meaning on its way to being absorbed into the physical changes that ensued. Census housing statistics were translated into “a generalized picture of housing conditions”; exterior field surveys, conducted by the city’s firemen, became “structural conditions”; family income, size, and characteristic reports became “indicator of what the area will be like in the future”; state department labor statistics became “possible effect on blight and physical deterioration” (Raymond & May Associates 18-21). Think of all the documents – all the people and objects that went into writing, producing, circulating, compiling, reading these texts. They aren’t present in the documentary archive in their original versions, as far as I can tell, but they are nonetheless listed here, in the Summary Report. Something is lost, in this textual absorption. It is difficult to tell how all of the documents listed stood on their own, before this external meaning was attributed to them. Besides what I have already explicated, what agencies shaped each one, what logics did their embedded actants divulge? Statistics, conversations, a sagging roof, a hole, a shaky step, were translated into signs of “blight,” a term that exerted tremendous agency justifying the demolition of housing, demolition that then translated into the construction of the parking garage (Raymond & May Associates 24).
Although the surveys purported to assess the entity of the Center Street “neighborhood,” there was not a “neighborhood” and then a “parking garage.” Instead, there were iterations of networks held within, and holding up, these delineated descriptions. In the early 1960s, when it became clear that displacement would occur – that the surveys had been translated into redevelopment plans which would soon be translated into housing demolition – about thirty white individuals and families voluntarily moved out of the project area before the city had begun to acquire properties. During this time, Center Street landlords, who were about to lose their homes to the redevelopment, continued to rent their units, mostly to individuals and families of color, who later had the most trouble relocating (Raymond & May Associates 6). This final “neighborhood” of people was marked “displaced,” but others – those that fled the neighborhood early, and perhaps even those who sought and acquired temporary homes in the redevelopment area – were displaced in their own right. Some of the residents pushed out of the Center Street project area then moved to the South End, which did not have enough units for all of the new people, and was targeted in its next redevelopment project (A1-8). The South End “displacement” translated into “overcrowding,” which became, again, “blight,” “demolition” and “parking lot.” But the documentary archive doesn’t make room for these complexities, spelling out only one “neighborhood,” one round of “displacement.”

As I enumerate the people affected by the shifting hybrid configurations of the waterfront neighborhood, the specific qualities of their relationships to the neighborhood become harder to pin down. I don’t know anything more about these
individuals who moved onto Center Street in the brief moments before the redevelopment besides what actant spokespeople, privileged by the documentary archive, recorded in the redevelopment’s documentary remains. Information on Center Street’s displaced individuals was included in the Final Report only as an anecdote encouraging future redevelopment officials to improve relationships with relocating residents and acquire properties as swiftly as possible so as to avoid the burden of having to relocate the city’s most disenfranchised citizens (13-14). These citizens, in all likelihood, were having troubling finding a home regardless; outside of the redevelopment area, however, the city would not have to be responsible for them. While group spokespeople are part of the group they form, they are inherently not a part of the anti-group they designate as they do so. Where do we find actants who do not speak for the anti-group – the displaced people of the neighborhood, their homes and belongings, their businesses, their friends? Their presence is nothing more than gestured toward.

Opening up the blackboxed, hybrid collective of the Parking Arcade and the documentary archive of “what we know” about the redevelopment, I not only determine who and what participated in the development of this particular object and its meanings. I attempt to uncover, also, connections have been severed, redirected, overridden – marked out – in order to make this new set of connections possible. Traces of these connections within the anti-group are even harder to discern, and often are only pointed to by the voices of actant spokespeople, who were engaged in the act of delineating, and thus privileging the new material form of the Parking Arcade. The record of actants is inestimably partial. The actants of a black box not
only worked to hide the materials that produced it, but all the other black boxes that preceded it, made of materials unbundled from their previous blackboxed forms.

**The Redevelopment Plan**

I transition now into an exploration of one of the city’s immaterialized traffic circulation plans – the “loop road plan.” I explore this text on multiple levels: as an actant pulled into play during the redevelopment and as a network of nested actants that held a convoluted set of actant intentions before they were absorbed by a material form. As already stated, plans, unlike objects, carry partially parsed actant traces that are absorbed by the objects they sometimes materialize into. It is no coincidence that, in my exploration of the Parking Arcade, texts filled in the many actantial roles that I was able to list: in moments of planning for the garage or reacting to the garage’s limitations. Textual plans partially remediate the problem of actant invisibility. Nevertheless, texts are written by group spokespeople, who are invariably engaged in the process of delineating which landscape objects and documentary archives will be at my disposal. In this section, I investigate how actants, or combinations of actants, carried their own logics and prejudices regarding and stemming from what it means to be “human” or “nonhuman” and what “humans” and “nonhumans” belonged in Middletown’s downtown. I am, as such, interested in the vocabulary and the logic of the actant, particularly rhetoric-as-actant, as it participated in the construction of the redeveloping city-as-archive.

Just after the construction of the garage, the Redevelopment Agency hired the Technical Planning Associates consultant group, which published the 1965 “Plan of Development” for the next phase of redevelopment. One of the main components of
this plan was the development of a “ring road” that would control automobile movement through the “Central Business District” and “feed” traffic into its parking facilities. Main Street would be transformed into an “access street” and “parking lot” for the bustling retail district, and the loop road would contain it, funneling motorists off of the Route 9 expressway, around and into the commercial area (Technical Planning Consultants 6). The loop road, an actant pulled into play to control traffic circulation in the city, perhaps partially on account of the city’s struggle to fill the Parking Arcade with cars, reappeared in redevelopment plans up until the 1980s, although it was never implemented.

I sit in the Law and Legislative Reference section of the Connecticut State Library in Hartford, trailing my finger along the lines of the loop road superimposed on a map of the downtown area, trying to imagine how it would have felt to drive along it, what the city may have been like had it been implemented. (Figure 18). The loop road was ostensibly aimed toward facilitating automobile access to parking facilities; nevertheless, it absorbed a far more convoluted set of actants and goals that together resulted in its failure. Nevertheless, as I have described already, outcomes do not trace back linearly to intentions, and actant agency does not simply disappear because it has not materialized. It matters what the loop road plan, as a text that influenced future plans that did materialize on the landscape, sought to do – what logics it perpetuated that participated in the redeveloping city. Six years after the initial loop road plan was published, a 1971 redevelopment report lamented the state protection of the Mortimer Cemetery as a hindrance in its construction:

It is apparent that cemeteries will, in the future, have to be dealt with in a more practical manner. Past practices indicate a great reluctance toward
involvement with cemeteries and their allied legal problems. It has been pointed out that other states, including New York, view urban cemeteries with less dignity. Perhaps future legislation at the State level may relieve local frustrations caused by cemeteries. Until new means are provided, Mortimer Cemetery will continue to be a stumbling block in the path of the ‘loop’ road. Alternatives have been discussed, including a westerly bypass of the cemetery (a road cutting diagonally across properties multiplies the necessary property acquisitions and severances) and ramping over the cemetery (air rights and additional construction costs seen as major problems). (A Parking Program 17)

Here, the Mortimer Cemetery was declared a “stumbling block” in the development of the plan for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, as the text shows, it was not simply the cemetery on its own that prevented the loop road from being constructed. It was “cemeteries and their allied legal problems.” It remains unclear to me, based on my investigations in the documentary archive, what “legal problems” the report refers to. “Legal problems” likely encompassed legislation contrived by legislators that arose out of particular conflicts involving actants denoted as “Connecticut” and “New York,” each of which exerted a distinct agency, dignity toward cemeteries, or lack thereof.

I went to visit the Mortimer Cemetery on a cold, grey day in November. When I arrived, I found the main gate, hinged between two rectangular stone pillars, locked with a thick rusted chain. A white sign on the door read “CEMETERY VANDALISM SUBJECT TO FINE AND OR JAIL.” About a week later, I learned that the key was held at the city firehouse, so I went to pick it up. Once inside the large enclosure, I walked the length of it, passing the tombstones, all varying sizes and shades of grey and brown, gathered in clusters around tall brown pillar-like tombstones carved with family names. The state “legal problems” described in the report privileged the preservation of these colonial bodies – many belonging to the
city’s most wealthy and powerful families of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – over the preservation of neighborhoods of living people – neighborhoods now largely severed from the locked cemetery.

John Mortimer’s 1778 will, held in one of many thick grantee and grantor indexes in the basement of Middletown’s City Hall, granted the inhabitants of the First Society of Middletown a one acre plot of land “to be used and improved as a Burying Ground for the inhabitants living within the town plot in said Middletown forever” (Mortimer). As the last person buried in the Mortimer Cemetery died in the mid-1800s, none of the people buried had any relationship to automobiles or to the automobile culture that would expand across the city leading up to and during the redevelopment period. Nevertheless, their agency as members of the city’s colonial history lingered. The city of Middletown, represented by the text of the redevelopment plan, challenged this agency, expressing that cemeteries should be uprooted, bodies displaced, for the purpose of improving downtown traffic circulation. The corpses seemed to lose meaning for the city officials writing the report perhaps because their lives no longer touched the lives of the living and because their lives never touched the automobile.

Regardless of the apparent tensions between the city and the state in the loop road conflict, the city also operated upon a disregard for human beings – specifically the city’s downtown residents, many of whom did not contribute substantially to the city’s tax base, and many of whom did not have cars at least partially on account of the tightly knit neighborhood of which they were a part. As an alternative to cutting through the cemetery, the city proposed to cut a road “diagonally across properties,”
which would increase “the necessary property acquisitions and severances” and, in all likelihood, augment the number of people who would be displaced. Even though the loop plan did not materialize, it was connected to multiple redevelopment projects that did push people out of the waterfront area. The plan was, as such, locked into the notion that the downtown area should be completely converted into a traffic-heavy retail area, necessitating the eradication of individuals from the residential district in favor of stores and parking lots.

Both the city and the state “legal problems,” though they were depicted in tension in the 1971 report, carried a disregard for particular configurations of people. The city government hoped to eradicate the Mortimer Cemetery and the bodies within it. Meanwhile, the state planned to protect the city’s colonial bodies over the city’s living residents: a meaningful privileging that participated in protecting a tract of land over half the size of the Center Street Project area from redevelopment. All these iterant disregards for people, manifested in multiple, snarled ways, were absorbed by the loop plan, which would not simply have become a swath of pavement, but a hybrid form and force directed against those who did not help foster the system of automobility in the city of Middletown. The immaterialization of the plan can be interpreted much the way its materialization could have been: it absorbed all of these actant logics, disguising the pervasiveness of actant orientation toward the automobile-person and away from the city resident.

Literary critic Barbara Johnson, like Latour, attempts to defamiliarize categories of “persons” and “things,” searching instead for something more specific, something attuned to the hybrid qualities of both. Her search is rooted in an
examination of rhetorical devices that deal with, exploit, manipulate, and produce the rigid categories of “persons” and “things” in question. “Is there,” Johnson asks in her essay “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” “any inherent connection between figurative language and questions of life and death, of who will wield and who will receive violence in a given human society?” (Johnson, “Apostrophe” 29). Johnson’s question points to a need to recognize rhetoric as an actant: as something that exerts agency. Rhetoric is, of course, an assemblage of actants writers, words, objects. It does not stand as an entity on its own, nor in any kind of concrete position in relation to “questions of life and death” or to “society,” neither of which hold solid forms.

I find Johnson’s question compelling nonetheless in my contemplation of what agency rhetoric, whittled down partially but not completely, exerts in combination with other actants. What does the rhetoric of redevelopment plans and press tell us about humans and nonhumans and how they operate in relation to one another? What are the stakes of this, in a moment where humans and nonhumans are being reorganized upon the landscape? I examine, as Johnson has, the particularities of rhetorical devices as they deal with humans and nonhumans. I ask, for each: how are human qualities attributed to artificial beings? What, according to the logic of this device, is “human”? How are persons and things positioned in relation to one another to reinforce this categorization, and what power dynamics and erasures does this positioning endow? Some rhetorical devices, as Johnson shows of the apostrophe, can “always have answered ‘yes’ to the question of whether [something] is a human being” (“Apostrophe” 34). Anthropomorphisms, Johnson writes in her chapter “Anthropomorphism in Lyric and Law,” “endow the world with meaning centered
around the representation of human being” and depend upon the givenness of the
essence of the human (Persons 18). They not only render their objects subjects, but
rely precisely on the status of the subject as distinct from the object – the status of
“human” as an enclosed, essentialized category.

There is no grand debate surrounding the humanity of a parking lot as there is
with a fetus, for instance (a subject Johnson takes on brilliantly and at length).
Nevertheless, the moment of redevelopment drastically altered the configuration of
humans and nonhumans in Middletown, an alteration that can be traced – at least
partially – in the movements of rhetorical agents. The rhetorical device of
anthropomorphism, which appeared frequently in redevelopment texts reinforced
essentialized – but nonetheless particularized and constructed – depictions of the
“human,” disguised the multiplicity and multidimensionality of actants involved in,
dislodged, and relocated during the redevelopment period, and contributed to
redevelopment’s systematic disregard for and forcible displacement of human actants
and the various hybrid connections that made up their lives. The myths of “human”
and “nonhuman” essentiality and actant singularity are not simply a collective
misunderstanding or ignorance of actants and techniques, as Latour suggests, but
something linked to the structure of our language, a structure that wielded seductive
claims about what automobiles and automobile landscapes, as individual entities
could do. The propensity of rhetorical structures and devices to do so participated in
propelling the changes that occurred in the redevelopment city.

In 1946, Connecticut’s State Highway Department published a report titled
“Connecticut’s Road Program.” The report holds three large images following the
same template, which divide up the piece. In each, “expressways” sits at the top of the page in a looping cursive font. (Figure 19). They read, in order, “Expressways are Safer,” “Expressways Will Solve Downtown Traffic Problem,” and “Expressways Pay” (State Highway Commission). Each of these graphics, placing the expressway in what Johnson calls “grammatical control,” anthropomorphizes the expressway as something that can protect, solve, pay. Different phrases following the same structure pepper the redevelopment archive. In a 1963 article, H.S. Sedgewick, general manager of Sears New England stores emphasized the role of the store as a citizen in the community by stating that it would “create jobs” (“Sears”). The 1965 “Plan of Development” affirmed that the city would “earn its collective living, just like any individual” (Technical Planning Consultants 20). In each case, an artificial body was placed in the subject of a sentence and depicted not just as a person but as a good citizen.

These claims of good citizenship by way of paying, making jobs, solving the traffic problem, making a living, were particularly significant as the redevelopment was launched partially on a campaign – sometimes more subtle than others – that asserted the low-income and working class citizens of the waterfront neighborhood were culpable for the decrepitude of their neighborhood and therefore the neighborhood needed to be eradicated. As stated earlier, documents assessing resident attitudes toward the neighborhood were combined with statistics on resident incomes and jobs and translated into a fuller assessment of neighborhood “blight” used in the redevelopment plans, which were then translated into the Center Street demolition and redevelopment (Raymond & May Associates). These documents, crucially, were
not included in the “citizen participation” portion of the 1964 Final Report, although they certainly could have been, particularly the resident interviews. The actants writing the report sought to delineate groups around particular sets of actants: to draw a line around two groups that, while not explicitly called “good citizens” and “bad citizens” nonetheless translated into two dramatically distinct outcomes. “Expressways pay” was translated into expressways: visible matter. “Negative attitude toward neighborhood” was translated into demolition: invisible matter.

Hybridity does not, as these texts suggest, exist in broad strokes, but in specific interrelations between individual actants which are never singular, never identical, never repeatable, and always shifting, changing, translating their goals into new matter with new meanings. Humans and nonhumans do not exert agency on their own. It is never simply expressways that pay, or department stores that make jobs. People plus expressways plus department stores plus cities pay, reduce traffic, bring jobs, make livings. Nevertheless, rhetoric can always have made the artificial being the subject of the sentence, allowing it to wield grammatical control to make a particular political point. In the same way, a web of actants is also a web of actancies that lean toward, pull against, morph with one another, pointing to new verbs, and many unexpected, translated outcomes. As such, I not only pry open the subjects of the sentence; I also open the verb, the goal, the action, the outcome. Expressways, department stores, and cities don’t just pay, make jobs, reduce traffic, make livings. They also displace, disorient, dismiss, erase. So does rhetoric, rhetoric as actant. It’s difficult to weigh or say what exactly its actancy does on its own, for rhetoric cannot be singular, cannot be an essential category any more than a human can be. It matters,
however, how the people and things of the redevelopment influence and shape the 
redeveloping city-as-archive. Insufficient understandings of the interrelationships 
between people and things permeated the intentions of players involved in the 
redevelopment, which together translated into the often violent outcomes that 
emerged, which primarily affected the city’s low-income residents and residents of 
color.

How did we get from a Parking Arcade to a sentence? How did we get from a 
sentence to an automobile landscape? I have before me a documentary archive, a 
redevelopment plan, but this is not the archive of my search. I am looking for the 
actors that went into this plan and emerged from it, for the archive of acts and 
translations extending in infinite webs within and beyond the document. Still, the 
document, and the other documents it points to, remain always partially in the black 
box of “what we know” about the redevelopment, shaped and named by actors 
working to conceal how expansive our archives actually are. This is my challenge; 
even as I conceive of new archives, I am always working with and against what the 
traditional archive shows me.

On the days I visited the Middlesex Historical Society, scouring through 
redevelopment texts, I left the colonial house in one of two directions. If I turned left, 
I passed the Parking Arcade down College Street to the east. If I turned right, I passed 
the original and new sites of the Southmayd House, and once I climbed up William 
Street, the Idella W. Howell day care center. I hadn’t realized their proximity to the 
Historical Society at first, these places of inquiry that had become, over the course of 
the year, strange, shifting archives of their own. If I open the remains of this
redeveloping city – a house, a teacup, a day care, a conversation, a preservationist, an activist, a sister – I find their many parts in motion, working to redevelop the city and to remember and reconstrue its materials, its remains. As I have traced their traces, I have left my trace. I have broken the archives down only to put new archives together. Where are the remains of the redeveloping city? They are in the places I have walked and written, they are in and around these pages, in these words. They are, perhaps most of all, outtimely, immaterial, reappearing, lingering in the spaces between intention and outcome. And so I leave my own tiny archive, as best I can with words and text, open.
Works Cited

Aerial Photo of Middletown, 1920s. Middletown City Hall.
Amato, Vincent. Transcription of the Vincent Amato Interview. Middlesex Historical Society, Oral History Collection, 2018.x.001, Folder 1, Middletown, CT.


Center Street. Middlesex Historical Society, Redevelopment Agency Collection, News Clips 1965-1980 Box #1A, Center Street, Middletown, CT.


“Day Care Center Construction Backed by $467,583 Grant.” The Hartford Courant, 3 Nov. 1978. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Hartford Courant.

De Armond, Thea, “Middletown Site Summaries.” Wesleyan Archaeology and Anthropology Collections, Middletown, CT.


---. Personal Interview. 2 Apr. 2018.


Hinz, Marla. Personal Correspondence. 5 Apr. 2018.


Panorama: Main Street, Waterfront. 1953. Provided by Erik Hesselberg.


Teacup from the Southmayd Pearlware Collection. June 20 2017. Wesleyan Archaeology Collection, Southmayd, Ceramic, So 84, Box 30, Bag 18, Middletown, CT.


Works Consulted

Figures

Figure 1. Aerial Photo of Middletown, 1920s

Figure 2. Southmayd House, Present Day
Figure 3. Southmayd House being moved from original site on William Street to Main Street (Beinhorn, “Old House”)

Figure 4. Map of the two sites of the Southmayd House (Winchell)
Figure 5. Map of William Street in 1877. The Southmayd House is located between Hanover Street and Main Street (O.H. Bailey & Co).

Figure 6. Middletown’s waterfront in the 1950s. William Street is the bottommost street running perpendicular to Main Street. The Southmayd House is in the bottom right corner (Panorama).
Figure 7. Floor Plan of the Southmayd House, Present Day. The first floor is on the left, and the second floor is on the right (Jenks).
Figure 8. Hand-drawn map of William Street in the mid-1900s by Isabelle Bozzo
Figure 9. Southmayd House on 87 William Street, 1967 (87-89 William Street)

Figure 10. Teacup from the Southmayd Pearlware Collection
Figure 11. Tour of the South End “Project Area” led by Howell (“Large Turnout”)

Figure 12. Idella Howell sign, Present Day
Figure 13. Parking Arcade, Present Day

Figure 14. Parking Arcade Construction
Figure 15. Parking Arcade Sign
Figure 16. Center Street, before redevelopment
Figure 17. Map of residential relocation after the Center Street Project (Raymond & May Associates 10)
Figure 18. “Loop Road” Plan (Technical Planning Consultants)

Figure 19. Image from “Connecticut’s Road Program” Report (State Highway Commission)