The Interstate System in the American Cultural Memory: The Creation and Contestation of the Highway Spaces of Cleveland and Detroit, Postwar to Present

by

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"For most of our century, urban spaces have been systematically designed and organized to ensure that collisions and confrontations will not take place here. The distinctive sign of nineteenth-century urbanism was the boulevard, a medium for bringing explosive material and human forces together; the hallmark of twentieth-century urbanism has been the highway, a means for putting them asunder."¹

--- Marshall Berman (1988) in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*

Despite the intentions of highway-builders to create a perfectly ordered, free-flowing, and rational urban spatial logic, highways were far from the perfect, enduring solution they were imagined to be. They did not establish a universal, resolved, spatial order nor the social order that this technocratic utopianism implied. In fact, they arguably further destabilized an implicit and complex socio-spatial order that highways negated, undermined and devalued. Highways were unable to keep the social collisions and confrontations they were meant to treat at bay. Ironically, highways are themselves a site of social collision and conflict. Thus, the highway is not a neutral, engineered object but rather a *place* which holds *meaning* and is assigned meaning by the negotiations and renegotiations which shape its physical form, legal function, and social purpose.

Highways were planned as culturally neutral movement spaces. They were birthed out of the utopic imagination of the machine age, the modernist era in which ‘space’ and ‘time’ ruled supreme and ‘place’ was an afterthought, an impediment, and a leftover. Edward Casey explains the essence of this modernist fixation on pure, non-social spatial geometries and relations in his 1996 work *How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena*. Tracing the root of twentieth-century modernist planning back to the pioneers of modern western science and the key philosophers of early modern Europe, Casey asserts,

> it is characteristic of the modern Western mind to conceive of space in terms of its formal essence—hence the insistent search for mathematical expressions of pure spatial relations. For Newton, More, Gassendi, Descartes, and Galileo, space was homogeneous, isotropic, isometric, and infinitely (or, at least, indefinitely) extended. Within the supremely indifferent and formal scene of space, local differences did not matter. Place itself did not matter.²

This abstract, continuous, and blank space is the space in which theorized highways were to be built. The trouble is that, in reality, they were built in distinctive places, not in a continuous and infinite space. Thus, highways were not, in their final built form, the culturally neutral spaces as they were intended to be. Highways are, in fact, places that have, over time, gathered layered cultural meanings. Casey recommends that we confront the totalizing, technocratic utopianism of high modernity by revaluing or reoccupying “the low land of place.”³ I will, over the course of this work, attempt to do just that: to reoccupy the American highway as a culturally specific

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‘place’ rather than a mere sliver of the abstract, continuous and blank ‘space’ of modernist thought.

Highways are not Neutral ‘Spaces’
The Production of [Social] Space

In order to reoccupy place, it becomes important to develop an understanding of the processes that created and modified that place as these processes each confer meaning. This close study of the processes that produce places is methodologically tied to the theories put forward by philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his landmark 1974 work, *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre introduces us to his theory by defining ‘social space’ (what I have been referring to as ‘place’) as distinct from its theoretical counterpoint, the abstract/natural/scientific space of modern thought, asserting a dialectical relationship between social process and spatial product: “[Social] space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations.” Working within the Marxist tradition, Lefebvre considers social space to be “at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures... Though a product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society.”

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producing and produced by social processes flows easily into a discussion of the layering or accumulation of meanings within any given social space.

Lefebvre seems to revel in this layered multiplicity of social space, considering this accumulation of cultural meanings to be a rich and exciting prospect. Lefebvre explains this layering of meaning, writing, “we are confronted not by one social space but by many—indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as ‘social space’. No space disappears in the course of growth and development.”

Continuing his train of thought, Lefebvre proclaims, “(social) space...subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder.” Having framed social space as a palimpsest whose meaning is relational rather than absolute, Lefebvre embarks on a descriptive visualization of the ways in which social spaces “interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another.”

Lefebvre characterizes these social spaces through material metaphors, claiming,

they are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia. Figurative terms such as 'sheet' and 'stratum' have serious drawbacks: being metaphorical rather than conceptual, they assimilate space to things and thus relegate its concept to the realm of abstraction. Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity.... A much more fruitful analogy, it seems to me, may be found in hydrodynamics, where the principle of the superimposition of small movements teaches us the importance of the roles played by scale, dimension and rhythm. Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves - these all collide and 'interfere' with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate. If we were to follow this model, we would say that any social locus could only be properly understood by

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6 Lefebvre, The Production of Space (1991), 86.
7 Lefebvre, The Production of Space (1991), 73.
8 Lefebvre, The Production of Space (1991), 86-87.
taking two kinds of determinations into account: on the one hand, that locus would be mobilized, carried forward and sometimes smashed apart by major tendencies, those tendencies which 'interfere' with one another; on the other hand, it would be penetrated by, and shot through with, the weaker tendencies characteristic of networks and pathways.  

It is the “hypercomplexity of social space” described by Lefebvre in this passage that has served as my guiding principle in the investigation of highways as social space.  

Building upon Lefebvre’s earlier theorizing, David Harvey, in his 2007 essay *Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form*, describes three ways of conceptualizing spatiality, the last of which I have attempted to apply to the study of highways as a cultural landscape. The first conception of spatiality is absolute, the second relative, and the third relational. With absolute spatiality, “space and time are mere containers of social action. They are passive, neutral containers. These passive, neutral containers simply allow us to locate the action which is occurring.” With relative spatiality (named for Einstein’s influential theory of relativity), “space and time, although they are still containers, are not neutral with respect to the processes they contain. Metrics of space and time can and do vary depending upon the nature of the processes under consideration… [and] different metrics yield different maps of the space/time coordinates within which social interaction occurs.” Relative spatiality admits influence but sees that influence as uni-directional rather than reciprocal. Finally, with relational spatiality, “space and time do not exist outside of process: process defines space/time… From this standpoint, we have to take very seriously the notion…that space and time are not simply constituted by but are also

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constitutive of social processes.”¹⁴ It is within this relational spatiality that my analysis takes place. I understand the highway not as “simply a site or a container of social action,” but rather as the product of “a set of conflictual heterogeneous processes which are producing spatio-temporalities as well as producing things, structures and permanencies in ways which constrain the nature of the social process.”¹⁵

The Highway as Agent of Fragmentation
Balancing Movement and Social Space

Beyond my attention to process and product as iterative and reciprocal, my analysis of the highway as an American cultural landscape is premised on the copious scholarship asserting that the highway has been, and continues to be, an agent of fragmentation and isolation in our cities. Matthew Carmona’s 2003 book Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design gives an especially clear account of the ways in which highway spaces fragment the urban fabric and isolate communities from one another. At the outset of his chapter on the morphological dimension of urban design, Carmona makes a distinction between two types of public space: (1) ‘movement space’ and (2) ‘social space’ defined as “outdoor space for people to engage in economic, social and cultural transaction.”¹⁶ Carmona then explains that each public space typology effects its surrounding environment differently. While social spaces produce activity at their edges, “movement space will tend to be faced by socially passive fronts with few or no windows and little

indicating of human presence.”17 Carmona uses this distinction to explain the fundamental difference between a ‘street’ as an agent of integration and a highway or ‘road’ as an agent of fragmentation.18 Carmona describes the evolution from ‘street’ to ‘road’ explaining,

when the principal modes of transport were by foot or horse, the realms of movement and social space had considerable overlap. With the development of new modes of travel, these realms have become increasingly compartmentalized into vehicular movement space and pedestrian movement/social space. At the same time, public space has been colonised by the car and the social aspects of the 'street' suppressed in favour of movement and circulation - the 'road'.19

Coming to the point, Carmona then asserts that, as a result of the road’s exclusion of social activity, “major roads to act as barriers to movement across them, creating severance and fragmenting urban areas.”20 Lefebvre, too, noted this fragmentation in *The Production of Space*, observing that urban space is “sliced up, degraded, and eventually destroyed by ... the proliferation of fast roads.”21 Carmona goes into greater detail on Lefebvre’s observation explaining, “movement between the fragments becomes a purely movement experience rather than a movement and social experience. Containing both social space and movement space, walkable streets connect buildings and activities across space. Containing only movement space, roads divide and separate areas.”22 The highway was the epitome of the modernist treatment of the street as a “channel for efficient movement” and nothing more—no messy

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22 Carmona, “The Morphological Dimension” (2003), 75-77.
intermingling of social and movement space, only the safe compartmentalization of each.\(^{23}\)

The result of this high modernist neglect of the street as social and movement space is, in Carmona’s words, “the multiplication of 'objects' and the neglect of ‘fabrics.’”\(^{24}\) In other words, the modernist space of the twentieth century, in its impulse towards order and control, compromised connectivity. Carmona comments on the fracturing effect of the modernist attitude that produced our nation’s highway landscapes, noting, “in the absence of explicit concern for the spaces between the buildings, environments were simply collections of individual buildings. The unintended outcome was a bastardized version of Modernist ideas of urban space design.”\(^{25}\) Scholar Roger Trancik similarly observed: “somehow—without any conscious intention on anyone's part—the ideals of free flowing space and pure architecture have evolved into our present urban situation of individual buildings isolated in parking lots and highways.”\(^{26}\) Lefebvre makes much the same argument, claiming that the result of the modernist planning ideology was a “fracturing of space” that could be described as “a disordering of elements wrenched from each other in such a way that the urban fabric itself—the street, the city—is also torn apart.”\(^{27}\) Each of these authors (Carmona, Trancik, and Lefebvre) see the modernist attitude, and its hallmark of the highway, as one that inherently fragments the city—both physically and socially—by reducing the connectivity (or ‘permeability’) of the urban fabric.

\(^{24}\) Carmona, “The Morphological Dimension” (2003), 68.
Permeability can be understood in terms of the quality of the physical infrastructure that facilitates social interaction and connectivity. Carmona defines permeability as “the extent to which an environment allows a choice of routes both through and within it. It is also a measure of the opportunity for movement.”

Reducing the number of “links between networks or layers,” as highways did, “introduces discontinuities into the movement system, reducing its permeability.”

Albert Pope explains this process of street grid erosion (or reduction in permeability) in his 1996 book, *Ladders*, arguing that freeways interrupted the “continuities of gridded space,” reducing pedestrian (and automobile) autonomy “by enforcing a strict hierarchical movement along a primary route of transportation, dramatically coarsening the urban fabric.”

This emphasis on hierarchical (or ‘laddered’) movement, Pope asserts, created an emphasis on destinations rather than journeys that robbed urban landscapes of the vitality produced by chance encounters along a journey.

Carmona gives an example of how destination-oriented movement results in the loss of journey-based vitality in the city, explaining, “as each road termination or residential cul-de-sac becomes an exclusive destination, it becomes only a place to go to rather than a place that might also be passed through on the way to somewhere else.” In this destination-oriented movement, Carmona explains, our cities lose the conventional by-product of movement: “the potential for other (optional) activities in addition to the basic activity of travelling from origin to destination.”

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28 Carmona, “The Morphological Dimension” (2003), 64.
29 Carmona, “The Morphological Dimension” (2003), 73.
32 Carmona, “The Morphological Dimension” (2003), 73.
this by-product of movement, a “critical element of urbanity” by Carmona’s estimation, can be crippling to cities, compounding the physical division of highways with the proliferation of transient landscapes in and around highways.\textsuperscript{34}

The highway landscape that now, in so many ways, defines the physical and social geography of our nation, is a landscape that inherently fragments our physical and social fabric at the local scale even as it connects us at the national scale. This simultaneous fragmentation at the neighborhood scale and integration at the national scale is the starting point for my study of the highway infrastructure of Cleveland and Detroit. My aim is to convey the way in which this fundamental tension of highways, their propensity to both connect and divide, has developed and changed over time. I find it helpful to think of this tension as the product of a century-old tug of war, with individuals joining and leaving each side and with the center flag being pulled first to one side, then the other, but never being pulled far enough for the tug of war to arrive at its conclusion. I hope to, in the chapters that follow, give a sense of the individuals and collectives that sat at each side of this tug of war, to convey the America envisioned by each side, and to convey how the highway has come to signify these multiple identities and aspirations for our nation’s future.

SECTION I
Two Cultural Meanings of America’s Highways, Locked in Battle

I will begin with the narrative of highway-building as I first came into contact with it: through the narrative of urban renewal and the copious literature on postwar America’s identity crisis, as embodied in the counterculture movements of the 1960s and ‘70s. My generation of urbanists and social historians see the enthusiasm and

ambition of the postwar building boom through the lens of the counterculture rejection of this postwar attitude. In the world of highway history, this narrative of national identity crisis is most commonly conveyed through the herculean clash of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses over Moses’s urban renewal highway schemes for the city of New York. Through this narrative, Moses has become the national figurehead of urban renewal (a space-based vision at the national scale), while Jacobs has become the figurehead of community resistance (a place-based vision, at the neighborhood scale).

I want to take some time to explore this mythologized conflict with the objective of uncovering the meaning assigned to highways by each side of this national debate and how that meaning connects to broader articulations of diverging directions for America. Although many modernists, highway designers included, thought of the spaces they were producing as culturally-neutral, universal works that were translatable to any context and consistent in their meaning, I want to make clear that Moses’ space-based vision was, itself, producing places imbued with the specific cultural meaning of urban renewal and the modernist attitude. Onto that cultural meaning was layered the meaning of counterculture freeway revolts and the tradition of righteous, democratic dissent. However, in our enthusiasm for the courageous critiques of Jane Jacobs and her peers, we have allowed the first cultural meaning to be obscured by the second: highways are seen through Jacob’s eyes, and not Moses’s eyes. The consistently reductive narrative of the Moses-Jacobs clash has conditioned and constrained the terms on which we debate the contemporary meaning and future fate of our nation’s Interstate Highway System. We need to engage with the
paradoxes of modernity, its inherent conflicts and contradictions rather than seek refuge in the stale extremism of Moses’s and Jacobs’s now calcified viewpoints.

We must restore the balance of these layered meanings of highways in our current times, so that we do not miss crucial elements of their history and accumulated, hybrid symbolism. In his 2011 essay “A Fight to Forget: Urban Renewal, Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs, and the Stories of Our Cities,” Timothy Mennel describes the way in which complexity has been lost in the mythologizing of the Moses-Jacobs clash, and the ways in which Moses’s perspective has been obscured by our consistent enshrining of Jacobs’s perspective:

as with urban renewal in general, talking about the relationship between Moses’s work and Jacobs’s sometimes seems pointless at this late date... All historical figures undergo this metamorphosis from living being to narrative construction, of course; a central responsibility of the historian is to preserve and convey the vivid complexities of an individual’s time, place, influence, and contingency. When this is done well, our present understandings of motive and action are enriched. When done poorly, we struggle to understand the power of mute statues of outmoded dictators and of worn photographs of sad-eyed saints. 35

We would do best to recall the origins of these conflicting perspectives, that it is a matter of which direction you reason from, what your starting point is: whether you reason from place to space (the specific to the general) or from space to place (the general to the specific). Both are valid and important, neither is comprehensive or complete. And so, while Jacobs legitimized the depth and value of a fragmentary local knowledge of place, we now must work to recall the value of Moses’ systematic, integrative and, yes, abstracted knowledge of the general, of space. And

finally, we must recall why Moses’ perspective held such sway so that we do not underestimate the power of its contemporary reincarnations. As Mennel puts it,

in the case of Jacobs and her putative nemesis Moses, the dominant narrative has not always done justice to the complexities and contradictions of their times and places—and our conceptions of urban power have been correspondingly the weaker. The popular narrative about them has become more important than either of them per se, even if that narrative is essentially false.36

I hope to re-inhabit this popular narrative and fill out the stripped and stale myth, three-dimensionalizing debates that have become flattened in our contemporary editorializing of the past, and restoring a healthy respect for and fear of the power of Moses’s all-too-often dismissed perspective on urban America.

SECTION II
Recovering the First Cultural Meaning of Highways, Establishing Local Specificity

Here, I want to further debunk the notion that modernism’s ‘spaces’ were neutral by positioning modernism as a culturally, regionally, and temporally specific movement. I want to take the time to explain and illustrate the magnetism of the modernist vision of an ‘expressway world’ through an in-depth study of the famous Highways and Horizons General Motors pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s fair, giving special attention to the large Futurama model designed and executed by Norman Bel Geddes. This study of Futurama will foreground a discussion of the patriotic rhetoric and theatrical dramatization that promoted the Futurama vision of a highway-centric future, and the later translation of this vision into reality at both the national and local scales. Treating Futurama as a shared national catalyst for the creation of an ‘expressway world,’ I will then follow how its cultural meaning

mapped onto and became infused in specific highways as constituent elements of the urban landscape in New York, Detroit, and Cleveland respectively. This comparative study will allow for an exploration of the local specificity of meaning assigned to the highway landscape, and a discussion of the unintended consequences of the symbolic agendas which so often accompanied the highway-building project, especially in cities like New York and Detroit whose grand aspirations tended to silence valuable voices of dissent. Foundational to this discussion is the substantial scholarship on modernist planning practice as a conflict-averse practice that fundamentally failed to productively engage with dissent and dissonance in the urban landscape. I will conclude this discussion by reflecting on the legacy of the highway-building project in Detroit and Cleveland respectively, and discussing the ways in which this legacy conditions and constrains contemporary contestation of and engagement with the highway landscape of each city.

SECTION III
Contemporary Contestation of Highways as Urban Landscape, Asserting Multiplicity

The sense of loss precipitated by the vast raze-and-rebuild renewal projects of the modernist era (highway and otherwise) has continued to fuel the post-modern romance with place, even as we have passed the half-century mark of Jane Jacobs’s seminal 1961 work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs’ insights, however, while they remain valuable, are insufficient to guide us through the challenges that now face us. Jacobs articulates the value of *place* with a preservationist undertone, but this is a rhetoric of defense, not creation, and we have outlasted the utility of this mental framework for urban landscapes. We must learn to
generate and not only to preserve or reject. We must begin to ask what happens if place cannot be pure as the preserved Jacobsian ideal of Greenwich Village but rather must include or envelop the modernist space of the highway? Similarly, what happens if Jacobs’s place is not static but rather dynamic and evolving in both form and function? We now have a sort of hybridized layering of cultural meanings that is at once fragmentary and continuous.

Through the ethnographic study of the contemporary highway landscapes of Cleveland and Detroit, I will attempt to illustrate what is happening in this liminal, interstitial space and how these ‘insurgent’ alterations of the highway landscape might offer a regenerative framework that could push us past Jacobs’ defensive framework. Insurgency is now, unfortunately, very closely associated with war, terrorism, aggression and attack. However, for writers like Henri Lefebvre and James Holston, insurgency was an exciting tool with which to constructively challenge calcified hierarchies and stale ideologies—to these academic radicals, insurgency was a tool with which to regain access to processes from which one had been excluded. It is this former definition of insurgency (as a constructive articulation of dissent) that I hope to pick up on and revive in my discussion of ‘insurgent’ alterations of the highway landscape.

I will again discuss the ways in which these insurgent processes of physical alteration of the cityscape engage in a negotiation of cultural meaning of the highway infrastructure they modify. My focus here will be on how these processes are specific to their locality, drawing upon the civic culture and social infrastructure of the cities in which they emerged. Finally, I will take a moment to consider what implications
these local insurgent practices of spatial contestation carry for the national Interstate Highway System as a whole, what kind of partnership they suggest between the grassroots and the government, and what kind of balance they prescribe between citizen power and state authority. I will suggest that even as these projects erode the foundational premises of the modern American city, they simultaneously regenerate those foundations by offering new structures and frameworks through which to understand the social, political, economic, and physical geographies of our nation.

CONCLUSION
Preserving Tension in the American Cultural Myth and Urban Landscape

This project has, if you strip it to its core, become a sort of demonstration case advocating that we embrace contestation of space as a useful exercise and accept a more layered, dynamic, and conflicting understanding of urban landscape. America seems to have a collective impulse to bury our mistakes, to fix them and to erase traces that might remind us of them, especially physical traces. And yet, every time we erase these traces of past mistakes, we lose contact with the tensions they record, tensions that animate and enrich our nation’s history and contemporary culture. I have kept returning, over the course of this project, to a quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack Up (1936) that my high school English teacher, Abby Laber, put on the whiteboard the first day of my sophomore year, in the fall of 2005 over seven years ago:

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.”

America aspires to be a first-rate democracy. Might this quote not translate to “the test of a first-rate democracy is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function…”? Transience and stability, mobility and rootedness, freedom and intimacy, independence and community, diversity and unity—these tensions define American identity, as they do many nations. Our strength is in our dynamic maintenance of these tensions, not in their resolution to a static conclusion of one or the other, and that means maintaining the tensions embodied in our highway landscape, whatever forms that may take.
"There can seem to be something futile, even willfully perverse, in continuing to talk about urban renewal, for the narratives about it are so deeply engrained in the popular imagination as to be taken for facts. Critiques of urban renewal have been plentiful, and many of them have brought insight to the failings of midcentury attempts to revitalize the city through housing projects and other large-scale land-use transformations [such as highway construction]. These narratives tend to hold that urban renewal sprang from the head of Le Corbusier and was implemented by soulless technocrats and the occasional power-mad evil genius who resolutely ignored the needs of individual communities out of a lust to remake the vital, living city into a network of barren concrete plazas and socially indefensible warehouses for the poor and nonwhite—until a plucky housewife named Jane Jacobs published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and opened the eyes of the nation to the merits of small-scale mixed-use neighborhoods and community-scale planning. This powerful narrative contains elements of truth, but its persistence derives from its Manichean simplicity."


Robert Moses, New York’s master builder in the urban renewal era, seems to be urban America’s favorite scapegoat. Villainized as the harbinger of urban America’s modern doomsday, Moses is consistently painted as a callous, single-minded, and tyrannical technocrat who annihilated America’s urban vitality in service of some vain and cockeyed vision of a mobile modernity. In this melodramatic narrative of modern America’s urban crisis, public figures are quickly cast as villains and saviors. And, of the many villain-savior narratives of America’s urban modernity, one of the most deeply engrained is that of Robert Moses the callous builder and Jane

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Jacobs the righteous activist. We have chosen to see Moses as an isolated operator rather than a single piston in the unwieldy engine of modernity, just as we have chosen to see Jacobs as a selfless lone warrior rather than the voice of a rising wave of discontent. This over-emphasis on individual agency and public persona neglects and obscures the larger context in which the iconic Moses-Jacobs conflict occurred, leaving us blind to the complexity of this tectonic shift away from urban renewal. Furthermore, this willful decontextualization of the Moses-Jacobs conflict severely handicaps our ability to confront the biggest challenges of our current historical moment. Without a balanced understanding of the politics and economics driving each side of this conflict, we will fail to comprehend the sheer power of the urban renewal perspective that we have thrown by the wayside. And, in failing to comprehend the power of this perspective, we make ourselves vulnerable to the repetition of its worst mistakes.

In particular, for the purposes of this study, I would propose that, in failing to comprehend the deep-seated political and economic power of the modern highway project in America, we fail to arm ourselves with effective tools to defend our cities against the casual prioritization of mobility over emplacement and national connectivity over local community.\textsuperscript{39} I maintain that emplacement and community, while often dismissed as trivial and secondary to mobility and connectivity, may be equally vital to the health of our nation’s economy. We cannot have a vibrant and resilient economy without a carefully calibrated balance of mobility and emplacement.

\textsuperscript{39} I am using emplacement throughout this work to signify the firm rooting of something or someone in their location. This term is used frequently in the discussion of community and ‘place-making’ practices in the social sciences. It can be understood as an adaptation of the general definition given by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (“a putting into place”) and the military- and geology-specific definitions given by the Oxford English Dictionary (“a structure on or in which something is firmly placed,” and “the process or state of setting something in place or being set in place”).
just as we cannot have a dynamic and flexible political system without the balance of liberal and conservative perspectives on government. Thus, if the discourse around Moses and Jacobs positions them at the extremes of this conflict over the spatial form of the modern city – Moses as the champion of mobility and Jacobs as the champion of emplacement – then, an investigation into the popular understanding of their antagonism becomes an important starting point for the restoration of a balance between mobility and emplacement as priorities for our nation’s cities.
The New Deal Spatial Order and Postwar Urbanism
Robert Moses as the Figurehead of an Emerging Growth Consensus

As a result of the mythologizing of Moses – of his character, his motivations, and his actions – Moses has come to represent and even *supplant* (in the popular understanding) the broad-based, political-economic highway alliance in which he operated. Moses was a competent and resourceful crewmember on a ship barreling towards modernity’s inevitable mishaps. But, in the popular imagination, Moses has been promoted to the captain and navigator, the helmsman beholden to no one and deaf to the calls for a course correction. As Anthony Flint writes unapologetically in his 2009 book *Wrestling with Moses*, "Robert Moses...has been inexorably cast in the role of villain."\(^{40}\) This enduring typecasting can be traced back to Robert Caro’s landmark tome of a book on Moses. Entitled *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* and published in 1974 (while Moses was still alive), Caro’s 1,344-page portrait of Moses was relentless and unforgiving, leaving little room for a balanced consideration of Moses’s role in the arc and development of American urbanism.

In recent years, criticism of Caro’s reductive narrative has resurfaced as part of an emerging desire to re-engage with the ideology of urban renewal in America and re-establish a more balanced, constructive critique of the era’s characteristic melding of naive optimism, visionary ambition, and magnetic confidence. As Timothy Mennel points out in his 2011 review essay *A Fight to Forget: Urban Renewal, Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs and the Stories of our Cities*, critiques of *The Power Broker* existed from the time of its publication. Mennel explains, “when

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journalist Robert Caro published *The Power Broker*... eminent scholars and critics called it 'clumsy' and shallow, with many noting Caro’s Manicheanism, naïveté, weak grasp of psychology, provincialism, use of anonymous sources, and poor historiography.”41 Modernist scholar Marshall Berman echoed these early critiques claiming that “Caro’s lack of perspective on his own perspective...leads him into tragic anachronisms.”42 Unfortunately, these initial criticisms failed to break the popular embrace of Caro’s narrative.

In the 1970s, America wanted someone to blame for the sharp decline and chaotic discontent of our nation’s cities, and Moses had a target painted on his chest. Anthony Flint recaps Caro’s narrative in his 2009 book *Wrestling with Moses*, touching on all the elements that made Caro’s portrait of Moses-as-Villain so compelling and convincing:

*The Power Broker*... was a devastating prosecutorial brief, detailing an obsession with power, ruthless evictions of the poor and people of color, manipulations of the legal and legislative process, misuse of eminent domain, cronyism, patronage, corruption, and insider contractor and developer deals. Coming out in 1974, right at the time of Watergate, *The Power Broker* inspired legions of journalists to root out backroom deals and secret financial negotiations. Robert Moses became the classic case-study for the abuse of power.43

Flint’s language implies that Caro’s book was an indictment of Moses, delivered in the court of public opinion and, in doing so, implicitly validates Caro’s narrative through its association with our nation’s judicial and legal processes. Flint further leverages this association by comparing *The Power Broker* to the Watergate trials.

The comparison to Watergate is an apt (if dramatic) analogy – Moses, much like

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Nixon, became representative of the manipulation and unjust extension of governmental authority. And, like the Watergate scandal, the Moses/Jacobs conflict has become embedded in the popular imagination as a symbolic cultural moment. Mennel describes this embedding of Caro’s narrative in the public imagination, lamenting,

Neither these [early] criticisms nor later ones made the slightest difference to the popular embrace of Caro’s portrait of a malevolent demigod who first built up and then destroyed New York as he evolved from a force of Progressive good into the very paragon of relentless, pointless, racist, traffickist, modernist evil. Caro’s tale had panache, a narrative arc, and the remarkable effect of seeming to close the book on Moses, something any historian knows is never the case. But as compelling as Caro’s story is, it is just that: a story for its time.  

And so, regardless of the hesitation of government officials, professional planners and academics alike, Caro’s Moses became the Moses and left little room for alternative portraits of this modern icon.

Caro’s compelling story would be rehashed and retold countless times for both a popular and an academic audience. Each time, Caro’s version of Moses was implicitly legitimized and affirmed, contributing to a further calcification of the collective discourse around urban renewal and the highway building project. Anthony Flint’s 2009 book, Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City, epitomizes this post-Caro editorial dramatization of the Moses-Jacobs conflict. As Mennel laments in his 2011 review essay on narrative documentation of the Moses-Jacobs conflict, "for every article or book that finds some ambiguity in Moses’s legacy or Jacobs’s, another keeps the true flame alive. Anthony Flint’s Wrestling with Moses, published by the

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same imprint of Random House that published Jacobs’s books, falls into this latter pantheon.\footnote{Mennel, “A Fight to Forget” (2011), 629-630.} Flint picks up right where Caro left off, disregarding the more subtle and balanced discussion of Kenneth T. Jackson and Hilary Ballon in their 2007 book, *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* which destabilized Caro’s strident and overblown portrait of Moses the power broker.\footnote{Mennel, “A Fight to Forget” (2011), 628.}

Providing what seems to be an epilogue or preface to Caro’s 1974 portrait of Moses, Flint includes the off-stage hero that was implied throughout Caro’s narrative – Jane Jacobs.

Flint takes a distinctly narrative approach choosing to focus on the upbringing and socialization of both Jacobs and Moses, before building into a flowery account of their herculean clash and Jacobs’ ultimate victory. But the fluidity and clarity of this dramatic arc comes at the expense of analytical complexity, as noted by Mennel in his 2011 review essay. Mennel clearly sees Flint’s narrative as representative of the irresponsible theatricality of urban renewal scholarship, declaring with considerable exasperation,

Flint is not a historian, and so it is perhaps no surprise that his book is a lazy palimpsest of others’ work, enlivened only by cliché and melodrama... In retelling this story, Flint—whose book has been optioned for development as a movie—perpetuates myths about how cities actually work. More than the sum and connection of their physical and social parts, cities are stories, but privileging a simple story over the complex ones that generate our perceptions of cities only diminishes our understandings of power and place, much as it only diminishes both Moses and Jacobs to cast them as merely antagonists. Doing so turns complex and thoughtful individuals into useless symbols.\footnote{Mennel, “A Fight to Forget” (2011), 630.}

Mennel is right to point out Flint’s flare for melodrama as historically irresponsible. It is precisely this theatricality, however, that makes Flint (and Caro’s) narrative stick in
the popular memory of this historical moment. As with Caro’s text, Flint’s reduction of Moses and Jacobs to symbols is all the more powerful for its emphasis on narrative and storytelling, character development and plot. It is because of this well-crafted narrative arc that Flint’s dual portrait so effectively distills and codifies the iconography of Moses and Jacobs in the popular imagination.

Anthony Flint eases you into his symbolic narrative with an empathetic and intimate portrait of Jacobs contrasting with a critical and distant portrait of Moses. Thus, from the beginning, by virtue of the differential social distance Flint’s language establishes, we are encouraged to see Jane as our proxy and Moses as a distant and suspect public figure. Flint then moves through each encounter between Jacobs and Moses, always starting with the moment Jacobs first becomes aware of Moses’s ill-fated proposals. By excluding the incremental development of Moses’s proposals, we are encouraged to see them as fully formed, static, and impersonal documents rather than as products of dynamic negotiations and multiple viewpoints. And so, without Flint ever explicitly stating it, we ‘independently’ come to the conclusion that, as Mennel puts it, "Robert Moses fits the profile of a power-mad jerk and Jane Jacobs fills the picture of a plucky and gemütlich house-wife, he was responsible for everything bad in New York, while she led it and all humanity to a kind of redemption, QED."\(^{48}\) If Flint had said that outright, the reader might be suspicious or critical of such a reductive narrative, but by allowing us to arrive at that conclusion without ever seeing it in writing, Flint effectively insulates this symbolic narrative from any direct challenge.

\(^{48}\) Mennel, "A Fight to Forget" (2011), 631.
Even with Flint’s indirect approach to the subject, his editorializing shines through. Flint’s language, at multiple moments throughout the text, betrays his contempt for and dismissal of Moses’s viewpoint. In his introduction Flint is perhaps the most transparent and forthcoming with his opinions claiming, "like the pharaohs of Egypt building the pyramids, Moses reshaped New York through the exercise of shrewd and unfettered power. He was an independent actor, beholden to no one, and largely insulated from opposition, dissent, and outside influence – including the meddlesome wishes of voters." But, even without reading the introduction, it only takes thirty pages before Flint hints at Moses’s cunning, manipulative and callous personality: "Moses's formula for steamrolling projects through [was to] secure the funding, personally work the legislators, court the press to publicize benefits, and build quickly before the opposition can mobilize." Flint picks up this same train of thought ten pages later, implying that Moses had a bad habit of sidestepping democratic process and ‘steamrolling’ over the opposition before they could galvanize sufficiently to pose a real threat. Flint manages to paint a vivid picture of Moses as an anti-democratic dictator:

In the democratic twentieth-century United States, Moses did not have a dictator to back him, and thus developed strategies designed to make his projects inevitable, protecting them from democratic resistance. Along with writing his own legislation and running aggressive public relations campaigns, one of his principal tactics in defeating opposition was simple: act fast. Plowing ahead with land acquisition and laying asphalt, he learned that once projects were started, they gained a momentum all their own. The opposition had a tough time arguing against something that was already half-done or built, and courts would never make him tear something down that public funds had already paid to build...’once you sink that first stake, they’ll never make you pull it up,’ [Moses once] told a friend.

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50 Flint, *Wrestling with Moses* (2009), 34.
51 Flint, *Wrestling with Moses* (2009), 44.
Flint further emphasizes Moses’ implied lawlessness and anti-democratic action by citing moments in which New York’s mayor actually called the police on him. He claims, "in every case, Moses operated outside the jurisdiction of city government; on more than one occasion, La Guardia resorted to dispatching police to make sure Moses didn't tear things down."52 True, Moses was a cunning manipulator of our bureaucracy and, true, he did bend the rules. But to paint him as an unchecked tyrant is to willfully exaggerate the scope of his authority and the autonomy of his action. This masterfully reductive mythologizing of Moses’s actions and persona leads to a misguided assumption that urban renewal-era highway construction was the product of a vindictive individual rather than the product of a national political-economic consensus that lives on in our era, however suppressed or disguised by a softened rhetoric.

Moses was part of something bigger than his own personality, character or ambitions – he was a figurehead and proxy for an emerging national consensus focused on economic growth and automobility (hereafter referred to as the national highway growth consensus). It was a consensus he believed in wholeheartedly, but it was not his brainchild as Caro and Flint would have us believe. As Gandy notes in his 2002 book Concrete and Clay, Moses was not acting on his own convictions so much as acting on behalf of a powerful lobby of New York’s contemporary business elite:

The real power of Moses and the Regional Plan Association was actually remarkably weak in relation to the underlying dynamics of urban change. Moses worked within the context of the Regional Plan, which in turn reflected the needs of New York's business elite. Their priorities were to focus business activity in lower Manhattan, redistribute urban growth outward, and restrict manufacturing industry to an intermediate belt within New Jersey and the

52 Flint, Wrestling with Moses (2009), 48.
outer boroughs. These developments favored the continued dominance of lower Manhattan business interests over any alternative conceptions of urban form by endorsing the emerging role of the city as an international finance center serving a global economy rather than an integrated regional economy. Moses was not trying to create a hostile, deserted and segregated environment. He was trying to revive a city that was experiencing the depopulation and decline typical of post-industrial cities. Moses believed in the power of his plans to ‘fix’ or ‘rescue’ New York City. Even Flint admits this: “Moses was convinced that middle-class families would remain in New York if they could get around by car.” And, he was not alone in this belief. As Raymond Mohl points out in his 2004 article Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities, it may be true that Moses "embarked on a long campaign promoting urban expressways,” arguing that “building these new traffic arteries provided an opportunity to clear out central-city slum housing and rebuild the urban core according to modern standards.” But this very same argument could be found in the federal highway reports of 1939 and 1944.

Furthermore, this viewpoint had many advocates cutting across the for-profit, private non-profit, and governmental sector. As Mohl points out,

big-city mayors and city managers, along with downtown developers, landlords, department store operators, and their advocacy organization, the Urban Land Institute, also championed the post-war dream of new downtowns and high-speed traffic arteries crisscrossing the cities. Virtually all of the powerful interests involved in urban America shared these widely held views about the links between expressways and 'reconstruction' of the postwar city.

What Mohl is highlighting here is the sheer weight of political opinion and scale of the economic lobbies that converged on the highway-building project. This

54 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 51.
56 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 677-678.
57 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 677-678.
convergence of political opinion, was evident across the political spectrum. As Moynihan notes in his 1960 article “New Roads and Urban Chaos,” “conservatives think of roads as good for business. Liberals think of them as part of the litany of public investment they so love to chant; ‘Better Schools, Better Hospitals, Better Roads...”

If we, for a moment, excise ourselves from our current historical moment and ignore 20/20 hindsight, might not highway construction seem a plausible strategy for revitalizing a struggling regional economy? Might not easy, comfortable access to the urban core serve as a catalyst for reinvestment?

It was not a bad idea on paper, but it was just that – an blueprint as yet untested at this scale, an informed hypothesis. And, yet, in 1956, our federal government would commit to invest an unprecedented amount of money in this hypothesis. So, the question becomes, not whether the hypothesis was correct but why the hypothesis was believable, who had a stake in its realization, and how this highway hypothesis was passed into law. America’s somewhat misguided enthusiasm for the highway project cannot be reduced to irresponsible decision-making nor can it be blamed on an unengaged public. Dissent (from within and without government alike) was not absent in this era but rather silenced by the repressive power of an uncommonly potent national highway growth consensus. In the case of the highway growth consensus, the individuals who controlled the formal levers of power (such as Moses) only possessed autonomy within the severely constrained and uncommonly potent political discourse of the imagined expressway world. And so, while Moses should still be held accountable for his role in bringing about that expressway world, we should strive to see him as a piston, not the engine itself.

This engine of the modern city is described by sociologists John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch as a ‘growth machine’ composed of political and economic machinery.\(^{59}\) In their landmark book, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (1987), Logan and Molotch outline a “sociology of urban property relations”\(^{60}\) advocating for “an interest-driven social construction of cities.”\(^{61}\) The main tenets of their argument are (1) that place is a commodity with both use and exchange values, (2) that use and exchange values often conflict and (3) that when these conflicts occur, the dominant agenda (or growth consensus) overpowers alternative perspectives, shaping place according to the growth machine’s needs. Working off of these main tenets, the highway-building project can be understood as an extreme case of Logan and Molotch’s growth machine, driven by an uncommonly powerful growth consensus.

Because places can be altered to serve new purposes, they necessarily become "sites of struggles over use and exchange goals."\(^{62}\) In Logan and Molotch’s account of commodified places, they identify use value with non-monetary occupation or exploitation of land for its physical or social qualities (associated with emplacement and community of people). Exchange value, on the other hand, is identified with income generation and investment based on the profitable or marketable qualities of the land (associated with mobility and connectivity of capital). These two types of value necessarily interpenetrate and overlap one another but, when attempting to study the tension produced through their interaction, it is helpful to distinguish

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between the two. This distinction and its corresponding tension is described in an example Logon and Molotch provide: “an apartment building… provides a 'home' for residents (use value) while at the same time generating rent for the owners (exchange value)… [However], the simultaneous push for both goals is inherently contradictory and a continuing source of tension, conflict, and irrational settlements.”\(^{63}\) Thus, if use and exchange values often conflict with one another, then the negotiation of a place’s value (and therefore its proper function) becomes a politicized wrestling match, oftentimes between structurally mismatched opponents.

Through the analysis of these political wrestling matches we can begin to “discover how inequalities in and between places—a stratification of place as well as of individuals and groups—are established and maintained.”\(^{64}\) Individuals and collectives engage in a process of advocacy for the value of any given land – whether it is a use-based value or an exchange-based value. However, it is important to recognize that this advocacy process is often grossly imbalanced as "differently equipped contenders mobilize their individual, organizational, and class resources on behalf of place-related goals. The ability to manipulate place successfully, including altering the standing of one place compared to that of another, is linked to an individual’s location in the stratification system generally. The two systems of stratification (place and individual) thus penetrate one another."\(^{65}\) Thus, the resolution of the tension between use and exchange value is routinely shaped by social stratification and power differentials. In particular, Logan and Molotch focus on the development of alliances among the empowered social and economic elite to push


along their collective agenda (or growth consensus) in the face of popular resistance. Although the elite go to great lengths to portray this growth in terms of universal societal benefits, “in reality the advantages and disadvantages of growth are unevenly distributed.” Thus, the growth consensus is a necessarily lopsided agenda because it is the product of particular special interest lobbies. Given that the growth consensus reflects the agenda of key political and economic interest groups, it becomes important for the purpose of this study to identify the key players in the highway growth machine and to examine the details of their negotiations starting as early as 1916 and leading up to their ultimate consensus, as articulated in the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act.

The 1916 highway act was little more than a framework to finance the gradual upgrading of a fragmented and variable collection of state road systems. Thus, it did not challenge state autonomy nor did it necessitate a broad-based political and economic consensus at the national level. In the years following the Great Depression, however, this tentative road improvement agenda was incorporated under the umbrella of the federal New Deal revitalization agenda. After the Depression, America was ready for an assertive government, for limitations to be placed on citizen’s freedom of choice. We were ready for authority and expertise to regulate our actions. We did not trust ourselves after the collapse of our free-market economy, and wanted guidance in the form of a powerful, beneficent central government. As Gandy writes in *Concrete and Clay,*

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making from the early 1930s to the mid-1960s. During the 1930s large-scale construction activity was transformed from a private to a public enterprise, facilitating a new approach to comprehensive reconstruction.67

Roads would become one of the anchors of this new enthusiasm for central government. The national highway project was first articulated as a conventional public works stimulus package. But it would, over the course of its development from the first 1916 Federal Aid Highway Act through to the 1956 authorization of the Interstate and Defense Highway System, become one of the most powerful political-economic growth consensuses of the twentieth century. The main elements of the highway growth consensus were, in roughly chronological order, (1) the Keynesian/New-Deal public works employment agenda, (2) a push to revive America’s major industrial cities, (3) wartime strategic defense planning, (4) national connectivity and communication, and, perhaps most importantly, (5) the need for a comprehensive commercial and freight transit network (as embodied in the emerging trucking industry). In its earliest iterations, however, only the first of these concerned the federal government. For President Franklin D. Roosevelt, highways were essentially a New Deal public works stimulus package like any other. FDR envisioned the national highway network as a project that had the potential to fend off a second Depression when soldiers returned from World War II, in need of jobs.68 Indeed, as Richard Weingroff put it in his 1996 article “The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating the Interstate Highway System,” FDR “repeatedly expressed

67 Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 127.
interest in construction of a network of toll superhighways as a way of providing more jobs for people out of work."

This employment-driven public works agenda was quickly joined by a close cousin – the notion that the freeway could be a kind of city savior, a catalyst for urban revitalization. Public opinion quickly galvanized around the idea that these freeways could not only employ the factory workers and soldiers that were adrift in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, but also revive America’s major post-industrial cities. In the ‘30s, ‘40s, and into the ‘50s, "big-city mayors, civil engineers, urban planners, public-works officials, and downtown business and real estate interests all envisioned new urban expressways that would revive the declining urban core. 'Saving' the central business district became a primary goal of the urban elites by 1940s." This highway network was envisioned by FDR and his contemporaries as a cross-country set of recreational routes, in the tradition of earlier parkways intended for personal cars and not for trucking. But, as the proposals progressed, this recreational infrastructure increasingly became an industrial, commercial, and strategic intercity transit network.

The Second World War expanded the New Deal highway agenda of the ‘30s and ‘40s, turning this agenda into a strategic defense vision. As Weingroff notes, President Eisenhower (whose name would eventually be the Interstate System’s namesake) was himself inspired and motivated to advance the highway project by his wartime experiences:

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70 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 676.
During World War II, Gen. Eisenhower saw the advantages Germany enjoyed because of the autobahn network. He also noted the enhanced mobility of the Allies when they fought their way into Germany. These experiences shaped Eisenhower's views on highways. 'The old [1919 cross-country] convoy,' he said, 'had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land.'

At the heart of this shift in the mission of the American highway system was an explicit criticism of the existing road network as substandard and therefore grossly insufficient to deal with catastrophe. As Vice President Nixon would point out in his speech at the signing ceremony for the 1954 Federal-Aid Highway Act, the existing highway network was obsolete in many ways, the worst of which were its “appalling inadequacies to meet the demands of catastrophe or defense, should an atomic war come.”

The inclusion of a defense agenda in the promotion of an interstate highway system leveraged a great deal of support through its simultaneous call for patriotic pride in our infrastructure and implication that without this infrastructure we were conspicuously vulnerable to Cold War attacks. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan notes in his 1960 article “New Roads and Urban Chaos,” Congress even lengthened the title of the highway proposal so it would read Interstate and Defense Highway Program, as a way of keeping the patriotism trump card in mind throughout political negotiations.

The patriotic rhetoric of this new defense-driven highway lobby would expand to equate a good highway network with an economically healthy, unified nation. The initial presentation of highway infrastructure as a military necessity evolved into an assertion that highways were an important component of our national identity. This equation of national unity and infrastructural connectivity is evident in the language

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of Eisenhower’s 1955 transmittal letter accompanying the report to Congress prepared by the Clay Committee (collectively responsible for the development of a highway financing plan):

Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods. The ceaseless flow of information throughout the republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways crisscrossing the country and joining at our national borders with friendly neighbors to the north and south. Together, the united forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear—United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts.\(^{75}\)

The Clay Report similarly claimed, "the automobile has restored a way of life in which the individual may live in a friendly neighborhood, it has brought city and country closer together, it has made us one country and a united people."\(^{76}\)

This rhetorical equation of the highway network with national unity, wasn’t, however, without motive. As Gandy points out in *Concrete and Clay,*

Roads symbolized a kind of 'structural continuity' in the evolving morphology of urban networks. Their creation attested to the enduring dynamics of spatial organization and movement within an emerging regional industrial complex, but at the same time their construction revealed a continuity in political and economic purpose that spanned the new constellations of state power and new forms of partnership with capital.\(^{77}\)

In the years following World War II, the defense agenda behind the highway project had been compounded by an increasing national investment in and dependence on the well being of the auto industry. As Moynihan notes,

Automobile registrations had almost doubled in the first decade after the war. By 1955 there was a motor vehicle for every seven hundred feet of lane in both directions on all the streets and roads of the nation. It was expected that registrations would rise another forty per cent in the following decade to a total of eight-one million. Yet already the cities were chockablock [full] with

\(^{77}\) Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 133-5.
cars. Unless more room was made for automobiles, the automobile industry itself might feel the pinch.  

America’s economic well-being was increasingly being understood through the lens of the auto lobby. Moynihan takes care to emphasize that the ‘auto industry’ is not only the literal car manufacturers (although they certainly had a stake in the building of a national highway network). The ‘auto industry’ also encompasses the constellation of car parts, service and support industries. In his words, “the economic interest in highways affects not only General Motors but also countless numbers of garage owners, automobile dealers, road contractors, real-estate developers, and similar large and small businesses throughout the land.” It is the convergence of all these stakeholders and their collective benefit from the auto industry that would, ultimately, give an extra thrust to the highway project. The highway had become, according to the Brookings Institution for policy research, “the greatest single combination of economic activities in men's history.”

But, even with such powerful military and economic forces aligning, this vision of a nation connected by highways could not be realized until the details of this emerging political-economic consensus were worked out. The primary sources of conflict were the allocation or regional distribution of federal aid funds (urban vs. rural, east vs. west) and the sources of funds (user tolls vs. gas tax, industry vs. citizen burden). At this point, the funding available to states for highway building was not differentiated from more general federal aid funds, meaning that states had to weigh the importance of a highway against the relative importance of other local needs.

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With so many competing demands for governmental resources, local governments were pitted against one another, each city and town clamoring to get their maximum justifiable allotment of federal aid. Thus, as described by Weingroff, "as consideration of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 began, the highway community was divided. Rival apportionment formulas divided the states. Urban interests battled rural interests for priority."\textsuperscript{82} The fundamental debate became whether funds would be allocated according to land area or population. As Weingroff explains, "heavily populated states and urban areas wanted population to be the main factor, while other states preferred land area and distance as factors."\textsuperscript{83} The ultimate agreement, years later, was a hybrid of the two: “the 1954 bill authorized $175 million for the interstate system, to be used on a 60-40 [60% federal to 40% state] matching ratio. The formula represented a compromise: one-half based on population and one-half based on the federal-aid primary formula (one-third on roadway distance, one-third on land area, and one-third on population).”\textsuperscript{84} But, even as the regional conflict was being settled, voices were being raised over the question of where this mythical $175 million would come from and who should rightfully bare the burden – industry or citizenry – and in what proportions. This question would prove far more volatile and resistant to resolution.

The first bills introduced in 1955 were undermined by the highway growth consensus’ primary beneficiary – the auto industry. Their motives were too visible. In the years leading up to the passing of the landmark 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act, there were several bills circulating with varying funding structures. The first was

drafted by Senator Albert Gore Senior of Tennessee, the chairman of the 
Subcommittee on Roads in the Committee on Public Works. Gore’s bill proposed a 
68,400km (or 42,500mi) system limit, offering a 75% federal funding subsidy out of a 
$10 billion overall budget. But it did not describe how the revenue it required would 
be raised. The Clay Committee also put forward a bill that relied on bonds to fund the 
program and would reimburse toll roads already built. The Clay bill would restrict tax 
revenue for 30 years to pay off the debt and interest on the bonds. The Senate voted 
on the Clay bill in early 1955 defeating it by a vote of 60 to 31 and offering 
provisional support for the Gore bill despite the lack of an adequate funding plan. At 
this juncture, Baltimore Representative George H. Fallon, the chairman of the 
Subcommittee on Roads in the House Committee on Public Works, drafted a revised 
version of the Gore bill (the Fallon bill) in order to present a more comprehensive 
financing plan that had a chance of making it through all stages. Fallon inserted 
‘Defense’ into the proposal name to represent the strategic importance of the network 
and specified a 12-year completion goal with a 90% federal subsidy to be generated 
by highway user tax increases (a funding method not favored by the trucking lobby). 

Both the Clay and Fallon bills were defeated—the Clay bill by 221 to 193 and 
the Fallon Bill by 292 to 123. "Most observers blamed the defeat of the Fallon bill on 
an intense lobbying campaign by trucking, petroleum, and tire interests. Speaker of 
the House Sam Rayburn told reporters, ‘The people who were going to have to pay 
for these roads put on a propaganda campaign that killed the bill.’" 85 Following this 
dual defeat, several key points were refined and reframed in preparation for the next

round of proposals and voting. First, the Bureau of Public Roads completed their route studies and published their locations in September of 1955. This collection of route studies (called the ‘Yellow Book’) would be used as an education and advocacy tool in the next round of votes. Soon after the publication of the Yellow Book, Eisenhower rallied support at the January 1956 State of the Union Address. And advocacy groups rallied around Fallon’s (new) revised 1956 bill. But, perhaps most importantly, "the highway interests that had killed the Fallon bill in 1955 were reassessing their views and clarifying their concerns… Trucking industry representatives indicated they were not opposed to all tax increases, only to the tax increases proposed in the Fallon bill, which they thought made them bear an unfair share of the load. They would agree to a one- or two-cent hike in gas taxes and increases in certain other taxes.”

Fallon’s revised 1956 bill “provided for a 65,000-km [or 40,400-mile] national system of interstate and defense highways to be built over 13 years. The federal share would be 90 percent or $24.8 billion.”

After considerable conversation, a hybrid of Gore’s 1955 bill and Fallon’s 1956 bill was approved and passed into law as The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. This 1956 consensus, hard-won as it was, would be seriously challenged as early as 1960. In particular, Daniel P. Moynihan would emphasize in his 1960 article “New Roads and Urban Chaos,” (an indictment of the entire interstate highway program) that the funding structure unfairly subsidized the trucking industry at the expense of the average citizen taxpayer. The use of a gas tax – rather than a vehicle-specific user toll – amounted to a substantial household tax that did not account for

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the disproportionate impact of trucking use on the cost and maintenance of the proposed highways. This meant that the distribution of financial burden was mal-aligned with the benefits to be derived from the system. This trucking subsidy threw the already struggling American freight rail system into crisis, securing trucking as the primary mode of commercial transit. But the agreement was made and the 1956 law was being enacted rapidly with little chance that the trucking industry would be held retroactively accountable for their disproportionate burden on the publicly funded system.

This 1956 consensus, built over 40 years of political and economic negotiations, would serve as the foundation for an unprecedented extension of the authority of America’s federal government. Without this consensus that cut across regional, party, and vocational lines and galvanized the political, social, and economic elite, our government would not have been able to proceed at such a rapid pace, nor would it have been able to confidently exercise eminent domain without considerable resistance. Initially, the federal legislation on highways was just an authorization, not a forceful assertion of priority or need, as it would become with the unprecedented 90% federal to 10% state fund-matching incentive of the landmark 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act. In 1947 no special funds were made available but the routes were provisionally agreed upon... “This required the states to take sizable amounts of money from regular projects to spend on interstate mileage. The result was that the interstate mileage didn't get built. Highway construction expenditure multiplied by nearly eight times from 1945 to 1952, but the states just wouldn't use

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their money on interstate highways. It had never, after all, been their idea.” 91 Funding was raised to 60% Federal, 40% State, but the increased funds didn't change this dynamic. 92 The states were stubborn in their autonomy and were not easily convinced to finance highway construction, despite overwhelming pressure from the national highway lobby.

But, starting in 1956, states would no longer have any significant autonomy in the face of highway proposals. Moynihan describes this shift explaining, “the Federal government, through the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, has assumed the direction of highway construction—one of the few areas of significant government activity in which the states still had the initiative after the New Deal. Although the Federal government has been providing some highway aid to the states since 1916, road building was almost entirely a state and local affair until 1956.” 93 Moynihan goes on to point out that, up until the 1956 extension of Federal authority via the Federal Aid Highway Act, “for the most part...[state-built] roads followed trails that had originated far back in frontier history. With the coming of the automobile they were just surfaced, and widened and straightened somewhat.” 94 Moynihan obviously sees this extension of central government as a dangerous deviation from America’s founding tenets remarking, “the Roman roads... [which] struck like a lash across the conquered provinces, were not reproduced in America until we too established a dominant central government.” 95

True, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was not a mandate; it did not legally bind the states to cooperate with this national vision. But, the reality was, even without an explicit legal obligation, there was little room for the states to resist the interstate highway initiative. As Moynihan observed in 1960, "the states have no real freedom of action… The basic decision to build the system has been made for them: the enormous 'bargain' of the 90-10 money makes it politically impossible to do anything but take the money as fast as possible and try to match it."96 This notion of the 90/10 funding structure as a coercive mechanism to push along the agenda of the highway growth machine is echoed by the author of the 1965 article “Hitting the Road,” who points out how the fiscal desperation of post-war cities and towns led to a rushed highway planning process at the state level: “State highway departments, eager to capitalize on the Government's offer to pay 90% of interstate highway costs, often want to build roads where residents think they are not needed.”97 Moynihan confirms this dynamic proclaiming, “the crisis has come. It has been impossible for the cities to resist the offer of unprecedented amounts of money, however futile they might know it will be to spend it on highways alone. In one metropolis after another the plans have been thrown together and the bulldozers set to work.”98

These last words, “the bulldozers set to work,” hint at the second extension of governmental authority – eminent domain. Extended by leaders at the state and city level (such as Moses), the somewhat relaxed twentieth-century interpretation of the constitutional restrictions on eminent domain enabled urban highways to advance at an alarming pace without the usual need to consult and convince residents and

As Raymond Mohl points out in his 2004 article *Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities*, Moses understood early in the game that a fast pace would be a crucial component to the successful completion of any highway:

Experienced highway builders expected public opposition when they began knocking down neighborhoods. In a 1954 statement to the President’s Committee on a National Highway Program, generally known as the Clay Committee, Moses noted that urban expressway segments of the interstate system would be “the hardest to locate, the most difficult to clear, the most expensive to acquire and build, and the most controversial from the point of view of selfish and shortsighted opposition.” Moses was prophetic on this point. By the mid-1960s, citizen-led freeway revolts stalled urban interstate construction in a dozen or more major cities. Rather than negotiate or compromise on route location, most state and federal highway officials initially sought to forge ahead, the operative theory seemingly being to build expressways quickly before opposition coalesced and politicians caved in to an outraged public.\(^{100}\)

As is evident in Moses’s language and Mohl’s subsequent interpretation, this rapid paced destruction of urban neighborhoods was justified by the collective value of a highway. The preemptive framing of the debate effectively silenced criticism, at least initially. However, this silencing of advocates for the use value of neighborhoods as the locus of community and identity was the biggest oversight of the highway growth machine. In their failure to consider the value of neighborhood, the highwaymen unwittingly contributed to the urban decline their roads were meant to reverse.

In the context of a powerful growth consensus like the highway agenda, the urban social landscape begins to acquire a sort of economic topography – or

\(^{99}\) Eminent domain is the common term used in reference to the *Takings Clause* of the constitution, a portion of the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution Bill of Rights. The fifth amendment reads “No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” The *Takings Clause* is this last sentence (‘nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation’). It is this language that served as the legal foundation for the claiming of private property for the routing of highways in the twentieth century.

\(^{100}\) Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 678.
stratification – according to any given place’s “strategic utility to the growth machine apparatus.” Thus, when operating under a powerful growth consensus, a place’s strategic utility (or exchange value) becomes its only source of value. In these instances, the sacrifice of community and vitality (or use value) is seen as both inevitable and worthwhile in the context of the larger agenda and vision of the Growth Machine.

Moses believed in and acted upon the set of priorities that drove the highway growth machine even before they had been officially articulated in the form of the 1956 consensus in Washington—his first highways were paved and peopled decades before the interstate system incentivized their construction. Moses first articulated, then demonstrated the importance of parkways, highways and expressways to the country’s political and economic elite, making a reputation for himself as a ring-leader and spokesperson for this emerging vision of an expressway world. But, as asphalt began to creep across the nation, Moses’s vision lost some of its appeal, its promises being met by hesitation at what might be sacrificed along the way. It gradually became clear that the highway growth consensus represented an unhealthy calcification of the relationship between use and exchange values in America’s economic landscape: in particular an over-valuation of mobility and industry and under-valuation of emplacement and community. It is this privileging of mobility over community in New York that Jacobs spoke out against in the 60s and 70s.

Emerging Dissent against the Growth Consensus
Jane Jacobs’ Legitimization of Local, Disempowered Voices

“Cities should be the ultimate manifestation of a society's collective achievements. City planning is the art of helping cities to become and to stay that way. My philosophy of city planning stems from a belief that the people of a city have a right to say what they want their community to be—physically, socially, economically, culturally—and the responsibility to go out and achieve those goals. City planning involves managing the process of change.”

--- Allan Jacobs (1985) in Looking at Cities

“The expressway world, the modern environment that emerged after World War Two, would reach a pinnacle of power and self-confidence in the 1960s, in the America of the New Frontier, the Great Society, Apollo on the moon…. The developers and devotees of the expressway world [such as Robert Moses] presented it as the only possible modern world… One of the crucial tasks for modernists in the 1960s was to confront the expressway world; another was to show that this was not the only possible modern world, that there were other, better directions in which the modern spirit could move.”


Jane Jacobs, through her magnetic conviction and sharp tongue, soon became the spokesperson for the victims of the highway growth consensus. She was fundamentally a catalyst, legitimizing and validating dissent against the highway-building project. Others that were important early critics of the urban renewal highway-building project include Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Lewis Mumford, and Herbert Gans. Their critiques collectively bolstered grassroots resistance to the highway project across the nation because of their high-profile written critiques in respected academic and professional journals and through books published in the ‘60s as resistance was building. But, none of them have gained the symbolic status of Jane Jacobs – in part, perhaps, because they were rarely if ever involved in the actual

105 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 675.
grassroots protests their critiques implied. Their contribution was on paper and in conversations, not in the organizing of community resistance and the galvanizing of neighborhood identities. Jacobs, on the other hand, got right in the mix – and in so doing, became a symbol of the counterculture critique of postwar urbanism.

Jacobs, at every turn, championed 'accidental' planning as a legitimate and important rival to Moses' intentional planning—she celebrated the urban system as simultaneous, layered, chaotic, contrasting, organic and accidental rather than (and in opposition to) the ordered, unified clarity of Moses's ideal urban system.\(^\text{106}\) As Marshal Berman describes in his 1988 book *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Jacobs celebrated “the freedom of the city, an order that exists in a state of perpetual motion and change, the evanescent but intense and complex face-to-face communication and communion.”\(^\text{107}\) Berman goes on to explain that Jacobs was essentially advocating for a revival of 19th century conceptions of modernity that were bound up in the street as the site of encounter, of dialectical synthesis:

> [Jacobs’s] celebration of urban vitality, diversity and fullness of life [in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*] is in fact…one of the oldest themes in modern culture. Throughout the age of Haussmann and Baudelaire, and well into the twentieth century, this urban romance crystallized around the street, which emerged as a primary symbol of modern life… The street was experienced as the medium in which the totality of modern material and spiritual forces could meet, clash, interfuse and work out their ultimate meanings and fates.\(^\text{108}\)

Jacobs’ visceral enjoyment of Greenwich Village’s ‘traditional’ and ‘messy’ urbanism thus fueled her critique of Le Corbusier’s sterile, ordered urban modernity –

a vision that was, itself, generated in reaction to the traditional urbanism Jacobs so enjoyed.

The modernist impulse of Le Corbusier and his followers was an outright rejection of the street as the place of encounter – precisely the kind of place Jacobs sought to salvage and maintain. Berman explains:

For twenty years, streets everywhere were at best passively abandoned and often (as in the Bronx) actively destroyed… Ironically, then, within the space of a generation, the street, which had always served to express dynamic and progressive modernity, now came to symbolize everything dingy, disorderly, sluggish, stagnant, worn-out, obsolete - everything that the dynamism and progress of modernity were supposed to leave behind. In this context, the radicalism and originality of Jacobs' work should be clear.109

But Jacobs’ critique of postwar urbanism’s obsession with order, clarity and static harmony did not amount to mere nostalgia for an unstructured, traditional past. Jacobs was attempting to re-frame the ‘traditional’ urbanism of the 19th century as its own order – an order that could (and should) offer a substantial challenge to the ‘modern’ order of Le Corbusier. She was trying to argue that this older order could, in fact, better accommodate ‘modern’ life than Le Corbusier’s order. In Jacobs’ words:

under the seeming disorder of the old city is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city, and liken it to the dance.110

Thus, while Jacobs’ vision did emerge from a certain brand of romantic nostalgia, it also found its origins in a certain grounded pragmatism – like the field ecologist, Jacobs was observing an urban ecosystem that, while at first confounding in its seeming incoherence and volatile dynamism, was ultimately seen to possess an order

which structured a remarkably complex, interconnected web of relations and dependencies.

Jacobs was making an argument similar to ecologists of the same era who sounded the alarm at our hubristic attempts to re-structure natural systems whose internal complexities were, in reality, far beyond our level of understanding. Jacobs was making a preservationist argument, not so dissimilar from the conservationist argument of the same era, which took as its fundamental premise that our enthusiasm for restructuring our environment was, in fact, destroying our environment at a pace that threatened to choke out the very vitality we sought to nurture. Berman explains that

Jacobs argued…first, that the urban spaces created by modernism were physically clean and orderly, but socially and spiritually dead; second, that it was only the vestiges of nineteenth-century congestion, noise and general dissonance that kept contemporary urban life alive; third, that the old urban 'moving chaos' [of 17th/18th century urbanism] was in fact a marvelously rich and complex human order, unnoticed by modernism only because its paradigms of order were mechanical, reductive and shallow.\textsuperscript{111}

This powerful critique legitimized arguments to salvage or protect the fabric of the traditional city that was being severed and torn apart by the construction of highways and other urban renewal projects. By making a well-written and convincing argument to place renewed value on the traditional city, Jacobs (as well as Moynihan, Mumford and Gans) made the defense of neighborhoods a patriotic, rather than a selfish, cause.\textsuperscript{112} Jacobs managed to reframe the debate in a coherent way – thus countering the ideological framework that Moses had so powerfully articulated earlier.

\textsuperscript{111} Berman, \textit{All That Is Solid Melts into Air} (1988), 170-171.
\textsuperscript{112} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 21.
The pendulum had started to go the other direction. Armed with a well-articulated attack on the ideological foundations of urban renewal’s modernist vision of the city, residents slowly began to raise their voices in opposition to the urban renewal highway project, in opposition to the growth consensus, citing Jacobs’ book as their bible. Berman recalls,

in the last two decades, this [Jacobs‘] perspective has gathered widespread and enthusiastic assent, and masses of Americans have worked steadfastly to save their neighborhoods and cities from the ravages of motorized modernization. Every movement to stop the construction of a highway is a movement to give the old moving chaos a new lease on life. Despite sporadic local successes, no one has had the power to break the accumulated power of… the highway. But there have been enough people with enough passion and dedication to create a strong undertow, to give city life a new tension and excitement and poignancy while it lasts.113

But, Jacobs’s contribution to dissent against the highway project did not stop at a written critique that could serve as a launching pad for others. Jacobs, unlike Moynihan, Mumford and Gans, actually engaged with the issues on the ground in her neighborhood, Greenwich Village. Jacobs, inspired by Saul Alinsky, the grandfather of community organizing, began to experiment with mobilizing her neighbors, putting her into direct conflict with Robert Moses and the highway growth consensus he represented.114 Thus, much like Alinsky, Jacobs became an icon of anti-government, grassroots community organizing, valuing ‘people power’ and insurgency over state authority.115 Her popular legacy has, in turn, come to be defined by the public confrontations of which she was a part. It is through dramatic accounts of these events that Jacobs gains her celebrity, and conversely, it is through their association

114 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 16.
115 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 16.
with what Jane Jacobs represents that these conflicts have acquired an elevated importance.

Thus, both Jacobs herself and the conflicts which define her public image endure as symbols of righteous dissent against the highway growth consensus and the modernist project. Each conflict has become a scene in the urban theatre enacted by Moses and Jacobs, contributing to the dramatic weight of their ideological antagonism – and they make for very good theatre, indeed. Flint, in his 2009 book *Wrestling with Moses*, brings out this theatricality of the Moses-Jacobs clash to great effect, using each conflict to further elaborate on the antagonism of these two public personalities. Flint consistently exaggerates the characters of Moses and Jacobs, developing them each into perfectly matched spokespeople for their corresponding sides of this societal debate. What is consistently left out of Flint’s theatrical embellishment of the Moses-Jacobs conflict, however, is the broader societal forces that reinforced and propelled these conflicts. We could not have asked for two better representatives of the societal debate taking place in America’s cities of the ‘60s and ‘70s – both were eloquent, persistent, and charismatic – but they were just that, representatives. The debate would have occurred whether or not they were the ones representing it in the public theatre of politics. But our understanding is nonetheless informed by this public theatre of the Moses-Jacobs conflict. This public theatre will serve as a frame of reference before delving deeper into the broader societal forces which Moses and Jacobs have each come to represent.

The first event highlighted by Flint is, in fact, an account of the lack of resistance as a way of setting the scene for Jacobs’ entrance into New York politics.
The largely uncontested construction of the Gowanus Parkway (1939-41), despite the nearby residents’ fear for its inevitably negative impact on their neighborhood, served as a warning of what might have happened over and over again throughout the city of New York, had Jacobs not risen to the challenge. The Gowanus Parkway – proposed 1939, and completed 1941 under Moses’ direction – represented Moses’ inflexible brutality and the neighborhoods’ corresponding impotence and subservience to his vision.\textsuperscript{116} Flint dramatizes Moses’ brutal perseverance, setting the stage for Jacobs’ entrance: “residents pleaded for the roadway to instead be cut through an industrial area one block over. But Moses would not agree to move the corridor he had planned. He had made the calculations and knew best where the roadway should be... Fiddling around with the right-of-way would only lead to costly delays. Thus, the Gowanus soared through, rattling windows on either side, and left the avenue in darkness. The neighborhood would, as a result, succumb to blight, closed storefronts, and crime.”\textsuperscript{117} This description of the fate of the neighborhoods divided by the Gowanus Parkway serves as a warning of what might have happened on the island of Manhattan had there not been sufficient resistance to make Moses back down.

This retrospective fear for what New York (and the island of Manhattan specifically) might have become without Jacobs’ sage wisdom and gutsy tenacity, is further justified by the narrative of the better-known Cross-Bronx Expressway. Conceived of in the 1929 \textit{Report on Highway Traffic Conditions and Proposed Traffic Relief Measures for the City of New York}, the Cross-Bronx route was further specified in 1936 by the Regional Plan Association and adopted in 1940 by the New


\textsuperscript{117} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 52.
York City Planning Commission. Moses made the final proposal in 1945 and broke ground on the project in 1948. The project opened in phases in 1955, 1956, 1960, 1961 and 1963 with extensions opening in 1964 and 1972. Flint emphasizes again, as with the Gowanus Parkway, Moses’ callous determination and the neighborhood’s helpless victimhood:

[The Cross-Bronx Expressway] would slash through one mile of densely populated neighborhoods in the Bronx. Over fifteen hundred families would be forced to relocate. Begun in 1948 and completed in 1963 at a cost of $128 million, the Cross Bronx Expressway represented Moses's dominance over neighborhood objections in that period, and the project is remembered to this day as a case study in brutally overriding citizen participation in roadway planning… [Moses] was also particularly inflexible on the route of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Moving it just two blocks south, to the northern section of Crotona Park, would have spared hundreds of families from having their homes destroyed. Tenants' groups and a handful of elected officials pleaded for the change, but Moses would not budge.

This kind of account of the Cross-Bronx Expressway’s brutality carries a latent implication that, had the neighborhood only had a Jane Jacobs, it could have been saved. But, that implication requires an irresponsible conflation of the two neighborhoods – the Bronx (relatively poor) and Greenwich Village (relatively wealthy) – that betrays an over-simplistic view of neighborhood mobilization against the highway-building project.

Marshal Berman, a former resident of the Bronx at the time of the expressway’s construction, challenges this simplistic equation of the two neighborhoods, posing the question "what if the Bronxites of the 1950s had possessed the conceptual tools, the vocabulary, the widespread sympathy, the flair for publicity and mass mobilization, that residents of many American neighborhoods would

120 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 142.
acquire in the 1960s? What if, like Jacobs’ lower Manhattan neighbors a few years later, we had managed to keep the dreaded road from being built? How many of us would still be in the Bronx today, caring for it and fighting for it as our own?\textsuperscript{121}

Berman ultimately concludes that the Bronx was a different kind of neighborhood than the Village or SoHo (threatened by the later Lower Manhattan Expressway)—it was much more transitory with a somewhat unstable identity. This meant that, although the neighborhood certainly did not deserve to be sacrificed, it was not equipped to organize around a stable long-term neighborhood identity, and so struggled to make a powerful argument for the value of their community. In this way, the transitory instability of the Bronx made it particularly vulnerable to the highway, more so that Greenwich Village (or Lower Manhattan) ever was. To imply that Jacobs was the key (or, the only) reason that Greenwich Village organized effectively against multiple urban renewal projects is to ignore the highly localized social context that was the precondition for Jacobs’ remarkably effective organizing. This failure to acknowledge the fluctuations in wealth, influence, civic culture and community identity between and within cities is one of the riskiest by-products of Jacobs’ celebrity symbolism— in assuming that her individual persona, conviction, and tenacity singlehandedly saved Manhattan from a terrible fate, we lose a crucial appreciation for the structural reasons why neighborhoods like the Bronx failed to organize an effective self-defense while neighborhoods like Greenwich Village and SoHo did so with ease, and even with panache.

Greenwich Village had its first encounter with the post-war urban renewal machine when the Washington Square Park Highway was proposed in 1952. Defeated

\textsuperscript{121} Berman, \textit{All That is Solid Melts into Air} (1988), 325-327.
in 1959, the neighborhood’s effective organizing against this desecration of their community resources would become a model for later resistance. Moses’ original proposal was a thinly veiled attempt to placate Manhattan’s powerful real estate lobby. As Lewis Mumford pointed out,

The real reason for putting through this callow traffic plan has been admitted by Mr. Moses himself: it is to give the commercial benefit of the name 'Fifth Avenue' to the group of property owners who are rehabilitating the area south of Washington Square, largely at public expense. The cause itself is unworthy and the method used by Mr. Moses is extravagant. To satisfy a group of realtors and investors, he is as ready to change the character of Fifth Avenue as he is to further deface and degrade Washington Square.\textsuperscript{122}

Confronting this kind of critique, coming from a well-educated and respected public intellectual such as Mumford, was uncharted territory for the city’s planners and builders. Momentarily on the defensive, Moses quickly came back with the ever-ready threat of governmental neglect. Given that federal money was being leveraged for this urban renewal project, if the project described was rejected by the community, no ‘renewal’ would occur. If this happened, then the city would, in effect, turn their back on the community and withdraw any planned investment in improvements.\textsuperscript{123} This was a classic coercive tool of the highway growth machine used to push through their plans in the face of inconvenient resident resistance. As in other neighborhoods faced with the decision between neglect and a deeply flawed renewal project, many Village residents responded to the threat, seeing the objectionable flaws of the renewal project as a necessary evil.\textsuperscript{124} However, the resistance was resilient in Greenwich Village and, even as some residents caved to Moses’ threat of neglect, others rallied renewed support for their critiques of the

\textsuperscript{122} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 80.
\textsuperscript{123} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 73.
\textsuperscript{124} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 73.
project, galvanizing the neighborhood in stubborn resistance. The combination of New York University’s staff and students with Greenwich Village’s residents proved to be a resourceful and resilient community that was not easily convinced of their powerlessness nor their peripheral importance to New York’s urban modernity.\textsuperscript{125}

Faced with the unexpected endurance of the West Village’s resistance, Moses attempted to point out the selfish origins of the resistance, painting the community’s activism as an obstructionist attitude that was fundamentally anti-progress and anti-modern. This rhetoric of necessary patriotic sacrifice and anti-modern selfishness is evident in the response Moses gave to a plea for playground improvements, published in city newspapers and written by one of the 'Children of Greenwich Village.' Moses wrote:

> It seems a shame you should suffer because of some stuffy, arrogant and selfish people living around the square [Washington Square Park]… The trouble is that our plans were blocked by stupid and selfish people in the neighborhood who don't want to give you a place to play, but insist on keeping Washington Square as it was years ago, with lawns and grass and the kind of landscaping which goes with big estates or small villages. These people want the square to be quiet and artistic, and they object to the noise of children playing and to other activities which we proposed. Under these circumstances we moved our...men and material to other crowded parts of the city where playgrounds are badly needed and...people welcome them and don't put obstacles in our way.\textsuperscript{126}

Moses believed his plans were in the city’s best interest and so turned to a standard tactic: Moses attempted to discredit the resistance, to turn the press against them in the hopes that the added pressure of this stigmatization would weaken the resistance of the Washington Square Park community. But they had Jacobs on their side.

\textsuperscript{125} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 73.  
\textsuperscript{126} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 73-74.
encouraging them, assuring residents that their resistance was righteous, selfless, even patriotic, despite the accusations of Moses and company.

Jacobs’ son, Ned, recalls these moments when the residents needed encouragement, reassurance of the value of their neighborhood and the importance of their voices against its sacrifice to the highway growth machine. Ned described the 1958 fight to save Washington Square Park, reminding us, "these were...the dying days of McCarthyism. People were afraid—even in the Village—to sign petitions for fear they’d get on some list that would cost them their careers. But I would go up to them and ask, 'Will you help save our park?' Their hearts would melt, and they would sign." It was this kind of clever tenacity that (rightly) earned Jacobs her reputation as an informal community organizer. She knew how to leverage the resources of her neighborhood and she knew how to catch people off guard and recruit participants who would normally avoid confrontation of any kind out of habit and self-preservation. She also knew who to pull in from outside the community – Jacobs helped recruit to the Washington Square Park cause key individuals such as Lewis Mumford (the architectural critic at the New Yorker), Raymond S. Rubinow (a consultant and historic preservation activist), Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Mead (an anthropologist and Village resident), William Whyte (editor of Fortune and author of The Organization Man), as well as the publisher of the Village Voice and a law professor at NYU. With such an entourage of savvy public intellectuals and devoted progressive publications, the Washington Square Park conflict became an

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127 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 85.
128 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 78-80
important intellectual focal point for the emerging critique of postwar urban renewal policies.

Flint, however, gives this conflict a bit too much historical weight, positioning this as the first major blow to Moses’ public image (rather than an early and important blow, Flint sees it as the blow that did Moses in): "the first negative editorials about Moses and urban renewal appeared in the major New York papers. The coverage of Washington Square Park had further chipped away at the Moses mystique... Moses was the man in charge of parks and of designing the optimal layouts for the city's streets and buildings; for the first time, the notion was planted in the public consciousness that his plans might not always be best for the city."\(^{129}\) Flint takes this narrative even further towards theatrical melodrama, claiming that the Washington Square Park conflict was not only encouraging to those who were facing urban renewal head-on in their neighborhoods, but it was also a turning point for New York City’s culture of dissent: "the achievement [of vehicle closure in Washington Square Park] was infectious as neighborhoods across the city found a new voice in development, public works projects, and especially parks... New Yorkers assumed a new sense of ownership over public space.... [seeing] themselves as stewards of the space."\(^{130}\) Flint goes on to depict the Washington Square Park conflict as a harbinger of Moses’ ultimate defeat – as if that one conflict alone turned the tables, singlehandedly dismantling the highway growth consensus on which his work was founded: "for Moses, the battle of Washington Square Park served as a worrying portent of things to come. He was particularly concerned that it would embolden the

\(^{129}\) Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 90.  
\(^{130}\) Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 88-89.
neighborhood forces to oppose all forms of progress for New York.... Jacobs, meanwhile, grew more confident. Moses had come into her neighborhood and been turned back. And there was something larger at stake: ordinary citizens could see that they could challenge the top-down planning that Moses represented, not just in New York but in cities across the country. And, indeed, the Washington Square Park conflict of the late 1950s was a turning point of sorts – but it was one of many conflicts throughout New York and the nation that were collectively crystallizing an emerging culture of citizen empowerment and dissent against the highway growth consensus. Washington Square Park was not the deadly blow, nor was Jacobs the only one dealing blows to the highway growth consensus.

In the years following the Washington Square Park conflict, Jacobs devoted herself to the production of what would become far and away one of the most iconic works in the canon of urban planning literature – *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In this book, published in 1961, Jacobs continued to develop and refine a vocabulary with which to challenge urban renewal’s foundational arguments, and core terminology – such as the indeterminate use of ‘slum’ and ‘blight’ for neighborhoods slated for renewal projects. Soon after completing the book, these terms about which she had thought so deeply, would be applied to her own neighborhood in preparation for the planned ‘renewal’ of the West Village. This direct attack on her neighborhood would inspire Jacobs to, for the first (and last) time, generate an alternative proposal, an alternative model of development to urban renewal. Well versed in the art of criticism and dissent, Jacobs was far less equipped

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to generate, to create new models. Her strength was in noticing the value of former models, not in translating that value into new development. This would be her maiden voyage into the uncharted territory of proposal (rather than resistance). Not surprisingly, Jacobs successfully stalled and eventually killed the urban renewal proposals for the neighborhood but was somewhat less successful at developing a viable, compelling alternative. This remains one of the largest holes in Jacobs’ argument – Jacobs provides us with a philosophy of resistance but fails to offer a compelling philosophy of creation. Her critique is a dead end that no one has been able to push beyond preservation to generation.

With the Lower Manhattan Expressway (Lomex), however, she was back in her element and giving her best performance; Jacobs’ vocal opposition to the Lomex proposal would become perhaps her most prominent and enduring legacy. While the route had been under consideration since its proposal in 1941, the conversation intensified in the late 1960s when Moses re-proposed the Lomex route. As Gandy put it in his 2008 book, Concrete and Clay,

The politicization of highways policy in New York intensified during the late 1960s. In 1965 Robert Moses proposed that an elevated expressway be constructed through lower Manhattan, linking the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges on the east side and connecting with the Holland Tunnel to the west... In response, the opposition to highway building became more sophisticated and better organized. Leading antimodern planners such as Jane Jacobs sought to raise the political profile of the campaign against the Lower Manhattan Expressway, in conjunction with the Sierra Club and a panoply of other newly emerging environmental groups. The road proposal became a powerful aspect of Jacobs's critique of postwar urbanism, which warned that such projects 'eviscerate great cities.' Jacobs became a leading critic of modern planning, comparable in terms of her impact with the contemporary critique of industrialized agriculture developed by Rachel Carson. The Lower Manhattan Expressway quickly became the most politicized of all the city's

Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 132.
major road projects so far, its opponents raising issues of blight, dereliction, and air pollution.¹³⁴

This press coverage of the escalating conflict over Lomex meant that the terms of the debate, the language being used by each side, was reaching residents and policy makers across the country. Given the early date of the conflict, Lomex became an important precedent for freeway revolts across the country – the bulk of it occurring from 1961-1962 and some of it occurring as far back as 1941 when it was first proposed. When Lomex was declared dead in 1962, the only other meaningful precedent for freeway cancellation was the San Francisco Board of Supervisors’ 1959 vote to cancel seven of the city’s ten planned freeways. Thus, Lomex, like the cancelled freeways of San Francisco, became an important precedent for direct confrontation and grassroots resistance leading to the cancellation of a freeway.

Lomex, first proposed in 1941, had been stalled for two full decades due to the controversial nature of the scale of demolition it would require. Routed along Broome Street, Lomex would take out huge swaths of what we now know as SoHo – much of the cast iron architecture for which the area is known would have been lost to the highway, along with the many businesses and residences.¹³⁵ Moses, determined to make the route viable, embarked on a new public relations campaign to get Lomex built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, placing extra emphasis on the area’s blight and depressed business climate. In one of the brochures Moses composed to promote Lomex, he positioned the expressway as an important catalyst for revitalization, the economic salvation of the city:

¹³⁴ Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 143.
Not to be overlooked in examining the benefits of the Expressway is the tremendous stimulus it will provide to the program of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association… This group of distinguished downtown leaders, headed by David Rockefeller, is assiduously tackling a giant task - the rehabilitation of Lower Manhattan. These citizens have undertaken a project of studding scope. They deserve nothing less than the complete cooperation of our elected and appointed city officials.\textsuperscript{136}

Here, Moses was speaking in part on behalf of other, powerful members of New York’s highway growth machine. Resistance had fluctuated over the nearly two decades in which Lomex was under discussion, reaching particular intensity in the years leading up to Moses’s 1961 re-proposal. But, as the resistance escalated, so did the advocacy for Lomex. One such advocate was that of downtown businessman David Rockefeller who commented on the areas along the Lomex route that were slated for demolition saying, “that area [SoHo] is our neighbor… Nobody likes to have an unfortunate neighbor next door. The expressway will be the occasion for a lot of clearing and opening up. It will bring in a lot of light and air.”\textsuperscript{137} Indeed, the downtown business interests for whom Lomex would bring the most benefit would become increasingly vocal as conflict over the 1961 proposal intensified.

In particular, prominent highway lobbyists went to great lengths to reiterate the anti-modern selfishness of those who were stalling the route’s construction. One such lobbyist, William J. Gottlieb, president of the Automobile Club of New York, responded to the rising resistance saying, “every delay gives added hope to those who indulge themselves in partisan politics and who make municipal progress a dirty word.”\textsuperscript{138} Similarly, Peter J. Brennan, president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, proclaimed with exasperation, "no matter

\textsuperscript{136} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 148.
\textsuperscript{137} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 164.
\textsuperscript{138} Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 156.
where a construction project is planned, the people of the area object very strenuously… If our city planners were to give in to all of these people, our city would still be a cow pasture with Indians running around.” 139 Moses, perhaps in response or anticipation of this impatience, attempted to work his usual magic with the press, trying to speed along the highway construction process by suppressing questions of relocation and emphasizing the selfishness of all those obstructing the highway’s progress. As Flint describes,

[Moses] encouraged the editorial writers at the New York Times to complain that delay-inducing studies were 'tampering with the future of the city.' In the summer of 1960, he warned the Board of Estimate, which he complained had already postponed action four times, that it must approve the route or the federal government would walk away from the project, along with tens of millions in funding. The city would be left to pay millions for design contracts that had already been commissioned... It would be pure folly to abandon a project that was effectively already under way, he argued. 140

But, his usual tactics didn’t work their usual magic—this time the neighborhood activist networks were primed for action.

Upon announcement of the 1961 re-proposal, Jacobs was recruited into the ranks of the Lomex resistance by Father Gerard La Mountain, whose parish would be torn apart by the expressway barreling through. 141 The Lomex battle offered Jacobs the opportunity to focus what had, up to this point, been a general critique of urban renewal, narrowing her argument to attack highway-motivated renewal specifically. Jacobs warned, “It's all part of a huge interstate network... they're getting it approved a piece at a time so people won't be able to grasp the whole picture.” 142 She emphasized that if they didn’t act now and act aggressively, they’d “be fighting the

139 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 159.
140 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 149.
141 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 147.
tentacles of this stupid octopus forever.”143 Due to her vocal opposition to the project, Jacobs was soon attacked for the selfish obstructionism Moses and the rest of the highway lobby had been bemoaning for decades. Henry Barnes, the city transportation commissioner proclaimed in frustration, “I have yet to hear of anything in New York that [Jacobs’s] group is for… [She is] a Jeanne d'Arc protesting [on behalf of] the people… [but] in the years to come she will be known as the one who has done the most to keep New Yorkers from progressing.”144 But, Jacobs, along with the residents and business owners of the SoHo and Little Italy neighborhoods—those in the way of Lomex’s ‘progress’—owned this coercive rhetoric, turning it on its head. Several protesters donned pickets in the form of tombstones saying “Little Italy—Killed by Progress.”145 By pointing out the violence of progress these picketers forced renewed consideration of the very rhetoric that was meant to silence them.

This expert manipulation of the repressive rhetoric of the highway lobby was indicative of an increasingly sophisticated group of organizers. The Lomex battle was not merely a matter of sheer numbers or the political clout of those protesting—it was about the way they articulated their protest. The Lomex activists were able to articulate, even as they protested, a coherent counter-argument to the main tenets of urban renewal. This was, in no small part, a product of Jacobs’ research into urban renewal while writing her book Death and Life. In particular, the Lomex activists were able to articulate a coherent, and well supported economic argument for the abandonment of the Lomex proposal centering on the idea of the need for stability,

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144 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 159.
145 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 155.
continuity and community as a precondition for investment. This argument had a remarkable potency due to its use of the same terms as urban renewal rhetoric and its implication of shared goals with urban renewal. Difficult to dismiss or discredit, this economic argument was the substantive core of Jacobs’ critique of post-war urbanism, the reason for her overwhelming impact and the pragmatic justification for her celebrity. She managed to critique the urban renewal highway-building project on its own terms and, in doing so, left the highway growth machine with nothing to defend themselves.

Furthermore, aside from challenging Urban Renewal’s economic foundations, Jacobs and company also managed to challenge urban renewal’s aesthetic foundations. Taking advantage of the still infantile historic preservation movement in New York (and across America), the Lomex activists positioned our traditional built heritage as equally important as our modernist experiments with as-yet-unbuilt forms. In particular, the Lomex activists argued that Broome Street represented an important record of our built heritage and thus our American identity. With the buildup to and establishment of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1965, it became possible to protect designated historic buildings and districts on the basis of their value to our heritage and identity. SoHo and Greenwich Village would be some of the first designated historic districts in which demolition and alteration were legally prohibited. And so, while the patriotic resonances of historic preservation would prove to be rhetorically useful, the legal infrastructure being developed as a

146 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 164.
147 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 164.
148 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 164.
result of the historic preservation movement would turn out to be the Lomex activists’ trump card.

At a final 1968 community meeting hosted by the New York Department of Transportation for the Lomex proposal (hosted more as a formality than out of any genuine interest in consulting or informing citizens of the specifics regarding the Lomex route and appearance), Jacobs gave a stirring speech and rallied the community members present to assert their frustration at the insincere nature of the meeting. Betraying their desperation, the government charged Jacobs with inciting riot at a Lomex community meeting with government officials. Upon hearing about the charge Jacobs said to reporters "the inference seems to be… that anybody who criticizes a state program is going to get it in the neck." This was a turning point of sorts—the riot charge was meant to suppress resistance by making an example of Jacobs but, instead it did the opposite, further enraging the public at the silencing of their resistance. When Lomex was defeated soon after, in 1971, Jacobs sent to her brother and his wife a clipping of the December 12 Village Voice story headlined “Political Powerhouse Kills Broome Street Expressway,” writing in the margins "You can well imagine what went on behind the scenes!... A traffic man told me this was the first time in the whole United States a (federal) interstate highway had been killed. Love, Jane." Regardless of whether Jacobs was correct in asserting that Lomex had been the first interstate highway route to be officially abandoned, her excitement was justified. This definitive defeat made one of the first cracks in the previously monolithic highway growth consensus.

149 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 175.
150 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 158.
This first crack was then much expanded by the conflict over the Westway interstate route. The West Side Highway, built in the 1920s as one of the nation’s first attempts at elevated roadbuilding, had begun to crumble come 1970 and by 1973 had to be closed to traffic due to a partial collapse. The West Side Highway remained in this partially dismantled state for more than a decade pending replacement. Westway, proposed as a replacement in 1971 and defeated in 1985, targeted a similar area as the earlier Lomex proposal and so stirred many of the same activist citizens into action. As Gandy notes in his 2008 book *Concrete and Clay*, “the affluent and culturally diverse neighborhoods of Greenwich Village and Chelsea [that lay in the path of Westway] gathered an increasingly elaborate and vocal band of supporters, drawing together expertise from the media, law, ecological science, and numerous other fields to reach a new level of sophistication in grassroots political lobbying.”

The Westway revolt, much like Lomex a decade earlier, had, from the outset, all the characteristics of a successful freeway revolt (as prescribed by highway historian Raymond Mohl).

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151 Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 144-145.

152 Raymond Mohl’s definition of these five terms is as follows. The following quotes were taken from Mohl (2004), 676.

**Good Grassroots Leadership**: “persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class and interracial alliances were needed to bring a high level of attention to the freeway problem over a sustained period of time.”

**Press Support**: “strong support from at least some local politicians and from influential newspapers and journalists.”

**Strong Planning Tradition**: “As Zachary M. Schrag has suggested, cities that had strong and historic planning traditions, such as San Francisco and Washington, D. C., responded more passionately and more effectively to the freeway threat.”

**Legal Action**: “Legal action over highway routing was a necessary ingredient; litigation sometimes delayed land acquisition and construction for years, but without such legal action, state highway departments could move ahead with dispatch.”

**Court/Gov’t Shutdown**: “The freeway revolters often needed a final shutdown decision from the courts, from highest levels of the highway bureaucracy, or after the early 1970s, from state governors.”
in the protesting of both Lomex and Westway – Jacobs provided, fueled or catalyzed many of these characteristics. As Mohl points out that, “grassroots, populist struggle against the urban interstates was crucial, of course, but without these other ingredients, there was a very good chance that the freeway would get built anyway.”  

Jacobs built around her a remarkable infrastructure for community organizing that was founded in the uncommonly plentiful social, intellectual and monetary resources of her area. It is this community organizing infrastructure and the resources it leveraged that differentiated the neighborhoods of lower Manhattan from the Bronx, allowing the lower Manhattan neighborhoods to kill not one but two major highway proposals while trucks barreled through the working and middle-class homes of the Bronx, elevated on a six-lane expressway.

The Westway battle had the quality of a slightly more leisurely and confident resistance movement than Lomex a year earlier—a product of the organizing skills that the network of New York freeway revolters had acquired in their recent Lomex battle as well as the shifting national climate. Jacobs, clearly self-assured and confident in her vision of the city, explained, “Westway is a metaphor for the city…how one feels about it depends on one's vision of what the city is and what it can become.” The implication is that the choice was ours, but the choice should be a clear one, one we should, by now, know how to make. And, in a sense, she was right – the tides had turned and now public opinion (and even public policy) more often than not lined up with Jacobs’s vision of the city, not Moses’s. As Gandy writes,

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153 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 676.
154 Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 144-145.
The collapse of the consensus over highway construction in the 1960s and 1970s closely mirrors the broader dissolution of the [residual] New Deal [era] bipartisan consensus in public policy. In New York, the emergence of well-organized opposition to road building can be traced to the coalition of small business and homeowners that defeated plans for the Lower Manhattan Expressway in the 1960s. Yet the opposition to Westway went far beyond these earlier protests to encompass a generalized indictment of the expansion of car ownership, consumerism, materialism, militarism, and the perceived misuse of public money. The [residual] New Deal [era] consensus sustained by inexorable economic growth was now being directly challenged as an irrational basis for public policy.\textsuperscript{155}

As the highway growth consensus disintegrated, its foundational tension – long obscured by its advocates – was at last apparent. As Gandy writes, “Westway embodied the inherently contradictory impulses toward rational order and personal freedom that underpinned the postwar economic and technological transformation of urban life but which had exploded into open conflict by the late 1960s.”\textsuperscript{156} The opening of this conflict signaled the disintegration of the highway growth consensus along with many of the other foundational premises of the postwar building boom.

Thus, while Jacobs can fairly be positioned as a catalyst for the disintegration of the highway growth consensus in New York and, to some degree, across the nation, she is by no means responsible for single-handedly destroying it. Jacobs’ critiques were timely as they put into words the rising wave of discontent with the highway-building project but, she was certainly not the only one voicing these critiques nor was she the only one acting on them. Jacobs is elevated beyond her due through the isolation of her work from its cultural context – namely that of the Counterculture and minority empowerment movements – and political context – namely the development of legislative tools for dissent against the Interstate Highway

\textsuperscript{155} Gandy, \textit{Concrete and Clay} (2002), 144-145.
\textsuperscript{156} Gandy, \textit{Concrete and Clay} (2002), 144-145.
System. Discussions of New York’s battle with highways often come down to a comparison of the conditions that led the Cross-Bronx Expressway to be built while Lomex and Westway were sent packing. These discussions often focus on the demographics of the two areas, and even the cultural climate of the times (‘50s Cold War vs. ‘60s Counterculture) but they rarely acknowledge the role of the shifting legal and legislative context of highways. Landmark pieces of progressive highway legislation include the 1962 Federal Aid Highway Act, the 1966 creation of the first cabinet-level, comprehensive Department of Transportation, the 1968 Federal Aid Highway Act, the 1969/70 requirements of environmental and housing impact assessment for all highways, and the final 1973 Federal Aid Highway Act which allowed for cancellation of routes and re-allocation of highway resources to mass transit. Without these tools of productive dissent, Jacobs would not have been empowered to stop New York’s freeways in the way she did.

In the years of the first urban freeways, America was a very different country than the country that rallied around Jacobs in the ‘60s. The America of the 1940s and ‘50s was a country that aspired to consensus, to assimilation. The cultural climates of the New Deal, World War II and the Cold War did not encourage or value dissent. Patriotism and indeed citizenship was defined more by conformity than diversity. Gandy comments on the intersection of the highway building project with this conformity- and consensus-driven cultural climate explaining, "the construction of multilane highways through the heart of densely populated urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s eloquently reveals the weakness of community power in resisting the
colossal momentum of the postwar highway construction program.” The lack of resistance in the early years of highway construction (the ‘40s and ‘50s) can, in part be explained by the time delay in the construction of urban routes – the ‘easy’ rural segments of interstate highways were often built first, meaning that few cities had broke ground on their urban freeways before 1960 [New York, of course, had but it was, as always, at the forefront of new development]. The growth consensus was necessarily weakened in response to the more direct conflict of plowing through a city neighborhood. The stories and images of urban highway construction exposed all the sacrifices necessary to continue pushing the interstate highway system forward and called its initial premise into question.  

In part because the speedy and largely uncontested construction of rural routes, the steely resistance of urban residents to the routes being planned through the city took the highwaymen by surprise. As Mohl points out in his 2004 study of America’s freeway revolts, when the first large-scale opposition to housing and neighborhood demolition appeared in the 1960s, road engineers were ill prepared. In response, state highway engineers and federal highway administrators at the BPR [Bureau of Public Roads] adopted a uniform, hard-nosed technocratic stance: their job was building highways; housing and relocation problems were the responsibility of other agencies. From their perspective, housing destruction was a necessary social cost if new highways were to accommodate growing traffic demands. After the mid-1960s, however, it became increasingly more difficult for highway agencies to rigorously sustain this position as the reality of massive urban housing demolition began to hit the public consciousness. Indeed, by the late 1960s, according to the U.S. House Committee on Public Works, federal highway construction was demolishing over 62,000 housing units annually - affecting possibly as many as 200,000 people each year.  

157 Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 139.  
This destruction was further concentrated in minority communities making the call for resistance all the more acutely felt in the already marginalized populations of the US. As one urban planner explained, “displacement will be particularly serious in the big city black ghettos where the supply of housing is inadequate and relocation beyond the confines of the ghetto is severely limited by racial segregation.” The injustice of the highway routing compounded past injustices calling upon those with the least resources to sacrifice their well-being, their livelihoods, and their community for the sake of a ‘public good’ that would largely benefit those who already possessed a great deal of privilege and power over these sacrificial neighborhoods. It was, from the beginning, an unfair request that reflected the hubris of a democracy that had not yet come to terms with the diversity of its citizenry.

As highways began to plow through ethnic urban neighborhoods, inching towards the downtown area, people tentatively began to question if anything of worth would be left after the highways were laid across America’s major cities, destroying broad swaths of the traditional urban fabric. With the disappearance of these broad swaths, people began wondering what (if anything) would be saved? This precipitated questioning of the prioritization of roads over social welfare programs and the loss of the city highways were meant to ‘save.’ As Moynihan noted in his 1960 indictment of the highway building project, "a few legislators such as Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois have questioned whether this is the very best way to spend our money. Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota has asked whether the program wasn't merely hastening the day when 'You'll be able to drive eighty miles an hour along superhighways from one polluted stream to another, from one urban slum to another,

from one rundown college campus to another.” And it wasn’t just elected officials that had the foresight to pose these questions in the early years of the interstate highway program – the Los Angeles Times, for instance, spoke up in response to resistance in the wealthy La Canada community, asking “does not a diminishing return set in when remaining residential and scenic areas are threatened with conversion into concrete freeway lanes?... We are running out of community and aesthetic resources.”

The question of what diminished version of the ‘city’ highways could be expected to ‘save’ was matched by the questioning of a singular mode of transportation dominating all other modes. As Mohl notes,

In the late 1950s, planners and policy experts also began questioning the interstate program. The ink was barely dry on the 1956 interstate bill when city planners began challenging the single-minded devotion of highway engineers to pouring concrete, urging instead the need for comprehensive planning and a balanced transportation system that included mass transit. In an influential 1960 article in The Reporter, rising urban analyst Daniel Patrick Moynihan criticized urban interstates for their lack of comprehensive planning and potentially damaging impact on urban life and metropolitan structure. In later years, these arguments for coordinated planning, mass transit, and preservation of small-scale neighborhood life in the modern city resonated with freeway opponents and buttressed antihighway movements.

This suggestion that transit planning should be a multi-modal and regional undertaking were usually paired with a direct criticism of the selfishness of the highway lobby. These early critiques of the highway project as a lopsided and irresponsible concession to corporate greed empowered residents to assert their value and question the government’s decision-making. These emerging voices of community dissent are embodied in the 1968 statement of Baltimore’s Movement...
Against Destruction in their newsletter: “there is a growing realization that expressways are being built in cities not for the sake of the people who live there, but for the sake of cement, tire, oil, automobile, and other private interests.” By giving name to this implicit prioritization of mechanized industry over quality of life for urban residents, dissenters like Baltimore’s MAD group tapped into a long history of marginalization and neglect. These residents were losing patience with the consistent sacrifice of their well-being for the betterment of a country that did not seem to value their presence.

These statements of dissent were delivered with increasing confidence as momentum built within the counterculture and minority empowerment movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s. Mohl notes: “as a collection of discrete, bottom-up movements beginning at the neighborhood level, the freeway revolt shared many aspects of sixties countercultural and change-inducing activity. Typical of time was rejection of top-down decision-making, the normal practice of the highway establishment in routing and building highways. Freeway fighters sought citizen participation in important decision making on expressway routes and urban policy.” Mohl goes on to note that, “in some cities, freeway construction coincided with black political empowerment and the rising civil rights movement, developments that took on added significance when black neighborhoods were targeted by the highwaymen.” The freeway revolt’s intersection with the counterculture and minority empowerment movements enabled the revolts to take on a symbolic meaning, an elevated importance as the last straw. This added symbolic weight for the minority underclass.

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164 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 696.
165 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 675.
166 Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 674-675.
that was so often the victim of highway planning meant that pre-existing organizations began to dedicate their resources and experience to the defeat of freeways. This leveraging of existing institutional structures as organizing platforms allowed communities to reach a level of sophistication with their resistance tactics that would have been inaccessible to the otherwise inexperienced leaders of the grassroots freeway revolts.

The combined weight of these highway resistance and minority empowerment movements resulted in governmental recognition of the need for a legal infrastructure of dissent against the highway project. At first, the federal government had tried to accomplish a reconciliation with the communities that were most impacted by highways. As one 1967 article observed, “so brutal has been the impact on city life of some of the completed expressways (3,454 miles of them have been built), that the Federal Government has cautioned cities against hasty planning that ignores esthetic, social and economic considerations.”

But, this encouragement of a more balanced and considered, responsible highway planning process proved insufficient to mediate the conflicts erupting between highway builders and residents. As Mohl comments in his 2004 study of freeway revolts, "by the end of the 1960s, interstate troubles had become political troubles, both locally and nationally. Freeway revolters took to the streets, noisily packed hearings and meetings, and forced highway issues onto the front pages of metropolitan newspapers. Congress became a major battleground, as conflicting interests faced off in House and Senate committee hearings… The

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freeway revolt had a major impact in raising these issues to the national level.\(^{168}\) Meant as a means of managing resistance and channeling it into state-sanctioned processes, the legislative shifts of the late ‘60s simultaneously constrained the previously open-ended highway planning process and enabled residents to make legal claims against the injustice of highway routing.\(^{169}\)

In Baltimore as in other cities, this ever-increasing toolbox of dissent-enabling legislation and structural changes in the administration of the Federal Highway Program helped correct for the previously insurmountable power imbalance of the highway lobby and the neighborhoods it targeted.\(^{170}\) As Mohl explains in his 2004 study of freeway revolts,

during the early and mid-1960s… highway builders in Baltimore seemed to have the upper hand. Downtown businessmen, suburban commuters, the engineering community, and most of the city’s politicians and planners supported some form of expressway system. Between 1966 and 1970, however, new federal environmental legislation, new state mandates on housing relocation, and new administrative procedures dramatically altered the highway-building environment. Taken together, these laws, mandates, and regulations posed new hurdles for the highway advocates and highway builders, created administrative confusion and delay at the local level, provided new access to information for citizen groups, and opened new opportunities for litigating the freeway revolt.\(^{171}\)

Thus, the legislative environment of the late ‘60s differed dramatically from the highway heyday of the ‘40s and ‘50s. The road builders had far less freedom of action and the citizenry had a stronger voice – enabling critic-activists like Jacobs to challenge and defeat highway proposals more readily. In particular, nature conservation and historic preservation (both movements armed with supporting

\(^{168}\) Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 682-683. Note: much of the unrest of the freeway revolts (as described in this quote) were fielded by the Johnson and then the Nixon Administrations.

\(^{169}\) Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 680. See Timeline of highway legislation/events for the progression of changes in the highway legislation and administration that facilitated and supported dissent against the highway project.

\(^{170}\) Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 674.

\(^{171}\) Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 697.
legislation) became the go-to tools of effective resistance. This tapped into a patriotic vein—preserving our natural and cultural heritage, our identity. As one newspaper article noted in 1970, “Roadbuilders are finding it more difficult even to route expressways through parks and poor neighborhoods, for long the line of least resistance.”\textsuperscript{172} The progressive legislation of the late 1960s (such as the ’68 highway act) signaled a shift in Washington, an attempt to backpedal and address some of the harshest criticisms of the interstate highway program – namely that highways were ruining our nation’s cites rather than revitalizing them.\textsuperscript{173}

In particular there were two major pieces of legislation that signaled a shift in the governmental attitude towards dissent: the 1966 creation of a federal Department of Transportation (DOT) and the 1968 requirement of environmental impact assessments and relocation housing. Precipitated by the many riots and revolts of the ’60s, the federal government no longer assumed they would be able to push through proposals with patriotic rhetoric and speed alone. The age of the unquestioned expert had come to a close. There was still little interest in grassroots planning efforts but there was an acknowledgement that, without community consultation and communication, ambitious government projects such as the highway system had little chance of ever reaching completion. Absorbing citizen discontent became a necessary part of the planning process. Alan Boyd, the first director of the newly created Department of Transportation, began to operate as a mediator and monitor of all highway-related efforts, arguing that the recent highway resistance could actually be valuable to the highway project as a whole. Mohl describes one of Boyd’s early

\textsuperscript{173} Bigart, “US Road Plans Periled” (1967), 1.
articulations of this new philosophy on resistance: “speaking in California in 1967, Boyd must have shocked his audience of transportation experts by stating, ‘I think the so-called freeway revolts around the country have been a good thing.’ He elaborated by urging more citizen involvement in highway decision making and advocating a balanced transportation system.”\textsuperscript{174} Boyd consistently advocated for greater consultation and regular reports to take the temperature of resistance.\textsuperscript{175} Commenting on the slowing of the highway building project in 1967 Boyd explained, "the people who must live with it have asked for a second look at the way we build the urban highway… They insist we take into account the noise it generates; the number of neighborhoods it shakes up; the impact it has on the appearance of the city. As a result, new highways may not necessarily follow the shortest, or cheapest, line between two points. And some won't be built on schedule, if at all."\textsuperscript{176}

Boyd’s encouragement of citizen-involvement and balanced planning was further emphasized by the 1968 highway act’s requirement of social and environmental sensitivity. As one 1970 newspaper article observed, “increasingly vocal protesters are buttressed now by requirements of the 1968 Federal Highway Act that insist upon thorough consideration of human needs, such as adequate relocation housing.”\textsuperscript{177} They go on to emphasize that the 1968 act “encourages people to scrutinize every proposal much more closely than before.”\textsuperscript{178} Mr. Turner, a highway engineer in the Bureau of Public Roads for forty years before the 1968 legislation, described the way it affected their work saying, “now we have to change people's

\textsuperscript{174} Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 681.
\textsuperscript{175} Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 681.
\textsuperscript{177} Janson, “Expressway Construction Lags” (1970), 1, 51.
\textsuperscript{178} Janson, “Expressway Construction Lags” (1970), 51.
minds and sell them on a relocation plan… Before, we just bought property and
relocation was their responsibility.”179 This new emphasis on consultation and
communication was, in a sense, a mix of admitting defeat, apologizing and
backtracking on the part of the government. It was not a proactive but a reactive step
on the part of the government. As one journalist noted in a 1968 newspaper article,
"Federal highway officials, stung by criticism, are moving to soften the shock caused
by the carving of freeways through the nation's cities."180

The federal DOT, while initially important because of its ability to strike a
new note in highway planning efforts, was ultimately crucial in the enforcement of a
new set of standards for highway planning. The federal DOT was able to intervene
directly in state planning efforts, primarily through the withdrawal of funds should
the states not comply with their now higher standards for highway planning. In
particular, as one journalist explained in his 1967 article, the DOT now required that
“alternatives must be studied whenever a proposed highway alignment mars scenic or
historic sites.”181 The second secretary of the DOT, John A. Volpe, appointed in 1970
under the Nixon administration, embraced this more assertive secondary role of the
DOT, building on Boyd’s shift in tone and expectations. Volpe once explained, “I'm
saying [to highway planners] that either they come up with decisions on their own to
save the environment and help people or we might well have to take the project
involved off the freeway system… While the states actually design the highways in
the interstate system, the Federal Government...can call off disputed projects or press

180 Shafer, "Freeways and Cities" (1968), 1.
for changes.”\textsuperscript{182} Responding to this shift in the highway planning process at the federal level, one 1970 article warned, “his [Mr. Volpe's] mandate that no roads be built without firm assurance of replacement housing could mean that highway planners may throw in the towel on some projects, considering the cost of finding new homes. Some 50,000 persons a year are uprooted from their homes by new highways. Replacement-housing problems have snarled highway projects in Charleston, W. Va., and Philadelphia, among other places.”\textsuperscript{183} And, as Mohl notes in his 2004 study of freeway revolts, Volpe didn’t hesitate to follow through on the threat of cancelling routes that did not meet the new standards for aesthetic integration, and adequate relocation housing: “soon after taking office, Volpe confronted two highly publicized urban trouble spots on the interstate map, ending long-running disputes by canceling the New Orleans Riverfront Expressway in 1969 and approving a costly restudy of a contentious inner-loop highway in Boston in 1971, effectively killing the project.”\textsuperscript{184}

Thus, as the freeway revolts of the ‘60s and ‘70s became increasingly interconnected and systematic in their challenge to the growth consensus, the government became increasingly adept at facilitating dissent.\textsuperscript{185} This combination of factors led to nationwide stalling. As early as 1965, journalists were noticing the rising wave of dissent against the highway project: “As the federal government's $41 billion interstate highway program enters its ninth year, more and more citizens are protesting that the road to faster automobile travel is not worth the havoc it often

\textsuperscript{182} Karr, “Halting Highways” (1970), 1.
\textsuperscript{183} Karr, “Halting Highways” (1970), 29.
\textsuperscript{184} Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 681-682.
\textsuperscript{185} Mohl, “Stop the Road” (2004), 696-697.
creates in the neighboring countryside.” A 1968 article picked up this same theme, noting, “though about 65% of the system's 6,336 urban miles are finished, work has been stalled by antifreeway revolts in more than 25 major cities. Included besides Washington are Cambridge, Mass., New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Nashville.”

And then, the same observation was reiterated two years later, this time with an expression of doubt for the viability of the system: "some 133 miles of the interstate system alone are being held up in 16 cities.... Two-thirds of the [42,500-mile network of Federal superhighways] is open now and most of the rest is under construction, but the achievement of the recently extended completion goal of 1974 has become extremely doubtful.”

And the doubts were confirmed by another article later that year: "because of various controversies, Highway Administrator Turner predicts that some 150 miles of interstate highways, probably costing more than $2 billion, will not be finished by the current 1974 deadline—if they're built at all. Partly because of these delays, the cost of the interstate highway program is climbing and the time set for finishing it keeps lengthening. Mr. Volpe is expected to ask Congress to extend until 1978 the mammoth highway trust fund and the taxes going into it to pay for the interstate roads; this arrangement is now scheduled to run out in 1972. Cost of the program is now estimated at about $63 billion, up from the $41 billion projected when it began 14 years ago.”

The interstate highway program and the highway growth machine that drove it hardly had a leg left to stand on. In the early years, as Eisenhower’s administration (1953-1961) came to a close, the program had been able to withstand critiques like

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186 “Hitting the Road” (1965), 56.
the *Wall Street Journal*’s assertion that the interstate highway program was “a vast program thrown together, imperfectly conceived and grossly mismanaged, and in due course becoming a veritable playground for extravagance, waste and corruption.”¹⁹⁰

But now, as the ‘60s came to a close, those critiques shook the already fragile and increasingly fragmented highway growth consensus to the core. As Gandy notes, this was not an isolated breakdown but rather a broader cultural phenomena that was shaping policy making throughout the nation and across all sectors: “the collapse of the consensus over highway construction in the 1960s and 1970s closely mirrors the broader dissolution of the New Deal bipartisan consensus in public policy.”¹⁹¹ Indeed, if we take the *New York Times* as an indication of the pulse of the progressive elite, their coverage of the interstate highway program closely follows the collapse of consensus Gandy describes: “Initially, the new multilane highways he [Moses] created were seen as a marvel of the modern metropolis, combining unprecedented mobility with completely new urban vistas. When the West Side Improvement in Manhattan was opened in 1937, for example, the *New York Times* described it as 'one of the most magnificent urban highways on earth.' Yet by 1973 the *Times* was referring to the same highway as 'an ugly traffic wall between the city and the river.' The eventual exhaustion of the Moses era in the 1960s marks the end of a long chapter in urban history and is inextricably linked with the dissipation of technological modernism as a progressive force for social change and the decline of the 'urban totality' as a meaningful focus for American planners.”¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 144-145.
Gandy goes on to explain that the dissolution of the highway growth consensus is traceable to the counterculture problematizing of the previously unquestioned bourgeoisie notion of a monolithic, objective and universal ‘public good’:

The political turmoil of the 1960s in Europe and North America set in train a complex set of changes in relations between the 'public interest' (as expressed through various government agencies) and alternative perspectives on urban form. The notion of public space became irrevocably problematized in relation to what Jonathan Raban refers to as 'the hypothetical consensus of urban life.' Classic conceptions of the bourgeois public sphere now conflicted with newly emerging social and political realities that placed much greater emphasis on difference, diversity, and market-driven dynamics of cultural change. The very idea of a 'public landscape' was now subject to intense critical scrutiny, leading to open conflict between 'avant-garde' and 'populist' conceptions of urban design.¹⁹³

This new emphasis on ‘difference, diversity, and market-driven dynamics of cultural change’ is intimately tied to the kind of critique Jacobs articulated in her landmark book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. As Gandy points out, Jacobs and her peers were some of the first to challenge the “the centralized engineering-dominated ethos behind infrastructural development” asserting the value of “greater public participation in urban policy making.”¹⁹⁴ As a result of this contestation of the ideology of the highway growth machine, urban planners were plunged into a kind of professional paralysis. Gandy explains,

Urban planning faced the disintegration of the kind of putative 'public interest' that had sustained the ideal of comprehensive urban renewal through large-scale investments in infrastructure. Planners themselves increasingly recognized that 'the ideal of master planning' was illusory and began to explore ways of bolstering their legitimacy through wider public consultation. Yet American society was becoming more divided and fragmentary in the mid-1960s, which contributed to the growing marginalization of urban planning. In the wake of the Harlem and Los Angeles ghetto riots, planners

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¹⁹⁴ Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 139.
could no longer conceive of the public interest as an unproblematic dimension to spatial and technological rationalization.\textsuperscript{195}

With America’s progressive planners paralyzed, the interstate highway system (along with the many other in-progress urban renewal initiatives) was left in a state of partial completion, abandoned by its most avid advocates without a clear alternative.

The fragmentation and dissipation of a once coherent network of populist public policy was thus mirrored in the fragmentation and disintegration of a once continuous (proposed) network of interstate highways. Nowhere is the symbolism more stark than with I-95. Originally envisioned as a symbolic thoroughfare connecting the economies and societies of the major cities of the East Coast, it would come to represent the resistance and autonomy of those very economies and societies it was meant to connect and unify. As one 1970 article put it, “Interstate 95 was designed a decade and a half ago as a 1,866-mile-long 'Main Street' of the East Coast from Maine to Florida. But on a map today it looks like a mortally wounded snake, severed in such places as Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington.”\textsuperscript{196} Thus, the fragmentation of the continuous network of interstate highways came to embody the tensions it uncovered in the American psyche – between mobility and emplacement, freedom and community, nationality and locality, unity and diversity.

Jane Jacobs, one voice amidst this rising wave of discontent and resulting disintegration of the highway growth consensus, has been credited as our country’s saving grace – the one that pulled us from the jaws of urban renewal just in time. Jacobs has become the enduring image of the civilian hero, the activist housewife who knew better than all the planners of progressive modern America. Her celebrity

\textsuperscript{195} Gandy, \textit{Concrete and Clay} (2002), 139.

\textsuperscript{196} Janson, “Expressway Construction Lags” (1970), 1.
is indisputable – the *Village Voice* once wrote that Jacobs was the “Madonna misericordia to the West Village...who has probably bludgeoned more old songs, rallied more support, fought harder, caused more trouble, and made more enemies than any American woman since Margaret Sanger.” Anthony Flint describes the extent of this implied celebrity in his 2008 book *Wrestling with Moses* (which is, itself, a tribute to her celebrity): “Drawing praise from surprising quarters, and controversy from everywhere in between, this middle-aged mother from Scranton had become a sensation. She was photographed by Diane Arbus for *Esquire*. Feature stories about her and her book appeared in *Newsweek* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. *Vogue* magazine would eventually call her 'Queen Jane.' She was invited to a luncheon at the White House by Lady Bird Johnson.”

Mennel, in reviewing the most decisive works concerning Jacobs’ relationship with Robert Moses affirms that “Jacobs, who died in 2006, has transcended mortality in more ways than one, having become more symbol than flesh, more icon than intellectual.” This deification of Jacobs, while founded in important, substantive contributions to our understanding of modern urban society, has had the problematic effect of trivializing the cultural and governmental context that enabled her critiques to have such far-reaching effects.

Jacobs has become an enduring symbol of high-quality, progressive planning and design (despite never having *created* much of anything to physically represent the ideas she described in writing and in speeches). Flint reminds us in his 2008 account of Jacobs as New York’s salvation that, “New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, proclaimed June 28, 2006, as Jane Jacobs Day… The American Planning
Association issued the National Planning Excellence Award for Innovation in Neighborhood Planning in honor of Jane Jacobs. The Jane Jacobs Medal, awarded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Municipal Art Society, recognizes ‘visionary work in building a more diverse, dynamic and equitable city through creative uses of the urban environment... whose accomplishments represent Jacobsean principles and practices in action in New York City.”200 But, what does it mean to attribute an award for “innovation in neighborhood planning” or a medal for “building a more diverse, dynamic and equitable city” to the memory of Jane Jacobs when she was more an outspoken advocate for preservation and salvage than a visionary leader in the creation or construction of a new city.

Jacobs reminded us of the value of a more traditional urbanism, offering many valuable critiques that have been translated into practice by others (with varying degrees of success). But, our deification of Jacobs obscures the fact that Jacobs did not offer a feasible model with which to guide future development. We are stuck now with all the negative spinoffs of Jacobs’ argument – complacency, NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), and obstructionism – and have lost the ability to experiment, to create, to generate proposals that might describe a direction in which to develop our future cities. We cannot prematurely rest on our laurels when the inequities of the twentieth century (the ones urban renewal tried to address) are still so glaringly present in our current society. We cannot continue to defend the status quo out of fear that our proposals will be wrong, as wrong as urban renewal, as wrong as the interstate highway system.

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200 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 194.
The Dangers of a Narrowing Narrative of Conflict:
The Melodramatic and Reductive Re-telling of the Jacobs/Moses Clash

"The Jacobsians sought fresh methods of making cities work—from the grassroots and the bottom up. The subaltern was exalted, the master laid low."^{201}


The exaltation of the citizen-inhabitant and the shaming of the planner-expert, while undeniably a crucial first step in the re-valuation of dissent, has had the (perhaps unintended) consequence of driving a political-economic shift to the opposite extreme of the governmental spectrum. We’ve gone from an overassertive central government to a meek and absent central government. This, in political terms, is understood as the decline of the Keynesian-New Deal city and the corresponding rise of the neo-liberal, entrepreneurial city. As described by John Rennie Short in his book *Urban Theory: A Critical Assessment*, the Keynesian-New Deal city (or Urban Renewal city) was a self-confident, assertive agent of social change, advocating for political and physical reform of our inequitable society. Short describes the agenda of this Urban Renewal city, the city of Robert Moses, recalling:

The period from 1933 through to the 1980s marks the high point of the Keynesian-New Deal city when there was a consensus between capital and labour on the role of government. Government spending stimulated demand so that unemployment would be limited and controlled. Government spending on programmes which ensured that the majority of the population had access to relatively affordable health, housing, education and social welfare softened the social consequences of business downturns.^{202}

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Earlier in this source on pages 155-156, Short wrote: “The Keynesian city is named after the English economist, John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), who argued that government had a major role to play in stimulating effective demand in the economy. While Keynes mapped out the theory of an activist government in capitalist societies, Roosevelt's New Deal put it into practice. Faced with massive unemployment, Roosevelt's Administration began in 1933 to use government spending to get the economy working at a higher capacity in order to soak up unemployment and secure social stability. The Keynesian-New Deal city lasted from the 1930s to the 1980s.”
Short is reminding us here that, while the city of Robert Moses may have failed its promise, its original aspirations for government-driven social change were admirable. In the wake of Jacobs’ powerful critique of the Keynesian-New Deal city as ignorant, hubristic and misguided, we have forgotten these aspirations for government-driven social change.

We have, in our embrace of Jacobs’ critique, dismissed not only the projects (or products) of the Urban Renewal city, we have also dismissed its motivations and aspirations. In discarding the core values of urban renewal, we have exempted ourselves from the duty to develop compelling alternatives to the urban renewal model that might produce more effective projects in the future. Instead of revising and regenerating government’s role in social activism, we have retracted government’s role, leaving the realm of the social to citizens, communities and commerce. This is what Short calls the ‘entrepreneurial city’ in which “the city is seen less as a place of residence and more as a site of business.”

This entrepreneurial city has, however, become a new, quieter, less publicized and propagandized growth machine, much like the urban renewal growth machine it challenged. As Short explains, “the ideology and policies of post-Keynesian administrations encourage the institutionalization of the business interests of regional entrepreneurs (Lowe, 1993). Their 'growth ethic'—growth is good—is used to eliminate any alternative visions of the purpose of local urban government or the meaning of community, and thus, civic pride in the growth and loyalty cuts across class lines.”

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destructive foundations, is a universal good has become one of the most damaging libertarian spin-offs of Jacobs’ critique of postwar urbanism. Within this new entrepreneurship-centric growth machine, our developers and the business elite have become our de facto planners.

The pendulum of planning, propelled by the repulsion of urban renewal’s legacy, has seemingly reached its furthest extension to one side and now must approach the center again. Our occupation of the extremes—an overactive, overconfident and assertive planning ideology and an inactive, apologetic, and meek planning ideology—have had equally detrimental effects on our cities with insensitive brutality on one hand and neglect on the other. This one-sided extremism is counterproductive. We must embrace complexity over simplicity, and subtlety over extremism – and planning must learn to lead the charge on this. We must revise, regenerate and re-legitimize the planning profession after the considerable blows dealt to it by Jacobs’ critiques. This disgracing and discrediting of the American planning profession is explained with great clarity by Thomas J. Campanella in his 2011 essay *Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning* in which he asserts that Jacobs sparked a reformation that dethroned Moses (and with him all planners).

[Jacobs’s] 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, much like the paperwork Luther nailed to the Schlosskirche Wittenberg four centuries earlier, sparked a reformation—this time within the planning profession. To the rising generation of planners, coming of age in an era of cultural ferment and rebellion against the status quo, Jane Jacobs was a patron saint.... but change did not come easily; the field was plunged into disarray. A glance at the July 1970 issue of the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (precursor to *JAPA*) reveals a profession gripped by a crisis of mission, purpose, and relevance. As the authors of one article—fittingly titled 'Holding Together'—asked, how could this well-meaning discipline transform itself
'against a background of trends in the society and the profession that invalidate many of the assumptions underlying traditional planning education'?²⁰⁵

Jacobs’s critique thus dealt the American planning profession a considerable blow, making it uneasy on its own two feet. Along with this critique came a structural narrowing of the autonomy and responsibility of the planner’s role in government that correspondingly limited the scope of what any planner could hope to bring about. Planners were paralyzed: they had purged their Keynesian identity but did not yet have a new model to replace it.

Before tackling the necessary reform and revision within the profession, however, we must restore faith in the basic premise of planning – that the intentional envisioning of the future and the development of potential directions in which to move as a collective is important, is valuable to society as a whole. This basic faith in the value of planning has, as Campanella notes, been lost in the crossfire:

So thoroughly internalized was the Jacobs critique that planners could see only folly and failure in the work of their own professional forebears. Burnham’s grand dictum ‘Make no little plans’ went from a battle cry to an embarrassment in less than a decade… to Jacobs not just misguided American urban renewal but the entire enterprise of visionary, rational, centralized planning was foul and suspect. She was as opposed to new towns as she was to inner-city slum clearance--anything that threatened the vitality and sustenance of traditional urban forms was the enemy. It is largely forgotten that the popular United Kingdom edition of Death and Life was subtitled ‘The Failure of Town Planning.’ How odd that such a conservative, even reactionary, stance would galvanize an entire generation of planners.²⁰⁶

But, perhaps she was right, at least in one sense. If the foundational premise of modernist planning was that the planner knew best, that the expert knew what the masses needed, then the modernist planning project was, at its worst, a paternalistic

practice which was condescending to and dismissive of the accumulated life experience and local knowledge of citizens. And so, planning had to confront a foundational crisis – a crisis of how to revive a discipline that was discredited at its root. Deprived of its government-granted authority, the planning profession must now earn its legitimacy through alternative channels that rely on facilitation and collaboration more so than on expertise.

Instead of engaging in this introspection and harsh culling process, however, the planning profession has tended towards disillusionment and cynicism. As Campanella asserts, this self-doubt has meant that the urban planning profession has become, through the weight of its own self-image, a ‘trivial profession.’ Campanella explains that there is a swelling perception, especially among young scholars and practitioners, that planning is a diffuse and ineffective field, and that it has been largely unsuccessful over the last half century at its own game: bringing about more just, sustainable, healthful, efficient and beautiful cities and urban regions... [There was] a looming sense that planners in America simply lack the agency or authority to turn their idealism into reality, that planning has neither the prestige nor the street cred necessary to effect real and lasting change.\(^{207}\)

Campanella, however, attributes this self-doubt to "the cultural shift that occurred in the planning field beginning in the 1960s. The seeds of discontent sown in that era brought forth new and needed growth, which nonetheless choked out three vital aspects of the planning profession—its disciplinary identity, professional authority, and visionary capacity.\(^{208}\) Marshal Berman, too, notes this cultural shift in his 1988 book *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, attributing the

self-doubt of the planning profession to the suffocating dominance of post-modern thought across all sectors of society:

Post-modernists maintain that the horizon of modernity is closed, its energies exhausted - in effect, that modernity is passé. Post-modernist social thought pours scorn on all the collective hopes for moral and social progress, for personal freedom and public happiness, that were bequeathed to us by the modernists of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. These hopes, post-moderns say, have been shown to be bankrupt, at best vain and futile fantasies, at worst engines of domination and monstrous enslavement. Post-modernists claim to see through the 'grand narratives' of modern culture, especially 'the narrative of humanity as the hero of liberty.' It is the mark of post-modern sophistication to have 'lost even nostalgia for the lost narrative.'

This cynicism and tendency to critique rather than create, and analyze rather than envision, is an unfortunate left-over from the strength of Jacob’s critique—a sort of tribute to how convincing her argument was. We have experienced a turning of the tables: whereas it was once politically safer to go along with a vision like Moses’ than to critique it, it now appears, in the post-Jacobs era, that it is politically safer to critique a vision than to support one.

In the years since the planning profession was deflated by Jacobs’ prodding at and ultimate puncture of its protective skin, planners have consistently cow-towed to public opinion rather than guiding discussion and pushing the assumptions on which individuals’ assumptions are based. Campanella explains this sidelining of the planner in contemporary planning processes, claiming, “[these grassroots activist] tools and processes [that were] introduced to ensure popular participation ended up reducing the planner's role to that of umpire or schoolyard monitor. Instead of setting the terms of debate or charting a course of action, planners now seemed wholly content to be facilitators--'mere absorbers of public opinion,' as Alex Krieger put it,

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209 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (1988), 9-10.
'waiting for consensus to build.' And indeed, planners have been forced to shift from the role of presenter to that of facilitator but, I would argue, the role of facilitator isn’t necessarily a passive, disempowered and unproductive role—it can be proactive, productive, and focused. But it is a difficult balance to strike, especially without the professional training to cultivate skillful, active facilitation. Planners that were trained as presenters are now being asked to facilitate public process. Whereas the Moses-era planner’s assignment was to develop a compelling and convincing argument for a singular solution, contemporary planners are being asked to guide a lively discussion, an exchanging of ideas, and an active engagement in impassioned debate so that we might collectively arrive at a strong set of conclusions bolstered by a wide range of viewpoints. Thus, planners do have an important role to play—that of an active, informed, critical, and agile facilitator who can assimilate and synthesize conventionally conflicting viewpoints and present potential directions whose pros and cons can then be debated before moving into experimental implementation. Without this structure and guidance, crowd-sourced ideas will inevitably veer towards self-interest, rigidity and fragmentated pockets of homogeneity rather than collective benefit, flexibility and unified heterogeneity.

This anti-authoritarian, grassroots crowd-sourcing of planning ideas is one of the legacies of Jacobs’s critique of planning and part of the mixed heritage of the counterculture revaluation of dissent. As Campanella points out, “the fatal flaw of such populism is that no single group of local citizens—mainstream or marginalized, affluent or impoverished—can be trusted to have the best interest of society or the

environment in mind when they evaluate a planning proposal.” Now Jacobs is an available weapon wielded by the “educated 'creative class' progressives who effectively weaponized Jane Jacobs to oppose anything they perceived as threatening the status quo—including projects that would reduce our carbon footprint, create more affordable housing, and shelter the homeless.” Campanella’s critique of Jacobs as an advocate for the status quo is by no means a new one. Edward Logue of the Boston redevelopment Agency called her 1961 book, *Death and Life*, “a plea for the status quo.” Roger Starr, the head of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, defeated by Jacobs in the West Village fight, shared Logue’s perspective. As recounted by Flint in his 2009 *Wrestling with Moses*, Starr “hit on the most stinging critique of Jacobs's theories: if no low-income housing was planned or built, her vision of organic city growth would do little to curb gentrification. And after all, the underlying motivation that drove many urban renewal projects and public housing plans was to help the poor. A growing underclass required a helping hand from government, and liberals of the time believed that affirmative action on their behalf was necessary.”

This critique of Jacobs as the champion of the status quo circles back to Short’s discussion of the rise of the *entrepreneurial city* in the wake of the Keynesian-New Deal city’s demise. Jacobs’s argument has been picked up by the libertarian camp and used to great effect, operating as leverage against the progressive democrats who generally like to think of themselves as aligned with

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Jacobs’s heroic activism. Thus, Jacobs has become a mouthpiece for libertarian anti-government advocates of the entrepreneurial city – a city run by a largely absentee state that defers to and collaborates with citizens, communities, developers, and business interests.

Among other things, this shrinking role of the state means that public process is often dominated by grassroots obstructionism, unchecked by planners or any other state authority. Campanella extrapolates on this phenomenon of grassroots obstructionism – conventionally referred to as NIMBYism, an acronym for the archetypal statement of this kind of selfish advocacy, “not in my back yard.” As Campanella points out,

NIMBYism has been described as ‘the bitter fruit of a pluralistic democracy in which all views carry equal weight.’ And that, sadly, includes the voice of the planner. In the face of an aroused and angry public, plannerly wisdom and expertise have no more clout than the ranting of the loudest community activist; and this is both wrong and a hazard for our collective future. For who, if not the planner, will advocate on behalf of society at large?... If we put parochial local interests ahead of broader societal needs, it will be impossible to build the infrastructure essential to the economic viability of the United States in the long haul.

But, this notion of the planner as the voice for the public good is an old one, and a dangerous one. It is exactly this argument for self sacrifice and this disparaging tone that accompanied the routing of highways through marginalized neighborhoods. The voices of self-preservation are important wake-up calls to the destructive reality of any restructuring or re-ordering project in the already built-up city. However, planners must learn to distinguish between self-preservation that aligns with collective loss (such as the loss of a collective resource, a collective heritage, a

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215 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 127.
needed service) versus self-preservation that is about preservation of a status quo that elevates the individual advocating for inaction. This is a fine line and a messy decision between the two. It will never, as assumed in the past, be an objective designation that can be arrived at by a well-trained expert. The planner must learn to listen and to be humble and flexible but also to be confident and persistent.

In order to regenerate the planning profession, we must discard the extremism of the Jacobs-Moses conflict narrative, the pitting of the Keynesian-New Deal city against the Entrepreneurial city and begin to inhabit the space between their two perspectives on and visions for the American city. The grassroots empowerment that grew out of Jacobs’ bold confrontation with the planning profession, while crucial in the re-valuation of dissent, has evolved into a grassroots leadership that is not balanced by state leadership. Planners have become so afraid of their own history, of urban renewal’s history, that they retreat from any kind of leadership role. Contemporary planning professionals seek to separate themselves from urban renewal rather than owning it as part of their self-narrative of transformation and accumulated experience. As Timothy Mennel points out in his 2011 review essay, “A Fight to Forget: Urban Renewal, Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs, and the Stories of Our Cities” the popular embrace of Robert Caro’s villainous Moses (as depicted in The Power Broker) can be understood as the product of the planning profession’s refusal to acknowledge any affinity with their forefathers, the so-hated advocates of urban renewal. This artificial separation of contemporary planning from its roots in urban renewal is both misleading and unproductive. What is needed is an earnest
reevaluation of the core values of the planning profession, coupled with a recognition of the good and the bad in both the Moses and the Jacobs legacy.

We are overdue for a moderate and mediated injection of the visionary (if flawed) planning that Robert Moses represented. The absence of planning’s visionary power is reflected in the words of Sam Roberts of the New York Times: “when Westway was declared legally dead…many of the eulogies also mourned the loss of New York's will to conceive and build great public works.” Even Flint, an obvious champion of Jacobs’s perspective on the city, admits that the absence of Moses’ perspective on the city is felt – ”Alex Krieger, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, lectured in 2000 that while history has taken a dim view of Moses's tactics, cities everywhere are in need of reliable infrastructure—and with citizens continually blocking cities' efforts, it was difficult to get even the most necessary projects passed.” New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff called, in 2006, for a new commitment to a balance of Moses’s perspective and Jacobs’s perspective on the city, emphasizing that both offer a great deal and do best when offset and supported by the other: “Today, the pendulum of opinion has swung so far in favor of Ms. Jacobs that it has distorted the public's understanding of urban planning. As we mourn her death, we may want to mourn a bit for Mr. Moses as well… [Moses's vision represented] an America that still believed a healthy government would provide the infrastructure—roads, parks, bridges—that binds us into a nation. Ms. Jacobs, at her best, was fighting to preserve the more delicate bonds that tie us to

217 Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 146.
218 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 189.
a community. A city, to survive and flourish, needs both perspectives.”

Ouroussoff is urging us here to take from Jacobs the appreciation of the small-scale, the cultivation of grassroots planning partnerships, and the valuation of rootedness (the ability to zoom in) and take from Moses the systemic thinking, the visionary ambition, and the valuation of mobility (the ability to zoom out) – and to hold them both in dynamic tension.

This need to balance Moses’s city with Jacobs’s city means that we (both the planning profession and democratic society as a whole) must collectively re-engage with a dialectical modernism, as articulated by Marshal Berman in *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Berman writes,

I want to bring the dynamic and dialectical modernism of the nineteenth century to life again. A great modernist, the Mexican poet and critic Octavio Paz, has lamented that modernity is 'cut off from the past and continually hurtling forward at such a dizzy pace that it cannot take root, that it merely survives from one day to the next: it is unable to return to its beginnings and thus recover its powers of renewal.' The argument of this book is that, in fact, the modernisms of the past can give us back a sense of our own modern roots, roots that go back two hundred years. They can help us connect our lives with the lives of millions of people who are living through the trauma of modernization thousands of miles away, in societies radically different from our own - and with millions of people who lived through it a century or more ago. They can illuminate the contradictory forces and needs that inspire and torment us: our desire to be rooted in a stable and coherent personal and social past, and our insatiable desire for growth - not merely for economic growth but for growth in experience, in pleasure, in knowledge, in sensibility - growth that destroys both the physical and social landscapes of our past, and our emotional links with those lost worlds...

Berman goes on to emphasize that we must develop and inhabit the paradoxical conflicts of Modernity:

Modernism contains its own inner contradictions and dialectics;... forms of modernist thought and vision may congeal into dogmatic orthodoxies and become archaic;... other modes of modernism may be submerged for generations, without ever being superseded; and...the deepest social and psychic worlds of modernity may be repeatedly sealed, without ever being really healed. The contemporary desire for a city that is openly troubled but intensely alive is a desire to open up old but distinctively modern worlds once more. It is a desire to live openly with the split and unreconciled character of our lives, and to draw energy from our inner struggles, wherever they may lead us in the end.  

In order to do so, we must actively engage with the ideology of urban renewal, the ideology of the highway-building project, so that we might understand the power of Moses’s vision of modernity. We must approach the leaders of motorized modernity with the perfect mix of compassion and a critical eye if we are to learn from their mistakes and emulate their triumphs.

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221 Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1988), 171.
“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistence. Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.”

Daniel Burnham, Designer of 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, known as the ‘White City’

"While Big Plans are generally considered effete, impotent—in a word, utopian—they are, on the contrary, all too dangerously efficacious in arousing complicated human passions and expectations that they are unable to fulfill."


"Visual images - architectural drawings, three-dimensional models, watercolors, bird's-eye views, maps, plats, and digitized computer images - … give expression to the fantasies of their creators and fire the imaginations of those who receive, or 'consume,' them. These images have a powerful allure because they convey aspirations that are distinctly utopian."


In wholly embracing Jane Jacobs’ perspective on the American city and discarding that of Robert Moses, we lose a crucial empathy for the power, allure and magic of the modernist vision in the 20s, 30s and 40s. We instead, only see its pitfalls and shortcomings, its failures and not its aspirations. Here, I will attempt to illustrate

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222 Charles Moore, Daniel H. Burnham, Architect, Planner of Cities, Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 147. The accuracy of this quote has been contested but it remains nonetheless influential, encapsulating an attitude that seemed at the core of Burnham’s era of planning professionals—as noted in Kolson’s Big Plans (2001).


the magnetism of the utopic vision of the Machine Age Metropolis laid out in the 20s, 30s and 40s. This excitement over mobility, speed and connectivity was coming from a deep yearning that was both pragmatic and symbolic – this highway-building project tapped some deep root in the American psyche. There was a resonance, a potency of the vision that connected to the language we often use to articulate the American dream. I want to emphasize the importance of the figures who conceived of this new world as a synthetic, cohesive whole — the illustrations of key figures such as Le Corbusier, Hugh Ferriss, and Norman Bel Geddes played a crucial role in crystalizing this new aesthetic, in dramatizing this otherwise imaginary Machine Age metropolis.

225 The term ‘Machine Age Metropolis’ is a hybrid term I have found useful in distinguishing between the mid-century conception of the modern city as compared with the modern city envisioned in the 1920s and ’30s. While this vision of the 1920s and 30s was a clear precursur to the visions put forward in the post-war era, they carry a different set of associations and resonate with a different social and political context. ‘Machine Age’ is often used on its own to describe the material culture and aesthetic character of this era’s artistic production and so I have extended that application to include the city as a manifestation of material culture and artistic production.
The Modernist Romance with *Space*
Conceiving of the Machine Age Metropolis

### A Distinctly American Vocabulary of Machine Age Aspirations

"Think of anything, of cowboys, of movies, of detective stories, of anybody who goes anywhere or stays at home and is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always with moving."²²⁶

--- Tom Lewis (1997) *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*

"[By the 1930s] the United States was already an automobile society. If one singles out the dominant elements in the American way of life, what come first to mind are the movies and the car. Both are based on movement (the motion picture, the automobile). They embody continual change, kinetic energy, progress, flux—qualities that are intrinsic to modern life in the developed world."²²⁷

--- Christopher Innes, *Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street* (2005)

"This is… the story of the American desire for freedom and movement, our desire to resolve our destiny in our vast landscape."²²⁸

-- Tom Lewis’ *Divided Highways* (1997)

"From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines"²²⁹

--- Excerpt from Walt Whitman's ‘Song of the Open Road’ (1956)

"We must now solve the problem of giving our culture the highways that its abundance demands."²³⁰

--- Bernard DeVoto (historian of the American West) in *Freedom of the American Road*, a 1956 Ford highway-advocacy pamphlet

“[You are about to witness] the greater and better world of tomorrow that we are building today, a vivid tribute to the American scheme of living, whereby individual effort, the freedom to think and the will to do have given birth to a generation of men who always want new fields for greater accomplishment.”²³¹

--- Description of the predicted landscape of 1960 in the film *To New Horizons* (1940)

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²²⁷ Christopher Innes, *Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 156.
²³¹ *To New Horizons* (23:01 min, 1940), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAz4R6F0aaY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAz4R6F0aaY).
The Machine Age metropolis cannot be understood as an imposition of government bureaucrats and controlling, selfish brutes (such as the Robert Moses portrayed in Caro’s *The Power Broker*). It was not an external vision but rather an internal vision that welled out of the American cultural myth. The Machine Age Metropolis was a synthesis of many of the aspirations that sit at the core of American culture – the manifest destiny of the frontier, the breadth and expanse of a continental terrain, the balancing of freedom and equality, and the physical mobility to reach beyond your immediate context. The Machine Age Metropolis did not engage with the tensions between and among the constituent elements of American patriotism but rather spoke in an uncomplicated, confident and direct way to all these values, aspirations and impulses that constitute the American cultural myth.

Perhaps the most powerful link to the American myth is that of the frontier mentality. The Machine Age Metropolis, with its dream of connectivity across our vast continental landscape came at the closing of the ‘frontier’ era – by the 1920s, there was not much hope of expanding our national territory beyond its coastal bounds, and so the frontier-era enthusiasm for extension and expansion was re-directed towards internal connectivity.\(^{232}\) This transference of effort from extension to connectivity is candidly described by the narrator of the 1940s film *To New Horizons*, a film commissioned by General Motors to share the experience of their 1939 Worlds Fair exhibit. The narrator proclaims:

> Our greatest strides in providing more things for more people have been made at a time when the influence of new geographical frontiers was about over. Mentally and physically, we are progressing towards new horizons… Without

\(^{232}\) To note: the closing of the American continental frontier also manifested in imperialist tendencies that reached beyond our continental landscape to other nations and cultures. This, however, is outside the scope of this paper and so will remain a caveat.
tedious travel, the advantages of living in a small town are within easy reach, bringing the people who live there into closer relations with all the world around. Over space, man has begun to win victory. Space for living. Space for working. Space for play. All available for more people than ever before.233

Thus, the Machine Age Metropolis, as envisioned by GM and Norman Bel Geddes in *Futurama*, was to be understood as a continuation of Americans’ domination of our continental landscape—the inscribing of roads was to be seen as a declaration of human control over the unruly and expansive natural landscape of the United States. This emphasis on the project of connectivity, present throughout the highway building project, could also be heard echoing at the end of the era—at the 1993 opening of Century Freeway in Los Angeles, a black minister shared his conviction that this structure “links us and binds us together.”234 Tom Lewis, commenting on this event in his 1997 book *Divided Highways*, explains “as it has always been, our highways hold the promise of connection.”235

But, in the ’20s and ’30s that promise of connection remained a distant promise for most Americans: their vehicles were generally as unreliable as the roads on which those vehicles jerked around. The road network certainly offered hope for a more readily accessible and easily navigable world but, the American public would need convincing before they would sign on for a national road-building project. Norman Bel Geddes, a jack of all trades with a degree in none of the fields in which he practiced (industrial design, theatre, architecture, urban planning, and engineering), Bel Geddes would do a great deal to convince America to sign on the dotted line to receive our interstate highway system in short order. Bel Geddes

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233 *To New Horizons* (1940).
managed to project the emerging vision of automobile-based connectivity across the full expanse of the American landscape, framing his projection in a distinctly American language. Executed in fulfillment of General Motors’ commission for their pavilion at the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair, Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*, would have a long legacy in the collective imagination and a substantial influence on America’s architects, engineers, planners, and builders.²³⁶

The Dramatization and Dissemination of Machine Age Aspirations

"Stage performance, with its immediacy and direct contact… can influence people's lives... On one level, the picture on a stage is always openly fantasy. The life it represents may never be as convincingly real as film, but precisely because theater is so obviously make-believe it can act as a powerful catalyst."237

-- Christopher Innes, Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street (2005)

The 1939/40 Futurama Exhibit, designed by Norman Bel Geddes, sponsored by General Motors, and presented as part of the New York World’s Fair served as the most concrete and comprehensive articulation of this common yearning for and collective vision of the Machine Age Metropolis. It was a national vision of a utopia that felt within reach. This vision had the power to capture the American imagination due to its theatricality, pragmatism and overtone of social progress. Bel Geddes’ set design prowess and industrial design experience each contributed a great deal to the project, creating an immersive theatrical experience.

The theatrical illusion of the Futurama model was reinforced, sustained and extended by the theatricality of its context – without the setting of the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair, it would not have had quite the same penetrating impact. In part, it was the physical setting that put the viewer in the right frame of mind. As Christopher Innes points out in his book, Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street:

The icons of the fair, famous across America and even globally, were the rocket-like needle of the Trylon, and the Perisphere globe beside it: futuristic images, gleaming white, and brilliantly lit at night. As with most of the architecture erected for the event in Flushing Meadow, these huge geometrical shapes were made of wood, canvas, wire, and stucco, just like theatrical scenery. They were almost literally a stage setting.238

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237 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), xi.
238 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 120-121.
But it was also the ideological framework and premise of the fair that reinforced *Futurama*’s dramatic effect.

The 1939/40 World’s Fair was not quite like its predecessors. Most World’s Fairs, right up to the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair (themed ‘A Century of Progress’) were about the cumulative progress of past accomplishments. The World’s Fair was typically an event that centered around the present as the culmination of all of the past progress of mankind, specifically, progress in the sense of scientific-technological progress. To some degree, the 1939/40 World’s Fair fit squarely within this tradition. It was about celebrating technological progress and its perpetual corollary, social progress. But, the New York World’s fair of 1939 was not just a retrospective of what had been; it was a self-conscious prediction of what would be. ‘The World of Tomorrow’ was its theme. Christopher Innes walks us through this distinction in his 2005 book *Designing Modern America*:

Like several previous International Expositions held in the United States, the fair marked a patriotic occasion in celebrating the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration as the first president of the new republic on the steps of Federation Hall in New York. But in sharp contrast to the 1933 Chicago Fair, which had marked 'A Century of Progress,' this occasion six years later was in no sense retrospective. Referring back to the founding of the republic validated the vision of a made-in-America future. As H. G. Wells wrote for a special World's Fair supplement of the *New York Times* in March 1939… its focus on 'Building the World of Tomorrow' was qualitatively different from earlier World's Fairs. The future was at the core of the fair: the General Motors Building, with Bel Geddes' flight over America twenty years from the present, was flanked by the Ford Building, which had a 'Road to Tomorrow' circling up its front wall, while the central edifice, the Perisphere, housed Henry Dreyfuss's 'City of Tomorrow.' One participant, interviewed for a film documenting *The World of Tomorrow*, expressed its impact perfectly: 'There are moments where you can see the world turning from what it is into what it will be. For me, the New York World's Fair is such a moment. It is a compass-rose pointing in all directions.'

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239 Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 121.
So, if the New York World’s Fair of 1939 was self-consciously meant to illustrate a (desired) collective vision of the future, rather than celebrate a collective past, what was behind that desire to project a cohesive common future?

Innes’ analysis does not attempt to penetrate the populist rhetoric of collective benefit framing the exhibits at the 1939 world’s fair. Terry Smith, however, points out the strained language that resulted from this self-conscious framing of the Machine Age Metropolis in his 1994 book, *Making the Modern*—he claims there was a "fractured language of a declassed and sterile management humanism."\(^{240}\) This fractured language can be understood as a by-product of the strain to convince ‘the public’ of the merits of this vision. It was a curated view of the future that was meant to inspire enthusiasm and discourage questioning: they had to strike it just right. This is not to suggest that the organizers of the fair were ill-willed but rather that they used the fair as a tool to bolster a vision that the elite felt was in the nation’s best interest. Smith recounts here the layering of a demonstrative agenda on top of the usual goal of collective uplift and celebration of progress:

[The] first plans for the fair in 1935 aimed at 'alleviating some of the economic distress in the metropolitan area' as well as increasing money circulation through tourism and, like the Chicago Fair just completed, reaping a 'modest profit.' The liberal intelligentsia of the city quickly rallied support for something 'more than' the usual celebration of new machinery plus sideshows. In Lewis Mumford's words, the fair should tell 'the story of this planned environment, this planned industry, this planned civilization.'\(^{241}\)

This same urge to tell the story of the planned future is reiterated by Norman Bel Geddes when explaining the motivations behind GM’s *Futurama* exhibit:

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Masses of people can never find a solution to a problem until they are shown the way. Each unit of the mass may have a knowledge of the problem, and each may have his own solution, but until mass opinion is crystallized, brought into focus and made articulate, it amounts to nothing but vague grumbling. One of the best ways to make a solution understandable to everybody is to make it visual, to dramatize it. The Futurama did just this: it was a visual dramatization of a solution to the complex tangle of American roadways.  

Smith then goes on to parody this intention describing the ‘World of Tomorrow’ theme as a New Deal propaganda festival:

Mr. New Deal Goes to the Circus - or rather, was taken. There was no doubt in the minds of the fair organizers, including the Theme Committee and the Board of Design which oversaw the planning of the whole and of each exhibit, that corporate state America embodied already all of the main elements of the desired World of Tomorrow. That is to say, it almost did, and could quite readily if enough Americans believed it.

Christopher Innes reiterates this same notion of the 1939 New York World’s Fair as “Mr. New Deal Goes to the Circus” in his 2005 book, Designing Modern America: “the populism led to everything being presented as entertainment. Earlier fairs maintained a sharp divide between commercial exhibits or national pavilions, and the Midway offering popular entertainment. Here the whole fair was a festival.” This conflation of national and commercial, information and entertainment made for the perfect mix of authority and fantasy, providing fertile ground for the building of consensus around the vision of the Machine Age Metropolis. The 1939 World’s Fair was not merely a showcase of all the great strides of mankind nor even a celebration of America’s exceptional achievements – it was an effective “catalyst for cultural

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243 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), 408.
244 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 122.
And specifically, a catalyst for dramatic cultural change in America’s near future.

General Motors took full advantage of this opportunity to place their company, their products, at the epicenter of this ‘World of Tomorrow’ – to make their automobiles integral to the vision. Innes explains that “the original job description [for the GM Pavilion] had been straight commercial advertising: ‘to construct... what might be a full size street intersection 20 years hence... Adapting all of this to the immediate problem of displaying the client's merchandise [the new range of 1939 GM cars] in their most favorable light.’”

However, as with the rest of the fair, what began as a commercial project drifted into the realm of a social and even governmental project in the hands of the period’s utopic design professionals. These ambitious designers of modern America are often thought of as sell-outs or assumed to be ill-willed from the get-go. Bel Geddes, however, like most of his contemporary design professionals, was neither. As Innes points out, Bel Geddes genuinely believed the auto industry held great promise for the future of America and did all he could to bring about that mythical autopia:

Ahead of his times, … Bel Geddes correctly viewed communications as the key factor in the modern world, even though… his vision was limited to conventional transport. This led naturally to a close association with the American automobile industry during the 1930s. He designed tires for Firestone (plus the firm's sign and trademark), exhibition displays for Goodyear and for Chrysler, revolutionary gas stations for Shell and Sunoco, spectacular advertising campaigns for Shell and General Motors—and in particular, cars for Nash, Graham-Paige, Frazer (and later Frazer-Nash), De Soto, Chrysler, and Buick. This made Bel Geddes a logical choice for General Motors in commissioning their display for the 1939 World's Fair.

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What the GM exhibit ultimately presented when the fair opened in the spring of 1939 would go far beyond corporate advertising: Bel Geddes expanded upon GM’s initial contract substantially, proposing what he termed a *Futurama*, which would be, he explained, a “continuous scale model of a national motorway system” that he promised to present “in *dramatic*, imaginative form.” 248 An industrial designer, engineer and set designer by training, Bel Geddes was adept at dramatizing this auto-centric vision that he believed in so deeply. GM couldn’t have asked for a better – or more genuine – advertisement of their company.

Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*, while not the official center of the fair, soon became not only the most visited, but also the most talked about exhibit. GM’s pavilion and the vision of the future it showcased would become a primary image of American modernity and would be referenced, both explicitly and implicitly, for more than a half century to come. Bel Geddes described the reception of the GM *Futurama* exhibit in his 1940 book *Magic Motorways* (a textual accompaniment to the *Futurama* exhibit). Celebrating its success, Bel Geddes emphasizes the sheer number of visitors and the proliferation of positive press following soon after the first visitors emerged:

Five million people saw the Futurama of the General Motors Highways and Horizons Exhibit at the New York World's Fair during the summer of 1939. In long queues that often stretched more than a mile, from 5,000 to 15,000 men, women and children at a time, stood, all day long every day, under the hot sun and in the rain, waiting more than an hour for their turn to get a sixteen-minute glimpse at the motorways of the world of tomorrow. There have been hit shows and sporting events in the past which had waiting lines for a few days, but never before had there been a line as long as this, renewing itself continuously, month after month, as there was every day at the fair.

The people who conduct polls to find out why other people do things, and the editorial writers, newspaper men and columnists who report daily on the doings of the human race, all had their theory as to why the Futurama was the most popular show of any Fair in history. And most of them agreed that the explanation was really very simple: All of these thousands of people who stood in line ride in motor cars and therefore are harassed by the daily task of getting from one place to another, by the nuisances of intersectional jams, narrow, congested bottlenecks, dangerous night driving, annoying policemen's whistles, honking horns, blinking traffic lights, confusing highway signs, and irritating traffic regulations; they are appalled by the daily toll of highway accidents and deaths; and they are eager to find a sensible way out of this planless, suicidal mess. The Futurama gave them a dramatic and graphic solution to a problem which they all faced.

As all who saw it know, Futurama is a large-scale model representing almost every type of terrain in America and illustrating how a motorway system may be laid down over the entire country - across mountains, over rivers and lakes, through cities and past towns - never deviating from a direct course and always adhering to the four basic principles of highway design: safety, comfort, speed and economy...

Much of the initial appeal of the Futurama was due to its imaginative quality. But the reason that its popularity never diminished was that its boldness was based on soundness. The plan it presented appealed to the practical engineer as much as to the idle day-dreamer. The motorways which it featured were not only desirable, but practical.249

Though Bel Geddes’ description may sound boastful, it is absolutely consistent with the analysis of his contemporaries – Futurama was a smash hit for many of the reasons he described. Innes, for instance, confirms Futurama’s popularity and influence in his 2005 book Designing Modern America:

Bel Geddes’ vision of how America might look twenty years ahead was so spectacular—and popular—that in August 1939 one radio program enthusiastically declared Futurama 'the high spot of the whole exhibition,' while a news headline from the same month proclaimed, 'Futurama: 8,307,600 Have Seen Tomorrow' - including (as a major article in the American City trumpeted) the Hollywood sex symbol Myrna Loy. Before it finally closed after a year and a half, in late fall of 1940, more than 15 million people had taken what the New York Post labeled a 'fascinating journey into the land of the future.'250

249 Bel Geddes, Magic Motorways (1940), 3-8.
250 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 142-143.
It was accurate enough to be believable, pragmatic enough to be implemented, and yet imaginative and visionary nonetheless. It was conceptually comprehensive and yet experientially immersive. It seems most sources can agree that, among a myriad of contributing factors, Bel Geddes’ successful arousal of the American imagination can be attributed to his masterful pairing of meticulous craftsmanship and imaginative illusion.

Bel Geddes apparently insisted on a level of precision that went far beyond the detail required for an overall impression – the model rewarded close study even though most of its viewers had but a few seconds to take in each feature.\(^{251}\) Furthermore, the terrain and vegetation of the model was keyed to the regions of the United States making it not only vaguely familiar but also identifiable. Innes explains, “the model landscape was in many ways a faithful copy of the geography of the United States, with the template following topographical geodetic survey maps and more than one thousand enlarged aerial survey photographs. It therefore contained recognizable geographical features within which Bel Geddes set his 'new society' of the future.”\(^{252}\) Bel Geddes refers to this process briefly in his book on the model, *Magic Motorways*: "in designing the Futurama, we reproduced actual sections of the country - Wyoming, Pennsylvania, California, Missouri, New York, Idaho, Virginia - combining them into a continuous terrain. We used actual American cities - St. Louis, Council Bluffs, Reading, New Bedford, Concord, Rutland, Omaha, Colorado Springs

\(^{251}\) Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 142-143.

\(^{252}\) Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 142-143.
- projecting them twenty years ahead.” This hybridization of the American landscape made the model at once specific and abstract, literal and fantastical.

The precision of these meticulous renderings of an American landscape was matched by an imaginative and expansive guiding vision. Bel Geddes’ illusionistic methods conveyed an exhilarating dynamism and fantastical quality while his precise renderings maintained a concrete realism and believability. Innes notes that Bel Geddes’ work, often dipping into the realm of the theatrical stage, was monitored by the theater world just as much as it was monitored by industrial designers and engineers:

Futurama was highly realistic as a display. But it was also a direct extension of Bel Geddes' stage work. Theater reviewers… wrote about it as frequently as sociologists or business reporters, and the techniques he had pioneered in Broadway productions over the previous decade were precisely what made it so convincing. The true effectiveness of Bel Geddes' theatre was the way he created a total environment, which immersed spectators in the dramatic action. Innes goes on to remind us how readily Bel Geddes employed tricks of the stage in the presentation of design work:

It was a short step from creating… a totally convincing… stage environment… to designing the physical and cultural context for society outside theater. And all these qualities came together in Bel Geddes' work for the 1939-40 New York World's Fair: his populism, his technical innovation with stage machinery and sound-recording, and the way he challenged the spectators' sense of space, creating apparently 'impossible' but convincing vistas.

There were, according to Innes, four illusory techniques at the core of Bel Geddes’ dramatization—the calibrated motion of the seats which simulated the irregularities of an airplane ride, the integration of an invisible and spatially coordinated soundtrack,
the use of lighting effects coordinated with scale and elevation shifts in the model, and the incorporation of moving elements into the model itself (such as moving cars and flowing water). Innes notes that, "although the mechanics of these systems were invisible, the details had already been widely publicized in press releases, and the impression of novel technology in practical operation contributed significantly to the credibility of the whole vision of America in the future." Furthermore, beyond the mechanics of illusion, Bel Geddes also employed the most basic principles of strategic concealing and revealing to his advantage—“the totally unexpected expanse of the model must have appeared particularly striking given the relatively small area within the building. There would have seemed to be no way of fitting in so much countryside, let alone a 'ride' extending over a third of a mile… It must have been almost magical—a tangible token of future science.”

Through Innes’ deep study of this material, we are afforded a glimpse of what the experience might have been like. Here, Innes walks us through the entrance progression to the Futurama ride:

On entering this building, the public funneled through a hall, illuminated only by blue light shining onto dark cyclorama from behind. What they saw was a gigantic cutout map of the United States which seemed to float in space, covering the curving wall and arching overhead, a dark silhouette crisscrossed by intersecting lines of light representing a network of motorways. Walking under this, they took their places in pairs of seats mounted on a conveyor belt moving through semidarkness, while a disembodied voice at shoulder level explained that they are setting out on an airplane flight from one side of the States to the other. And they emerged into afternoon sunlight, apparently high in the sky. Below, through a slanting window of continuous glass, as the endless line of seats moved absolutely silently along, spread a springtime landscape. (The fair opened on 30 April.)

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258 Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 142-143.
259 Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 130.
This description elucidates Bel Geddes’ balanced use of both continuity with daily reality (which necessarily framed the experience of the fair), and a calculated discontinuity and departure from that mundane normalcy. This balance of pragmatism and theatricality, the ordinary and the extraordinary pervades Bel Geddes’ work and made his physical rendering of the Machine age Metropolis uncommonly convincing. He seems to have rendered this utopia so magnetic that it was almost viral – and what’s more, the ‘virus’ seems to still be circulating.

One might assume that, when the fair closed in late 1940, Futurama would have faded from the collective imagination. Innes, however, would argue otherwise: "the future was put on hold during the coming war. But, Bel Geddes' vision had always been more far-reaching than that, peering ahead a whole generation to 1960; and the vision of Futurama was kept alive after the close of the World's Fair in 1940 right through the postwar world." Bel Geddes’ vision did indeed have a long afterlife – in the printed press, in traveling exhibits and films, in army training, and in Disney’s work. While some were more obvious or direct than others, all of these outlets contributed to Futurama’s remarkable longevity. Perhaps the most direct example of Futurama’s afterlife is its extensive publication in contemporary magazines and journals – the list includes, among others, *Life Magazine*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the Detroit *Saturday Evening Post*, the Plainfield *Courier-News* (New Jersey), the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the New York *Journal of Commerce*, and *Architectural Forum*. The next layer of Futurama’s afterlife comes in the form of the traveling exhibits and film. Innes notes,

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A short film on the fair was released, partly in Technicolor (marking one of the first uses of this new film technology), and titled *To New Horizons*, which replayed the experience of the Futurama ride… When the fair was over, the model city from the display was transferred to the Saint Louis Art Museum, where it was featured in a 1941 exhibition of urban planning. Afterward large sections of the model, mounted on trucks, toured the United States as a ‘Parade of Progress.’ This traveling fairground exhibit came to an end only in 1944. So memories of Futurama were still fresh when the war ended a year later.262

Less expected or well known, the magnetic vision of Bel Geddes’ *Futurama* was also sustained through the war by its use in camouflage skills workshops for the American Army in World War II. Innes explains that,

Perhaps the most effective source of Bel Geddes' influence in the period immediately after 1945 was through the U.S. Army, which became one of the main government vehicles for postwar renewal. During the war the army borrowed part of the Futurama model for a camouflage school, where it was used to demonstrate techniques of deceptive coloration and the effectiveness of visual illusion. More important for the future, it also kept Bel Geddes' ideas about motorways in the eyes of platoons of soldiers right up to 1945. Reinforced by his book *Magic Motorways*, which discussed the engineering and safety principles underlying the model, his views directly influenced the road-building program carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the decade after the war.263

Even less well known is the connection between modern day Disney and Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*. Disney helped the ideas of *Futurama* to resurface in the fifties by effectively remaking the 1940s GM-sponsored film *To New Horizons*. Anthony Flint explains, in his 2009 book *Wrestling With Moses*, the details of this Disney remake:

In 1958, the Walt Disney Studios produced an eight-minute animated film called *Magic Highway U.S.A.* for an episode of its television program *Disneyland*. Narrated in the authoritative bass of a newsreel, the film showed gleaming white highways and cloverleaf interchanges, overpasses and bridges and tunnels. In the future, the voice-over said, these roads would glow, disperse fog, and melt snow, and cars equipped with radar would ultimately drive themselves… The Disney film took as a given that the highway would

262 Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 146-147.
263 Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 146-147.
play a vital role in civilization in the years ahead: 'It will be our magic carpet to new hopes, new dreams, and a better way of life for the future.'

But, Disney’s emulation of Bel Geddes’ Futurama goes even further than this. Innes makes clear that Disney’s work can be understood as a direct extension of Futurama, complete with the world’s fair atmosphere and the theatrical transportation to an imagined world. First, Disney did so at the 1964 World’s Fair:

Walt Disney… had an exhibit at the New York 1964 World's Fair… [that was] a variation on Bel Geddes' original Futurama: a Magic Skyride along which spectators rode in futuristic cars from a prehistoric past to 'Space City.' Although Bel Geddes himself had died in 1958, six years before, his vision was still very much in evidence… Arguably the entire concept of Disney's theme parks can be traced to Joseph Urban and Bel Geddes.

And then, not long after, Disney began planning a more permanent Futurama-inspired environment:

The connections between Bel Geddes' forecast of the future at the New York World's Fair and the Disney World Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow are... direct. The EPCOT Center - which Walt Disney began planning shortly before his death in 1966 although it opened in 1982 - was a direct successor to the Magic Skyride of the 1964 World's Fair. Both were specifically inspired by Disney's personal memory of Futurama from more than a quarter-century before... Just like Futurama, EPCOT, which is also explicitly 'featuring a World's Fair atmosphere,' embodies the message of technology as utopian progress, and it too was conceived (in Walt Disney's words) as 'the prototype of the future.'

Thus, we can see the ways in which Futurama's magnetic vision of the Machine Age Metropolis was kept alive in the American utopic imagination across generations and through the war by these multiple outlets—press, exhibits, army training, and Disney’s reincarnation. As Innes argues, “Futurama, by far the most popular single display at the New York World's Fair, stands as a graphic demonstration of the way

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265 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 150-152.
266 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 150-152.
267 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 146-147; 120.
Broadway theatricality helped to shape the images and material objects that define modern America… The display dramatized a futuristic vision of everyday life so successfully that it carried over in the public imagination through World War II, ten years later being recognizable all across America and reappearing as the title of a popular television show in the 1990s.”

Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 120.
The Adoption and Implementation of Machine Age Aspirations

"The traffic multiplied, concrete lanes moving laterally across the landscape."269
--J.G. Ballard in *Crash* (1973)

"The remodeling of the earth and its cities is still only at a germinal stage: only in isolated works of technics, like a power dam or great highway, does one begin to feel the thrust and sweep of the new creative imagination."270
--Lewis Mumford as quoted in *Architectural Record* (1939)

The palpable excitement over Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*, coupled with the many economic and political interests converging on its vision, would fuel the highway-building project for many years to come. These early highways were not only pieces of infrastructure in the eyes of those who commissioned, designed, built, and used them – they were symbols, monuments to modernity in both form and function. As described by Wilson et al. in *The Machine Age in America: 1918-1941*, the highway had its own aesthetic that tapped into the aspirations of Machine Age America:

The superhighway, motorway or freeway would become a new American art form… the parkway and freeway represent a substantial accomplishment not only of technology, engineering, and construction, but in the creation of an aesthetic of speed and motion; broad, long, and continuous surfaces; a cinematic view of nature; and the machine as the dominant fact.271

The streamlined aesthetic and sheer scale of the designed highway elevated it from the realm of pragmatic infrastructure to that of cultural symbol. Wilson et al. emphasize this point further, explaining:

The scale, comprehensiveness, and design of many of these large projects indicate a fundamental belief in the power of the machine—in the intelligent hands of man—to remake and control the environment. In the earlier landscape the machine was an intruder, and while its power could be admired, seldom was self-conscious beauty or design evident. In this new landscape a

special environment was created in which the machine could operate efficiently in concert with nature. Nature brimmed up along the new superhighway, great dams became primal forces creating a new geography, and bridges joined earth and sky in a new pattern.\textsuperscript{272}

America’s leading cities rushed to erect their own highway monuments to modernity—and they all looked to Bel Geddes’ \textit{Futurama} for guidance and inspiration. Endorsed by the country’s leading highway engineers, \textit{Futurama} became a template for highway construction across the continent.\textsuperscript{273} But, for cities that aimed to be trendsetters and avant-garde modernist visionaries (such as New York and Detroit), the implementation of Bel Geddes’ highway vision was only an escalation of the plans they had already laid out for their city’s expressway future.

The provision of highway infrastructure was understood as the first step towards the Machine Age Metropolis, the ticket to this auto-centric utopia. Unlike many of the other, more fantastical and far-fetched blueprints for a future utopia, Bel Geddes’ \textit{Futurama} was a blueprint that officials and engineers alike felt equipped to act upon. As Innes notes in \textit{Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street}, among a wealth of utopic plans, Bel Geddes’ stood out as pragmatic and concrete:

Utopia, repeatedly envisaged, was continually postponed. By contrast, …Norman Bel Geddes had tangible and immediate influence. In some ways… [he was] associated with this idealist aspect of the modern movement… Although hardly less visionary, the designs produced… by Bel Geddes, were more in tune with the times… Refinements or extensions of what already existed, [his] plans were more accessible and served as models for others. Bel Geddes’ urban planning reached the eyes of government and the White House—as well as, perhaps even more important, the attention of an empire-building bureaucrat like Robert Moses—because Bel Geddes managed to gain wide exposure through commercial publicity.\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{273} Innes, \textit{Designing Modern America} (2005), 146.
\textsuperscript{274} Innes, \textit{Designing Modern America} (2005), 172-173.
*Futurama*, which already encompassed a staggering range of solutions to the highway problem, would morph and mutate as it was assimilated into the building programs of America’s iconic modern metropolises. *Futurama*, while universally evocative of the Machine Age Metropolis of tomorrow, was necessarily adapted to the specific context of each city’s brand of modernity. Terry Smith describes this fragmentation of the monolithic modernity of Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*. Smith characterizes the production of an iconography of modernity in terms of three typologies; the first maps onto Detroit while the second onto New York City:

> By the later 1920s the iconography of Modern America seems to coalesce into limited, loose, but nonetheless flexible and effective ensemble of images. Its elements, so constantly repeated, varied, approximated, so rarely violated, are readily listed: (1) the industrial plant and manufacturing worker (for example, the River Rouge and the assembly-line worker); the agricultural site and the farm worker (the wheat silo and the sharecropper); (2) the vertical city and the crowd (almost always New York City and the Wall Street/Broadway crowd on the pavement); (3) the stylized product and the consumer (a burgeoning number of examples of great structural similarity).²⁷⁵

Thus, if we operate within Terry Smith’s division of the iconography of modernity into three typologies, we can begin to see the ways in which the monolithic and universal visual language of Bel Geddes’ *Futurama* is stretched and divided into related but nonetheless distinct iconographies of modernity—one, embodied by Detroit, the iconography of the factory and production; and the other, embodied by New York, the iconography of commerce and trade. In the next chapter, I will attempt to illustrate how these related but distinct iconographies of Detroit and New York were expressed in divergent highway forms and attitudes. In both cities, the highway acted as a symbol of and monument to modernity, but the modernity it stood for was slightly different in each.

New York’s Translation of the *Futurama* Vision

New York’s brand of modernity is often presented as *the* modernity in a way that overpowers and dismisses the wide variation of modern metropolises. I would contend that New York’s Machine Age modernity, far from being a universal template for modernity, was (and is), in fact, a *specific* modernity, a unique and local adaptation of Bel Geddes’ national *Futurama*. I will attempt to engage here with some of the many ways in which New York has become not only a modern city but also a *symbol* of the modern city.

New York’s economic identity in many ways derives from and is traceable to its geography. New York, early on, had the geographic position and geologic foundations to become the epicenter of international commerce and trade: the island of Manhattan was not only rich with supportive bedrock, it also sheltered an uncommonly ideal harbor, meaning that the port city was ideally suited to receive both ships and skyscrapers. It is owing, in part, to this remarkable geography that New York gained its iconic status as a city of commerce and trade. Commercial exchange is, of course, intimately linked to industrial production and Machine Age New York was no exception. However, New York’s industrial production was not singular or monolithic (as Detroit’s became with the advent of the auto industry) – New York has the kind of variety and scale that naturally grows up around the shipping yards of a port city. Thus, in symbolic terms, New York city was not only a factory (the locus of production), it was also a market (the locus of trade). Kenneth Jackson and Hilary Ballon describe in their book *Robert Moses and the Modern City* this dynamic tension of New York’s diverse yet interwoven trade economies:
In 1950, it [New York City] was the unchallenged center of American life, and its skyline was famous around the world. The city was a virtual United Nations in miniature, its citizens drawn from every continent and almost every nation. Its five boroughs were renowned for excellent public schools, pure and abundant water, spacious and well-kept parks, and matchless mass transit. New York was also the world's leading industrial city, and its many thousands of shops and factories produced most of the nation's women's clothes, one-fifth of its beer, most of its magazines and books, and many of its specialty goods. Its great harbor, protected from North Atlantic storms by the narrow opening between Brooklyn and Staten Island... was by many measures the largest and finest in the world. It was also the busiest port anywhere, and its hundreds of bustling docks and piers gave employment to tens of thousands of sailors, longshoremen, tugboat operators, maritime workers, and shipbuilders. Meanwhile, Wall Street was the heart of American finance, Madison Avenue of advertising, Seventh Avenue of fashion, Fifth Avenue of elegant shopping, and Broadway of entertainment.\footnote{Kenneth T. Jackson and Hilary Ballon, ed., Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 67-68.}

Thus, New York’s iconic status was and is not tied to any one characteristic or singular industry. New York’s Machine Age modernity was, instead, about exchange and convergence, about a diversity that was at once chaotic and coherent.

One of the simultaneously enraging and exhilarating consequences of this convergence is that it cultivates intense competition for recognition within New York’s geographically constrained footprint; each new arrival attempting to assert its own superlative modernity. Marshall Berman describes these competing modernities in his 1988 book \emph{All That is Solid Melts into Air}:

\begin{quote}
Many of the city's most impressive structures were planned specifically as symbolic expressions of modernity... The cumulative impact of all this is that the New Yorker finds himself in the midst of a... forest of symbols... its symbols and symbolisms are endlessly fighting each other for sun and light, working to kill each other off, melting each other along with themselves into air. Thus, if New York is a forest of symbols, it is a forest where axes and bulldozers are always at work, and great works constantly crashing down.\footnote{Marshall Berman, \emph{All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity} (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 288-289.}
\end{quote}
Berman is describing a perpetual, cyclical process of destruction and creation: as the city tries to incorporate more and more converging paths, the old guard must at some point give way to the most recent arrival. This perpetual newness fuels New York’s particular brand of modernity – a modernity that replaces rather than expands, supplants rather than extends. Michael De Certeau reiterates this same symbolic patterning of the New York landscape in his 1984 essay *Walking in the City*, claiming, “New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental reliefs.”\(^\text{278}\) The modern highway played right into this patterning – the highway’s snaking monumentality presented the perfect opportunity to reinvent, to purge and start anew.

The modern highway was used as a tool to catalyze a re-ordering project, an attempt to clamp down on the chaotic, messy urbanism that wells up from Manhattan’s rigid grid.\(^\text{279}\) This messy urbanism that results from a layering of phases of modernity, while dynamic and exciting to some, was uncomfortable and offensive to others. Architect Harvey Wiley Corbett articulated in 1926 an emerging desire to resolve New York’s chaotic multiplicity once and for all. This desire to order the modern metropolis was a common impulse that was all the more potent in New York due to its extreme embodiment of layering and intersectionality. Corbet described the city of New York as a ”simultaneously exciting and appalling 'conglomerate, helter-skelter, jumbled up' architectural mess” and conveyed his ambitions to transform the


city (without loosing its essence) “into something more livable: 'If one could only be screened, sorted, analyzed, separated, some order brought out of the present chaos, all that is really worthwhile could be retained....’” The trouble with this modernist ordering impulse is its delusion that messiness and all its corollaries – diversity, dissensus, conflict – can be purged from urban life, leaving it pure and uncontaminated by the unpredictable and unexpected. The irony is that, the more remarkable and dynamic the ‘mess,’ the more powerful and dramatic the ordering impulse was – New York’s highway proposals would be by far the most fantastical (both financially and formally) of the interstate highway system. As Anthony Flint describes in his 2009 book Wrestling with Moses, “[New York’s] crosstown routes… were no ordinary, ground-level highways. New York's congested urban terrain meant that they would have to soar and sweep and dive through the city; they would be highways that poked straight through skyscrapers, highways with housing on top, highways that dipped below ground and rose a hundred feet in the air.”

The fantastical nature of New York City’s highway proposals can also be seen as a call for recognition from an international audience. New York City, in the hopes of being chosen as a ‘world capital’ by the United Nations, set about planning and building modern developments that would push boundaries and make a statement. Innes explains,

The surge of national self-confidence that followed victory in World War II propelled [Robert] Moses into even bigger rebuilding programs [than his pre-war initiatives]. The same sense of mission that had mobilized the population for 'the people's war' fueled support for reclaiming cities from social disaster. In addition, New York and Washington, as well as Philadelphia and San

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282 Flint, Wrestling with Moses (2009), 139-140.
Francisco, harbored ambitions to become world capitals - all were competing to be the site of the new United Nations. And modernization was the key. Business groups and organized labor agreed with city planners in replacing slums and manufacturing industries by university and hospital complexes, corporate offices, as well as downtown housing for the professionals who worked in them and the expressways that gave access to them.283

Thus, the construction of New York’s modern expressways can be seen not only as a duty-bound fulfillment but also as an extravagant performance of modernity. Berman sheds light on this perspective in his 1988 book *All That is Solid Melts into Air*:

The city [New York] has become not merely a theater but itself a production, a multimedia presentation whose audience is the whole world. This has given a special resonance and depth to much of what is done and made here. A great deal of New York's construction and development over the past century needs to be seen as symbolic action and communication: it has been conceived and executed not merely to serve immediate economic and political needs but, at least equally important, to demonstrate to the whole world what modern men can build and how modern life can be imagined and lived.284

New York City could not expect to earn the admiration of a global audience if they moved at the slow pace required to build meaningful consensus around subtle and complex solutions to the problems of modernity in their increasingly overbuilt and overcrowded metropolis: the city had to take bold risks if it wanted to lead the way.285 And that they did.286 As Innes proclaimed, "the American city, with its skyscrapers and arterial expressways funneling traffic into the downtown core, is the dominating symbol of modern life, and during the twentieth century Manhattan has become its most powerful image."287

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Moving quickly, New York City set about formulating an ambitious regional plan that retained much of the fantastical flair of Bel Geddes’ Futurama. The result is perhaps best described by Rem Koolhas in his essay Delerious New York:

The City of the Captive Globe... is the capital of Ego, where science, art, poetry and forms of madness compete under ideal conditions to invent, destroy and restore the world of phenomenal reality... Manhattan is the product of an unformulated theory, Manhattanism, whose program [is] to exist in a world totally fabricated by man, to live inside fantasy... The entire city became a factory of manmade experience, where the real and natural ceased to exist.... a mythical island where the invention and testing of a metropolitan life-style, and its attendant architecture, could be pursued as a collective experiment.

New York City’s promise of a fantastical man-made environment, while integral to its symbolic status in urbanistic discourses, has repeatedly undermined its own best interest, accelerating the city’s leaders down the brash and destructive paths of high modernism. Robert Moses, New York’s master builder of the modern era, did just that; unwaveringly and adeptly, he led New York down a path that was at once visionary and catastrophic.

New York, while propelled into the expressway world by its exposure to Bel Geddes’ Futurama in 1939, was already at the forefront of the emerging vision of the Machine Age metropolis before Futurama was even conceived of. The New York metro area was home to the first automotive parkway, the Bronx River Parkway, approved in 1907 and completed in 1923. This set into motion a cascade of parkway projects throughout the metro area. Wilson et al. explain:

Immediately after the popular success of the Bronx River Parkway, the Westchester County Park Commission began a system of other parkways to link together all the recreational areas in Westchester County and also to

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288 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 172.
provide better access for motor vehicles to and from New York City. Between 1923 and 1933 the commission constructed eighty-eight miles of parkways and ten miles of freeways.\footnote{Wilson et al., “The Machine in the Landscape” (2001), 97.}

Collectively, this constellation of New York parkway projects described the beginning of a shift in the geography of the American city.\footnote{Wilson et al., “The Machine in the Landscape” (2001), 97-98.} Indeed, by as early as 1928 the traffic engineers of the New York metro area had begun innovating, pioneering traffic mechanisms that would push the recreational parkway closer and closer to the modern commuter freeway and industrial expressway. As Wilson et al. note, "the cloverleaf intersection… was first put into use in Woodbridge, New Jersey, in 1928"\footnote{Wilson et al., “The Machine in the Landscape” (2001), 97-98.} and was soon followed by “the tremendous intersection of the Grand Central Parkway, the Grand Central Parkway Extension, the Union Turnpike, the Interboro Parkway, and Queens Boulevard known as 'The Pretzel.'”\footnote{Wilson et al., “The Machine in the Landscape” (2001), 97.} The Pretzel, completed in the 1930s, was one of Robert Moses’ early highway projects and would become, like many of his projects to follow, “a landmark, a sort of monument to the machine age.”\footnote{Wilson et al., “The Machine in the Landscape” (2001), 97.}

In part due to his role in pioneering projects like the Pretzel and in part due to his self-confident promotion of the Machine Age metropolis, Robert Moses is often represented as a visionary whose ideas sculpted the landscape of New York and beyond.\footnote{This perspective was popularized by Robert Caro’s portrait of Moses in The Power Broker and has since been picked up by a broad range of other sources.} Much emerging scholarship, however, has shifted towards a more restricted view of his vision and influence giving more credit to those who inspired and proposed the plans Moses then implemented. Innes, for example, points out in his book Designing Modern America that, “Moses's strengths were political. He was the
organization man, not an engineer. He had no training in architecture, or even city planning.” Wilson et al. explain this emerging perspective in great detail in their essay ‘The Machine in the Landscape’:

_The Power Broker_ [Robert A. Caro’s 1344-page biography of Moses published in 1975] suggests that Moses was a perceptive dreamer and a visionary, the kind of exceptional intellect who could see beyond the limitations and clutter of contemporary life to the possibilities and potential of a very different future environment... In fact, none of those ideas was original to Moses; all were derivative of plans conceived and published by others long before he laid claim to them. What made him unusual was not the originality of his thought but the personal qualities that allowed him to build were others could only dream. Moses the visionary was second rate; Moses the builder was in a class by himself.

Luckily, however, Moses had a great deal of contact with two first-rate modern visionaries: Norman Bel Geddes and Walt Disney. Moses latched onto the vision articulated by Bel Geddes, and later by Disney too, and pursued it doggedly. Innes explains this relationship of visionary and builder as follows:

Just as... Bel Geddes effectively shaped the lifestyle of the period, a single person was responsible for creating much of the modern geography of New York. This was Robert Moses... Even people who disliked him intensely... acknowledged that he did more to shape modern American cities than anyone else in the twentieth century. Moses was no designer, however. Nor did he have the versatility that gave... Bel Geddes something approaching a continent-wide influence over multiple fields that reinforced each other. The impact of Moses, who was a Napoleonic manipulator of bureaucracy, was practical and organizational, rather than through design.

Thus, the grandeur of Bel Geddes’ vision found its perfect match in Moses’ bureaucratic persistence and political prowess. Innes goes on to explain that, “while Moses had an engineering and architectural staff reporting to him, his concepts came directly from Norman Bel Geddes.”

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297 Jackson and Ballon, _Robert Moses and the Modern City_ (2007), 70.
298 Innes, _Designing Modern America_ (2005), 178-179.
While Moses publicly critiqued Bel Geddes for his fantastical and impractical vision, he did relate to the magical quality of the vision, even as he resented the overblown expectations it had instilled in the American public. Despite the staggered careers of Moses (1888-1981) and Bel Geddes (1893-1958)—Bel Geddes reached his professional peak with *Futurama* in 1939 and died not long after while Moses’ career was just getting underway in the ‘20s and lasted—Geddes and Moses did have considerable contact with one another in the ‘30s and ‘40s, engaging in an implicit exchange, each influencing the work and ambitions of the other. And, even after Bel Geddes passed, Moses remained connected to his work through Disney’s work, which he greatly admired. Disney (1901-1966) began developing his theme parks and planning fantasies in 1955, incorporation of Bel Geddes’ *Futurama* in the Disney EPCOT center and throughout Disney’s work more generally, continuing well beyond his 1966 death. Thus, just as Disney kept Bel Geddes’ vision alive in the collective imagination of America more generally, he also kept the more fantastical side of the expressway world of *Futurama* close to Moses. This built on Moses’ considerable professional contact with both Bel Geddes’s work, and Bel Geddes himself.³⁰⁰ Innes describes their evolving relationship as follows:

Bel Geddes devoted a significant portion of his career to redesigning city layouts, and Moses was well aware of his work. As parks commissioner he [Moses] had overseen the 1939 New York World's Fair and been particularly impressed by Bel Geddes' GM Building and its Futurama exhibit. Moses, and his departmental officials, were also familiar with the 'City of the Future' that Bel Geddes had constructed for Shell Oil's advertising campaign. As well as receiving wide publicity, this had been officially approved by a 1937 National Planning Conference; and the head of the Traffic Research Bureau at Harvard University told the *New York Sun* that Bel Geddes' models embodied 'an inevitable development of the automobile revolution.'

Furthermore, in April 1938 the Shell model had been presented at a public meeting over a rezoning proposal for Harlem to the New York City Planning Group, as well as at an Uptown Chamber of Commerce meeting, both of which Mayor La Guardia attended. In fact, when the model of the city was on display at the offices of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency (which had brought Bel Geddes and Shell Oil together), Moses sent his managerial staff... Together with representatives from the Port Authority and the New Jersey Highway Commission, they had a daylong private view.... A New York monthly picture-paper, The News, ran a piece relating to the future changes being planned by Moses for Brooklyn, which was illustrated with photos of the model. Bel Geddes corresponded with Moses himself about his urban plans.

In addition, Moses would have known about the Toledo city plan, designed by Bel Geddes in 1945, which sparked calls for exactly the same kind of projects to be initiated in other cities, notably by New York and Rochester newspapers...

Robert Moses never directly acknowledged Bel Geddes' influence. But even if by the late 1940s such ideas had become general currency, their source was undoubtedly Bel Geddes' theories, and the plans and scale models he had created a decade before, which showed their practical application.301

Furthermore, as alluded to in the final sentences of this quote, Moses was not the only influential New Yorker to grab hold of Bel Geddes’ vision and promote its direct application to the urban fabric of New York. And Moses was heeding their calls. The New York World Telegram ran a major article when the Toledo display opened [on the 6th of August, 1945], reporting that 'New York bankers, realtors and city planners were generally agreed that many phases of the Toledo Plan should be applied to the five boroughs here - particularly in Manhattan and Brooklyn.' Significantly, it concluded: 'The New York Planning Commission have formulated tentative plans for this area along the lines of the Toledo plan.' The New York Planning Commission, of course, meant Robert Moses.302

By speaking out in favor of Bel Geddes’ dramatization of the Machine Age metropolis, these prominent New Yorkers bolstered Moses’ positions, reinforcing his increasingly ambitious and controversial renewal plans.

301 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 181-182.
The changes Moses introduced, which replaced blue-collar trades with white-collar services, turned New York into the first postindustrial metropolis. It was through him New York earned its title as the 'Imperial City.' When Robert Moses built his expressways… he was following principles promoted by Bel Geddes. Moses's redevelopment of Brooklyn's retail and factory zone into a new civic center in 1952… looks a lot like the downtown section of 'Toledo Tomorrow' near the approaches to the new bridge Bel Geddes envisaged over the Maumee River. Bel Geddes' model might have been intended as a projection of what could be achieved by the millennium. [But] in the hands of Robert Moses, 'Toledo Tomorrow' became 'New York Today.'

Innes explicitly points out the socially exclusive nature of this vision and subtly implies that the speed at which this vision was ushered into reality left little room for alternative viewpoints of the blue-collar city his plans so consistently ostracized.

Perhaps the most iconic example of this swift brutality is Moses’ planning and construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. Flint describes this moment in his 2009 book *Wrestling With Moses*, explaining that the Cross-Bronx Expressway…

Would slash through one mile of densely populated neighborhoods in the Bronx. Over fifteen hundred families would be forced to relocate. Begun in 1948 and completed in 1963 at a cost of $128 million, the Cross Bronx Expressway represented Moses's dominance over neighborhood objections in that period, and the project is remembered to this day as a case study in brutally overriding citizen participation in roadway planning. As Robert Caro later wrote in *The Power Broker*, the Cross Bronx Expressway broke up thriving and diverse immigrant enclaves and jump-started the economic and social decline of the Bronx. Moses knew it would be difficult to plow through the Bronx neighborhoods of East Tremont and West Farms, home to middle- and working-class Jewish and Italian families, but he was also particularly inflexible on the route of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Moving it just two blocks south, to the northern section of Crotona Park, would have spared hundreds of families from having their homes destroyed. Tenants' groups and a handful of elected officials pleaded for the change, but Moses would not budge.

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This story would become the story, the symbol of the blue-collar experience of New York’s emerging Machine Age metropolis. Like the Black Bottom neighborhood in Detroit, the destruction of the South Bronx, presented as a sacrifice to the altar of modernity, would become a poignant catalyst and call to arms for future resistance to the modernist project.

Jeff Chang describes this crisis of identity and quiet rage of the South Bronx in his 2005 book *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. The South Bronx was by no means a racially or ethnically monolithic population but, its residents, by virtue of their physical distance from the island of Manhattan, shared a sense of occupying the periphery, the margins of modernity. Chang articulates the fundamental crisis of identity experienced by residents of the South Bronx in terms of racial allegiance but he could just as easily have been describing the thought processes of the Bronx’s Jews, Hispanics, or White Ethnics: "at the heart of the issue was the age-old African-American question: shall we fight for the nation or build our own? Shall we save America or ourselves?" The rhetoric of social progress and utopic modernity fueled the progress of the expressway through mile upon mile of houses that sheltered families and individuals who themselves dreamed of upward mobility and fuller participation in the consumption-centric modernity they had been taught to aspire to. Marshall Berman, himself a teenager in the South Bronx at the time the Cross-Bronx Expressway was driven through his neighborhood illustrates this internal conflict with great compassion and clarity:

The developers and devotees of the expressway world presented it as the only possible modern world: to oppose them and their works was to oppose

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modernity itself, to fight history and progress, to be a Luddite, an escapist, afraid of life and adventure and change and growth. This strategy was effective because, in fact, the vast majority of modern men and women do not want to resist modernity: they feel its excitement and believe in its promise, even when they find themselves in its way.\textsuperscript{306}

Berman later explains how crucial Moses was in conveying this vision and presenting the South Bronx (and its residents) as an obstruction to modernity and progress:

It is easy to dwell endlessly on Moses's personal power and style. But this emphasis tends to obscure one of the primary sources of his vast authority: his ability to convince a mass public that he was the vehicle of impersonal world-historical forces, the moving spirit of modernity. For 40 years, he was able to pre-empt the vision of the modern. To oppose his bridges, tunnels, expressways, housing developments, power dams, stadia, cultural centers, was--or so it seemed--to oppose history, progress, modernity itself. And few people, especially in New York, were prepared to do that...Moses struck a cord that for more than a century has been vital to the sensibility of New Yorkers: our identification with progress, with renewal and reform, with the perpetual transformation of our world and ourselves--Harold Rosenberg called it 'the tradition of the new.' How many of the Jews of the Bronx, hotbed of every form of radicalism, were willing to fight for the sanctity of 'things as they are'? Moses was destroying our world, yet he seemed to be working in the name of values that we ourselves embraced.\textsuperscript{307}

And so, the residents of the South Bronx acquiesced to the vision of Machine Age modernity that prescribed their own erasure. In Berman’s words: “we had no way to resist the wheels that drove the American dream, because it was driving us ourselves - even though we knew the wheels might break us.”\textsuperscript{308}

But, this sacrifice of imperfect community to idealized modernity was remembered and would fuel a wave of delayed resistance to and rebellion against the modernist project. As Chang writes, "in 1953, the future of the Bronx could be seen along the seven-mile man-made trench cutting through it. Once an unbroken continuum of cohesive, diverse communities, the trench was now the clearing for the

\textsuperscript{306} Berman, \textit{All That is Solid Melts into Air} (1988), 313.
\textsuperscript{308} Berman, \textit{All That is Solid Melts into Air} (1988), 325-327.
Cross-Bronx Expressway, a modernist catastrophe of massive proportions." The highways in New York and elsewhere became “monuments to a brutal kind of efficiency” which served to remind high modernism’s victims of the immense destructive potential of once-utopic visions. The rebellion would not always be articulated in the cool analytic tone of Jane Jacobs’ academic writings. It was first expressed in incoherent and raw bursts, in the riots of the 60s, which collectively reasserted the role of dissent in our young democracy. Chang describes this relationship somewhat abstractly saying, "when the sound of automobiles replaced the sound of jackhammers on the length of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the fuel was in place for the Bronx to burn." He later goes on to emphasize, "these were not the fires of purifying rage...these were the fires of abandonment." The abandonment he is describing was inscribed in the sanitized and idealized vision laid out in Bel Geddes’ *Futurama* more than twenty years earlier. The vision of the Machine Age metropolis, by excluding mess and conflict, chaos and spontaneity, also excluded people – real people whose communities and livelihoods were actively undermined by a fundamentally (but implicitly) classist vision of modernity. This vision of modernity, steeped in the language of the American cultural myth and the style of Machine Age modernism, was all the more powerful for its subtlety and theatricality and all the more limitless in its destruction for the very same reasons.

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310 Chang, “Necropolis” (2005), 11.
312 Chang, “Necropolis” (2005), 15.
Detroit’s Translation of the *Futurama* Vision

The modernist vision was equally powerful in Detroit as in New York, and the destruction in its name was equally limitless. However, I want to emphasize that, while they were quantitatively comparable, they were *qualitatively* different. Detroit was a different kind of modern city than New York. Not a lesser kind, but a different kind. Detroit, too, sought to be a symbol, a beacon of modernity, like New York, but it was a factory city; the beacon of a singular, industrial modernity that was about production more so than about exchange. In this chapter, I will seek to describe the specific strain of material culture that fed Detroit’s brand of modernity as well as the ways in which that brand of modernity produced physical manifestations of the Machine Age metropolis that were notably different from those of New York.

Detroit, nicknamed “Motor City” and by extension “Mo-town,” illustrates the glamorous and disastrous extremes of autophilia. Detroit carried the visual culture of car production and ownership to an extreme that was not possible in New York. As Jackson et al. explain in their 2007 book *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, "Detroit, in 1950 was the Motor City in fact as well as in name. All three great automakers made the Michigan metropolis their headquarters, and all focused their manufacturing operations in the dozens of plants in the metropolitan area.”^313^ This threesome of the American auto industry – Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler – constituted Detroit’s symbolic essence as well as its life force. The city had, by 1950, become completely and utterly dependent on these three companies to employ the vast majority of the

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city’s 1.8 million residents, either directly or indirectly. While the three companies reinforced and elevated their collective symbolic significance, Henry Ford became an American icon, and was incorporated into the American cultural myth. At times, he seemed to stand in for it: for many Ford was the American Dream. Ford’s symbolic significance has its root in his professional legacy: his development of assembly-line division of labor, his promotion of the Model T as the working-class car, and his legendary offer of a $5-a-day wage. I will attempt to illustrate the interrelation of these last two in greater detail.

Cars, regardless of their make or model, were rapidly assimilated into the American myth of freedom and mobility and shifted seamlessly from their status as a material object to the status of national cultural symbol. Ford was however, above all other makers, revered as the one to truly deliver on this promise of social mobility across class lines. Innes describes the production of Ford’s iconic status in his book *Designing Modern America*:

In 1907 Henry Ford presented the original Model T as the promise of a new social order, democratic liberation, and individual self-fulfillment: ‘I will build a motor car for the great multitude.... It will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one—and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces.' Offering this combination of enjoyment with usefulness struck a new note in manufacturing. It was to be the basis of the coming consumer society, while the way Ford associated an industrial machine with a return to nature, and scientific progress with God, called on fundamental strands of the American cultural myth.

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314 12% of 1950 population was employed in blue-collar manufacturing jobs with an additional 3% employed in associated white-collar jobs (Figure taken from Thomas J. Sugrue, "From Motor City to Motor Metropolis: How the Automobile Industry Reshaped Urban America posted here: http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Race/R_Observations/R_Observation5.htm ). And these were just those that were directly employed. Many more were indirectly employed through the associated demands of and services for Detroit’s auto industry. For the purposes of this paper, I am far more interested in the symbolic (rather than literal) centrality of these three companies in the collective identity of modern Detroit. And for that reason, I am far more interested in Ford than in Chrysler or GM.

At the same time it was the nuts and bolts of assembly-line production, introduced by Ford in 1914, which made mass marketing—and the achievement of this grand vision—possible. This revolution in manufacturing was so notable that it came to be widely hailed as 'the American system,' and the automobile industry became synonymous with the nation. If, as President Herbert Hoover famously remarked, 'the business of America is business,' then what was good for Detroit (in the words of a later General Motors executive) was good for America.316

Thus, whether or not Ford actually delivered on these promises or lived up to these expectations, he (along with his cars and his company) was placed on an untouchable pedestal. Like Moses, as described by Marshal Berman, Ford too could “convince a mass public that he was the vehicle of impersonal world-historical forces, the moving spirit of modernity”317 and, to oppose Ford’s cars, factories, assembly lines, or wages “was—or so it seemed—to oppose history, progress, modernity itself.”318

At the core of Ford’s iconic status was his association with the idea of accessibility and equality for America’s working class. This legacy can be traced back to, among other things, his decision to pursue the idea of the Model T, a car that, unlike most on the market, did not aspire to Victorian extravagance for the upper classes but rather to stripped functionality for the working classes. While interpreted by many as a noble gesture, it was also a shrewd business choice. As Terry Smith describes in his book Making the Modern, "the Model T signaled a shift to cost reduction..., to simplification..., and to a marketing approach based on blanket availability and ease of purchase.”319 Smith then goes on to explain the populist resonance of Ford’s coordinated marketing of the Model T within his own company.

316 Innes, Designing Modern America (2005), 156.
319 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), 94.
Smith asserts that the company’s "greatest public moment came when, along with the $8-a-day offer to workers, Ford Company offered $50 to each purchaser of a 1914-1915 Model T, both under the populist rubric of profit sharing. Although only a small part of the year's profits were shared (1.5 of 30 million) and the wage offer was hedged with qualifications, this twinned gesture secured Ford Company's enormous reputation for 'industrial democracy.'"\(^{320}\) The pride of Detroit residents in the city’s superlative industry can be read in Thomas Sugrue’s authoritative account on twentieth-century Detroit, published in 1996, and titled *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequity in Postwar Detroit*. Sugrue, a Detroit native, announces, "the city was the very essence of American industry. Mid-twentieth-century Detroit embodied the melding of human labor and technology that together had made the United States the apotheosis of world capitalism."\(^{321}\)

In part out of pride for this emerging reputation as the superlative industrial democracy, and in part out of sheer necessity, Detroit in the Machine Age became an extension of its factories. Like Cleveland, the city is structured both economically and spatially by its industry just as New York was structured by its ports. But, whereas Cleveland’s industrial logic was necessarily subjugated to the extreme topography of the Cuyahoga River (whose valley divides the city in two and is host to the majority of the city’s steel industry), Detroit’s industrial logic was subject to no meaningful geographical constraints. And so, by default, the factory and its infrastructures became the dominant spatial determinate. The driving force behind this industrialization of Detroit’s cityscape was the brutal efficiency of Ford’s method,


Fordism. As Terry Smith writes, "Fordism was based on the assumption that the demand for Model Ts was insatiable, so that the single purpose of the plant was to process incoming materials into product at the maximum rate." This incessant maximizing of production led to an obsessive streamlining of all supply and delivery lines. In other words, as Ford zeroed in on a more efficient, streamlined method within his own factory walls, he increasingly looked beyond those walls into the city and demanded of the city’s infrastructure the same single-minded, streamlined efficiency. Smith describes this extension of Fordism beyond the factory walls:

The continuous assembly production of Highland Park had necessitated not only the fitting of feeder lines to the main lines in logical sequence but a precision of timing, of coordinated human/machine action unprecedented in industrial work, indeed, in nearly all organized behavior. The Rouge network instituted this on a massive scale: it assumed that the synchronized flow could be generalized not only to the whole plant, but to all elements of the network which fed the plant. Eventually, Ford was to see it as the essence of a universal philosophy: all other relationships become subordinate to maintaining the Flow.  

Sugrue illustrates the product of this relentless focus on efficiency – the city as ‘total industrial landscape’:

Early twentieth-century Detroit was, in the words of historian Olivier Zunz, a 'total industrial landscape.' Factories, shops, and neighborhoods blurred together indistinguishably, enmeshed in a relentless grid of streets and a complex web of train lines. To the casual observer, the design of Detroit seemed anarchic. The city's sprawling form and its vast array of manufactories made little sense. But Detroit's industrial geography had a logic that defied common observation.

The city, then, while to some degree defined by its neighborhoods, communities and commercial districts, was more forcefully delineated by its rail, river and roads – these are the bones of the industrial city. According to Sugrue, the rail lines "formed

the threads that tied the city's industries together.”

The Detroit River provided “egress,… easy access to coal and ore,… water for… cooling systems, and… a ready place to discharge industrial wastes.” And, the roads became the “vital conduit linking Detroit's numerous industries to each other… [and] allowed for speedy transit in and out of the city center.” Sugrue’s analysis is echoed by another Detroit native, Mark Binelli, who just came out with a book this year (2012) entitled *Detroit City is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*. In his introduction, Binelli reminisces about his upbringing in the city recalling its magnetism: “Detroit… stood for the purest fulfillment of U.S. industry.”

This notion of the logic of the factory extending to encompass the whole cityscape is reinforced by the sheer scale of Detroit’s factories. The scale of the Ford River Rouge factory alone approaches that of a city. As the head of education at the Detroit Institute of Art pointed out in the audio guide to the museum’s Rivera murals, “at its peak in the 1930s, the Ford Rouge Plant was a mile and a half wide and more than a mile long. It used over 120 miles of conveyor belts.” These facts and figures are complemented by the experiential account of former factory worker Lolita Hernandez: “the factory is a city in and of itself. It has its own life.” This new scale and intensity of work inspired a mix of apprehension and exhilaration. More often than not, the apprehension individuals experienced was not shared with others. It was a private struggle that was subordinated to the public narrative of exhilaration and

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329 Head of Education at the Detroit Institute of Art, exhibit voiceover narration for Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals at the Detroit Institute of Art.
330 Lolita Hernandez, 30 year factory worker building automobiles, exhibit voiceover narration for Diego Rivera’s *Detroit Industry* murals at the Detroit Institute of Art.
enthusiasm for the new speed and scale of this mechanized world. Binelli’s account of the Detroit of his childhood gives voice to this public narrative of unbridled enthusiasm:

Detroit used to be the greatest working-class city in the most prosperous country in the world. With the explosion of the auto industry, it had become the Silicon Valley of the Jazz Age, a capitalist dream town of unrivaled innovation and bountiful reward. My family came from Italy, our neighbor from Tennessee, my dad's friends were from Poland, Lebanon, Mexico. All had been drawn to Detroit, if not explicitly for the auto industry—my father sharpened knives and sold restaurant equipment—then because of what the auto industry had come to represent. The cars rolling off the assembly lines existed as tangible manifestations of the American Dream, the factories themselves a glimpse of the birth of modernity… Workers, eager to claim their share of the unprecedentedly high wages on offer, migrated to the city in droves, doubling Detroit's population in a single decade, from 465,000 to nearly a million, making the city, by 1920, the fourth largest in the nation. The art deco skyscrapers bursting from the downtown streets like rockets must have seemed like monuments to Fordism's manifest destiny. Everything pointed up.  

Even among critics of this emerging ‘total industrial landscape’ there was a stupefied awe and admiration for the boldness of this new vision. As Mark Binelli, a Detroit native, observes in his 2012 portrait of the city, "in 1929, the New York monthly Outlook sent the poet and journalist Matthew Josephson to cover the auto show. A leftist intellectual (and a fierce critic of Henry Ford)... Josephson writes of the city with scorn and condescension, but also with undeniable awe... [Josephson] recognizes the brute power of a metropolis that he says has 'no past... no history.' He calls Detroit 'the most modern city in the world, the city of tomorrow.'" Though Josephson was writing about Detroit a full decade before the 1939 New York World’s Fair, it is no mistake that he practically prophesizes the fair’s 1939 theme, ‘The World of Tomorrow.’ Detroit’s industrial spatial and social logic was consistently new and

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331 Binelli, Detroit City is the Place to Be (2012), 3.
332 Binelli, Detroit City is the Place to Be (2012), 6-7.
exciting for the Machine Age enthusiasts but often overbearing and intimidating for those who were skeptical of the promises of the Machine Age. Either way, Detroit’s industrial urbanism was a root inspiration and creative starting point for the utopic vision that Bel Geddes’ would crystalize in GM’s *Futurama*.

Indeed, Detroit actively facilitated its placement at the epicenter of this bold new Machine Age modernity. Among other things, Detroit facilitated an event that would bring together many of the most cutting edge producers of Machine Age visual culture – the industrial photographers. As Smith recounts,

The year 1933 also saw the first Detroit International Salon of Industrial Photography, a worldwide competition held at the Institute of Arts, attracting many entries and much interest. Under the headlines 'Photographic Artists Find Beauty Interest in Machine' and 'Camera's Lens Seeks Out the Most Striking Aspects of Era of Smoke and Steel,' a staff writer of the *Detroit Free Press* poured out such resounding dreams of unity as these:

> The artist looked at the Machine Age and, working with a product of that age, found the beauties inherent in the machine, and became an industrial photographer, The exhibit of what these modern artists have found will not only be the first international salon in Detroit but the first anywhere. This is as it should be, for Detroit, of all of the world's cities, was the forerunner in the enshrining and ennobling of the machine. This new art form already has its old masters. Dr. Max Thorek and E. O. Hoppe were amongst the first to see beauty in the dynamo, the plunge of the piston, the rhythmic pattern of steel grinders, and the curl of the plumes of smoke and steam. Leonardos of the lens, their work will be on display at the Institute.

Behind the hyperbole lies the hope that artists can help secure acceptance of an industrial-social order which, although so recently evolved, in so few places and with such drastically transformatory consequences, seeks consent as 'natural,' 'beautiful,' 'noble,' and, in case none of these absolutes work, as powerful and inevitable anyway. Artists such as Sheeler had already supplied the desired imagery, and it was flooding business magazines. The new corporations seemed well on the way to finding the imagery most appropriate to projecting their modernizing order, to both their managements and their customers. This imagery seemed flexible enough to accommodate the diverse demands on it, yet fundamentally coherent enough to be everywhere, evidently new.\(^{333}\)

This 1933 Detroit salon showcased an emerging body of work which glorified the machine, celebrated its form, popularized its sleek, streamlined aesthetic of functionality and systematically excluded the messy human blur which surrounded, and in fact, animated these otherwise static and monumental mechanized landscapes.

Of all these photographers, Sheeler became Detroit’s unofficial portrait artist. Sheeler, through his iconic imaging of the Ford River Rouge factory, was the medium through which many individuals across America (and internationally) first came into contact with Detroit’s iconic Machine Age industrial landscape. As Smith explains in his book *Making the Modern*, "not only has the Rouge become a mythical icon, but Sheeler's visualization of it has become iconic." Indeed, Sheeler’s representation of the Rouge has become so iconic that a 1960s textbook felt comfortable stating with the aura of objectivity that “Sheeler's series of paintings and photographs, made in 1927 and 1930, of the River Rouge plant of the Ford Motor Company, probably more than any other work opened the eyes of his generation to the severe beauty of functional engineering design.” Like Bel Geddes’ partnership with GM, Sheeler’s partnership with Ford was highly productive and rewarding for both. The partnership began as a contractual relationship, Sheeler in service of Ford, but soon became more significant to Sheeler. He was hired in 1927 by the advertising agency N. W. Ayer of Philadelphia with the idea that Sheeler would take a series of photos as to promote the imminent release of Ford’s new Model A car. Specifically, Sheeler was recommended for the job by Vaughn Flannery, N. W. Ayer’s art director who had long been keeping track of Sheeler’s work. As Smith asserts, for Vaughn,
The aim of this campaign was not only to sell the car as a more refined, aesthetically pleasing, and thus 'modern' model; it sought also to reshape consciousness of Ford Company modernity itself, to update it, adjust it to the shift toward the newer modernity... Susan Filin Yeh has explored the Sheeler-Flannery connection in detail, concluding that the art director 'sought to create a glamorous image for the Ford Company by touting the aesthetic side of industry.'

The photo series that Sheeler produced in fulfillment of this process were widely circulated—sometimes as advertisements and sometimes as art objects. Smith notes “these [Sheeler’s Model A campaign] photographs were, in 1928 and 1929 printed in a variety of popular magazines - *Vanity Fair, Life, USA* - as well as photography magazines - *Transition, Creative Art.*” Again, like Bel Geddes’ *Futurama*, these images were at once commercial and artistic, pragmatic and theatrical. Sheeler was presenting (and dramatizing) American industry, according to his own beliefs and according to the agenda of his client; there was little conflict between the two. In fact, as Smith points out, they were mutually in service of one another: “an industry without producers, process, or product—this is Sheeler's promise—an industry of image, look, an abstract domain, a suitably clear background for the pure act of consumption of the sign to be sold, the Model A.” This abstracted purification of the industrial landscape permeates Sheeler’s work, embodying precisely the problematic of the Machine Age visual culture. It was a perspective that idealized the industrial landscape, editing out the mess and strife, the wastes and the workers. By stripping modern industry of these integral components of its mechanics, Sheeler’s Machine Age imagery edited out every perspective but that of the industrialists (like Ford) who eagerly consumed, promoted, and often commissioned his artwork.

Sheeler, after the 1927 Model A commission for Ford, would return to the subject of the Ford River Rouge plant out of his own artistic curiosity and investment in the project of imaging America’s industrial modernity. These paintings, perhaps more so than the photos he took on commission, dramatize the Machine Age metropolis he wanted to celebrate with and communicate to others. Smith describes the literal and symbolic content of these works at length in his book *Making the Modern*:

Two paintings of the Rouge by Sheeler have come to symbolize American Industry triumphant. Although they are both relatively small (24 x 31 inches and 25 x 32 1/4 inches respectively), *American Landscape* (1930) and *Classic Landscape* (1931) attempt something major - indeed, the iconic force stated in their titles. 'Landscape' - each is a view of a section of the world in which everything perceivable has been created by man or is controlled by man… The paintings present this new world, unassimilable by previous genre such as cityscape, even by the view from an airplane, and, just in their titling, they attempt to replace previous landscapes in as resolute a way as Ford processing transforms the raw materials of nature. A new, different, but equally total, natural order is proclaimed. 'American' - this new order is a national one… only [in] the United States has such a radical transformation occurred. 'Classic' - the transformation is an aesthetic one as well; it has produced a kind of calm harmony equivalent to that of Greek art, reminiscent of the grandeur and changelessness of Egyptian monuments.339

Through the framing of his titles and the qualities of the paintings themselves – the hard lighting, tight framing, sharp geometric lines, muted colors, and absence of people – Sheeler begins to present a new synthetic, industrial order that is monumental in its comprehensiveness and scale. Furthermore, by placing them in the category of ‘landscape’ he is implicitly suggesting that this new human-made order is dominating or replacing the former (natural) world order. But, what is perhaps most telling about these awe-inspiring (and terrifying) images of Machine Age modernity is that, the *people* are excluded from their own landscape – as Smith calls to our

attention, "the paintings... repress, like most of the 1927 photographs, the labor power which is working the plant being pictured." A writer at the New York Daily Worker, a worker’s party magazine, took note of this tendency and suggested somewhat snidely that Sheeler’s images represented an industrialist’s utopia, “pure and uncontaminated by any trace of humans or human activities, an industrialist's heaven where factories work themselves.” And, he was, in no small part, correct – Sheeler was depicting an industrialist’s utopia. Indeed, Bel Geddes’ Futurama can be understood as an industrialist’s utopia as well. The utopic Machine Age metropolis that seemingly stole America’s heart in the 30s and 40s was couched in the terminology of populism and even democratic socialism – but it was still, at its core, a middle-class, entrepreneurial vision that catered to a middle-class ‘public.’ The nouveau riche stood to benefit the most from this utopia and they were the ones backing it. Smith points out just this phenomena proclaiming, “the creator of this man-made landscape is Man; but the first to concretize the abstraction are… Henry Ford in particular and industrialists in general, followed by their architect-engineers, their managerial planners. The Daily Worker writer is quite right: undeniably, a class-dominant way of seeing structures these pictures.” Ford was certainly no exception – the epitome of the nouveau riche himself, he consistently articulated this classed vision of the Machine Age metropolis in terms of populism and, more generally, in terms of the American cultural myth of social mobility, freedom, and the pursuit of the frontier. For instance, when Ford was questioned about the title of his 1956 pamphlet ‘Freedom of the American Road,’ he explained, "because we Americans

341 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), 122.
342 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), 122.
always like plenty of elbow room—freedom to come and go as we please in this big
country of ours."343

Ford couldn’t have asked for a better city in which to demonstrate this attitude
— this pursuit of elbowroom and bigness. Detroit’s geography posed few if any
constraints on the whims of its human stewards. There was practically no elevational
change across the full expanse of the city, there were no major waterways penetrating
the central city, and there was fertile soil that held foundations well across most of the
city. Sugrue comments on this featureless topography explaining that,

In a large, amorphous twentieth-century city like Detroit, there were few
visible landmarks to distinguish one neighborhood from another. But residents
imposed onto the city’s featureless topography all sorts of invisible
boundaries—boundaries shaped by intimate association, by institutions (like
public-school catchment areas or Catholic parish boundaries), by class, and,
most importantly by race.344

This meant that, without imposed definition, the city’s neighborhoods and districts
bled into one another producing multiple contested borders and layered affiliations.
This lack of definition and clarity of the social geography of the city led to a low-
lying tension and undermined strong ties to place. Sugrue notes that, “as the invisible
boundaries within Detroit frayed, whites continued to flee from the city”345 to
suburban communities “whose boundaries were firmly established and
governmentally protected, unlike their urban counterparts who had to define and
defend their own fragile borders.”346 But, not all the human-imposed boundaries were
invisible: some were in plain sight. Without pre-existing geological variation, the
infrastructure of Detroit’s industrial landscape – its rail and road networks – became

343 Lewis, Divided Highways (1997), 123.
345 Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis (1996), 266.
some of the city’s most meaningful and enduring social boundaries. Railroad lines and highways provided the hard boundaries Detroit’s natural features never provided, and they were used consciously to produce boundaries that would be ‘useful’ to the city.

In Detroit, like in almost any other American city, the highway was understood as a tool of urban renewal. Thus, Detroit’s raze-and-rebuild rhetoric was not, in itself, more brutal or extreme than that of its peers. As Sugrue notes,

The centerpiece of Detroit’s postwar master plan was the clearance of ‘blighted areas’ in the inner city for the construction of middle-class housing that it was believed would revitalize the urban economy. Like most postwar cities, Detroit had high hopes for slum removal. City officials expected that the eradication of ‘blight’ would increase city tax revenue, revitalize the decaying urban core, and improve the living conditions of the poorest slum dwellers.347

Jon Miller, a resident of Detroit’s ‘Mexicantown’ neighborhood, shares much the same understanding of the city’s approach to highway building in the postwar years. In speaking about his own neighborhood in relation to the highway I-75 that cut it off from the Detroit River to the south, Jon Miller explained that,

For Detroit’s city planning office, the highways were a tool for slum removal. The idea is that areas of the freeway could be developed as industrial, that the freeway could be used to divide uses. The intent was to eliminate the community on the south side of I-75.348

However, Detroit’s rhetoric of auto-driven modernism and (middle class, white) social progress was too strong to permit dissent. Detroit had, by mid-century, developed a racial and economic power imbalance that effectively silenced dissent throughout the highway-building project. Following the Great Migration of black

348 Jon Miller, Detroit Highway History and Experience as Resident of Southwest Detroit/Mexicantown, Phone Interview, August 2012.
agricultural workers from southern plantation and sharecropping work to northern manufacturing and industrial work, the white working class of northern cities like Detroit became increasingly defensive of their jobs and neighborhoods, fearing that they would be overpowered, replaced or excluded by the influx of work-ready blacks. As a result, blacks were consistently marginalized by their white coworkers, neighbors and supervisors in order to keep them ‘in their place’ and guard against the loss of white privilege. Sugrue alludes to this silencing of already marginalized dissenters in his description of the city planners’ disregard for the interest of the black communities that frequently lay ‘in the way’ of this utopic white-collar modernity planners hoped to bring about.

Detroit's city planners promised that the system of cross-city expressways would dramatically improve the city's residential areas, as well as bolster the city's economy. [However,] for the thousands of blacks who lived in the path of Detroit's first expressways, both promises were false. Detroit's highway planners were careful to ensure that construction of the new high-speed expressways would only minimally disrupt middle-class residential areas, but they had little such concern for black neighborhoods, especially those closest to downtown. Instead, they viewed inner-city highway construction, in Detroit as in other major American cities, North and South, as 'a handy device for razing slums.'

The callus single-mindedness and racist classicism of this highway-building project has, in Detroit, come to be synonymous with Black Bottom. The brutal destruction of the once-thriving Black Bottom community has been forever inscribed in Detroit’s collective memory. Like the South Bronx in New York, Black Bottom is remembered by Detroiter’s as a community sacrificed to the altar of modernity. And like the Bronx, Black Bottom remains a commonly understood reference and a rallying cry for resistance and dissent against the modernist project of highway construction, and in

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particular against the racist undertones of that project.

The painful story of Black Bottom’s erasure was, consistently, the first story I was told by residents when I inquired in the summer of 2012 about Detroit’s relationship to its highways. In particular, I recall the rambling, impassioned testimonials of Josephine and Tony. Now living together at Spalding Court in North Corktown, they have both lived in Detroit, below the poverty line, their whole lives. It didn’t take long before I discovered that both of their parents were evicted from Black Bottom by the postwar freeway construction. Tony recalls Black Bottom as being full of black businesses; businesses that still haven’t recovered or reappeared in the same numbers. In particular, he recalled growing up in a neighborhood full of black business owners, mourning the absence of that kind of neighborhood, a kind that doesn’t exist anywhere in Detroit anymore. Tony’s recollection is confirmed by the statistics included in the 1996 article ‘Michigan History – Paradise Valley and Black Bottom’ –

By 1920, African-Americans owned 350 businesses in Detroit, including a movie theater, the only black-owned pawn shop in the United States, a co-op grocery and a bank. The [Black Bottom] community also had 17 physicians, 22 lawyers, 22 barber shops, 13 dentists, 12 cartage agencies, 11 tailors, 10 restaurants, 10 real estate dealers, eight grocers, six drug stores, five undertakers, four employment offices, a few garages and a candy maker. He impressed upon me the predictable injustice of this erasure emphasizing that Black businesses were wiped out by the freeway and have never recovered. More than thirty years after this government-sponsored erasure of the heart of Detroit’s Black community, Tony was still visibly upset by this loss. Thus, Black Bottom

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has become the backdrop, the cultural legacy of highway construction in Detroit. Its emotional vestiges and racialized resonances continue to code the discussion around highway infrastructure and urban segregation in the city of Detroit.

Sugrue, once a resident of Detroit, who was also intimately acquainted with the collective narrative of Black Bottom’s erasure, went to great lengths to illustrate the process by which this once strong community was scattered to the winds. I have not come across a more candid, balanced or compassionate account of this process in my conversations or in my readings and so I will let his words speak for themselves.

Sugrue describes this loss as follows:

Beginning in the late 1940s, the most densely populated sections of black Detroit were devastated by highway construction. The Oakland-Hastings (later Chrysler) Freeway blasted through the black Lower East Side, Paradise Valley, and the Hastings Street business district, wiping out many of the city's most prominent African American institutions, from jazz clubs to the Saint Antoine branch of the YMCA. The John C. Lodge Freeway cut through the Lower West Side, the increasingly black area bordering Twelfth Street, and the heavily black neighborhoods bordering Highland Park. The Edsel Ford Freeway, an extension of 'Bomber Road' which connected Detroit to the Willow Run defense complex west of the city, bisected the black West Side, and cut through the northernmost fringe of Paradise Valley.

Left behind was what one black businessman called a 'no man's land' of deterioration and abandonment. The announcement of highway projects came years before actual construction. Homeowners and shopkeepers were trapped, unable to sell property that would soon be condemned, unable to move without the money from a property sale. Building owners had no incentive to invest in improvements. An enormous number of buildings were condemned and leveled to make way for the new expressways. By 1950, 423 residences, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 vacant lots had been condemned for the first three-mile stretch of the Lodge Freeway from Jefferson to Pallister; by 1958, the Lodge Freeway from its terminus in downtown Detroit to Wyoming Avenue (about 7 miles) displaced 2,222 buildings. Similar destruction cleared the path for the Edsel Ford Expressway: in the 1950s about 2,800 buildings were removed for its construction….

Black residents of the expressway construction areas often pointed to the folly of highway plans, but few government officials took their complaints
seriously. They had little political power in a majority white city… Mayor Albert Cobo, the city's most ardent supporter of the new expressway system (and a Republican who was elected with virtually no black support), discounted the hardship wrought by construction: 'Sure there have been some inconveniences in building our expressways and in our slum clearance programs, but in the long run more people benefit. That's the price of progress.'

These final words epitomize the relentless rhetoric of social progress that not only catalyzed this mass destruction of already marginalized spaces, but also, in a large part contributed to their symbolic erasure. There was no language with which the marginalized population of Black Bottom could assert their distinct value to American modernity; its very language dismissed and devalued their contribution to it. Furthermore, in the years following the eviction and resulting diaspora of Black Bottom’s residents, the memory of that community—of its structure and its internal life—was also scattered and thus its contribution to American culture largely forgotten.

In an attempt to resurrect this memory of Black Bottom’s role in America’s history, The Detroit News published an article in 1996 on the cultural mainstays and famous figures of this community. After reminding her readers of the location of Black Bottom on the near east side of downtown, Vivian Baulch described the celebrities that called Black Bottom (or Paradise Valley as it was also called) home: “By 1936, the name Paradise Valley was firmly established and the neighborhood had its own informal mayor, Roy Lightfoot. The community also had its heroes like Olympic star Jesse Owens, whose visit to the Valley inspired a celebration. And of course there was heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, the Valley's favorite son....” Baulch then goes on to list the stars—both Detroits and visiting acts, many

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of whom were based out of Harlem—that performed regularly at Black Bottom’s much-loved Paradise Theater:


And, finally, Baulch concludes her grand tour of Black Bottom’s heyday with a description of the equally celebrated Gotham Hotel:

Around the corner from the Paradise Theater was the elegant Gotham Hotel. The nine-story, 200-room inn was built in 1924 by Albert Hartz, who sold it to John J. White and Irving Roane in 1943. The entrepreneurs soon turned it into a social center for Detroit's African-American community... Famous visitors at the Gotham Hotel included Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, Adam Clayton Powell, Langston Hughes, Sammy Davis and Billie Holiday.354

It was this kind of vibrant community that was scattered and silenced by the highway building project and its accompanying rhetoric of Machine Age modernity and social progress. And it was the loss of this kind of community that fueled the riots of the 1960s and 70s. Even Michigan Governor George Romney admitted that, "freeway construction in Detroit was a major cause of that city's 1967 riot."355

The rage against Detroit’s highway building project, and its iconic auto-centric functionalist modernity slowly penetrated the walls of academia in the 60s and

70s, gradually becoming assimilated into the emerging literature of protest against technocratic Machine Age modernity. For example, in 1963, Lewis Mumford spoke out in opposition to Detroit’s iconic brand of modernity, a brand of modernity that excluded and marginalized the very populations on which the city’s industrial reputation rested. Mumford spoke of Detroit as a model towards which America’s smaller cities worked, blaming these cities’ blind imitation of this model on Detroit’s iconic Machine Age modernity. Mumford warned, "If they don't want the motorcar to paralyze urban life, they must abandon their fantastic commitment to the indecently tumescent chariots they have been putting on the market…it is absurd to make over the city to fit the swollen imaginations of Detroit... Why should our cities be destroyed just so that Detroit's infantile fantasies should remain unchallenged and unchanged?"356 This question would arise again and again in different guises. It was, fundamentally, a questioning of our yielding to the visionary power of the Machine Age metropolis; it was a questioning of the value of the modernist project and an expression of an emerging dissatisfaction with the supposed utopia it had built around us.

The Consequences of the Symbolic City

"The Big Plans [or metaphysical fancies] that people generate compete with one another, which means that the execution of any particular one may require a measure of force or fraud. When imposed, they often have unintended consequences, or consequences that were intended but not advertised at the outset. Big Plans have a way of becoming ends in themselves. And not infrequently, they contain the seeds of their own destruction."\(^{357}\)


The Machine Age utopia presented in Bel Geddes’s *Futurama* at the 1939 New York World’s Fair was a vision that assumed consensus – a consensus that could cut across class, race, and region; a consensus that was meaningful and healthy. And, in the years immediately following *Futurama’s* striking dramatization of this utopia, there was something approaching this kind of consensus. But it was a fragile, unstable consensus that fragmented not long after it formed…and some would argue, even as it formed. As Innes notes in his book *Designing Modern America*, antagonism and suspicion permeated the World’s Fair atmosphere even as it celebrated America’s wholehearted embrace of the Machine Age: "Despite Gallup polls showing that most of the unemployed believed that they had been displaced from their jobs by machines (suggesting a certain popular antagonism to an event like the World's Fair that promised a vast extension of technology) or excluded by high ticket prices (63 percent of those who stayed away said they could not afford it), 'the people' were front and center in many of the exhibits."\(^{358}\) Instead of engaging with and validating this popular antagonism to the extension of technology into all aspects of life, the

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\(^{358}\) Innes, *Designing Modern America* (2005), 121-122.
elite of the Machine Age dismissed and devalued this perspective in the hopes that it would disappear. But it persisted and permeated the entirety of America’s Machine Age modernity. And so, in moments when this popular antagonism seemed too powerful, America’s elite, out of an intense desire to maintain this mythical modern consensus, would actively manipulate public opinion, silence dissent, and marginalize conflicts that deserved center stage.

This failure to engage with conflict in a productive way was a hallmark of Modernist planning – while the unwavering confidence of the modern engineer and planner contributed to the allure of their plans, it ultimately produced simplistic and out-of-touch solutions to the complex problems of modern urbanity. In his book *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman characterizes this modernist simplifying/ordering impulse as a ‘flattening’ of modernism:

If we listen closely to twentieth-century writers and thinkers about modernity and compare them to those of a century ago, we will find a radical flattening of perspective and shrinkage of imaginative range. Our nineteenth-century thinkers were simultaneously enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions; their self-ironies and inner tensions were a primary source of their creative power. Their twentieth-century successors have lurch ed far more toward rigid polarities and flat totalizations. Modernity is either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm, or else condemned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt; in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith, incapable of being shaped or changed by modern men. Open visions of modern life have been supplanted by closed ones, Both/And by Either/Or.359

Berman is arguing here that the twentieth century conceptualization of modernity was a flattened, closed version of its nineteenth century predecessor, and that its understanding of modern society was equally two-dimensional and monolithic. Berman goes on to explain that “Modernism... tends to posit a model of modern

society as one that is in itself devoid of trouble. It leaves out all the 'uninterrupted disturbances of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation' that have for two hundred years been basic facts of modern life."\(^{360}\) James Holston elaborates on this point in his 1999 essay “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” pointing out the gaping holes obscured by the overconfidence of modernist planners:

Modernist planning does not admit or develop productively the paradoxes of its imagined future. Instead, it attempts to be a plan without contradiction, without conflict. It assumes a rational domination of the future in which its total and totalizing plan dissolves any conflict between the imagined and the existing society in the imposed coherence of its order. This assumption is both arrogant and false. It fails to include as constituent elements of planning the conflict, ambiguity, and indeterminacy characteristic of actual social life. Moreover, it fails to consider the unintended and the unexpected as part of the model.\(^{361}\)

Indeed, this attempt to suppress, to overpower conflict would be the ultimate downfall of Modernist planning practice.

Modernism failed to productively engage with the paradoxes of modernity: the clarity of speed and the amorphous landscapes it produces, the opportunity for better quality of life and the increasing of disparity in access to that betterment, etc. Instead, twentieth century modernists attempted to resolve and reduce these paradoxes to a singular, coherent and uniform modernity, leaving no choice but rebellion for those who took issue with this singular vision. As Matthew Gandy points out in his 2002 book, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, the paradoxes, conflicts and antagonisms that had been swept under the rug for decades would finally emerge en-masse in the 60s and 70s, gaining momentum and confidence from one another. Gandy writes,

During the 1960s the construction of urban parkways began to open up a conflict between the centralized engineering-dominated ethos behind infrastructural development and growing demands for greater public participation in urban policy making. Urban planning faced the disintegration of the kind of putative ‘public interest’ that had sustained the ideal of comprehensive urban renewal through large-scale investments in infrastructure. Planners themselves increasingly recognized that ‘the ideal of master planning’ was illusory and began to explore ways of bolstering their legitimacy through wider public consultation. Yet American society was becoming more divided and fragmentary in the mid-1960s, which contributed to the growing marginalization of urban planning. In the wake of the Harlem and Los Angeles ghetto riots, planners could no longer conceive of the public interest as an unproblematic dimension to spatial and technological rationalization.362

So, if Gandy is right that, by the 1960s, “planners could no longer conceive of the public interest as an unproblematic dimension” then, was it really true that they could legitimately conceive of the public in this way before the 1960s? While it is true that ‘the public’ found its voice in the 60s, there were many indications throughout the 30s, 40s and 50s that ‘the public’ was not monolithic in any way—that it was, in fact the publics, plural, and that the vision of a utopic Machine Age modernity was only truly a utopia for a very small swath of those publics.

One such indication can be seen in the conflicting representations of the Ford River Rouge plant in its heyday in the 30s. The best known (and the dominant) of these two representations is that of Sheeler, as I described above, and yet there is another representation of the Rouge, completed around the same time, that paints a wholly different picture, that throws a cog in the wheel of Sheeler’s enshrined pictorial authority. Sheeler’s perspective on modernity, as articulated in his 1927 photographs of the River Rouge plant and his 1930/31 paintings that followed from them, was celebrated at the time and continues to be among the most prominent

362 Gandy, Concrete and Clay (2002), 139.
representations of the material culture of the Machine Age. Diego Rivera, however, was the author of an equally comprehensive and penetrating portrait of Detroit’s modern industry: the 1932-33 mural series *Portrait of Detroit* (or *Detroit Industry*), commissioned by Edsel Ford (son of Henry Ford) and installed at the Detroit Institute of Art.\(^{363}\) Rivera’s portrait of Detroit, however, is not nearly as widely recognized as a significant contribution to modern American visual culture. This lack of recognition and incorporation into the narrative of American art-making is no mistake—the relative marginalization of this imagery, and its corresponding ideological perspective on modernity, is a product of deliberate campaigns to constrain its influence.

Around the same time that Rivera was asked by Edsel Ford to depict Detroit’s industrial identity at the DIA, Rivera was also commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller to do a mural for the new Rockefeller Center development in New York.\(^{364}\) Both the New York and Detroit murals sparked enormous controversy at their unveiling in the early 1930s, and both were, as a result, swiftly marginalized by the very same people who had once commissioned them, Nelson Rockefeller and Edsel Ford. The marginalization, however, was achieved by radically different means: Rockefeller physically destroyed the mural (thus marginalizing Rivera’s perspective through erasure) and Ford rendered it impotent with his pointed advertising campaigns promoting the aspects of modernity Rivera’s mural critiqued and questions (thus marginalizing Rivera’s perspective through domination and replacement). Terry Smith explains their tactics of marginalization in his book *Making the Modern*:

> What Nelson Rockefeller and his architects achieved with hammers, Edsel Ford managed by the most modern of means - the advertising campaign. Both


reasserted the power of their class over cultural definition at a time when that power was profoundly threatened. Both attempted to counter and contain public antipathy by popularizing some of their domains… It can be shown that, in the case of the Rivera murals, Ford succeeded where Rockefeller failed… The Detroit controversy, I argue, was a classic instance of manipulating public opinion, of co-opting radical discontent through organizing its expression in a controlled way.\textsuperscript{365}

The question then becomes, what about Rivera’s twin murals were so threatening as to push Ford and Rockefeller to clamp down on them so powerfully? What about Rivera’s imagery embodied this volatile and radical discontent with the modernist project of industrial development and highway building that both Ford and Rockefeller depended on for their livelihood and worldview? While Rivera’s murals did not explicitly comment on highways or automobility, his representations of industry visually destabilized the assumptions on which the highway project depended through his rejection of the Machine Age aesthetic.

Sheeler’s stripped aesthetic of clean lines, hard lighting, and sharp, abstracted geometries embodied the essence of Machine Age modernity, including that modernity’s exclusion of the manpower that animated it. Sheeler and his peers were adept at editing out the “crowds, clamor, filth, and confusion” of modern life.\textsuperscript{366} This pointed exclusion of an imagery of human messiness is explained by Theresa Carbone in her 2011 essay ‘Silent Pictures: Encounters with a Remade World’ as an effort to embrace or celebrate an alien modernity that was often uncomfortable and abrasive. Carbone explains that artists in the 1920s and ‘30s, and citizens in general, oscillated between a “brave embrace” of and a “visceral revulsion” towards the new

\textsuperscript{365} Smith, \textit{Making the Modern} (1994), 236-237.
“scale, speed and sound” of the industrializing, urbanizing world. Sheeler and his crew, however, chose to represent only one side of this pendulum – the brave embrace – and to exclude the experiences of ‘visceral revulsion’ that came hand in hand with moments of brave embrace. James N. Rosenberg commented on this tendency to represent the fantasy and not the reality of industrialized urban life in his 1920 review of a New York art show, announcing, “it seems to me that American art shrinks from contact with American life.” And perhaps he was right because, as Carbone points out, "when American artists...did engage industry and the city in their work, they omitted the sweating men and urban crowds." Thus, the images circulated of American industry increasingly pulled away from the messy reality that was its source material, becoming instead an abstracted fantasy that fueled a misguided, and unbridled enthusiasm for the modernist project. Malcom Cowley, an American writer who served on the Western Front for much of World War I, described this gap between the reality and fantasy of American industry as follows: “in Europe we [learned] to regard the dragon of American industry as a picturesque and even noble monster; but [for] our friends at home...the dragon blotted out the sky...all they could see was the scales of its belly, freshly alemited [oiled/greased] and enameled with Duco [an automobile lacquer].”

Rivera was to provide the counterpoint to Sheeler’s stripped, monumental, and monolithic modernity. Rivera’s modernity was a teeming, dynamic, and layered modernity. As Smith explains in *Making the Modern*,

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So the stage is set for a contrast, even a dramatic confrontation, with implications on all the levels of meaning which we have been considering. In one corner, Modernism accumulates a reductive, cool, abstract styling, a 'pure' formality, a concentration on means rather than ends. It evokes the new industrial age, the dreams of the *nouveau riche*, the shaping of a dominant new order, a seamless unity, compelling and total. Clustering in the other corner around the concept of Realism is an equally monolithic regime dedicated to everything other, in opposition: a battling place for the multiplicity of life, for the right of all to satisfying experiences of work and leisure, the democratic openness of the usually unpainted workers, a call to struggle, an avowedly Communist artist. Sheeler and Rivera suddenly become representatives of two contending artistic, cultural, social, even political orders, whose struggle for supremacy marks fundamentally the development of art since the mid-nineteenth century.\(^{371}\)

Sheeler and Rivera’s conflict was a visual and ideological one, not a personal one.

And yet, Rivera’s images would, if examined closely, systematically undermine every last assumption on which Sheeler, and Ford’s—and Rockefeller, Moses, Disney and Bel Geddes’—modernity rested. Smith explains,

Rivera strove to project an unforgettable image of the nature of modern industry—its prehistory, its birth, its present structure, and its future... He recognized the emergence, in the 1920s, of a globalizing imagery of modernity, that he saw it was taking its strongest form in the United States, that it was essentially tied to the imaging of modern industrial production, and that it was the expression of a dynamic yet alienating economic, social, and political order. He was, of course, scarcely alone in such a perception. His response was, however, exceptional. He set out both to absorb the irresistible inventive energy of this emergent imagery of industrial modernity and to add to it two other contrary kinds of energy. These were, first, an insistence on organic ancientness of industry itself; and, second, a related emphasis on the primacy and the persistence of physical work as still central to industrial production. Without in any sense being reactionary, Rivera was cutting against the mechanist, consumerist grain of modernizing industry in the United States. Nor did he accept the visual imagery which had, by 1929, evolved to most effectively project the new modernity: the clean, white walls, the subtle shadows, the eternal silences, the celebration of objects, the displacement of workers, strife and ambiguity, the controlled power of the picturing of industrial plant by Charles Sheeler.\(^{372}\)

Thus, it was Rivera’s inclusion of the natural and the human in the imaging of Machine Age modernity that was so threatening to Ford and Rockefeller. By re-establishing these ties to human civilization throughout the ages, Rivera articulated a continuity, rather than a breakage with this common lineage and so debunked the magnetic newness of Machine Age modernity. As Smith explains, “Rivera's outlook was, in sum, essentially historical, that is, about human growth through work and struggle.”373

Rivera, by emphasizing the values of pre-modern society that have carried over and continued to guide modern society, positioned modernity as an extension rather than an invention and in so doing downplayed the status of the ‘inventor,’ the ‘entrepreneur,’ and the ‘engineer’ and re-emphasized the role of human labor as an indispensable constant. Thus, for Rivera the factory was not “a clean-lined, self-replicating through-put system” but rather, “a set of great machines attracting workers to service it like drone bees: the assembly line reaps labor power, like a combine harvester.”374 This re-establishment of labor power as a constituent element of capitalism, rather than merely the inventor and the machine, was profoundly threatening to the industrialists as it forecasted dynamic struggle of a community rather than the locked-in balance of a factory. As Smith explains, “Rivera's insistence on the fundamental equivalent of men and machine power is fundamental to his conception, but it is one which sees these two forces as in dynamic struggle under capitalism, a disequilibrium not a fictive balance.”375 In sum, Rivera’s work rejected the flattening of modernity, the repression of conflict, and the marginalization of the

373 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), __.
375 Smith, Making the Modern (1994), 221.
worker. As Smith puts it, “as a mural cycle, *Detroit Industry*, in its fluid excesses, its solid obviousness, its unevenness, its absences, seems to invite the containment of generalization.”\(^{376}\)

This hard-nosed generalization of modern experience would endure for more than two decades beyond Rivera’s prophetic 1932 *Detroit Industry* mural. However, when the voices of academia finally chimed in on this half-century of increasing repression of dissent, they were harsh and unforgiving. There are any number of quotes that could illustrate this slow emergence of academic outrage but, for the sake of brevity, I will only include two. Helen Leavitt, author of the 1970 book *Superhighway — Superhoax* was one of these voices, proclaiming:

> When the...freeway blasts its way into the heart of cities where people live and want to continue to live, the effect is not progress and speed, but destruction. Freeways isolate non-auto owners, as happened in the Watts district of Los Angeles, where the ghetto area was sealed off by highways. Freeways take living quarters, tightening up valuable land, destroying established neighborhoods. Untrammeled freeway construction in urban areas is exacerbating the very crisis in our cities we are hoping to allay.\(^{377}\)

Lewis Mumford echoed this same concern for the health and well being of those who lived in rather than passed through America’s cities: “We cannot have an efficient form for our transportation system until we can envisage a better permanent structure for our cities. And the first lesson we have to learn is that the city exists, not for the facile passage of motorcars, but for the care and culture of men.”\(^{378}\) These voices of delayed academic outrage, however, came as this ‘utopic’ Machine Age modernity was approaching completion—when the interstate highway system was nearing the nationwide network envisioned in Bel Geddes’ 1939 *Futurama*—and so they took on


\(^{378}\) Mumford, “The Highway and the City” (1963), 107.
more the tone of lament, of mourning, than of protest. This tone of resentment and
downtrodden loss can be heard echoing through Tom Lewis’s 1997 book *Divided
Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*: "Like
citizens of other civilizations, we profess to cherish stability...while relentlessly
celebrating our mobility." America had finally begun to realize that, despite all our
enthusiasm for mobility and speed, we still wanted a place to return to where we
could put down roots. Only, by the time we began to recognize this need for
foundation, for rootedness, we had already lost much of our soil to the expressways
that allowed us to leave that soil in the first place.

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Cleveland’s Not-Quite Futurama

But there are places in America where not quite so much of this soil was lost, where the utopian visions of Machine Age modernity did not hold quite the same unquestioned authority. This is the quiet triumph of America’s second-tier cities: these cities, because they were not in the limelight and did not have the same pressure to perform modernity for an international audience, they did not lose quite so much of their urban fabric to the misguided enthusiasm for mobility and devaluing of emplacement. While many of these ‘second-tier’ cities, Cleveland included, were still prosperous, desireable, and well-respected, they were not the locus of popular culture or innovation in the same way ‘first-tier’ cities like Detroit and New York were. Cleveland was one of these ‘second-tier’ cities which were saved the suffering of cities subjected to more aggressive symbolic agendas.

Cleveland is a steel town, a city that grew up around the messy modernity of the first industrial revolution. The city’s behemoth steel mills and all their accompanying industries line the banks of the windy Cuyahoga River that snakes its way down the central north-south axis of the city, just west of downtown. Its steel, like Pittsburgh’s, was the bones around which derivative modernities grew. Cleveland’s steel became the skeletons of skyscrapers, the frames of automobiles, the spanning beams of factory floors, the scaffolding of Moses’ bridges, and the encasements of his tunnels. Thus, while steel was Cleveland’s original and dominant product, the uses of and markets for that product were diverse and varied meaning that the city’s industry itself diversified over time. And so, while Cleveland was eventually economically handcuffed to the auto industry’s insatiable appetite for
steel, it was culturally disconnected from the auto industry. I do not mean to suggest that Cleveland didn’t aspire to the utopia envisaged by Bel Geddes’ *Futurama* just the way New York and Detroit did, but rather that Cleveland’s elite could not command fragmented public opinion with the same unflinching confidence and authority of New York and Detroit. And so, while Cleveland looked to Detroit as an iconic regional example of industrial modernity, Cleveland’s implementation of the Detroit template deviated from Detroit’s example in important ways. A close study of Cleveland reveals how these ‘iconic’ urban visions shifted as they were appropriated, adopted, and adapted by cities that did not have the same symbolic or iconic agenda as New York or Detroit.

First, it is important to understand the importance of timing – Cleveland missed out on the momentum of *Futurama* because of delayed action. Detroit was already in the midst of clearing neighborhoods and laying down asphalt when, in 1952, the city of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County commissioned New York traffic engineers Knappen, Tippetts, Abbett and McCarthy to undertake an analysis of the traffic needs of the city. By 1955 the engineers’ study had been published and a series of possible solutions laid out.\(^{380}\) All options—A, B, and C—would connect as far East as Boston, as far West as Minneapolis-St. Paul, and South to Charleston, South Carolina and Knoxville, Tennessee without one turn. The East-West I-90/I-80 artery alone would connect Cleveland to Buffalo, New York, to Erie, Pennsylvania, and on to Toledo, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois with only a short jaunt North to arrive in Detroit, Michigan. Some of the largest and most influential industrial centers in

\(^{380}\) Comprehensive arterial highway plan, Cuyahoga County, Ohio. A report to the Board of County Commissioners, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, February, 1955.
America could be seen clustered around this economic lifeline. Cleveland’s highway plans were just as grand and utopian as any when they were hot off the presses. But it wasn’t long before this grand vision was muddied by the complexities and complications at the local level.

The first sign of the rocky road ahead was the attentiveness and advocacy strength of the close-in Eastern suburbs—Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, and Pepper Pike. This constellation of streetcar/garden suburbs was, in and of itself a branch of Machine Age modernity, a brand of futuristic utopia based on community and retreat. Thus, it was, in part Shaker Heights’ own ‘Big Plan’ that bolstered its resistance to the equally big (if not bigger) plan of the interstate highway system. They felt righteous and confident in their patriotic resistance. Shaker Heights residents and their neighbors in Cleveland Heights and Pepper Pike were first made aware of plans to put a highway through their community as early as 1956 but, by 1963 the specific location was made public and it wasn’t long before resistance began to build. Cleveland Heights residents snapped into action and Shaker Heights and Pepper Pike weren’t far behind. One of the many committees formed to prevent the Clark, Lee, and Heights freeways from being built was called Citizens for Sane Transportation and Environmental Politics or CSTEP. One of their advertisements exclaimed, “STOP FREEWAY STUPIDITY… The Highwaymen are at it again! They want to make the Heights Area into an asphalt jungle [reference to 1949 film of that title depicting the city as the locus of crime and the realm of the underclass].

Once more we must stop these destroyers of our homes, parks, lakes, and

Residents showed up in droves at the January 1970 CSTEP meeting to support local representatives as they condemned the highway proposal. A month later, the Ohio Governor, James Rhodes, abandoned the plans for I-290. Marian Morton of the Cleveland Heights Historical Society explains, “Rhodes was no particular friend of historic preservation or the environment; he had earlier proposed an alternate freeway route that would have eliminated most of the homes on Shaker Boulevard. But he was running for the United States Senate and certainly needed friends in these traditionally Republican suburbs.” And so, Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights and Pepper Pike could breath easy. Their organizing power and political clout had managed to spare the Shaker Lakes—a part of Cleveland’s ‘emerald necklace’ of parks, named for its collection of man-made lakes. [MAP]. The beloved park would remain intact and their communities would remain uninterrupted.

But this wasn’t the only challenge or impediment to Cleveland’s highway plans. The topography of the Cuyahoga River Valley posed, at times insurmountable engineering problems for the city’s highway designers and resulted in irregular, winding and absurdly high routes over the dramatic topography of the river valley and industrial geography of the steel mills’ crisscrossing rail and traffic bridges below. However, these physical challenges and impediments to the conventional through-cut recessed or at grade highways built in Detroit meant that Cleveland’s downtown highways are often so high above head that they do not significantly impact the districts over which they soar. Furthermore, the readily accessible supply of steel in the immediate downtown area meant that, unlike most urban highways,

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Cleveland’s downtown highways are largely steel frame rather than concrete masses meaning that, in some locations, they are actually quite open and delicate rather than imposing and wall-like. All these irregularities, ultimately, have afforded Cleveland greater flexibility in reclaiming the urban fabric beneath and around these highway monuments to modernity. Because Cleveland’s downtown highways are mostly elevated, and therefore narrower than Detroit’s recessed and at-grade highways, there was more material left to work with. For example, whereas Black Bottom (the Detroit neighborhood hardest hit by highway construction) was effectively cleared and replaced by the Chrysler Freeway’s broad girth, Tremont (the Cleveland neighborhood hardest-hit by highway construction) was divided into four quadrants and left to reconnect itself. Thus, although Cleveland may have mourned the geographical irregularities and multiple, competing modernities that slowed, distorted, and truncated its idealized highway network (most of the eastern routes were not built), the city is now left with more material from which to regenerate, more soil in which to lay down roots.
“To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be
overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power
to control and often to destroy all communities, values, lives; and yet to be
undeterred in our determination to face these forces, to fight to change their
world and make it our own. It is to be both revolutionary and conservative:
alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the
nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create
and to hold on to something real even as everything melts.”385

-- Marshal Berman in *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience
of Modernity* (1988)

*Futurama* was a catalyst for what would become an inflexible and static techno-
pastoral vision of modernity. But, by the 1960s (and certainly by the 1970s), this
oversimplified modernism was approaching a dead end. Academics, officials, and
urban residents alike were calling for a re-introduction of complexity, ambiguity and
contestation. As Berman points out, this call for diversity and conflict can be seen as
a return to the mixed and multiple layered modernisms of the nineteenth century
claiming, “the difference between the modernist and the anti-modernist... is that the
modernist makes himself at home here [in the paradox of modern life], while the anti-
modern searches the streets for a way out.”386 By this definition, then, the ‘high
modernists’ who heralded in the age of the highway were, in fact, anti-modern. They
sought to resolve, separate and simplify rather than to negotiate and live messy
flexible lives. Berman goes on to explain the fundamental oversight of the modernist
planners who ushered in *Futurama*. Referring here to Brazilian modernist architects

386 Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1988), 162.
Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa, designers of Brasilia, the capital city of Brazil’s imagined utopian modernity, Berman points out:

The great gulf between these [Modernist] hopes and their realization seems to illustrate… [that] it can be a creative adventure for modern men to build a palace, and yet a nightmare to have to live in it. This problem is especially acute for a modernism that forecloses or is hostile to change - or, rather, a modernism that seeks one great change, and then no more. Niemeyer and Costa, following Le Corbusier, believed that the modern architect should use technology to construct a material embodiment of certain ideal, eternal classic forms. If this could be done for a whole city, that city would be perfect and complete; its boundaries might extend, but it would never develop from within. Like the Crystal Palace, as it is imagined in Notes from Underground, Costa and Niemeyer's Brasilia left its citizens—and those of the country as a whole—'with nothing left to do.'

The inflexible resolution of modern life into unchanging concrete and steel forms left little room for adaptation or appropriation out of hopeless idealism and hubris. Born out of their fundamental assumption of a growth consensus, the world’s modernist engineers, architects and planners thought they could predict every need, every demand that would be placed on their structures and designs by the monolithic ‘public.’ They couldn’t have been more wrong, just as they couldn’t have been more confident that they were right.

Thus, the fundamental and self-destructive myth of the Machine Age high modernism is that there was ever a meaningful and stable consensus. While the political and economic consensus ran deep in some sectors of society, it was fundamentally a consensus of the empowered at a time when the disempowered were beginning to find their voice; huge swaths of the American public were not included in the conversations leading up to this consensus and so the consensus was not as stable as it was imagined to be. However, the power of this vision—its American

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387 Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (1988), 7.
language and utopian drama—effectively obscured and marginalized this dissensus for a full generation, for twenty years. As Matthew Gandy puts it in *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*:

> The political turmoil of the 1960s in Europe and North America set in train a complex set of changes in relations between the 'public interest' (as expressed through various government agencies) and alternative perspectives on urban form. The notion of public space became irrevocably problematized in relation to what Jonathan Raban refers to as 'the hypothetical consensus of urban life.' Classic conceptions of the bourgeois public sphere now conflicted with newly emerging social and political realities that placed much greater emphasis on difference, diversity, and market-driven dynamics of cultural change. The very idea of a 'public landscape' was now subject to intense critical scrutiny, leading to open conflict between 'avant-garde' and 'populist' conceptions of urban design.\footnote{Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 15-16.}

Thus, this now-accepted complication of the New Deal and postwar notion that ‘the public interest’ was a coherent and identifiable, singular and monolithic imperative can be understood as a reaction to, among other things, the wave of freeway revolts throughout America. In her 1968 article “Reconciling the Conflict of Highways and Cities,” Pricilla Dunhill asserts “a city's conflict with a highway usually means an internal conflict...it means a city has not yet thrashed out what it wants to be.”\footnote{Lewis, *Divided Highways* (1997), 205. Quoting Pricilla Dunhill, “Reconciling the Conflict of Highways and Cities,” *The Reporter* Vol. 39 no. 3 (February 8, 1968).} I would push this claim further saying the nation’s conflict with the interstate highway system pointed to a (long present) internal conflict in the American psyche: we simply cannot resolve our conflicting desires for mobility and rootedness. And, I would argue, we should not resolve this tension. It is, perhaps, one of the most productive and constructive tensions in the American cultural myth. It is when we sublimate or repress this tension that we veer off-course.
Prominent American landscape architect Lawrence Halprin captures this sense that our enforced postwar consensus has resulted in a loss of balance. Halprin calls for an urgent course-correction proclaiming,

In the process of a single-minded approach to mobility, every other aspect of environmental design has been sacrificed, as though speed and mobility were the only and ultimate justification, with an overriding virtue of their own. As a result, freeways have cut great swaths through urban communities, whole neighborhoods have been sliced in half, parks have been segmented, waterfronts have been cut off from the body of the city, and the intricate, closely woven texture of the city's tapestry has been demolished. 390

This same concern for America’s loss of perspective—its loss of the dynamic tension of mobility and rootedness—is reiterated by Gandy in *Concrete and Clay*. Gandy points in particular to the protests against Robert Moses’ Lower Manhattan Expressway (nicknamed Lomex) and later against Moses’ Westway highway as reassuring course-corrections. Gandy draws particular attention to Jane Jacobs’s role in surfacing this repressed tension, explaining that the re-establishment of a dynamic tension between mobility and rootedness was part of a broader development of a more sophisticated set of strategies and skills for grassroots political lobbying in which Jacobs played a key role. 391 This knowledge base for the articulation of righteous, patriotic dissent had atrophied in the New Deal and postwar years when consensus became the hallmark of American patriotism. The 1960s and ‘70s was like learning to ride a bike for a second time as an adult; America needed to re-learn how to productively articulate and incorporate dissent in our democratic process.

In these years of the ‘culture wars’ as they have been retrospectively dubbed, there was a shifting attitude towards the federal government based on Cold War,

390 Gandy, *Concrete and Clay* (2002), 143.
integration battles, and the Vietnam War, among other national issues. As Tom Lewis notes in his 1997 book *Divided Highways*, “on all fronts, long-held assumptions were being challenged. The technocrats who had spoken with such authority in the twenties...and who had become a standard part of the federal government, suddenly found ordinary citizens asking questions and holding firm convictions about matters that formerly they would have left to ‘experts.’”³⁹² This was a period of time when America was shedding the culture of the expert and the ‘public interest’ of the Great Society government. It was a cultural reckoning in which “confrontation and reassessment became the norm.”³⁹³ Perhaps the most symbolic instance of this questioning of an authority based in the culture of the expert was the emergence of a righteous resistance to the once-visionary, utopic plans of Robert Moses. Lewis captures this moment of reckoning explaining that, “by 1965, some in New York City were beginning to challenge Robert Moses' abilities as master builder and urban problem solver. 'Men have begun to feel that it is safe to question Robert Moses,' said the *New York Post* in an editorial that signaled it would no longer be cowed by the aura of his ability and expertise.”³⁹⁴

And it wasn’t only happening in New York. Across America, the once-unquestioned ‘public interest’ of the interstate highway system was being universally challenged. As noted in a 1970s *New York Times* article entitled ‘Expressway Construction Lags as Officials Heed Urban Outcry’:

> Some 133 miles of the interstate system alone are being held up in 16 cities.... Two-thirds of the [42,500-mile network of Federal superhighways] is open now and most of the rest is under construction, but the achievement of the

recently extended completion goal of 1974 has become extremely doubtful. Here in Philadelphia the expressway is stalled by apparently successful demands of residents that part of it be depressed and covered with a landscaped lid and by the insistence of conservationists that it not damage a wildlife refuge. For similar reasons I-95 has been delayed in Boston, Baltimore and Washington, while in many other cities, such as San Francisco, New York, New Orleans and Milwaukee, other highways considered essential by engineers and planners have been scuttled altogether in response to protests. Roadbuilders are finding it more difficult even to route expressways through parks and poor neighborhoods, for long the line of least resistance. And increasingly vocal protesters are buttressed now by requirements of the 1968 Federal Highway Act that insist upon thorough consideration of human needs, such as adequate relocation housing.\(^{395}\)

Bolstered by the 1968 highway act's requirement of social and environmental sensitivity, residents were finally equipped with the tools to effectively veto the ambitious highway plans that had, for decades, been destroying their communities. As the 1970s \textit{New York Times} article pointed out, this new legislation encouraged people to "scrutinize every proposal much more closely than before."\(^{396}\)

All across the nation, the former champions of the Machine Age metropolis, the once-heroic heralds of Bel Geddes' 1939 \textit{Futurama}, were facing an onslaught of public criticism and rage. And it wasn't just marginalized residents who were 'in the way' of progress; it was academics, professionals, celebrities, artists, mothers, and children.\(^{397}\) In Manhattan, Bob Dylan even joined in the fight. As Anthony Flint writes in \textit{Wrestling with Moses}, "Bob Dylan—not yet the celebrity he would soon become, somewhere between the albums containing the songs 'Blowin' in the Wind' and 'The Times They Are A-changin'-- wrote a protest song about the Lower Manhattan Expressway, listing the melodic street names in the area -- Delancey, Broome, Mulberry -- and provided it to the anti-highway campaigners to sing at

\(^{396}\) Janson, "Expressway Construction Lags" (1970), 51.
\(^{397}\) Flint, \textit{Wrestling With Moses} (2009), 165.
future demonstrations."398 The rhetoric of modernist monumentality and sacrifice in the name of progress was slowly but surely being toppled. Equipped with a now mature language of patriotic, righteous protest, these grassroots protesters wielded an unexpectedly powerful influence.

By the time Robert Moses presented Lomex in its final, most fantastical and desperate incarnation in 1962, he had lost his once untouchable power base. When New York’s city officials realized that they would have to “evict twenty-two hundred families, demolish over four hundred buildings, and relocate more than eight hundred businesses to clear the way” for this fantastical freeway, they decided to forego the staggering price of this “monument to progress.”399

398 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), 155-156.
399 Flint, Wrestling With Moses (2009), xii.
"Cities are plugged into the globe of history like capacitors: they condense and conduct the currents of social time. Their layered surfaces, their coats of painted stucco, their wraps of concrete register the force of these currents both as wear and as narrative. That is, city surfaces tell time and stories. Cities are full of stories in time, some sedimentered and catalogued; others spoorlike, vestigial, and dispersed. Their narratives are epic and everyday; they tell of migration and production, law and laughter, revolution and art. Yet, although obvious, their registry is never wholly legible, because each foray into the palimpsest of city surfaces reveals only traces of these relations. Once lived as irreducible to one another, they are registered as part of the multiplicity and simultaneity of processes that turn the city into an infinite geometry of superimpositions. Their identities, modes, forms, categories, and types recombine in the gray matter of streets. City narratives are, as a result, both evident and enigmatic. Knowing them is always experimental."

--- James Holston (1999) in *Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship*

"Considered as a whole, this society finds itself incomplete. Between the subsystems and the structures consolidated by various means (compulsion, terror, and ideological persuasion), there are holes and chasms. These voids are not there due to chance. They are the places of the possible. They contain the floating and dispersed elements of the possible."

--- Henri Lefebvre (1996), in *The Right to the City*

"The childhood experience that determines spatial practices later develops its effects, proliferates, floods private and public spaces, undoes their readable surfaces, and creates within the planned city a 'metaphorical' or mobile city, like the one Kandinsky dreamed of: 'a great city built according to all the rules of architecture and then suddenly shaken by a force that defies all calculation'"

--- Michel DeCerteau (1984), in *Walking in the City*

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A New Generation, A New Understanding

My generation has inherited the nation for which Futurama was a blueprint. We have inherited the fragmentation and the isolation it imposed much as we have inherited the dynamism it offered and the freedom it allowed. We have inherited Moses’s city and Jacobs’ city, one hitched to the other, neither driving and yet both trying to. This tension between mobility and rootedness is practically inscribed in the surfaces of our highways; the social histories that revolve around and derive from our nation’s highway building project are now embedded in the cultural meaning of the structures themselves. Highways have become a kind of cultural repository for our nation’s tug-of-war between mobility and rootedness: they record the triumph of mobility just as they record the resurgence of rootedness. The continuing negotiation of the highway’s outward form and social purpose maintains this tension in the American cultural myth, layering current contestations on past contestations and new meanings on old meanings, producing and reproducing ever-more hybridized and nuanced symbols of our nation’s polarity and dynamism.

Thus, it is best if we attempt to conceptualize the highway’s cultural meaning not as static and constant but rather as dynamic, evolving, negotiated and contested. The space of the highway is constantly being produced and re-produced by the people who interact with it – highways do not have a fixed stable meaning but rather a meaning that is constantly undergoing processes of contestation and alteration, distortions and accumulations. David Harvey, in his 2007 essay, “Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form,” stresses this need to perceive the city (and all its constituent elements) as the product of intersecting processes. Harvey implores us to
focus on processes rather than things and…think of things as products of processes… [When] we examine dynamics and processes, we may try to do so by conceiving of them as relationships between pre-existing things. But if things too are not pre-existing, but are actually constituted in some way by a process, then you have to have a rather different vision. This transformation in our way of thought seems to me absolutely essential if we are going to get to the heart of what the city is about.  

Thinking in terms of the layering of processes and the dialectical relationship of product and process, we can begin to see the highway as a palimpsest of historical moments and cultural meanings, each partially legible through the fragments of the other. Harvey explains how this notion of a palimpsest – defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain; something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form” – might apply to the city. In Harvey’s words: “different fixed forms have been precipitated out at different historical moments and assume qualities reflective of social processes at work in particular times and places. The result is an urban environment constituted as a palimpsest, a series of layers constituted and constructed at different historical moments all superimposed upon each other.” It the case of the highway, this ‘palimpsest’ is often only evident at the micro scale as the highway structure itself is so durable and dominant (both physically and politically).

There is now two generations of experience with highways in place. A generation of experience with the contestations, adaptations and appropriations of the highway landscape. A generation that has both actively and passively taken part in this layering of meaning and a generation that is well-positioned to understand the

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404 http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/palimpsest
405 Harvey, “Contested Cities” (2007), 228.
multiplicitous and often conflicting meanings ascribed to our nation’s interstate highway system. Harvey continues proposing that, should we accept the notion of the city [or highway] as palimpsest, then a series of questions arise: “how does the life process work in and around all of those things which have been constituted at different historical periods? How are new meanings given to them? How are new possibilities constructed?” I hope to capture this emerging body of experience with the highway as palimpsest, as I have encountered it in Cleveland and Detroit, and articulate how it begins to outline a new approach to urban living in America’s scarred and often abandoned cities.

The State Solution: Highway Modification as Apology

The debate around urban freeways has remained more or less dormant for the last couple decades but is now resurfacing as our nation’s highway infrastructure approaches its half-life, its crumbling concrete forcing us to re-engage with the ideologies that once produced these concrete monoliths. As our generation of activists and policy makers turn their energies to transportation planning with renewed urgency, there has been a re-opening of the debate that once raged between Moses and Jacobs, and indeed between individuals and collectives across the nation. The question of whether to tear down our urban freeways has, in the past two years, been picked up by reporters and urbanists with increasing intensity, even going so far as to get air time on NPR, and page space in Urban Land (the real estate industry’s professional journal). In September, 2010 Neal Peirce, a respected urban expert and author of a syndicated newspaper column, wrote a piece on the teardown movement asking: “Is America ready to tear down more of the elevated expressways that ripped throughout its cities in our post-World War II freeway building boom?” And, indeed, it would seem we are – at least in select locations: only a month after Peirce popped the question, the US Department of Transportation awarded federal stimulus dollars to freeway teardowns in three cities – New York, New Haven and New Orleans – under the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery

408 Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 7-8. Note: Peirce’s column is a syndicated column that is published regularly in over 50 newspapers, starting as far back as 1978. I found this out through this speaker bio: http://www.harrywalker.com/speaker/Neal-Peirce.cfm?Spea_ID=418.
(Tiger II) program. So, what combination of factors have led to such a wild role reversal at the Federal level? Why now?

Raymond Mohl takes a close look at the origins of this tectonic shift in his 2011 article The Expressway Teardown Movement in American Cities: Rethinking Postwar Highway Policy in the Post-Interstate Era. Mohl points first to the very real physical, material need to revisit the products of postwar highway policy – in his words: "now, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the nation's Interstate Highway System has entered a new era in its relatively short half-century life. The system is aging, its bridges collapsing, and its maintenance long deferred. Traffic everywhere overwhelms capacity." As a result, the system “requires massive funding for redesign, repair, and rebuilding” necessitating some form of federal recognition of the problem. Much as the federal government may try to shift responsibility for the system to the states in which each route is located, the federal role in the creation of the Interstate Highway System (HIS) will always implicate the federal government in its continuing maintenance. And so, not surprisingly, “beginning in 2009, federal stimulus funding poured into state highway projects around the nation, financing deferred maintenance, resurfacing, additional lanes, new bridges, and more complex interchanges.” This massive investment in the maintenance of the highway system indicates that, far from being dead and gone, the highway growth consensus that drove the initial construction of the interstate highway system remains a powerful voice in our nation’s political and economic decision making process. As Mohl points out, although “the Interstate Highway

System is in a state of flux… it nevertheless remains essential both to the mobility of the American people and to the health of the American economy.” ⁴¹³

But, now the grassroots ‘place’ and neighborhood lobby is also strong and unafraid to confront the highway lobby. Those advocating for highway teardowns frequently frame the dismantling of our urban freeways as a sort of apology to neighborhoods that were once dismissed and devalued, speaking to a shifting value system that places neighborhood and community health on the same playing field as trade and communications infrastructure. In 2011, Jack Skelley of the Urban Land Institute described freeway teardowns as a way of “knitting back together the many neighborhoods that were ripped apart” by postwar highway building.⁴¹⁴ Similarly, Mohl cites the argument that expressway teardowns offer “a means to redress the imbalance between people and cars, to reclaim portions of cities decimated by highway construction, and to restore more human-scale streetscapes, neighborhoods, and commercial districts.”⁴¹⁵ This is undoubtedly a legacy of the Moses-Jacobs confrontation, the dismissal of the postwar building mantras and the embrace of the counterculture protest movements. In fact, the teardown movement, Mohl asserts, can be understood as a direct extension of Jacobs’ critiques of postwar urbanism.⁴¹⁶ In other words, "the expressway teardown has emerged as a contemporary response to some of the now perceived failures of mid-century urban transportation planning and policy."⁴¹⁷ Mohl continues this train of thought asserting, “the expressway teardown without replacement represented at least a partial rejection of one of the key urban

policy goals of mid-century highway builders—that is, that big expressways through central cities were essential components of modernization, urban redevelopment, and economic growth.\textsuperscript{418} Thus, there has been a kind of flip-flopping: the highway infrastructure that was seen, in the postwar era, as our ticket to urban revitalization is now seen by many as our biggest \textit{barrier} to urban revitalization while pedestrian, bike, public transit and train infrastructure are seen as better investments.\textsuperscript{419}

And so, the debate rages on, picking up right where it left off in the late 70s as the last few links of the interstate highway system were rejected and re-routed by a vocal neighborhood-based opposition to the auto lobby. As Mohl notes, “the increasing number of expressway teardowns…brings into sharp relief the contested nature of urban transportation, the conflict between cars and cities, and the ongoing struggle to revive the nation’s central cities.”\textsuperscript{420} Now the debate has surfaced again with “preservationists, environmentalists, new urbanists, city neighborhood organizations, and a few mayors” questioning the value of automobility and “most state and city officials, political and business interests, highway engineers, and suburbanites” calling for a renewed commitment to \textit{improved} automobility.\textsuperscript{421} “As in the past, automobility remains a key divisive issue. In many ways, the expressway removal movement highlights the continuing ambiguities surrounding the city and the highway, the American people and their automobiles.”\textsuperscript{422} But, the reality is that the most powerful stakeholders are still, more often than not, those that are part of the

\textsuperscript{418} Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 1-3.
\textsuperscript{419} Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 1-3.
\textsuperscript{420} Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 1-3.
\textsuperscript{421} Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 8.
\textsuperscript{422} Mohl, “The Expressway Teardown Movement” (2011), 10.
auto lobby and so, "realistically, no one expects that main-line expressways that carry heavy auto and truck traffic through metropolitan areas will get torn down."\(^{423}\)

But, in select cities where the auto lobby never held quite the same sway, resistance has built to the point that teardowns have become a real alternative to highway maintenance and expansion. "[There has been] a loosely organized national expressway teardown movement at the half-century mark of the Interstate Highway System. The teardown movement stemmed from a fundamental shift in the nation’s transportation politics. A new generation of political and business leaders has recognized that the elevated expressways built in the late 1950s and the 1960s destroyed neighborhood vitality and undermined the urban core.\(^{424}\) This is, however, city by city – not all cities welcome the arguments for teardowns just as not all cities agree to expand or improve freeways that were detrimental to the areas they penetrated. Similarly, the authenticity and genuine intent of these teardowns varies from city to city and highway to highway—much like the mid-century proposals to construct highways, the rhetoric of public good which animates these pleas to dismantle our highway infrastructure is not always matched by admirable motives. We must keep our eyes peeled for signs of the same manipulation of public opinion that once bolstered the highway growth machine as those same techniques may very well be applied to a contemporary anti-highway, train-oriented growth machine and can have just as catastrophic consequences.

New York, not surprisingly, is once again at the forefront of this national shift in transportation politics, hashing out this contested terrain of the urban freeway. New

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York’s first ‘freeway teardown’ actually occurred in the 70s when a 60-foot section of the West Side Highway collapsed causing the highway to be condemned and ultimately demolished – the proposal for its replacement, Westway, was defeated by Jacobs and company, resulting in the demolition of the entire West Side Highway only a half century after it was built. Carrying quite a bit of symbolic weight, the West Side Highway was both the first elevated expressway to be built (construction began in 1920 under Moses) and the first to be torn down. And, as the later freeways begin to approach their half century mark, the New York’s freeway teardown advocates – once lead by Jacobs – are once again invoking her name and calling for demolition without replacement. The city of New York is now seriously considering alternatives to both the elevated Sheridan Expressway and the trenched Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. The Sheridan Expressway in particular, has become, according to the New York Times, “a battleground in a national fight to take urban spaces back from the automobile.” And, as I will argue in the pages to follow, so have all of America’s highways in one way or another. Our highways, as a collection of places, have become important sites for a continuing national debate around the conflicting valuation of mobility and rootedness, infrastructure and community, freedom and intimacy.

Detroit’s Teardown Debate and Gateway Project

Indeed, perhaps one of the most charged debates is occurring in Detroit – our ever-struggling ‘Motor City.’ Not surprisingly, the auto lobby is still impossibly strong in Detroit, reflecting the region’s continuing dependence on and dedication to

automation – culturally, economically, and politically. And so, while New Yorkers can make a potent argument for freeway teardowns (because the public transit infrastructure can absorb a great deal of displaced traffic and there is such intense pressure to use all available land to its maximum potential value), Detroiter have a much harder time making the argument for tearing down the city’s freeways. Detroit has neither the public transit infrastructure nor the land value pressure to drive a freeway teardown decision. As one Detroit-based blogger commented, “Detroit without its freeways is like NYC without its subways.”427 Detroit has not only defined itself by its freeways, it has become dependent on them. As another blogger put it, “freeways bring us parts to make our Mustang’s, Cadillacs, Dodge Trucks, F-150’s, Volts, Focuses, Mazda 6’s as well as get them to markets. Without a way to get these products to market cheaply, there ain’t no Detroit.”428 But, even in the face of this overwhelming bias towards and industrial need for automobility, the debate is present – it is a marginal debate, one that is unlikely to ascend to the level of governmental action in the near future, but it is still a subject of debate. In March of 2010 an internet forum, DetroitYES had a lively cyber debate going on in which all of the classic perspectives were voiced, with a predictable enthusiasm and didacticism on both sides, a predictable sense of urgency, a predictable mix of idealism and resignation, and finally a predictable stalling and standstill after only four days of discussion and 82 posts.429

429 “DetroitYES Forum: Remove Detroit’s Freeways?” (2013). Started by a poster named ‘detroitnerd’ – a clear advocate for freeway removal – the conversation primarily took place between detroitnerd, and posters Bshea, ghettopalmetto, and CassCorridor, each representing distinctive perspectives on the freeway teardown conversation. Detroitnerd and ghettopalmetto were both consistently in agreement and on the side of the freeway teardown movement, Bshea was unconvinced by their arguments, considering freeway teardowns to be brash and impractical, and CassCorridor was more or less in the middle ground.
Detroit has become an important ideological battleground for the national tension between mobility and rootedness in part because it is seen by so many urban planners and enthusiasts as a ‘tabula rasa’ – a place for America to start anew, to get it right, and to demonstrate to a global audience that we, as a nation, can ‘fix’ a city that has become an international symbol of some of our nation’s most catastrophic mistakes of modernity: our overconfidence, our sprawl, our ever-more polarized and volatile race and class relations, our tendency towards monopoly and concentration of power, and our excessive investment in automobility. John Norquist (president of the Congress for the New Urbanism) embodies this common conviction that freeway teardowns prove America’s resilience: after implying that Detroit’s dramatic decline is indicative of our nation’s misguided commitment to automobility, Norquist proclaims: “San Francisco, Portland, New York, and Milwaukee all are deconstructing freeways. All four cities are undoing damage done to them, which points out one characteristic of Americans: We make huge mistakes, but we also correct them.”

By this logic, if the construction of Detroit’s freeways were an archetypal American mistake, their removal would be the archetypal American correction of that mistake. The over-simplicity of Norquist’s argument makes me uneasy—he stops short of describing what would happen to the land freed up by a teardown and seems to imply that the physical removal of these highway structures alone could heal and resolve all the accumulated grievances and resentment of the neighborhoods in which these mid-century highways were built. And, yet, even in Detroit (‘Motor City’), this idea of the teardown as a correction for past mistakes is

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getting some attention. Several contributors to the March 2010 DetroitYES forum articulate a similar vision for Detroit – one in which the freeways are removed and neighborhoods reconnected. DetroitYES contributor Detroitnerd (the one who initiated this online conversation) makes his case for freeway teardowns in Detroit explaining,

Disinvestment is a long-term process. It doesn't happen right away, but as you remove critical services from a city thoroughfare while investing in bypassing it and building new farther and farther away from it, the effect is cumulative… Nobody seems to be saying that removing freeways is a magical "silver bullet" that will turn Detroit into a land of sunshine and soap bubbles. But if we were to build up our rail transit infrastructure while de-emphasizing and perhaps removing some freeways, it could help unite neighborhoods that were cut off from each other.431

Another DetroitYES contributor, ‘ghettopalmetto’ makes a parallel argument claiming,

A funny thing happens in places without freeways: you start building things closer together. So, instead of hopping on the freeway and driving 5 miles to buy a gallon of milk, you walk 5 blocks down the street. Instead of slogging 30 miles to work, maybe you take a bus 3 miles. Amazing, isn't it? It's almost like we forgot how cities functioned for thousands of years, and history began in 1945.432

But, freeway teardown advocates such as Norquist, ‘detroitnerd’ and ‘ghettopalmetto’ are up against a heavyweight competitor – the sustained power of our nation’s auto lobby, and Detroit’s auto lobby in particular, is not to be underestimated. As one Detroiter (DetroitYES screen name BShea) remarked, “the Ilitches [the name of an ambitious Detroit-area developer] would have a far better shot at getting an entirely publicly-funded arena made out of gold before politicians would try to sell taxpayers on the notion of tearing down freeways as a sort of environmental/hyper-local

economic/social justice effort because it would be inconvenient to drive. Never going
to happen.”
Freeway removal, in Detroit, “just seems too politically toxic” according to BShea – and many would agree with him/her.

Instead, we have projects like the Bagley Ave pedestrian bridge, an add-on to the I-75 Gateway Project undertaken by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). The Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge, opening on May 5th, 2010, was meant to reconnect the neighborhood of Mexicantown-Southwest Detroit after over 30 years of being separated by the I-75 onramp to the Ambassador Bridge, an important border crossing for the trucking industry that ushers truck traffic over the Detroit River to Detroit’s sister city of Windsor, Canada. The opening cinco-de-mayo celebration was described on the Facebook event page in terms of this reconnection mission: “CELEBRATE AS EAST MEETS WEST! Please join us on Wednesday, May 5, 2010 at 2:00 p.m. as Detroit's Mexicantown Community is reunited by the opening of the Mexicantown Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge & Plaza, the centerpiece of the MDOT I-75 Gateway Project. The festivities will include a ribbon-cutting ceremony, community art unveiling and Cinco de Mayo festival (which begins at 1:00 p.m.) to salute 200 years of Mexican independence.” But the deliberate emphasis on a reconciliation mission on the part of MDOT did not stop at the Facebook event description – the official literature released as part of the project has the tone of a pleading apology.

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The official report released, entitled *Moving Michigan Forward: Building the MDOT I-75 Gateway Project* opens with the commentary of governor Jennifer M. Granholm, who proclaims, “the new Mexicantown Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge Plaza, with its state-of-the-art cable-stayed pedestrian bridge, reunites east and west Mexicantown; and the inspirational public art project designed by Michigan artist Hubert Massey is truly a community treasure.”

And then she goes on to enumerate some of the reasons [or justifications] for the Gateway Project more generally (as opposed to the pedestrian bridge in particular) including the objective “to improve safety by removing trucks and traffic congestion from local streets near the bridge” as well as the intention of “forging a bond between government and community by creating a public plaza unique in its art, architecture and beauty; improving access to the over 600 small businesses in southwest Detroit, connecting neighbors and reuniting a community.”

Indeed, the logo for the Gateway project includes a graphic of roads, river and bridge with the large words ‘Connecting Neighbors’ beneath the graphic and then, in much smaller letters beneath that the words ‘mdot I-75 ambassador bridge gateway project.’

Clearly, MDOT and the Governor are communicating this project in such a way as to emphasize its value to the Mexicantown community, to implicitly speak to past complaints and underlying suspicions of MDOT’s role in Detroit’s neighborhoods.

The emphasis on reconciliation between MDOT (as the relevant government entity) and the Mexicantown community is consistently revisited throughout this

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digital report. The message is particularly direct in State Transportation Director Kirk T. Steudle’s public statement:

MDOT has been connected to the people of Mexicantown and the city of Detroit throughout the 25 years with which we have been associated with the Gateway Project. From the very beginning, we were determined to construct a project that would provide for the safe movement of people and goods through this vital corridor while preserving Mexicantown’s unique role as a family neighborhood and tourist destination. We worked hard to involve and include local residents and businesses every step of the way. One of our primary goals was to build a pedestrian bridge that would reunite east and west and enable residents of all ages to cross safely and securely. We believe the result is state-of-the-art.

We secured the federal grant for a public art project to be installed here because we believed it was important to give Mexicantown a local landmark that would designate the bridge as an important part of this community’s history. While the Gateway Project is more than 95 percent complete, be assured that our commitment to this community is as strong as ever and will continue for years to come. MDOT believes in Mexicantown. We are proud to work with and for the residents of this wonderful community.

The report even makes explicit reference to this project’s origins – positioning the Bagley Ave Pedestrian Bridge as a reversal of the highway’s prior destruction:

Creating a Bridge: Reuniting a Community
A Mexicantown community that was once divided in two by interstate freeways will now be reunited through the construction of the Mexicantown Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge, a breathtaking 407-foot design marked by a signature slanted pylon that soars 150 feet from the freeway floor. The architectural design by VanTine Guthrie (now inFORM Studio) was the result of a nationwide design competition seeking a capstone for the project that would bring a cohesive element back to the community.

And again, with their description of the Michigan Welcome Center:

Realizing Mexicantown’s Vision: The Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center and Mercado
Mexicantown, located in the heart of southwest Detroit, has a rich cultural heritage forged by working-class people who came to escape the political and economic upheaval of early 20th century Mexico.

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441 Moving Michigan Forward (2010).
Over the years the community has seen many changes: prosperity in the early 1900s with the rise of the auto industry, the struggles of the Great Depression, and renewal in the 1950s. But in the early 1970s a double blow fell: a downward economic spiral that challenged the city, and the construction of the I-75 freeway, physically dividing the community in two. But the community had a vision. Travelers from the U.S. and Canada would make their way to a Mexicantown Welcome Center and new businesses would thrive in an indoor Mercado. In 1994, with plans for the Gateway Project underway, the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation partnered with MDOT. The results: the initial opening of the Mexicantown Mercado in October 2006 and of the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center in August 2008. 442

And once again with their description of the public art element of the project:

Capturing Culture and History: The Community Art Project
One is a mosaic of handmade glazed tile, nearly 5 feet long and 4 feet high, a multi-colored mural that tells the history and culture of the people who call Mexicantown home.

The other is a textured aluminum form that spirals 12 feet into the air with a bronze globe mounted at its point. The globe represents universal kinship between two sovereign nations, and the aluminum spiral, unity.

Together, they make up the Mexicantown Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge and Plaza Community Art Project. Both were created by Detroit artist Hubert Massey who was chosen from among 46 applicants vying for the opportunity to create the project. Funded by a federal grant secured by MDOT, the art will be located on the Mexicantown Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge Plaza.

This project is the latest in a series of monumental public works by Massey, a former linebacker and discus thrower at Grand Valley State University. His work can be seen and enjoyed in spaces ranging from Detroit’s Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History to Campus Martius Park and the Flint Institute of Art.

In the tile piece, titled “Spiral of Life,” a hand grasps a ribbon of fabric that flows throughout the art, with patterning representing the community’s different cultural groups. Culture and history are represented in the spires of Ste. Anne de Detroit Church set at a diagonal near the center of the composition and in the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit River set in its upper right. Also represented are urban farming and the migrations to and from Mexico.

442 Moving Michigan Forward (2010).
In the other piece, titled “The Spiral Kinship,” the vertical orientation of the aluminum spiral interacts with the angle of the pedestrian bridge’s center pylon. MDOT Region Planner Andrew Zeigler, who was instrumental in making the project a reality, said, “The art project is designed to capture the voice and the legacy of the community. Many people have really embraced this part of the Gateway Project. The beauty of the pedestrian plaza will encourage tourism and have a positive economic impact on the businesses in Mexicantown and southwest Detroit.”

This kind of language is exactly the kind of language that would have accompanied mid-century proclamations of progress towards an automobile future. They have the same taint of naive (or perhaps, in this case, willfully manipulated) optimism. It is not that the promoters of the Gateway Project were ill-willed per se, but rather that they are too quick to celebrate a ‘community process’ that was, in fact, considerably flawed.

I voice this criticism not to dismiss or diminish the value of the improved community engagement practices at the state and federal level, but rather to bring attention to the need for earlier, deeper, and more systemic involvement of citizens in the creation of these massive infrastructural projects. I say this because the state-level account of the Gateway Project doesn’t quite line up with my experience of the project on the ground, nor does it resonate with the reflections of the community leaders and residents of Mexicantown that I encountered in the summer of 2012. I heard over and over of the devastating impact of I-75 when it first bisected the community and of its lasting isolation and fragmentation of, in particular, the Eastern portion of Mexicantown. One former resident of Mexicantown, now the manager at downtown café Broadway 1515, recalled “you can’t get into or out of [Mexicantown]...”

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443 Moving Michigan Forward (2010).
without going under an overpass or over a bridge.”444 Kathy, the director of the local neighborhood development group, Southwest Detroit Business Association, recalled, “Bagley [Avenue] was the heart and soul of the community with theatre and retail. Now it is just restaurants. It was just cut in half and that was it.”445 And, her former colleague at SDBA, Denise, remembered much the same pattern, explaining, “Before the freeway went through, Bagley was a strong community commercial corridor but, in 1975, when the freeway went through, people started migrating west. It was no longer a self-contained, self-sufficient community.” 446

As Denise’s comment begins to suggest, I-75’s incision had two main impacts, each related to the other. First, residents and business owners rooted in what is now known as East Mexicantown began to migrate west, concentrating along the Vernor Highway corridor (a normal at-grade commercial strip, not a highway), re-establishing a collective commercial and community identity, and, more recently, residents of the adjacent and rapidly gentrifying Corktown neighborhood began to adopt the East Mexicantown fragment. “Now the Corktown community, the hipsters, have begun to adopt the eastern side—Honey Bee has begun to change their stock items to meet the demand of the younger community of Corktown.”447 Honey Bee La Colmena (the hive) grocery store, established in 1956 by Mexicantown resident Geraldo Alfaro and still in the Alfaro family, recently more than tripled its size, expanding from 4,000 to 15,000 square feet of floor space and adding an adjacent

444 Manager at 1515 Broadway Café, Mexicantown-Southwest Detroit Highway History, In Person, June 2012.
445 Kathy, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, July 2012.
446 Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
447 Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
parking lot. The grocery store has been consistently highlighted and praised by local lifestyle magazine *Metro Times* since 2005 lending it a prominence that has surely reached the recent plethora of young Detroit transplants. In 2006, third-generation owner Tammy Alfaro-Koehler responded to interviewer Jeff Broder’s question “How has your customer profile changed in recent years?” saying “We are seeing more downtown residents shop here... Also, there's has quite a bit of residential growth in the immediate area.” This statement implies that they are observing and adapting to the evolving demographic context of their store, making sure to cater to an expanding customer base. The Mexicantown community I-75 divided has shifted, split, merged and healed in new configurations and concentrations: parts have become destinations, parts have become resources to absorb and facilitate the growth of the nearby Corktown neighborhood and downtown, and parts have become new community centers. The highway redefined the boundaries of this community; it left too small of a fragment on the eastern side of I-75 for that fragment to survive in isolation.

The Gateway Project represents MDOT’s first major intervention, backed by federal funding, since I-75 initially tore this community apart. They are clearly attempting to improve both the highway and the neighborhood that it bisects. And, it would seem, they did follow a better process this time. But it still fell short of what was hoped for. It was a token community engagement process, coming off as a tardy apology and little more. Because the Gateway Project had federal funding, they had

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to complete an environmental impact statement (that’s why the pedestrian bridge was incorporated). As Kathy of the SDBA points out, “the community educated MDOT over time. MDOT thought that anything that slowed down or impeded traffic was a problem. Now, attention is being paid to walkability and what truly constituted economic development.” But, as Denise explains, the project remained somewhat out of touch with conditions on the ground, in the neighborhood. The designs reflected a sort of disconnected idealism and hope for the best, but a lack of dedication to thorough research and genuine engagement of residents and stakeholders more intimate than state officials with the challenges faced by the East Mexicantown fragment.

The fundamental misunderstanding of the state officials was that they were seeing Mexicantown as a community that had remained largely static since the freeway went through in the ‘70s, a community frozen in its bisected state – an open wound still unhealed. But the reality is that the community has healed. It is a scarred community for sure; it bears the mark of the highway’s violent disruption of their identity and economic viability. But it is a functional community that has shifted and reorganized itself, adapted to the constraints and opportunities afforded by its new physical bounds and proximities. And so, even despite MDOT’s effort to engage community organizations in planning, the project was complicated by this initial assumption that the community remained much the same as it was in the 70s when MDOT last interacted with them in a meaningful way. The area bracketing the freeway on either end of the truncated Bagley Avenue is more of a destination than a community place and so lacks the interrelations and interdependencies that

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451 Kathy, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, July 2012.
characterize Mexicantown’s neighborhood places like the Vernor corridor nearby. Without these interrelations and interdependencies there are fewer ties to pull Bagley Avenue back together. Denise pinpointed this weakness of MDOT’s reconnection project explaining, “the project wasn’t as successful as it might have been because Mexicantown isn’t really a community place. It is more of a destination for people outside. They’re coming and leaving, not thinking. And so, the bridge lacks the feeling of security, that things won’t happen to you…you know, eyes on the street.” Thus, although the Bagley Ave Pedestrian Bridge (as well as the public art and welcome center that reinforced it) was a valiant gesture, and an important step toward more effective collaboration between neighborhood and government, it has not served as quite the catalyst it was made out to be in MDOT’s report. This bridge sought to suture back the community the highway had bisected back in the ‘70s, but that community had evolved such that it was no longer in that raw state, with feelers out ready to reconnect. The neighborhoods status as a tourist destination and proximity to the gentrifying Corktown neighborhood and wealthy downtown developments has meant that the eastern fragment of Mexicantown has begun to be incorporated into the daily routines of these wealthy newcomers, resulting in the beginning signs of gentrification. And so, the existing social geography of the Bagley Ave area needed to be disrupted, stirred up again in order for the ‘suture’ of the bridge to have the desired impact of connecting the immediate Mexicantown community rather than merely facilitating the gentrification of the area.

Thus, prior to the bridge’s construction, Denise and Kathy (both working for SDBA at the time) collaborated with the state to prepare for this reconnection, to

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452 Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
combat some of the accumulated sense of isolation and dissociation of the eastern fragment of Mexicantown, to spur pedestrian traffic between the two parts of the neighborhood and to re-establish a collective identity. The resulting Mexicantown Fiesta events were, as Kathy explained, meant to draw people over to the eastern side, the less touristed side, to build a better commercial base.\textsuperscript{453} It was, as Denise recalled, a strategy in particular to build a consumer base on east side for Honey Bee, La Bodega (party store), and the Tortilla Factory. Denise explained the origin of the Fiesta idea, noting, “the east side isn’t considered ‘Mexicantown’ by visitors…. [so] a consultant came up with the idea to have an event to portray the positive side of Hispanic culture and boost the east side to a destination.”\textsuperscript{454} In 1990/91 they had the first one, themed around a Mexican Rodeo. It happened on a vacant lot and lasted for three days. 20,000 people came from both the suburbs and the neighborhood—but, Denise emphasized, it didn’t matter where they were coming from so long as they were coming to the East side, not the West side. It continued for four years and ended in 1994 because the last one wasn’t as successful as its predecessors. In fact, as Denise pointed out, it wasn’t sustainable—it never made money. The idea was just to build up to the construction of the welcome center.\textsuperscript{455} But the legacy of the Fiestas lingered in unexpected ways—the plethora of public art on the Eastern side all came after the Fiestas. As Denise noted, the Fiestas were very early in the redevelopment of the east Mexicantown fragment, and arguably a starting (or restarting) point for that development.\textsuperscript{456}

\textsuperscript{453} Kathy, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, July 2012.
\textsuperscript{454} Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
\textsuperscript{455} Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
\textsuperscript{456} Denise Pike, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, August 2012.
It’s too early to tell what effect the new bridge will have on the Mexicantown and Corktown communities that border it and share the East Mexicantown fragment. Only two years out, the new pedestrian bridge has, at its best provided greater connectivity at the local level and given residents and business owners the opportunity to adopt and reclaim the East Mexicantown fragment that for so long had been dually isolated from both the Mexicantown and Corktown communities. But, I would question whether this Bagley Avenue bridge really operates as a primary asset to the Mexicantown community or if it acts more as a public relations booster for MDOT, i.e., a landmark to anchor an emerging Detroit tourist destination, and a sculptural piece to entertain drivers cruising by underneath. I would argue that other, less visible projects and initiatives by community members – such as the Fiesta events and the Honey Bee Market expansion – did far more to reconnect the East Mexicantown fragment to its neighboring communities than the Bagley Avenue bridge or the Gateway Project it was a part of. We must be careful in our praise of these token symbolic projects to recognize the moments of grassroots collaboration that actually anchor the projects. It is not the bridge itself that will reconnect this fragment to its neighbors, it is the actions taken in support of this bridge that will reconnect the fragment. The infrastructure alone has no value if it is not rooted in a healthy community process and an active desire to shift the use of the land on which the infrastructure is built.
Cleveland’s Shoreway Teardown Proposal and Innerbelt Project

Cleveland has had a similar experience with federal-level investment in maintaining, updating, and, in Cleveland’s case, also tearing down local segments of the Interstate Highway System. As early as 2006, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) proposed the conversion of the West Shoreway to an at-grade boulevard, with the intent of reconnecting Cleveland’s western neighborhoods to the Erie lakefront. The proposal has been refined, debated, and altered continuously since, but as yet remains in the proposal stage. In the mean time, starting as far back as 1999 ODOT began work on the segment of I-90 (locally known as the Innerbelt) that connects downtown Cleveland to the Near West Side across the Cuyahoga River and industrial valley below. The segment being rebuilt now was targeted for redesign over a decade ago due to the deteriorating state of the structure that supports the bridge spanning the river and to the sharp turns and many accidents this section of interstate has become known for locally. The span of this ‘Innerbelt Bridge Project’ stretches between two communities touching down in the Gateway District on the downtown side and the Tremont neighborhood on the near west side. In each of these touch-down locations, ODOT has proposed substantial enhancements of pedestrian and bike infrastructure, as well as the commissioning and installation of murals along the foundations of the bridge at each end. Of the two communities, Tremont is the more vocal and the more invested in the outcome of the project. While the Gateway District is largely a marginal commercial and entertainment destination for city residents and suburbanites alike, Tremont is a largely residential community laced with galleries, cafes, eateries of various kinds and some retail shops. And, more

importantly, Tremont has had a long history of tense relations with ODOT and was subjected to some of the most brutal highway interventions in the Cleveland area.

Sited just to the west of the river and immediately adjacent to the once-booming steel mills that drove Cleveland’s industrial economy, Tremont is now largely defined by the highways that extend from the cloverleaf intersection that occupies the neighborhood’s center. The neighborhood has been imprinted with the crossroads of I-90, I-71 and I-490 and has struggled for over thirty years with the isolation, divestment, and transience that have resulted from the physical, cultural, and behavioral impact of this cluster of highway infrastructure. The memory of this especially brutal imposition of highways on the largely immigrant, working class neighborhood of Tremont back in the ‘70s has had a lasting impact. Its recollection continues to inform the nature of community activism and participation in governmental interventions in their neighborhood. I will, in the pages that follow, attempt to describe the origins of this sensitivity to injustice and marginalization that is now so evident in the community process ODOT has facilitated as part of the recent Innerbelt Bridge Project.

Tremont is often understood (locally) in counterpoint to the wealthy ‘Heights’ suburbs on the eastern border of the city which successfully boycotted the freeways that would have impacted their community negatively. Tremont was not so lucky, mostly because its largely working class, immigrant population couldn’t leverage the same resources as the largely Caucasian and highly educated population of the Heights suburbs. Furthermore, there was no available claim to conservation or historic preservation to aid them in their fight. Indeed, the Tremont community was
hardly able to advocate effectively for access to the highways that would bisect their community let alone assert that the highway should be stopped in its tracks. The neighborhood had to fight for an on- and off-ramp to the Innerbelt when it was under construction in the ‘70s and then, not long after, they had to stand as a community, hand in hand over the exit ramp to prevent ODOT from bulldozing the exit in the ‘80s.\(^{458}\) The demolition of large swaths of the neighborhood’s residential and commercial fabric throughout the 1960s and 70s sent many of the neighborhoods’ congregations, families and businesses packing – out to the closest western suburbs (e.g., Parma, etc.). This massive departure and its corresponding divestment from the neighborhood was further compounded by school desegregation and white parents’ desire to escape the long-distance bussing that was the keystone of school integration across the country.

In talking to a few long-time residents it was overwhelmingly apparent that the highway building project, was, for them, an agent of loss. It was a massively destructive project which uprooted friends, family, neighbors, leaders, team members, businesses, congregations, teachers and students leaving in its wake a void that still, for those who know the land beneath the highway, for those who knew it in its previous incarnation as neighborhood streets, reverberates with that absence, with all the things the highway took from them. Jimmy Noga, a Temontian born and bred who grew up cultivating the land of his father’s backyard, land that is now graded and paved over, can still be found in his shop on West 14\(^{th}\) Street. Noga Flower Shop occupies a small, bright storefront, its front twenty feet or so crammed with flowers and their accompanying accouchement arranged on tables and shelves, its storage

\(^{458}\) Councilman Joe Cimperman, Tremont Highway History, In Person, August 2012.
stretching far back on the skinny lot to accommodate his (as I learned later) healthy internet business. I had heard about Jimmy from Tremont’s former councilman, Joe Cimperman but Joe had been quick to mention I should avoid revealing my source because Jimmy wasn’t too happy with the councilman’s position on a recent issue; it was best if I was just a passing admirer of his shop. When I called Jimmy over the phone his voice had been brusk but open and eager for a chance to talk about the old Tremont, the one he grew up with. After I waited a few minutes in with the flowers, Jimmy emerged from his conversation somewhere in the recesses of the internet business storage area that wound back behind a half-height screen. It didn’t take long after we sat down to talk before Jimmy opened up. As I began to explain my research interest Jimmy chimed in recalling, “they [the highways] took so much of Tremont, just wiped them out – all of the 15th, 16th and 17th streets. All the upscale houses, the mansions on W. 14th, the movie theatre on W. 14th and Fairfield.” He went on explaining that the highways “took out half the Valleyview social housing project and didn’t replace it,” and “wiped out more than half of most of the congregations.”

When I asked where all those Tremont residents went he was quick to respond: “Parma and further out west, maybe Brooklyn and further” lamenting, “they [the highway folks] were trying to take people back into the city but it really took people out, did just the opposite.”

Luckily, for me, enough stayed to carry the story of that loss through to this generation. Unlike in Detroit, where former residents of Blackbottom are scattered to the winds and without a piece of land to root their oral history, Cleveland’s former Tremont residents still have four fragments of their

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neighborhood left – enough to keep a few anchors like Jimmy and his childhood friend Eric around.

Eric Hooper I heard about through a childhood friend of my own, Erica Zarowin, who moved to Cleveland after graduating from Oberlin College not far away in order to help organize access to affordable, local produce. Her goal was to offer Cleveland’s welfare recipients a healthful and cheap alternative to the convenience stores that have filled in for grocery stores in much of the city. She encouraged me to get brave and wander to the far side of the West 11th Street pedestrian bridge that spanned I-71 and walk down the street to the second house on the left, the one with the plywood placard for Hooper Farm out in front. I needed the encouragement because the last time I had walked over the bridge I had turned right around, worried I was trespassing or just unwelcome given the deserted street and the many vehicles parked at odd angles around the dead-end of West 11th Street. But, after being reassured by Erika, I walked right up to Eric’s door and gave it a good hard knock. While I waited I looked around, taking in the hand-painted sign and the newspaper clippings at the corner of the door’s windowpane. I heard some rustlings inside and, as Eric came to the door, I caught the cadence of a classic Western soundtrack and the crackly voice of those old movies that haven’t been ‘restored’ and have a scratchy quality to them. He held the door ajar as I explained the reason for my visit. After he was sure I didn’t pose a threat, he welcomed me in, ushering me over to a bookcase that was heavy with red leather albums and scrapbooks, the composite board visibly sagging with their weight. He had to have one for every year he had lived here—or at least it seemed he had all his bases covered.
As he flipped through one, he paused at a photo of a youth baseball team posed, their chests puffed out and their gloves folded up in their hands, at the nearby Clark Field, back in the 80s. Eric pointed to the photo and looked up at me saying with purpose and a lingering bitterness, “the 490 bridge took fifty families out of my neighborhood and took twenty athletes from our team and pushed them out further in the suburbs. We could have been competitive. Churches shrunk. Businesses closed. These families left holes in the commercial fabric and there was a loss of tax dollars from this departure.”

After a full tour of his house and most of the story of his early awakening to the promise of urban farming before all the hipsters made it trendy, he told me to come back another time when he had had more time to prepare, to gather his thoughts and his pictures. Later that week, we met at one of his regular haunts – Civilization – a classic coffee shop at the corner of Tremont’s Lincoln Park and an anchor in the trendy, gentrifying portion of Tremont. His thoughts composed this time he showed me a collection of photos of Clark Field before and after I-490 cut across the top of the field, running west to east across the industrial valley below. This is the piece of road that took out half of the Valleyview public housing Jimmy had mentioned to me, and Eric reminded me again of the teammates he had lost, some of which lived in the Valleyview apartments. But the public housing wasn’t the only thing on that hill. That piece of road “took out the leadership [of the neighborhood]. Block club chair Mr. Clemens, for example.”

And, as Eric noted with an equally somber tone, it had also taken out the neighborhood’s best sledding hill. Eric

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concluded, “the freeway system takes those things—the woven fabric of the neighborhood—away without even realizing it.”

Jimmy had made much the same comment when our conversation was winding down the previous day. Sitting in his flower shop with his hands clasped, leaning on the table, he remarked, “the freeway system, you know, it really ruined America.” Recalling the vibrant downtown he had grown up with and lamenting its dwindling draw in recent years, Jimmy clearly saw the freeways as the harbinger of this collective departure from his downtown, his neighborhood. The freeways were the agent of this loss and abandonment. And in some ways he was right to point the finger at Tremont’s highway crossroads. The construction of these freeways did mark a new era in which the city was not the focal point of America’s collective life. But, as always, it was part of a constellation of interventions and initiatives that resulted in the loss and abandonment that Jimmy was alluding to. Gale Long, a once-upon-a-time Tremont resident and the former head of Merrick House, an active and effective advocacy institution rooted in the settlement house tradition and based out of Tremont, left the neighborhood several decades after the freeways went through in order to offer her daughter the experience of learning in a racially and economically diverse environment. Gale explained to me across a small table in Shaker Square’s Dewey’s Coffee Shop, sipping on a cup of coffee my aunt Felice assures me is the best in Cleveland, that school desegregation, coming around the same time as the construction of urban highways, had a substantial impact on depopulation and divestment in inner-city neighborhoods like Tremont: “people moved to avoid

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bussing, to be able to walk their kid to school. The resulting departure of families from Tremont, Gale explained, meant that the public schools suffered from under enrollment and an increasingly marginalized student body — those whose families didn’t have the resources to move. Gale recalls, with a pang of resentment, “that’s why I moved to Shaker Heights — to be in an integrated neighborhood with integrated schools.” Because Shaker Heights spans the municipal divide between the city of Cleveland and its wealthy eastern suburbs, and because of the original planned mixed-income housing of the area, it has become one of the few racially and economically diverse school districts in the entire city. Gale added, “schools can bring neighborhoods together — then people will meet each other” the implication that their deficiencies can also allow the social fabric of the neighborhood to disintegrate. But, no matter the complexities of the reasons families and community members decided to depart Tremont, the highways have become the physical symbol of Tremont’s victimhood, its disintegration, its hardship.

Nobody I spoke to — whether in passing or in an intentional conversation — hesitated to blame Tremont’s downfall on the highways. When I asked Cory, the head of Tremont West Development Corporation (TWDC), how the highways changed the neighborhood, he responded, “it [the highway construction] definitely impacted the neighborhood — it killed the neighborhood. The highways severed Tremont from all other neighborhoods. It suffered more than thirty years. It had been forgotten — a tight little neighborhood, right next to downtown. An isolated island.” Jimmy Noga of the Noga Flower Shop said much the same in more blunt terms proclaiming,

466 Gale Long, Tremont Highway History and Cleveland Organizing History, In Person, January 2013.
“Tremont became a slum, really…you know, it wasn’t safe, houses were burning down all around those places” referring to the houses that are still standing and being renovated. Colleen Gilson, a former Tremont community organizer, speaking to me on her morning commute via speakerphone, “when I first started [in the ‘80s] it was still a tough, tough neighborhood.” Her implication being that it wasn’t tough anymore, that the well-served and gentrifying neighborhood I had come to know in 2012 was not at all like the one she recalled from the ‘80s and ‘90s.

The neighborhood I had come to know had no arson, few homeless, nominal crime, access to education and food—it was a functional neighborhood. Indeed, it was a trendy neighborhood, one of the inner-city neighborhoods that was gentrifying fast. It seemed odd to me, at first, that a neighborhood that had been devastated by highways would be one of the first to ‘come back’—to be desirable, a ‘neighborhood of choice’ as area developers called it. But, as I inquired further it seemed it was not a fluke at all—that the two were actually connected. Tremont’s isolation, a result of the neighborhood’s topography, industrial geography, and its highways, had made it an easily-identifiable piece of the city: its boundaries were well-defined and so branding and promoting it was less complicated as there was little contention as to what could be thought of as ‘Tremont.’ TWDC even goes so far as to, on its website, describe the neighborhood in terms of its isolation as an asset and not a detractor: “the small town character fostered by the isolation created by the development of the interstates along with the unique mix of architectural styles and proximity to Downtown, has spurred a

471 Colleen Gilson, History of Cleveland Organizing, Phone Interview, January 2013.
renewed interest in urban living in the neighborhood.

It may seem odd to say, but, the same structures that divided and isolated the neighborhood, throwing it into a deep depression, have also come to define the neighborhood, to unite and enhance it.

Giancarlo, a Cleveland-based sculptor and recent Tremont transplant and entrepreneur, saw the highway in a positive light… The owner of a gallery and eatery that are credited by many as some of the first trendy spots, early markers of the neighborhood’s revitalization, Giancarlo is one of the many post-highway transplants, people who see the highway as a precondition rather than as a scar, the reminder of a trauma. Sitting across from me and his assistant at a picnic table outside his favorite Italian market on Cleveland’s east side—only a short jaunt from his studio complex and gallery—Giancarlo dug into some homemade meatballs and marinara while he explained that “Tremont has an identifiable character, street structure. It is easier to recognize due to its bounding—you can see the borders. Slavic Village [the neighborhood just adjacent to and East of Tremont] is similar—the highway helps orient you to the community.”

Colleen agreed, recalling that, “while it was a hard fight and the destruction and taking of land, it sort of made a little enclave.”

Local councilman Joe Cimperman went even further: talking at the speed of light over a table at Bon Bon, a nearby coffee shop, Joe remarked in passing as he listed off all the residents and businesses owners I should get in contact with, “ODOT has bound Tremont with a common enemy. That is their biggest favor.”

474 Colleen Gilson, History of Cleveland Organizing, Phone Interview, January 2013.
475 Councilman Joe Cimperman, Tremont Highway History, In Person, August 2012.
But not all Tremont residents will acknowledge how the highway has united as well as divided the community. For many, the destruction is all too evident and the galvanizing effect is hardly worth note. This is all the more true for those who still recall what the neighborhood used to be like without the highways. For the newcomers the highways seem a permissible trade-off for mobility and access but for the old guard, the sacrifices made to the highway significantly outweigh any benefit that could be derived from them. Eric Hooper in particular harbors a great deal of frustration at shifts in land use resulting from the highways, shifts that are incompatible with the neighborhood life he recalls. Eric explains that Tremont used to be centered on Professor and Literary Avenues before the highway came through and pulled the hub of Tremont towards West 14th Street and Lincoln Park. This was, he explained, in part because West 14th Street became a bypass to get downtown quicker when the highway was backed up: “they’re traveling at higher speeds off the highway on 14th – people should be going 25 by these schools and churches but instead they’re going 45 to get into work downtown, to avoid congestion on the highway.” Eric was sure to remind me, “these are folks from the suburbs [going fast down West 14th] who really don’t care about the city of Cleveland, they’re just trying to get from point A to point B and don’t care how fast they’re going.” The highway’s rippling effect did not stop at traffic overflow, however, it has also meant the rezoning of the areas immediately adjacent to and underneath it. As Eric explained, “the [highway] bridges instigated rezoning—the highway is an industrial zone—and so we’ve got all these vets and dog pounds for no reason…. just because they’re one of the few businesses

that can locate in an industrial zone. We don’t need another dog pound. We need a
grocery store.” His complaints continued. As a neighbor to the West 11th pedestrian
bridge (which he regularly cleans and repaints on his own dime) Eric was particularly
incensed at the state of the land encompassed in the road’s right of way: “ODOT
doesn’t upkeep the property around their projects. Why not pay local communities
around the project to maintain these places?” These re-zoned gaps in the
commercial fabric and lapses in investment and upkeep compound the literal physical
boundary of the highway trenches and overpasses resulting in broad strips of
impassable, uninhabited and often desolate voids in the previously continuous urban
fabric of the neighborhood.

Thus, despite the unity of the neighborhood in their defiance and perseverance
against the agents of their decline, and despite the strong institutions spanning the
highway’s divides (Merrick House, Tremont West Development Corporation, etc.),
the internal division caused by the highways continues to challenge Tremont’s
community. As Eric Hooper remarked, “if the highway wasn’t here, the neighborhood
would be a unit and would have more of a voice. It divided the neighborhood down
even further.” And, to add insult to injury, as Gale Long of Merrick House
explained, the highway left many fragments without direct access to the social and
commercial centers with which they were once associated: “I-90 really destroyed
neighborhoods – the pieces that got cut off, they’ll never come back. They don’t have
something to draw people.” This severance and disproportionate suffering of all but
the northeast ‘trendy’ quadrant of Tremont seemed to be a refrain in all my

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conversations. Colleen noted that the highways “divided the neighborhood and made a schism in terms of value.” Giancarlo remarked, “the highways cut it up…there is that odd part of Tremont, the other side of Tremont. I never have a reason to go there. It hasn’t got any of the development. There are no shops.” Recent Tremont transplant and community pastor in the southeast quadrant, Mark Pratt explained, “when I think of Tremont, I think of it in four quadrants according to the highway’s divides.” The director of the Kent State Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative indicated, “there’s the classic revitalized art gallery Tremont, and the other side is still a bit wild.” Jimmy of Noga Flower Shop remarked that the southeast quadrant of Tremont containing Clark Field and, among other things, Eric Hooper’s house and farm, is “so out of the way, its almost not part of Tremont.” But for every one of these remarks there is a resident on that ‘far side’ that ‘wild part,’ that other, odd section who insists on maintaining ties with the Tremont they were once so enmeshed with. Eric, for instance, proclaimed with considerable force, “my section is always going to be part of Tremont no matter what those yoyos say over there by the park.” He is referring to Lincoln Park and the northeastern trendy quadrant of Tremont, the part most outsiders would identify as Tremont. It is this legacy of highway brutality and this ongoing struggle over the boundaries and definition of membership in the Tremont neighborhood that informs and, indeed, motivates public participation in the planning processes of the City of Cleveland. Tremonters don’t want to be marginalized, neglected and devalued the way they were by the last

482 Colleen Gilson, History of Cleveland Organizing, Phone Interview, January 2013.
484 Mark Pratt, Tremont’s West 11th Street Bridge and His Bridge the Gap initiative, In Person, July 2012.
485 Terry Schwartz, Pop up Urbanism of The Bridge Mix Event and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, In Person, August 2012.
generation of highwaymen and public officials, they want to ensure their well-being and the health of their community is considered in future proposals.

The sense of victimhood felt by many Tremont residents has surfaced recently as they have been given a chance to confront the agent of their hurt and loss – ODOT – once again, and the community has made overwhelmingly clear that they are not going to be hoodwinked this time. The general response seems to be “our neighborhood has already been obliterated by highways and now you’re gonna put another one through? Can’t you make it a little nicer to be around?” ODOT, to its credit, has responded with considerable flexibility and concern for the questions brought up and the demands made by the Tremont community. Former Tremont (and current Ohio City) Councilman Joe Cimperman reflected back on some of ODOT’s community meetings remarking, “people have a long memory. You know, the freeway literally created an exile. It isolated people from their communities. A lot of people still remember those times when there wasn’t such a thing as community engagement. So, folks are skeptical of our efforts now—they assume we’re going to go back on our word.”

Jocelyn, public relations manager for the Innerbelt Bridge Project on behalf of ODOT, gave a similar account over lunch at Bon Bon café in Tremont’s adjacent Ohio City neighborhood. Also noting the role of Tremont’s past in shaping its present participation patterns, Jocelyn pointed out, “the freeway cut the neighborhood in half and they have not gotten over it since the 1970s. Now we’re making up for mistakes of the past.” And, in many ways, it seems, they have made up for mistakes of the past – their citizen participation program has been quite

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488 Councilman Joe Cimperman, Cleveland Organizing History, Phone Interview, January 2013.
489 Jocelynn and Doug, Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge Project and Ohio Department of Transportation Community Engagement Practices, In Person, July 2012.
rigorous and consistent since the project’s inception in 1999. Jocelyn described their stakeholder process, explaining that they had broken it down into two focus groups— one for the Tremont Neighborhood and one for the Gateway District, each with residents and representatives from community development corporations (CDCs), Businesses, and Metroparks (the local park authority).  

ODOT hosted quarterly (and, at times monthly) stakeholder meetings with the Tremont focus group in which the community fought for better lighting, security measures, and a more streamlined construction process to avoid negative impact on local businesses. Cory of TWDC was overwhelmingly positive about the process, recalling, “they were more thoughtful with the community process this time around than they were the first time around. They are beginning to comprehend that, what seems like a ‘little decision’ to them at the scale of the project as a whole could have a huge impact at the community level.” Jocelyn seemed to understand that all the many, many community meetings and the ever-longer list of compromises and concessions made throughout the design approval process “was necessary given the context we’re in—there are a lot of folks in the neighborhood that feel we haven’t done enough.” And right she was: even in light of such rigorous and regular community involvement, there were lingering critiques and room for improvement. Kathy, the current director of Merrick House in Tremont remarked that the visual materials at the community meetings failed to communicate the design ideas effectively “I consider myself fairly educated and even I was having trouble

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490 Jocelynn and Doug, Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge Project and Ohio Department of Transportation Community Engagement Practices, In Person, July 2012.
493 Jocelynn and Doug, Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge Project and Ohio Department of Transportation Community Engagement Practices, In Person, July 2012.
visualizing it.” Kathy recalled that they had pass-outs and lots of renderings, but no 3-D models. This made it hard for someone not trained in the design professions to comprehend the full extent of the project and the ways in which the different elements related to one-another. Another common critique was that the public art incorporated into the new bridges was unsatisfactory, not meeting the community’s standards either for supporting local artists or for pushing artistic boundaries, or for some community members, the selected artwork’s failure to meet either standard. The public art had been proposed by the contractor that won the Innerbelt bidding competition as an innovative way of fulfilling the stipulation in the 2009 Obama American Recovery + Reinvestment Act that 2% of the allocated funds for a project like the Innerbelt be spent on ‘Aesthetics’ The “aesthetics” budget in ODOT terminology covers all the extras—including, for the first time in an ODOT project, a public art element. The catch is that, because it was federal money, ODOT had to conduct a national rather than local search for the art element. Despite considerable efforts to seek out artists with local ties, many residents were unsatisfied. Although all the artists ended up having a local connection of some kind, none of them were current Cleveland artists. Kathy of Merrick House commented on this shortcoming of the project saying, “it makes no sense. We were disappointed given the strong art community here.” Eric, too, was quick to comment that, “these art pieces for the

494 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
495 Jocelynn and Doug, Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge Project and Ohio Department of Transportation Community Engagement Practices, In Person, July 2012.
ODOT projects aren’t cutting edge, they’re cookie cutter.” And perhaps they are a bit ‘safe’ or too disconnected from the community they are supposed to represent but, given the kind of complaints ODOT was fielding back in the interstate-building era regarding much larger project issues, these complaints seem trivial. They are not to be dismissed, but their prominence is, in itself a victory as it indicates that nothing else eclipsed them in terms of importance to the community.

Indeed, this time around, most of the complaints are about the construction process, not the ultimate impact of the final project itself. Residents generally seem, if not happy, then satisfied with the basic mission and design of the Innerbelt bridge project. Most of the controversy and frustration has revolved around the burdens and inconveniences of the lengthy and comprehensive construction process. As Eric pointed out to me when we sat down to talk at Civilization in January, every part of Tremont is dependent on bridge infrastructure for even the most basic connectivity (for example: access to the grocery store, downtown employment, etc.). If one of these bridges is closed, Tremont loses its link to whatever is on the other side, and more often than not, that means residents without cars simply can no longer access the resources which that infrastructure was meant to make available. Tremont’s Abbey Avenue Bridge is its only walkable connection to Ohio City (the location of the public market and Dave’s Supermarket, the only two venues in the city that offer fresh produce). In Eric’s words, “to get to food—these [bridges] are key connections. Basically, the market—90% of the neighborhood shops there.”

Similarly, Clark bridge is Tremont’s only connection to the adjacent neighborhood of Slavic Village.

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and the West 3rd Street bridge its most direct connection to downtown. Eric emphasizes, “The West 3rd bridge is a pet peeve of mine. That’s the way we walked to downtown as kids. Last time they fixed it, they made the cable too short meaning that the deck of the bridge cannot be lowered into place after a barge passes beneath it, and therefore is functionally obsolete as a pedestrian link downtown. Over a decade, that bridge has been closed. And, the Abbey Ave Bridge keeps getting repaired every few years. Fix it once and it should last much longer.” While the closure of the West 3rd bridge is unrelated to the Innerbelt project, the loss of Abbey Ave (closed for the majority of the summer months in which I was living in Cleveland) was not only a substantial inconvenience but a very real hardship for the many residents of Tremont who depend on that pedestrian connection to their food source. Eric recalls, “we had rallies back when they started the Innerbelt project saying hey, you’re cutting us off from our food source. They don’t think of how the construction is going to impact our lives.” It is this kind of oversight that state officials and agencies are likely to make when operating independently of the citizens affected by their decisions. Luckily in this case, Tremont’s residents were vocal enough to push back.

**Beyond the Official Channels of Citizen Participation**

ODOT, like MDOT in Detroit, is learning how to work with residents but still has many lessons to learn. The relative strength of the Tremont I-90 Innerbelt Project, as compared with its Detroit counterpoint of the Mexicantown I-75 Gateway Project

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(of which the new Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge is a part), has its origin in the strength of citizen participation. Future projects will presumably be stronger if ODOT (and MDOT) continues to assimilate lessons learned in practice. As I gained some distance from these two projects—the Gateway Project in Detroit and Innerbelt Project in Cleveland—I increasingly felt that this pair of projects made overwhelmingly clear that, no matter how well intentioned or rigorous the state-sponsored planning process, any project needs the input and support of the grassroots to be effective. And the state needs to learn how to use the grassroots well: it is a skill of a democratic government to know how best to engage with the citizenry. Henri Lefebvre, a prominent French social theorist, describes this pattern with great clarity in his seminal 1996 text, *The Right to the City*. Lefebvre explains, “the architect, the planner, the sociologist, the economist, the philosopher or the politician cannot out of nothingness create new forms and relations. More precisely, the architect is no more a miracle-worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations, although under certain favourable conditions they help trends to be formulated (to take shape). Only social life (praxis)...possesses such powers.”504 Pointing to the many failed urban renewal projects of the twentieth century in both Europe and America, Lefebvre argues,

[Urban reform] needs a social support and political forces to be effective. It cannot act on its own. It cannot but depend on the presence and action of the working class, the only one able to put an end to a segregation directed essentially against it. Only this class, as a class, can decisively contribute to the reconstruction of centrality destroyed by a strategy of segregation and found again in the menacing form of *centres of decision-making*. This does not mean that the working class will make urban society all on its own, but

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504 Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” (1996), 150-151.
that without it nothing is possible. Without it integration has no meaning and disintegration will continue under the guise of nostalgia and integration.\textsuperscript{505}

If the engagement of the working class is the key to any effective transformation of our physical and social environments, then it becomes important to give greater attention to our government’s community engagement or citizen participation practices as a lens through which to evaluate the efficacy and strength of any given urban reform initiative, whether that initiative be building, dismantling or transforming highway infrastructure.

Sherry Arnstein, former leader of the United Nation’s Model Cities Program, gave this question considerable thought in her landmark article “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” published in the \textit{Journal of the American Institute of Planners} in 1969. Arnstein argues in this essay that citizen participation, while often seen as a bonus or a chore, is in fact integral to the success of any project and should be at the core of any proposal. Admitting that, "by and large, people are being planned for" Arnstein goes to considerable length to describe the ways in which people might be planned \textit{with}.\textsuperscript{506} Arnstein writes,

\begin{quote}
Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy - a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone. The applause is reduced to polite handclaps, however, when this principle is advocated by the have-not blacks, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos, and whites. And when the have-nots define participation as redistribution of power, the American consensus on the fundamental principle explodes into many shades of outright racial, ethnic, ideological, and political opposition.\textsuperscript{507}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{505} Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” (1996), 154-155.
Advocating the cultivation of citizen power, Arnstein defines citizen participation as a “categorical term for citizen power,”\(^5\) describing citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.\(^5\)

Based off this premise that citizen participation is the primary channel through which the have-nots can drive social reform and share in prosperity, Arnstein embarks on a discussion of the gradations of citizen participation asserting that "there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process."\(^5\)

Arnstein presents this argument about the ‘gradations’ of citizen participation in terms of a ladder, considering each discrete gradation to be a rung on the ladder. She writes: "the eight [levels of participation]... are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product."\(^5\) These rungs are grouped into the bottom two as non-participation, the middle three as tokenism, and the top two as citizen power. Arnstein first describes the forms of non-participation, i.e., governmental practices that are disingenuous public relations tools that are used to repress, bypass and override rather than engage with citizen concerns: "The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two rungs describe levels of 'nonparticipation' that have been

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contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants.\(^5\) Next up are the forms of tokenism, governmental practices that open up channels for citizen advisory and editorializing but do not actually afford those citizens with any form of power or leverage with which to actually shape or re-direct the end-product: “Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of 'tokenism' that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack to power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no 'muscle,' hence no assurance of changing the status quo. Rung (5) Placation is simply a higher level of tokenism because the groundrules allow have-nots to advise but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide.”\(^6\) Finally, Arnstein arrives at governmental practices that actually offer citizens a role in decision-making and a means of sharing power: “citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.”\(^7\) Arnstein, having outlined the many different ways in which the government can engage its citizenry in decision-making, finally admits that, while the government would ideally initiate this kind of partnership, exchange and shared power, it is far more common for citizens to

initiate, to demand, to create these opportunities just as it is far more common for the state to resist and circumvent these opportunities.

So, what happens when the state isn’t leading the charge (as it often doesn’t), when it is citizens that must initiate? Arnstein asserts, as I too believe, that, "in most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizens, not given by the city. There is nothing new about that process. Since those who have power normally want to hang onto it, historically it has had to be wrested by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful."\(^{515}\) If shared power is a product of citizen resistance and insurgency than how does the articulation of grassroots demands relate to government before official channels of participation are established? Lefebvre offers one of the more prominent contemporary models for conceptualizing the articulation of grassroots demands in his 1996 *Right to the City* essay. Lefebvre first affirms that the responsibility of creating democratic forms of government will regrettably always lie with those who are most often abused by it – the working class. Lefebvre however, points out that this is one of the great legacies and strengths of the working class, both historically and in present times claiming,

> It [the working class] gathers the interests…of the whole society and firstly of all those who *inhabit*. Who can ignore that the Olympians of the new bourgeois aristocracy no longer inhabit. They go from grand hotel to grand hotel, or from castle to castle, commanding a fleet or a country from a yacht. They are everywhere and nowhere…They transcend everyday life... It is essential to describe at length...all those who endure a well-organized daily life…to exhibit the derisory and untragic misery of the inhabitant.\(^{516}\)

If we are to depend on the working classes’ rootedness as the starting point for a more interconnected, functional and equitable urban fabric, then, Lefebvre argues, we must

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\(^{516}\) Lefebvre, "The Right to the City" (1996), 158-159.
make room for this set of priorities by generating a framework for and understanding of the ‘right to the city.’ Lefebvre describes this right as “a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*. [in which] the 'urban', place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time [is] promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base and its practico-material realization.”\(^{517}\) Adding again, for emphasis that, “only the working class can become the agent, the social carrier or support of this realization.”\(^{518}\) But, as always, there is considerable consternation on the part of government officials, policy makers and planners when confronted with this brand of lofty social theorizing. Even as governments like that of Brazil attempt to legislate Lefebvre’s *Right to the City* in acknowledgement of its romantic and civic appeal, it remains a slippery and fleeting concept that is hard to pin down. It is only through my experiences and conversations this past summer in the cities of Cleveland and Detroit that I feel I have begun to capture Lefebvre’s meaning. I will, in the pages to follow, attempt to share with you the projects and behaviors, adaptations and appropriations that have come to collectively define my understanding of Lefebvre’s theory of grassroots insurgency.

I find it easiest to understand Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city through James Holston’s explanation of insurgent citizenship in his 1999 book by the title *Cities and Citizenship*. Holston, powerfully influenced by Lefebvre’s essay *The Right to the City* published only three years earlier, gives a more rooted explanation, rich with examples that resonate with my own experiences on the ground. Holston begins his argument by indicting Modernist planning practice as a utopian project that failed

\(^{517}\) Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” (1996), 158.  
\(^{518}\) Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” (1996), 158.
to “admit or develop productively the paradoxes of its imagined future” and vainly tried to maintain that unitary and restricted vision by marginalizing and repressing any voices that would contradict, challenge or complicate the utopian project.\textsuperscript{519} Holston goes on to argue that the utopian impulse of modernist planning privileges state authority over citizen empowerment. Holston points out in particular the ways in which the Congress International de Architecture Moderne’s (CIAM) brand of utopianism feeds an authoritarian, technocratic state which must necessarily rely on forcible implementation of a plan devised by professionals and validated by the culture of the expert and the support of the elite who benefit from the proposed new order. It is a vision that consolidates rather than distributes legitimate power, disenfranchising more than enfranchising.\textsuperscript{520} In Holston’s words, modernist planning attempts to be a plan without contradiction, without conflict. It assumes a rational domination of the future in which its total and totalizing plan dissolves any conflict between the imagined and the existing society in the imposed coherence of its order. This assumption is both arrogant and false. It fails to include as \textit{constituent} elements of planning the conflict, ambiguity, and indeterminacy characteristic of actual social life. Moreover, it fails to consider the unintended and the unexpected as part of the model... Their [the master plan solutions] basic feature is that they attempt to fix the future--or the past, as in historical preservation--by appealing to precedents that negate the value of present circumstance. The crucial question for us to consider, therefore, is how to include the ethnographic present in planning, that is, the possibilities for change encountered in existing social conditions.\textsuperscript{521}

Holston then goes on to ask, "if the notion of alternative futures is both indispensible and yet, in its utopian form, perverse, what kind of intervention in the city could construct a sense of emergence without imposing a teleology that disembodies the present in favor of a utopian difference?"\textsuperscript{522} Holston’s proposal is that we embrace

\textsuperscript{519}Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 165-166.  
\textsuperscript{520}Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 159-160.  
\textsuperscript{521}Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 165-166.  
\textsuperscript{522}Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 165.
and encourage insurgency as a legitimate and productive relationship between grassroots activism and state authority, rather than as counterproductive, corrosive and unpatriotic practice of the poor and marginalized.

Holston, with his idea of insurgent citizenship is essentially elaborating upon Lefebvre’s idea of the Right to the City, attempting to describe a societal and governmental attitude that would legitimize and cultivate a culture of grassroots dissent, conceptualizing this dissent not as undermining but rather as strengthening our state though counterbalancing it. Holston describes the role of insurgency as follows:

one of the most urgent problems in planning and architectural theory today is the need to develop a different social imagination—one that is not modernist but that nevertheless reinvents modernism’s activist commitments to the invention of society and to the construction of the state. I suggest that the sources of this new imaginary lie...in spaces of insurgent citizenship... By insurgent, I mean to emphasize the opposition of these spaces of citizenship to the modernist spaces that physically dominate so many cities today. I also use it to emphasize an opposition to the modernist political project that absorbs citizenship into a plan of state building and that, in the process, generates a certain concept and practice of planning itself [in which] the state is the only legitimate source of citizenship rights, meanings and practices. I use the notion of insurgent to refer to new and other sources and to their assertion of legitimacy.523

Holston is, like Lefebvre, reminding us that the insurgent assertions of the underclass are, in the bigger picture, one of our democracy’s greatest assets, one of our most important resources. Picking up on the United States’ founding notion of checks and balances within government, Holston extends this valuation of checks and balances to the citizenry, to those who are beyond or outside of conventional governmental processes. Holston’s theory however, is not emerging primarily from the lens of

policy and political structures but rather from the lens of design and the planning profession’s internal culture. Holston writes,

if modernist planning relies on and builds up the state, then its necessary counteragent is a mode of planning that addresses the formations of insurgent citizenship. Planning theory needs to be grounded in these antagonistic compliments, both based on ethnographic and not utopian possibility: on one side, the project of state-directed futures, which can be transformative but which is always a product of specific politics; and, on the other, the project of engaging planners with the insurgent forms of the social that often derive from and transform the first project but are in important ways heterogeneous and outside the state.

Holston, finally, arrives at a description of what insurgent citizenship might look like as a social process, what Lefebvre’s Right to the City might manifest as in planning processes:

These insurgent forms are found both in organized grassroots mobilizations and in everyday practices that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas. They are found, in other words, in struggles over what it means to be a member of the modern state... [which] has never been a static identity...Citizenship changes as the new members emerge to advance their claims, expanding its realm, and as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it. The sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion.... they are sites of insurgence because they introduce into the city new identities and practices that disturb established histories.\(^{524}\)

For me, this notion of insurgency as a mode of urban contestation that is meant to assert membership and announce identity through the alteration of physical spaces is a useful lens through which to understand those initiatives that have altered the visual identity of our nation’s highways but have not occurred through state-sponsored projects. If I mentally catalog the interventions which caught my eye as I drove under, over and around Cleveland and Detroit’s snaking highway infrastructure, and if I review the conversations I had with those involved in their materialization, I begin to

\(^{524}\) Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 167.
see each of these alterations of highway infrastructures as assertions of citizenship, of membership, of belonging and deserving a voice in the narratives of meaning which our nation’s highways now hold and signify. What better place to assert citizenship than the highway landscape that was conceptualized and carried out under the premise that state authority could transcend or discard its dependency on and partnership with the grassroots?
Individual vs. Collective Insurgency—Local Civic Culture in Detroit and Cleveland

If we consider current citizen insurgency patterns to be implicitly responding to the local legacies of accumulated government interactions with the residents and stakeholders of their region then it becomes important to examine not only the patterns of local insurgency practices but also their possible origins in prior interactions between the state and the grassroots. As I got deeper into the nature of the insurgent initiatives I had noticed near Cleveland and Detroit’s highways, I became more bewildered at how they could possibly be so divergent given the relative similarity of the two cities’ industrial past and demographic similarities. In terms of their shared industrial past, Randy Cunningham notes in his 2008 account of Cleveland’s community organizing history that Detroit and Cleveland were both industrial boom towns to the max: "Cleveland industries were based on transportation, the iron and steel industries, petroleum and chemicals, garments, electrical products, and automobiles. In 1930, at the zenith of its growth, Cleveland was second only to Detroit in the percentage of its workforce employed in industry."525 And, as a May 2009 report on community advocacy structures in Detroit (researched and compiled by the University of Michigan planning program) points out, there is every statistical reason to think Detroit and Cleveland would have similar patterns of economic and social contestation based on their economic hardships:526

525 Randy Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland: The Rise and Fall of Community Organizing in Cleveland, Ohio 1975-1985 (Cleveland, OH: Arambala Press, 2008), 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Area (sq mi)</th>
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<th>Pop dens.</th>
<th>Pop loss since peak</th>
<th>People below poverty line</th>
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These statistical similarities were, in part, the basis of my interest in a comparative study of the two cities’ highway histories. But, in my experience, their resistance patterns bear surprisingly little resemblance to one another. This discrepancy—their divergent patterns of grassroots insurgency—I have come to believe, has its origins in their divergent patterns of governmental leadership. This is, of course, a classic chicken-or-the-egg situation and so I will not attempt to determine which caused the other but rather will attempt to illustrate the ways in which governmental leadership has shaped grassroots insurgency and vise versa in each city.

Given that I am dealing with highways here, the legacy of Cleveland and Detroit’s local administration of the federal urban renewal initiatives of the mid-twentieth century (many of which implied, included, or depended upon a highway landscape) seems an apt starting point if we are attempting to comprehend the current relationship between the grassroots and local government in each of these cities. The older generation of neighborhood leaders in our cities have a clear recollection of this period and their experiences with urban renewal certainly continue to inform their conception of and interactions with government. William D. Jenkins, in his 2001 article “Before Downtown: Cleveland, Ohio, and Urban Renewal, 1949–1958” addresses this legacy directly by explaining the ways in which Detroit and Cleveland’s administration of Urban Renewal initiatives differed. Building off of Jon Teaford’s 1990 analysis of urban renewal in twelve American cities, *The Rough Road*...
to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985, Jenkins asserts that Teaford’s “underlying assumption that urban leadership did not consider social reform important was not the case in Cleveland...”\textsuperscript{527} Jenkins goes on to assert that in Cleveland, like in Philadelphia and a handful of other cities, “planners and redevelopers...seemed deeply sensitive to the sociological ramifications of urban development, especially the need to rehouse displaced black families in unsegregated housing.”\textsuperscript{528} And, like Philadelphia, Cleveland “anchored its postwar housing and redevelopment dreams to a solid foundation of political and social reform.”\textsuperscript{529}

Jenkins relates this holistic and integrated administration of urban renewal initiatives to Cleveland’s “good government tradition” explaining that, “from...1901 [through] 1950, Cleveland's mayors were generally known for independence from their parties and freedom from corruption. This good government tradition had spawned a climate receptive to using planning initiatives to stem the decline of the city.”\textsuperscript{530} He then goes on to argue that this good government foundation carried Clevelanders through the urban renewal era maintaining faith in government despite the outright failures and many frustrations of the city’s urban renewal projects: "Cleveland was well prepared to take advantage of this [1949 urban renewal] legislation. It had a long history of cooperation between its business leaders, politicians, and newspapers centered around the planning and development of a better Cleveland."\textsuperscript{531} Jenkins emphasizes that this was not the norm, and that many cities defaulted to a superficial \textit{physical} renewal without the social reform its rhetoric

\textsuperscript{528} Jenkins, “Before Downtown” (2001), 492.
\textsuperscript{529} Jenkins, “Before Downtown” (2001), 492.
\textsuperscript{530} Jenkins, “Before Downtown” (2001), 472-473.
\textsuperscript{531} Jenkins, “Before Downtown” (2001), 472.
implied. Jenkins highlights, in particular, the ways in which Detroit’s administration of urban renewal failed to go deeper than the clean lines and broad plazas of its modernist designs: "Detroit…did not share the experience of Cleveland or Philadelphia. Although plans were drawn for urban renewal of each of these cities, the designers did not include broad-sweeping social goals... In Detroit…from the beginning, redevelopment schemes emphasized restoration of the city's central business and industrial districts." The subtext of this indictment of Detroit’s urban renewal policies is that the city’s renewal, while well-meaning and beneficial to many, did not address the deeper social structures which constrained access to these benefits.

The legacy of political process in any city has far more continuing influence, it seems, than I would like to admit. I am reminded of several pages of my grandmother’s memoir in which she described the reasons for her and my grandfather’s decision to move to Cleveland during the years in which they were both serving in the US Navy during World War Two. My grandmother Franny Taft was a sergeant in the Waves and my grandfather Seth Taft was a navigator for a destroyer. Seth, or Popsie as I has always called him, was a politician in a long line of Cincinnati-born and Yale-educated Tafts and was looking for a city in which he could do his bit, a place that was open enough to outsiders like him and public spirited enough to support his enthusiasm for accountability and reform—support he did not feel in his hometown of Cincinnati. He chose Cleveland, turning his back on Boston and Chicago. Cleveland became his city not because he had any prior tie to or

fondness for the city but because he had heard good things about their government and had been excited by his conversations with Cleveland politicians. It seems to me that good government tends to attract well-intentioned and competent politicians looking to be a part of something honest and rewarding just as corrupt and incompetent government tends to attract greedy and ineffective politicians looking to exploit the city’s resources. Like any rule, there are many exceptions, individuals with grand ambitions and high hopes for systematic reform and structural change. But fighting an uphill battle with few comrades is an exhausting task that all-too-often results in burnout, resignation, and embitterment. I by no means mean to imply that past government practices forever condemn or sanctify future civic potential but rather to point out that the momentum can be surprisingly powerful and that Cleveland’s legacy of good government—cited widely by historians, politicians, academics and activists alike—has given it a head-start on Detroit whose government has struggled to effectively manage a city at such a large scale with such powerful special interest lobbies and such an explicit economic dependency on so few powerholders.

I find Sherry Arnstein’s insights, pertaining to her 1969 article “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” useful in framing this discussion of local civic culture and governmental legacy. Arnstein may as well have been explicitly describing Detroit’s struggle to reach out and engage citizens when she wrote,

the most significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation...lie on both sides of the simplistic fence. On the powerholders' side, they include racism, paternalism, and resistance to power redistribution. On the have-nots' side, they include inadequacies of the poor community's political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge base, plus difficulties of
organizing a representative and accountable citizens' group in the face of futility, alienation, and distrust.  

Detroit routinely experiences the roadblocks Arnstein describes. The city’s powerholders, once mighty in their influence, resent any further loss of power and its have-nots have little experience with or support in the implementation of their aspirations for structural change. The last major win for grassroots organizing seems to have been the $5 a day wage that was won through labor organizing back in the 40s and this ultimately undermined faith in community organizing as the decency of the $5 a day wage is so often blamed for the departure of Detroit’s auto industry and the city’s corresponding decline. Similarly, Arnstein could easily have been describing Cleveland when she observed that ‘window dressing’ participation (as in most urban renewal programs) can fuel later demands for more substantive roles in decision-making processes: "having been so grossly affronted, some citizens have learned the Mickey Mouse game, and now they too know how to play. As a result of this knowledge, they are demanding genuine levels of participation to assure them that public programs are relevant to their needs and responsive to their priorities."  

Finally, I can’t help but notice that Arnstein’s description of partnership, the sixth rung in the ladder of participation she lays out (and the first rung of the ‘citizen power’ grouping), enumerates all the qualities of Cleveland’s local government’s relationships with Community Development Corporations:  

- partnership can work most effectively when there is an organized power-base in the community to which the citizen leaders are accountable; when the citizens' group has the financial resources to pay its leaders reasonable honoraria for their time-consuming efforts; and when the group has the resources to hire (and fire) its own technicians, lawyers, and community

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organizers. With these ingredients, citizens have some genuine bargaining influence over the outcome of the plan.\footnote{Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (2007/c.1969), 241.}

And so, it is no wonder that Cleveland’s insurgent alterations of highway infrastructure are interconnected and coherent. The political infrastructure and support system is in place and operating smoothly, allowing each individual insurgent alteration to engage in collaborations and conversations with the others, forming a more collective and systemic insurgency than Detroit has yet been able to produce.

This conviction that local government is an important lens through which to view local patterns of grassroots insurgency was not my starting point—I have little background in political science or government—but rather, I have come to this conclusion through the conversations and encounters (and later through the reading) I engaged in while studying insurgent alterations of highway infrastructure. At face value, the insurgent alterations of highway infrastructure that I observed in Detroit seemed much the same as those I observed in Cleveland. But, as I began to investigate the processes behind these alterations and seek out indications of how the nearby residents related to these alterations, I gradually came to see them as fundamentally different categories of insurgency – one far more structural and interconnected than the other. Detroit’s insurgent alterations, while originating in similar motivations and desires, were rarely part of a clearly articulated, coherent and broadly communicated grassroots vision for an altered landscape that had institutional, community or governmental support. They were do-it-yourself (DIY) projects at times animated by a sort of anarchistic, frontier mentality. Cleveland, on the other hand, due to its strong Community Development Corporation (CDC)
network, institutional strength, and community spanning of the highways’ divides, is host to more concentrated and directed community efforts. These factors, among many others, lead to more structural and communal rather than do-it-yourself solutions to the problems posed by highways. I do not mean to imply that Cleveland’s projects are categorically better, but rather that they leverage greater resources and are more publicly visible due to their collective nature. Therefore, their influence seems to be broader and the behaviors of residents seem to reinforce rather than break down the progress made by these interventions.

It is also worth noting, before I embark on a description of grassroots insurgency in each city, that, in both cities, these alterations have occurred in places that still need or want to have a connection with whatever is on the other side of the highway, what they were cut off from. Without the desire to reconnect, there is little motivation for a project. Many of Detroit’s highways, in coordination with urban renewal efforts, replaced entire neighborhoods leaving little from which to regenerate.\footnote{It is worth noting here that Detroit’s inner-city highways are substantially, perhaps twice or three times, as wide as Cleveland’s inner-city highways and so operate at a different scale.} Many of Detroit’s neighborhoods have come to be defined by their highways. This is not necessarily negative or positive – highways can provide helpful definition to a district. However, when social borders align with physical borders there is little reason to bridge or fuse the two sides, and so there are no projects evident. Thus, I am less interested in the neighborhoods that have accepted and adjusted to the boundaries as newly defined by the highways which fragmented our cities’ urban fabric but rather in the neighborhoods that have rejected and attempted to overcome or alter these imposed boundaries. Such neighborhoods asserted
continuity across these voids and barriers to movement and *contested* the definitions imposed by our nation’s interstate highway system. The projects I did encounter (in both Cleveland and Detroit) occurred in neighborhoods that had maintained a strong identity and were evidently split (rather than replaced/supplanted). In Cleveland, these neighborhoods were Detroit-Shoreway, Ohio City and Tremont on the West Side and Slavic Village on the East Side. In Detroit these neighborhoods were East Mexicantown/Mexicantown (also known as Southwest Detroit) and Corktown/North Corktown (also known as Briggs).
In my experience, the people of Detroit, and black Detroiters in particular, distrust their government. They do not tend to believe in the prospect of structural, systemic change through institutional or governmental pathways because, over and over, they have been shown that institutions and governments in particular are selfish, inefficient, and ineffective. Residents have been conditioned, through past experience, to expect dishonesty, manipulation, and flip-flopping from their leaders. And, in terms of highways, in particular, residents have learned to be suspicious of the motives and promises of their leaders. This suspicion is now largely tied to the memory of the (largely Black) Black Bottom neighborhood. Its demolition and resulting diaspora has become the backdrop, the cultural legacy of highway construction in Detroit. The closest black neighborhood to downtown at the time of its demolition, the emotional vestiges and racialized resonances of its legacy continue to code the discussion around highway infrastructure and urban segregation in the city of Detroit.\(^{537}\) The Urban Renewal neighborhood-clearing approach with which highways are associated undermined black community structures, devalued black communities, and desecrated the space in which they once thrived leaving a ‘no-man’s land’ in their wake. Appealing to no one, these tracts of land adjacent to highways were rarely adopted by new residents in any meaningful way. They had so completely lost their initial identity that they lacked anything to build off of. The resultant urban spaces were too blank.

\(^{537}\) Its location: located along what is now the Chrysler Freeway between the Fisher and Edsel Ford Freeways, the Eastern border of Midtown (http://www.63alfred.com/essas.htm) and “The community was centered on the near east side of downtown in the area of St. Antoine, Hastings, Brush, John R, Gratiot, Vernor, Madison, Beacon, Elmwood, Larned and Lafayette” (Baulch, 1996).
Layered onto this specific distrust of highway-related government decisions is a more general (and recent) disillusionment with government leadership and the potential for structural change in the city of Detroit. Detroiter Mark Binelli, author of the book *Detroit City Is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis* (2012), a reflection on his experience with post-peak Detroit, gives a spirited account of this disillusionment, revealing the depth of its layers. Binelli locates the core of contemporary disillusionment with the recent recollection of Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick’s failure deliver upon the promises which he made (both explicit and implicit) to Detroit’s people, and to black Detroiters in particular: “Detroit's tawdry and dispiriting political erosion had started at the top, with the undoing of Kwame Kilpatrick, the young, virtuosic, wildly charismatic mayor who'd come into office in 2002 on a wave of promise and left in handcuffs, charged with perjury and obstruction of justice.”

Binelli goes on to explain that, after Kilpatrick, Dave Bing was elected in 2009 with the assumption that “this guy was not going to cause trouble; this guy wouldn't be capable of tricking us. Detroit no longer wanted a visionary—just a ruthlessly competent technocrat in the mold of Michael Bloomberg, someone whose very lack of charisma would be its own mark of authenticity.”

But, because of his vow to only work one term, he left the seat open for Charles Pugh, a TV personality who was more show than substance and was, even before he was elected, already a source of scandal.

Binelli recalls that Detroit was, after this election, conspicuously ambivalent: "As November approached, stencils began appearing on buildings around town

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539 Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be* (2012), 232.
540 Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be* (2012), 232-236.
featuring an anachronistic, bearded visage and the words RE-ELECT PINGREE.

Elected in 1890, Hazen S. Pingree still reigns, pretty much uncontested, as Detroit's finest mayor." 541 He was, fundamentally, a trust-busting progressive but managed to ingratiate himself with the Republican elite enough to get elected to office and thus be put in a position to act on his convictions. 542 Binelli relates Pingree’s legacy back to Kilpatrick, remarking,

the yearning for a duly-elected savior like Pingree was understandable. In recent years, the only Detroit politician who'd come close to the old man's panache--as terrible as it was to admit--was the Hon. Kwame Kilpatrick. From the moment I returned to the city, no matter what Bing or the council happened to be grappling with, a disproportionate amount of news coverage was devoted to the deposed mayor... His every move, voluntary or otherwise, caused seismic tremors in Detroit--a telling commentary on the power of his charismatic pull, even in exile and disgrace, and especially compared with those who had replaced him... they couldn't tear their eyes from the larger-than-life figure born to command a room... There was an extra sting to Kilpatrick's downfall precisely because, once upon a time, he truly had struck many as an energetic and even visionary leader who might alter Detroit's trajectory through the sheer strength of his personality. 543

Binelli is essentially arguing that Detroit’s current civic culture is all the more depressed and discouraged for the recent resurrection of hope for change and the all-too-closely following dashing of that hope.

This resolute rejection of Detroit’s government was perhaps most bluntly stated by Jane Orr, a Detroit transplant who grew up in New York as a kid. Jane has worked as a barista and usher at downtown hybrid café-black box theater, 1515 Broadway Café, for several years. She commutes by bike from her apartment in Spaulding Courts just across the highway from the trendy, gentrifying neighborhood of Corktown. I met Jane twice – the first time when I came walking into 1515 with a

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541 Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be* (2012), 237.
542 Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be* (2012), 237-238.
543 Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be* (2012), 239.
gaggle of other liberal arts students from around the country getting ready to depart for our urban studies study abroad program, looking for a coffee to get us through our next lengthy orientation session. The second time, I was lingering at a block-party potluck at Spaulding Courts, a nineteenth-century masonry townhouse development adjacent to Hostel Detroit, my North Corktown home for the week. She had just come back from work after a twenty-hour day and was ready to blow a fuse. She had just heard from her boss at 1515 that the owner of the building next door (from which a brick had fallen the previous month, breaking through the 1515 roof and landing on the breakfast table of the owner’s apartment above the café) had been released of any obligation to maintain or secure their building, presumably because the building owner was friends with the judge assigned to the case. It was after my conversation with her that night that I asked her about my hunch that Detroit’s inept government might be the reason for the isolated do-it-yourself insurgency I had been observing. In reply to my e-mail Jane wrote back confirming, “Why would you trust our government to do anything of substance when they can’t even make a decision to keep us out of bankruptcy?”

Binelli picks up on this same train of thought in his 2012 account of post-peak Detroit, recalling, “as the nationwide sense of economic doom was hitting Michigan harder than any other state of the union, Detroit not only faced bankruptcy but the threat of a state takeover, made possible by Governor Snyder’s emergency management law, dangling like an invisible sword. Was it real, or just that, a threat, meant to stiffen the spines of Detroit's historically feckless political class in their

544 Jane Orr, Detroit Distrust of Local Government, Email Exchange, January 2013.
forced marched toward austerity?\textsuperscript{545} Threatened with emergency management, the city ultimately agreed to a reduced autonomy that maintained the voice of elected local officials. Binelli explains,

In the end, the city-state consent agreement reached was infinitely preferable to emergency management: the mayor and council would retain their power, though their budgets would now be subject to final approval by the nine-person financial oversight board. Mayor and council would solely or jointly appoint five of the board's members; the board would not have an emergency manager's power to discard union contracts completely. Still, the city was basically agreeing to work with the state to slash payroll, sell off city assets, and outsource departments.\textsuperscript{546}

But, Binelli notes, the damage was done. The reduced autonomy of Detroit’s local government was a universal signal to its residents that the city’s political process had hit rock bottom:

though Detroit’s elected leadership remained in place, it felt less relevant than ever; its powers, in the face of unworkable math, had basically come down to managed decline. Gary Brown, ever the realist, was quick to declare the consent agreement a 'great deal'--if, as he pointed out, 'you look at the fact that we don't have anything to bargain with, we don't have anything to negotiate with, we're down to the ninth hour, we don't have any cash and we don't have any leverage.'\textsuperscript{547}

Brown’s perspective, as quoted by Binelli, is echoed by Southwest Detroit Business Association president Kathy’s comment to me in reference to the city’s weak management of the Gateway Project in her neighborhood: “even the city wasn’t a good advocate for its own interests. When the feds contribute money or land, the city doesn’t have a basis of negotiation.”\textsuperscript{548}

Furthermore, the Detroit city government has displayed a consistent lack of understanding of the community geography of their city. The city planning

\textsuperscript{543} Binelli, \textit{Detroit City is the Place to Be} (2012), 232.
\textsuperscript{546} Binelli, \textit{Detroit City is the Place to Be} (2012), 251.
\textsuperscript{547} Binelli, \textit{Detroit City is the Place to Be} (2012), 251.
\textsuperscript{548} Kathy, Southwest Detroit Business Association Initiatives, Phone Interview, July 2012.
department’s official neighborhood boundaries bear little resemblance to the self-assigned boundaries of residential communities I encountered. This is perhaps traceable to Detroit’s “flat, featureless topography” described by Thomas J. Sugrue in his 1996 urban history of the city, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequity in Postwar Detroit. Even the community development organizations have struggled to define their service areas in terms that resonate with their residents.\(^549\) It seems that, on all sides, there is a poor understanding of neighborhood identity. Jane Orr made reference to this when suggesting that I visit her neighborhood remarking,

> One thing to look into regarding highways splitting neighborhoods is, our community Briggs. It was an area that was once considered Corktown but the highway fractured it off. When researching the name it seems like it was named after the highway was placed. But the community organization put in place to brand this new neighborhood was debunked by a lack of results and the residents took it upon themselves to brand it North Corktown.\(^550\)

The collective definition of neighborhoods is obviously under continuous negotiation and contestation in Detroit. The lack of a deliberate effort on the part of the government to study the community structures and neighborhood associations of their constituents in the years since rail lines, highways, and urban renewal efforts have redefined boundaries is a local problem. By contrast, it seems as Cleveland’s CDC service areas, ward boundaries, official neighborhood boundaries, and grassroots branding all have, in my experience, lined up such that they reinforce rather than undermine one another. The internal discrepancies in names and boundaries of Detroit’s neighborhoods inhibit efforts to plan with community-based organizations (rather than individuals and self-selecting groups) as there is not sufficient consensus on the definition of those communities.

Other major inhibitions to the efficacy of Detroit’s patchwork CDC network include a lack of consistent foundation support and an internal culture of distrust within the city’s community development industry. The University of Michigan’s 2009 report on Detroit’s CDC network, Growing Stronger, notes, “Local foundation representatives have stated a willingness to support CDC programs that exhibit a comprehensive plan and/or vision.” This mission-conditional funding displays a poor understanding on the part of the local foundations of the nature of community development and bottom-up grassroots organizing. Any comprehensive plan or vision is inherently top-down, constraining the organization’s ability to be responsive to the community’s needs and demands as articulated by residents. This mission-conditional funding is further illustrated by the local foundations’ privileging of project support over operational support: “the lack of operating support is partly a result of several foundations' project-oriented funding strategy and targeting initiatives. Therefore, the limited amount of operating support to CDCs from the Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the city has worsened some CDCs' financial situations.” Finally, the Growing Stronger report indicates, "a culture of distrust exists among participants in Detroit's CDC system. Industry leaders have stated, 'Detroit has a long history of city government not feeling the need to cooperate with CDCs,' along with other similar expressions of sentiment, including accusations of lack of transparency, incompetence, antagonism, and lack of mutual respect." All of these elements—the lack of effective neighborhood definition, the privileging of mission-driven funding over operational funding, and the culture of distrust and

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551 Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 29.
552 Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 29.
553 Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 29.
antagonism between the CDC networks and local government—substantially inhibit the capacity of Detroit’s CDC network to advocate for and catalyze coordinated, coherent and interconnected grassroots insurgency, whether that insurgency be directed at highways or at other symbols of repression and imposition.

This largely ineffective patchwork CDC network, combined with the lack of effective channels for official citizen participation in local government decision-making, has, along with other factors, cultivated a DIY-frontier insurgency subculture that is perceived to take up the slack from the government. Detroit’s activist residents tend to strike out on their own, making valiant efforts to singlehandedly transform their communities rather than pursuing institutional platforms from which to launch their personal campaigns for change. Often rooted in the relationships of neighbors, these efforts rarely become inscribed in institutional life, or even in community organization. They remain isolated attempts and so are inherently limited in their effect, as they do not carry the momentum, the underlying collective vision that a more structural approach would nurture. Binelli describes this DIY culture fondly as a sort of celebration of the opportunities afforded by relative anarchy:

Spend any time in Detroit and you'll quickly see that the city's ongoing and multi-sectored collapse has made room for a kind of street-level anarchy. Red lights: optional. Buildings: porous. All manner of vice could easily be had. More positively, self-reliant Detroiter exploited, with admirable vigor, the twin strengths of their particular failed state: space and lawlessness. Artists, musicians, and other bohemian types tended to hog all the ink when it came to manifestations of the do-it-yourself spirit, but painting foreclosed homes 'Tiggerific Orange' as a conceptual art prank or throwing a rave in an abandoned auto factory were not the only creative reclamations of negative space. Detroit had become a DIY city unlike any other, the kind of place where regular civilians took it upon themselves to tauten the civic slack.554

554 Binelli, Detroit City is the Place to Be (2012), 54.
Binelli here is pointing out that even though the city's conspicuous lack of even the most basic infrastructure doesn't leave much time in the day for community, Detroiter still find that time. Binelli turns to the words of Des Cooper, “a local journalist and demographer, [who] moved to Detroit from the D.C. suburbs in the early eighties… [and has come] to see the DIY nature of her adopted hometown as one of its 'huge, huge strengths.'” Binelli goes on to explain, “the amount of work people do for themselves simply to live in the city, she told me, was truly stunning when you stopped to think about it.” In Des Cooper’s words, “because the problems are so huge and the people have so few resources, it doesn't always look that way… There's a perception that people here are kind of lazy and not really trying. But then you think of somebody who doesn't have a car and has to take two buses to get to work and worry about child care—and then they come home and do neighborhood patrol and go to block club meetings. Nobody in West Bloomfield has to do neighborhood patrol!" Binelli sums up the city’s DIY-frontier pattern of insurgency, remarking, "the struggle by Detroitersto reinvent their city has been under way for decades and does not necessarily await a Marshall Plan or some other consultant-driven solution from above."

Indeed, the DIY-frontier culture of Detroit has almost become a recruitment slogan. The city’s unique combination of anarchy and ambition is so widely broadcast as to be covered (or advertised, some would say) in the New York Times, which covered Detroit’s “DIY revitalization” ten times in 2010 alone. Binelli notes this
recruitment effect, remarking, “along with the influx of homesteading artists, by far the most breathlessly covered aspect of this neo-frontier autonomy has been the urban farming movement. Very rarely are journalists treated to a story so metaphorically apposite—hope literally growing from the fallow soil of the postindustrial necropolis.” The romanticism and magnetism of this utopian-dystopian image of DIY-frontier regeneration of the ‘postindustrial necropolis’ is hard to resist. Binelli observes:

The frontier's endless horizon has always proved attractive to those with the facility for conjuring utopian mirages. The logical conclusion to such thinking is something I like to call the Dystopian Happy Ending... In the same way that the microsocieties formed at Zuccotti Park and other Occupy encampments in 2011 provided, for the simpatico, an exhilarating glimpse of freedom, postindustrial Detroit could be an unintentional experiment in stateless living, allowing for devolution of power to the grass roots.

But, in romanticizing the DIY-frontier regeneration of the postindustrial necropolis, we lose sight of the relative scope of individual versus collective insurgency. The lack of community structure and organizational infrastructure in Detroit substantially constrains the capacity for change, the scale of that change. Without community organizing, without collective action, we can only leverage so much and so can only have so much impact: there is a limit to individual influence.

That being said, the ambition and vision of Detroit’s insurgent activists remains admirable, even inspirational, given the tremendous stack of obstacles to accomplishing what these small groups of committed citizens have managed to push through. The initiatives I have seen were concentrated around the part of I-75 that divides the trendy hipster neighborhood of Corktown from its counterpart on the

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560 Binelli, Detroit City is the Place to Be (2012), 56.
561 Binelli, Detroit City is the Place to Be (2012), 62.
north side of the highway, generally known as North Corktown and occasionally referred to by the name of Briggs. When on my first day in the city I asked the owner of the successful Midtown creperie “Good Girls Go to Paris” what neighborhoods had been split up by the highways, she first said none, that they were all gone, making reference to Black Bottom. But, as we talked more, she changed her tune, directing me to the Corktown stretch of I-75 explaining, “the highway divides North Corktown from the rest of Corktown—on one side you have rustic and farmy, on the other you have Slows [an upscale, heavily touristed and locally celebrated barbeque joint].”562

As I continued to talk with Detroiter, I heard versions of this distinction—North Corktown as the rougher sister to Corktown—again and again. Tony, a resident of the North Corktown Spaulding Court apartments, for instance, recalled, “North Corktown was cut off by the freeway. It was abandoned”563 and Joel, a crepe customer who worked downtown and commuted from a close-in suburb, explained, “North Corktown was cut off by the freeway. It was isolated. They had to fend for themselves.”564 When I walked along the freeway on the Corktown side there was no evidence of any insurgent initiatives to bridge the gap. But when I walked along the North Corktown side, I noticed two: one a large masonry cat marked as the ‘Monumental Kitty’ located at the foot of the Cochrane Avenue pedestrian bridge and the other a small garden labeled the “Pine Street Park Tree Nursery” only a few blocks west of Cochrane.

564 Joel, North Corktown Highway Alterations, In Person, August 2012.
North Corktown’s Monumental Kitty Sculpture

When I left Detroit after my first research visit and began driving down I-75 to return to my apartment in Cleveland, I didn’t have much of a lead on either project. The Monumental Kitty sculpture in particular had little indication of what processes led to its creation: only a plaque reading “Monumental Kitty / Jerome Ferretti / Corktown.” It wasn’t until my next Detroit visit that a chance encounter brought me a bit more to go on: Good Girls Go To Paris Creperie was jam packed with families and couples (it was a Saturday morning) and my table had one of the few seats available. A young man, not much older than myself, asked if I’d be ok sharing the table. When Joel sat down and saw me studying a map of Detroit he inquired as to the reason for my visit. Once he grasped my project, the ‘Monumental Kitty’ I had noticed my prior visit immediately came to mind and he told me a bit about it. It was a “Loveland” project, an Imagination Station project started with funds raised through the internet-based crowd sourcing micro grant website, Kickstarter. Armed with these new keywords I embarked on an internet expedition to find out the Kitty’s backstory. Soon after I had stumbled across the archived Kickstarter page, the artist’s website, and the Loveland organization webpage, and later a handful of articles on North Corktown’s large masonry cat. I began to piece together the project from these sources. The Kickstarter page described the project in terms of connectivity and neighborhood history explaining:

Monumental Kitty [rests] at the north foot of the Corktown Pedestrian Overpass. This overpass once served as a direct pathway to Detroit's old Tiger Stadium, for those attending baseball games. Old Tiger Stadium has been

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demolished, but the pedestrian overpass still serves as a gateway, connecting the two very active neighborhoods of North and South Corktown.566

The Kickstarter profile then went on to explain the broader vision and support for the project indicating, “this sculpture is a Corktown Residents' Council project and part of the first of a three-phase project to beautify the overpass, serving as an icon for the neighborhood that will both welcome and say farewell to Corktown's residents and visitors.”567 I now had a handful of questions: Who initiated the project? To what extent was it collaboration between the neighborhoods that the bridge connected, Corktown and North Corktown? Why did they turn to Kickstarter for funding? What were the roles of the groups involved—Kickstarter, Loveland, the Corktown Residents’ Council—and how did they relate back to the North-Corktown based artist, Jerome Ferretti?

It wasn’t until I uncovered several archived articles on the Kitty, months later, that I finally began to comprehend the origins of and motivations for this project. The most enlightening description came from the 2010 Metro Times article ‘Cat Power!’ written by Michael Jackman. It is because of Jackman’s description that I began to see Ferretti’s Monumental Kitty as a community effort. However unconventional and extra-governmental the process, the Kitty’s construction did have its roots in relationships and institutions of the Corktown and North Corktown neighborhoods. I was struck, however, by these institutions’ lack of an explicit relationship to Detroit’s city government, as the institutional partners for Cleveland’s insurgent alterations all had. Jackman explained the process behind the project as follows:

567 LOVELAND, “‘Monumental Kitty’ Sculpture In Detroit,” Kickstarter.
A few years ago, two local residents, Corktown Residents Council's Jeff DeBruyn and Classic Landscape Design's Jeff Klein, teamed up on an innovative plan known as "Building Bridges." See, the freeway has long separated Corktown from the Briggs neighborhood to the north. Though both locales are making a comeback, the north end of the bridge, a grim stretch of service drive with its concrete ramp, isn't the most inviting place to touch down into any neighborhood. And so the vision is to reclaim the bridge as a connection between the two communities by giving the neglected land an extreme makeover.

Over the last couple years, Klein and DeBruyn cut down the weed trees, hauled away the garbage, and brought together community stakeholders to rip up and cart away five tons of asphalt. A talented landscaper, Klein has designed a whole garden for the space, and has committed thousands of dollars for greenery to be planted this coming spring. Thanks to generous donations from local enterprises — including Slows Bar-B-Q, Nemo's and the Corktown Housing Corporation — the clearance phase of the project is mostly done, with much larger plans in the offing.

Then this spring, Jerry Paffendorf, of Loveland — a fundraising experiment that sells square-inch parcels of Detroit land to "inchvestors" worldwide — came to the Building Bridges project with an offer: We want to fund an art project for you.

That's when Klein, DeBruyn and Paffendorf approached painter and sculptor Ferretti with the possibility of building a sculpture.\textsuperscript{568}

The tremendous outpouring of energy and resources from local residents and businesses clearly compensated, at least in part, for a lack of governmental assistance.

This DIY spirit is the kind of "Dystopian Happy Ending" Binelli made reference to in which post-industrial Detroit’s “experiment in stateless living” might become an encouraging rather than discouraging fate.\textsuperscript{569}

Although comically odd, out of place, and seemingly random at first, the project had quite a bit of thought behind it, and a surprisingly clear mission in relationship to the highway landscape it altered. Artist Jerome Ferretti, in a statement

\textsuperscript{568} Michael Jackman, “Cat Power!” \textit{Detroit Metro Times - Arts Section} (November 17, 2010), http://metrotimes.com/arts/cat-power-1.1064798.

\textsuperscript{569} Binelli, \textit{Detroit City is the Place to Be} (2012), 62.
quoted by Jackman in the 2010 *Metro Times* piece on the sculpture, explained the Kitty as a Sphinx that could interrupt the transience of the roadscape it faced:

The sphinx is supposed to be part cat. And the sphinx would wait by the side of the road and would ask you a riddle. You could either turn around and leave, and not try, or try to answer his riddle and go through. But if you tried to answer his riddle, if you didn't get it, he got to eat you! But if you got it, you could go by — to a land of riches and gold.  

Later in the article, Ferretti touched on the same theme of interrupting transience, of drawing passerby into the life of the neighborhood, into the community’s quirks and creativity:

A lot of them thought it was a turtle. Some people thought it was an owl. ... I've had so many different [reactions]. And like, they *stop*, right? And they don't even pull over, they just stop and roll down their windows — and they're on a service drive! But I figured the amount of people that go by there in one year is pretty close to a million people.  

Ferretti, a resident of the North Corktown neighborhood and a lifelong Detroiter, is clearly in direct conversation with the transience of the highway landscape imposed upon Detroit. His work is engaging in a dialogue about the value of stopping, the virtue of an attitude that engages in the journey and not just the destination, the loss and abandonment associated with the highway’s increased mobility.

Similarly, although the funding structure of the project, at face value, seems disconnected from the community, the use of internet-based Kickstarter as a funding platform read to me as a last-resort effort to garner support for a project that could not get off the ground on local support alone, that had not caught the imagination of its community. I eventually came to believe that the Kickstarter platform disguises the ways in which Monumental Kitty’s financing structure represents its community of

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stakeholders. In a city in which the institutional, governmental and physical infrastructure inhibits connectivity among and between residents and their neighborhoods, these internet-based forums, blogs, and organizations serve as social infrastructure, as political tools, and as community catalysts. I am thinking here of comments like that of Jerry Paffendorf of Loveland Technologies (an internet-based, city-wide community development platform), who, in Jackman’s words “hails the generous [Kickstarter funding] response as an example of what happens when folks feel ‘social ownership.’” What does it mean to have ‘social ownership’ via virtual rather than physical relationships? Is there a way in which the virtual merges with the physical in a city that depends on the digital world to compensate for a lack of physical connectivity? And is a virtual community of lesser value than its physical counterpart?

The community established throughout the process of producing the Monumental Kitty sculpture seems, to me, even more substantive than the sculpture’s physical presence, which largely serves as a marker, an indication of the processes behind it. This intersection of the virtual and physical community represented by the Kitty is explicitly celebrated on the project’s Facebook page: “the Monumental Kitty Project…is entirely funded by private citizens, through kickstarter.com, Loveland, The Corktown community, businesses Brooks Lumber, Slows Bar-B-Q, Nemo’s, and really cool people.” And, furthermore, the project is still rooted in its place: as artist Jerome Ferretti explains on a video featured on the Kickstarter page,
“I am a local artist. I live just down the street here (points). I’ve lived in Corktown now for 30 years and I have been an artist in this neighborhood. And, what I propose to do here (gestures towards marked area below feet) is a sphinx-like kitty-cat to greet people that are getting on the freeway or leaving this area...[it] kind of has a call back to the Tigers that played on the other side of this walkway here.”

Ferretti clearly sees this sculpture as a North Corktown initiative, regardless of how the funding is cobbled together: “We’re looking forward to doing the project. Everybody in the community’s excited about it.” And again, commenting on an article posted on RoadsideAmerica.com, Ferretti emphasizes the project’s collaborative, community roots: "I just want to clarify one thing: It is my sculpture but the project was a collaborative effort involving several groups and individuals.”

This intentional emphasis on collaborative, community rootedness makes clear that the Monumental Kitty, however physically isolated or small in scale, is asserting a direct challenge to the highway landscape’s transience, the sense of being bypassed or left behind—a daily experience of any Detroiter that lives near a commuter highway whisking money out of the city as quickly as it comes in. However, the depth of thought and the vision behind the Monumental Kitty remain opaque to the casual visitor, for the project lacks publicity, visibility, and reinforcement. It stands on its own because there is no institutional framework through which to present the work, to present the work’s relevance to and relationship with the garden only a few blocks down. They remain rhetorically distinct from one another and so miss the opportunity to reinforce one another.

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574 LOVELAND, “‘Monumental Kitty’ Sculpture In Detroit,” Kickstarter.
575 LOVELAND, “‘Monumental Kitty’ Sculpture In Detroit,” Kickstarter.
North Corktown’s Pine Street Park Tree Nursery

If you drive west along the I-75 service drive by three blocks, a colorful garden full of young trees will blur by on the right as the hollowed-out and abandoned Michigan Train Station hovers on the far side of the highway to the left. Only when you walk around to the other side, the side that faces towards North Corktown’s Hostel Detroit and the neighboring Spaulding Court apartments, will you see the plaque that explains the garden’s mission: “This is a demonstration tree nursery. It is estimated that Detroit will lose 20% of its tree cover due to the Emerald Ash Borer. These trees will provide residents with the resources to re-plant neighborhoods devastated by this destructive beetle. Once grown, these trees will be planted in surrounding neighborhoods.” Beneath this description Greening Detroit was listed as a partner on the project. A short walk across the highway and down Michigan Avenue towards downtown put me at the propped-open doorway of Corktown’s Greening Detroit office. After asking around the small storefront office, I found someone who knew the garden, who had worked on it: she informed me that, while orchestrated by Greening Detroit, this Tree Nursery was the idea of the property owner. He wanted to find something nice to occupy the site until the neighborhood was doing well enough that he could develop the site as housing. This was a place keeper that had more to do with occupying a vacant lot rather than occupying this vacant lot. I mean that to say that, the particular relation of this site to its surroundings (the iconic Michigan Train Station, the cavernous valley of I-75, the

577 A service drive, an archetypal Detroit highway add-on, is a three-lane high speed street running alongside the highway and connecting the street grid to the highway on and off ramps. It is intended to help highway traffic flow at a continuous and uninterrupted speed but it has the effect of doubling the highway’s overall width and complicates the separation of pedestrian and high-speed vehicle pathways.

578 Pine Street Park Tree Nursery Plaque, displayed on North Corktown garden site.
three-lane service drive, the gas station, Hostel Detroit and Spalding Courts) was not an integral part of the project’s mission.

But, whatever the agenda of the property owner, the Pine Street Park Tree Nursery still operated as a puzzle piece in the Greening of Detroit’s original stated ecological restoration mission:

The Greening of Detroit [was] established in 1989 to guide and inspire the reforestation of Detroit… The founders of The Greening were motivated by the following facts: Between 1950 and 1980, around 500,000 trees were lost in Detroit to Dutch elm disease, urban expansion and attrition. During that same time period, economic constraints prohibited the city of Detroit from replacing those trees. With no routine maintenance to support it, our urban forest began a decline that has not yet been halted. In 1989, Detroit, a typical American city, was losing an average of four trees for every one planted.579

But, the mission of Greening of Detroit, an institutional presence in Detroit for over twenty years, has shifted. As an article on The Detroit Hub noted, “as time passes, they’re expanding their goals to promote urban agriculture and educational programs.”580 The article goes on to explain the ways in which Greening of Detroit’s ecological mission has evolved, becoming a more socially engaged and community-based organization, meeting the demands that would normally be placed on a neighborhood development corporation:

The Greening of Detroit’s Open Space program takes a different approach, working with farmers and community members to support already existing gardens and transform vacant lots into green community spaces. You can see several of these initiatives within blocks of each other in North Corktown. The Vermont St. Community Garden was created this year in collaboration with Corktown residents. Down the street, the Pine St. Tree Nursery’s canopy is formed from over 200 young trees.581

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581 Hennen, “Greening of Detroit Creates Green Infrastructure in Motor City” (2012).
And so, once again, like the Monumental Kitty project only a few blocks away, while the Pine Street Park Tree Nursery appears to be an isolated initiative, it is in fact tied into a network of initiatives of which Greening of Detroit is a part. But you wouldn’t know that to look at it!

Even for Todd Mistor, the priest-turned-urban-forester who maintains the small nursery, this garden is a project that is about transforming Detroit on a citywide scale. As noted in an article “Former Priest Loves Trees But Not the Woods” posted on Bridge Michigan.com, “Mistor is an urban forester, working for the city of Detroit for the past five years, in charge of the removal of dead trees that blight the cityscape.

In his spare time, he works with the nonprofit The Greening of Detroit to plant trees in the strips of earth between the sidewalk and curb. There, he sees the future of the urban forest.” Mistor explains his perspective on the project, and on his role in the city as a whole, remarking,

the whole idea in understanding an urban system is the idea of building something good that works that is successful for everybody, where everybody has an opportunity… That is why I want to be a part of Detroit. That is why I wanted to move to the city when I left active ministry. It was appealing, the opportunity to work with my hands, the opportunity to use my background, my skills.

As the article declares, Mistor is “convinced that his life’s purpose is to help reforest Detroit.” In his own words, “transformation can and will happen, but it does not happen instantaneously… It’s all the little things that add up to make that larger transformation.” And my friend Jane Orr seems to agree with him: sitting on her stoop at Spalding Courts, only a few blocks from the nursery, she asked me after

noticing I had come and realizing I had finally seen the nursery she had mentioned to me a month ago when I described my project, “you get why I said to come here, what this community is like? That project [the tree nursery], it seems like the first idea of what to do with that space. It’s a beginning.”

Cleveland’s Local Civic Culture: Neighborhood-Based Institutional Partnerships Catholic Activism, Foundations, Community Organizing and the Development Legacy

Cleveland’s ‘beginnings’ however, look a bit different. Their transformation is of a different kind, coming from a different kind of civic culture, a different default way of getting things done. Cleveland is all about the Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and it is rare to come across an insurgent alteration that did not, at some point, go through the relevant CDC to get their project built, or approved, or maintained. As noted in the 2009 *Growing Stronger* report on the need to grow Detroit’s CDC network, Cleveland has a weak economy like Detroit’s but has a far stronger CDC system even despite a common set of economic challenges.\(^{587}\) This 2009 report, which carried out a comparative study of Detroit and Cleveland (along with Memphis, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, all of which share a similar economic profile), praised Cleveland’s CDC network noting that,

> Cleveland CDCs and leaders throughout the industry share what appears to be a trusting, open commitment to community development. CDC leaders have commonly moved among prominent community development roles with the city government intermediaries, the Cleveland Housing Network, foundations and CDCs. This pattern encourages transparency and accountability within the industry. It also encourages greater understanding among community development stakeholders and helps keep working relationships constructive.\(^{588}\)

Furthermore, this trusting network is made all the stronger for its specific focus on and attention to Cleveland’s areas with the highest concentration of poverty. These areas are consistently covered by “CDCs with more narrowly-focused boundaries… [while] the CDCs that cover the more affluent areas of the city tend to focus on larger

\(^{587}\) Ash et. al., *Growing Stronger* (2009), 36.

\(^{588}\) Ash et. al., *Growing Stronger* (2009), 37-38.
This clear correspondence between increased need for institutional support and increased coverage allows Cleveland’s CDC network to at least partially compensate for the lack of access to decision-making processes and lack of resources to leverage towards advocacy in these resource-poor neighborhoods. The effective matching of institutional mission with Cleveland’s neighborhood and community geographies is, at least in part, a product of the CDC network’s roots in the city’s community organizing heyday of the late ‘70s and early ‘80s.

Walking through the strengths of Cleveland's CDC System, as laid out by the 2009 *Growing Stronger* report, it is possible to trace each back to a former community organizing victory. The first is the structure of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation, along with the allocation of other development-oriented government funding. As *Growing Stronger* explains, “Cleveland's ward-based structure guarantees each alderman funding...from the City Department of Community Development, which they then allocate directly to CDCs and other neighborhood non-profit organizations. This allocation strategy guarantees an even dispersion of some CDBG funding throughout the city.” This direct CDBG funding structure was an early priority of Cleveland organizers as my friend Joel Solow, a Cleveland-based community organizer, explained to me, and as social historian and former organizer Randy Cunningham explained in his book on the Cleveland organizing legacy. Another strength cited in *Growing Stronger* is the existence of Neighborhood Progress Inc. (NPI), an independent citywide neighborhood development funding subsidiary in Cleveland: “national policies and protocols of a

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590 Ash et. al., *Growing Stronger* (2009), 43.
national intermediary like [Detroit’s] LISC or Enterprise do not fetter NPI, yet its relationship with Enterprise allows it access to funding that is not usually available to local intermediaries: HUD Section 4 and Living Cities grants... As a local intermediary, NPI holds an integral role in the CDC industry based on its local roots and ties to foundations."⁵⁹¹ NPI, too, was a by-product of Cleveland’s community organizing movement and its demand for citywide coordination across and between neighborhood boundaries, identified as a weak point by leaders in the movement. And, finally, the trust within and between CDC entities across the city of Cleveland can be understood as a direct legacy of the working relationships and baseline trust developed between organizers in the years of organizing’s peak intensity. This legacy of trust was evident to the Growing Stronger report research team after only six interviews with individuals in the Cleveland CDC network: “collaboration, transparent decision-making, and strong leadership throughout the Cleveland CDC industry are all assets that establish a solid base for engaging in both traditional and creative community development activities involving participation from multiple stakeholders.”⁵⁹² And, indeed, the Growing Stronger researchers identified this connection advocating that Detroit follow suit and “elevate the importance of community organizing” in their CDC practices.⁵⁹³

The Growing Stronger report later delves into an in-depth description of the interdependence of Community Development Corporations and community organizing, tracing the development of each in relationship to the other:

⁵⁹¹ Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 43.
⁵⁹² Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 43.
⁵⁹³ Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 73.
Across the nation many of today's CDCs trace their roots to the late-1960s and 1970s when community-organizing movements focused on mobilizing citizens for tenants' rights and protesting against racially imposed living conditions, urban renewal, and private divestment. Since then, two categories of community development organizations have predominantly replaced their politically motivated predecessors: those that provide physical development and those that provide social services. Programmatic shifts parallel shifts of funding sources. Government agencies and philanthropic foundations began funding various community development activities in the 1970s and 1980s. "Many of today's CDCs gain their legitimacy not from the local community but from the external institutions on which they depend for funding." Consequently, many CDCs have diverged from their origins as community-based political organizers.

Yet literature and interviews suggest that some of the most successful CDC efforts are successful because they are grounded in community organizing and deeply tied to their neighborhoods' needs. According to one definition, community organizing is 'a direct effort to bring residents together around one or more specific issues;' in doing so, neighborhood residents can communicate development needs to their CDCs. Seventy-two percent of respondents to a 2008 survey of Detroit's CDCs listed community organizing as one of their activities. Yet definitions of community organizing vary across the industry, and some entities within the CDC system do not recognize CDCs' organizing efforts. Some actors in the system believe that block clubs, religious institutions, and other community-based organizations represent neighborhood concerns more effectively than CDCs. Making community organizing a priority would strengthen Detroit CDCs' network and political capacities at the neighborhood level, reinforcing their role as grassroots organizations attuned to their neighborhoods' development needs.\textsuperscript{594}

This fundamental premise—that rigorous and genuine community organizing is the core of any strong, effective and resilient CDC system—was reiterated over and over again by every individual I spoke with in Cleveland.

If community organizing is the core of CDC efficacy then, the question becomes what exactly is rigorous and genuine community organizing, what does it look like? My friend Joel Solow asked me much the same thing when I first approached him hoping to learn more about Cleveland’s history with community organizing:

\textsuperscript{594} Ash et. al., Growing Stronger (2009), 73-74.
How to define community organizing? Lots of people settle for window dressing community organizing. Thinking of organizing as solving issues is contentious—it gets into the conflict-oriented vs. the community garden kind of organizing. It’s really about addressing fundamental issues; it’s about people power. ‘You have power. You just don’t know how to use it. Those in power need you. You just need to show them why they need you.’ Cleveland organizing has transitioned from the conflict-oriented to garden type organizing.  

Embedded in Joel’s language here is an implicit criticism of community development as a lesser, toned down, politically meek version of community organizing—the ‘garden type.’ So, if community development work is somehow impure, tainted, then what would ‘pure’ community organizing look like? Does it exist? There is a quote that shows up in several pieces of literature on Cleveland’s social history, a quote from Hugh Kidd, a city resident at the time of community organizing’s emergence in Cleveland: “I hear sometimes people talking about how the police need to do, how the councilman needs to do, how the mayor or governor or some other official needs to do. There was a sense that we need to do, and I think that’s what organizing…helps people to recognize because there’s something we need to do.”

From Hugh Kidd’s description, organizing might be defined as residents banding together to accomplish something that the government or other local leadership has failed to provide or prioritize.

And yet, even that definition of organizing is easily made impure when there is an indication that the motivation, rather than coming ‘authentically’ from the community, is instead coming from the powerholder’s desire to control or coopt grassroots discontent and channel it into less disruptive means. As Joel explained, “community organizing was originally thought of as a riot vaccine. If you fund the

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595 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
596 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), i.
community organizers, then there will be a structure for change rather than burning down a neighborhood. Riot insurance is what they called it – if we can direct the energy and anger to these organizations, then we can prevent our cities from burning. I mean, landlords were burning down their own houses just for insurance. It was scary bad.”

And so, the ‘pure’ form of community organizing is, in most cases, an ideal towards which organizers and communities aspire but is rarely a label that can be claimed by any organizer. But, the ideal nonetheless motivates and animates the best organizers. In every conversation I had with a current or former organizer, I asked what ‘good organizing’ looked like. Joel explained it in terms of sacrifice, selflessness, a lack of agenda, and commitment, citing canvassing as an example, giving a joking impersonation of himself going door to door pleading, “my fingers are blue: I care about you.” Barbara Anderson, former head of Cleveland’s East Side Organizing Project (ESOP) and current city government employee in the community development department, explained that, to be a good organizer, “you need to hear the heart and the voice of the people—you need both blended.” She continued on the same train of thought

Organizers should always be asking, what is the complaint or the need of the community? Go out and listen, without agenda. Bring them all together despite different voices to talk about them and prioritize. To get the numbers there, you need to convince folks that their voices are valued, will be heard, and acted upon, will be used. Keep the voices there throughout the process, not just thanks and bye.

Giving me some advice for if I ever became a community organizer, she told me,

If you’re really a community organizer, it’s about what they want. It’s those little triumphs that inspire them to do more. You gotta find the little victories

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597 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
598 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
599 Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
600 Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
they’ve made and make sure they can see it…. It’s like the Bible. At the end of each day he said ‘it was good.’ He was already declaring victory. Don’t stop working but, celebrate the in-betweens not just the great big massive thing. Our challenge [as community organizers] is to make sure that celebration continues, that there are more things to celebrate. We’ve gotta mentor the next generation. We want them to feel committed, to give them a foundation that they can step up on and reach higher heights.\textsuperscript{601}

She ultimately concluded, “it’s about the strength of the people organizing—we’re only as strong as the people—their numbers and their resources.”\textsuperscript{602} It is because of people like Barbara that community organizing has such a good reputation in Cleveland. Animated by the values that Barbara described, many of Cleveland’s best organizers earned the faith not only of the communities with which they worked but also the trust of the government employees to which they often reported; these organizers were the eyes and ears for government just as they were the legs and voice for neighborhood.

Ultimately, Cleveland residents believe in community organizing because they have seen results, they know that it can be successful and so they are willing to give their time and invest themselves in the process because they assume it will not be in vain. As long-time Tremont organizer and former head of Merrick House, Gale Long, remarked, “when people saw that we could prevent that not-for-profit clinic [from moving into the neighborhood]…people saw results. They saw the police patrol go up, they saw stop lights go up.”\textsuperscript{603} Barbara Anderson echoed this sentiment claiming, “there is a significant history of community organizing in Cleveland and also a significant history of delivering on their promises. People have continually seen their goals met. The leaders come from their roots, not corporate interests. We

\textsuperscript{601} Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.

\textsuperscript{602} Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.

\textsuperscript{603} Gale Long, Tremont Highway History and Cleveland Organizing History, In Person, January 2013.
have a history of success.” As Joel points out, these successes may have something to do with Cleveland’s scale and geography. Issues seem manageable at the scale of Cleveland neighborhoods but, in Detroit where the city’s sprawling, undefined geography blurs and extends, they might not “have the hope Cleveland has—the scale of the city makes it feel like the problem is too big to tackle.” But, the distinction holds, regardless of the reason for its being: Cleveland’s neighborhoods are well-defined and are home to strong CDCs which generally perform at a high level, building capacity for structural change at the governmental level.

Supporting this strong CDC network, there are a whole host of citywide organizations and institutions that reinforce, catalyze, monitor and promote the work of the individual CDCs. As explained by the president Ann Zoller and manager Nora Romanoff of city-wide Cleveland non-profit Landscape Art Neighborhood and Development studio (LAND studio), there are layers of overarching civic support to shore up these the CDCs, made up of organizations like LAND studio. On the flip side, while I was interning at LAND studio, Ann and Nora had each mentioned in passing that the kind of work LAND studio does in Cleveland simply could not happen without the CDC network they depend on. It is this kind of collaborative interdependency and diversity of mission and scale that gives Cleveland’s CDC system the resiliency Detroit’s CDC system is now working towards. The mutual trust and respect between LAND studio and their CDC collaborators is evident in the language with which Ann and Nora describe Cleveland’s CDCs:

604 Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
605 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013
606 Ann Zoller and Nora Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
The creation of the CDC infrastructure was precedent-setting in Cleveland. They strive to be a hybrid complex of all elements of their neighborhood. There is a tremendous parochial challenge for these organizations – they have to understand the pulse at each tier and at each residential address. They’re really charged with understanding each piece and part of miniscule decisions and, all the while, are expected to rule by consensus. [For many of these organizations] community organizing and economic development are seen at the same level and, the funding system [in Cleveland] allows them to devote time to community organizing rather than chasing money.\textsuperscript{607}

In listing the various civic entities that feed, fund, and reinforce Cleveland’s CDCs, Ann and Nora agreed that one of the key players was Neighborhood Progress Inc. (NPI) which specializes in assessing and building capacity, developing community-wide goals, providing stability, awareness of national trends, attention to broader needs, opportunities for skill sharing, and prediction of what’s down the road. Close runner-ups are the Cleveland and Gund foundations which both work closely with all of the city’s non-profits to fund development at the operational and project levels. Cleveland Tomorrow, composed of CEOs from Fortune 500 companies fills a similar role, investing in capacity building. Nora and Ann also site the direct Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding as a reason for the stability of Cleveland’s CDC system. And finally, they both emphasized the value of the Levin School of Urban Studies at Cleveland State University’s Department of Urban Planning. This feeds people into CDC and government work as well as educates people already working in those fields. It is a huge asset for the city and helps to reinforce and elevate much of the development work being done here. Ann adds, “this is capacity—higher education generates community leaders.”\textsuperscript{608}

\textsuperscript{607} Ann Zoller and Nora Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{608} Ann Zoller and Nora Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
Over and over again, the people I spoke to in Cleveland pointed to the combination of early organizational support from the Catholic Commission and foundation support from the Gund and Cleveland Foundations when trying to pinpoint the origins of the current CDC network, and of the organizing movement that was its predecessor. Many people also pointed to the governmental leadership and training infrastructure that were present later on in the organizing movement. Bobbi, a long-time community organizer whom multiple people referred me to, summed up the unique combination of factors that together make Cleveland’s CDC network so remarkable. Sitting at her kitchen island in the near-west side neighborhood of Detroit-Shoreway, Bobbi explained,

    in Cleveland there was a funding structure locally—the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, and the Campaign for Human Development (national Catholic funding)—all of which funded grassroots organization. There was also good training infrastructure—the National Training Information Center. We went off of the Sol Alinsky Approach—his ‘Rules for Radicals.’ There were city-wide organizing infrastructures—city-wide committees on broader issues through the Catholic Commission. This integrated across neighborhood boundaries. Some of these organizations were Neighborhood People in Action, National People’s Action (an annual conference for national organizers, hosted in Chicago).609

She referred me to Randy Cunningham’s 2008 book on Cleveland’s organizing tradition, *Democratizing Cleveland: The Rise and Fall of Community Organizing in Cleveland, Ohio 1975-1985*, for a more thorough explanation of how all these elements interacted to make the strong CDC network the city has today. Handing me a copy of his book, she cautioned me that, having worked with Randy, he could be a bit of a purist about organizing but that he had all his information right, so I shouldn’t

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609 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
be put off by his criticisms of the development work that came out of earlier
community organizing efforts.

And, indeed, Randy Cunningham provided a comprehensive analysis of the
ways in which the “Commission on Catholic Community Action, the social action
arm of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, was critical to the launch of the community
organizing movement.”\cite{Cunningham10} Cunningham explains its inception recalling,

[Auxiliary Bishop William] Crosgrove met with [Reverend Dan] Reidy, who
at the time was working at the Department of Urban Affairs at the University
of Akron and was completing a doctoral degree at the University of
Pittsburgh. He asked Reidy to do a study of the parishes in the Cleveland
diocese, focusing on how they fit into the surrounding neighborhoods and how
the diocese could address the issues and problems plaguing the city. The
recommendations of the document that Reidy produced led to the founding of
the Commission on Catholic Community Action.\cite{Cunningham15}

This founding document was submitted in February of 1969 by Reidy in the form of a
proposal itemizing “examples of social failure in continuing poverty, deteriorating
neighborhoods and racial strife” calling the Catholic community to respond. In
Reidy’s words:

The time for words has ended. The time for education as our sole major effort
has ended, the time for patchwork approaches to inadequate jobs and
inadequate housing has ended. We will no longer be part of a half-hearted
effort to show our love to our brothers in need. Rather, the problems of human
and social blight must be approached with an immediacy, an urgency that
means TOTAL RESPONSE.

This language set the tone for Cleveland’s organizing scene and resulted in the
Commission on Catholic Community Action (CCCA). Cunningham frames the
mission of the CCCA writing, “the commission would cooperate with all efforts for
social justice, evaluate the performance of diocesan institutions ’to see that they are

\cite{Cunningham10} Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 10.
\cite{Cunningham15} Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 15.
measuring up to their fullest capacity to meet the problems of social indignity,' and most important, 'the Commission will also function as a catalyst to the larger community.'”\(^{612}\) Their inaugural project, Action for Change “made the commission a place where people came for help in combating social problems and injustices ranging from housing discrimination to the redlining of inner-city neighborhoods.”\(^{613}\) As the community organizing movement continued to develop, the CCCA would provide “institutional cover and resources to Cleveland activists wanting to organize a grassroots response to the many problems of a troubled city.”\(^{614}\) The Commission on Catholic Community Action served in this way as “an institutional launching pad for social change activism. The stage was now set for launching a movement.”\(^{615}\)

Equally critical to the establishment of Cleveland’s strong community organizing and CDC network was the early support and collaboration of the city’s two major local philanthropic foundations.\(^{616}\) These two foundations were The Gund Foundation, founded with the family’s Cleveland-based industrial fortune and still allocating funds according to the values and priorities of Gund family members, and the Cleveland Foundation, founded as a collective trust.\(^{617}\) Cunningham describes their biases and priorities, differentiating between the two as follows:

The Cleveland Foundation was founded in 1914, and is a collection of various bequests, some that are quite specific in their use, and some not. The Cleveland Foundation had funded studies and reform efforts in criminal justice and education, but has generally been the more traditional and conservative of the two. One reason for this is that its decisions are made by a board of trustees who represent a broad range of the moneyed and business leaders of the community. The Gund Foundation, on the other hand, since its

\(^{612}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 16.
\(^{613}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 21.
\(^{614}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 21.
\(^{615}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 21.
\(^{616}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 8.
\(^{617}\) Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013
founding in 1952, has reflected the values and interests of Gund family members. The Gund Foundation is far more nimble than its older peer, and far more willing to invest in new policy ventures. The Gund Foundation was very active in the 1970s, helping establish the community organizing movement in Cleveland via its close relationship with the Commission on Catholic Community Action.

Acknowledging their individual and joint influence on the Cleveland organizing scene, Cunningham notes the ways in which their work both cogenerated with and depended upon an emerging non-profit infrastructure: “This foundation activity would have meant little without the rise of non-profit organizations. Starting in the 1970s and exploding into the 1980s non-profit organizations made the initiatives and priorities of the foundations realities in the communities of Cleveland. They have become virtually equal to local government and corporations in their impact on the lives of Clevelanders.”

Thus, we can begin to see Cleveland’s uncommonly strong CDC network currently as a product of a unique mix of missions, actors, and interrelationships that all co-produced the powerfully interconnected system in place today.

Secondarily cited by many as a source of continued strength and integrity within Cleveland’s local non-profit organizing industry is the training and networking infrastructure that reinforces and extends the capacities of newcomers and experienced organizers alike. Cunningham traces this skill-sharing infrastructure in part to the “friendship and alliance between Harry Fagan [leader at the Catholic Commission on Community Action], and Henry 'Hank' Doll, program officer of the George Gund Foundation” and their foresight in establishing a training facility.

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618 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 8.
619 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 45.
Cunningham notes the ways in which their combination of skills and experiences intersected, explaining,

Doll was a Presbyterian minister who worked in a wide range of positions in Cleveland at the Cleveland Foundation, in the administration of Mayor Carl Stokes and for the Greater Cleveland Interchurch Council. His specialty was working both sides of the street: for foundations and for the non-profit organizations. He was interested in pursuing the community organizing ideas of Saul Alinsky that he had been introduced to at the University of Pittsburgh. He found the opportunity to put those ideas into action when he was hired by the Gund Foundation and began his association with Fagan.620

Doll recalled their partnership fondly, remarking, “I think both Harry and I agreed that there was a need for community organizing prior to doing development work. You had to have the neighborhood people coalesce around issues and ideas; therefore, you had to have community organizing activities going on.”621 This initial meeting of the minds would later become the Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA) program. Run by the Catholic Commission and funded by the Gund Foundation, “the program began in 1978 and provided consultants, trainers, and outside experts to help the neighborhood movement grown and develop.”622 Cunningham also cites the Ohio Action Training Center as a key skill sharing platform for the movement: “its goal was to provide the groups with their own training center and a common strategic forum that was not restricted by the priorities of the larger institutions that had been so influential in the movement's start.”623

The final element I want to bring attention to was the way in which Cleveland’s local government officials met the organizing and community development movement halfway: there were individuals reaching out both from and

620 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 34.
621 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 34.
622 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 34.
623 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 45.
to the city’s government to form partnerships. Only a year after the 1966 Hough Riot, Cleveland elected the first black mayor of a major U.S. city, Carl Stokes, defeating his opponent and friend (and my grandfather) Seth Taft by a small but significant margin.\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 4.} The 1968 Glenville Riot followed soon after in which Stokes called upon the National Guard to keep the order.\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 5.} But, despite continuing racial strife, the election of Carl Stokes “opened the doors of city hall to Cleveland's marginalized African-American community. Inner city concerns, such as housing, jobs and public services, occupied front and center on the public agenda. Stokes also inspired people to join in reforming society.”\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 5.} Of particular note was the election of the formidable black politician, George Forbes, to President of Cleveland’s City Council under the Stokes administration.\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 7.} One of Stokes’ most lasting impacts on Cleveland politics was that he, in Cunningham’s words, “inspired a generation of young African-Americans to become active in politics, civic affairs, and activism.”\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 5.} For a city that continues to struggle with dramatic racial segregation and redlining of black neighborhoods, this legacy is an important one.

Another important legacy of the Stokes administration is his recruitment of key public figures who had lasting impacts on the structure of community development in the city. As Cunningham points out, "Stokes recruited and brought to Cleveland urban planner Norm Krumholz and future Gund Foundation administrator Hank Doll to join his staff."\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{Democratizing Cleveland} (2008), 5.} I have already described the role Doll played in the partnership of the Catholic Commission and the Gund Foundation in the development
of a training infrastructure that could reinforce and extend the organizing work being conducted in Cleveland neighborhoods. Norm Krumholz, however, had a national impact—he was the father of Advocacy Planning and is studied around the world for his work on equity policy. Krumholz, inspired by thinkers like Paul Davidoff, author of the seminal 1965 article “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning,” ushered Cleveland through what Kenneth Kolson, author of the 2001 book *Big Plans: The Allure and Folly of Urban Design*, described as a “unique, ten-year experiment in advocacy planning.”

Krumholz took to heart Davidoff’s imperative that “planners should be able to engage in the political process as advocates of the interests both of government and of such other groups, organizations, or individuals who are concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community.” As Kenneth Kolson points out, Krumholz rejected the technocratic utopianism of urban renewal era planning, which saw the profession as “both civic art and the science of reordering the physical environment.” Kolson goes on to explain that Krumholz, along with many of his contemporaries, "took it for granted that since urban politics 'is above all the politics of land use, city planners were bound to be politicized.'” Appointed by Stokes as planning director in 1969, Krumholz set about putting this new activist planning mantra into practice. Kolson describes Krumholz’s impact on Cleveland’s planning practices, noting,

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630 Ann Zoller and Nora Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
Krumholz, recently retired from his long-time professorship at Cleveland State University’s Levin College of Urban Affairs, saw the urban development process as “inherently exploitative of the poor and especially of the minority poor,” considering it the planner’s job to place “priority attention on the needs of the poor” so as to “provide them with countervailing power.” 635 Krumholz actively destabilized what he described as “the planner's traditional posture as an apolitical technician serving a unitary public interest.” 636 It is this kind of governmental leadership that enabled strong partnerships to form between the grassroots organizations of Cleveland and their local government officials.

Furthermore, this legacy of “good government” continued far beyond the Stokes administration, building upon partnerships and relationships that had

635 Kolson, Big Plans (2011), 89-91.
developed under Stokes’ leadership. Stokes successor, Kucinich (1977-1979), “championed an urban populism that was inspired not only by the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s, but by the legacy of Cleveland's legendary Progressive Era mayor, Tom L. Johnson (1901–1909), who had done battle with the tycoons of his day, just as Kucinich would.” Kucinich is remembered, in particular, for his (successful) fight to save Cleveland’s public utility and is credited by Cunningham with reviving Cleveland's “progressive political tradition so that it could continue to bedevil Cleveland's 'great and good' into the future.” Kucinich was then followed by “republican George Voinovich...[whose] administration was looked upon as boring, but effective and successful.” Thus, the collection of leaders that brought Cleveland through the rocky years of 1967–1989 set the tone, operating as models for how government might engage with the sometimes volatile and hostile world of community organizing and development.

It is because of this unique context—with the Catholic Commission as an organizational platform, the Gund and Cleveland foundations as funding partners, the Cleveland-based skill sharing infrastructure provided by Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA) and the Ohio Action Training Center, and the willing collaboration of Cleveland’s civic and governmental leaders—that Cleveland’s organizing movement (and later it community development system) reached the height it is now known for. Cunningham celebrates this reputation writing in the introduction to his history of the movement, "for a decade between the mid-1970s and 1980s, the neighborhoods of Cleveland, Ohio hosted a vibrant community organizing

637 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 6.
638 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 7.
639 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 7.
movement. This movement put a pro-neighborhood agenda on center stage in a city that was the very definition of the term 'urban crisis'. Generally agreed to have been at its height from 1974 to 1985, it picked up on the flagging momentum of the earlier civil rights movement. Cunningham explains:

Starting in the early 1970s, activists who had been inspired and educated in the civil rights and anti-war movements began to search for a grassroots response to the failures of elite initiatives to solve the problems of the city's neighborhoods. The result of their efforts was a grassroots movement that fought disinvestment and redlining from financial institutions and insurance companies, demanded democratic accountability and fairness in the delivery of city services and government programs, and required that development serve the neighborhoods, not just downtown Cleveland.

Ultimately, Cunningham claims, by the beginning of 1980, the community organizing movement in Cleveland was an established, flourishing force in the city's neighborhoods. It had a cadre of experienced organizers who trained new organizers and consulted with new groups. The groups developed their own distinct identities and areas of expertise. Leaders from the block clubs and neighborhoods were, day by day and issue by issue, becoming more sophisticated, knowledgeable organizers in their own right. The movement had institutional cover, research resources, and fundraising aid from the Catholic Commission and the George Gund Foundation. Cleveland groups had sealed an alliance with National People's Action and other national organizations. They were in the national forefront of such issues as bank and insurance redlining, arson, the use of Community Development Block Grant money, and the reform of Veterans Administration and Federal Home Administration policies.

The original ‘seed’ community organizing entities—Citizens to Bring Broadway Back, Near West Neighborhood Coalition, St. Clair Superior, Buckeye-Woodland, Union Miles Coalition, Senior Citizens Coalition—remain some of the strongest community advocacy and development organizations in the city. Many operating under slightly altered names, these ‘seed’ organizations represent “the purest form of

\(^{640}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), vi.

\(^{641}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), vi.

\(^{642}\) Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 53.
organizing...have residents articulate needs, desires and develop actions.”

Continuing to inspire the current generation of organizers and activists, these original six helped to make the resounding statement that, in Cunningham’s words, “the usual movers and shakers in Cleveland could no longer make policies for the neighborhoods by fiat.”

However, few of them have managed to maintain that ‘pure’ organizing that Cunningham’s account celebrates. Most have not, in response to the changing funding structures of local community work. Bobbi, a long-time leader in Cleveland’s organizing industry, explained to me, perched on a wooden stool at her kitchen table, “we went too far with our anti-corporate tactics (SoHio) so, corporations put a smack-down on organizing. So, some foundations cut funding to the original six organizations but they would fund Community Development. Many organizations had housing development arms so they began to shift to that framework.”

As a result, she went on, there was a “cooptation, legitimization and toning down of original organizing groups to filter neighborhood demands.”

Former Tremont-based organizer Colleen Gilson echoes this analysis of the shift from community organizing to community development recalling, “it changed. Initially it was funded at the foundation level. There were also partnerships with programs like AmeriCorps. Many of our CDCs are based on [federal] Community Development Block Grants—we keep trying to get it to cover organizing but it doesn’t. But, in the 70s and 80s there was a huge surge in support for community organizing. There are also statewide and

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643 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
644 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 53.
645 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
646 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
citywide staff. Organizers are the eyes and ears for the CDCs. Cunningham widens the scope of this analysis attributing the ‘fall’ of community organizing to larger national trends that were less supportive of organizing: “the community organizations of Cleveland perished because they could not adapt to major changes in their environment. These changes included the presidency of Ronald Reagan and the rise of conservatism, the departure of key supporters in the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, the change of leadership of the diocese, and a shift in foundation interest from the always-problematic world of organizing to the much safer world of development.” The implicit judgment in Cunningham’s language, that development is the lesser cousin of organizing, echoes throughout the organizing community in Cleveland.

My friend Joel Solow, a current Cleveland organizer who first came to the city while working for Obama’s 2008 campaign for the presidency, told the story with much the same implicit lament for organizing’s fall from grace. Joel explained, talking with a speed that betrayed his New York upbringing, “there’s this one moment—people either think it was the most badass moment for community organizing in Cleveland or they think they ruined it forever. The moment was a campaign against SoHio [oil] to get lower gas prices in the 70s…. Their [1981] rush on SoHio country club was a win: out of that came the Home Energy Assistance Program and the Home Weatherization Assistance Program.” But, the scale and assertiveness of the SoHio campaign permanently altered the organizing scene as it, at a fundamental level, scared Cleveland’s leaders and in particular discouraged the

647 Colleen Gilson, History of Cleveland Organizing, Phone Interview, January 2013.
648 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), vii.
649 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013
Cleveland and Gund foundations from funding ‘pure’ organizing. So long the mainstay for the city’s community organizing scene, these two foundations became, instead, the anchor for community *development*, a far less controversial role. Joel went on to explain the nature of this shift within the industry claiming, “They [the CDCs] were the second wave after SoHio ended the first wave. CDCs are an even more cautious version of riot insurance. Militancy was dying out…in part because there was less reason to be fearful of it: rich people started feeling less threatened by the poor people in part because they were no longer living side by side, in part because urban industry was no longer at the heart of the national economy. Being a housing developer is different from People Power.” But, despite Joel’s obvious frustration at the increasingly peripheral role of ‘pure’ community organizing in Cleveland, he ends on a hopeful note – “Cleveland’s CDCs have it in their DNA that organizing was their foundation.” Clearly his hope is that this community organizing DNA of the CDC system might express itself again.

Proving Joel’s point, we can see Cleveland’s allocation of the federal Community Development Block Grant money, one of the CDC industry’s monetary life-lines, as a direct outcome of the community organizing of the 70s and 80s. As Cunningham explains, “control of millions of dollars coming into Cleveland under this program sparked years of conflict… One of the most important campaigns of the community groups of Cleveland was to claim the funds and wrestle control away from those who had dominated CDBG decision-making since the start of the program in 1974. The campaign to reform the use of CDBG was fought on a citywide,

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650 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013
651 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013

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neighborhood and block level.652 Cleveland’s first, and arguably strongest, community organization—the Buckeye Woodland Community Congress—led the charge on this fight, assuring that municipalities “followed the mandates of the 1974 Community Development Act establishing the CDBG program, namely to implement real citizen participation and to spend the money where it was supposed to be spent.”653 The fight to ensure genuine citizen participation in the allocation of CDBG funds, in and of itself, created the need for community development organizations that could assess and articulate neighborhood priorities. As Cunningham points out, the efficacy of CDBG spending became “a question of how democratic the non-profit sector is. This varies widely across the city. What it reflects is the degree to which community groups have been able to build the democratic capacities of the people in their communities.”654 Thus, the early community organizing campaigns to claim control over CDBG funding implicitly created the demand for and ultimately was in some way responsible for the emergence of Cleveland’s CDC network—there needed to be some non-governmental institutional framework through which the allocation of CDBG money could be monitored and assessed for capacity and efficacy.655

Over and over, I was reminded by those I spoke with, that Cleveland’s CDCs never would have earned the respect and trust many of them now enjoy, had they not emerged in the context of Cleveland’s community organizing heyday. Joel assured me, “all of the structures that now are the substrate of current community organizing—the CDCs, the laws, the block grants in Cleveland—are all the result of

652 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 93.
653 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 95.
654 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 102.
655 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 102.
past wins.” Colleen Gilson remarked, “many of our community development organizations were founded on community organizing. I think it has certainly shaped neighborhood and community participation in community initiatives, projects and planning.” George Barany, former organizer with the Buckeye Woodland Community Congress asserted, “bottom line, it was the development corporations. That was the legacy.” Cunningham picks up on this sentiment in his history of Cleveland’s organizing movement remarking,

it is unlikely that the neighborhood development corporations and their supporting networks would have developed as they did without the earlier community organizing movement as their foundation. The organizing groups won the victories that the development groups consolidated and developed. They also won formal recognition of the value of neighborhoods, even if the major focus of post-Kucinich Cleveland has been on downtown development.

Cunningham then relates this evolution from organizing to development back to one of the implicit goals of the movement at the outset:

this legacy of a community development infrastructure of Cleveland is the consummation of one of the goals of the earliest founders of the movement. As Hank Doll of the Gund Foundation explained, the desire to empower people was not an end in itself when the Gund Foundation began its relationship with the Catholic Commission. The other goal was to use community organizing as a launch pad for successful development work in the neighborhoods. Since the 1950s, Cleveland had seen the failures of urban renewal and the Model Cities program. In the 1970s, organizing was perceived as a way to sustain neighborhoods and prepare them for development.

Barbara Anderson, a former community organizer and current city employee articulated to me, speaking to me across her desk at city hall, the desire for the city’s CDCs to rediscover and reaffirm these roots in community organizing in order to

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656 Joel Solow, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013
657 Colleen Gilson, History of Cleveland Organizing, Phone Interview, January 2013.
658 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 144.
659 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 145.
660 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 145.
push the development work to the next level. Barbara explained, “CDCs have that ability [to sponsor community organizing work]—they already turn it on and off to meet their goals—Slavic Village Development, Tremont West Development Corporation, Union-Miles, Formicos. But, I’d ask, if you use it [community organizing] and succeed, why turn it off?”

And she’s right. Cleveland still has the interpersonal network in place to regenerate its community organizing, and, without a renewed effort at strengthening the CDCs’ connection to their grassroots constituency, there is a risk that the smooth partnerships and clear communication now enjoyed by government officials and grassroots leaders alike will atrophy without a concerted effort to extend this foundation into the future. I was struck by how consistently residents, organizers, community leaders, and government officials alike cited the interpersonal network as one of the most important and lasting legacies of the city’s community organizing heyday from 1974-1985. Eileen Kelley, an organizer at Near West Neighbors reflected on her organization’s role in the organizing movement recalling, “that whole process of showing people that they have an impact makes a difference for the rest of their lives. I don't know the impact of the [Near West Neighbors] organization on the city, but on the people, it was huge.” And, it was true on the other side of the fence, too: as Barbara Anderson explained to me, many of the city’s government and non-profit leadership have their roots in organizing: “if a person talks long enough, you can tell that they used to be an organizer.” Former organizer Bobbi described just this pattern herself when I asked what the legacy of the organizing movement was:

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661 Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
662 Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland* (2008), 144.
663 Barbara Anderson, Cleveland’s Community Organizing Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
“there is a great deal of support for neighborhood-led initiatives in Cleveland’s local government. Approximately 25% of the original community organizers developed into city planners, CDC workers, non-profit workers, city workers. All of them were involved in the six-to-seven year heyday of community organizing in Cleveland [1978-84]. They are all committed and growing in related careers. It’s a solid group with high trust in each other and we all share the goal of neighborhood empowerment.”664

I was given countless examples of individuals that had embarked on the transition from grassroots leader to government official over the course of conversations with Bobbi, Colleen Gilson, Nora Romanoff, Ann Zoller, Barbara Anderson, and Councilman Joe Cimperman. And many of these officials, like Barbara Anderson, now look to the CDCs and other community-based non-profits for community engagement and participation on government initiatives.665 Councilman Joe Cimperman, part of a younger generation of city workers that did not personally experience the organizing heyday of which Barbara was a part, confirmed that for him too, “the CDCs are my go-to for development and community engagement. They can really help to facilitate the conversation.”666 Nora and Ann summed it up agreeing, “Mayors, even, were organizers once… There are a lot of political folks who come from that organizing tradition and respect it still.”667 Bobbi echoed this claim, agreeing, “there is an infrastructure of professional staff that encompass citizen empowerment and engagement.”668 This infrastructure is further reinforced by those

664 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
666 Councilman Joe Cimperman, Cleveland Organizing History, Phone Interview, January 2013.
667 Ann Zoller and Nora Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
668 Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
community organizers that stayed on to work and serve the CDCs, even though they
don’t always agree with the CDC agenda, as well as organizers that are now invested
largely in their own neighborhood, becoming vocal residents and local watchdogs for
block clubs and other resident groups.⁶⁶⁹

Cunningham, too, acknowledges this interpersonal legacy as a critical element
of the organizing movement’s ongoing influence in the city’s local civic culture:

They [neighborhood-based community organizations] helped train ordinary
Clevelanders in the skills of organization and democratic life. The movement
won significant concessions from Cleveland’s powerful financial institutions
which began reinvesting in the neighborhoods. Government bureaucracies
were taught new lessons in accountability by the people they had always
ignored or dismissed. Politicians had their worlds turned upside down.⁶⁷⁰

But Cunningham is quick to warn the city of the dangers of resting on its laurels, of
assuming that the current democratic capacities and working relationships,
established in the organizing era of ’74–’85 will last indefinitely:

failure to give the past its due blinds the development groups to the long-term
harm of not having organizing going on in their neighborhoods. Without
organizing, there are limited opportunities to discover and to develop new
leaders to serve on boards and committees. The pipeline from the grassroots is
shut down. The development corporations discovered that, without
organizing, they were frequently flying blind in their own neighborhoods. An
idea or a development project that looks wonderful at the board level might be
viewed as the exact opposite on the street. Without organizers in contact with
residents, the boards never know when they were about to step off a curb and
get hit by a bus.⁶⁷¹

In the final pages of Cunningham’s account of Cleveland’s organizing, he circles
back to the question of ‘democratizing’ Cleveland, speaking of the city’s organizing
movement in terms of “lineages of activism” and “insurgent traditions” that together
articulate a “democratic legacy” that shapes the city’s civic culture in ways that are

⁶⁶⁹ Bobbi Reichtell, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013; Ann Zoller and Nora
Romanoff, Cleveland’s Community Organizing History and Legacy, In Person, January 2013.
⁶⁷⁰ Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), vii.
⁶⁷¹ Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 146.
both explicit and implicit, evident and invisible. 672 Cunningham concludes his history of Cleveland’s community organizing movement with the somewhat lofty claim, "perhaps the greatest legacy of this era of activism in Cleveland is that it happened at all and that its values, issues and history is now part of the common heritage of all Clevelanders."673 And perhaps he is right—perhaps the literal, institutional legacies are less important than the interpersonal ones, the relationships of trust and respect that encourage residents to reach out for help from institutions and government officials rather than avoid their involvement as is typical in Detroit.

The bottom line is that, because of this community-organizing legacy throughout the city’s uncommonly strong community development system, Cleveland’s solutions to the interstate’s fragmentation of urban neighborhoods are quite different from those of Detroit. Cleveland’s community development system serves as a sort of booster system for resident initiatives, giving them a foundation from which to assert their legitimacy, a platform for finding collaborators, allies and supporters, and a means through which to leverage more resources toward their chosen initiatives. Merrick House, a community organization based out of Tremont and rooted in the settlement house tradition, is a classic example of the ways in which the city’s community development system serves as a catalyst for residents, bringing together all the ingredients needed to carry a project through to completion and sustain its impact and intent over time. Gale Long, former head of Merrick House back in the 80s described their mission and working style explaining, “Merrick House is a mixture of things. We’re issue-oriented, focusing on low income issue organizing

672 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 149.
673 Cunningham, Democratizing Cleveland (2008), 149.
along with block club organizing focused on crime and safety, vacancy—the usual neighborhood issues.”674 She described their relationship with the community saying, “at Merrick House we always emphasized partnership not a client relationship. That implies dependency and a power relationship – we’re not about that.”675 Gale makes a powerful argument for the central role of community involvement in any neighborhood initiative no matter how big or small. She tells me over coffee, relaying how she evaluates efforts of other organizations asking, “Did they hire neighborhood people to build it? Because they [neighborhood residents] won’t touch it if they’re a part of it.”676 This deep commitment to early and comprehensive community involvement sets the work of Merrick House apart from the work of business associations and community development corporations that are fundamentally about real estate rather than neighborhood integration, connectivity and well-being.

Tremont’s Flag Murals

I had only been in Cleveland for two weeks when I first noticed the flag murals lining each and every underpass stretching beneath Tremont’s elevated section of I-90. Because the neighborhood sits at the intersection of I-90 running north-south and I-71 and I-490 running east-west, the highways must stagger in height to accommodate their interchange. I-71 burrows below grade, while I-90 maintains its elevated profile, resting on concrete pillars that carry the road at a constant grade as it moves from the Innerbelt Bridge over the Cuyahoga River at the edge of the neighborhood and south through Tremont towards the adjacent neighborhood of

Clark-Fulton. Only four roads remain intact running east-west across I-90’s six lanes of traffic: Starkweather, Kenilworth, Fairfield and Abbey Avenues. These four channels alone now bear all the burden of connecting the northeastern quadrant of Tremont to its western counterpart and beyond to the neighborhood of Ohio City. All but Abbey Ave – due to the Innerbelt reconstruction – have a gamut of colorful flags running the length of the underpass stretching beneath I-90. Meticulously rendered and labeled according to the nation they represent, these flags are both a greeting and a farewell, framing the neighborhood. The first few times I saw them, I was in a car and couldn’t stop to study them further but, as I learned my way around the city and began to take the back roads and neighborhood streets instead of the highways Google maps told me to use, I noticed that the flags appeared again under the elevated train tracks that ran along the industrial valley separating Tremont and Ohio City.

This second layer of flag murals, painted on the elevated train line’s continuous concrete foundation instead of the discrete pillars of the I-90 foundation, had the words Merrick House emblazoned across the top. As yet unfamiliar with Cleveland’s social geography, it took me almost a month to get in touch with Rocky, the organizer of the flag project. But when I finally did sit down with Rocky and his new boss, Kathy, at Grumpy’s Café just around the corner from Merrick House’s Starkweather Avenue base of operations, it quickly became clear that the roots of the flag project ran deep.

Rocky has been working with the youth of Tremont since ’88—long enough for some of them to have become adults. He runs Merrick House’s Arts Employment program and has been working with Youth Opportunities Unlimited, a funder and
collaborator, since he first arrived. Rocky recalls that, when he first started working with Y.O.U.,

the kids were just gardening and weeding, painting houses. The kids didn’t like this type of work. I figured they’d be more invested in something creative, fun, collaborative, visible to the community, and appreciated…. So, in ’98 we started doing murals under the freeways in Tremont. It was a time of transition; it was becoming vogue to live in Tremont. We wanted people coming into the neighborhood to see that they were arriving here in Tremont, that there was history here. We wanted to replace the graffiti so there was another identity for the community. We wanted to give the kids the opportunity to take ownership, to solve real problems.677

These murals under I-90 mark the gateway to ‘classic’ Tremont from the West. You pass under the freeway flanked by murals, and when you emerge, you are greeted by Tremont Historic District signs and a map to orient you to the neighborhood center. These murals are not conventional in that they do not occupy a wall—they are instead, a series of mini murals, each occupying a support column of the freeway above. Each column now bears the flag of a country that has been or is represented by residents of Tremont. Meant to celebrate the rich history and diversity of the neighborhood, Rocky selected the flags by speaking to community members and business owners. Their uniformity in style is meant to convey the unity of the community.678 Each is hand-painted and touched up by Tremont’s youth. Rocky recalls, “as we started doing them, people kept stopping on the road to talk about it, neighbors came out and gave the kids pizza and drinks, thanking them, waving and clapping. One guy came out with a Polish flag to show what they should paint. It

677 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
678 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
really pulled the neighborhood together for a good cause.”679 This excitement and support for the project has stayed steady for over a decade—only one flag has ever been tagged, the American flag, a routine target the many critics of our country. Never has the flag of another nation been graffitied nor has the installation as a whole been vandalized in any way.

Rocky, cited this respect for the murals as a form of approval, of validation, echoing Gale Long’s commentary on the importance of getting the community invested in any neighborhood initiative. Rocky asked, “do you ever notice that Merrick House never gets tagged? Merrick House looks great because the kids care. Exclude them and see what happens! Kids are the foundation of this neighborhood, of this community. [Organizing] is about building relationships over years to have clear communication and work towards a common goal.”680 Tanesha, one of the kids who painted the flags with Rocky a few years back and was now in her late teens, confirmed for me the value of the relationships Merrick House has built over the years. I talked with Tanesha in Merrick House’s basement gym while she kept an eye on some younger boys playing basketball. Fidgeting with her chair and smiling, she told me that she somehow just keeps coming back to Merrick House, that they do good work, that she doesn’t really know what it is but it just feels right. When I asked if she thought the community liked the flag murals she nodded vigorously and said she didn’t know one person who didn’t like them.

Walking up the stairs and back to my car I began to wonder if the key to the community’s obvious embrace of the flag murals was just the sheer number of kids

who had been involved over the years. The murals have, since the program’s beginning in the late 80s and 90s, been the responsibility of the kids in Merrick House’s Arts Employment Program—a creative job-training program for Tremont’s youth. There is an application and interview process to get into the twenty-kid program every year. When they’ve made their decision, Rocky reviews the application and evaluation with each kid who applied so they understand why they did or did not get a spot. This allows them to push kids who didn’t qualify to take the steps so that they can qualify the next year and gives Rocky the chance to convey to the kids not only the importance of their academics but also the value of determination and self-presentation. Rocky is absolutely devoted to this life-skills program, and visibly beloved by all the kids he works with in part because he is straight with them. Tanesha had told me just before I left the Merrick House gym, that Rocky, “he trusts us. He treats us like adults. And when we screw up, he tells us.” And I could see that in the way Rocky had explained his philosophy a few weeks back at Grumpy’s: “[we] never play with their money, but we want them to earn their money. We’re trying to make productive young people. They get paid $7.75 an hour, minimum wage. We go to the bank together to discuss banking, finances—they need to understand how it works.”681 Most of all, he explained, he has to make the kids believe in the value of what they’re doing: “[the kids] take a lot of pride in the art employment program. With this, at least they don’t quit the program.”682 The flags, while powerful on their own, are all the more potent for their close connection with this long-standing and effective Arts Employment Program—Tremont’s youth is not

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681 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
682 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
only invested in the flag mural project, they are indebted to this project. As Rocky warned, again echoing Gale Long’s attitude, “exclude them [the kids] and see what happens.”

This last comment, this warning, was at least in part directed at the neighborhood’s other major community-based institution, Tremont West Development Corporation (TWDC/Tremont West). Merrick House and Tremont West operate in tandem, at times collaborating and at times butting heads. They cover much the same area, both focusing on the betterment of the neighborhood. Yet they have, in some ways, come to define themselves in opposition to one another. Merrick House tends to focus on more class-based advocacy for uplift, social justice, and policy equity as well as community programming and the recreational life of the neighborhood. Tremont West tends to focus on infrastructure, government partnerships, the business environment, and the physical appearance and branding of the neighborhood. Both contribute a great deal to the well-being of the neighborhood as a whole and the tension between their overlapping and diverging institutional missions helps to balance the neighborhood’s framework for community development. Each, in their own way, serves as a catalyst and coordinator, identifying opportunities and bringing together all the ingredients needed to push community initiatives to the next level of execution and impact while managing the external perception of those initiatives and advocating for the ambitions which motivated the initiatives at the outset. This catalyzing and reinforcing role is evident in the way Gale Long described the beginnings of the flag project under her directorship of

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683 Kathy and Rocky, Merrick House Flag Mural Project and Innerbelt Project Community Engagement Experience, In Person, July 2012.
Merrick House: “Money was available to hire kids, to keep them off the streets. [We also had] money to pay an artist to work with us. We wanted to represent who this community is, to recognize that diversity with flags.” Gale and Rocky saw the potential, leveraged the resources required and recruited support from the community earning the trust and devotion of the kids and their parents and neighbors along the way.

_Tremont’s West 11th Street “Bridge the Gap” Project_

Tremont West filled much the same role for another resident initiative, the West 11th Street ‘Bridge the Gap’ Project, started by Tremont resident Mark Pratt. Mark, a pastor with a college degree from rural Virginia, moved to the Southeast section of Tremont in July of this past year. When he first started going to block club meetings, the Southeast section was divided into two block clubs neither of which was particularly strong or active. After much discussion, and consultation with Tremont West, it was decided that the best way to get some momentum was to join forces. Not too long after this merger, Mark approached the new block club with an idea. On one of their family walks, he had stumbled upon the West 11th Street pedestrian bridge tucked away in the shadows of the trees lining the left corner of the dead-end street that is its namesake; they were on their way to Lincoln Park to walk their dog. He started using it regularly because it was convenient but, he recalls, “the footbridge was totally trashed. There were homeless camps underneath. Folk knowledge was that it is a scary place, a site of drug deals etc. in part because of the poor visibility. It is a dead end with poor lighting, so you can’t even see who’s on the

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In the hopes that something small could help spur more regular use of the bridge, Mark set up a meeting with Cleveland Docks + Bridges to urge them to maintain the bridge lights, which had become almost completely covered with overgrown vegetation.

But, his desire to revive this convenient if underused piece of infrastructure soon ballooned into a much bigger project:

I was walking my dog on the bridge and there was glass everywhere. I was afraid of his paws getting cut. So, I brought it up at the Block Club and people started nodding. They were definitely interested in what I was saying. So, I applied for a $3,000 Neighborhood Connections grant from the Cleveland Foundation. The grant was for basic beautification, to spark interest, to increase usage so that the increased traffic would begin to make it safer, and to make a mural on the walkway using local Tremont artists.

He got the grant. The organizing strength of the Tremont neighborhood is built on its block clubs, smaller groupings within the neighborhood that meet regularly to discuss problems, needs, and ideas. As Mark’s experience demonstrates, these meetings serve as a means of consolidating and sharing ideas, and the first step towards collaboration with either Tremont West or Merrick House (or in some cases, both). Known officially as the ‘Bridge the Gap’ project, it is to be completed a year from May on the condition that he gets all the permits he needs. When I asked why he did it, he explained,

The West 11th bridge is the greatest barrier to the Northeast quadrant. People from the Northeast quadrant don’t feel comfortable walking in the Southwestern quadrant. With increased traffic on the footbridges, hopefully there will be more mixing between sections; people will start to get to know each other. I’m hoping to ‘bridge the gap’ that has been created by the highways that divided the neighborhood. Cleveland is very diverse but there are dividing lines. We want to be a part of bringing that together.

Mark Pratt, Tremont’s West 11th Street Bridge and His Bridge the Gap initiative, In Person, July 2012.

Mark Pratt, Tremont’s West 11th Street Bridge and His Bridge the Gap initiative, In Person, July 2012.
Without the support of his block club and the neighborhood CDC, Tremont West, Mark’s effort may well have stopped at getting Cleveland’s Department of Docks and Bridges to maintain the lighting for the bridge. But, with the momentum and resources provided by the strong institutional infrastructure of the neighborhood, his initial idea has grown into a more fully developed, substantial and visionary project whose mission and intent is clear not only to Mark but to others who know very little of the project. The foundation provided assistance to him in the form of the block club framework and Tremont West’s accumulated experience pushing projects like this through all the red tape and paperwork required to officially alter government property. This allowed Mark’s initial idea to have a far greater impact, both physically and ideologically.

*Tremont’s Pop-up Bridge Mix Event*

The potential of Mark’s project was even further enhanced, I learned, by an intervention that had occurred two years prior to his arrival in Tremont from Virginia, priming the community for an intentional reclaiming of this piece of underutilized connective infrastructure. Terry Schwarz, director of the Kent State Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, known as the CUDC, had initiated a temporary, ‘pop-up’ event to, in her words, “create an image, not on paper, but an experience and vision of an integrated city that we can work towards.” On the West 11th Street pedestrian bridge in 2008 called ‘The Bridge Mix.’ The event description gives a bit of a flavor and motivation for the event:

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687 Terry Schwartz, Pop up Urbanism of The Bridge Mix Event and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, In Person, August 2012.
Bridge Mix will unite the north and south parts Tremont by transforming the pedestrian bridge into a viewing platform and a gathering place. Local artists Patsy Kline, Alex Tapie, Wes Johansen, Gauri Torgalkar, and David Jurca will create installations and performances on and around the bridge. Telescopes will be available on the bridge for stargazing. One Dollar Hat and Miss Melvis and the Buford Pusser Experience will perform. Hooper's Farm will sell fresh produce and conduct a greenhouse raising. Congolese dancers, storytellers, and food vendors will round out the night.688

Terry Schwarz explained her take on the event to me in the CUDC’s crisp and playful industrial office space downtown: “The event was about trying to heal, to reconnect Tremont for one night. We really tried to attract a multi-racial crowd, tried to balance programming on both sides of the bridge.”689 Because the CUDC is an outgrowth of Kent State’s graduate program in design, much of their work is research-based, theoretical, with a focus on systems and patterns. However, this zoomed-out perspective has, starting in 2007, been complemented by their ‘Pop-Up-City’ campaign, a collection of planned interventions designed to prod residents to think creatively about the city’s underused and abandoned spaces. These pop-up interventions do not attempt to formulate alternative master plans or generate blueprints for construction. Their originators do not subscribe to Daniel Burnham’s maxim “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood.”

In fact, the CUDC’s pop-up campaign seems to operate in direct opposition to Burnham’s well-known advice to planners. Pop-up urbanism, an increasingly popular mode of urban design, engages in a dialogue with the planning ideology of Burnham’s era and its reincarnation in the Moses era. Pop-up urbanism aims, instead to inspire creativity and generate momentum at the community level from small-scale

689 Terry Schwartz, Pop up Urbanism of The Bridge Mix Event and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, In Person, August 2012.
interventions, experiments that are both thoughtful and thought-provoking. This ‘Pop-up’ model is especially common among shrinking cities—as described in CUDC’s description of their ‘Pop-up city’ program, it “brings empty places to life through magical, ephemeral experiences that demonstrate how vacancy can be an opportunity and an adventure, not just a liability. These are temporary events and installations that occupy vacant buildings and activate vacant land in ways that shine a spotlight on some of Cleveland's spectacular but underutilized properties.”

Terry begins to suggest why this might be when she talks about the unique problems these cities face: “depopulation and divestment are sporadic and unpredictable. It [urban infrastructure] is a network, you can’t just take pieces out…. you start to think, what can we decommission? But then again, redundancy in old infrastructure is good.”

Terry is essentially articulating the catch-22 of cities that are dismantling and transforming rather than growing. The kind of plan-execute model associated with the linear progress of a growing city simply doesn’t apply to deconstruction and repurposing in a shrinking city.

Burnham’s adage, Moses’s modus operandi, is an ill-suited model for cities like Cleveland and Detroit. These shrinking cities occupy a new territory and demand a new approach to the linear, top-down design work of past generations. The solutions cannot be mandated from on high—they must be tested, they must find roots in the everyday—and often that means a ‘pop-up’ intervention. In this way, the work of the CUDC serves as the design-oriented counterpoint to the community development work of organizations like Merrick House and Tremont West. The

691 Terry Schwartz, Pop up Urbanism of The Bridge Mix Event and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, In Person, August 2012.
CUDC, too, acts as a catalyst and a translator between and amongst interested parties. They keep an eye on the big picture and work to assimilate and build upon small-scale, super localized resident initiatives that have the potential to propose broader changes at the neighborhood and citywide level.

Lakeview Terrace and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project

The CUDC’s merging of the small scale and large scale in design and community development work is perhaps best seen in the organization’s annual pop-up events on the lower deck of the Detroit-Superior Bridge. Perhaps its most visible and well known event among Cleveland residents, the CUDC’s investment in the re-imagining of this retired piece of infrastructure epitomizes their twin commitment to community-generated ideas in partnership with the mentorship and facilitation of trained design professionals. Their ongoing work on the re-imagining of this decommissioned infrastructure has brought them into contact with, among other things, the land-use and social impacts of the city’s winding Shoreway highway. Built back in 1961, the Shoreway dumps commuters and truckers alike into the busy intersection of Detroit Avenue and West 25th Street, right at the western edge of the Detroit-Superior Bridge. Just above the industrial valley (or ‘The Flats’ as it is called by most Clevelanders) and across the river from Cleveland’s downtown, this intersection carries substantial truck, auto, and pedestrian traffic alike, complicating and conditioning any potential uses for the lower deck of the Detroit-Superior Bridge which continues from this intersection across the river to connect with Superior Avenue on the eastern bank of the river. Originally used for streetcars, the lower deck
of the Detroit-Superior Bridge has been unused since 1954. Terry muses about the special quality of the space: “The Detroit-Superior Bridge doesn’t fit the pattern of vacant spaces. It is well maintained. The county is very protective of it.” She goes on to explain that, while the county’s protective relationship to the bridge makes it difficult to get permission to program it, once permission is secured, the space is ready-to-go unlike many vacant spaces that require massive cleanup efforts and often involve challenging encounters with homeless people who have adopted the space as their own. CUDC has capitalized on this opportunity to engage in a collective brainstorming for this available public space open to their design imaginations.

As early as 2005, for several years straight through a partnership with CUDC, the lower deck was home to one of Cleveland’s biggest fine art and performance festivals, Ingenuity Fest. This, however, was just the first of many events CUDC has invited to adopt the bridge as part of ‘The Bridge Project’—they are continuously developing an evolving set of partners in the reimagining of the bridge. CUDC has worked with Bike Cleveland, a local advocacy non-profit, for several months to host a trial run of bike and pedestrian pathways along the lower deck connecting the Ohio City neighborhood to the Warehouse district downtown. In their latest effort to recruit partners in this collective brainstorming, CUDC organized a ‘design camp’ in August of 2012 to recruit community input from the kids of Lakeview Terrace, a small New Deal-era public housing development just a few blocks from the Ohio City entrance to the bridge. This area of the city easily fits into James Holston’s notion of the city as palimpsest; it is full of remnants and layers, fragments and overlays. For instance, the Detroit-Superior bridge, built in 1917, replaced the earlier stone viaduct (whose

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692 Terry Schwartz, Pop up Urbanism of The Bridge Mix Event and The Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, In Person, August 2012.
western approach remains intact on the western bank of the Cuyahoga), allowing much larger ships to pass through underneath. Jeff Kruth, designer at the CUDC and the coordinator for the Lakeview Terrace Design Camp, alluded to this layering of fragments and networks, remarking, “the urban form of that area is interesting…. you’ve got the redevelopment, then the spaghetti of the highway and then there’s the viaduct, and then you’ve got the church. I don’t know if they house homeless men that are in and around the area. They are a strong cultural institution with 114 years of history. And then there’s the [city public works] garage.”

Kruth gave me a seemingly comprehensive account of the intersecting transportation networks and social histories of the Lakeview Terrace area. This is the product of his ongoing study of the needs and wants of those who will be impacted by the transformation of the Detroit-Superior Bridge. He began with the transportation challenges that constrain his ambitions to transform the Bridge: “Detroit Avenue and the Shoreway are much used to get into downtown and then there’s a big truck route just south of the highway that is a major route to the industrial flats.” The continuous freight traffic crowding and disrupting the pedestrian use of these few blocks, he explains, is further compounded by the heavy commuter traffic converging on the corner of Detroit Ave and West 25th Street. The result, he explains is a layering of obstructions that collectively cut the Lakeview Terrace community off from Ohio.

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693 Jeff Kruth, The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative’s Lakeview Terrace Design Camp and The Detroit Superior Bridge Project, Phone Interview, January 2013.
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City, Downtown, and, of greatest importance for his work, from the lower deck of the Detroit-Superior Bridge.

Much of the work Kruth has been involved with has been forging a pedestrian connection between the Lakeview Terrace community and the bridge as a primary link to downtown. Because of this combination of factors, the CUDC has conducted a transportation study through the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency, funded by a federal Community Development Block Grant. Kruth describes the outcome of this study, its implications for the bridge and for the intersection of Detroit Avenue and West 25th Street:

the city would like to see happen is to close the on and off ramp at W 25th street because there’s another one at 28th street. We’re proposing to put residential development on the NW corner of 25th. One of the biggest issues is just the crossing. Shifting the truck route would be another key connection to move away from this area so that it could have more continuity. It’s a real dangerous crossing at the northern section of W 25th. We’re proposing street lamps and raised crosswalks at bare minimum so there is more visibility and an improved connection.

However, reflecting on the more general isolation of the Lakeview Terrace community from the neighborhood of which it is officially a part, Ohio City, Kruth’s discussion of the transit study began to shift away from his focus on the agenda of enhancing the Bridge’s connection to the near west side pedestrian network. Instead, Kruth began to point out the many ways in which Lakeview Terrace had become isolated from its surroundings in the last half century. He cited the highway and its accompanying truck route, along with the “desolate no-man’s land” that stretches the length of West 25th Street between the Detroit Avenue intersection and Ohio City’s

thriving Market District, centered around the Public Market 1.5 miles down West 25\textsuperscript{th} Street, at the corner of Lorain Avenue.\textsuperscript{698}

This insight of Kruth’s was quite clearly a product of his experience working closely with the residents of Lakeview Terrace in the design camp which he had coordinated six months prior to our January 2012 talk over the phone. In a blog post archived on the CUDC Detroit-Superior Bridge Project site, they had quoted Kruth, describing his realization. It had been this quote that first sent me in search of Kruth. In the blog post, he had explained that, when the camp participants took a field trip to the bridge, many articulated “a psychological sense of disconnect between the bridge and Lakeview Terrace, despite its location a mere five-minute walk from the Community Center.”\textsuperscript{699} Kruth, as quoted in the post, had recalled being somewhat surprised that many of the students said they preferred to walk through the Flats as opposed to walking across the top of the bridge to get downtown, but after seeing just how dangerous some of the intersections on W. 25\textsuperscript{th} between Lakeview Terrace and the bridge can be with Shoreway traffic and major truck routes to the Flats, it began to make sense… There is a real sense of isolation and disconnect from the rest of the near west side, downtown, and their amenities, which the Bridge Project could potentially help to alleviate.\textsuperscript{700}

Lakeview Terrace Community Center worker Mrs. Steele had shared much the same insight with me in a chance conversation back in early August (only a few weeks before the 2012 CUDC design camp). Ms. Steele had explained to me that residents identify more with the nightlife of West 6\textsuperscript{th} Street and the Warehouse District downtown than with the commercial scene of Ohio City. When I asked if this lack of connection with Ohio City was a source of frustration, she reassured me that, so long

\textsuperscript{698} Ms. Williams and Company, Lakeview Terrace Community Experience, In Person, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{700} “Lakeview Terrace Design Camp Engages Students,” The Bridge Project (2012).
as they could get to the grocery store and bus lines, they were just fine. But, this basic access to the city’s public transit and a healthy food source remains a daily challenge for most residents due to the steep slope which is the namesake of Lakeview Terrace along with the poor pedestrian infrastructure spanning the dangerous highway and Detroit Avenue crossings. These basic pedestrian impediments pose an especially debilitating barrier to those who are not able-bodied.

When I asked Kruth about these localized questions of pedestrian access and social connectivity, he began to talk through the various opportunities to connect Lakeview Terrace back to Ohio City’s central West 25th commercial corridor, the way it had been prior to the highway’s 1961 construction. One piece of which was to strengthen the pedestrian connection across the highway. Beginning with a caveat, Kruth noted, “there is a benefit to the isolation—it has fostered a strong community because of that isolation. Everyone kind of knows each other in a good way…”

Mrs. Williams, the director of the Community Center too felt the highway had not been all together negative, that the residents had become closer because of its isolating effect. However, both Ms. Williams and Kruth were quick to emphasize that the connectivity issues were not to be dismissed, demanding that there must be a safe way to get out. Perhaps because of Kruth’s training and background, perhaps because of his original investment in reviving the Bridge and not the highway, and perhaps because of his interaction with the kids and community leaders of Lakeview Terrace, Kruth did not see the question of connectivity in terms of the highway

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infrastructure alone. Instead, Kruth positioned the highway as the first barrier to residents’ movement into and out of the Lakeview Terrace community.

Kruth saw this question of pedestrian connectivity and the isolation of this community in terms of the fragmentation of the neighborhood as a whole. He explained, his observations resonating with my own experience of the area, “as you hit the Riverview apartments [walking away from the Market towards the Lakeview Terrace apartments], the street widens and you lose that continuous commercial frontage that would make it more walkable… We did a study a couple years ago on that corridor but one of the things that is happening is that just off West 25th they’re converting an old industrial building to apartments and the CMA is opening a satellite museum location…. right off of Franklin.” Completing his train of thought, Kruth remarked, “maybe West 25th isn’t the connection to make…perhaps its further west along Franklin and West 28th streets to make that north-south connection to the grocery store [Dave’s Supermarket] and to the Public Market at Lorain Avenue. You know, 28th is already a low traffic street so it might be better suited for that pedestrian connection.” This kind of systems thinking combined with an intimate understanding of the needs and wants of the Lakeview Terrace residents seems an exciting combination to me, one that may very well enable them to overcome the access issues that compromise this community’s well-being.

The CUDC’s work on the Detroit-Superior Bridge project promises to serve as a catalyst for this re-integration of Lakeview Terrace with the warehouse district downtown and the Market District of Ohio City but, the community is not waiting for

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the Bridge Project to solve the connectivity problems they have struggled with for
decades. Two insurgent alterations are already present, both in some way smoothing
the transition out of Lakeview Terrace, specifically, the walkways under the
Shoreway Highway. The first is a large-scale mural at W 28th Street and the second a
youth garden not far away. Granted, these are visual rather than structural changes,
but they nonetheless alter and improve the passage from Lakeview Terrace to nearby
districts, working to diminish that ‘psychological sense of disconnect’ that the
Lakeview Terrace kids articulated to Kruth while walking the lower deck of the
Bridge at the August design camp.

Lakeview Terrace’s West 28th Street Mural

The West 28th Street mural, as I learned from my boss at LAND studio, Greg
Peckham, had emerged from artist Emily Acita Croft’s fondness for and devotion to
the children she worked with at the neighborhood community center. Emily had been
a student at the Cleveland Institute of Art (CIA) and had begun teaching art to the
Lakeview kids through an AmeriCorps position when she first contacted Greg. Then
working at Cleveland Public Art (CPA), a local non-profit focused on bringing
“catalytic art” to the city’s public spaces, asking for help.705 When I finally got the
chance to speak with Emily over the phone, she described how the mural project, her

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705 Cleveland Public Art (CPA) merged with Parkworks in 2011, forming what is now known as LAND studio, which stands for
Landscape, Art, Neighborhoods and Development. Greg Peckham, formerly the president of CPA, is now managing director of
LAND studio under executive director Ann Zoller, former president of Parkworks. On the LAND studio website they explain the
rational and merger process as follows: “LAND studio was formed in 2011 through the merger of Cleveland Public Art (CPA)
and ParkWorks, two of Cleveland's leading non-profit organizations focused on enhancing public spaces. Historically, CPA had
accomplished this through stimulating public art and ParkWorks through the creation and care of inviting greenspaces. But each
organization evolved over time to embrace larger roles in the envisioning, planning, designing, building, and programming of
Cleveland's public spaces. And this evolution was a collaborative one, with both organizations working together more frequently
on multiple projects citywide. Eventually, the two parent organizations came to the conclusion that by becoming more than
occasional partners, they could accomplish even greater work for Cleveland. Thus, after a thoughtful merger process, LAND
studio was born.” (http://www.land-studio.org/about/history)
thesis project at the CIA, had emerged from her earlier work with these kids; “I was interested in how they responded to art making. They couldn’t do it at home so this was really important to them. I wanted to keep coming for art lessons. It became the focus of my own art making. For my thesis I wanted to do some kind of public art project with these kids so I approached Greg at Cleveland Public Art [to see what options I had].” It is through Greg’s facilitation that she was able to get through the public hearing and permissions process smoothly, garner financial support from the Cleveland Foundation, convince local paint company Sherman Williams to donate the paint required to implement the project, and get Ohio City Councilman Joe Cimperman engaged and invested in the realization of the project. As Emily recalled, this facilitation, networking, and support provided by the institutional framework of CPA was critical to the project’s realization, as she had no prior experience working in the public realm and was rather intimidated by the approval processes and logistics.

It is through the web presence of Cleveland Public Art – now doing business as the expanded non-profit, LAND studio, that I got my first lead on the motivation for and process behind this mural. When I encountered the mural I had been on my way to work. When I came to a stop at the end of the West 28th Street exit ramp off the Shoreway, I was pleasantly surprised to see a colorful mural facing me but had no idea of the backstory, the rationale for this insurgent alteration. Later that week, I googled “West 28th Street Mural Cleveland, OH” and immediately came across LAND studio’s description of the project: “The intent of the murals is to visually connect the Lakeview Terrace community with Ohio City, showcase the children’s

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306 Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural Project and The Lakeview Terrace Community, Phone Interview, July 2012.
artwork in a public and permanent place, and instill a sense of pride in the residents by bringing positive attention to the area. In addition, the murals are meant to make a smoother and safer transition between Ohio City and the Lakeview Terrace housing. Without the web presence of LAND studio, this project would remain, like Detroit’s Pine Street Park Tree Nursery and Monumental Kitty sculpture, a more or less isolated intervention. But, with the clear communication and prominent presence of LAND studio, I was able to see the West 28th Street mural as part of a network of interventions that articulated a broad vision for the transformation of the city’s public spaces and the reconnecting of communities across the accumulated impediments and voids that have historically inhibited Cleveland’s urban neighborhoods. In this way CPA’s institutional framework, living on through LAND studio, continues to elevate the visibility of the project and aid in the communication of the project’s original intent.

When I got in touch with Emily, she recounted the more personal stories behind the official statement of intent publicized by LAND studio. She recalled her motivations in choosing the site, explaining to me, “someone had been hit by a car—because they [the driver] didn’t realize they were entering a community, because it didn’t look like you were. That person died. This was an important part of the argument to paint the mural—it was a safety move.” As she continued to talk, however, she made clear that for her it was not only an issue of safety, but also one of connectivity: “I had the site in mind because the kids I was working with, they had to walk through that underpass to get ANYWHERE. It was always covered in graffiti.
and trash. There was no transition. I saw that area as a potential to both create a transition and greet the folks coming off the freeway with something positive.™

Like Merrick House’s Flag Murals in Tremont, the West 28th Street mural was not only a way to announce the community to outsiders. It was also an effort to redefine the daily experience of residents who had no choice but to use these unpleasant pieces of pedestrian infrastructure.

And again, like in Tremont, Emily’s honest, direct and enthusiastic engagement with the youth of Lakeview Terrace fed the project and has sustained it in the years since she painted it. The community members I spoke with still have a sense of ownership over and pride for this artistic intervention. And, as Emily points out, you can read in the absence of graffiti on the now several-year-old mural an affirmation of the project’s original mission and process: “There really was graffiti everywhere when I started the project. City officials would stop to check on me while I was painting and would say ‘you’re crazy, it’ll be graffitied right away.’ I consider it an accomplishment that it wasn’t graffitied…it was accepted. In painting every day I had lots of conversations about what I was doing. I think that helped.”™

Not everyone knows who painted the mural, or when, or why, but they seem to respect it nonetheless. While Emily’s initial vision was her own, the idea emerged out of her contact with and investment in the community and continued to grow and change with input from the kids. Emily explained her initial vision describing, “before I knew what I wanted to do, I knew it needed color. There’s no color, just brick in the community. I was interested in how flat and gridded Cleveland was. I wanted it to be

™ Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural, Phone Interview, July 2012.
™ Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural, Phone Interview, July 2012.
unintimidating, recognizable, but not too literal. I wanted to keep it connected to the location.” Describing how the mural evolved in tandem with her workshops with the kids, Emily recalled, “as we were planning, I did small projects with the kids thinking about what they liked about their neighborhood—parts of their routine that they enjoyed. Mostly they drew their apartments, a few businesses.” Their drawings about the neighborhood would become screen-printed Plexiglas panels hovering over the large colorful pattern Emily painted behind them. The scope and visionary ambition of the project similarly grew with the involvement of Greg Peckham at Cleveland Public Art and local councilman Joe Cimperman. It is the recollection of this project’s collaboration, and evolution that makes it more than just a colorful wall.

On the last day before I left Cleveland this past August to head east for the beginning of the school year, I realized I still needed to document some of the spaces I had studied. Racing the sun and the dying battery of my camera, I drove the five minutes or so it took to get from my apartment to the West 28th Street mural. I felt a bit intrusive and uncomfortable taking the photos as a young white girl in this predominantly black community. I was just so conspicuous and out of place, I was sure my behavior seemed suspicious. And right I was. As I was backing up into the street to get a wider angle shot of the mural’s context and that of the youth garden nearby, a car drove by, then stopped and reversed back up the hill. An older black woman, her hair graying a bit at the temples, stuck her head out of the car and asked “you writing an article or something?” The tone of her voice made clear she meant

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711 Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural, Phone Interview, July 2012.
712 Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural, Phone Interview, July 2012.
business, and she wasn’t cutting me any slack. I walked over to the car to explain my research, why I was there, how the photos would be used, and when I got around to mentioning my conversation a few weeks earlier with Emily, the artist of the mural, the woman’s posture relaxed and a smile spread across her face. She introduced herself as Ms. Williams, the Community Center worker Emily told me she had collaborated with on the mural several years ago. I had been hoping to somehow get in touch with Ms. Williams but had been unable to. Emily didn’t have her contact info and I wasn’t sure where to start, whom to ask. I told her as much and we both laughed and the absurd luck of our running into one another on my last day, and in the last few hours before Ms. Williams left town for a weekend trip. We exchanged contact info and would talk again in January, when I returned to the city to do some follow up work but, before she drove back down the hill, we talked a bit about the dedication for the mural her sitting in the driver’s seat of her jeep and me standing on the pavement leaning over the car door to see what she was scribbling on a scrap of paper she’d found in the glove compartment.

Mrs. Williams remarked that she still knew some of the kids that had made those panels, that she could put me in touch with them and while she wasn’t sure if the mural had accomplished all they had hoped—shifting pedestrian traffic to the safer side of the underpass, presenting the community well to outsiders, smoothing the transition into and out of the community, articulating a shared identity with central Ohio City—it had been a start. Both Mrs. Williams and the artist Emily Acita had particularly fond memories of the dedication barbeque, itself a sort of pop-up insurgent event. Both considered the sense of community and celebration present that
day as one of the major positive outcomes of the whole project. Emily recalled, “it happened right under the highway with tables, food, and a PA system. [Ohio City Councilman] Joe Cimperman came, Greg [from Cleveland Public Art], Mrs. Williams [from the Community Center], the councilman [Joe Cimperman] and I all spoke. Without a mural there, people would have wondered ‘what are those people doing?’”

As I have continued to reflect on the value and impact of insurgent alterations like Emily’s mural, the importance of the dedication barbeque, in terms of changing the meaning and daily use of the West 28th Street Shoreway underpass, seems to almost outweigh the mural itself. I have come to feel that my initial approach—to seek out insurgent interventions that physically, visually altered the highway landscape—while a pragmatic starting point for an outsider to these cities like myself, was perhaps a flawed lens through which to understand the negotiation of the cultural meaning of our nation’s highway landscapes. I had been viewing these visible interventions as the initiation of a change but they have increasingly seemed to be, rather evidence or the record of a change that has already been occurring. The negotiation of the meaning of these highway landscapes is a behavioral negotiation that is only signified by these visible traces. The real change is occurring in the behavior that inspires, supports, and extends these interventions, not in the interventions themselves.

This is, essentially, an affirmation of David Harvey’s assertion, in his 2007 essay, “Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form” (quoted at the outset of this chapter) that we must begin to see the city in terms of process rather than product. It is the processes behind these products of insurgency that speak to an

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713 Emily Acita Croft, Process Behind West 28th Street Mural, Phone Interview, July 2012.
evolution of cultural meaning and negotiation of use. Thus, while each of the visual
codes I have catalogued in this study of Cleveland and Detroit’s insurgent highway
alterations—the Monumental Kitty, the Pine Street Park Tree Nursery, the Flag
Murals, the West 11th Bridge the Gap Project and its predecessor the Bridge Mix
event, the Detroit-Superior Bridge pop-up events, the West 28th Street Mural and the
Lakeview Terrace Youth Garden—each do record and signify social processes that
are engaging in a debate around the cultural meaning of highways. There are just as
many social processes engaging in this debate in invisible or illegible ways—
especially to an outsider or visitor like myself. Connectivity across highways can
come in the form of a physical link, but it can also come in the form of school
districting, trucking routes, lighting schedules and locations, bus routes, lease-to-own
incentives, land-use zoning, or appropriation policies and squatters rights. These, too,
are products of social processes but, without an in-depth knowledge of each
community in which I was conducting this research, I had little chance of picking up
on the more subtle and coded signifiers of these processes.

This renewed personal conviction that the real impact of physical
interventions and alterations is their implication of a new behavioral life of a (social)
space brings me back to the musings of Michel De Certeau on the notion of a
“Pedestrian Speech Act” can be understood as a form of grassroots problem solving, a
way of informally or subconsciously proposing alternatives to the modernist Concept-
City. De Certeau describes this modernist “Concept-City” as “the 'city' founded by
utopian and urbanistic discourse [and defined by]...the production of...[a] rational
organization [that represses] all the physical, mental and political pollutions that
Fortunately, he asserts, in our era, “the Concept-city is decaying,” or eroding as a result of the insurgent ‘pedestrian speech acts’ of the Concept-City’s contemporary inhabitants. De Certeau explains that, while the master minds of the Concept-City sought “to eliminate [pedestrian speech acts], because they compromise the univocity of the system,” we must learn to discard the romanticism and repression of univocity, of consensus, and instead embrace compromise, the dynamic negotiation between multiple voices. I think of De Certeau’s notion of pedestrian speech acts as describing the assertion of multiplicity in the cityscape, a direct challenge to the sterile order of the Concept-City and an implicit revaluation of marginalized or unrepresented viewpoints. De Certeau uses the notion of pedestrian speech acts to “locate the practices that are foreign to the ‘geometrical’ or ‘geographical’ space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions...a migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.” Thus, the pedestrian speech act can be understood as an unconscious and unavoidable act of appropriation and re-definition of the space a given person moves through and is a form of “writing” and “re-writing” the urban text.

De Certeau goes into greater detail of what this re-writing of the urban text looks like. Remaining somewhat abstract and metaphorical, De Certeau describes the “re-writing” process in terms of distortions explaining that pedestrian speech acts “correspond to manipulations of the basic elements of a constructed order [and are]
like the tropes in rhetoric, deviations relative to a sort of ‘literal meaning’ defined by the urbanistic system.”\footnote{DeCerteau, “Walking in the City” (1984), 100.} Using the metaphorical framework of distorting language he uses the notion of a spatial version of a linguistic “turn-of-phrase” or a physical gesture that adds meaning to the literal meaning of the words used by the speaker. Again seeing the gesture or turn-of-phrase as a distortion, De Certeau explains, that a space operated upon by a spatial turn of phrase “is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands [through] swellings, shrinkings, and fragmentations.”\footnote{DeCerteau, “Walking in the City” (1984), 101-102.} As these gestures and turns-of-phrase, these pedestrian speech acts, accumulate, “their rhetorical transplantation carries away and displaces the analytical, coherent proper meanings of urbanism; it constitutes a ‘wandering of the semantic' produced by masses that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others, distorting it, fragmenting it, and diverting it from its immobile order.”\footnote{DeCerteau, “Walking in the City” (1984), 102.} Thus, De Certeau goes on, “within the structured space of the text, they thus produce anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and escape.”\footnote{DeCerteau, “Walking in the City” (1984), 107.} This last phrasing—the idea of a pedestrian speech act producing an anti-text to the inherited, intended meaning of a space—is what returned to me as I reflected on the interventions I had studied in Cleveland and Detroit. These visual alterations, which have been central to my study of the negotiated meaning of highway landscapes, now register as alterations that record, prompt and encourage pedestrian speech acts, as defined by De Certeau. Furthermore, the ability for these visual alterations to authentically record and inspire transformational pedestrian speech acts seems to be largely dependent on the extent and effectiveness of community involvement in the
production of these visual alterations – only when the community is invested in and aware of the mission of any given alteration is that transformation realized.
Towards a State-Grassroots Partnership: the Basis of Collaborative Problem Solving Community Organizing, Advocacy Planning, and Pop-up Urbanism

When I left Cleveland to head eastward at the end of August this past year, I found myself hesitant to admit the judgments that had begun to float to the surface of my comparative study of Cleveland and Detroit. Over the course of the ten-hour drive back to Boston, I relived my research over and over again, trying to find a reason for the discrepancy I had been struggling with for the duration of my fieldwork: Why did Detroit’s interventions feel insubstantial compared to Cleveland’s? They occupied similar physical areas, there was a similar number, they used similar language in the articulation of their mission and vision. And yet, Detroit’s somehow felt smaller. Worried that, by living in Cleveland and only visiting Detroit, I had come to favor my adoptive home, partly meaningful due to familial history, I held off on sharing this lingering judgment, this implication that Detroit wasn’t performing as well as Cleveland. But, as I began to go about generating maps and diagrams of each city back in Middletown, Connecticut, this discrepancy in impact eventually felt unavoidable and began to guide my choices of what projects to focus on. Under pressure to narrow the scope of the project, I began to focus in on just the Cleveland projects as I felt there was a real change occurring as a result of each project I had studied in the city. But, by the end of three months of indulging this bias, I had become a bit ashamed at my dismissal of Detroit and began to reach out to my contacts in each city again—this time, with a different set of questions. I asked about their institutions, about their government, about their leaders and their social networks—all the things I had shied away from because of my bias towards design and visual transformation. It is in these seemingly “invisible” and “illegible” social
geographies that I finally found a possible explanation for the discrepancy I had been observing.

Cleveland’s social geography—its institutional life and civic culture, its interpersonal networks and governmental legacies—has bolstered and enhanced projects that, in the context of Detroit, remained in their seed form. This is not a judgment on the people of Cleveland or the people of Detroit. It is not some inherent deficiency or unavoidable fate, but rather the accumulation of past interactions of the grassroots and government, the product of a pattern of processes that encourages different strategies for urban transformation and “insurgent citizenship” as James Holston would put it. Detroit, because of the incompetence, corruption, and selfishness of a handful of its past leaders—informal community leaders and elected officials alike—has become a city that distrusts its leaders and seeks alternative, unfettered, DIY solutions to daily challenges and anarchistic pursuit of visionary aspirations. Cleveland, on the other hand, because of the openness, concern, creativity, and devotion of a handful of its community and civic leaders, has become a city that generally trusts its leaders and recruits the help of institutional and governmental resources wherever possible. This means that Cleveland citizens can leverage far more resources than most Detroit citizens have access to, allowing the ideas of Clevelanders to grow and extend becoming more systemic interventions with deeper and broader roots than the ideas of their Detroit counterparts.

But, as I alluded to before, this baseline partnership and trust between the Cleveland’s grassroots and its government is not a given nor is it a stable constant. It is the product of an accumulated collection of interactions and a shared history and
understanding of how to engage with one another. This shared history and understanding must be renewed and reinforced if it is to last beyond the generation that took part in the city’s 1974–1985 organizing heyday. It is not a closed book. I was reminded of the instability of this partnership, in particular, by the Lakeview Terrace residents with whom I spoke in January of this year. Mrs. Williams, the director of the Community Center, and two friends of hers, both in their sixties or seventies if I had to guess, told me about what they considered to be the greatest triumph—and greatest disappointment—of their community’s history. They informed me, each contributing little bits along the way, that from 1985–1994 the Lakeview Terrace community was given permission to shift away from supervision by the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA)—the local umbrella for management of all public housing developments and section 8 housing—towards resident management. Following the lease-to-own model pioneered by other public housing groups in Philadelphia and St. Louis, they began to transition to a system by which everybody would own a share in the development. CMHA offered a tenant-to-home-ownership program that allowed developments like Lakeview Terrace to be resident owned and operated. Mrs. Williams recalled, “we wanted to do it right—we went to HUD in Washington and we went to see it in action in St. Louis, and we got approval from all the residents.”

CMHA shut down the resident management program in ’94 and all three of them resoundingly agreed that the condition of the community has gotten worse ever since—the crime, the shootings, the drugs, the food access, and just the overall maintenance and appearance. They attributed this decline to the loss of a sense of

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ownership, explaining that people just don’t invest in their property anymore now that they don’t have control of what it might become a few years down the line. Mrs. Williams recalled with a mix of lingering sadness and defiant pride in her voice, “we had something real fine.” But, they lost it. They agree, “it’s bad now—it’s not safe and folks are coming in and out more frequently, not staying as long.” This loss of control over their community seemed to have initiated for this group of community leaders, a breakage with government that has not healed in the years since. The more able-bodied of the two women immediately followed this story of the community’s decade-long experiment in self-management with commentary on the government’s continued disregard for the needs of their community, referring to the flawed community engagement practices of the planners of the Toe Path Trail, a recreational Cleveland area bike and pedestrian trail that is currently under development. She explained that, when the planners finally did meet with the community, none of their questions were answered: “What houses will it take out? The townhouses. Why come by this way? They say it’ll reconnect us but I don’t see how. Back a while, the water filtration station cut us off from Edgewater [a Park on the lake Erie shore]—the station is city owned. We used to be able to walk right on over, send our kids there on their bikes. But not now.” This is clearly just one of many grievances that have begun to add up, discouraging these three community leaders from pursuing partnerships with government officials and regional planners.

The other woman, sitting in the Community Center gym across from me and Mrs. Williams and hooked up to a wheelable respirator that ran under her nostrils,
continued this train of thought explaining that the community had bad bus service, that she too felt abandoned by the city and manipulated by public engagement hearings for toepath trail. But, for her, the sticking point was the bus service more so than the toepath trail. She had a hard enough time getting around already: “the 81 bus is the only bus that comes down here—all the other times you gotta go up to 25th. And, either way, you gotta walk up that hill. And, you know, we got handicapped folks here and they still gotta walk up that hill? It ain’t right.”

Eric Hooper, a lifelong resident of Tremont that remains active and vocal in community development work seems to share a similar frustration with ‘token’ community participation, as Sherry Arnstein defined it in her article on the ladder of citizen participation:

“They’re going to put money in the field so, why don’t they talk to us? They basically already have their minds made up—ODOT, the city, RTA—these meetings with the public are just a formality.” I cite these examples of citizen distrust and resentment towards local government not to imply that the Cleveland city government is necessarily in the wrong or that they do not have good reasons for the way they have structured the community engagement practices for the Toe Path Trail and Clark Park re-design but rather to make clear how quickly the tables can turn and how easily partnerships and working relationships can be lost, even in cities with such progressive planning legacies as Cleveland.

I do not contend that, based on these experiences or conversations alone, I am qualified to deliver judgment on the planning profession as a whole nor do I claim to think that I could prescribe how city planners might work in the future. However, I do

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want to take this opportunity to, for a moment, to pull back and consider what implications these experiences and conversations have for the planning profession, what kind of partnerships and processes they support or discredit. The most compelling models I stumbled across were those of Advocacy Planning—in vogue back in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s—and the current model of Pop-Up Urbanism. Advocacy Planning was a first stab at re-inventing the planning profession in response to the collapse of its modernist ideological foundations. Career planners like Cleveland’s Norm Krumholz had inherited the broken Moses-era model and the anti-planner rhetoric of Jane Jacobs. Advocacy Planning rejected every last hallmark of the Moses-era planning, including the visionary utopianism that lay at its roots. It was a pragmatic, policy-focused model that rejected the polished showmanship of models and renderings, rejected the theatrical and the imaginative, opting instead for realism and rootedness.

Brian Goldstein discusses Advocacy Planning’s rejection of the Moses-era model in his 2011 article “Planning's End? Urban Renewal in New Haven, the Yale School of Art and Architecture, and the Fall of the New Deal Spatial Order,” published in the Journal of Urban History:

As an alternative to the ideal of the master builder, advocacy planning reserved a more modest role for the design profession, one informed by the specific social causes of the era, especially civil rights. The advocate planner served as an intermediary, offering professional expertise on behalf of interest groups instead of developing an all-encompassing plan from the top down... [This represented] an evolution, from the absolutism of the plan and the authority of its planner to a consideration of the 'conflicting roles' that planners faced.729

The initiation of this evolution from the absolutist authority of the expert planner to the planner as intermediary, was an important one that has re-contextualized the work of the planner, asking that the planner embrace and work with rather than overpower the paradoxical and the political. As noted by Kolson in his 2001 book *Big Plans*, the Advocacy Planning model and Cleveland’s Norm Krumholz in particular,

‘asked the city planners to be what few public administrators are: activist, risk-taking in style, and redistributive in objective... Planning practice actually is cautious and conservative.’ Advocacy planning... is a paradox. On the one hand, it is avowedly partisan, in that it rejects the very idea of an objectively knowable and unitary public interest. On the other hand, it is political in the highest, Aristotelian sense of being animated by a vision of a just and equitable society.\(^730\)

Merely by engaging with this paradox, Advocacy Planning did a great deal to revive the planning profession and to push it past the dead-end of Moses-era planning. However, the model did not spread. Kolson, his focus being the role of imagination, inspiration and utopianism in the planning profession, asserts that one of Advocacy Planning’s biggest shortcomings was its dismissal of visionary theatricality like that of Futurama. “It lacked the power to inspire—perhaps because its basic principles were not conveyed well through the kinds of visual images normally associated with Big Plans. Actually, that doesn't go far enough...advocacy planning was constitutionally allergic to such visionary rendering and thus could never hope to compete with those advocating grandiose construction projects of one kind or another.”\(^731\) This “constitutional allergy” of Advocacy Planning to the visionary rendering and grandiose plans of Moses-era planning is understandable, given how fresh their failure was. But, now, with some distance from the catastrophic

miscalculations and manipulations of Moses-era planning, there is room to consider where the visionary theatricality of Futurama might, actually, be valuable.

Pop-up urbanism, I believe, begins to provide a model for how this visionary theatricality might be deployed in a constructive, catalytic way rather than in a manipulative and overpowering way. Pop-up urbanism acknowledges the importance of inspiring citizens, and at times leading the way to give citizens a vision for how their world might be transformed. But, it does not presume that the vision initially presented is the right one and does not force that vision upon the citizens that are receiving it. The visionary rendering, in pop-up urbanism is treated as a catalyst for conversation rather than a blueprint for construction. It is a cyclical or iterative process in which proposal and counterproposal can intermingle and combine rather than mutually destruct or overpower one another. It generates debate around issues of urban space creation and highlights existing contestation by encouraging conversation and feedback on temporary experiments. Similarly, pop-up events are accessible to those who are not trained in 3D visualization or spatial thinking—people like Kathy from Merrick House who found the 2D renderings of the Innerbelt Project to be confusing and therefore insufficient for the communication of the design idea as a whole. There are obvious limitations to the pop-up model—one of the most conspicuous being the risk of wasting financial resources on a trial-and-error method without sufficient direction or promise of solution, and the other being that the model is not easily scalable to a citywide transformation (it is only really useful at a relatively localized scale). But, the pop-up model nonetheless adds a great deal to the
internal debate around how planners should engage with the citizens and communities
for whom they are designing.

James Holston’s 1999 analysis of the planning profession and the potential of
what he termed “insurgent citizenship” helps me to formulate what ideal we are
striving for in the planning profession, even if the implicit understanding is that we
may never reach that ideal. Holston frames this ideal in terms of a balance of building
state authority and providing for insurgency against that state. Using the U.S.
Constitution as an example of this balance, Holston advocates for a balance of central
authority and grassroots counter-assertions:

Not all master plans negate the present as a means to get to the imagined
future (or past) of planning. A powerful counterexample is the U.S.
Constitution.... as a blueprint, it does not try to legislate the future.... above all,
they establish a trust that future generations of citizens have the ability and the
right to make their own histories by interpreting what the master plan means
in light of their own experience. The U.S. Constitution has, therefore, two
types of planning projects: state building and citizenship building. The key
point for our discussion is that the latter is conditioned by the former but not
reducible to it because the Constitution secures for citizens a real measure of
insurgence against the state. On the one hand, it designs a state with the
minimum conditions necessary to institutionalize both order and conflict. On
the other hand, it guarantees the necessary conditions for social mobilization
as a means to include the unintended and the unforeseeable as possible
sources of new constitutional interpretation.732

Holston then goes on to explain how this notion of constitutional balance of state
building and citizenship building might translate to the planning profession as
opposed to governmental structures. Holston first warns of the danger of excessive
citizen power noting the tendency for residents to close, fortify and privatize
community spaces in an attempt to protect against outsiders, concluding, “local

732 Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 166.
enactments of democracy may thereby produce anti-democratic results.” Holston then uses this risk of fragmentation, isolation and segregation as a platform from which to describe the need for some centralized authority that can mediate and moderate this tendency:

The lesson of this paradox is that planning needs to engage not only the development of insurgent forms of the social but also the resources of the state to define, and occasionally impose, a more encompassing conception of right than is sometimes possible to find at the local level… Above all, planning needs to encourage a complementary antagonism between these two engagements. It needs to operate simultaneously in two theaters, so to speak, maintaining a productive tension between the apparatus of state-directed futures and the investigation of insurgent forms of the social embedded in the present. 

Holston is, here, describing a government, and by extension, a planning profession that is defined by tension, negotiation, compromise and evolution.

This implicit demand that planners embrace tension, negotiation, compromise and evolution negates the foundation of utopian high modernism which so stridently sought to resolve, order, and prescribe future social relations so that they remained in perfect harmony at all times. Holston acknowledges that he is asking for a fundamental redefinition of the profession’s mission writing, “to reengage the social after the debacle of modernism's utopian attempts…requires expanding the idea of planning and architecture beyond this preoccupation with execution and design. It requires looking into, caring for, and teaching about lived experience as lived. To plan the possible is, in this sense, to begin from an ethnographic conception of the social and its spaces of insurgence.” This ‘looking into, caring for, and teaching about lived experience,’ I would contend, was one of the major contributions of

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Advocacy Planning and one of its lasting legacies for those who were involved in it. Advocacy Planning placed value on of those aspects of urban life that were consistently dismissed or overlooked in modernist planning practice. However, it lacked the central authority and vision needed as a counterbalance. It rejected the notion of a master plan, however flexible and open to interpretation, and so its model was incomplete, lopsided, much like the modernist Moses-era planning model had been before it, but in the opposity way.

When I arrived at Holston’s description of insurgent citizenship and its spatial equivalent, insurgent urbanism, I couldn’t help but think of pop-up urbanism and of each of the insurgent alterations of the highway landscape that I have catalogued above—Monumental Kitty, Pine Street Park Tree Nursery, Tremont Flag Murals, West 11th Bridge the Gap Project and Bridge Mix, the Detroit-Superior Bridge Project, the West 28th Street Mural, and the Lakeview Terrace youth garden nearby—I can’t help but think that these may collectively hold the key to defining a dynamic partnership between the government and the grassroots, and between the planner-expert and the citizen-inhabitant. Holston describes insurgent urbanism as spatial practices that in some way expand or erode citizenship. 736 Holston’s insurgent urbanism, much like De Certeau’s notion of the pedestrian speech act and Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city, presents the city “as both the text and the context of new debates about fundamental social relations” and valorizes “the constitutive role of conflict and ambiguity in shaping the multiplicity of contemporary urban life.” 737 Holston then goes on to explain that the heterogeneity of these insurgent spatial

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practices work “against the modernist absorption of citizenship into a project of state building, providing alternative, possible sources for the development of new kinds of practices and narratives about belonging to and participating in society.”\textsuperscript{738} It is for these reasons, he asserts, that insurgent urbanism is central to “the project of rethinking the social in planning… [Insurgent urbanism] reveals a realm of the possible that is rooted in the heterogeneity of lived experience.”\textsuperscript{739}

The insurgent spatial practices that I observed and studied in Cleveland and Detroit have become central to my own personal rethinking of how the social enters into planning. Each of the insurgent interventions I have catalogued helps to expand my own understanding of the many levels on which these spaces operate currently, the many meanings that they already hold, and thus the many potential future uses and meanings they might imply. It is this specificity to local context, heterogeneity of use and negotiation of meaning that lends these highway landscapes their richness and dynamism, and it is this intersecting depth of experience which makes these highway landscapes, both individually and collectively, significant to any student of American history, culture, society or government (and certainly to any student of urban planning).

\textsuperscript{738} Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 171.
\textsuperscript{739} Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship” (1999), 171.
CONCLUSION

The Highway as Vernacular Landscape
Erasure and Curation of the Past – Contemporary Preservation Practices

“We should not wait upon some great political revolution to tell us how to reorganize our cities in a socialist or eco-feminist or some other way. No, what we have to do is to work on the nature of the social relations in the cities. If there is going to be a revolution, it is going to be a long revolution, located within the urban process. That long revolution of social relations is going to have to comprise a steady working out, over a long period of time, of transformations.”


"The ground plan of most settlements can be seen as a series of overlays from different ages. The term 'palimpsest' is used as a metaphor for such processes of change, where current uses overwrite, but do not completely erase, the marks of prior use…Patterns of streets and spaces have often developed over many hundreds of years, and fragments and 'ghosts' of patterns from different eras can be seen in the ground plans of many cities."


The American highway landscape has come to serve as a sort of cultural repository, collecting and consolidating disparate elements of and tensions in the American cultural myth, telling of our national ambition and insurgent tradition side by side, the aspirations of each conditioning the other. Entering into this project, I had a steely determination that highways around the country should be demolished in payment for the hurt and isolation they had caused. But, as I emerge from this twelve-month investigation into the localized meanings and historical context of our nation’s highway landscapes, I find I cannot take the same categorical stance. Our nation’s highways may be unified by a common set of physical characteristics and functional

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missions, their cultural meanings and social histories are highly specific to their local context. While it is useful to group highways together into an analytical conglomerate for the purpose of investigating the systemic reasons for their creation, this grouping very quickly becomes insufficient to explain the layered meanings assigned to these pieces of infrastructure by those nearby residents, rather than by driver-users.

The peeling paint, chipping concrete, rusting steel, and pock-marked asphalt of our nation’s highways give us an opportunity to revisit the collective memories and social histories now inscribed in their materiality, and to cultivate a critical perspective not only on their functional value but also on their cultural, their social value. As the power-holders in our nation begin to confront decisions about how to deal with this deterioration and erosion of our country’s auto infrastructure, many will only see two outcomes: maintain or destroy, build or dismantle, enhance or erase. But, when I look at the way residents and communities adjacent to highways have confronted the physical form of their local highway infrastructure, I see a far more complex and exciting engagement with the functional, cultural and social value of this infrastructure. The insurgent alterations I have observed in Cleveland and Detroit begin to suggest a territory in between maintenance and destruction, construction and erasure. These insurgent alterations are engaging with rather than attempting to overpower and obscure the layered histories and collective memories that highways now hold for our nation. This insurgency implicitly affirms and contributes to the city-as-palimpsest, in a way that the state-sponsored teardowns and reconstructions do not. If we begin to see the highway network as yet another overlay in an accumulation, then the question becomes whether we should actively preserve the
highway as part of this urban palimpsest or whether it is a part of our landscape and heritage that we want to discard and move away from.

In considering whether there is reason to preserve pieces of our occasionally obsolete highway infrastructure, I can’t help but drift in my thinking to the many adaptive reuse projects that engage with our post-industrial rail infrastructure. To me, the functions and histories of rail and auto infrastructure are inseparable – each represented a prioritization of large-scale connectivity over small-scale local continuity, national transit and communication over neighborhood community, and mobility over emplacement. The only meaningful difference, it seems to me, barring the obvious aesthetic difference, is a difference in nostalgia for what these infrastructures represent. Retired rail infrastructure signifies a past we have, for the most part, lost contact with and in many cases wish to return to. Obsolete auto infrastructure, including the highway, is still too close to our contemporary experiences and daily frustrations to inspire any romanticism or sentimentality. And yet, our highway infrastructure represents an equally important chapter of our nation’s history. I am thinking here of the national Rail-to-Trail movement, the most prominent example being New York City’s Highline project, a project that both reclaims and reframes the meaning and value of this now obsolete elevated rail infrastructure. And, in the same spirit, I am thinking of Detroit’s Dequindre Cut, a project that similarly reframes the meaning and value of a piece of depressed rail infrastructure. Might there not be a similar reclamation and reframing project undertaken with a now obsolete piece of highway infrastructure?
Being a Boston native, born in 1990, I grew up during the “Big Dig” formally known as Boston’s “Central Artery Project” to put our major downtown highway underground and reclaim the land once beneath it as a park. The project went wildly over budget and over time meaning that the last piece of the project—the design and construction of a park in the footprint of the former highway—read to most Boston natives as an afterthought, leading us all to question what we had gained through this massive tunneling project. It is this experience that shapes my hesitancy to embrace the teardown movement. I distrust the teardown movement because I do not believe that what replaces these highways is being given enough thought. ‘Open space’ is not an end in and of itself as we learned from the modernist architects that thought the open space of tower-in-the-park layouts would be our salvation. So, what is it that we are promising, or hoping for when we decide to tear down a highway? The emotional drivers (putting aside the economics for a moment) seem to be a craving for urban connectivity and community. But, is tearing it down actually going to satiate those cravings? We must be careful not to be swept away by the visionary theatricality of these teardown schemes. We must remember to peer behind them to see the economics and politics that are their core motivations. And, we must look for the less flashy alternatives that may, in reality, provide more substantive solutions. I see these substantive solutions in the insurgent processes of alteration and adaptation more so than in the dramatic renderings and hyperbolic language of the teardown proposals.

If we take these insurgent processes, initiated by those who encounter and seek to alter their local highway landscapes, to be our starting point, the question becomes how to extrapolate from them to a more systemic vision for the adaptive
reuse and social repurposing of our aging highway infrastructure. I find the intellectual framework provided in Dolores Hayden’s 1995 work *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* to be a useful tool in making this jump from individual insurgent alterations to a vision for the creative preservation and adaptation of our highway infrastructure more generally. Hayden begins by explaining that traditional historic preservation is unitary (and restrictive) in perspective, and focused on individual sites or buildings that can serve as monuments or memorials to a particular moment within a singular narrative.\(^{742}\) It has not, she explains, been focused on the preservation of cultural *landscapes* (as apposed to cultural *landmarks*). This opens up a discussion of vernacularity, working landscapes and the preservation of a network of conflicting and interpenetrating meanings. Hayden is, in the context of her book, referring to a neighborhood-based vernacularity of the working class residential landscape. However, I think her argument can easily include or expand to encompass engineered public works as a constituent element of the vernacular, working class landscape. To frame my use of Hayden’s analysis of urban landscape preservation practices, I would like to position highways as a kind of American landscape vernacular – there is something standard, normalizing about them that makes them an important backdrop to more statement-oriented structures that are explicitly concerned with identity formation.

Perhaps the biggest impediment to the conventional historic preservation of our nation’s vernacular highway landscape is that they do not have a singular, dominant narrative. The preservation of highly contested landscapes (such as that of

the American highway) necessarily complicates conventional historical preservation, which is founded on the notion of a unitary, uni-perspectival past with a coherent and continuous narrative of collective identity. Historical preservation practices have luckily matured a great deal since Hayden’s 1995 piece, embracing the importance of recognizing contested meanings of historic sites like the American highway. As Hayden points out, in contemporary times, there is an increasing number and diversity of claims being made on the urban landscape to “furnish resources for public history and public culture.” The American highway landscape is irreducible to a singular narrative and so its preservation must follow this fragmentary and layered structure of meaning. If the preservation of this vernacular highway landscape is going to necessarily become a sort of curation of the past, then the key question becomes who will be curating it and for whom?

Working with a contested landscape demands a more collaborative community-based approach to public history. As Hayden notes, "history of workers, women, ethnic groups, and the poor requires broad source materials, including oral histories, because often people, rather than professors, are the best authorities on their own pasts." And so, if “experts” are no longer the best authorities, then we must begin to find “new, community-based ways of working with the physical traces of the past beyond its preservation as museums or adaptive use as real estate.” Hayden delves into this notion of a community-based preservation practice explaining that it offers validation of membership in a collectively described American identity, inscribing inclusivity in the urban landscape:

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Change is not simply a matter of acknowledging diversity or correcting a traditional bias toward the architectural legacy of wealth and power... Instead, a larger conceptual framework is required to support urban residents' demands for a far more inclusive 'cultural citizenship,' as Rina Benmayor and John Kuo Wei Tchen have defined it, “an identity that is formed not out of legal membership but out of a sense of cultural belonging.” Benmayor and Tchen argue that public culture needs to acknowledge and respect diversity, while reaching beyond multiple and sometimes conflicting national, ethnic, gender, race and class identities to encompass larger common themes, such as the migration experience, the breakdown and reformulation of families, or the search for a new sense of identity in an urban setting. They are asking for an extremely subtle evocation of American diversity, which at the same time reinforces our sense of common membership in an American, urban society.\(^747\)

Hayden goes on to explain how spaces might cultivate this sense of inclusion and shared history, writing,

Public space can help to nurture this more profound, subtle, and inclusive sense of what it means to be an American. Identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories (where we have come from and where we have dwelt) and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbors, fellow workers, and ethnic communities. Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes.\(^748\)

For me, there is also a sense that in thoughtfully preserving elements of the vernacular highway landscape we might not only affirm the value of diverse perspectives and experiences of the highway landscape. We might also be able to preserve the lessons taught by these landscapes, lessons we seem to be forgetting already. Perhaps the physical remains of a highway, framed by the values which animated the Jacobs-Moses conflict and the aspirations which animated Futurama’s visionary theatricality, might remind us of the danger of these totalizing, grandiose

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visions of a utopian future and remind us of the repressive power of a culture which values expertise over experience.

These lessons may already be recorded in written analyses and visual documentation but, I feel strongly that their physical record is of paramount importance, that the vernacular highway landscape speaks to these intersecting histories more powerfully than text or image can alone. Philosopher Edward S. Casey makes a powerful (if abstract) case for the value of recording physical, place-based histories rather than relying on textual accounts and documentation alone. Speaking of place as a “container of experiences,” Casey argues that places act as a kind of trigger, claiming, “an alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported.”

Hayden picks up Casey’s notion of place memory as a trigger mechanism for public history, asserting that place memory “is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their public pasts: places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.” Hayden, however, sees a disquieting differential between which place memories are preserved and which are erased and discarded, noting that place memories rooted in vernacular landscapes rarely are accorded the attention and value they deserve:

The power of place - the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory - remains untapped for most working people's neighborhoods in most American cities, and for most ethnic history and most women's history. The

sense of civic identity that shared history can convey is missing. And even bitter experiences and fights communities have lost need to be remembered - so as not to diminish their importance.751

Highways certainly serve as unofficial monuments to the destruction of working communities, the perpetuation of ethnic segregation and the violation of the domestic realm, and so they clearly fall within Hayden’s description of vernacular landscapes that are all too quickly discarded and their significance forgotten.

And yet, it is hard to imagine how the preservation of our vernacular highway landscape would not also preserve the isolation and marginalization that resulted from that landscape’s initial construction. But, by the same token, a physical record of that shared history is lost when we erase the highway from our urban landscape, as many teardown proposals attempt to. I am struck, here, by the tremendous burden of deciding how to represent and reframe the highway landscape as a vernacular typology and a social symbol in our nation’s urban history, and I find myself worrying that the planners of our era, who implicitly bear this burden, are not truly trained to handle it with the subtlety and compassion it requires. I find it helpful to think of the planner as a physical historian, in this context, as a curator who is crafting and delineating what George Kubler described as the “shape of time.” Kubler was referring to the historian as an artist, like any other, whose primary concern was with representation and whose mission was “to discover a patterned set of properties that will elicit recognition all while conveying a new perception of the subject.”752

Perhaps we can hope that planners, too, will embrace this mission as they confront the

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question of how to represent and reframe our nation’s highway history within the fabric of our cities.
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APPENDIX—TIMELINE

Building and Dismantling the Interstate Highway Growth Consensus

1908 – First New York Parkway Built
The New York Parkway System construction spanned a half century (1908-1959) and was both a precursor to and important precedent for the Interstate Highway System. Originally built as low-volume, high-speed recreational routes, they would eventually become secondary and alternate routes to the interstates. At least 13 of these parkways were conceived of and completed before the landmark 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act that set the National Interstate and Defense Highway System into motion.

1916 – (First) Federal Aid Road Act
This merely put aside federal aid financing to help the states build highways—it did not include a planning element nor did it extend federal authority over the states in any way. Extension of this policy was stalled by the financial demands of WWI.

1921 – (Revised) Federal Aid Highway Act
This increased the funding available and initiated federal involvement in the planning and prioritization of the route locations.

1922 – Pershing Map Published
This was an Army-generated map of strategic defense highway locations.

1938 – Franklin D. Roosevelt New Deal Highway Planning Begins
"The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1938 directed the chief of the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) to study the feasibility of a six route toll network. The resultant two-part report, Toll Roads and Free Roads, was based on the statewide highway planning surveys and analysis.
"Part I of the report asserted that the amount of transcontinental traffic was insufficient to support a network of toll superhighways. Some routes could be self-supporting as toll roads, but most highways in a national toll network would not.
"Part II, "A Master Plan for Free Highway Development," recommended a 43,000-kilometer (km) nontoll interregional highway network. The interregional highways would follow existing roads wherever possible (thereby preserving the investment in earlier stages of improvement). More than two lanes of traffic would be provided where traffic exceeds 2,000 vehicles per day, while access would be limited where entering vehicles would harm the freedom of movement of the main stream of traffic.
"Within the large cities, the routes should be depressed or elevated, with the former preferable. Limited-access belt lines were needed for traffic wishing to

1 Weingroff (1996), 11.
2 Moynihan (1960), 14.
bypass the city and to link radial expressways directed toward the center of the city. Inner belts surrounding the central business district would link the radial expressways while providing a way around the district for vehicles not destined for it."

### 1939 – Toll Roads and Free Roads Report Published

Issued by the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) and authored by MacDonald and Fairbank, this report was "an early statement of the need for a national highway system. Largely written by BPR commissioner Thomas H. MacDonald and his assistant Herbert S. Fairbank, both engineers, the 1939 report conceptualized the links between highway building and urban redevelopment, suggesting that 'the whole interior of the city is ripe for...major change.' The report contended that proper planning of highways would facilitate slum clearance and rebuilding along modern lines."

### 1939 – New York Worlds Fair: General Motors Futurama Exhibit (Bel Geddes)

### 1944 – Interregional Highways Report Published

Issued by the National Interregional Highway Committee (headed by MacDonald, the committee was appointed by President Roosevelt) and authored by Fairbank. This report "built on the 1939 study and mapped out a 40,000-mile interregional highway network not too different from the system that was actually built in the late 1950s and 1960s. Like the 1939 report, Interregional Highways recommended that new limited-access highways penetrate the heart of the nation's metropolitan areas, where careful planning would integrate the new roads with 'the future development of the city.' The committee's plan also called for inner and outer beltways encircling the largest cities, as well as radial expressways tying the urban system together."

### 1944 – Federal Aid Highway Act

"Pushed by state highway engineers, road builders, truckers, and other members of the emerging highway lobby, Congress passed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944, incorporating much of the Interregional Highways report."

"Wartime financial exigencies prevented any immediate efforts to fund and build the system. Disputes among highway builders, engineers, truckers and automobile interests over who would pay and who would benefit from the proposed road network further delayed congressional appropriations until the early 1950s."

### 1952 – Federal Aid Highway Act

"The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1952 authorized $25 million for the interstate system on a 50-50 matching basis. These were the first funds authorized specifically for interstate construction. However, it was a token amount, reflecting the continuing disagreements within the highway community rather than the national importance of the system."

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1 Weingroff (1996), 1-2.
2 Mohl (2004), 677.
3 Mohl (2004), __.
4 Mohl (2004), 677.
5 Mohl (2004), 677.
6 Weingroff (1996), 5.
1955 – General Location of National System of Interstate Highways (‘Yellow Book’)

1956 – Federal-Aid Highway Act Passed⁹
When the 1954/55 proposal passed in April, 1956 with the specification that it authorized 41,000 miles to be built over 12 years with an overall cost of $25 billion of Federal Aid dollars. This money was, in part, financed by an increased fuel and tire taxes meaning that highway use taxes were increased, overall, by 2/3 in order to fund this initiative. This was devised, in part, as a way of separating highway spending from the general budget so that the scale of spending would not be readily apparent in the Federal Government's general report of fiscal spending.¹⁰ It would ultimately take 35 years to complete and would cost $114 billion when declared complete in 1992.

1959 – First Freeway Revolt (Location: San Francisco)¹¹
1962 – Federal Highway Act
"The Federal Highway Act of 1962 required state road departments to work with local governments in developing 'a cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing urban transportation planning process,' a process that considered both other transportation modes and local land-development patterns. These mandates had the potential to challenge the power of state highway engineers. So also did a second provision that for the first time required state highway departments to provide relocation assistance to displaced families and businesses. However, these new requirements for transportation planning and housing relocation did not take effect until July 1, 1965, thus undercutting the intent to protect urban communities from arbitrary highway decisions. Subsequent study also demonstrated that the BPR, which worked with the state road departments in building the interstates, developed a series of policies and procedures that for all practical purposes undermined and frustrated congressional intentions as expressed in the 1962 Highway Act."

1965 – New Requirements of 1962 F.H.A. go into effect¹³
1966 – Creation of first cabinet-level U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
This clamped down on the previously unchecked power of individual appointed positions within the president's cabinet, providing a more balanced and thoroughly considered approach to transportation as a whole. This structural shift in highway administration "had major implications for the interstate highway program. An administrative reorganization pushed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to rationalize and concentrate executive power, DOT legislation brought together a number of previously separate agencies involved in transportation... now, federal highway engineers were sub- jecte

⁹ Moynihan (1960), 15-16.
¹⁰ Moynihan (1960), 15-16.
¹¹ Mohl (2004), 678.
¹³ Mohl (2004), 680.
to a level of administrative supervision and control they had never before experienced. A similar process was underway in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the state level, where state DOTs were replacing highway departments and where governors were taking control of state highway policy through appointment and funding powers. Creation of the federal-level DOT provided the start of something new in federal highway policy—an effort to provide a balanced or “multimodal” transportation system. Moreover, the first DOT secretary, Alan S. Boyd, responded to the public clamor over the damaging impact of the interstates in urban neighborhoods. An attorney with varied experience in several state and federal transportation agencies, Boyd seemed willing to challenge basic BPR highway engineering strategy—that is, that transportation policy simply meant building more highways, pouring more concrete, and worrying about the consequences later.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{1968 – F.H.A Mandates Housing/Relocation Provision}
This revision "required that states provide decent, safe, and sanitary relocation housing prior to property acquisition for interstate routes. Considerable federal funding was made available to states for moving expenses, housing relocation, and housing and rent supplements."\textsuperscript{15}

The 1968 Highway Act required that "more attention be paid to social and environmental considerations in planning expressways."\textsuperscript{16} This precipitated a new engineering attitude.

\textbf{1969 – National Environmental Policy Act}

\textbf{1970 – Uniform Relocation Assistance Act}

\textbf{1970 – (amendments to) Federal Clean Air Act}
"The 1968 law, along with the subsequent Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1970, required greater attention to the troublesome relocation issue than ever before. Moreover, additional environmental legislation—the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) and the 1970 amendments to the Federal Clean Air Act—posed new mandates and regulations curbing high-way builders and opened new avenues for litigating the freeway revolt."\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{1973 – F.H.A allows cancellation + supports mass-transit}
"The Nixon administration, too, proved receptive to community concerns about urban interstates, a responsiveness that eventually led to the Federal Highway Act of 1973 and other legislation in the mid-1970s that permitted states to cancel interstate sections and that opened the Highway Trust Fund for mass-transit alternatives."\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{1992 – Interstate Highway System Declared Complete}

\textsuperscript{14} Mohl (2004), 680-681.
\textsuperscript{15} Mohl (2004), 681.
\textsuperscript{16} Janson (1970), 51.
\textsuperscript{17} Mohl (2004), 681.
\textsuperscript{18} Mohl (2004), 683.
[Note: underlays are from 1955 Yellow Book and are national planning documents generally available on the web]

**Section III**

[Note: both below are pulled from the *Growing Stronger* Report on Detroit CDCs]
Cleveland City Planning Neighborhoods, Graphic by NODIS

Detroit City Planning Neighborhoods, Graphic by Data Driven Detroit
These show the overlap between official planning neighborhood boundaries, CDC neighborhood service areas and Google Maps neighborhood boundaries.