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Agonism in the Artistic City: Choreographies of Protest and Placemaking

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

by

Maiza Laurent Hixson

Committee in charge:

Professor William Davies King, Chair

Professor Leo Cabranes-Grant

Professor Ninotchka Bennahum

Dr. Rick Benjamin, UCSB

June 2024

The dissertation of Maiza Laurent Hixson is approved.

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June 2024

Agonism in the Artistic City: Choreographies of Protest and Placemaking

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by

Maiza Laurent Hixson

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performing with Professor Appel in Dr. Morton's play, *Trumpus Caesar* on Zoom during the pandemic. Many thanks to Julie Fishell for allowing me to teach Acting to non-majors—the greatest class on campus. It was also a joy to serve as Teaching Assistant to Dr. Carol Press and Christina McCarthy who enabled me to learn much more than I ever imagined about dance. I also extend my sincere gratitude to our inimitable departmental advisor, Mary Tench, whose excellent counsel knows no bounds, and to our undergraduate advisor, Sean O'Shea, whose steadfast support helped me navigate the myriad challenges of teaching.

Multiple interviews and research archives have informed this dissertation. I thank playwright Idris Goodwin, actor Jessica Wortham, Director and Chief Curator of 21c Museum Hotels, Alice Stites, and artist Nancy Baker Cahill, each of whom generously provided me with the interviews cited in these chapters. Additionally, the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections as well as the Filson Historical Society provided an invaluable trove of images of urban renewal in Louisville that enabled this study. I thank Dennis Dolan for gifting me with a membership to the Filson; and Louisville art collectors, Larry Shapin and Ladonna Nicolas, for their enthusiastic support of my work.

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environmental activist, Clarence Hixson—encouraged me to “just keep putting one foot in front of the other.” I also wish to credit my mother, Billie Brierly, whose legacy of true grit inspired me to complete the long doctoral journey. I believe she would be very proud.

If my feminist grandmother Dr. Allie Hixson were alive to witness the completion of my dissertation, she would be overjoyed. She was the first woman to receive a Ph.D. in English from the University of Louisville, fought for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, and promised to make me a “first-class citizen.” My brilliant grandfather, William F. Hixson, was a mechanical engineer and economist who taught me how to drive a pick-up truck and read Karl Marx, both of which came in handy during my Ph.D.
Words cannot express my enduring gratitude to my magnificent uncle and aunts without whom I could not have made it through this program. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Walter L. Hixson, a Cold War historian and distinguished professor who read each of my chapters and provided me with invaluable feedback along the way. An attorney and human rights advocate, my aunt Emma Hixson taught me to stand up for social justice and to persist through the hardest of times. I thank my indefatigable Aunt Kandy for her wisdom, kindness, and steadfast support, and my Aunt Katie for her intelligence, youthful spirit, and culinary genius. I would also like to thank my brother and sister, Jon Spencer and Chloe Barret Hixson, for inspiring me with their boundless creativity, and my cousins, Keith Ahlborn, Ashley, Steve, Quinn, and Max Young, for bringing so much joy to our family. Last but not least, I would like to thank my incredibly generous “found” family members—Patricia Perryman, Joan Pirkle Smith, and Kurtwood Smith. I love you with all my heart.

DEDICATION

Dad, I thank you for literally and figuratively teaching me how to walk “against the grain” my entire life. Our drifts through Louisville’s sewers and alleyways inspire this text.

VITA OF MAIZA LAURENT HIXSON
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Scream Queen, curated by Christopher Velasco, performance, Little Tokyo Arts Complex, Los Angeles
2019 *Useless Man*, group exhibition, Highways Performance Space, Santa Monica, CA
Maiza Hixson: Sustainable Future, solo painting exhibition, Cabadagray Gallery, Ventura, CA
Chimera, solo MFA Thesis Exhibition, play, performance, exhibition, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UCSB
Multimodal Performance Festival, group exhibition and performance, Glassbox Gallery, UC Santa Barbara
2018 *Internet's Down*, solo exhibition and performance, Glassbox Gallery, UC Santa Barbara
Looping Swans, responsive performance with Maya Gurantz for Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) at The Cabin, Los Angeles, CA
Featured Being, solo exhibition, Glassbox Gallery, UCSB
2017 *Running For Mayor*, Santa Barbara, CA
The Conspiratorium, Fishbon Art Collective, Pescadrome, Santa Barbara, CA
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ABSTRACT

Agonism in the Artistic City: Choreographies of Protest and Placemaking

by

Maiza Laurent Hixson

Agonism in the Artistic City analyzes hegemonic and counter-hegemonic choreographies of public art and placemaking in the Southern U.S. city of Louisville, Kentucky. Placemaking is examined as the choreographed rehearsal and performance of aesthetic public space by key political actors, ranging from elected officials and corporate art curators to protestors and playwrights. Five discrete choreographies are presented through theoretical examples and real-life models of bureaucratic, embodied, digitally augmented, virtual, and agonistic placemaking. A foundational case study of bureaucratic placemaking provides the basis for a comparative analysis of the 2020 Louisville Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name movements' radically embodied model of placemaking.

This dissertation argues how, following the tragic police killing of Breonna Taylor in her Louisville home, Louisville protestors re-made the city a more racially just and socially inclusive urban space through collective occupations of streets and public parks, re-iconizations of civic monuments, and mobilizations of makeshift memorials and mutual aid. The conclusion elucidates how radical, agonistic placemaking can be sustained to resist ongoing legacies of structural racism, white supremacy, dynastic wealth, and corporate

funding infrastructures that spatialize social, racial, and class divisions in neoliberal Louisville and other cities across the United States.

Interviews with curators, artist-activists, and other city actors contribute to this contemporary performance historiography of the 2020 Louisville protest movement. Oral histories surrounding the art and protests also inform a critical examination of Louisville arts leadership and institutional aesthetic production. *Artistic City* profiles the bureaucratic placemaking of Louisville Metro Government, the digitally augmented placemaking of 21c Museum Hotel and the virtual placemaking of Actors Theatre of Louisville. It also analyzes the individual performances of administrative, critical, and creative producers across the arts: Sarah Lundgren, Alice Stites, Robert Berry Fleming, Nancy Baker Cahill, Brianna Harlan, Hannah Drake, Josh Miller, and Idris Goodwin. *Artistic City* addresses the lacuna in theater, dance, and performance studies scholarship of Louisville as an understudied artistic geographic region.

Building on the embodied dance and performance studies methods of SanSan Kwan, Susan Leigh Foster, Jessica Nakamura, Joseph Roach, and Christian DuComb, *Artistic City* employs walking and protesting in the city as a resistant urban practice. Observations of everyday pedestrian movement at civic sites supply corporeal evidence of how bodies tactically counter-produce urban space. A close analysis of urban and arts policy text and visual design schematics demonstrates the ways in which "invisible" administrative and curatorial labor produces aesthetic place. Such research provides the basis for this investigation into how Louisville arts policy and urban renewal histories have informed hegemonic and bureaucratic placemaking in the recent past and how contemporary activists performed artistically and agonistically against hegemony during crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Agonism in the Artistic City: Choreographies of Protest and Placemaking examines how the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 challenged historic and recent urban spatial planning and aesthetic placemaking in the city of Louisville, Kentucky.[1] Following the white police killing of two African American citizens—George Floyd in the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Breonna Taylor in her Louisville home—anti-police brutality protests erupted in cities worldwide.[2] Activists in both cities mobilized their demands for social, racial, and spatial justice to counter the police officers' deadly choreographies of Black bodies in public and private space. While the police murder of Floyd was the catalyst for worldwide protests,[3] Louisville protests over the killing of Taylor also targeted a variety of long-standing problems, including the history of urban redevelopment, structural racism, and economic division in the city.[4] Fighting against police brutality, local activists initially occupied a main public square, then attacked authoritarian monuments, and ultimately protested neighborhood gentrification through what I argue were acts of radical placemaking. As I contend in the following chapters, protestors embodied their resistance against institutional signs and signifiers of police violence, white supremacy, and racial capitalism in critical corporeal formations that re-signified the city as increasingly politically and artistically progressive.

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[1] Howard University School of Law, "A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement," Vernon E. Jordan Law Library, Last Updated Jan 6, 2023. Black Lives Matter was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in 2013 following the acquittal of Travon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman. The movement grew in 2014 following the deaths of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York. A decentralized movement, it further expanded after the police murder of George Floyd. https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM.

[2] "Protests erupt in US after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor – in pictures," *The Guardian,* Sat 30 May 2020.

[3] Zamira Rahim and Rob Picheta, "Thousands around the world protest George Floyd's death in global display of solidarity" *CNN*, June 1, 2020.

[4] Hilary Mason, "A Southern Story: Contestations over redevelopment in Louisville reveal a historical pattern of prioritizing property over people," *The Architect's Newspaper*, September 7, 2020.

Drawing on the Louisville protest movement as a case study, I show how local officials and corporate elites subsequently attempted to absorb the radical placemaking of 2020 in their tourist re-branding of Louisville as "Bourbon City." *Artistic City* posits that as a corollary to the protest movement, future choreographies of radical placemaking should be adopted and sustained as agonistic forms of spatial justice to reject hegemonic placemaking.[5]

In this dissertation, I articulate placemaking as the choreographed rehearsal and performance of aesthetic public space by key political actors, ranging from protestors and elected officials to corporate curators and theater makers. In Louisville, Black Lives Matter activists remade place by occupying a downtown government park known as Jefferson Square for over 180 days, renaming it Injustice Square or #Breeway, and calling for the arrest of the three Louisville Metro Police officers responsible for Taylor's death.[6] Other Louisville protestors occupied NULU, a historically low-income Black neighborhood that was re-developed as an upscale creative arts district funded by local white bourbon industry oligarchs.[7] Throughout the United States, cities, corporations, and arts institutions collectively responded to the historic moment with both substantive anti-racist statements as well as superficial displays of solidarity against police brutality, giving rise to what became known as a discourse of "racial reckoning" in America.[8] I maintain that as national protests ensued over the course of 2020, Louisville protestors transformed the local Bourbon City brand into an internationally recognized artistic and activist space with posters of Floyd and

[5] I use *Artistic City* as an abbreviation of the full title throughout this dissertation.
[6] Tessa Duvall and Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar 12, 2021.
[7] Allie Fireel, "Occupy NULU as Creative Placemaking," *Ruckus Journal*, https://ruckusjournal.org/Occupy-NuLu-As-Creative-Placemaking, August 11, 2020.
[8] Ailsa Chang, Rachel Martin, Eric Marrapodi, "Summer of Racial Reckoning," *NPR*, August 16, 2020.

Taylor whose faces proliferated throughout neighborhoods and on business facades.[9] The tragedy, coupled with the strength and duration of the protests, compelled celebrities and prominent arts and cultural institutions to publicly acknowledge the Taylor killing within physical spaces and on signs installed in the city. Oprah Winfrey erected one billboard for each year of Taylor's life throughout Louisville, demanding that the police be arrested and charged for Taylor's murder.[10] The encyclopedic J.B. Speed Art Museum mounted a high-profile exhibition entitled *Promise, Witness, and Remembrance* in which it displayed Michelle Obama portrait artist Amy Sherald's memorial painting of Taylor that also graced the cover of *Vanity Fair*.[11] Directly inspired by Taylor, the Speed organized the exhibition in such a short period of time that it prompted *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter to write, "It speeds up exhibition production, focuses on the present, and in doing so reaches out to new audiences vital to the institutional future."[12] While celebrities, art stars, and institutions rapidly deployed art and visual culture to identify, signify, and place Louisville on a national and international stage, there were other less reported, independent, non-institutional acts, and political gestures of public art and counterhegemonic placemaking that were lost, yet radically re-staged the *artistic city*. The latter is my term for institutional and independent mobilizations of public art, protest, and placemaking in neoliberal urban space.

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[9] Erica Rucker, "New Bourbon City Campaign Finally Makes Louisville Look Cool," *LEO Weekly*, May 15, 2023, https://www.leoweekly.com/2023/05/new-bourbon-city-campaign-finally-makes-louisville-look-cool/.
[10] "Oprah Says 26 Billboards of Breonna Taylor Are 'My Form of Protest," *The Oprah Magazine*, Aug. 10, 2020, https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/a33515050/breonna-taylor-billboards-oprah-magazine-louisville/.
[11] Holland Cotter, "Breonna Taylor Show Puts Art Museums on a Faster Track," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/arts/design/breonna-taylor-review-museum-louisville.html.
[12] Holland Cotter, "Breonna Taylor Show Puts Art Museums on a Faster Track," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/arts/design/breonna-taylor-review-museum-louisville.html.

‘Creative City’ Placemaking and Hegemony

This critical analysis enables a comparative study of how institutional bodies performed hegemonic planning and enactments of aesthetic civic space prior to 2020 and how the Louisville protests of 2020 dramatically contested such institutional performances through independent choreographies of counter-hegemonic placemaking. The Louisville protest movement laid bare the city’s historic racial division in urban infrastructures as well as the limited representation of African Americans in arts leadership, public visual culture, and placemaking.[13] Placemaking is the development of artistic initiatives in city space through strategic public, private, non-profit and community partnerships.[14] The term emerged from the ideas of urban activists of the 1960s such as Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte who advocated for a community-centered and place-based approach to urban planning to correct the problems of modern cities.[15] Jacobs asserted that the death of American cities was caused by the highway construction and “slum clearance” projects of Urban Renewal.[16] Building on Jacobs, in 2002, the urban theorist Richard Florida advocated that in order to revitalize their economies, cities needed to cater to the ‘creative class’, whom he argued spurned suburban conformity for the diversity of city life.[17] Urban planning scholar and historian Brian Tochterman writes, the creative class “rejects the conformity and banality of suburban living, preferring instead the difference, diversity, spectacle, and amorphous authenticity of city life. Creative-class magnets possess certain places — bars, clubs, coffee shops, and workout facilities — within or near inspiring residential neighborhoods where creative-class members

[13] Elijah Anderson, “The White Space,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 2015, Vol. 1(1) 10–21.
[14] “Creative Placemaking.” National Endowment for the Arts, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/How-to-do-Creative-Placemaking_Jan2017.pdf.
[15] Project for Public Spaces, “Jane Jacobs,” Jan 2, 2010, https://www.pps.org/article/jjacobs-2.
[16] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961.
[17] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2002.

can congregate and cultivate their creativity."[18] Cities across the world have deployed the creative city model to attract the creative classes yet this practice has also been described as a form of neoliberal urban planning.[19]

In *Artistic City*, I maintain that rather than artist-driven, creative city placemaking emerges as bureaucratic spatial productions performed by political and corporate ruling class elites. I also demonstrate that prior to the protests of 2020 the 'creative city' model of planning and placemaking in Louisville had become hegemonic. The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci theorized that a ruling class is hegemonic in how it subordinates other groups through ideological means.[20] Beyond simple class alliance, hegemony is the indissoluble union of political, intellectual, and moral leadership.[21] *Artistic City* articulates how hegemonic, government-initiated corporate placemaking was and remains performed by elite city actors such as mayors, institutional art curators, dynastic families, and real estate developers who conceptualize and deploy "art" in public space. Artistic politics in Louisville are specifically intertwined with the global bourbon industry's ideological branding and development of the city, particularly through arts philanthropy, tourism, and cultural programming.[22] *Artistic City* asserts that government-initiated public art projects and placemaking are weaponized in contemporary urban contexts to performatively re-brand cities plagued by the impacts of deindustrialization, neoliberal capitalism, suburbanization, population loss, failing infrastructures, poverty, and other challenges.

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[18] Brian Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," *Radical History Review,* Issue 112 (Winter 2012), p. 66-67.
[19] Brian Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," *Radical History Review,* Issue 112 (Winter 2012), p. 66-67.
[20] Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
[21] Chantal Mouffe, *Gramcsci and Marxist Theory*, p. 179.
[22] Olivia Evans, "Bourbonism is Still Growing" *Louisville Courier Journal,* Friday, December 29, 2023.

Artistic City introduces hegemonic institutional placemaking performances in Louisville prior to 2020 to provide a basis for understanding how protestors creatively occupied and temporarily overturned authoritarian civic space in 2020. It shows how government agents historically choreographed racial segregation in the mid-twentieth century through urban renewal and how they subsequently attempted to choreograph against the segregated city in the twenty-first century through aesthetic placemaking. While there is ample scholarship on creative placemaking, there is insufficient critical reflection on how hegemonic processes of placemaking function in tandem with choreographies of civic space, particularly in urban areas in the Southern United States. Turning to Louisville as a neglected Southern city in the field of performance studies, I center the creative and cultural production of this geographic region through my study of protest and placemaking. Although theater and performance studies scholars have focused on New York City and economically globalized non-U.S. cities ranging from London to Tokyo, I profile Louisville as a Southern omission in artistic and performance studies discourse. My study specifically addresses how radically embodied protest practices in Louisville disrupted hegemonic choreographies of space to mobilize a more racially and spatially inclusive Southern democratic city. Rather than instrumentalizing the arts in the corporate placemaking of Louisville, protestors produced queer, Black, and Brown socially engaged space that contested the police surveillance of Black and Brown people and the violent legacies of white settler colonialism and plantation slavery embedded within Louisville's predominately white patriarchal visual culture.

Neoliberalism and Placemaking

I begin my study by interrogating creative planning and placemaking as part of a neoliberal capitalist development strategy to aesthetically re-brand struggling cities.[23] Neoliberalism is defined as a "set of economic policies aimed at promoting free trade, the deregulation of financial markets, the privatization of welfare, and the globalization of capital."[24] With neoliberalism, governments, global capitalism, and the economic development of cities have become increasingly linked.[25] The neoliberal period begins in the mid-1970s "post Keynesian" era of austerity and de-regulation of the market and culminates in the Clinton-era of economic globalization that extends into the present moment.[26] Scholars such as Martijn Konings and Damon Silvers have respectively referred to this form of late capitalism as "unchecked market expansion"[27] and a hegemonic "system of power."[28] While neoliberalism has multiple definitions and is not easily applied to artistic practices, I draw on scholars who write about the relationship between the arts and neoliberal production of U.S. space to structure my argument that Louisville has folded creative planning and spatial development into neoliberal placemaking operations that Black Lives Matter protestors temporarily interrupted.

In Louisville, I critique the coordination of government, global capitalism, and economic tourist development that produces corporate aesthetic placemaking in the neoliberal creative city. Robert G. Hollands defines the neoliberal creative city as "the state-

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[23] My study of artistic cities is particularly informed by urban cultural analysis; Sharon Zukin's, *The Cultures of Cities* (1995), Christine Boyer's *The City of Collective Memory* (1994), and David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* (2012) have greatly influenced my understanding of the cultural and economic branding of urban space.
[24] "Art Under Neoliberalism," *Art Margins,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022, p. 126
[25] Maiza Hixson, *Artistic City*, Chapter 1, p. 6
[26] Leigh Claire La Berge, "Art Under Neoliberalism," p. 143
[27] Martijn Konings, "Art Under Neoliberalism," p. 137.
[28] Damon Silvers, "Understanding Neoliberalism as a System of Power," University College London, Tuesday, April 25, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLtkJ-AgLuY.

facilitated marketization of creativity and the development of a competitive place-based urban cultural economy."[29] Regarding such urban entrepreneurial and placed-based arts initiatives, dance and performance studies scholar Sarah Wilbur cites the criticism of creative placemaking as "market driven efforts to hone 'creative cities', cultural tourism, and workforce innovation."[30] While Wilbur clearly perceives the negative implications of creative placemaking as a form of gentrification, she ultimately argues that to be effectively implemented in cities, placemaking efforts take time and should not be dismissed a priori as colluding with a neoliberal agenda.[31] Regarding neoliberalism in Washington DC, in *Black in Place: The Spatial Aesthetics of Race in a Post-Chocolate City,* geographer Brandi Thompson Summers writes, "Rather than suppressing cultural and racial difference, neoliberalism produces difference. Notions of diversity and multiculturalism get stitched onto narratives of renewal, globalization, and American progress."[32]

Artistic City asserts that the neoliberal capitalist commodification of the arts, or the strategic implementation of the arts as an engine for economic development, sells a branded image of a diversely artistic cosmopolitan utopia that negates the politically agonistic potential of art and fails to meaningfully address urban inequality and spatial exclusion. Local scholars and community organizers Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy have specifically described Louisville spatial development in neoliberal terms. They write, "the combination of neoliberal capitalist urban redevelopment, plantation culture and plantation social management systems. . . create wealth through racial banishment, dispossession, and policing

[29] Robert G. Hollands, *Beyond the Neoliberal Creative City*, 2023, p. 2
[30] Sarah Wilbur, "It's About Time: Creative Placemaking and Performance Analytics," *Performance Research*, 20:4, 96-103, 2015.
[31] Sarah Wilbur, "It's About Time: Creative Placemaking and Performance Analytics," *Performance Research*, 20:4, 96-103, 2015.
[32] Brandi Thompson, Summers, *Black in Place: The Spatial Aesthetics of Race in a Post-Chocolate City*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2019, p. 5

of Black residents in Louisville."[33] Drawing on Poe and Bellamy, I maintain that through their urban spatial planning and placemaking, the political and owning class of Louisville conflates art with urban revitalization, indoctrinating artists and citizens into ideological acceptance of art in service of corporate urban branding.[34] *Artistic City* argues that government and corporate players choreograph public art and space in tandem with urban development, thus creating a contemporary distraction from historically devastating urban renewal and other civic problems. This choreography enables gentrification measures that ultimately re-produce urban spatial inequality.[35]

SCOPE

My analysis of Louisville employs performance studies to highlight the effects of hegemonic arts placemaking on city space. Drawing on scholar Joseph Roach's study of New Orleans,[36] Christian DuComb's focus on Philadelphia,[37] SanSan Kwan's kinesthetic ethnography of Chinese urban spaces,[38] and Jessica Nakamura's spatial analysis of the Yasakuni Shrine in central Tokyo,[39] I focus on the embodied experiences of city spaces to identify the street-level impact of hegemonic artistic productions. In my research, I utilize performance studies' emphasis on embodiment and pedestrian experiences in city spaces to investigate how, rather than solving problems of aesthetically bleak and non-pedestrian-

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[33] Jessica Bellamy and Josh Poe discuss the plantation dynasty of bourbon whiskey as a culturally significant economic development engine and tourist attraction in Louisville in "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville, Kentucky," *Radical Housing Journal,* 2020, Vol 2(2): 144-145.
[34] Jessica Bellamy and Josh Poe, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville, Kentucky," *Radical Housing Journal,* 2020, Vol 2(2): 143-164.
[35] Oxford English Dictionary, "utopia," from the mid 16th century: based on Greek ou 'not' + topos 'place'; the word was first used in the book Utopia (1516) by Sir Thomas More, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/utopia_n?tab=factsheet#16046005.
[36] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance,* 1996.
[37] Christian DuComb, *Haunted City: Three Centuries of Racial Impersonation in Philadelphia,* 2017.
[38] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance & Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, 2013.
[39] Jessica Nakamura, "Lingering Legacies of the War: Performance and Specters at Yasakuni Shrine." In *Transgenerational Remembrance: Performance and the Asia-Pacific War in Japan,* 2020, 71-91.

friendly city space caused by negative urban revitalization, hegemonic placemaking contrives a diversion, cultural erasure, historical memory loss, and placelessness.

While Roach, DuComb, and Nakamura connect city performances to acts of surrogation, hauntings, and the spectral performative, respectively, I add to the literature by rendering visible the ghostly remains of urban renewal, public art, and curatorial policy in city planning and placemaking. By clarifying the work of politicians, architects, designers, developers, artists, and arts administrators who participate in the production of city space, I elucidate distinctions between hegemonic and nonhegemonic methods in institutional placemaking and site-specific public art and urban spatial planning. While Roach, in *Cities of the Dead* (1996), demonstrates how historic Carnival laws and policy in New Orleans shaped the cultural transmission of embodied memory,[40] I call attention to hegemonic placemaking's transmission of infrastructural failures to city inhabitants who must ultimately live with the spatial consequences. I bring contemporary critiques of curation into conversation with Roach, DuComb, and Nakamura, who do not explicitly emphasize bureaucratic and corporate actors responsible for shaping public space.[41]

Profiling city arts planning and curatorial roles as less visible bureaucratic labor, I demonstrate how "behind-the-scenes" administrative work scripts and produces public space. In connecting obscure bureaucratic labor to spatial artistic representations in this performance historiography, I profile different and hidden actors such as self-identified women in public arts administration, politicians, and curators whose key roles in creative

[40] Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, p. 241.
[41] Examples of contemporary curatorial activist critiques include Laura Raicovich's *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (2021), Nato Thompson's *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the Age of Cultural Production* (2015); Irit Rogoff's "Turning" (2008); Maria Lind "On The Curatorial" (2009).

placemaking often vanish while site-specific art objects remain.[42] Highlighting the less visible and more practical administrative tasks such as crafting public art master plans and placemaking initiatives through a performance studies lens enables a more specific, humanized, and critical analysis of the people working within institutions. In contrast to the anonymous institutional language of hegemonic creative placemaking that obfuscates curatorial agency and administrative authorship, I closely examine the mediating role of city agents who exercise spatial power and maintain existing power structures. These individuals stage manage public art and urban aesthetic culture while often remaining unaccountable for their work. In exploring curatorial work and arts administration, for example, I examine hegemonic place-makers who have historically omitted queer people, women, Black and Indigenous people, and people of color from public spaces. Writing about the art of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, author Chime Asonye calls for the commissioning of inclusive public art: "Ideas that should be memorialized include everyday heroes sacrificed like Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, peaceful protestors and workers whose labor continues to advance society, and women whose limited representation in public spaces is thought to only be 7% in the United States."[43] Also addressing the limited symbolic representation of Black women in public art, author Dixon Li asserts, "Since the earliest days of this country's founding, Black women have taken on monumental labors while suffering

[42] In "Beyond the Head: The Practical Work of Curating Contemporary Art," Sophia Krzys Acord writes, "…exhibitions of contemporary art—establish and administer the cultural meanings of art." Yet, little is known about how curators go about creating these meanings in the physical process of exhibition installation." *Qualitative Sociology*, 33, pp. 447–467, 2010.

[43] Here I draw on Chime Asonye, "The Art of Black Lives Matter: Lessons for Organizations and Policymakers From the Streets," Brookings Institution, published online, September 15, 2021. Asonye calls for the commissioning of inclusive public art: "Ideas that should be memorialized include everyday heroes sacrificed like Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, peaceful protestors and workers whose labor continues to advance society, and women whose limited representation in public spaces is thought to only be 7% in the United States."

monumental dispossession."[44] My contemporary performance history of Louisville cites the administrative choreographies of urban policy that have denied representations of Black women and other people of color within the visual and aesthetic production of city space. Placing my work in relation to both Roach and DuComb in the U.S. cities, I examine bureaucratic functions of placemaking alongside counter-hegemonic street protests in a racially and economically segregated city haunted by slavery, Jim Crow-era segregation, urban renewal, and police brutality. I enlarge the scope of Roach's and DuComb's urban performance genealogy. In contrast to Roach and DuComb, who approach racialized street performance through carnival in New Orleans and Blackface in Philadelphia, respectively, I demonstrate how Louisville streets are the staging ground for racialized urban renewal and infrastructural arts policies and placemaking that haunt the neoliberal city. Such policies have scripted the Black body's relative obscurity in public space, a process that has resulted in white hegemonic city planning performances and visual culture that protestors in 2020 effectively mobilized against.[45]

Defining the Agonistic Artistic City

I contextualize protestors as *agonistic* creative agents and practitioners of collectively embodied city space. My understanding of agonism stems from Chantal Mouffe's political theory of agonism as applied to artistic practice. Mouffe writes, "According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate."[46] Theater scholar Christopher Balme applies

[44] Dixon Li, "Of Monuments and Black Women's Monumental Labor," *Monument Lab*, July 28, 2020.
[45] One primary example of this is the graffitied statue of Louis XVI at Jefferson Square Park, which was ultimately removed. See "King Louis XVI statue removed from protest site in Kentucky" *ABC News*, September 3, 2020.
[46] Chantal Mouffe, *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Volume 1. No. 2. Summer 2007.

Mouffe's political theory of agonism to expand Jürgen Habermas' rational public sphere discourse to encompass protestors as enacting counterpublics.[47] Balme calls for a theatrically ludic or playful public sphere that connects rational-critical debate to passionate agonal behavior in order to argue for a discursive and embodied understanding of public sphere discourse.[48] In contrast to Balme's concept of the *theatrical public sphere*, I propose the *artistic city* as a more inclusive agonistic discourse that combines multiple aesthetic practices, ranging from theater, choreography, and socially engaged art—to painting, sculpture, protest, and everyday life performances. I contribute to theater, dance, and performance studies by joining these discourses with those of the visual arts, including curating, public art, and placemaking.

Approaching ideas of agonism in their recently published *Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, Peter Eckersall and Helen Grehan present essays on cultural activism; and in the *Companion*, Sophie Nield writes that a riot is political because it is impossible to appear *off stage* on the street.[49] Like Nield, I address the "unruly" protest as evidence of non-signifying bodies vying for visibility and racial justice in the hegemonic city. However, I would also like to add that protest performances may remain symbolically unmarked while ultimately re-signifying city space. Beyond Nield's framing of the protestor's political message through the body's physical appearance in and disruption of the city's theatrical space, I further probe how protestors signify through calculated symbolic artistic performances—ranging from monument-making to painterly and sculptural manipulations of

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[47] Christopher Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere*, 2014, p. 9. Balme writes, "The most influential recent critique of Habermas's 'normative' theory of the public sphere has come from the so-called 'agonal' or 'agonistic' school of political theory. Identified mainly with the work of Chantal Mouffe…agonistic theorists question fundamentally the whole rationalistic, consensus-oriented approach of the concept."
[48] Christopher Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere*, 2014, p. 202.
[49] Sophie Nield, "How Does the Riot Speak?" In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, eds., 2019, pp. 239-41.

found objects—which the hegemonic city routinely removes from public sight.[50] Louisville protestors' and artists' creative agonism performed an ephemeral form of site-specific counter-hegemonic creative placemaking in 2020.

Louisville: An Understudied Artistic City

The focus on Louisville during the pandemic and protests resulted in news coverage of the city as violent,[51] which contrasted with other more nuanced perceptions of Louisville as an artistically agonistic cultural space—a central focus of this study. Louisville's contemporary art scenes, for example, have historically received little critical attention in terms of arts criticism compared to those of New York and Los Angeles, a fact that underscores the cultural dominance of coastal U.S. cities and media outlets.[52] Performance and art scholars rarely identify the Southern U.S. either as an artistic region or as a site grappling with the effects of neoliberalism. Writing about non-U.S. cities within the field of theater and performance studies, Jisha Menon, Jen Harvie, Peter Eckersall, and Rick Knowles have profiled Bangalore, London, Tokyo, and Toronto, respectively.[53] Writing about

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[50] For example, the City of Louisville routinely removes the protestors' monument to Breonna Taylor from public view at Jefferson Square Park. A recent news article shows the removal is ongoing: "Plans to keep Jefferson Square Park clean require removal of Breonna Taylor rally memorabilia," *WLKY.com.* March 15, 2021.

[51] For example, *The New York Times* published multiple stories on Louisville protest-related violence in 2020: "7 People Shot at Louisville Protest Over the Death of Breonna Taylor," May 29; "2 Officers Shot in Louisville Protests Over Breonna Taylor Charging Decision," Sept 23; "Louisville's Police Force Feels Besieged on Two Fronts," Sept 24; "Kentucky Police Training Quoted Hitler and Urged 'Ruthless' Violence," Oct 31.

[52] András Szántó, "The Visual Art Critic: A Survey of Art Critics At General-Interest News Publications in America," National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 2002. The survey asked critics, "Which American city has the most vital visual art scene at the present time?" The report found, "New York is perceived to dominate—107 critics voted for it. Los Angeles came second, with 14 mentions. Chicago, with three mentions, was the only other city to receive multiple votes. Answers to the question, "Which newspaper do you think contains the best visual art criticism today?" form a similar pattern. The New York Times has no true rival—106 critics voted for it. The runner-up Los Angeles Times received nine mentions; the Village Voice got two."

[53] Here I am referring to Jisha Menon's, *Palimpsestic City: Nostalgia in Neoliberal Bangalore* (2012); Jen Harvie's, *Theatre & the City* (2009), Peter Eckersall's, "Tour Performance 'Tokyo/Olympics'" (2010); Rick Knowles' "Multicultural Text, Intercultural Performance: The Performance Ecology of Contemporary Toronto" (2009).

New York City, Hillary Miller, Giulia Palladini, Catherine Spencer, Cindy Rosenthal, and James Harding have examined Off Off Broadway theater and performance histories.[54] Scholars of site-specific and socially engaged art such as Miwon Kwon, Claire Bishop, and Shannon Jackson have focused on internationally-renowned and U.S. coastally established artists who, upon occasion, temporarily grace disparate Southern communities with their site-specific projects.[55] A recent scholarly exception to the Southern artistic omission is Bertie Ferdman who has written about site specific art and post dramatic theater in Kentucky.[56] I thus distinguish my critical approach from that of Ferdman who highlights institutionally affiliated and dominant art-world vetted artists operating in rural Kentucky's public space. I call attention to Southern regions and unsanctioned artistic protestors who are neglected in academic theater and performance studies discourse.

I spotlight the Southern U.S. to recuperate the creative labor of geographically and economically marginalized artists and publics who consistently escape scholarly attention. As an artist and curator who was born in Kentucky and has lived and/or worked in Louisville periodically for over forty years, I have witnessed dramatic economic and social changes in the city and participated in the city's artistic scenes and activist movements, including the BLM protests of 2020.

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[54] Hillary Miller, *Drop Dead: Performance in Crisis, 1970s New York* (2016); Giulia Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor, and Leisure in 1960s New York* (2017); Catherine Spencer, *Beyond the Happening* (2020); Cindy Rosenthal and James Harding, *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies* (2006).

[55] Art Historian Miwon Kwon writes about celebrated artists such as Mark Dion, Richard Serra, and Fred Wilson in *One Place After Another* (2004) and Claire Bishop writes of Tania Bruguera and Paul Chan in *Artificial Hells* (2012); Performance Studies scholar Shannon Jackson devotes attention to Merle Ukeles, Paul Chan, Andrea Fraser, and Rimini Protokoll among others in *Social Works* (2011).

[56]Ferdman writes about Los Angeles artist John Malpede's site-specific performance *RFK in EKY* (Robert F. Kennedy in Eastern Kentucky) in *Off-Sites: Contemporary Performance Beyond Site-Specific*, 2018. p. 88-105.

Adding to my awareness of regional arts and funding infrastructures, I have curated for over twenty years for non-profit art centers, museums, and government art agencies across the United States. My professional work has taught me how wealth and funding streams operate in different urban cultures and how these inform the selection process for public art. As Chief Curator of the Santa Barbara County government's Office of Arts and Culture (OAC), I learned how the OAC chooses public art to compliment the local Spanish Colonial design aesthetic. Attracting tourists to California's "American Riviera" the OAC eschews "off brand" artworks that do not match the gentrified identity of the resort town. As Chief Curator of the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, I encountered wealthy white board members of non-profits suffering from "founder's syndrome" who dictated which artists should receive exhibitions. Indeed, government art curators, curators of museums, and artistic directors of theater institutions alike must often conform to a socially, economically, and racially exclusionary and hierarchical exhibition process. In Louisville, the arts are funded by wealthy families whose dynasties secure their hegemonic ruling class ideology and cultural position. Their members direct museums, purchase art collections, serve on national boards, hold political office, and ensure the lasting marriage between neoliberal corporate branding and the arts in Louisville, for example. Every spring the Kentucky Derby attracts local and international crowds to sip mint juleps and gaze tipsily upon thoroughbred horses running around the Churchill Downs track. Through my immersion within this affluent southern culture, I have observed celebrity stars marveling at "blue chip" contemporary art collections housed in former plantation mansions. Louisville dynastic wealth and influence dictate who is allowed to curate and what art meets the public

eye. Their careful public relations management drives how Louisville stages itself in the present and how it remembers its past.

METHODOLOGY

As an embodied methodology, the act of walking in the city enables my close observation of the city's presentation of placemaking projects in physical space, providing the basis for my analysis of specific sites. Critically re-mapping the city through my own proprioceptive body, I illuminate vitally important protests and obscured urban performances of hegemonic and counterhegemonic placemaking. My approach to walking as a critical spatial methodology evolves out of the theoretical writings of such philosophers as Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and others. In the *Arcades Project* (1927-1940) Benjamin builds on Charles Baudelaire's term flâneur to poetically describe the walker of cities. He writes that to be a flâneur is "to set up house in the heart of the multitude, to be away from home yet everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet remain hidden from the world."[57] SanSan Kwan draws on Benjamin to frame her own kinesthetic methodology in *Kinesthetic City*, as that of a feminist flâneuse who eschews the detached flâneurial male gaze to experience and co-produce Chinese urban spaces with and through her own body.[58] As a self-identified feminist flaneuse I align my own movement-based research with Kwan's, yet I position my walking practice as one that re-routes dominant and branded narratives of Southern U.S. identity. Walking Louisville urban space as a socially engaged artist and scholar, I profile individual and community productions of multiple and complex Southern identities that mobilize the disruption of hegemonic city myths and placemaking.

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[57] Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 1927-1940, p. 443.
[58] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance & Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, 2013.

In *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre conceptualizes the city as a semantic field where "actors improvise a play which has no script."[59] Analyzing urban space as a metaphorical sightseer, Lefebvre breaks down the city's visual language of the built environment, including its monuments, theaters, and cathedrals into distinctly legible units. He reads the street as an urban microcosm and social text wherein the theater of everyday life erupts spontaneously. I build on the idea of the city as a theatrical space for everyday life in which objects in the built environment inspire a rhythm of movements and social interactions. Walking Louisville, one ventures toward Bourbon tourism placards, drifts to symbols and statues of French heraldry (Louisville was named after Louis XVI), and confronts ubiquitous settler colonial statues. In Lefebvrian terms, together, these form a material and semiotic system of Louisville's capital accumulations. I examine Louisville's urban semantic field as a stage where citizen-actors such as Black Lives Matter protestors, downtown employees, and diverse publics encounter this material culture, rewriting its symbols through the body, and re-routing its ideological narratives and choreographies.

Like scholars Roach, DuComb, Nakamura, and Kwan, I too incorporate Michel de Certeau's spatial tactic of walking the city as a resistant urban practice. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau articulates ways in which people living in a capitalist society are not merely passive consumers of it but also make and produce through their signifying practices in technocratically constructed space.[60] Rather than being marginalized within this dominant urban strategy or framework, individuals may deploy tactics, ranging from cooking to walking, to subvert the dominant paradigm.[61] He gives the example of how indigenous

[59] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II*, p. 310.
[60] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. xi-xii
[61] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. xix

peoples subverted from within Spanish colonizers' imposition of their own culture, by using the latter's rituals and laws differently from what conquerors had in mind.[62] De Certeau writes, "The weak must continually turn to their own ends, forces alien to them."[63] Further, he states, "A tactic depends on time, it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing."[64] Similarly, *Artistic City* deploys the spatial tactic of walking in Louisville and protesting in the Black Lives Matter movement to produce what I argue is my own critical trajectory or counter-choreography in subversion of the hegemonic city. Walking against the city's spatial productions also informs my research into how Louisville's past art policies haunt the material present. My observations of everyday pedestrian movement at civic sites, as profiled in the following chapters, provide corporeal evidence for understanding how bodies tactically counter-produce urban space.

My methodology allows for in-depth engagement with those who plan, use, visit, and "live with" monuments, art, and placemaking initiatives. I conduct interviews with Louisville curators, artist-activists, and other city actors. I also collect city orature, analyze arts infrastructure and urban planning documents, draw on local news media, and decipher photographic evidence of the city's urban visual and spatial productions. Such research provides the basis for my investigation of how the history of arts policy scripting and urban renewal have informed placemaking in the recent past and how protestors performed artistically and agonistically during crisis. My study of Louisville hinges on close analysis of policy writing and visual design schematics as documents of seemingly mundane administrative labor that ultimately creates place. In drafting public art master plans and

[62] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. xiii
[63] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. xix
[64] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. xix

curatorial projects, which I define as bureaucratic city arts labor, policy authors' names disappear. For example, in the Louisville Public Art Master Plan created by Creative Time in 2008, no authors' names appear on the written document.[65] I explore the process by which curatorial practice exercises spatial influence over the built environment despite the curatorial role receding from public visibility in "back-stage" arts activity.[66] Reading and analyzing policy documents allows me to review the written record of how site specific creative placemaking projects developed over time, and to identify administrative labor by individuals and committees. Importantly, studying the public policy record alongside the material sites, I compare the stated visions and the material reality of art and placemaking projects in the built environment to show a fuller picture of the project's life span and its physical impact on space and the body. I also study photographic documentation of creative placemaking projects in-situ, site-specific protest art, and ephemeral artistic protest performances. Additionally, incorporating digital ethnography into my methodology allows me to analyze how protestors, artists, and city administrators utilized the Internet and social media during this historic period. These methods allow me to employ embodied scholarship as a performance studies critique of the disembodied acts of urban planning.

Following Rebecca Schneider's concept of a "history of the present,"[67] my contemporary history calls attention to individuals whose efforts have been eclipsed by national and international news devoted to the Taylor tragedy, Louisville Metro Police, and ensuing violence of the period. As a protestor both within Louisville's city streets and online

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[65] Creative Time, Louisville Public Art Master Plan, 2008-2009, commissioned by former Mayor Jerry Abramson.

[66] Shannon Jackson's articulating of stage management in her book *Social Works* informs my thinking about the role of the curator here.

[67] In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Rebecca Schneider writes "…events are given to be past, or to become past, by virtue of their ongoingness and their partialness, their incompleteness in the present." 2011, p. 33.

as mandated during quarantine in 2020, I was a live and digital witness to the social and spatial production of the actions of the city's queer, Black and Brown cultural leadership in Louisville. Accordingly, my methodology generatively remaps Louisville through a queer, local, and intersectional feminist lens. Informed by the feminist performance studies methods of Kwan,[68] Nakamura,[69] and Kim Marra,[70] I employ feminist historiography to amplify the everyday work of local social justice activists, self-identified women, LGBTQIA+ activists, and artists of color in response to Louisville's history and this historic period. In so doing, *Artistic City* enables a deeper awareness of Louisville and by extension the U.S. South's less visible queer, feminist, Black & Brown communities.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 1 presents *The Louisville Knot* as a recent public art and placemaking effort under way before BLM protests erupted in 2020. Using *The Knot* as a case study, I introduce how city arts agents have imagined the role of art as instrumental to the neoliberal city's future and investigate how Louisville's artistic production has been recently conceived by politicians, developers, philanthropists, and corporations through written policy documents and visual illustrations. Analyzing these as understudied bureaucratic works, I interrogate them as predicated on commercial visions of corporate bourbon-branded public space. By placing art objects like *The Knot* in neighborhoods historically segregated by racist urban

[68] My feminist methodology draws from SanSan Kwan's study of Chineseness and dance, *Kinesthetic City*, in which she writes, "One of the aims of this book is to claim the "feminized" practice to dance in order to assert a choreographic approach to city space that might counter, in flexible ways, a masculinist reading centered on the visual and the textual." 2013, p. xxx.

[69] In *Transgenerational Remembrance*, Nakamura writes about the history of Japanese "comfort women" and illustrates how feminist artist Shimada Yoshko's embodied performance *Becoming A Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* conjures "transgenerational responsibility," p. 73. I am inspired by Nakamura's centering of women's artistic work, which informs my approach to historicizing self-identified women and artists in Louisville.

[70] My methodology is inspired by Kim Marra's article "Riding, Scarring, Knowing; A Queerly Embodied Performance Historiography," *Theater Journal*, 2012.

renewal measures and divisive transportation infrastructures, the city suggests that government-engineered placemaking in service of urban bourbonism will magically catalyze racial harmony and upward mobility in the neoliberal city.

In this chapter, I examine hegemonic placemaking in Louisville's Vision Russell Transformation Plan, which features *The Knot* as a "multimodal arts infrastructure" to be placed at the 9th Street Divide. *The Knot* structure's design and implementation in 2019 served as the city's spatial intervention to resolve the historic East and West End schism in downtown Louisville by promoting business and arts tourism in the Russell neighborhood. In looking at the city's scripting and placement of the sculpture in the Russell neighborhood where Breonna Taylor was from, I address *The Knot* as part of a larger long-term strategy of gentrification of the low-income Russell neighborhood that several critics maintained was targeted by Louisville police in 2020. I closely analyze the visual rendering of *The Knot*, which was created by the Philadelphia-based Interface Studio Architects, the built structure of *The Knot* at 9th & Main Street, as well as a video of then-Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer's public presentation of the sculpture uploaded to YouTube in 2019. Through close analyses of these evidential elements, I consider the roles and vision of the designers, developers, and urban planners in producing *The Knot's* austere metallic street furniture that materialized in Russell's urban space. I consider the structure in light of local allegations that police ultimately killed Taylor as a result of carrying out the city's multi-million-dollar Vision Russell plan.[71] I position the *The Knot* as an example of pre-2020 creative placemaking that the 2020 protestors' socially engaged and embodied artistic placemaking contested, which I explore in Chapter 2.

[71] Phillip M. Bailey and Tessa Duvall, "Breonna Taylor warrant connected to Louisville gentrification plan, lawyers say," *Louisville Courier Journal* July 5, 2020.

Chapter 2 sets the Louisville protests of 2020 in contrast with the ways in which installations like *The Knot* organize city space. It analyzes the epicenter of BLM protests at Jefferson Square Park, a public square surrounded by City Hall, Hall of Justice, and County Courthouse, where protestors performed agonistic, iconic, and unscripted aesthetic memorials of Taylor in the aftermath of her death at the hands of Louisville Metro Police. I investigate how protestors formed a resistant body politic that gave rise to a suppressed Black visual culture in the segregated city of Louisville; and consider protestors' ephemeral occupation of public spaces as counter-monumental choreographies of artistic placemaking. The protestors re-iconized and re-infrastructured the public square at 6th & Jefferson. Their "behanding" of the iconic Louis XVI statue and collective installation of paintings, protest signage, and organic gardens, dramatically ruptured Louisville's white patriarchal symbols and visual culture. I probe how the protests contested representations of institutional power within the square and created an urgent awareness among city arts leaders to performatively address the call for racial justice. Focusing on the iconic Taylor Memorial as an unauthorized protest monument, I analyze photographic representations of the protestors' creative cultural production of ephemeral, aesthetic, and symbolic Black female representation during massive civil unrest, which challenged city arts leaders and institutions to belatedly redress racial inequity in aesthetic and cultural representation.

Chapter 3 profiles the performance of 21c, a national hotel chain and museum foundation's institutional placemaking response to Taylor's killing. This chapter approaches creative placemaking efforts by institutional curators who work for 21c hotel's downtown "urban revitalization" efforts while stage managing the activist art of protestors. Examining the project as a hegemonic placemaking intervention, I center the institutional coordination

of artistic placemaking in 2020. I analyze *She Ascends* in terms of the project's competing neoliberal and artistic claims, respectively, for Black and Brown spaces in Louisville. Specifically examining the less visible role of 21c Director and Chief Curator Alice Stites, I highlight her administrative labor in staging *She Ascends*, a virtual memorial artwork to Breonna Taylor by artists Brianna Harlan and Nancy Cahill, located across from Jefferson Square Park where the protestors' created the iconic Taylor Memorial. This chapter profiles Stites, whose position at 21c is funded by Brown-Forman bourbon family wealth. I investigate her curatorial endorsement of the project, which enabled the artists' digitally embodied placemaking. *She Ascends* was a site-specific 21c project visible only through the 4th Wall app, a free, augmented reality (AR) public art platform "exploring resistance and inclusive creative expression." *She Ascends* visualized a virtual collage of notable Black Kentucky women including Nancy Taylor Green and celebrated Louisville attorney, Alberta Odell Jones, whose brutal and unsolved murder in 1965 still haunts Louisville.

Chapter 4 builds on the analysis of Louisville arts' institutional performance in support of artist-activists in the neoliberal artistic city underwritten by the bourbon industry's extractive capitalism. I draw on scholars Laurent Berlant, Alan Read, and Miranda Joseph to critique the Louisville non-profit Actors Theater's locally relevant institutional response to 2020. I argue how in the aftermath of the Taylor tragedy and during the Covid-19 pandemic, Actors performed anti-racist gestures and discourse online, which infrastructured a virtual public sphere. Examining the theater under the artistic direction of Robert Berry Fleming throughout the crises, I illuminate how Actors' positioned Idris Goodwin's *Ali Summit* in relation to building Black and Brown wealth in Louisville. Addressing Actors' performance as a form of potentially counter-hegemonic placemaking in the virtual public sphere, I

analyze the non-profit theater's corporate funding sources that sustained the arts but maintained structural inequality in Louisville.

As a conclusion, Chapter 5 articulates how an agonistic model can be used to critique aesthetic production within specific urban political contexts and philanthropic funding ecologies. I maintain that art and resistance to hegemonic placemaking are inevitably compromised by dynastic wealth and funding infrastructures. Yet rather than ignore the potential for an agonistic counterhegemonic placemaking model to bring about much-needed change, I position *Artistic City* as a discursive intervention and potential aid for artists and others who seek to challenge the existing urban arts and spatial order.

Ch. 1. Legacies of Urban Renewal: Performance and Haunting at *The Knot*

Fig. 1. *The Louisville Knot* at the 9th Street Divide. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

The Louisville Knot, a giant steel sculpture made of conjoined orange pipes spanning half a city block in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, illuminates the ways in which the local government has recently deployed public art to psychically and spatially "re-connect" this historically segregated city. *The Knot* is an interactive sculpture that doubles as a "Louisville" sign and playground (see figure 1). While a knot is defined as an interlacement of parts, it is also a problem that is hard to solve.[1] Yet the space of *The Knot* also represents what border theorist Thomas Nail describes as a "fuzzy zone-like phenomenon" or "a third thing: the thing in between the two sides that touch the states."[2] Performing to multiple definitions, *The Knot* was purported to bridge the socio-economic gap between wealthier white neighborhoods to the East and poorer Black neighborhoods to the West. It is currently

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "knot," accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/knot. A knot can be defined and interpreted metaphorically as a bond of marriage, interlacement of parts and others. For this essay, I contextualize a knot as "something hard to solve."
[2] Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 2016, p. 3.

installed on the sidewalk beneath a highway overpass at a desolate intersection that is locally known as "The 9th Street Divide."[3]

The Divide is an historic racial and spatial barrier that is the consequence of an interstate highway strategically placed through the urban center to enable "white flight" to the East End suburbs.[4] Stating that the sculpture was designed to eliminate The Divide, *The Knot's* public art curator Sarah Lindgren asserted, "You can literally speak into the talk tube from one end of the overpass to the other and speak to another person at the other side…It connects us to the Portland neighborhood and the Russell neighborhood."[5] *The Knot* seemingly tackles the problem of division through reconnection, yet the separation between East and West Louisville is not predicated on an incidental lack of connections but by racially discriminatory urban design.[6] Despite the city's claims, *The Knot* failed to overturn the history of discriminatory redlining policies of the 1930s and the mid-20th-century demolition of African American-owned businesses in downtown's West End that led to The Divide.[7]

The sculpture was initially devised in tandem with the corporate tourist re-branding of The Divide as part of the city's new walkable "Whiskey Row."[8] Driven by a global $9 billion bourbon industry that generates over $286 million dollars for the state, the bourbon-funded

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[3] "The Louisville Knot, proposes to recreate the Ninth Street underpass as an engaging and enticing public space tied together by local influences and traditions, providing a destination for exploration, commerce, and play." "Design team selected for Ninth Street underpass project," September 08, 2016, https://louisvilleky.gov/news/design-team-selected-ninth-street-underpass-project.

[4] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy (Root Cause Research Center), "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville, Kentucky," *Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2): 143-164.

[5] Senait Gebregiorgis, "'The Louisville Knot' is creating ties between divided communities," *WHAS11 News*, Sept. 6, 2019.

[6] Leo Cabranes-Grant, "Re: Thank You." Received by Maiza Hixson. 14 August 2023. In personal correspondence and dissertation review, Dr. Leo Cabranes-Grant queries, "how can a knot (a tightening) eliminate a 'divide'? A 'divide' is not necessarily based on a 'lack' of connections, but on an intentional 'occlusion' of connections…"

[7] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy (Root Cause Research Center), "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville, Kentucky," *Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2): 143-164.

[8] *Downtown Louisville Master Plan*, 2013-2016, pp. 138-140, https://louisvilledowntown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ldpmpfinal-5.pdf.

re-development of a more pedestrian-friendly downtown underwrites urban revitalization efforts in low-income and predominately Black neighborhoods.[9] In this chapter, I explore how Louisville city planners rolled out *The Knot* as an ideological tool and spatial choreography in order to distract from The Divide's ongoing urban fragmentation.[10] Investigating how city agents position art as reparative of divisive infrastructures in low-income, segregated areas while encouraging luxury tourist development in these same areas, this study asks, how does the city perform neoliberal placemaking?

The Knot was presented as an aesthetic placemaking corrective to Louisville's failed urban renewal initiatives of the past that still haunt Kentucky's largest city. Placemaking can be defined as the strategic practice of urban space or the choreographed planning and participatory re-design of public place by key urban actors.[11] Analyzing *The Knot's* placemaking choreographies through "master" plans, visual schematics, arts policy, and publicity spectacles enables this examination of how city agents performatively conjure projects like *The Knot* prior to installing them in civic space. After elucidating the ways in which the city deploys *The Knot*, for comparative analysis, I turn to a street-level study of *The Knot's* material performance in the built environment. I conduct multiple site visits to The Divide to highlight and capture live and embodied choreographies of *The Knot* that escape the city's policy, plans, and publicity. As a counter to the city's claims, this chapter contends that rather than serving as an aesthetic site dedicated to the re-unification of the city,

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[9] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy (Root Cause Research Center), "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville, Kentucky," *Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2): 143-164.
[10] My use of the term "ideological" is derived from Louis Althusser's definition in "Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays," *La Pensee*, 1970. I characterize *The Knot* as the product of an Ideological State Apparatus that produces submissive subjects.
[11] To inform my definition of placemaking I draw on Michel de Certeau's concept of spatial practice. He writes, "Space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers." In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p. 117.

The Knot functions as a machine of distraction from the ongoing poverty, stagnation, and segregation plaguing the West End that neither aesthetic placemaking nor bourbon re-rebranding have alleviated.[12] *The Knot* effectively directs the subordination of people, art, and public space to corporate ruling class interests.

The 9th Street Divide: A Spatial Archive That Remains

Joseph Roach observes that "Cities of the dead are primarily for the living. They exist not only as artifacts, such as cemeteries and commemorative landmarks, but also as behaviors."[13] I draw on Roach to contextualize my framing of Louisville as a living archive of historic behaviors that created the present conditions of urban renewal, which contemporary urban dwellers must live with today. Specifically, the 9th Street Divide commemorates spatial practices starting from the 1930s to the 1960s, in Louisville and in other US cities, when the United States government initiated urban renewal as a program to address so-called "blighted" city neighborhoods across the country. It was a post-World War II urban planning objective designed to demolish urban sites under eminent domain in order to accommodate new highways, the increased presence of cars, and ostensibly provide affordable housing.[14] In Louisville, redlining and urban renewal occurred through a series of racially discriminatory housing and transportation policies rolled out by the city to "contain the Negro Housing Problem."[15] Urban renewal operated in tandem with interstate highway construction and literally paved the way for what became known as "Negro Removal" and

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[12] Ana Rosio Alvarez Brinez writes that Louisville recently announced that it received a $15.6 million federal grant to fund "Reimagine 9th Street" project, the article quotes multiple members of the West End community who establish the ongoing "mental barrier" of the Divide, *Louisville Courier Journal*, Oct 31, 2022.
[13] Joseph Roach, "Preface," *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, 1996, p. xi.
[14] Michael H. Carriere, David Schalliol, *The City Creative: The Rise of Urban Placemaking in Contemporary America*, 2021, p. 31.
[15] Elijah McKenzie, "KY Place breaks down the history and future of Louisville's racist Ninth Street Divide," *Broken Sidewalk*, June 14, 2016

"white flight."[16] The Divide haunts the present lives of residents West of the Divide, in neighborhoods such as Russell and Portland, where people experience a "marked difference in poverty, education, access to jobs, and health outcomes…These neighborhoods often have disparate health outcomes and are among the worst rated for life expectancy, asthma rates, diabetes, COVID death rates, and many more public health challenges."[17] Although the city's 9th Street Divide is a metaphorical grave site of discriminatory behaviors that destroyed Black neighborhoods, The Divide still haunts people's lives and movements around this ongoing psychic and spatial barrier.[18]

Whereas performance has been defined as an ephemeral medium, following Rebecca Schneider, I maintain that as a relic of civic behaviors and practices, The Divide does not disappear, but instead stands as a physical reminder of previous eras' racially segregationist practices from which the rapidly gentrifying, neoliberal city strives to distance itself. Accordingly, The Divide is a performative record of mid 20th century urban planning that effectively segregated the city and perpetuates that division in the present.[19] While segregations are never absolute,[20] The Divide functions as both an archive and an operative site that conscripts the living to perform "its work" in terms of forcing city planners and users

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[16] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, "Root Shock: The Consequences of African American Dispossession," *Journal of Urban Health,* Vol. 78, no. 1, March 2001, p. 72.
[17] Louisville Metro Government, "Reimagine 9th Street," a project designed to re-design the Divide, lists the ongoing health and poverty impacts of the Divide, pp. 17-18, https://louisvilleky.gov/advanced-planning-and-sustainability/document/raise-2022-9th-street-narrative.
[18] "Reimagine 9th Street," https://louisvilleky.gov/advanced-planning-and-sustainability/document/raise-2022-9th-street-narrative.
[19] Rebecca Schneider, "Ch. 3. In the Meantime: Performance Remains," in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment,* 2011, pp. 87-110.
[20] Leo Cabranes-Grant, "Re: Thank You." Received by Maiza Hixson. 14 August 2023. In personal correspondence and dissertation review, Dr. Cabranes-Grant asserts that "the need for a 'divide' appears exactly at the point when we realize that segregations are 'partial'— and a visible marker (the border, the divide, the frontier) is always leaking into the other side… when we plan to build a wall we are recognizing that something is flowing."

to grapple with this tear in the urban fabric today.[21] As Louisville strives to overcome the structurally racist legacy of urban planning, the city is still plagued by the physical remains of urban renewal's infrastructural projects and metaphorical transportation monuments.[22] Even though the city no longer legally practices segregation and avidly denounces the harmful effects of urban renewal as it strives for world-class status, The Divide remains a psychic, spatial, racial, and economic barrier to Louisville's urban revitalization planning.

While mid-20th-century urban renewal choreographed mostly middle-class white people away from the West End, the contemporary city now seeks to choreograph the suburban middle class back downtown for bourbon tourist experiences through aesthetic placemaking initiatives like *The Knot* at The Divide. To overcome downtown's segregated image, in 2013, Louisville mobilized the idea of aesthetic placemaking in tandem with urban bourbon revitalization, to re-make the city a creative hub not only for middle-class suburbanites and tourists, but urban professionals.[23] Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer claims to have coined the term "Bourbonism" as a tourism and economic development tool.[24] In 2014, he formed the Food and Bourbon Work Group to strategize growth, stating, "At that time, there were no distillery experiences in the city. Today, there are 10, as well as the bourbon-

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[21] I draw here on Jessica Nakamura's theme of conscription in *Transgenerational Remembrance: Performance and the Asia-Pacific War in Contemporary Japan*, in which she writes about Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine: "If, following Rebecca Schneider, we need to rethink "remains" "not solely as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with" the past, it is critical to contemplate how this past mnemonic institution drafts contemporary bodies to carry on its work." p. 4.

[22] I am deeply indebted to UCSB Professor Ninotchka Bennahum for familiarizing me with modern dancer Katherine Dunham's famous protest of a segregated Louisville auditorium in 1944. Curated by Dr. Bennahum, at the *Border Crossings* symposium held at UCSB Jan 25-28, 2024, I delivered a paper in which I argued that Dunham's protest was a counterhegemonic choreography that enables a deeper understanding of the embodied protests of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement in Louisville.

[23] *Downtown Louisville Master Plan*, 2013-2016, p. 138, https://louisvilledowntown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ldpmpfinal-5.pdf.

[24] Metro Louisville Press Release, "Mayor Fischer highlights and celebrates significant growth of Bourbonism and its impact on Louisville over the last decade," December 29, 2022. https://louisvilleky.gov/news/mayor-fischer-highlights-and-celebrates-significant-growth-bourbonism-and-its-impact.

centric music festival Bourbon and Beyond, and the Urban Bourbon Experience, a city-wide trail filled with award-winning micro-distilleries, exhibits and craft cocktail destinations."[25] As the city accelerated its bourbon tourist re-branding of downtown, it folded the arts into its revitalization plans.[26]

Aesthetic revitalization is a global practice; for example, in the context of Bangalore, India, author Jisha Menon asserts, "Urban planners advance aesthetics as central to the remaking of cities. Making cities beautiful is crucial to the aspiration of remaking urban space in the image of the idealized world-class city."[27] As scholar Sharon Zukin has written, cities such as New York and Los Angeles have effectively capitalized on culture and used it as an economic base.[28] In 2002, the urban theorist Richard Florida pioneered the concept of the 'creative class' as an economic engine for struggling cities.[29] He built on the 1960s urbanist Jane Jacobs' idea that the death of American cities was due to highway construction and "slum clearance" projects. Florida argued that in order to revitalize their economies, cities needed to cater to the creative class, who rejected suburban conformity in favor of the diversity and spectacle of city life.[30] Indeed, cities strive to revive themselves through aesthetics but the deployment of the creative city model in urban revitalization plans and discourse has also been described as a form of neoliberal urban planning.[31] Tracing a genealogy from Jacobs to Florida, scholar Brian Tochterman shows the progressively

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[25] Louisville Metro Government, Press Release, December 29, 2022, https://louisvilleky.gov/news/mayor-fischer-highlights-and-celebrates-significant-growth-bourbonism-and-its-impact.
[26] Ceil Miller-Bouchet, "Bourbon sprawl: Louisville mixes art with its iconic drink," *The Washington Post*, Dec 27, 2018.
[27] Jisha Menon, *Brutal Beauty: Aesthetics and Aspiration in Urban India,* 2022, p. 175.
[28] Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, 1995, p. 11.
[29] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2002
[30] Brian Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," *Radical History Review,* Issue 112 (Winter 2012), p. 66-67.
[31] Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," pp. 66-67.

intertwined relationship of the state, global capitalism, and urban economic development since the 1960s.[32] Tochterman writes, "cultural- and tourist-focused development, creative freedom 'promoted by the city's powerful cultural institutions,' political tolerance for identity politics, and the 'diversified consumerism' of gentrification played a role in the city's neoliberal transformation since the 1970s."[33] In an effort to stimulate or drive the economic revitalization of its "dead" downtown, within the last two decades, Louisville, too, has seized upon the creative city model, combining the public and private sector to promote bourbonism with and through aesthetic placemaking.[34]

Fig. 2. View of The 9th Street Divide showing I-64 overpass and ramp at 9th & Main facing West
Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

[32] Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," pp. 66-67.
[33] Tochterman, "Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development," pp. 66-67.
[34] "'We will make great use of every donation'; How to support improving downtown Louisville Donations will fund ongoing and special projects like adding additional trees and flowers and installing public art." WHAS News, 2022.

Performatives of The Knot I: Choreographies of Placemaking

"Master Planning"

In 2013, the *Louisville Downtown Master Plan* instigated strategic placemaking operations to re-signify the Divide as a desirable new tourist destination.[35] The plan called for the placement of a gateway enhancement between bourbon distilleries and wayfinding signage on Main Street between 9th and 10th to encourage tourists and pedestrians to cross Main from east to west (see figure 2). The Master Plan identified West of 9th Street as a target for the development of the newly expanding Bourbon District: "With the announcement that Peerless Distilling will be developing the Walker Bag Company building (at 10th & Main Street), the Bourbon District has now jumped 9th Street and will help to draw people across what has long been a divide between Downtown and the west side of the city."[36] Following the growth of an ever-growing Bourbon District footprint and tourist re-mapping of the area, the city's Master Plan 2040 establishes a choreographed governmental response to private bourbon industry expansion and tourist planning.

Design Competition

To fulfill the objectives of the aforementioned Master Plan, in 2016, Metro Government launched a national design competition for aesthetic placemaking treatments of The 9th Street Divide.[37] However, rather than seek out artists to create public art based on critically diverse concepts and criteria, the city pursued its commercial goals to re-brand The

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[35] *Downtown Louisville Master Plan*, 2013-2016, p. 138, https://louisvilledowntown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ldpmpfinal-5.pdf.
[36] *Downtown Louisville Master Plan*, 2013-2016, p. 138.
[37] According to the Louisville.gov website, "The call for proposals was open to professional artists, architects, designers, and collaborative teams, based locally and nationally. Metro is seeking a project combining art, design and infrastructure that activates and promotes public use of the space, and considers the surrounding neighborhoods, community assets, and people served by the area's infrastructure and amenities." https://louisvilleky.gov/news/design-team-selected-ninth-street-underpass-project.

Divide as a bourbon tourist destination on Main Street—the walkable Bourbon District.[38] With its coordination of the competition, the city began to orchestrate a counter-narrative of The Divide using art as a tool of distraction from Louisville's ongoing structural racism and urban poverty in the West End.[39]

The Request for Proposals (RFP) to re-design The Divide called for a visual enticement to the overpass that would assist with the choreography of pedestrians across this thoroughfare. By launching a national competition for a gateway enhancement, the city performed a spectacle of governmental redress of this partition through the deployment of art. As part of the design competition, "community meetings" were held in which constituents engaged in brainstorming sessions for creative programming ideas at The Divide.[40] A Philadelphia-based architecture firm, Interface Studio Architects (ISA), ultimately won the competition with its design for *The Louisville Knot,* which the firm billed as a quick street improvisation and way to circumvent long-term spatial planning efforts such as removing the highway 64 overpass at The Divide altogether.[41] Moneyed stakeholders, Louisville Metro Government and the Rotary Club, paid ISA to suit the clients' objectives.[42] The ISA maintained the appearance of a participatory placemaking process by including the

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[38] Bourbon District. "Louisville's Bourbon District." Bourbonism.com, 2024. https://bourbonism.com/#map.
[39] Louis Althusser asserts that the reproduction of the material conditions (of raw materials) is necessary for the means of production of goods, for example. However, outside of material production, there are material conditions required for the means of production of ideological subjection. Borrowing from Althusser, I characterize *The Knot* is the product of an Ideological State Apparatus that produces submissive subjects. "Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays," *La Pensee*, 1970.
[40] ISA, "The Louisville Knot: 9th Street Underpass," Louisville, Kentucky Government, March 20, 2017, https://louisvilleky.gov/arts-culture/document/20170320louisvilleknotpdf.
[41] *Downtown Louisville Master Plan*, 2013-2016, "Removing this ramp would allow for the creation of a development site west of 9th Street. Adding buildings here would help close the gap and extend the built edge of Main Street. Taken together with the planned lighting and gateway enhancements for the Bourbon District at 9th and Main Street, these improvements would help to knit the urban fabric back together and reconnect West Main Street to East Portland," p. 140.
[42] Bruce Allar, "Core Design Owner Jeremy Semones Tackles the Louisville Knot," *Louisville.com*, May 20, 2019.

documentation of the city's community meetings in its final proposal.[43] As a result of this durational performative choreography of public space by institutional players over the course of multiple years, a newly re-branded image of the 9th Street Divide emerged.

Consistent with Louisville's new bourbon-themed identity, ISA's proposal constructed images of how *The Knot* would perform as an interactive, "multi-modal" arts amenity that could conveniently be used as a bourbon bar and seating area. Illustrations show the word "Louisville" spelled out in orange metal tubes indicating that the object is both a sign and new downtown tourist destination and experience.[44] There are also "talk tubes," a workout station, bike racks, "tool kit," "happy birthday zone," "fun lights," "selfie-station," and dining area.[45] Photoshopped graphics placed model bourbon consumers interacting at *The Knot* while enjoying all of its elements. For example, a daytime scene finds a mother and daughter engaged in a balloon fight in front of the structure while a group of teens strike a pinata behind them; and in a later happy hour vignette, people enjoy drinks near *The Knot* while seated at Old Forester whiskey barrels that have been repurposed as bar tables. Two "friends" pose for a selfie while well-heeled young professionals flank *The Knot's* metallic frame. Bicycles appear to have been temporarily propped up against one of *The Knot's* many poles to suggest co-workers could ride to *The Knot* to unwind. An evening scene shows two young men playing electric guitar under *The Knot* while concertgoers surround the musicians and take in the entertainment.[46] ISA thus stages not only *The Knot* but the entire streetscape as one communal production starring middle-class millennial BIPOC and white professionals reveling in buzzed ebullience and casual sophistication.

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[43] ISA, The Louisville Knot: 9th Street Underpass, 2017, p. 20.
[44] "Design team creates Louisville Knot installation to connect east and west," *Louisville Future,* Nov 15, 2017.
[45] ISA, "The Louisville Knot: 9th Street Underpass," March 20, 2017, p. 24.
[46] ISA, "The Louisville Knot: 9th Street Underpass," p. 37.

Satisfying the client, in fulfillment of the design competition, ISA furnished such attractive images for the Mayor and Commission on Public Art (CoPA) who then used the scenes and proposal as evidence to tout *The Knot* as a foregone placemaking success. ISA's concept and visual schematic not only renders *The Knot* legible but also signifies the culmination of the city's long-term planning performances that archive the city's accomplishment. By vivifying *The Knot* through colorful illustrations of the object transforming the Divide, the designs persuasively suggest that the city's aesthetic placemaking effort has already been achieved. Brandishing the illustrations on the CoPA website and publishing them in numerous news articles and across media outlets, the city successfully produced, documented, and celebrated placemaking in advance of the project's actual completion.[47] By choreographing the competition and selection of the ISA, as well as mandating the ISA's visual and verbal articulation of the city's desired placemaking process and performance in physical and digital document form, the city originated and located *The Knot* as a viable arts destination.

Publicity and Policy

In March 2017, the online journal *Broken Sidewalk* published *The Knot* design and announced that the sculpture "serves as a beacon that attracts people, *like moths to a flame* [emphasis mine], to the dispirited tract."[48] Also in 2017, Louisville Metro Government officially introduced *The Knot* as a streetscape improvement that would alleviate the social

[47] Louisville Commission on Public Art shows *The Knot* as part of the city's art collection, https://louisvilleky.gov/government/arts-culture/city-art-collection.
[48] Brandon Klayko, "The Louisville Knot: An art installation hopes to mend a torn urban fabric: Semi-permanent installation a sure sign that Louisville will "knot" accept the Ninth Street Divide," *Broken Sidewalk*, March 30, 2017.

and spatial effects of The Divide by bridging east and west under the overpass.[49] The placemaking project was heralded as the city's immediate "intervention" in lieu of demolishing the Interstate 64 onramp that disrupts pedestrian traffic flow in the area.[50] According to a 2017 news article about *The Knot*, "city officials view this project as the first step in stitching together the burgeoning businesses in the Russell community and the Main Street corridor."[51] However glowing the 2017 praise, *The Knot* was not built until 2019 and as of 2018, still had to be permitted by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KTC) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).[52] In contrast to the laudatory publicity, Greg Preece, a KTC engineer who processed the permit for the sculpture remarked in an email, "My first thought was that it looked like an HVAC schematic, but what do I know about art."[53]

A 2019 news article announced the project's "grand opening" and ribbon cutting ceremony stating, "*The Louisville Knot* has been in the works for three years. The $175,000 public art space was spearheaded by Interface Studio Architects based in Philadelphia, along with the community and city leaders."[54] Curator Lindgren stated, "for years, the norm was people walking down Main Street after a trip to the museum or restaurant, and their journey ending once they would reach the overpass."[55] In a video of Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer's

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[49] "The Louisville Knot, proposes to recreate the Ninth Street underpass as an engaging and enticing public space tied together by local influences and traditions, providing a destination for exploration, commerce, and play." https://louisvilleky.gov/news/design-team-selected-ninth-street-underpass-project.
[50] "Design team creates Louisville Knot installation to connect east and west," *Louisville Future,* Nov 15, 2017.
[51] "Design team creates Louisville Knot installation to connect east and west," *Louisville Future,* Nov 15, 2017.
[52] Louisville Metro Government response to a public records request #22-12029 from the KY Transportation Cabinet regarding *The Knot* permit, March 31, 2023.
[53] Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. Email correspondence regarding *The Knot*. Sent from Greg L. Preece to David Whitworth, Federal Highway Administration, March 15, 2018.
[54] Senait Gebregiorgis, "The Louisville Knot is creating ties between divided communities," *Louisville Courier Journal,* September 6, 2019.
[55] Senait Gebregiorgis, "The Louisville Knot is creating ties between divided communities," *Louisville Courier Journal,* September 6, 2019.

formal ribbon-cutting presentation of *The Knot*, he thanks all of the people who helped make the project happen, including "partners from the Metro Council, Barbara Sexton Smith, "right in the Heart of District 4," and the Rotary Club.[56] He recognizes ISA while championing local fabricators at Core Design KY who produced the metal furniture. Calling out the name of a local white male sitting on the sculpture behind him, Fischer exclaims, "Jeremy made this. This will be one of your signature pieces and I'm really happy that you're the guy behind this in terms of the fabrication. So let's give it up for Jeremy. Way to go, brother! Nice job!"[57] Fischer frames the momentous occasion as coinciding with "what's happening in the rest of our country" but does not actually name what he describes: "9th Street is a divide" but "art brings people together" and "Why not put a great piece of public art right on Main Street?"[58] Fischer's script continues and he then recites the financial crux of *The Knot*:

> Now a piece of art is not enough to create a bridge…Almost a billion of dollars have been invested in the West End of Louisville…a great Renaissance in arts and business…It's a movement we've got going on and *The Knot* is the entryway to all that…We need to understand the history of the city and how we're all in this together.[59]

In his monologue, Mayor Fischer also refers to the history of redlining in Louisville as a source of decimation of African American wealth and nightclubs.[60] The Mayor's reference to creating "a bridge" to the burgeoning businesses in the West End's Russell neighborhood

[56] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.
[57] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.
[58] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.
[59] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.
[60] "Urban Renewal and Lost Louisville," *The Filson Historical Society*, filsonhistorical.omeka.net, Accessed Feb 1, 2022.

elides the demolition of African American-owned businesses on Russell's Walnut Street or what became known as the Harlem of Louisville.[61] Fischer states:

> We can't control *that*, but what we *can* control is our city moving forward, both in actions and deed, and the way that we talk about it. So that's part of what we're trying to do with public art. It's also what we're doing with our "Lean Into Louisville Initiative" which brings art as a way into bringing people together. . . . Pedestrians will help people . . . coming from downtown to continue west on Main street to businesses just beyond 9th Street. Great businesses like Peerless Distilling, Old 502 Winery, the beautiful, fabulous art collection at ENS gallery so it's important that people move East and people move West and then it all comes together.[62]

Following Fischer's statements, his co-star Fourth District Councilmember Barbara Sexton Smith stepped up to the podium. The West End's Fourth District includes the Russell, Butchertown Neighborhoods, Smoketown, and other historically low-income areas.[63] Smith announces that she thinks *The Knot* is going to represent commerce: "Yes, I believe art drives commerce. Just look down the street to the East a couple blocks and you'll see a 32-foot statue of *David*! [(see figure 3)] He was very controversial when he landed but I will say, he stands and rests and greets people into what was once called the number one hotel in the world—full of Art. Art Does Drive Commerce. Yes, it Does."[64]

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[61] Latisha Reynolds, "Old Walnut Street & African American Businesses," Archives & Special Collections, Univ of Louisville Library, September 4, 2013.
[62] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.
[63] "District 4 Neighborhoods," LouKy.gov, Accessed Feb. 13, 2022.
[64] "Access Louisville: The Louisville Knot," Louisville Metro TV, *YouTube*, September 10, 2019.

Fig. 3. Two blocks East of *The Knot* at 7th & Main Street showing statue "David" and bourbon branding.
Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2022.

Councilmember Smith understood that the West End's Russell residents have very low household incomes and on average are much poorer than other city residents. Indeed, according to *Vision Russell*, the "unemployment rate is almost twice that of Louisville overall, resulting in a median household income of $14,209 compared to nearly three times that city-wide at $44,159."[65] However, *The Knot* was designed for visitors and tourists with disposable income to purchase bourbon and the free time to attend *The Knot's* promised curated programs, concerts, and events.

[65] *Vision Russell Transformation Plan,* 2017, p. 30.

Despite not indicating how the extensive list of activities explicitly envisioned for *The Knot* (yoga, gardens, concerts) would be programmed or funded, Fischer and Smith vocalized several key themes of the project's narrative arc. The West End's streets were those of Metro Louisville government, to be appropriated as a staging ground for choreographed performances around objects that the city designated as "art." A commercial architectural firm worked for city agents who imagined and scripted language around the space and objects, which they labeled "art," for the promotion of commercial development of real estate; official civic actors then enacted speeches and proclamations in a highly visible and mediated event designed to communicate the official marking of public place through objects deemed "art"; citizens read, watched, and listened to endorsed deployments of such structures *as* art, and audience members experienced the city's public pageant of neoliberal placemaking. Without any indication or evidence that the project performed as it was intended to, the city then codified *The Knot* as a successful policy-in-action in its 2019 *Plan 2040*, asserting that it was an infrastructural object that remedied The Divide.[66]

What this analysis of the procedures of master planning, public art competition, publicity, and policy making of *The Knot* demonstrates is that the structure enables the city's elaborate dance around the core issues of The Divide that still haunt the West End. Borrowing from Louis Althusser, I characterize *The Knot* as an Ideological State Apparatus that was born out of a governmental process to reinforce the power of the state to mandate public art in service of commercial development.[67] The city's performatives of *The Knot* choreograph citizens to accept *The Knot* at face value and without critique—and to believe the dominant narrative that *The Knot* really is improving connections between East and West,

[66] *Plan 2040, A Comprehensive Plan for Louisville Metro*, Art Policies in Action (The Knot), 2019.
[67] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press 1971.

when it in fact has never demonstrated this function. Carefully examining the sequence of steps that the city implemented to realize the project aids in an alternative understanding of *The Knot* as a means of aesthetic distraction from the city's concerted effort to draft bodies into the performance of the preferred ideology of bourbon commerce and consumerism. How does a contemporary analysis of *The Knot* in situ reveal other specific disparities between the city's mythologization of *The Knot* and the lived experience of its material form?

Performatives of The Knot **II: Choreographing Against Neoliberal Placemaking**

Contrasting Louisville's policy and publicity framing of *The Knot* with the built sculpture at The Divide, I apply the methods of performance and dance studies scholars who re-map urban space through the body.[68] From the vantage point of a dancer and urban flaneuse, for example, SanSan Kwan's kinesthetic investigation of the production of multiple Chinese identities in global cities informs my deployment of critically embodied spatial tactics in Louisville.[69] Kwan considers choreography as a mutual process: "Bodies choreograph space; space choreographs bodies."[70] Similarly, I show how *The Knot* produces place and how living bodies also re-choreograph the area of *The Knot*. My physical interrogation of the sculpture attempts to disrupt the city's wielding of *The Knot* as a creative

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[68] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, 2012, p. 7. Kwan distinguishes the flaneuse from Walter Benjamin's flaneur in his *Arcade* project, a landmark study of 19th Paris through various liminal figures, including the flaneur. Benjamin describes the male walker's choreography or movements through urban space at a particular moment when the arcades of industrial Paris provided novel pedestrian walkways and storefront window shopping. The 19th century literary trope of the flaneur became a key figure in 20th century philosophical discourse and continues to influence 21st century performance studies scholars, particularly contemporary dance studies scholars such as Kwan who theorizes the body's movement in cities and space through the lens of choreography. As a scholar, Kwan approaches movement in Chinese urban spaces to center her own ethnographic methodology and analyses of shifting Chinese identities. Challenging the Western male flaneurial body through a feminist spatial experience of Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Los Angeles and New York, she enables situated understandings of each city based on its own unique geographic and historical conditions.

[69] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984. In "Part III: Spatial Practices" de Certeau writes about spatial tactics to critique urban strategy and my deployment of the term "tactic" is in reference to his concept, pp. 91-130.

[70] Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*, p. 4.

diversion from the lingering ghosts of urban renewal and strategic bourbon tourist gentrification of the West End. My kinesthetic study asks, how does a critically embodied approach re-focus attention on the underlying problems of The Divide in the face of the city's neoliberal aesthetic placemaking assault and concomitant celebration of urban progress?

I develop my choreographic analysis out of multiple visits to *The Knot* from 2019 to 2023, when I investigated the structure on different days of the work week, weekends, and holidays. In my analysis, I walked around, sat on, and photographed *The Knot*. I studied *The Knot* at various times of day, including mornings, afternoons, and evenings, and during the summer, fall, winter, and spring. My lived experience of the structure therefore enables a "counter-memory" and corporeal assessment of *The Knot's* three-dimensional contortions while illuminating what the ISA design schematics fail to demarcate.[71]

Visiting the *The Knot* on Main between 9th and 10th, one immediately recognizes the iconic sculpture spelling out the word "Louisville" in bright orange letters. Built out of 2-inch round steel pipe, the letters are attached to a sprawling linear form spanning half of the block. The form is made from the same pipe material and is bolted to clunky anchor points on the sidewalk.[72] In addition to serving as a literal sign, the sculpture appears as an abstract playground set with bleachers; however, because of its cautionary orange color and expansive footprint, it also confusingly suggests a construction zone. The area immediately

[71] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*. Roach uses "counter-memory" in discussing history as it is discursively transmitted versus memory as it is "publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" p. 26.
[72] *The Knot* does not feature a visible sculptural base as in classical sculpture. As a hybrid piece of "street furniture" and interactive, multi-modal work, it does not directly reference art historical precedents for dispensing with the base. However, if we analyze it as an "autonomous" art object, it is one that eschews autonomy for site-specific audience participation. Minimalist artist Richard Serra, for example, famously eschewed the base and created large scale, site-specific sculptures for people to physical experience in real space. Performance studies and art scholars including Shannon Jackson in *Social Works* (2011) and Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another* (2004) have respectively addressed works of site-specific public art. Michael Fried famously denounced the "theatrical" turn in 1960s minimalist sculpture in his text, *Art and Objecthood*, an oft-cited text in performance studies scholarship.

behind *The Knot* is the "Happy Birthday Memorial Parking Lot," so named after two Louisville sisters, Mildred and Patty Hill, who first published the famous song in 1893 (see figures 4 and 5).[73] Touted as an attraction in the ISA's schematic, the celebratory-sounding Lot actually exists as an unceremonious catch-all for highway litter and a drainage ditch for storm water run-off. "Plopped" on the ground between The Lot and five-lanes of traffic heading West, *The Knot* is partly trapped beneath the I-64 overpass's dehumanizing frame (see figure 6).[74]

Fig. 4. *The Knot* spanning the overpass and entrance to Happy Birthday Lot behind it. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

[73] Andrew Wolfson, "Who Really Wrote the 'Happy Birthday' Song?" *The Louisville Courier Journal*, June 29, 2013.

[74] I invoke the term "plop" in reference to the corporate co-optation of Minimalist art, which *The Knot* embodies. Art critic Roberta Smith writes, "ART adores a vacuum. That's why styles, genres and mediums left for dead by one generation are often revived by subsequent ones. In the 1960s and '70s public sculpture was contemporary art's foremost fatality deader than painting actually. The corpse generally took the form of corporate, pseudo-Minimalist plop art. It was ignored by the general public and despised by the art world," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2008.

Fig. 5. Rear view of *The Knot* beneath the 64 overpass from Happy Birthday Lot facing Main St. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

Fig. 6. View of overpass and Happy Birthday Lot behind *The Knot.* Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

While the Louisville sign portion of the sculpture appears outside of the overpass on the East side, the middle portion of *The Knot* occupies a quasi-interior created by the overpass that is choked by exhaust fumes. I sit down on *The Knot's* hard metal pipes facing pre-rush hour traffic on Main as people drive by in their cars paying more attention to the road than the sculpture. The part of *The Knot* where I am seated is one of the only areas unsheltered by the overpass due to a split in the highway overhead. A small sliver of sky opens between the two ramps above where I watch semi-trucks barrel by and feel them rattle *The Knot's* skeleton. The indifference of this auto zone to bodies—both animate and inanimate—is staggering. My form is insignificant in proportion to the dominant structures that also hulk over and around *The Knot's* bones. I attempt to use its conjoined poles as a desk to take notes beneath the megalithic overpass, but am distracted by the poor air quality.[75] Directly across the street, I see trucks idling in front of a concrete bunker housing a highway traffic surveillance company (see figure 7). Boxed in and dwarfed by this overwhelming car-centered environment, I hesitate to breathe. *The Knot* attempts to re-stage place within this historic archive of failed transportation infrastructure yet the archive continues to perform in the present. By directing human movement to the toxic space beneath the overpass, *The Knot* choreographs unwitting acceptance of Louisville's ongoing capitalist inequality that justifies human degradation and environmental pollution for the sake of neoliberal urban "progress" at any cost.

[75] Doug Brugge, John Durant, Christine Rioux, "Near-highway pollutants in motor vehicle exhaust: A review of epidemiologic evidence of cardiac and pulmonary health risks," *Environmental Health* 2007; 6: 23.

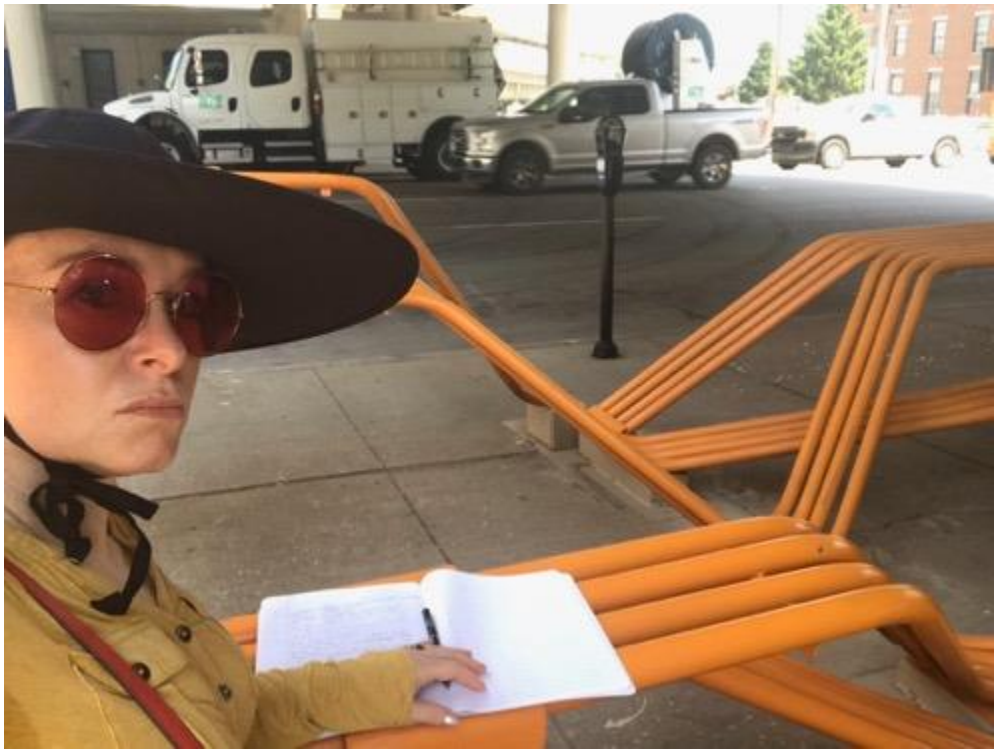

Fig. 7. Self-portrait at *The Knot*. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2022.

While the transportation archive upstages *The Knot, The Knot* in turn entraps the living body within its frame. In order to study it, my body becomes ensnared within the spatial quagmire of the overpass. As I take in the suffocating air, I reflect on the possible health risks associated with remaining within such a polluted space.[76] Although I have the urge to flee, I remain seated in order to analyze it, and this remaining becomes an act of physical endurance, self-annihilation, and choreography of protest against the toxic overpass. In my own remaining, I become aware of how my body also performs as an archive in real time, and in contrast to the scant passersby who walk quickly through the overpass, I haunt *The Knot*.

[76] Through Kwan, I understand my embodied effort to sit under the overpass at *The Knot* as a durational urban movement. Kwan asserts that even stillness can have a temporality—an interval full of experience and presence. Kwan's notion of stillness informs my concerted act of sitting at *The Knot*. Citing Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological notion that "immensity is within ourselves" and Andre Lepecki's view of the body at rest as "introspective proprioception," Kwan describes the stillness of Falun Gong protestors who mobilized sit-ins in city space to choreograph against Hong Kong's disappearance. Kwan writes, "If movement in public space mobilizes...How then does stillness mobilize?" p. 94.

In my ritual return to *The Knot,* I note the absence of other bodies in the underpass compared to nearby streets. Physically experiencing the sculpture, I confront the stark contrast between the built structure and the city's rehearsed talking points promising human presence and interaction through key amenities. Despite Curator Lundgren's claims that the talk tubes would connect two sides of the city, in actuality, the "talk tubes" are merely symbolic horn-shaped pipes that do not work due to the sound of passing cars on the overpass (see figure 8). The talk tubes do function, however, to signify the city's failure to remediate the problem of roaring ambient highway noise. People do not meet at *The Knot* to converse beneath the overpass through the tubes, nor do parents bring their children to play on the highly touted swing amenity. If they did, they would discover the swing is broken and as dysfunctional as the talk tubes (see figure 9). While *The Knot's* neoliberal place-makers argued that this site-specific plop art would re-frame the underpass as a desirable destination, they did not consider the underlying economic structures of inequality that produced this dismal space in the first instance.

Fig. 8. View of *The Knot* facing East from West side of overpass showing "Talk Tube" (right). Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

Fig. 9. View of *The Knot's* broken swing and Happy Birthday Lot. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

Fig. 10. Fenced in area immediately behind the Happy Birthday Lot (hole boarded up in 2022). Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

Although people rarely populate *The Knot*, panhandlers appear one block away on Market Street under the same overpass. There, several people visibly camp under the overpass even though Metro Louisville has consistently tried to remove encampments along the roadways.[77] It seems incongruous that unhoused people are not also visible by *The Knot* on Main Street. However, perambulating behind *The Knot* leads to a grassy wedge of land separated from the Happy Birthday Lot by a metal fence (see figure 10). The metal fence originally had a hole ripped out in the middle, which provided a "door" for unhoused people to enter and exit the encampment behind *The Knot*. Over the course of two years, I observed several individuals living within this overgrown grassy wedge. Their sleeping bags, scattered clothes, suitcases and garbage bags would appear and disappear as relics of their routine

[77] Grace McKenna, "City clears camp, advocates hope promised outdoor space a solution," *WHAS11 News*, Nov 4, 2021. The clearing is part of the Mayor's new $1.5 million "Safe and Outdoor Space" initiative which also plans to create an outdoor location to house people formerly living in the camps.

movements in and out of this obscured space. Upon one occasion, I walked behind *The Knot* through the fence to investigate the area and inadvertently surprised people living under the overpass. A man proceeded to follow me out of the encampment and across Main Street. Returning to *The Knot* in July of 2022, I found that Metro Department of Public Works had attached a No Trespassing sign next to the opening in the fence. The sign warned of an anticipated Clean-up Date within three weeks when encampments in the area would be removed and abandoned items would be discarded. The sign read, "You are trespassing and will be subject to criminal prosecution if you remain." I subsequently returned in August, just after the area had been evacuated, to observe that the fence had been boarded up and all evidence of the encampment gone. The installation of *The Knot* on Main thus not only obscures encampments behind it, but by occupying the sidewalk where unhoused people would otherwise camp, it continuously encourages the displacement of bodies to adjacent areas under the overpass. In their embodied effort to remain in place, unhoused people challenge the city's placemaking of *The Knot*. Unlike my body, which has the privilege of remaining visible at *The Knot*, unhoused bodies remain out of sight.

Fig. 11. Bourbon signs at 9th and Main facing West (with *The Knot* to the left, 64 on-ramp to right). Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

Strategically placed between distilleries and signage at 9th and 10th, *The Knot* further conducts a spatial clearing of "unwelcome" bodies while appealing to moneyed tourists and pedestrians. Facing West at 9th & Main, I find orange distillery wayfinding signage on the street that resembles the color of *The Knot* and draws the sighted eye to the overpass (see figure 11). As envisioned, the sign provides a gateway enhancement to the overpass and welcomes the bourbon flaneur to the neighborhood by listing the number of minutes it takes to walk to nearby distilleries on the ever-expanding Whiskey Row: Rabbit Hole: 40 min., Angel's Envy: 30 min., Old Forester: 20 min., Evan Williams: 10 min., Mitcher's: 1 min., and Peerless: 1 Minute. At night, *The Knot* is brightly illuminated and also lights the overpass, which would otherwise appear as a long dark corridor. The lighting assists *The*

Knot in hailing to bourbon flaneurs heading East to West and aids in the city's removal of unhoused bodies along this gentrifying arts and business corridor. The lit sculpture secures the overpass as "safe" for the city's preferred visitors seeking to park at The Happy Birthday Lot and cross The Divide during evening hours (see figure 12). Underlit by long strips of white light installed beneath its pipes, the Louisville sign and sculpture shine under the overpass, assuring that people will be able to see it as well as be seen.

Fig. 12. *The Knot* illuminating the overpass at night. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2022.

To bolster the city's clearing of "undesirable" bodies, the city orchestrates a display of protection for its preferred bourbon flaneurs. An Ambassador Patrol routinely circles *The Knot* on bicycles and in cars while stopping to surveille people from The Happy Birthday Lot. The Patrol is part of the Louisville Downtown Partnership whose mission is to "take the long view on Downtown success, through strengthening commerce, providing *high-quality placemaking* [emphasis mine], improving visitor, resident and workforce experiences, and to

stimulate high-quality development and vitality in Louisville's Downtown."[78] The Ambassadors form a mobile urban army who contribute to the militarization of public space through what Sharon Zukin describes as "a democratic discourse of aestheticizing both cities and fear."[79] Following Zukin's logic, the Ambassadors make *The Knot* and 9th Street overpass "more secure but less free," creating space that only appears to be public because people use it for common purposes.[80] With this patrol in place, the city manifests its panoptic power through *The Knot* and its surrounding geography, rendering the sculpture an aesthetic tool of surveillance.[81] As envisioned by the architects, the structure creates a photo opportunity for *Knot* users to capture themselves, day or night. Consequently, bodies near *The Knot* can also be caught and observed by others in both physical and photographic space. Anyone moving in front of *The Knot's* signature orange letters and poles cannot be mistaken for being elsewhere in the city. Regardless of whether they wish to engage the sculpture, pedestrians appearing near *The Knot* are drafted into its performance and become a prop for *The Knot*'s placemaking. Even in my haunting of *The Knot,* my body involuntarily advertises the overpass as safe for bourbon passage. Placing my body in front of the Louisville sign, I ineluctably model how to visit *The Knot*.

***The Knot*: An Un-Ironic Metaphor**

As in many U.S. cities, visual culture and public art monuments such as *The Knot* operate at the epicenters of civic life and thus connect a network of citizen-actors to the street as staging-ground for competing aims, including tourist consumption and the urgent need for

[78] Louisville Downtown Partnership, "Louisville Ambassadors," https://louisvilledowntown.org/ambassadors/.
[79] Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, p. 39.
[80] Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, p. 38-39.
[81] Here I employ the term "panoptic" and draw on Michel Foucault's articulation of the word in "Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977.

food and shelter. In Louisville and other cities, government agencies and tourist bureaus instrumentalize creative cultural production to prime urban centers for increased commercial activity. In this intensified branding process, multiple stakeholders, from politicians to developers, consolidate their efforts to dominate and re-colonize public space. The design and implementation of *The Knot* exists as a dramatically unfolding spatial production and un-ironic metaphor for Louisville's infrastructural problems, historic racial segregation, and income disparity. With *The Knot*, the city and its stakeholders scripted, rehearsed, and staged a tone-deaf placemaking spectacle that promised to help eliminate the 9th Street Divide. Political actors such as the architect, mayor, curator, and councilmember each delivered their lines to an eager city audience. Their choreographies of neoliberal placemaking may have temporarily shifted the public's attention away from the lingering issues of 9th Street but the ghosts of segregation remain and continue to serve as active forces shaping the desolation, displacement of the unhoused, pollution, and economic stagnation of the area. While *The Knot* should have enticed more bourbon tourists and pedestrians through the 9th Street Divide, the sculpture itself became ensnared by The Divide and therefore compromised the city's placemaking ambitions. Like the 20th century concrete highway overpass that preceded it, the 21st century *Knot* now serves as yet another hard body archive that haunts the city and accentuates the enduring disconnect between East and West Louisville.

Ch. 2. Protest Art & Placemaking at Jefferson Square Park

As foregrounded in Ch. 1, through an analysis of *The Louisville Knot*, I expose how the city has recently deployed placemaking to choreograph pedestrians past the 9th Street Divide into the West End. In Ch. 2, I analyze the 2020 Breonna Taylor protest movement in Louisville's Jefferson Square Park (The Square) as a kinesthetic form of counter-hegemonic placemaking. Choreographing against Taylor's disappearance, protestors occupied The Square for 180 straight days and renamed it Injustice Square, or, "Breewayy."[1]

The Square is a civic plaza in the heart of downtown Louisville that is "surrounded by symbols of government might"—Metro Corrections, the Jefferson County Courthouse, City Hall, and the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD).[2] Patriarchal statues commemorating the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson, fallen police officers, and firefighters killed in the line of duty are installed in and around The Square at 6th & Jefferson Street and reinforce the city's material display of public history, law, and order. An archive of the built environment, The Square also exhibits Metro Louisville's ownership of the downtown urban planning process. Although a park is nested within The Square, the majority of its activity occurs along the perimeter where police deliver arrestees, lawyers usher clients in and out of the courthouse, and people park outside of the jail to wait for inmates to be released. The layout of this civic space choreographs city users around and through monuments dedicated to discipline and punishment.

Taylor's killing catalyzed the appearance and mass assembly of bodies whose physical presence mobilized a radical form of placemaking-in-action that upended the

[1] Tessa Duvall Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 13, 2022.
[2] Tessa Duvall Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 13, 2022.

authoritarian control of city space. While the city reeled from trauma and demanded that the Louisville Police officers be charged in Taylor's death, activists spatialized their opposition to racist police brutality through corporeal gestures and site-specific memorials to Taylor in and around The Square.

Taking up SanSan Kwan's idea of choreographing against disappearance in *Kinesthetic City*, I position the protestors' movements as efforts to represent and symbolically corporealize Taylor after the police took her life.[3] I "read the experience" of Louisville protestors' bodies at and around The Square to show how their actions attempted to recover Taylor from erasure. Indeed, Breewayy placemaking occurred through embodied interventions that physically reclaimed this civic center.[4] Centering the live repertoire of the Taylor protestors, I assert that they choreographed against Taylor's disappearance by temporarily *re-iconizing* and *re-infrastructuring* The Square even as the city continually removed Breewayy's iconic memorials and material traces.[5] The performance of Breewayy was an embodied placemaking effort that materialized as a result of protestors' "habitual location" at the site where they collectively disrupted hegemonic place.[6] One of their initial targets was the city's most iconic symbol, the statue of King Louis XVI. I explore their alterations to this statue as an initial case study to demonstrate the counter-monumental tactics they deployed to re-iconize The Square in Taylor's memory. Citing a second case

[3] In *Kinesthetic City,* SanSan Kwan describes how mobilization and inscription enabled Falun Gong protestors in Hong Kong to stake a claim on public space and demand freedom of assembly and religion during the handover of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule, pp. 87-97.
[4] SanSan Kwan's term in *Kinesthetic City,* p. 87.
[5] Alexis Matthews, "Plans to keep Jefferson Square Park clean require removal of Breonna Taylor rally memorabilia," *WLKY.com,* March 15, 2021.
[6] Tessa Duvall Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 13, 2022.

study of their embodied tactics, I analyze the protestors' planting of community garden memorials as a form of protest infrastructure that also re-choreographed The Square.

The Bureaucratic Placemaking of Jefferson Square

Fig. 1. Jefferson Square Park facing Jefferson Courthouse. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Fig. 2. Jefferson Square Park raised planters. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

The Square is the product of hegemonic placemaking that the Taylor Movement temporarily offset through protestors' occupation of civic space. Like *The Louisville Knot*, The Square is also haunted by Louisville's failed urban planning history—the reality of which protestors specifically sought to redress *in situ*, at the most visible center of government power. In order to contextualize Breewayy at The Square as an embodied form of radical urban placemaking, I foreground The Square's spatial history via its past urban

planning texts, visual culture, and built environment. My analysis of the Taylor protests examines the space of The Square as what Christian DuComb would describe as an accumulation of time periods that re-appear in the present in ways "ungoverned by a linear-temporal timeline."[1]

Built in 1976, The Square was the former site of a razed building, where the city had originally planned a new parking lot in the 70s until local urbanists quashed the initiative.[2] It is now a one-acre plot with a defunct water fountain, as well as several raised concrete planters with ornamental flowerbeds that fragment an otherwise open civic space (see figures 1 and 2). The raised planters exemplify urban furniture designed to splinter mass gatherings. Prior to and after Breewayy, the park inside The Square was devoid of live bodies and replete with these cumbersome forms. In *Kinesthetic City*, SanSan Kwan frames the mobilization of such flowerbeds in her writing about Falun Gong protestors in Hong Kong.[3] Kwan shows how the Falun Gong deployed their bodily mass to corporealize Hong Kong's status as a separate entity from China, stating:

> The. . . Beijing Liaison Office decided to build flowerbeds in the place where activists typically held their daily sit ins. Beijing meant to replace the practitioners' bodies, as objects in space—with the power to mobilize—with other, inanimate objects. When this attempt proved unsuccessful. . . police eventually arrested several members on charges of obstruction. That is, their material bodies were in the way—in the way of Hong Kongers in the midst of transit and in the way, in other words, of Hong Kong progress and therefore, perhaps, of Hong Kong's culture of disappearance.[4]

As Kwan indicates, the Beijing Liaison Office weaponized flowerbeds to replace bodies. Similarly, Metro Louisville deployed raised planters in The Square to limit and control gatherings and usage of this civic space. In addition to the planters, signs reading

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[1] Christian DuComb, *Haunted City: Three Centuries of Racial Impersonation in Philadelphia*, 2017, p. 25.
[2] William Morgan, *Louisville: Architecture and the Urban Environment*, 1979, p. 52.
[3] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*, p. 95.
[4] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*, p. 95.

"NO CAMPING" appeared throughout the park to further discourage people from occupying The Square. A palpable absence of people persisted, and, rather than a site of animated presence, it was a spatial void around which cars flew by and a smattering of pedestrians drifted. The Square failed to draw bodies from the street into the park and to connect the park with the surrounding architecture. With a projected cost of $7,680,000, however, Metro Louisville's urban plan *Jefferson Re-Squared* ensured that the space would function as "not only an urban park, but as a stage, memorial, gallery, and as a sustainable environment within Louisville's growing urban heat island."[5] The "Master Plan" called for the addition of a new Memorial Wall and aimed to more prominently display existing iconic monuments to past and future fallen fire and police officers.[6] The redesign would also reduce the urban heat island effect by planting "flowering shrubs, ornamental grasses, and seasonal perennials"[7] while creating "productive" pollinator landscapes and a display for native vegetation.[8] A re-mapping of space, the Jefferson-Re Squared plan rhetorically posed the question, "what is the function of a civic space within today's urban context?"[9] The urban planning and landscape architecture firm MKSK answered this question with attractive illustrations and a vision to effectively re-iconize and re-infrastructure the Square.

The Re-Squared plan would "Re-present the primary civic space in downtown Louisville as a beautifully green and *performative* landscape (emphasis mine) that serves the diverse social, cultural, and historical influences of the city."[10] Appropriating "performative" to enhance its sales pitch, MKSK used this term to sell an idea of institutional placemaking

[5] Louisville Metro, "Jefferson ReSquared; A Vision For Louisville's Premier Civic Space," Technical Report, February 2019, p. 4.
[6] "Jefferson ReSquared," p. 38.
[7] "Jefferson Re-Squared," p. 35.
[8] "Jefferson Re-Squared," p. 27.
[9] "Jefferson ReSquared," p. 4.
[10] "Jefferson ReSquared," p. 7.

that the Taylor Movement physically interrogated. In contrast to the official plan, Breewayy was a local, collective, and subaltern placemaking effort that unofficially produced what Jefferson Re-Squared had originally proposed—an iconic, green, and performative civic space.[11]

A city-authored plan, Jefferson Re-Squared claimed to solicit "community" collaboration by hosting an open house event one night in 2018: "Thirty participants received a form to fill out with the prompt 'My wish for Jefferson Square is…' and were asked if the potential re-design concept met their expectations."[12] There was no demographic break down of participants and only the reassurance that the "realization of this vision will be a collaborative process between Louisville Metro Government, downtown businesses and users, and project stakeholders."[13] The Re-Squared plan espoused community involvement to justify its multi-million-dollar placemaking project but did not deliver. With the tragic killing of Taylor, protestors suddenly arrived to collectively re-author and transform the existing Square and its surrounding streets into Breewayy as their "second home."[14] A performance and dance studies analysis of the embodied placemaking of the Taylor movement at Jefferson Square assists in my recuperation of the term performative from Square planners' co-optations. By re-mapping the space through collective, embodied choreographies, Breewayy re-performed the Square in ways the Re-Squared plan did not envision.

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[11] In Dwight Conquergood's "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research" the performance scholar cites opposition to binary distinctions between official texts and objective knowledge versus the practical or embodied stories of people is useful to my analysis. He asserts, "This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies," *The Drama Review, Vol.* 46, no. 2, Summer 2002, p. 145.
[12] "Jefferson Re-Squared," p. 13.
[13] "Jefferson Re-Squared," p. 13.
[14] Tessa Duvall Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 13, 2022.

Re-Iconization and Counter-Monumental Choreographies of Breewayy

As protests initially broke out on the streets surrounding The Square, the statue of Louis XVI next to the Jefferson County Courthouse at 6th and Jefferson Street became a primary symbol of the Taylor Movement's initial re-iconization of Breewayy. Sculpted in Carrara marble by the French artist Achille-Joseph Valois in 1829, the 9-ton, 12-ft high statue serves as a multi-layered symbol of the French aristocracy, the French and American Revolutions, and the city of Louisville itself. Due to its highly visible location directly across from The Square, protestors incorporated the monument into initial Breewayy placemaking improvisations. On May 28, 2020, one Louisville protestor dramatically "behanded" the statue in a live performance later uploaded as a YouTube video.[15] The protestor spontaneously mounted the monument and balanced himself upon its pedestal by holding onto its outsized white hand.[16] While addressing a sea of protestors below him who besieged the statue on all sides, he shouted "I'll be here all night!" Proclaiming this, he lifted and wrapped both of his arms around the giant hand, which caused his weight to shift and snap off the appendage, thus throwing him off the base directly onto the ground.[17] Another protestor promptly ran to his aid as the "behander" lay prone while the marble hand landed intact on the sidewalk next to him.[18] Seeing this, yet another man immediately scooped up the hand and hoisted it over his right shoulder before shaking it like a trophy in front of the cheering crowd. The man with the marble hand then showed the behander the object that he

[15] Although this is not a real English word, I apply it to describe the removal of the hand after the removal of the head as in behead. Behand is also defined on Ludwig.guru as "To remove the hand or hands from; cut off one's hand or hands, https://ludwig.guru/s/behand.
[16] Eric Crawford, Twitter (video), uploaded May 28, 2020.
[17] Tessa Duvall and Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 12, 2021.
[18] This is another neologism that I employ to describe the individual who removed the hand of the statue of King Louis XVI.

salvaged in vindication of the former's inadvertent fall. Broadcast internationally, the behanding of the statue was a momentous physical act in the theater of civic life.

In her essay "Patricide and the Passerby," Rebecca Schneider draws on Michel de Certeau's theory of how citizens produce space in everyday life to probe the way ordinary pedestrians pass by city monuments. Applying Schneider's use of the term "pass" both literally and figuratively during a time of crisis, Taylor's killing created the conditions for the protestors' public "passing by" the Louis XVI monument. The behander's passing confrontation with a statue registered Taylor's loss. In a decisive collision of the statue's fixed body and the protestor's living flesh, the passerby pedestalized her memory. Scrutinizing "the tangle between the monumental and the everyday," Schneider notes that unlike specific men, specific women are rarely monumentalized, and are thus historically "at odds" with the usual monument.[19] She states, "The affective (feminized) body of flesh is given to accumulation and dispersal, to the constant passage of detail in flux of gesture and expression—to indeed passing . . . The edifice, on the other hand, is given to stasis, solidity, and sameness."[20] In the protestor's sequence of movements, through his mounting and behanding, he assumed monumental proportions to symbolically re-iconize Jefferson Square through Louis XVI and in so doing created a counter-monument to a specifically ordinary (i.e., essential, working) woman. Though her body disappeared, her memory materialized through his embodied actions in a counter-monumental gesture that I argue exemplifies the corporeality of Breewayy placemaking.

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[19] Rebecca Schneider, "Patricide and the Passerby," in *Performance and the City*, D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga, p. 61-62.
[20] Rebecca Schneider, "Patricide and the Passerby," in *Performance and the City*, D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga. p. 61.

Fig. 3. Augmented statue of Louis XVI across from Jefferson Square
Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

Contextualizing the protestors' alterations to Louis XVI as counter-monumental, I cite scholar James E. Young's writing on the significance of anti-fascist counter-monuments in Germany. Young writes, "By inviting its own violation, the monument humbles itself in the eyes of beholders accustomed to maintaining a respectful, decorous distance. It forces viewers to desanctify the memorial, demystify it, and become its equal."[21] Young's articulation of the counter-monumental demystification process applies to my analysis of the protestor's be-handing of the Louis XVI statue. The behanding was counter-monumental in that it transgressed the monumental stage, eliminating the distance between monument and

[21] James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry,* Winter, 1992, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 279.

beholder. In his symbolic representation of Taylor and his physical dance with King Louis, the protestor's fleshy body confronted the hard body of history, creating a duet between living memory and history.

About Germany's fraught Holocaust memorial work, Young asserts, "The counter-monument objectifies…not only the Germans' secret desire that all these monuments just hurry up and disappear but also the urge to strike back at such memory, to sever it from the national body like a wounded limb."[22] In a US context, however, the Taylor protestors' displays of opposition to the police state in the segregated city of Louisville called attention to the limits of protection and democracy for Black Americans. The protestor physically took the hand of a treasured object from the city as paltry retribution for the taking of Taylor's life from Taylor and her family. In severing the wounded hand of Louis XVI, the behander choreographed a counter-monument to Taylor. This live spatial claim arose organically after tragic conditions necessitated a physical and material expansion of the city stage where Taylor's memory would continue to appear in myriad representational and non-representational forms. The protestors' alterations of such an iconic monument helped forge Breewayy.

After the protestor broke off the statue's hand, activists spray painted its right wrist and left hand black, and then painted the words "BLM / We Will Win" across the marble base. Someone also graffitied "George Floyde (sic)" across the pedestal (see figure 3). In light of the sculpture's physically augmented state, it was no longer an intact emblem of Louisville's chosen history and heritage. It had become a living memorial that was continually augmented by more protestors passing by. Returning to the monument again and

[22] James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry,* Winter, 1992, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 279.

again, walking around its base, spray-painting and re-spray painting it, the protestors' ritual passes, movements, and alterations of Louis XVI contested police brutality directly on a primary symbol of what Pierre Nora would term Louisville's "universal authority."[23] Their repetitious encounters with the monument kept Taylor's memory alive in a physical interrogation that intersects with Nora's description of the split between memory and history. Nora writes, "That we study the historiography of the French Revolution, that we reconstitute its myths and interpretations, implies that we no longer unquestioningly identify with its heritage. To interrogate a tradition, venerable though it may be, is no longer to pass it on intact."[24] Through their embodied critique and counter-monumental choreographies, protestors refused to pass on Louisville's authoritative history intact. In behanding the statue of Louis XVI, they severed ties with history as a universalizing, immovable object. As Taylor protestors asserted through their physical movement to metaphorically depose the institutional authority figure—the area around Jefferson Square became the site of spatial resistance. In their site-specific actions at and around The Square, activists re-signified what racial justice and placemaking have historically meant and could mean in Louisville. Their embodied spatial critique of this symbol of Louisville was so effective that after 99 days of protests, the city removed the statue from public view on September 3, 2020.[25]

In 2024, NPR reported that the city was debating its restoration and reinstallation elsewhere in the city and that conserving the statue could cost over $200,000.[26] Metro

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[23] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations*, Spring, 1989, No. 26, p. 9
[24] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations*, Spring, 1989, No. 26, p. 10
[25] Lucas Aulbach, "Louisville removes downtown King Louis XVI statue at Sixth and Jefferson streets," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Sept 3, 2020.
[26] Roberto Roldan, "Removed during protests, Louisville's statue of King Louis XVI is still in limbo," *NPR*, March 1, 2024.

government also solicited public feedback about what to do with the statue in a questionnaire in 2022.[27] Ninety percent of the people who responded to the city's survey wanted the statue put back on display but for different reasons.[28] One person said that for historical accuracy, the statue should be returned to the same spot but “minus his head.”[29] Councilmember Stuart Benson quipped, "I don't know who's upset at King Louis XVI. I didn't know him very well, but it seems like to me, if he was such a bad person, maybe we ought to change the name of our city to something else and not Louisville."[30] An empty plot appears where the statue once stood, yet its memory remains archived in the bodies and flesh of those who re-iconized Breewayy and continue to say Taylor’s name.

[27] Billy Kobin, “Damaged during 2020 protests, will the King Louis XVI statue return to Louisville? *Louisville Courier Journal*, Oct. 7, 2022.
[28] Roberto Roldan, “Removed during protests, Louisville's statue of King Louis XVI is still in limbo,” *NPR*, March 1, 2024.
[29] Roberto Roldan, “Removed during protests, Louisville's statue of King Louis XVI is still in limbo,” *NPR*, March 1, 2024.
[30] Billy Kobin, “Damaged during 2020 protests, will the King Louis XVI statue return to Louisville? *Louisville Courier Journal*, Oct. 7, 2022.

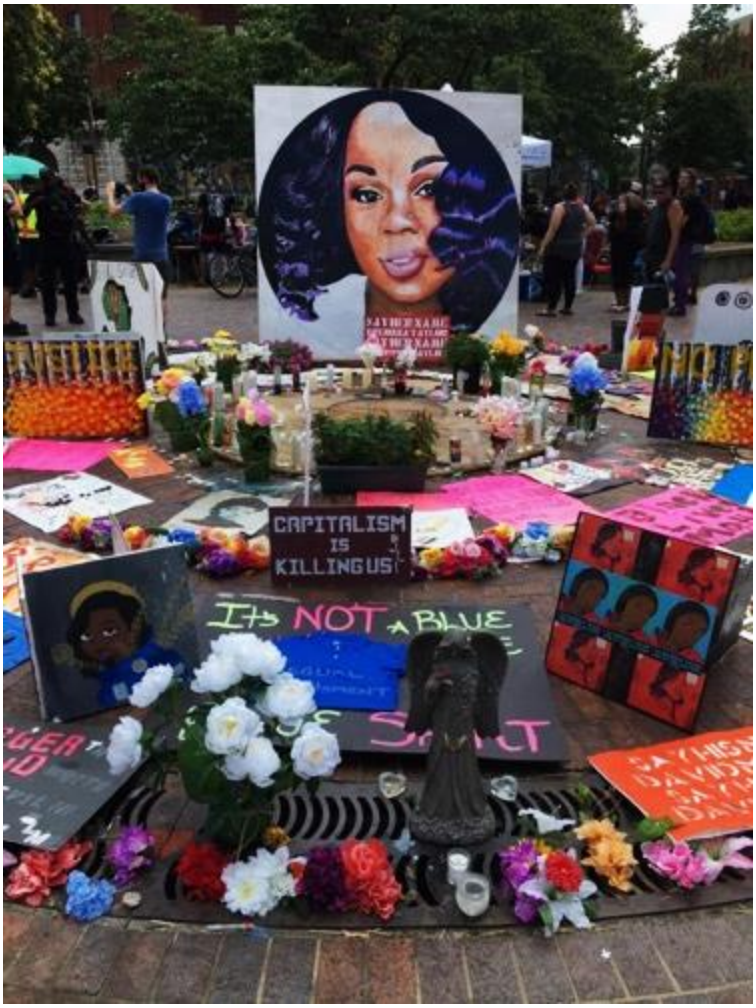

Fig. 4. Breonna Taylor Memorial at Breewayy (Jefferson Square Park)
Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

The placement of a shrine to Taylor directly across from Louis XVI also re-iconized The Square as Breewayy, and enabled visitors to easily approach it and mourn her loss.[31] Unlike the statue of Louis XVI standing elevated and imperiously above the masses, the primary visual emblem of The Square, a large circular portrait painting of Taylor, was neither pedestalized nor carved from marble (see figure 4).[32] Although her face was a magnet to drivers and protestors-passersby, in the deployment and repetitious display of her image in

[31] Alexis Mathews, "Plans to keep Jefferson Square Park clean require removal of Breonna Taylor rally memorabilia," *Louisville Courier Journal*, March 15, 2021.
[32] Aron Conaway is a Louisville-based artist who painted the portrait of Taylor as noted by Ken Baker, "Jefferson Square Park, now enforcing standard park procedures, clearing Taylor Memorial," *WAVE 3 News*, March 15, 2021.

business storefronts and museum facades, her image also became ubiquitous throughout the neoliberal city. Her iconic face eventually appeared in different forms throughout The Square over the ensuing days and months of the Taylor movement. In addition to Taylor's painted portrait, Taylor banners were installed around the park on three sides in 2020 after 110 days of protests. Designed on a computer, the 17 vinyl signs were emblazoned with the hashtag, "#Breewayy" and attached to black lampposts lining the streets (see figure 5). Printed in purple, black, and white, with images of Taylor's face as well as photos of local BLM protestors, the banners read, "Say Her Name: Breonna Taylor," "Black Lives Matter," and "No Pride For Some of Us Without Liberation For All of Us," the latter a quotation of the famed gay liberation activist Marsha P. Johnson.[33] The signs were the result of an initiative by local Louisville activist Nicole Hayden who wanted them to represent the inclusiveness of the Taylor Memorial.[34] Yet according to one article, the "Downtown Louisville Partnership, which the mayor's office said is responsible for hanging any banners in the Central Business District, confirmed Metro Government invested no dollars into the project."[35] Although the #Breewayy signs affirmed the protestors' counterhegemonic approach to Louisville placemaking, they arose out of fear that the movement would be forgotten and remain invisible around The Square unless they pursued a more permanent visual approach to placemaking. Lining the periphery of The Square, the banners both demarcated the area as #Breewayy while complementing other Downtown Louisville way-finding signage hanging from nearby lampposts. In contrast to Taylor's large round portrait that allowed protestors'

[33] Rachel Chang, "13 Powerful Marsha P. Johnson Quotes," *Biography*, Jan 28, 2022, https://www.biography.com/news/marsha-p-johnson-quotes.
[34] Sarah Ladd, "'Breewayy' created in Louisville to honor Breonna Taylor and those who've fought for change," *Louisville Courier Journal*, September 14, 2020.
[35] Sarah Ladd, "'Breewayy' created in Louisville to honor Breonna Taylor and those who've fought for change," *Louisville Courier Journal*, September 14, 2020.

close physical proximity to the Memorial, however, the #Breewayy banners imposed a physical distance between the elevated signs and street-level passersby.

Fig. 5. "Say Her Name" vinyl banners surrounding Jefferson Square, City Hall in background. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2021.

While Breewayy re-iconization could be seen in the physically augmented statue of Louis XVI, as well as in the accumulation and exhibition of Taylor's face in and around The Square, the re-iconization of Breewayy was but one aspect of its placemaking performance. In *The Design of Protest*, author Tali Hatuka differentiates between re-iconization as a protest tactic to re-signify a place's character and acts of infrastructure as protest tactics of internal coordination.[36] Regarding infrastructural protest tactics, Hatuka writes:

> The challenge concerns developing a sustainable new area that will both support personal needs (e.g., shelter and health care) and cultivate a collective cause (i.e., ideology). Protests that use this tactic should be considered an ongoing political, spatial, and aesthetic struggle. Thus, this tactic is not about having an instantaneous impact or about creating a spectacle; it is instead about cultivating everyday practices

[36] Tali Hatuka, *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space,* Ch. 8, *Place-making*, 2018, p. 231.

within an a priori sociospatial framework, and the physical setting is regarded as a manifestation of activists' ideas.[37]

Although the re-iconization of the Square occurred swiftly with the behanding of Louis XVI and the site-specific installation of Taylor's iconic image, Breewayy placemaking evolved over time through infrastructural protest tactics both at and beyond The Square. I argue that the Taylor protestors' longer-term placemaking efforts functioned as durational performances of urban infrastructure.[38] Importantly, the Breewayy infrastructural tactics at The Square's central location made The Square a staging ground for other activities that influenced more distant civic locations.[39]

Most notably, radical urban gardeners mobilized Breewayy to connect the protest movement to the West End and the city's larger systemic economic inequalities.[40] One primary example of Breewayy placemaking infrastructure included the planting of edible vegetable gardens to memorialize Taylor.[41] Protestors choreographed embodied acts of food support in The Square's existing raised flower beds, which, as mentioned, consumed otherwise usable space. Their plantings functioned as an ongoing performance of infrastructure during the crisis.

I draw on performance scholar Shannon Jackson's articulation of infrastructure as forms of interdependent support—social systems of labor, sanitation, welfare, and urban

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[37] Tali Hatuka, *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space,* Ch. 8, *Place-making*, 2018, p. 231.
[38] Phylicia Ashley, "A look inside life at Louisville protest hub, roles, teamwork and deep emotion," *Wave 3 News*, July 28, 2020.
[39] Tali Hatuka, *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space,* Ch. 8, *Place-making*, 2018. I draw on Hatuka's discussion of distance in *The Design of Protest* to inform my reading of Breewayy placemaking at Jefferson Square, p. 232.
[40] Breewayy Gardeners "Beargrass Thunder" commented that though "The city tore it down last year, we have regrouped on Preston & Burnett with a 5-year lease agreement. We aren't going anywhere." *YouTube* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6OYWA0dzf8.
[41] "Urban Agriculture Tips in Breonna's Roots' garden at Injustice Square Park," *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6OYWA0dzf8, Sept 22, 2020.

planning that coordinate humans in groups over time.[42] Jackson demonstrates how performance lends itself to an analysis of socially engaged artistic practices that deploy infrastructural support in a US context, for example, where educational, health, and welfare systems have been "rolled back":

> Performance's historic place as a cross-disciplinary, time-based, group art form also means that it requires a degree of systemic coordination, a brand of stage management that must think deliberately but also speculatively about what it means to sustain human collaboration spatially and temporally.[43]

Jackson's definition of performance enables my contextualization of Breewayy protestors' unsanctioned urban farming as a time-based group performance. Their movements served as embodied forms of infrastructure and placemaking-in-action. Moreover, protestors collectively coordinated their bodies in tandem with plant bodies, both spatially and temporally, in order to support the movement and re-stage The Square.[44] In the spring of 2020, a group of allies called WRATH (White Radicals Against Thoughtless Hate) planted, tended, and maintained vegetable gardens in the raised planters at The Square under the project banner "Breonna's Roots."[45] WRATH's food justice activism included organized marches of farmers and gardeners who flooded downtown Louisville streets with pitchforks and wheelbarrows while holding large signs reading "Breonna's Roots: These Roots Run Deep."[46] Breaching the Jefferson Square hard concrete flower beds, they physically staked their claim on this infrastructure designed to keep their protest bodies out, by planting the ornamental beds with kale, tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables in the name of justice for

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[42] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics,* p. 27.
[43] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics,* p. 14.
[44] Shannon Jackson's *Social Works* informs my reading of protestors' infrastructural performances.
[45] Breonna's Roots, WRATH, *Facebook* post, April 20, 2020, "Breonna's Roots has been asked to help a great local organization that helps with outreach. We will be building beds, help get the gardens started and once a week teach how to maintain and sustain the gardens.* If you would like to volunteer your time please DM us."
[46] "Farmers and gardeners demand justice for Breonna Taylor, help feed those in need" *WLKY News Louisville, YouTube,* July 28, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAFn-dKWkPM.

Taylor. By September 2020, journalist Ryan Van Velzer tweeted, “The protests for racial justice have gone on for so long that protestors have begun to harvest gardens planted months ago.”[47]

Fig. 6. Protestor standing in Breewayy memorial gardens, Summer 2020, Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

Like the protestor who transgressed the pedestal of King Louis XVI and took back the marble hand, protesters mounted the elevated concrete beds to re-appropriate Jefferson Square as the people’s base (see figure 6). Such embodied placemaking gestures at Breewayy continued to evolve as protestors managed the garden edifices. Specifically, through their unsanctioned plantings, protestors choreographed a site-specific sustainable food foundation that both commemorated Taylor’s loss and countered her disappearance. Through collective acts of placemaking, they literally and metaphorically seeded The Square with Taylor’s memory, and by planting and dispersing the seeds beyond Breewayy, multiplied and magnified her figurative flesh and tangible impact throughout the city. Simultaneously,

[47] Ryan Van Velzer, Twitter post, Sept 4, 2020, https://twitter.com/RyanVanVelzer/status/1301926980707905536.

Breewayy satisfied the goal of the Jefferson Re-Squared plan to create a sustainable environment that meaningfully connected the civic square to the larger city.

In December 2020, a protestor wearing a hat and scarf stood atop one of the raised beds with a megaphone, announcing, "We're gonna do another planting this spring to refresh everything, then we'll do another spring seed swap."[48] As he spoke, an audience listened intently while live streamers documented his presentation from below. Multiple shovels wedged into the dirt stuck out of the garden bed like so many theatrical props. A pair of gloves rested on the ledge and potted plants placed around the beds awaited transfer to the ground. More trays of plants appeared next to a sign propped up in the garden that read, "Stop Digging Up Black Seeds." Multiple volunteers began jumping the concrete wall to shovel dirt and dig holes. A man handed a woman a plant which she began to transfer to the ground. She bent down on her hands and knees while steadying herself in the soil. Everyone engaged in ritual motion: digging, shoveling, planting, and transplanting, in anticipation of a spring harvest. Children climbed up onto the beds to help adults push the dirt around. Their hands wrapped around roots as their boots sank into the soil. Withstanding the cold winter air, the protestors covered the ground with their footsteps in distinct choreographic compositions. Speaking at times, digging in silence at others, they moved from one planting to the next while remaining low to the ground. Some exchanged gardening tips such as, "If you have vegetables you have to have something to pollinate them," while others remained standing and sorted through seed packets that lined the concrete ledge. "Fighting food insecurity is all part of the protest," one woman stated matter-of-factly.[49]

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[48] "Breonna's Roots, Travis Nagdy Memorial Planting at Breewayy," *The Louisville ProActivist Report*, December 6, 2020, *Facebook* video.
[49] "Breonna's Roots, Travis Nagdy Memorial Planting at Breewayy," *The Louisville ProActivist Report*, December 6, 2020, *Facebook* video.

Bluegrass Thunder, protest-gardeners affiliated with Breonna's Roots, commented directly on the Jefferson Re-Squared plan, stating that what The Square needed in 2020 differed from what Jefferson Re-Squared originally envisioned. Rather than new police memorials, they said, "We need memorials to people who have fallen in *this* fight."[50] Bluegrass Thunder also called attention to the heat island problem previously identified in the Re-Squared plan, which they asserted the Breewayy gardens temporarily alleviated.[51] They further critiqued the planned removal of trees at The Square, asserting that it was "a nice way of trying to deliberately dissuade people from the park."[52] A local food activist affiliated with the Taylor protests, Shauntrice Martin, commented that the issue of food insecurity was a racial justice issue in the West End where "food apartheid" is a legacy of the city's plantation capitalist economy that has deprived Black people from land and property ownership. The lack of access to fresh produce and Black-owned food production and distribution systems reflects the history of structural racism and white supremacy in Louisville. Martin stated:

> If you recognize the historical significance of the word "apartheid," then you recognize the seriousness of what Louisville's West End is up against. Deserts are found in nature. Apartheid is not. These are man-made, political and economic systems that perpetuate unequal access to resources — resources that allow some humans to thrive, and others to literally starve. The Blackest zip codes in Louisville, KY tend to live a decade less than more affluent zip codes. Black residents in Louisville are much more likely than white residents to have diabetes and heart disease. Black children are more likely to suffer from health issues, which lead to truancy and incarceration.[53]

Addressing the reality of food apartheid in Louisville's West End at Breewayy, Beargrass Thunder and Breonna's Roots gardeners taught basic gardening skills through free

[50] Beargrass Thunder, "Breonna's Roots," *YouTube*, September 22, 2020.
[51] Beargrass Thunder, "Breonna's Roots," *YouTube*, September 22, 2020.
[52] Beargrass Thunder, "Breonna's Roots," *YouTube*, September 22, 2020.
[53] Olivia A. Cole, "Fast Facts: Food Apartheid in Louisville — What You Can and Should Do," *medium.com*, March 31, 2021.

workshops and expanded the community gardens to other locations throughout the city.[54] The produce that was grown in The Square was donated to KY Alliance, a prominent social justice organization in Louisville whose founding members include political activists Angela Davis and Anne Braden. KY Alliance then distributed the food to organizations to help feed the West End.[55]

A kinesthetic awareness underpins my framing of the protestors' infrastructural choreography as a performance of mutuality between humans and plants in Jefferson Square. Lucidly, Kwan articulates kinetic movement as intrinsic to the urban environment in her underscoring of the flow of cars, buses, trains, and mopeds speeding by her in the city. Building on ideas of urban movement, I extend Kwan's kinesthetic argument to include plant growth as a slower form of motion that is no less intrinsic to city space. The durational cultivation of gardens challenges conventional understandings of urban movement; yet human mobilizations of urban agriculture during a food apartheid in the city, for example, demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between humans and edible plants in kinetic performances of care at Breewayy. Choreographing their plantings, Breewayy gardeners collaboratively sought to shore up the lack of food infrastructure in low-income Black communities wanting for food autonomy and resources. Protestors used their own bodies to re-imagine Breewayy as a sustainable green space that interrogated the concrete beds and achieved what the bureaucratic Jefferson Re-Squared plan did not. They distributed the seeds of plants grown at The Square to other protestors throughout the city who planted offsite

[54] Riotheart, "Breonna's Roots Garden going strong here at the park. All the produce collected is going to the #FeedTheWest initiative. Such beauty. #BreonnasRoots #SayHerName @ Injustice Square," *Facebook*, August 21, 2020.
[55] "Farmers and gardeners demand justice for Breonna Taylor, help feed those in need," *WLKY News Louisville, YouTube*, July 28, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAFn-dKWkPM.

memorial gardens, thus expanding their choreography of care beyond the borders of Jefferson Square.[56]

Furthermore, attending to the protestors' refusal to merely pass by the ornamental concrete beds as edificial space, builds upon Schneider's concept of the mutual relation between the monumental and the live: "The focus on that which passes by or is easily overlooked rather than on the grand object that remains is a shift in attention…that could be…resistant to master narratives, master plans, and events of mastery."[57] Following Schneider, while Jefferson Square structurally "tried" to choreograph protestors to pass by the decorative concrete flower beds during their marches through The Square, during the Taylor crisis, protestors resisted this choreography by shifting their attention to the beds and physically re-choreographing their own functional urban plan at Breewayy.

I highlight the Breewayy garden memorials as a kinetic form of remembrance that physically required digging in the dirt. Indeed, protestors mobilized human and plant mutuality in space, time, and soil through such collective "plant-ins." Dance Studies scholar Susan Foster's writing on choreographies of the protest body enables my historical contextualization of their actions.[58] Foster shows how effective Civil Rights era movements were in staging non-violent action. While being refused service and experiencing blatant discrimination, the protestors who conducted lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina sat silently and staring forward while physically articulating their right to be treated equally.[59] Similarly, as Louisville protestors waited inexorably at Breewayy for the officers

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[56] Breewayy Gardeners "Beargrass Thunder" commented that though "The city tore it down last year, we have regrouped on Preston & Burnett with a 5-year lease agreement. We aren't going anywhere." *YouTube* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6OYWA0dzf8.
[57] Rebecca Schneider, "Patricide and the Passerby," in *Performance and the City*, D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga, p. 58.
[58] Susan Foster "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Dance (Oct., 2003), pp. 395-412.
[59] Susan Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Dance (Oct., 2003), p. 401.

involved in Taylor's killing to be charged, they planted seeds and cultivated their growth, corporealizing the desire for Black people to remain alive and safe from police harm. The calculated nature of the protestors' actions echoes Civil Rights era interventions in hegemonic space. Choreographing against Taylor's disappearance by placing their bodies in mutual relation to plant bodies, Louisville protestors corporealized Breewayy—and Louisville—as a more just city during crisis.

However, as a form of placemaking-in-action, Breewayy remembrance was also complicated by tragedies that followed her death. On June 1, local Black restauranteur David McAtee, 53, was shot by the National Guard near his West End barbecue stand during protests.[60] Then on November 23, a prominent local BLM activist Hamza "Travis" Nagdy was shot dead in a downtown carjacking. Subsequently, The Square became the setting for multiple makeshift memorials to those who died throughout Louisville in 2020.[61]

Additionally, despite Breewayy's peaceful demonstrations, The Square itself became the site of trauma with the killing of Tyler Gerth, a 27-year-old white photographer and BLM supporter. Gerth was shot by a man from the Park, Steven Lopez, 23, who was promptly arrested and charged with murder and first-degree wanton endangerment.[62] Lopez had also helped plant gardens at Breewayy, and before his death, Breewayy protestors had called for Lopez to be removed from The Square.[63] Following Gerth's death, officers unceremoniously hauled activists' tents and other belongings to the local bulk waste drop-off center, sending

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[60] Tessa Duvall, "Breonna Taylor shooting: A 2-year timeline shows how her death has changed us," *Louisville Courier Journal*, March 13, 2022.
[61] WRATH and Breonna's Roots, "Travis Nagdy Memorial Planting, Memorial March, Seed Swap" *Facebook* event, Dec. 6, 2020.
[62] Tessa Duvall, "Breonna Taylor shooting: A 2-year timeline shows how her death has changed us," *Louisville Courier Journal*, March 13, 2022.
[63] Tessa Duvall Hayes Gardner, "'You need to be reminded of Breonna': How a tiny city park became the heart of a movement," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Mar. 13, 2022.

protestors scattering.[64] Yet they would return after Gerth's killing to add makeshift memorials to his memory in an iterative re-choreography of this space. With death and memorials accruing in an ad hoc fashion at Breewayy over time, the space became haunted not only by the memory of Taylor but by that of Gerth, Nagdy, McAtee, and others who fell during the protests.

Gerth's death in The Square specifically troubled notions of Breewayy as a collective infrastructural placemaking effort. Rather than a site for local residents who experienced the trauma of Taylor's killing to process their grief, at times Breewayy itself became a violent space. I draw on Kwan's study of a different urban crisis context to inform my interpretation of Louisville during 2020. Kwan focuses on the example of New York City to describe how a post 9-11 concert dance held in New York City, *Apple Dreams*, re-mapped the World Trade Center after the historic attack. The dance performed a "neat" remembrance of the event, which diverged from the messiness of the lived reality of Chinatown after the tragedy.[65] Extrapolating from Kwan's concept of "messiness" following devastation, the lived reality in Louisville after the killing of Taylor registered as a messy interval of periodic breakdown, conflict, and bloodshed. In contrast to Breewayy's choreographies of care, it also unfolded carelessly and tragically at times, in the aftermath of trauma. As a result, it reflected the devastating corporeal events and spatial practices of a city in crisis.

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[64] Lucas Aulbach, "Louisville police clear tent city at Jefferson Square Park, but protesters remain," *Louisville Courier Journal*, June 28, 2020.

[65]In *Kinesthetic City* Kwan writes, "In Apple Dreams, Chen remaps a traumatized space into something ordered but diverse, a pre-lapsarian place that is not, in fact, like the messiness of Chinatown," p.123.

Fig. 7. Protest sign at Breonna Taylor Memorial, Jefferson Square
Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020

After Gerth's killing when the city attempted to clear Breewayy, an article in the *Louisville Courier Journal* quoted local racial justice activist Shameka Parrish-Wright who responded, "The community that was built there is not ending because they decided to throw us out."[66] In 2021, the city again justified its removal of the iconic Taylor Memorial as part of "clean-up efforts" to keep the park "safe and accessible."[67] Asserting the need to clean and save The Square by removing the Memorial, the city mobilized its desire to clear protestors' "unruly" bodies from the space. Local news reported, "…city officials say Louisville Metro Public Works will clean the park daily and that permits for events there will be required as

[66] Lucas Aulbach, "Louisville police clear tent city at Jefferson Square Park, but protesters remain," *Louisville Courier Journal*, June 28, 2020.
[67] Alexis Mathews, "Plans to keep Jefferson Square Park clean require removal of Breonna Taylor rally memorabilia," *WLKY News*, March 15, 2021.

outlined under city ordinances."[68] Later, protestors installed a hand-painted sign in place of the disappeared Taylor portrait (see figure 7):

> The Louisville Police don't want (You) to see the face of the woman they murdered. Breonna's Memorial was created by the community to honor a life taken too soon. For over a year the Louisville police Department has brutalized and arrested those that come to demand Justice, to heal, to mourn, and to be in community. Each morning the entire Memorial is set up by volunteers and must be removed every night, by order of the city government, or everything in Injustice Square is taken to the city dump. Until there is Justice for Breonna and significant reform, help us make this sacred, historic space permanent by reaching out to Metro Council representatives, the mayor's office, and City departments. Demand Justice. Make them hear the People.[69]

As evidenced by the sign and repeated memorial removals, the city began to de-iconize Breewayy. In the idiom of Schneider, the City wished to script the live performance of Breewayy as having disappeared.[70] Returning to The Square one week before the Kentucky Derby in 2022, I encountered a Louisville Metro garden crew re-planting the raised beds with colorful flowers (see figure 8). One Metro gardener informed me that they uprooted all of the Breewayy vegetable gardens because "the protestors got to do what they wanted and now they need to let us do what we need to do."[71] Along with the removal of the protestors' behanded statue of Louis XVI as well as the Taylor iconography, by digging up the memorial gardens, city agents resumed their hegemonic placemaking operation in this civic space.

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[68] Alexis Mathews, "Plans to keep Jefferson Square Park clean require removal of Breonna Taylor rally memorabilia," *WLKY News*, March 15, 2021.
[69] Protest sign found at Breonna Taylor Memorial, Jefferson Square, 2020.
[70] Rebecca Schneider, "Patricide and the Passerby," in *Performance and the City*, D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga. p. 60.
[71] Anonymous, (Louisville Metro Gardener) in discussion with the author, May 2017.

Fig. 8. Metro Louisville gardeners replant Jefferson Square. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2022.

Analyzing the impact of Breewayy after acute and durational crisis provides this chapter's critical and kinesthetic analysis of the protests as corporeal re-mappings of urban space. As communal performances of urgent care, Breewayy re-iconized the city and mobilized makeshift urban-agricultural infrastructures. Given the tragic conditions of Breonna Taylor's death that created the impetus for Breewayy and the subsequent killing that occurred there, Breewayy cannot be instrumentalized as a bureaucratic placemaking model nor romanticized as a utopian protest community. However, as a kinetic and site-specific improvisation in and of civic space, Breewayy provides a useful case study for a performance studies critique of urban placemaking-in-action. In my study of the counter-monumental gestures and embodied infrastructural choreographies of Breewayy, I have shown how Louisville protest bodies effectively re-performed this key city square.

Chapter 3: Corporate Choreographies of Artistic Activism

During the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, arts institutions across the United States performed in solidarity with protestors.[1] While some museums and artists made substantive efforts to dismantle structural racism and social inequality, others deployed art to deflect public criticism during the protests.[2] In response to the killing of Breonna Taylor in her Louisville, Kentucky home, 21c Museum Hotel curated a collaborative memorial artwork dedicated to Taylor and the #SayHerName campaign in Louisville.[3] #SayHerName highlights how "Black women are disproportionately affected by fatal acts of racial injustice and documents stories of Black women who have been killed by police."[4] This chapter focuses on choreographies of art and activism that I argue simultaneously memorialized and critically erased Taylor during this tumultuous time.

Amid citywide protests over the police killing of Taylor, 21c announced that a new memorial entitled *She Ascends* would appear in Augmented Reality (AR). The Museum Hotel touted the work as a marriage of contemporary art and technology that promised "a true reckoning with racism and injustice."[5] New media artist Nancy Baker Cahill initiated the collaboration by contacting 21c Director and Chief Curator Alice Stites from Los Angeles during the protests. Cahill asked Stites for a recommendation of a Louisville artist with whom she could partner to honor Taylor on Cahill's mobile-phone-based AR application, 4th

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[1] Holland Cotter, "Museums Are Finally Taking a Stand. But Can They Find Their Footing?" *The New York Times*, June 11, 2020.
[2] Alex Greenberger, Tessa Solomon, "Major U.S. Museums Criticized for Responses to Ongoing George Floyd Protests," *ARTnews*, June 2, 2020.
[3] John Russell, "21c Museum Hotel to bring jarring luxury to Old City Hall," *Indy Star*, July 18, 2015.
[4] Archives of Women's Political Communication, "Say Her Name," Iowa State University, https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/say-her-name-sayhername/.
[5] 21c, "Honoring the Life of Breonna Taylor Through Art," June 25, 2020. https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/blog/2020/honoring-the-life-of-breonna-taylor-through-art/

Wall.[6] Stites suggested Brianna Harlan, a socially engaged artist from Louisville who had recently spoken out against the white supremacy of local arts institutions throughout 2020.[7] Harlan accepted Cahill's invitation and created a digital photomontage dedicated to Taylor and two other prominent Black women from Kentucky, Nancy Green and Alberta Jones (see figure 1). Cahill exhibited Harlan's memorial imagery in the virtual and civic space of her 4th Wall app, which brought the artwork to life. In the summer of 2020, 21c was facing public allegations that the hotel discriminated against its Black service staff. Against local arts institutional critique and this labor relations background, 21c exhibited the memorial.[8]

She Ascends was an ephemeral, site-specific public artwork that invited people to see and experience politically charged images of Taylor, Green, and Jones in downtown civic space. As a monument to social justice, it mobilized a politically resistant form of digitally embodied placemaking that countered white hegemonic monuments and ideologies in Louisville public space. Although the artists' memorial re-signified the city as racially inclusive, it was critically absorbed into 21c's larger neoliberal placemaking performance during and after the movement. As I argue, *She Ascends* was rendered invisible due to a failure of curatorial care for the work in un-augmented civic space.

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[6] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023.
[7] "Big Talkers: Amplifying Black Artists in Louisville," Ruckus, July 11, 2020, https://ruckusjournal.org/Big-Talkers-Amplifying-Black-Artists-in-Louisville.
[8] Sara Pequeño, "Employees Claim a Local Museum-Hotel Idolizes Black Women Artists without Protecting Its Staff," *Indy Week*, August 26, 2020, https://indyweek.com/news/durham/21c-museum-hotel-shakerah-obery/.

Fig. 1. Brianna Harlan, *She Ascends* Memorial. Hosted by 4th Wall/COORDINATES. Metro Hall and *She Ascends* in 4th Wall Mobile Phone App. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Curatorial Choreographies of Art and Care

The word "curate" derives from the Latin 'cura', which means 'care', a term that helps to frame an art curator as someone who cares for art.[9] Definitions of care can be broadly interpreted in relation to curatorial practices. Curating can mean "maintenance," "charge," "supervision," "painstaking or watchful attention," and many other things.[10] The curator is also a subject position that may appear or disappear behind the name of a larger institution, featured artist, and artwork. As Nanne Burrman writes, "the practices of curators

[9] Nanne Buurman, "From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Subjectivities in the Context of Gendered Economies," *ON-CURATING.org,* 52 (2021), https://www.on-curating.org/issue-52-reader/from-prison-guard-to-healer-curatorial-authorships-in-the-context-of-gendered-economie.html.
[10] Oxford English Dictionary, "curator," revised 2021, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/curator_n?tl=true.

and care workers are generally associated with an emphasis on modesty, restraint, and a negation of productivity or creativity of authorship."[11] In contrast to this, within a globalized art world context, curators have gone from "invisible agents/stagehands behind the scenes . . . to the role of protagonists that take center stage."[12] In contemporary exhibition-making, a slippage also occurs between the roles of curator and artist to the degree that the two become virtually indistinguishable. For example, contemporary artists working in socially engaged, new media roles may perform curatorial functions such as selecting and displaying artists' works, while contemporary curators might author and produce thematic exhibitions into which they incorporate artists' practices.

Curating is a logistical, physical, visual, and metaphorical choreography that performs exhibitions in a given space. The work includes: conceptualizing exhibitions, researching artists, choosing an artist for exhibition, creating visibility for their practice, identifying specific art to be exhibited, scheduling the dates and durations of exhibitions, creating a budget, checklist of works, providing signage and object labels to inform the public about the artist; working with staff such as preparators and crew to design how a show will be installed, moving visitors through an exhibition, critically contextualizing an artist's practice through writing, disseminating information about an artist to marketing and public relations departments, touring Board members and patrons through an exhibition, advocating for an artist's work, training docents to assist public engagement, ensuring the safety and care of artwork, et al. Each of these efforts expresses the care and maintenance of the art and exhibition. Additional steps ensue during and after the run of the exhibition as publics

[11] Nanne Buurman, "From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Subjectivities in the Context of Gendered Economies," *ON-CURATING.org*.
[12] Nanne Buurman, "From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Subjectivities in the Context of Gendered Economies," *ON-CURATING.org*.

choreograph their own paths through the exhibition to see, experience, and respond to the artistic content organized in a particular space. Exhibitions can generate public interest, disinterest, positive affect, disdain, understanding, and misunderstanding, any of which might motivate individual action or larger cultural change.[13]

She Ascends is an ephemeral art exhibition that Stites, Harlan, and Cahill choreographed in virtual and civic space. The memorial blurs the subject positions of artist and curator as well as conventional understandings of art and exhibition space, proffering such questions as "Who is the artist and curator? Where is the space of care in AR-based exhibitions? How should an AR-based artwork be cared for? What do publics experience as they interface with the artwork?"[14] For this collaboration, Cahill and Stites extended their respective "spaces" to Harlan. Stites assumed care for *She Ascends* in Louisville on behalf of 21c while Cahill performed as digital curator of the memorial in 4th Wall space.

As it exists in augmented civic space, the artwork must be cared for within both realms. The curators and artists should anticipate how publics will specifically find, see, access, encounter, and engage with the work. For comparison, in 2023, an AR art platform called Kinfolk mounted an Augmented Reality exhibition in New York City. The exhibition featured artists' digital monuments that represented Black history and culture throughout the city.[15] The monuments were advertised on Instagram and social media but the creators "also placed vinyl stickers with QR codes near digital monument locations so that people passing

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[13] Barbara Pollack, "The Exhibitions That Changed Art History," *ARTnews,* April 17, 2013.
[14] For performance criticism of popular uses and audience experiences of virtual and digital technologies in rock concerts and other forms of live entertainment, see Suk-Young Kim's *K-pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance*, 2018.
[15] Melissa Noel, "We Don't Think You've Seen NYC Like This! Must-See Exhibition Is Placing Black Culture and History Monuments All Over The City Using Augmented Reality," *Essence.com,* Dec. 11, 2023. https://www.essence.com/news/black-history-and-culture-kinfolk-app/.

by can scan, download the app, and then see the monuments."[16] One of the organizers emphasized how AR is an essential space to "tell our stories" because of the lack of "physical markers that showcase the spaces and the culture that we brought and built within this city."[17] The exhibition organizers cared for the artworks by providing the public with visible signage at the site of the AR monument. This enabled people to contemplate the significance of each artwork in relation to existing monuments throughout the city. Without visible signage, publics would not have known how to access the otherwise invisible digital artwork that re-framed the city through Black historic representations.

Like the augmented Kinfolk exhibition, *She Ascends* is an ephemeral public experience that merges innovative technology and interactive engagement. *She Ascends* is an aesthetic hybrid of New Media and Socially Engaged Art (SEA) practices. New Media Art is "an interdisciplinary and collaborative discipline focusing on our relationship with technology, visual culture and performance in contemporary art."[18] A New Media artist, Cahill founded 4th Wall as a free, monumental (AR) public art platform to "extend and subvert the lineage of land art, often highlighting ecological imagination, civics, and a desire for more equitable futures."[19] Harlan holds a Master of Fine Arts in Art and Social Action from Queens College and produces qualitative research, installation art, public interventions, photography, and more.[20]

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[16] https://www.essence.com/news/black-history-and-culture-kinfolk-app/.
[17] https://www.essence.com/news/black-history-and-culture-kinfolk-app/.
[18] Grau, Oliver. "New Media Art." Oxford Bibliographies, May 26, 2016. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199920105/obo-9780199920105-0082.xml.
[19] https://nancybakercahill.com/profile.
[20] Brittany J. Thurman, "BallotBox: Review," *Ruckus Journal*, Dec. 9. 2020. Harlan's legacy of activism is also well established in Louisville as her grandmother is an iconic Louisville Civil Rights activist named Mattie Jones.

Social and public art practices downplay the role of the individual artist. Artist Pablo Helguera's disparate social practices, for example, eschew the creation of art objects to provide educational opportunities and incorporate audiences in the co-creation of the work. He writes:

> Socially engaged art is specifically at odds with the capitalist market infrastructure of the art world: it does not fit well in the traditional collecting practices of contemporary art, and the prevailing cult of the individual artist is problematic for those whose goal is to work with others, generally in collaborative projects with democratic ideals. Many artists look for ways to renounce not only object-making but authorship altogether, in the kind of "stealth" art practice . . . in which the artist is a secret agent in the real world, with an artistic agenda.[21]

Helguera's immersive educational and theatrical performance interventions disrupt academic and art world conventions. In 2014, while working as an institutional art curator, I invited the artist to deliver a keynote presentation on his practice for a symposium I was organizing at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts (DCCA). Helguera counter-proposed a scripted public debate on Byzantine iconography between "serious" arts professionals who were also his collaborator-accomplices. The Iconoclast Arguments: A Byzantine Discussion was the title of his ersatz art symposium in which I performed as myself along with other arts "officials" who also delivered lines that Helguera had written for them. During the symposium, the artist masqueraded as an audience member who posed questions that derailed the speakers and subverted the art historical topic.[22] The symposium was performed for a live museum audience who did not know that the event was fully rehearsed. The Iconoclast Arguments offered an entertaining educational enactment of SEA that ruptured the audience's expectations and provoked public discourse on contemporary art. The artist acted

[21] Pablo Helguera, *Education For Socially Engaged Art*, p. 4.
[22] In 2014, as Chief Curator of the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, I curated and performed in *Ask Leo*. http://pablohelguera.net/2014/05/ask-leo-2014/.

as a facilitator for collective engagement rather than as an individual author of an image or object. After the symposium, Helguera held a Q & A in which he revealed his performance as an example of the artist's social practice. As his curatorial collaborator on behalf of the DCCA, I anticipated the audience's reactions, which ranged from confusion to appreciation.

Helguera's symposium and Kinfolk's AR exhibition of Black monuments enable my conceptual framing of *She Ascends* as a digitally embodied form of social practice that mobilizes public engagement in subversion of hegemonic paradigms. Like Kinfolk, 4th Wall provides a platform for people's live participatory engagement with public monuments. Like the DCCA's institutional support for Helguera's symposium, 21c's institutional endorsement of *She Ascends* ostensibly provides Harlan and Cahill with a more visible platform for their critical combination of artistic practices. To curate such practices proffers a more socially and racially pluralistic civic space. The artwork requires close care for the communities and spaces it seeks to engage. Together, Harlan and Cahill mobilized *She Ascends* as an interdisciplinary work of public art that challenged 21'c curatorial conventions of museum object care.[23]

[23] Nancy Baker Cahill, www.4thwallapp.org/about.

Fig. 2. Director and Chief Curator of 21c Museum Hotel, Alice Gray Stites (left), and former President of 21c and current Louisville Mayor, Craig Greenberg (right). Author: Skift Global Forum, 2015. Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/138608854@N03/24103519810/. CC by 2.0.

As 21c Curator, Alice Stites made a careful decision to provide a platform for *She Ascends* in 2020. Stites is nationally recognized for her aesthetic selections, critical juxtapositions, and erudite interpretations of politically charged art for the Museum Hotel (see figure 2). Headquartered in Louisville, 21c was founded in 2006 by Kentucky aristocrats and marital partners Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown, the latter an heiress to the billion-dollar Brown-Forman bourbon fortune.[24] Stites' leadership role thus positions her alongside the most wealthy and powerful civic stage managers and social actors in the city.

Unlike independent curators who care for artists while working with little to no budget, Stites curates expensive exhibitions from the Museum Hotel's collection for its boutique hotels throughout the Midwest and South. Along with the sale of Brown-Forman bourbon products, including Jack Daniels and Southern Comfort, 21c generates revenue by

[24] "21c Founders Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson," www.21cmuseumhotels.com/company/team/.

deploying art to sell luxury hotel stays in gentrifying post-industrial cities, from Louisville to Bentonville, Arkansas.[25]

21c Louisville is located at 7th and Main Street in the heart of bourbon tourist attractions, Whiskey Row and the Bourbon Trail.[26] Urban bourbon flaneurs can walk to and from the distilleries along the trail, including 21c's restaurant and bourbon bar, Proof. Directly in front of Proof, they are greeted by Turkish-American artist Serkan Özkaya's 30-foot-tall golden statue inspired by Michelangelo's *David* (see figure 3). Regarding the placement of art in such a visible public space, the hotel website states, "21c Museum is grateful to the city of Louisville for supporting 21c's mission to share outstanding works of art from all over the world with the public through exhibitions and programs that integrate contemporary art into daily life."[27] 21c works closely with city government officials to curate international art objects such as "David" to drive local commerce along this urban corridor. The Museum Hotel deploys curatorial choreographies of art in tandem with urban bourbon branding of Louisville.

[25] Abram Brown, "Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown: The artful lodgers," *Forbes India,* Dec. 7, 2015. www.forbesindia.com/article/recliner/steve-wilson-and-laura-lee-brown-the-artful-lodgers/41667/1.
[26] https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/louisville/.
[27] https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/museum/exhibit/david-inspired-by-michelangelo-2/.

Fig. 3. 21c Museum Hotel, Serkan Özkaya, *David* (Inspired by Michelangelo), 2010, and Bourbon District signage along Main Street's Whiskey Row. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Thes current Mayor of Louisville, Craig Greenberg, served as President of 21c from 2012 to 2017. Greenberg succeeded Wilson as President and CEO from 2017-2022. In 2017, Greenberg stated, "I feel privileged to have been a part of 21c since its inception, and I'm humbled to take on this new role . . . Laura Lee and Steve's vision, courage, and commitment have certainly benefitted so many of us – locals and travelers alike, artists, and 21c teammates."[28] Mayor Greenberg's transformation from 21c brand maker to city politician demonstrates the overlapping interests of corporate art, tourism, and civic governance in Louisville.

Stites travels widely to scout for art with Wilson and Brown who are known for their extravagant lifestyle and "cutting edge" collection of contemporary art. In 2013, Stites,

[28] https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/blog/2017/craig-greenberg-named-ceo-21c-museum-hotels/.

Wilson, and Brown were profiled in the New York Times while buying art at Art Basel Miami:

> Eleven minutes into the 11 a.m. preview of Art Basel Miami Beach on Wednesday, Steve Wilson, a Kentucky collector, made his first purchase: an installation made from dozens of bricks by the Italian artist Elisabetta Benassi. And Mr. Wilson was just revving up. At 11:20, he told a dealer to reserve a large collage for a couple of hours so his wife could take a look. Seventeen minutes later, at a different booth, he bought a bust sculpted with a chain saw from a stack of Encyclopedia Britannicas, by Wim Botha [emphasis mine] of South Africa. Total time: 37 minutes. Total sticker price for the three pieces: $117,000.[29]

Moving from one artwork and gallery booth to the next, Wilson choreographed his aesthetic-spatial conquest of the fair. His march to acquire contemporary art emblematizes how 21c's billionaire art mavens collect and curate critical art as a luxury commodity and investment. In purchasing the aforementioned Botha's art at Art Basel, for example, they procured the work of a white South African artist who interrogates racial segregation and his Western European art historical training based on Apartheid cultural education. Botha sculpts interpretations of white Eurocentric art icons, from ancient Hellenistic figuration to Roman commemorative busts. His hacked-up reconfigurations of "classical" marble busts and statues critique his training in a Christian higher education curriculum that emphasized white cultural supremacy in the Dutch Afrikaans settlement where he grew up. In the spacious galleries of 21c, Stites curates Botha and other artists' works as spoils of Wilson's conquests. The resulting exhibitions produce situations of public encounter with fine art in 21c's commercial space, creating elite aesthetic experiences for vacationers along the Bourbon Trail.

I situate Stites' curatorial choreography of 21c within Louisville's neoliberal placemaking, which reifies art as tourism, leisure class consumption, and capitalist investment to the neglect of art's agonistic potential. Colonial in nature, neoliberal

[29] Patricia Cohen, "A Collector Bets His Eye and His Gut," *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2013.

placemaking renders the would-be critical dimension of artwork obsolete, turning art into a trophy of symbolic value rather than counter-hegemonic activism. In the Museum Hotel's commercial appropriation of "alternative" aesthetic culture, the more critically provocative or politically resistant the art, the better for hotel sales. Hotel guests wander through the luxurious galleries gazing upon international artistic representations of trauma while sipping bourbon at a safe remove from social and racial inequality in the Louisville arts scene. While many object-based artworks such as Botha's are suited to this curatorial model, other socially engaged art projects like *She Ascends* are not. In 2020, *She Ascends* resisted the neoliberal order. It was an ephemeral artistic provocation that threatened corporate and political power structures within the socially, racially, and economically stratified city.

Choreographies of *She Ascends*

Stites could not have predicted that Botha's art would be on view at 21c when the Louisville protests erupted and Covid-19 hit. Botha's disfigured marble portraits and statues stood in silent critique of white cultural hegemony at a time when the citizens of Louisville and cities across the country were vociferously contesting public monuments of white cultural oppression. Botha's work formed a kind of interior analog of the exterior city where activists marched against legacies of apartheid conditions.

While Botha's art filled the lobby of 21c, Stites curated Harlan's augmented memorial *She Ascends* in downtown Louisville where activists occupied Jefferson Square Park.[30] In a 21c press release, Stites introduced Harlan as a local "visionary" whose artwork commemorated "the fight for Breonna Taylor, Black women, and community justice."[31]

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[30] *She Ascends* was announced on June 25, 2020.

[31] "Honoring the life of Breonna Taylor through art. Experience the virtual, interactive augmented reality monument in downtown Louisville," *21c*, June 25, 2020, www.21cmuseumhotels.com/blog/2020/honoring-the-life-of-breonna-taylor-through-art/.

Stites curated Harlan's work when the activist had recently challenged local arts institutions to become more diverse and inclusive without tokenizing artists of color. The artist's social practice exposed white supremacy and the power structures that she said abused Black people and other people of color. In 2020, she launched "Louisville Arts Scene Report: Injustices and Inequities," which invited artists of color in the city to contribute their personal stories of racial discrimination.[32] A news article on the Report quoted Harlan as saying, "after reading [the artist] respondents' experiences of racism, sexism, tokenism and wage disparities . . . a 'resulting theme' is a 'white supremist foundation.'"[33]

Publicly agitating for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts, Harlan had also appeared on a panel called "Big Talkers: Amplifying Black Artists in Louisville."[34] Speaking on the topic of white supremacist power-hoarding, paternalism, and patriarchy in the local arts scene, Harlan said:

> Louisville is very much a city of appearance politics and playing that game seems winnable for a while. You show up the right way, make the right project, get the right grant, talk to the right people, and . . . people are just supposed to be ok and comfortable with that . . . but when you're in these arts and cultural spaces, you're actually experiencing abuse. There is so much power hoarding, lines that you can't cross, [in terms of] where our funding comes from and the way that funding is given out.[35]

Harlan's agonistic criticism of white supremacy in the local arts scene at that moment carried weight. She became one of the most prominent artist-activists of the protest movement and

[32] Stefanie Wolf, "Brianna Harlan, 'Louisville's Art Scene More Equitable,'" *Louisville Public Media,* October 11, 2020.
[33] Stefanie Wolf, "Brianna Harlan, 'Louisville's Art Scene More Equitable,'" *Louisville Public Media*, October 11, 2020.
[34] Brianna Harlan, "Big Talkers" panel, https://vimeo.com/442894420, July 11, 2020.
[35] Brianna Harlan, "Big Talkers" panel, https://vimeo.com/442894420, July 11, 2020.

was sought after by institutions such as 21c who offered her high visibility in the local arts scene she had been critiquing.[36]

Stites described why she recommended Harlan to Cahill during the protests. She had remembered Harlan as someone "with a lot of potential" whose work was about social justice and activism, so she connected the two artists. Stites maintained that her own curatorial role was "very minimal":

> It was just about making it happen . . . . I wanted it to happen no matter what, so I went to Craig Greenberg who was our CEO then and said, 'if we can launch this through 21c, it will have more traction than if we do it on individual social media channels.' Craig, Steve, and Laura Lee wanted to do this. They were very proud to support it.[37]

A month before 21c issued a press release for *She Ascends*, a news article pronounced, "Employees Claim a Local Museum-Hotel Idolizes Black Women Artists without Protecting Its Staff."[38] The author pointed out the contradiction that as *She Ascends* promoted a virtual memorial for Taylor and the "Say Her Name" movement, the hotel's corporate managers refused to provide shelter for protesters and turned them away.[39] Showcasing a virtual memorial to Taylor in 2020 would deflect public attention away from claims 21c perpetuated racism and sex discrimination in the workplace.

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[36] Stephanie Wolf, "This Artist Has Embarked On A Crusade To Make Louisville's Arts Industry More Equitable," *Louisville Public Media*, July 16, 2020.
[37] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023.
[38] Sara Pequeno, "Employees Claim a Local Museum-Hotel Idolizes Black Women Artists without Protecting Its Staff," *Indy Week*, August 26, 2020.
[39] Sara Pequeno, "Employees Claim a Local Museum-Hotel Idolizes Black Women Artists without Protecting Its Staff," *Indy Week*, August 26, 2020.

Fig. 4. Louisville Metro Hall. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Consistent with social distance protocols during 2020, Stites, Harlan, and Cahill officially unveiled *She Ascends* online through Facebook and Instagram rather than in a formal in-person gathering.[40] Cahill published an announcement in an Instagram post informing people how the memorial could be seen in front of Metro Hall (see figure 4). She choreographed a series of steps: "download 4th Wall app, allow permissions, tap the COORDINATES, Enable audio, Find it in the space, Take photos and video."[41] Cahill also plugged multiple hashtags and accounts such as: #21cmuseum, #4thwallapp, @4thwallapp, @_BriannaHarlan, and @21chotels. Neither Stites' nor Cahill's personal names appeared on the Instagram announcement—only the monikers of 21c and 4th Wall were listed alongside Harlan's name.

[40] Miyoung Chong, "Calling for justice with #JusticeforBreonnaTaylor: a case study of hashtag activism in the evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement." *Soc Netw Anal Min*. 2023;13(1):67.
[41] Nancy Baker Cahill, "directions to use 4th Wall app," published in Elizabeth Kramer's article, "Harlan Ascending," *Louisville Arts Bureau,* August 14, 2020.

Stites, Cahill, and Harlan mobilized a form of networked activism, which performance scholar Marcela A. Fuentes defines as protest that configures "a cross-platform, extended event that redefines notions of embodiment, co-presence and liveness."[42] However, 21c appropriated such socially engaged art and activism to protect and extend the bourbon branding of Louisville.

21c's version of networked activism differs from Fuentes's description of the networked activism of a 2011 student protest movement in Chile in which students collaborated online to deploy anti-capitalist flash mobs in the street.[43] Using a Facebook event page, protestors disseminated flash mob choreographies, which ranged from posting meeting times and locations to instructions for costuming and makeup.[44] Responding to increasing student loan debt and social inequalities inherited from Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, the students choreographed *Thriller for Education* (2011) set to the soundtrack of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. Their performative protest in which they dressed as zombies in the city dramatized "the (undead) life of flexible workers in permanent training as a source of capital investment and neoliberal gain."[45]

In contrast to the Chilean students' use of social media to confront dictatorship in the streets, Stites, Cahill and Harlan employed Instagram to choreograph visitors to the AR-based mobile phone application. Tagging 21c and Harlan, Cahill connected the Hotel's and Harlan's online followers to the 4th Wall's, thus expanding Cahill's network and her app's online visibility. Cahill's choreography or curation of social media helped link the ephemeral 4th

[42] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, p. 19.
[43] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, p. 73.
[44] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, p. 72-73.
[45] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, p. 77.

Wall as a technological product or immaterial platform with Harlan's local, socially engaged activist work.

Upon downloading the app to one's phone and visiting Metro Hall in Louisville, 4th Wall users could open the app and point their device at the building facade to view *She Ascends*. Harlan's artwork appeared as a two-dimensional PNG image file floating in mid-air and superimposed over the monument. Harlan's black and white photographic collage is in the shape of a triangular monument on a yellow base. With its architectural style and grandiose white columns, *She Ascends* crudely complemented the neoclassical appearance of Metro Hall, which served as the geographic anchor and visual reference for *She Ascends*.[46]

Begun in 1837 and completed in 1860, the imposing Greek Revival-style building made of grey stone and featuring a four-column Doric portico was historically the site of slave trading in the 1840s and abolition speeches and the site of multiple protest events in 2020.[47] The Louisville Daily Journal once referred to the structure as an "elephantine monstrosity."[48] When in 1948 Frank Lloyd Wright visited Louisville, he referred to the structure as a "noble old edifice," adding, "We shouldn't build this type of building anymore, but we should keep those we have left."[49] Stites said *She Ascends*' placement was intentional: "We talked about floating it above the garden space, but conceptually . . . it was stronger to have it floated by Mayor's Office and the statue of Louis XVI."[50] Harlan's site-specific memorial re-signified the "monstrosity" as an inclusive, Black, activist space.

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[46] www.gpsmycity.com/attractions/metro-hall-48657.html.
[47] www.gpsmycity.com/attractions/metro-hall-48657.html.
[48] www.gpsmycity.com/attractions/metro-hall-48657.html.
[49] Martha Elson, "Retro: Frank Lloyd Wright leaves mark in KY," *Louisville Courier Journal*, April 12, 2016.
[50] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023.

She Ascends depicted multiple figures of Taylor, from a vibrant and forward-facing woman who gazes out at the world, to a winged angel whose back faces the viewer as *She Ascends* toward the golden sky. At the bottom of Harlan's memorial are documentary images of Louisville protestors holding signs that read: "Say Her Name," "Black Lives Matter," and "No More No Knocks."

Within the 4th Wall app, Harlan's imagery is also accompanied by an audio track of a spoken-word poem by local activist Hannah Drake, whose voice can be heard reciting: "If I close my eyes/I can see them/Nancy Green/Alberta Jones/Breonna Taylor/And if I quiet my mind/I can hear them/Their voices carried on the wind. . . ."[51] Drake's poem is punctuated by the sounds of protestors' chanting "Breonna Taylor" and "Say Her Name," which can also be heard through the 4th Wall app. As Drake's poem begins to play, app users can also see the memorial as they walk in and around Metro Hall. The juxtaposition of audio and monumental imagery effects a visual and immersive sensory experience. In addition to the poem, app users can participate by documenting the memorial and recording the sound component of the monument as they drift through civic space. By virtue of the audio documentation of the historic protests, the contemporary app user is transported back in time to the protests of 2020. Through the 4th Wall app, the memorial returns voices and aural memories from the past to the present, creating a roving contemporary sound monument in civic space.[52]

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[51] *She Ascends*, Hannah Drake, 4th Wall/COORDINATES App, 2020, www.4thwallapp.org.
[52] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023. Stites links *She Ascends* to Emily Bingham's contextualization of the song "My Old Kentucky Home" as a sound monument. In 2022, Bingham also wrote *My Old Kentucky Home: The Astonishing Life and Reckoning of an Iconic American Song*.

Fig. 5. *She Ascends* (rear view), showing portrait of Nancy Green (top right), at Metro Hall in 4th Wall Mobile Phone App. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Harlan's memorial image also pedestalizes the iconic faces of Green and Jones to which Drake's poem refers. Green was a formerly enslaved woman from the Bluegrass State whose face became the emblem of the Aunt Jemima brand and Alberta Jones was Louisville's first Black female Civil Rights attorney whose brutal and unsolved murder in 1965 still haunts the city today.[53] Nancy Green (see figure 5) was born into slavery in either 1834 or 1854 in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky (because birth certificates for enslaved people were rarely filed, there is an ambiguity regarding Green's date of birth). After gaining her freedom, she became a cook for a Chicago alderman and judge, Charles M. Walker, Jr. She was then recruited in 1890 to tour America as the face of Aunt Jemima self-rising pancake flour brand,

[53] Elizabeth Kramer, "Harlan Ascending: Artist's work grows with monument to Breonna Taylor, survey about equity in arts and culture sector," Aug 14, 2020, www.artsbureau.substack.com/p/harlan-ascending-artists-work-grows.

and at stops along the tour, Green would "flip flapjacks in a flour barrel-shaped pavilion 16 feet in diameter while singing spirituals and other obligatory tunes and waxing rhapsodic about antebellum plantation servitude under benevolent white masters."[54] Africana Studies scholar Riché Richardson asserts that the Aunt Jemima stereotype was "grounded in an idea about the 'mammy,' a devoted and submissive servant who eagerly nurtured the children of her white master and mistress while neglecting her own."[55] Despite her legacy, Green's family never received any recognition or compensation even though the character of Aunt Jemima outlasted Green for another 97 years on labels and boxes. It was only in 2020, when Quaker Oats, which bought the brand in 1926 and which was acquired by PepsiCo in 2001, announced the character's retirement, acknowledging that Aunt Jemima was "based on a racial stereotype."[56] At what is believed to be the age of 89, in 1923, Green was tragically struck and killed by a car while standing under the South Side El train and subsequently buried in an unmarked grave at Oakwood Cemetery in Chicago.[57]

[54] Sam Roberts, "Overlooked No More: Nancy Green, the 'Real Aunt Jemima,'" *New York Times*, July 17, 2020.
[55] Sam Roberts, "Overlooked No More: Nancy Green, the 'Real Aunt Jemima,'" *New York Times*, July 17, 2020.
[56] Sam Roberts, "Overlooked No More: Nancy Green, the 'Real Aunt Jemima,'" *New York Times*, July 17, 2020.
[57] Sam Roberts, "Overlooked No More: Nancy Green, the 'Real Aunt Jemima,'" *New York Times*, July 17, 2020.

Fig. 6. *She Ascends* showing detail of Alberta O. Jones' portrait, top right, at Metro Hall in 4th Wall Mobile Phone App. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

A civil rights pioneer, Jones' legacy remains relatively unknown outside of Louisville (see figure 6).[58] She was a neighbor of Muhammad Ali in the majority Black West End of Louisville where she lived with her mother and sister. A graduate of Howard University School of Law, Jones served as Louisville's first female Black prosecutor who negotiated Ali's first boxing contract, insisting that "15 percent of his winnings be held in trust until he turned 35, with Ms. Jones serving as a co-trustee."[59] She helped register 6,000 African Americans to vote by establishing the Independent Voters Association. Voting as a bloc, "blacks replaced the mayor of Louisville and many of the city's aldermen in 1961. Two years later these officials outlawed racial discrimination in businesses, the first public accommodation ordinance of its kind in the South."[60] While the 1964 Civil Rights Act was being pushed for passage, Jones and other civil rights leaders encouraged blacks and whites to eat together and socialize.

On Aug. 5, 1965, at age 34, Jones was brutally beaten and thrown off Louisville's Sherman Minton bridge into the Ohio River to drown.[61] Witnesses saw "two black males drag a screaming woman into the back seat of a car like the Ford Fairlane Ms. Jones was driving, according to police records. Her body, with trauma to the head and face, was retrieved from the river near an amusement park in the West End. A large quantity of blood stained the back seat of the Fairlane, discovered nearby, which she had rented while her own

[58] Trip Gabriel, "A 'Quest for Justice' for a Murdered Civil Rights Pioneer, 52 Years Later," *New York Times,* Sept. 19, 2017.
[59] Trip Gabriel, "A 'Quest for Justice' for a Murdered Civil Rights Pioneer, 52 Years Later," *New York Times,* Sept. 19, 2017.
[60] Trip Gabriel, "A 'Quest for Justice' for a Murdered Civil Rights Pioneer, 52 Years Later," *New York Times,* Sept. 19, 2017.
[61] Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, "Alberta Odell Jones," www.kcaah.org/women-in-history/alberta-jones/.

car was in the shop."[62] The Louisville police have never determined a prevailing theory about suspects or a motive for Jones' murder; however, one idea is that the Nation of Islam had her killed because leader Elijah Muhammad coveted Ali's 15% earnings that Jones was trying to protect, yet this has never been substantiated. Additionally, given Jones's high profile as a Black woman prosecutor and her involvement in civil rights activities, there was "speculation that she was killed because of her race, because of those activities, or both, and that speculation remains today."[63] As a result of this, her death was referred to the Cold Case Unit in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division, pursuant to the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act of 2016 (the Till Act).[64]

Harlan depicts Green and Jones emanating golden auras as their faces appear atop two towering Corinthian capitals flanking Taylor. Linking Green's and Jones' exceptional lives to Taylor's in monumental remembrance, *She Ascends* honors their historic achievements, individual struggles, and tragic ends. Harlan stated, "So often Black women are erased, forgotten, and not given support. . . . Black women aren't taken seriously. We have to fight for women more."[65] Wanting *She Ascends* to reflect on the injustices and violence Black women have faced for decades, Harlan embraced "the overarching idea of a monument to Taylor with the Say Her Name movement and work to honor and declare the names of other Black women who are often discounted."[66] Harlan's representation of their

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[62] Trip Gabriel, "A 'Quest for Justice' for a Murdered Civil Rights Pioneer, 52 Years Later," *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 2017.
[63] Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, www.justice.gov/crt/case/alberta-jones.
[64] Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, www.justice.gov/crt/case/alberta-jones.
[65] Elizabeth Kramer, "Harlan Ascending: Artist's work grows with monument to Breonna Taylor, survey about equity in arts and culture sector," Aug 14, 2020, www.artsbureau.substack.com/p/harlan-ascending-artists-work-grows.
[66] Elizabeth Kramer, "Harlan Ascending: Artist's work grows with monument to Breonna Taylor, survey about equity in arts and culture sector," Aug 14, 2020, www.artsbureau.substack.com/p/harlan-ascending-artists-work-grows.

iconic images coupled with Drake's recitation of their names affectively re-animated the antebellum Metro Hall as a haunted civic space.

4th Wall Choreographies

Cahill's concept for the 4th Wall points to AR, GPS, and mobile phone technologies as theatrical staging devices. In traditional theater the 4th Wall is defined as an invisible wall that allows the actor to see past the stage and imagine the entire room as an extension of the actor's world.[67] In AR, the 4th Wall app allows the mobile phone user-cum-actor or to see beyond the limits of the built civic space. Cahill explains her idea for naming the app: "because the idea of breaking or intervening in an accepted reality is crucial to any XR tech, whether it's mixed, virtual or AR, but particularly AR where we are seeing and experiencing 'meat space,'[68] then this illusion is broken by this new illusion. . . . That's the opportunity—what happens when an actor turns to the audience—the spell is broken, but it's also activated, so I feel like this is activating a new spell."[69]

4th Wall mobilizes theatrical sight and sensory immersion through geolocation. With AR technology, the 4th Wall app is interactive in real time and "registered in three dimensions."[70] The position of the individual app user's body in relation to Metro Hall serves to anchor the virtual content of *She Ascends* in built civic space. This anchor of the physical world is a defined location in space determined using GPS.[71] Cahill geolocated the image of *She Ascends* from LA while Stites and Harlan arrived at Metro Hall "to observe and help

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[67] Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the Fourth Wall as an imaginary wall (as at the opening of a modern stage proscenium) that keeps performers from recognizing or directly addressing their audience.
[68] Oxford English Dictionary, "meatspace," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7836098200.
[69] Nancy Baker Cahill, personal interview with the author, June 9, 2023.
[70] "In-Depth Review of Augmented Reality: Tracking Technologies, Development Tools, AR Displays, Collaborative AR, and Security Concerns," www.mdpi.com/1424-8220/23/1/146.
[71] "In-Depth Review of Augmented Reality: Tracking Technologies, Development Tools, AR Displays, Collaborative AR, and Security Concerns," www.mdpi.com/1424-8220/23/1/146.

situate the work and record the sound and document it."[72] Without the live, socially engaged, and embodied co-presence of Cahill, Stites, and Harlan operating between LA and Louisville to help geolocate and anchor *She Ascends*' virtual content over Metro Hall, the memorial could not exist.[73]

She Ascends choreographs a digitally mediated and embodied experience of urban space. Fuentes asserts, "media analysts on both sides of the divide tend to leave bodies behind, stressing modes of communication, cooperation, and collective intelligence across media without regard to modes of performance, that is embodied, time-based, and collective action modes that assemble asynchronous and remote modalities of collaboration."[74] In contrast to Fuentes' concept of digitally networked performance constellations that assist in embodied global political activism, I argue that the 4th Wall's augmented technology curates live, visual, and virtually embodied choreographies of civic space. Such choreographies, which stage civic place, in turn produce digitally embodied placemaking.

Proprioceptive choreographies arise with the public's use of the mobile phone and 4th Wall app. In their individual interface with handheld AR, 4th Wall users practice space by wandering and walking, which produces technologically embodied urban placemaking. I draw on multiple scholars, including Fuentes and Jason Farman, to show how 4th Wall produces digitally mediated urban space by choreographing kinesthetic urban spatial practices to foster live, affecting experiences of the city. Outside the elite comfort and control

[72] Elizabeth Kramer, "Harlan Ascending: Artist's work grows with monument to Breonna Taylor, survey about equity in arts and culture sector," Aug 14, 2020, www.artsbureau.substack.com/p/harlan-ascending-artists-work-grows.
[73] For example, if no artwork has been geolocated at a particular site where a 4th Wall app user happens to open the app, then the app shows the civic space without artwork and with text that reads, "Searching For Artwork."
[74] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, p. 19

of 21c, viewers engage with Harlan's image that offers a new vision for a more inclusive urban social life.

As Fuentes develops the concept of networked performance, she cites Farman's mobile interface theory wherein Farman asserts, "To begin to locate embodiment in the mobile media era as that which is 'sensory inscribed,' I want to reiterate the notion that embodiment is always a spatial practice."[75] Farman borrows from phenomenological and post-structuralist discourse to develop his theory that embodiment is not only reliant on physical space. He cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty's foundational idea that "embodiment is conceived out of the sensory" and that our knowledge of and place in the world "depends on feedback from our senses."[76] Farman writes that since the mobile phone is a product of culture, and embodiment can never exist outside of culture, then the mobile user is virtually embodied. Building on Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production with regard to embodiment and the mobile interface, Farman asserts:

> In terms of our embodied engagement with mobile media, which simultaneously takes place in our everyday spaces (which have been "realized") and in the ways this space is augmented by virtuality infused from our interfaces, the terms cannot be used in isolation from one another. The realized or actualized is always implicated by the virtual (broadly defined) and such an implication is produced through embodied practices.[77]

Farman highlights the false opposition of real and virtual space. He also cites Lefebvre's Marxist theorization that the material or built environment is a product of capitalism, shaped by individual, social, and institutional forces. Lefebvre articulates space as

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[75] Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p.19
[76] Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p.25
[77] Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p.22

a triple dialectic of the perceived, conceived, and lived. He argues that space is a social and spatial practice (perceived as daily activities and routines); a representation of space (as conceived by architects and urban planners); and representational space (lived as subjective and emotional experiences of space).[78] Lefebvre writes, "each living body is space and has space; it produces itself in space and it also produces that space."[79] Accordingly, the mobile interface and the body are intertwined in the production of digitally embodied space. Taking Lefebvre and Farman's philosophy of space into account, I maintain that the 4th Wall and similar apps like Kinfolk produce digitally networked civic space, which, like the built civic environment, remains an immaterially networked, or digital, form of urban production.

Returning to Metro Hall through the app in 2023, I revisited my own participation as a protestor in the 2020 movement.[80] Carrying my phone, I looked through the app to watch the image of *She Ascends* float through the air while listening to Drake's poem and chants. While wandering alone through this charged civic space recalled the sounds and movements of fellow protestors, my solo drift differed from marching with others at these same architectural symbols of historic and recent civic injustice. While the 4th Wall/*She Ascends* conjures and reenacts the protest movement itself as a digital archive, it choreographs memory and history into the individual user's body, enabling the app user to perform embodied placemaking. Drake's listing of Green and Jones' names evokes antebellum, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights era histories in the present and brings the lost lives of these women

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[78] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Malden: Blackwell, 1991.
[79] Farman's quoting of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* in *Mobile Interface Theory*, p. 18.
[80] For example, on July 25, 2020, I attended a protest at Louisville Metro Hall coinciding with the arrival of an independent armed militia known as the NFAC (Not Fucking Around Coalition). I positioned myself on the street in front of the building then walked to the right of the steps of Metro Hall while documenting NFAC's movement. Louisville police who were armed and positioned on the roof across from Metro Hall created an intimidating presence and I left the protest out of concern that armed fire would break out between NFAC and police.

back into embodied memory and public consciousness. Choreographing embodied reenactments of the past in the present, the augmented memorial resists the hegemonic city's erasure of Taylor, Green, and Jones from civic space.

Choreographies of Placelessness

Fig. 7. *She Ascends* viewed from the right of Metro Hall showing lack of immersion in 4th Wall App. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

The 4th Wall theatrically stages Harlan's vision, enables listening, and prompts human touch, movement, and remembrance at the site. These experiences reveal how the memorial choreographs affective and kinesthetic remembrance of the 2020 protests through the body. However, 4th Wall does not precisely geolocate *She Ascends*, nor does 21c place public signage for the memorial in civic space. Such curatorial choreographies contradict Cahill's and Stites' stated desire to effectively visualize and exhibit the Taylor monument at Metro Hall.

Because the image of *She Ascends* appears as a flat, pixilated, black and white photocopied image that is imprecisely geolocated at Metro Hall, the memorial simultaneously disrupts the user's sense of believable immersion in the augmented civic world. As the user walks around the building, *She Ascends* seems to drift and break apart as the app tries to re-anchor the two-dimensional image at Metro Hall (see figure 7). Cahill asserts:

> Geolocation allows us to be nimble and have these guerrilla interventions anywhere we want; but the problem/challenge of geolocation is that it's not really fixed; I see the poetics of that and like that it's uncontained and uncontainable. So sometimes it'll bounce [referring to the image]. It's much easier with bigger assets [images] that are geolocated over large bodies of water. There's nowhere for them to go, no interference, but buildings and other objects can really be difficult so geolocating things in cities is always a challenge. If the goal is precision, we did this without a dollar, no funding, so we just did it because it was the right thing to do. . . . Had we any resources we could have mapped it precisely on the face of Metro Hall.[81]

Cahill acknowledges that the interference of other objects in the city as well as a lack of funding compromised the exact geo-mapping of *She Ascends*. With more funding, she would have been able to anchor *She Ascends* onto Metro Hall, which would have produced a more illusionistic aesthetic. For example, if it had bounced less and been perfectly superimposed

[81] Nancy Baker Cahill, personal interview with the author, June 9, 2023.

over the building, perhaps it would have created a trompe l'eoil effect.[82] In trompe-l'eoil art, we see the illusion of a three-dimensional object painted onto a two-dimensional surface. In AR, we see a digital image superimposed over a given environment.[83] AR can be interpreted as a digital form trompe l'eoil in that it visualizes something that is not present in un-augmented space, which fools the eye. Due to its limitations, however, 4th Wall mitigates against the user's immersive experience.

Cahill also suggests that she was willing to forgo money in exchange for the opportunity to partner with 21c and Harlan. While she received no budget, Cahill earned in-kind support from the free online publicity that 21c and Harlan provided 4th Wall during the protests and pandemic. Stites explained that the lack of budget was because "everyone wanted to do the work for free. Brianna reached out to Breonna Taylor's family who wanted to make sure that no one would profit from either protesting about her death or honoring her life. Even if I had had a huge budget, I wouldn't have been able to offer a budget."[84]

The lack of funding was not only the only explanation for *She Ascends*' lack of precise geolocation. It is also an acknowledged deficiency of mobile-phone-based handheld AR systems according to the authors of Augmented Reality Art. "Handheld AR applications . . . are ideal when deploying technology to an outdoor setting. . . . However, handheld AR systems are faced with limitations in their ability to immerse the user into the augmented world.[85]

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[82] Manuel van der Veen, "Crossroads of seeing: about layers in painting and superimposition in Augmented Reality," *AI & SOCIETY*, 2021, 36, pp. 1189–1200.
[83] Manuel van der Veen, "Crossroads of seeing: about layers in painting and superimposition in Augmented Reality," *AI & SOCIETY,* 2021, 36, pp. 1189–1200.
[84] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023.
[85] K. Cˇ opicˇ Pucihar and M. Kljun, "Ch. 1" of *Augmented Reality Art: From an Emerging Technology to a Novel Creative Medium*, Ed. by Vladimir Geroimenko, Third Edition, Springer: 2022, p. 11.

The sense of what was missing from the mediated space revealed itself to the user as they wandered around Metro Hall. With the memorial's imperfections, the 4th Wall choreographed against unconscious immersion in augmented civic space, producing a Brechtian effect.[86] In Bertolt Brecht's plays, a sensation of estrangement arose when characters did not attempt to solicit empathy from audiences.[87] This style of theater could be seen as political "because it aims to overturn the paralysing sense that things have always been 'this way' and therefore that there is nothing that can be done to change them."[88] Similarly, by not allowing audiences to remain comfortable with white patriarchal space, *She Ascends* politicized Metro Hall and called for inclusion of Black female representation in the city.

The imperfect experience of technology echoed how mobile phone users take communication for granted until their connections are lost, when they become conscious of their limited Wi-Fi and cell reception.[89] I extrapolate from the examples of trompe l'oeil, Brechtian estrangement, and interrupted connections to assert that while *She Ascends* created an initial sense of intrigue and empowerment for publics seeking to creatively participate in site-specific art, activism, or remembrance through augmented technology, *She Ascends'* lack of three-dimensionality and fixed place produced a sense of disconnection from place as it underperformed. Adrift at Metro Hall, *She Ascends* unironically monumentalized placelessness. Yet the 4th Wall's imperfect vision effectively reminded the viewer that social justice and Black female aesthetic representation are not guaranteed in the city. Harlan

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[86] Oxford Reference, "estrangement-effect," accessed Apr 6, 2024. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095758798.
[87] https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095758798.
[88] https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095758798.
[89] Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, pp. 28-29. www.ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsb-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3060954.Farman.

underscores this idea in her socially engaged practice and qualitative research on the Louisville arts scene.[90]

In addition to *She Ascends*' imprecise geolocation in augmented space, the lack of public signage announcing the monument produced other alienating effects. Returning to Metro Hall at the site/location of the AR installation in 2023, I interviewed members of the public to test the casual and spontaneous, self-directed social interactions and choreographies that arise when sharing the 4th Wall app experience with people in public space.[91] On Jun 17, 2023, I visited 6th & Jefferson in front of the Thomas Jefferson memorial, which stands directly before Metro Hall. Walking across Jefferson Street toward a group of teens, I greeted random pedestrians to inquire if they were aware of the AR memorial to Taylor at that precise location. One young man replied, "I did not know that." Using my own phone to illustrate how to access it, I showed the group how the memorial appears in front of Metro Hall in the 4th Wall app. I ask if they could see it by showing them my phone and pointing out that it would appear directly in front of the building on their phones, too, but first required them to download the app to view it.

On a separate occasion, two men walked toward me to access a view of the Thomas Jefferson monument at Metro Hall. [92] I initiated social engagement, stating, "Hi, did you know that there's an AR app that actually lets you see a memorial to Breonna Taylor right here?" "No, I did not," one man replied to which I added, "I downloaded it – it's called 4th Wall. Can you see? it's got Breonna going up to the sky, angel wings, all the protestors that

[90] Brianna Harlan, *Louisville People's Art Report*, 2020. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a09a9f1f9a61ee5b2b2baad/t/6134ee277c894d65d3251bef/1630858795196/LPAR.pdf
[91] Anonymous, personal interview with the author, June 17, 2023.
[92] Anonymous, personal interview with the author, June 17, 2023.

were once here." I hold up my phone to exhibit the monument and with genuine surprise the man exclaims, "AHH, I didn't know about that." This interaction offered an opportunity for me to explain that I only knew about it because I happened to know the curators/artists: "They told me about this, but nobody can see it 'cause it's invisible unless you download the app, but if you knew it was there, would you be interested in seeing it, downloading it?" The man paused to think about it and said, "Maybe not. No, I think I'm good." Before walking away in ambivalence, he added that a QR code would allow someone to quickly access the app.

Extrapolating from the app's 4th Wall metaphor, the mobile AR technology should enable publics to see and experience public art interventions that augment our conventional understandings of theater, art, and civic space. Rather than sitting in chairs in a hushed auditorium to view a staged performance or wandering around a museum from one sculpture to the next, in digitally embodied placemaking, audiences should be able to engage the city as augmented stage actors. Yet due to the absence of public signage at Metro Hall informing visitors to download the 4th Wall App, people peruse the site unable to access, sense, and embody the digitally realized memorial. As Cahill maintains, the app ostensibly allows for stealth artistic correctives of authoritarian monuments. Yet as indicated in the interactions above, the app user must already know to look for them within the app at a particular geographic location. Without a priori knowledge of the app's existence or an informational object label or signage at Metro Hall, users cannot begin to know how to access the artistic imagery or fully appreciate the imagery. While those with the app hold their phones up to a particular location and gaze upon an augmented theatrical treatment of the site, others lacking a phone, WIFI, and/or the app see the un-realized mediated environment as it stands.

Regarding 21c's missing public signage or a QR code for *She Ascends* at Metro Hall, in 2023, Stites said that only city officials had the power to make that decision:

> Whether they'd be open to including information about *She Ascends*, I don't know. I think that's a really good question and I would like to ask that. Because yeah, that might make more people aware of it, might spur someone to reinvestigate the murder of Alberta Jones. I mean you never know. I don't know. . . . We're living in such a fraught time that people have knee jerk reactions and make assumptions. I think people tread lightly, especially people in government. It's really hard to find people that have the courage, right? I kind of wanna see what I can do, to just ask the question about a QR code.[93]

Stites' response suggests several ideas. One is that before this point, it was not anticipated as part of the curation to ask officials for permission to place accessible public signage at the site. Another is that the curator anticipated "people in government" would have intense reactions about a sign for *She Ascends*. In this admission, Stites acknowledges that asking the city would have required interfacing with politicians and members of metro government who had the power to make the decision. The underlying concern, she suggests, is that meaningful visibility would make people more aware of it, which would have unforeseen and potentially unmanageable effects. Stites even volunteered that if more people saw it, *She Ascends* could spur a renewed investigation of Jones' murder. She did not mention that it could have also created unwanted political blowback for 21c in the summer of 2020 when CEO Greenberg was resigning from 21c to plan his next bid for Louisville Mayor.

21c advertised remembrance of Taylor when it was politically advantageous for the institution in 2020. Yet the Museum Hotel avoided the curatorial work to effectively "say her name" on a sign in civic space. The artwork is still live in the 4th Wall as of 2024, yet members of the public do not know it is there. Risk avoidant, 21c choreographed the de-

[93] Alice Stites, personal interview with the author, June 14, 2023.

politicization of the artwork that mobilized social critique that embodied a threat to hegemonic institutional and civic control.

She Ascends was a hybrid virtual and civic monument that required care in the augmented and civic realm. Making the mobile-phone-contingent memorial artwork inaccessible in civic space reinforced barriers to augmented public space and civic participation. Like "invisible stagehands," Stites and Cahill choreographed *She Ascends* from behind the scenes, which amplified the institutional brand of 21c and technological infrastructure of 4th Wall. Yet their choreographies minimized the immersive experience and public impact of Harlan's monumental artwork, resulting in the relative abandonment of *She Ascends*.

Quickly rolled out by 21c in a symbolic and expedient act of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name Movements, *She Ascends* illuminates the politics of curating, public art, and placemaking in the neoliberal city. The 4th Wall app provided a free, innovative platform for 21c to "gesture towards" socially engaged art and activism in quasi solidarity with artists at a time of great social unrest when institutions like 21c performatively responded to the political moment.[94]

Structuring *She Ascends*' as an ephemeral memorial, 4th Wall supported the hotel in maintaining its central position to claim artistically innovative projects in civic space while absorbing socially engaged artistic activism in Louisville. 21c lent 4th Wall and Harlan its institutional imprimatur while preserving its own reputation as a bourbon, arts, and tourist destination as it was under public attack for racial discrimination during civil unrest. While

[94] Tiffany Hsu, "Corporate Voices Get Behind 'Black Lives Matter' Cause," *The New York Times,* May 31, 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/business/media/companies-marketing-black-lives-matter-george-floyd.html.

the gilded statue of David still stands at 21c, *She Ascends* hovers in augmented civic space. Yet it remains to be seen.

Ch. 4 Actors Theatre of Louisville: Virtual Placemaking in Crisis

Artistic City argues how diverse aesthetic practices of urban space result in specific performative iterations of placemaking. Chapter 1 demonstrated how the city government art's agency choreographed hegemonic placemaking to re-brand segregated civic space through bourbon gentrification prior to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. Louisville's corporate planners instrumentalized public art to override structural racism and re-direct public passion towards the intensified bourbon branding of downtown. Chapter 2 examined how the local Breonna Taylor movement's re-iconization and re-infrastructuring of a government park choreographed radically embodied placemaking to temporarily transform the neoliberal city into #Breewayy. In social justice performances, local activists usurped hegemonic placemaking by re-purposing iconic statues and occupying government space. Chapter 3 illustrated how 21c Museum Hotel responded to the police killing of Taylor by curating a site-specific, Augmented-Reality memorial, *She Ascends*, which I argue is a form of digitally embodied placemaking. Corporate art elites staged artistic activism in the form of symbolic reconciliation and remembrance at Louisville's Metro Hall.

Chapter 4 analyzes how Actors Theatre of Louisville performed locally *relevant virtual placemaking* during the pandemic and protest crises. The Theatre mobilized public discourse and mutual aid for artists and communities during 2020-2021. Actors' anti-racist artistic leadership and inclusive programming also redressed institutional white supremacy. Yet the work that Actors performed was also entangled in an exploitative capitalist funding environment in which corporate foundations gave to non-profits to offset their companies' locally destructive impacts, thus placing the burden of community repair on the non-profit. In Louisville, arts institutions are folded into this enduring funding *paradox* wherein politically

progressive non-profits are sustained by corporate wealth generated from legacies of plantation capitalism.

Actors Theatre of Louisville

Actors Theatre of Louisville is an arts and culture organization as social enterprise utilizing a transmedia multiplatform approach. This strategically centers experiences that reflect a civic commitment to the social good and the ***health and wellness*** *of the many constituents we serve. In pursuing a synthesis of art and service, our interdisciplinary laboratory intersects art, emergent technology, and social transformation for a storytelling (r)evolution. Actors Theatre is committed to the ongoing disruption of the cycles of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation.* ***Anti-racism and anti-oppression are essential in an ecosystem that has profited from the historic antecedent of plantation capitalism.*** *By supporting the fully flourishing local and global community committed to equitable service, we have animated and operationalized our values in staffing, governance and programming.*[1]

An internationally renowned destination for experimental theater based in bourbon country, Actors is most known in theater circles outside of the city for its International Humana Festival of New American Plays. Every year since 1976, the event has provided a career milestone for emerging playwrights, launch pad for world premieres, and potential gateway to critical acclaim. Yet at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March of 2020 the 44th Humana Festival of New American Plays had to be canceled as gathering in groups evaporated and social distancing became the norm during the crisis (see figure 1). Actors' virtual programming in 2020-2021 mobilized ticketed performances and free critical conversations online, providing Louisville constituents with a platform to confront the political, social, and economic crises unfolding in the polis.

I employ cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's definition of the term crisis as a "drama that shocks being into radically open situations . . . that elaborates the potential good in a radical break."[2] The author specifies "crisis" as a method in which individuals live on in an incoherent relation to desire, and posits a *relation of cruel optimism* to describe how an object of desire is also an obstacle to one's idealized fantasies of attainment. In longing for

[1] Actors Theatre of Louisville, "Mission," actorstheatre.org/about-us.
[2] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 5.

"the good life" within a fraying liberal capitalist meritocracy, an individual maintains optimism for the fantasy despite the inability to achieve the goal. This sense of possibility within a futile relation is what Berlant deems *cruel*.[3]

Following the viral outbreak and the killing of Taylor, downtown Louisville's late capitalist staging of what Berlant would term "the good life" registered as a cruel and futile fantasy to many.[4] Although Berlant wrote *Cruel Optimism* after the Occupy movement began in September of 2011, they foresaw American crisis in the "Trumping of Politics."[5] Indeed, former President Donald J. Trump capitalized on affective politics to appeal to voters with a sentimental prospect of the "American Dream" to "Make America Great Again." Despite the neoliberal conditions of ordinary life having already drained U.S. workers before Covid-19 and Trump struck, the rise of the pandemic forced a new imposition on the normalized daily suffering of neoliberal subjects.

The display of police killing in 2020, re-emergent white nationalism, and the protracted pandemic period evidenced Berlant's notion of the "cruelty of the now."[6] Protestors fighting for social justice placed their bodies in the streets while in clinics and hospitals they suffered exclusion and unequal access to adequate healthcare in the U.S. Partially housed in a neoclassical building in what was formerly the Bank of Louisville, Actors Theatre stood empty near the epicenter of the downtown protests a few blocks from Justice Square Park where Black Lives Matter activists occupied the government center for over 180 days. As local civil unrest from Taylor's murder and Covid-related economic

[3] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* p. 19.
[4] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism.*
[5] Hua Hsu, "Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety," *New Yorker*, March 18, 2019.
[6] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism.*

downturn threatened Actors' survival, the Theatre responded to these crises by improvising politically and socially relevant online public programming to better serve local audiences.

Fig. 1. Actors Theatre Building Advertising 44th Humana Festival. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

Fig. 2. Actors Theatre façade showing Black Lives Matter Mural. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2020.

Actors demonstrated its relevance to the city during the pandemic and social justice movement by programming beyond its building. Theater scholar Alan Read asserts,

"Theatre's relevance and innovation are contingent upon variable political perspectives" located specifically within the *polis*.[7] Read interprets *theater* as a theory within a practice that looks beyond the building to prove its relevance in and to the larger urban context. He draws on the term *theorein,* which is formed from two words, *thea* and *horao*, in which thea translates to "outward look" or the way something shows itself.[8]

Actors announced that its digitally innovative lineup for a virtual 2020-2021 season would be presented through a new digital platform, Actors Theatre Direct, the company's "multi-channel, transmedia approach to storytelling."[9] The season included a wide range of content, including poet Hannah Drake's *Fix It Black Girl*, and educator Erica Denise's *Unscripted* series, which held community conversations like "Why We Riot/Why We Write" on Facebook Live. The 45th Humana Festival that year featured playwright Idris Goodwin's *Ali Summit* based on the activism of Louisville native Muhammad Ali. Actors' new virtual stage pointedly addressed structural racism and systematic injustices that led to police violence and ongoing heath and wealth disparities in Louisville's largely segregated Black and Brown communities. The Theatre mobilized a virtual civic space and artistic public sphere for critical dialogue surrounding the killing of Taylor, ensuing social unrest, the ongoing wealth gap between Black and white families, and other relevant topics.

Performance scholar Miranda Joseph's "Against the Romance of Community" informs my analysis of the non-profit's relevant virtual placemaking during crisis.[10] I apply Joseph's idea of how non-profits deploy the romance of community discourse in order to

[7] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1993).
[8] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life*, p. 11.
[9] "Actors Theatre of Louisville Announces Lineup for a Virtual 2020-2021," ATL press release, June 03, 2020.
[10] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002.

supplement their capitalistic function.[11] Non-profits such as Actors confront a paradox, or catch-22, in which the institution that serves local communities reeling from catastrophe is also funded by philanthropic gifts from extractive corporations that in part either cause or contribute to the very catastrophes arising in those communities.

As evidence of philanthropic support, in addition to its annual festival funding from the Humana Insurance foundation, the non-profit's 2020-2021 digital series was sponsored by the Louisville-based, global, multi-billion-dollar whiskey conglomerate, Brown-Forman.[12] The Browns are listed as thirteenth on the Forbes list of wealthiest US families, with a combined net worth of $20.4 billion."[13] As a plantation economy of the South, the bourbon industry was established by enslaved labor in states such as Kentucky and Tennessee, and only recently has Brown-Forman acknowledged the role of enslaved Black distillers' contributions to the history of bourbon production. For example, in 2016, Brown-Forman, which is parent company to Jack Daniels, said that Jack Daniels himself was taught how to distill by an enslaved man named Nathan "Nearest" Green.[14] Fawn Weaver, a co-founder of Uncle Nearest bourbon, which is named after Green, said, "All (distilleries) began the same way. They all had slaves that were putting the barrels together, rolling the barrels. Not one wasn't utilizing slaves for this."[15]

While there has been a twenty-year boom in bourbon production and increased representation of Black entrepreneurs in the industry, the Brown-Forman bourbon dynasty

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[11] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community,* p. 9.
[12] "Actors Theatre of Louisville Announces Lineup for a Virtual 2020-2021," ATL press release, June 03, 2020.
[13] Forbes, "Profile: Brown family: $20.4B: 2020 America's Richest Families Net Worth as of 12/16/20," https://www.forbes.com/profile/brown/?sh=ab1fe1958148.
[14] Bailey Loosemore, "'We Can't Forget': Kentucky is (slowly) recognizing the role of slaves in bourbon's legacy," *Louisville Courier Journal,* June 27, 2019.
[15] Bailey Loosemore, "'We Can't Forget': Kentucky is (slowly) recognizing the role of slaves in bourbon's legacy," *Louisville Courier Journal,* June 27, 2019.

that funds the community-serving non-profit Actors Theatre still indirectly subsidizes land dispossession and gentrification in low-income Black neighborhoods. This process has led to racialized violence through policing, particularly in Louisville's West End, including the Russell neighborhood, where Taylor was from.[16] At a time of committed racial reckoning and institutional virtue signaling, in 2020, Actors utilized Brown-Forman funding to perform a pertinent, anti-racist community response to local crisis.

Actors Theatre in Crisis, 2020-2021

In 2020, black box theaters such as Actors were in crisis because everyday life was in crisis. Fantasies of theater's "in-personness" endured as performers and audiences waited out a deadly pandemic, deprived of income and the stage. In a larger U.S. context, writing only nine days after New York theaters shut down, Alexandra Schwartz wrote in *The New Yorker*, "The suddenness with which the city's performance ecosystem has vanished defies comprehension—it's as if the Great Barrier Reef had died overnight. Grasping for comparison, we have to look well beyond the proximate disasters of Hurricane Sandy and 9/11, when, ultimately, the shows went resolutely on."[17] What was immediately apparent was how difficult theatre was to replace.[18] Absent the architectural space of the theater and stage in Louisville, Actors' leadership and audiences also recognized their attachment to the building's object-ness and the conjoined ritual of attending in person productions pre-Covid. The then-new Artistic Director Robert Barry Fleming reflected:

> For this community and the national and international theatre industry, closing the Humana Festival is not dissimilar to canceling the [Kentucky] Derby or NCAA basketball tournament — a central event in the national and international artistic landscape. . . To my knowledge, there was no other theatre in the country whose

[16] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 151.
[17] Alexandra Schwartz, Performers on Lockdown Turn to Their Cell Phones, *The New Yorker*, 2020.
[18] Alexandra Schwartz, Performers on Lockdown Turn to Their Cell Phones, *The New Yorker*, 2020.

> recent decision to close their doors resulted in the shutdown of five world premiere plays.[19]

Fleming's statement revealed a shared attachment to the ritual of attending live Humana performances pre-Covid. Since its inception, the Festival had become an annual destination for members of the theatre industry who would descend on the city for a window of time to witness cutting-edge plays. Critic Jeremy Gerard wrote:

> For more than three decades, it was a vernal rite as attention-demanding as the Run for the Roses a few weeks later. . . lacking a home base but adept at pitching stories for a pittance to penny-pinching editors, I scored assignments from five big-city broadsheets, assuring the festival (and my byline) of exposure to a significant chunk of the American populace for compensation which, in the aggregate, almost covered the cost of flying to Kentucky, bunking down at the posh-like Seelbach Hotel among fellow ink-stained kvetches (remember ink?), producers, agents, managers, spouses, not-spouses, and all manner of hangers-on, and taking in a long—a very long—weekend of shows at the multi-stage complex comprising the Actors Theatre of Louisville."[20]

Historically, the Humana Festival remained separate from Actors' predictable local theater fare—*A Christmas Carol* and *Dracula*, for example—which explained why critics such as Gerard were not otherwise lured to see theater in Louisville each spring. However, in 2020, no one visited Actors or the Humana Festival since U.S. cities, their theaters, staff, performers, and audiences were in a state of crisis. Locally, Actors, as well as nearby distilleries, hotels, and restaurants, boarded up their windows and hired artists to paint Black Lives Matter murals on the sides of buildings (see figure 2). Like many downtown businesses, the non-profit theater displayed such signs of solidarity, however, these displays were also deployed as shields to deter vandalism and looting as the city shuttered and

[19] Shea Van Hoy, "Actors Theatre Leader on the Weight of Canceling the Humana Festival of Plays," *Bizjournals.com,* April 24, 2020.
[20] Jeremy Girard, "In Louisville There Once Was a Festival," *American Theatre,* April 18, 2022

protests continued. While Actors' physical structure communicated messages of social justice to protestors and fellow businesses on the street, it had become a monumental shell.

I analyze Actors beyond its building in an expanded virtual field to contextualize its 2020-21 relevant virtual placemaking performance as a practiced application and outward demonstration of its ethics in relation to local communities. At this time, the building became insignificant in relation to the city in crisis. Read writes that conventional thought suggests that there is binary between the inside of the theater and the outside, where everyday life, politics, and community art occur.[21] He argues that the idea that theater and everyday life are entirely separate is the more profound crisis that creates a crisis of relevance for the theater. His emphasis on the everyday assists my argument that Actors performed its relevance by moving beyond the building to showcase innovative digital theatre to specifically connect with and serve local communities.

With this understanding of the theater's relevance as predicated on the exigencies of everyday life in the city, I examine Actors as part and constitutive of the political polis of crisis ordinariness in Louisville where protestors risked their lives to rally in person for justice for Taylor while the pandemic clarified the already limited access to healthcare for Black people and historically marginalized groups. In 2020, it was reported that the state of Kentucky lagged in racial equity for vaccine access. While Black Kentuckians make up around 8% of the state's population, they received only around 5% of the administered shots.[22] As people awaited vaccination or their next stimulus check, the crisis of social distancing mandates combined with racial and wealth inequality functioned as a double

[21] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, pp. 1-2.
[22] Ryan Van Velzer, "One Year of Covid-19 in Kentucky by the Numbers," *WFPL.org*, March 15, 2021.

impasse that required many people to adjust to a highly isolated and precarious state of survival. The pandemic situation created a health catastrophe, the difficulty of which was complicated by local and nationwide civil unrest. During this period of crisis ordinariness, Actors demonstrated its philosophical and practical commitments to local health and wellness, anti-racism, and anti-oppression.

Prior to 2020, Louisville business leaders advertised the city as the bourbon capital of the world and poured millions of dollars into new distilleries with adjacent hotels and restaurants, yet the same leaders did not foresee that the commercial whiskey properties lining Main Street would ultimately sit empty for months.[23] Such signs of economic downturn and civic turmoil contradicted the superficial branding of Louisville as a genteel tourist destination with its multitudinous posters of white male whiskey pioneers and Derby-themed plop art.[24] From "Wanted" signs for the three officers responsible for Taylor's death in her own home to the defaced and disappeared King Louis XVI statue across the street from Taylor's makeshift memorial, known locally as "Injustice Square and Breewayy," downtown Louisville culture reflected local protestors' urgent calls to end structural racism and police brutality. Locally, the rise of Covid-19 and outrage over Louisville's mismanaged investigation of Taylor's case created a sense of acute crisis ordinariness. As Louisville confronted the reality that there would be no return to "pre-Covid" normalcy," Actors Theatre leveraged the quarantine online.

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[23] Brian Wright, "Distillery Visits May Be Paused, but Old Forester Continues to Evolve," May 2020, https://beyond.breakthrubev.com/articles/Old-Forester-Distillery-Continues-to-Evolve.

[24] "Plop art" is a phrase attributed to architect James Wines to describe sculpture installed in a public plaza, https://www.curbed.com/2022/07/21-questions-architect-james-wines.html. As a curator in Louisville, I was asked to adjudicate a Derby-themed exhibition with fiberglass horses entitled *Gallopalooza*, which I characterize as plop art.

Actors' Pre-Pandemic Crisis: Theater's Structural Inequality

Actors openly redressed structural racism and inequality during this period after a history of racist and hegemonic institutional practices that predated Fleming's arrival in 2019. While Actors has garnered many awards since its inception in the 1960s, including a Tony Award as an outstanding non-profit resident theater, and had three Humana Festival plays receive the Pulitzer Prize, its legacy also reflects a history of racial exclusion as well as white supremacy and elitism pervasive throughout the wider theater industry.[25] Before Robert Barry Fleming was hired, Actors had exclusively white male artistic leadership, showed few plays by Black playwrights, often failed to attract local audiences of color, and operated using unpaid apprentice labor.[26] The infrastructures that enabled or negated access to productions at Actors in downtown Louisville, for example, were always already present and contingent on intersections of race, class, sex and gender.

Critiquing U.S. theater institutions, in 2020, a coalition of hundreds of prominent theater-makers of color issued a 29-pagelist statement, "We See You White American Theater," in which they demanded white American theater stop catering to white audiences and hire and include BIPOC artists and staff.[27] A National Endowment for the Arts-funded study published in *The Gerontologist* in 2018 acknowledged that "Mainstream theatre audiences are known to be selectively white, well-educated, and affluent," and Actors Theatre's audience conformed to that expectation. The study recognized that their

[25] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville*, 2008.
[26] Jeffrey Ullom, *Theatre History Studies,* June 2005, p. 30
[27] "We See You White American Theatre," https://www.weseeyouwat.com/about, 2020.

"participants were wealthier, more educated, and less ethnically diverse than the general population."[28]

The history of both Actors Theatre's and Louisville's institutional artistic leadership has also been white and male. In a departure from this institutional history, on March 11, 2019, Actors Theatre announced the hiring of Fleming as the new Artistic Director, prompting local arts commentator Allie Fireel to write:

> Fleming is an awesome and interesting choice in his own right, but arts leadership in Louisville is Edelweiss AF, so a black man in leadership is important, and only the second such leader in the Big 5; Louisville Ballet, the Kentucky Opera, Kentucky Shakespeare, the Louisville Orchestra, and Stage One. Idris Goodwin, who took the reign of StageOne . . . has been a little quiet this year, as far as the public eye goes. . . . Fleming is an out (and presumably proud) gay man, and that is also a huge shift. Queer issues have been onstage at Actors for a long time, but the company has never had (out) queer leadership before. But in the community and on the scene he's been everywhere, meeting everyone, and you can tell he's got big plans. Between Fleming and Goodwin, Louisville is sending a clear message, it wants to do a lot more than pay lip service to the idea of diversity.[29]

Actors sought leadership that would reflect the hiring trends of other regional theaters in the 21st century. The delay in hiring Black leadership reflects the challenges of social and political change within a conservative Southern culture.[30]

Looking back to the Theatre's second season, 1967-68, Actors' Board fiercely objected to the first Artistic Director Richard Block's announcement that Actors had hired three African American actors. The Board supposedly did not object to Block's politics but rather to "his unfortunate timing of the announcement" because it purportedly gave the appearance that the theatre took a progressive stance in the midst of a civil-rights debate in a conservative town when the city saw a week of contentious civil rights marches for open

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[28] Suzanne Meeks, etal. "Theatre Involvement and Well-Being, Age Differences, and Lessons From Long-Time Subscribers," *The Gerontologist* 58, no. 2, April 2018, Pages 278–289, https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx029.
[29] Allie Fireel, **"**4 Big Thoughts On Actors Theatre's New AD Robert Barry Fleming, And What He Could Change In Louisville," *Arts Writing Is Dead, Regional Arts and Culture Online Magazine***,** March 11, 2019.
[30] Jessica Wortham, personal interview with the author, November 13, 2023.

housing in Louisville.[31] By 1969, Block announced he would resign, however, it was understood that he was forced out.[32]

In response to criticism that new play festivals should reflect a multicultural society, Actors' illustrious second Artistic Director Jon Jory replied, "Perhaps it's because we are a Southern theater or a theater with white leadership, but we have never got a lot of plays by African Americans in the mail. Of the good ones, we have turned down very few."[33] In a more recent context, a *New York Times* article from 2001 discussed the third incoming artistic director Marc Masterson's new role and specifically criticized the outgoing director Jory for not producing more plays by Black playwrights. Author Chris Jones wrote, "Black writers have never been a large presence at Humana. Aside from 10-minute works, the last play by an African American was Regina Taylor's "Between the Lines" in the 1994-95 season."[34] According to former *Louisville Courier Journal* theater critic Judith Egerton, the *Humana Festival* rarely included "an African American play" and preferred to select plays by certain authors "with whom it was comfortable."[35] However, Masterson's festival tenure saw more experimental plays than did Jory's whose selections tended toward the more commercially viable.

Signifying the shift in tastes and leadership, in 2001, Masterson commissioned *Description Beggared; or the Allegory of Whiteness*, which was written by Mac Wellman—a white playwright. One reviewer described *Allegory of Whiteness* as "a cautionary tale of modern-day Victorians," writing:

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[31] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville*, 2008, p. 26.
[32] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville*, 2008, p. 27.
[33] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville*, 2008, p. 148.
[34] Chris Jones, "Will a New Broom at Humana Sweep the Old Era Away?" *The New York Times*, March 11, 2001.
[35] Judith Egerton as quoted in Chris Jones, "Will a New Broom at Humana Sweep the Old Era Away?" *NYT*, 2001.

> Wellman's landscape of the ruling class is improbably white—clothing, hair, snow, skin. The stage is in the round, with a floor painted in concentric rings of white and less white, simultaneously a rug and target for the family reunion atop it. At the edge of the millennium, on the fringes of a Rhode Island swollen to continent-size, the Ring Family has gathered for their portrait. Like a blacklight, Wellman reveals the grotesque pallor of their whiteness, with its implications of unsullied purity and its underlying reality of delusion and erasure.[36]

In its Louisville staging, *Allegory of Whiteness* could have also been interpreted as a satirical indictment of the racial privilege of the local ruling class beyond that of Rhode Island; yet, it was characterized as "easily the most confusing play in the Humana Festival's history."[37] Under Masterson, Actors also presented the plays of August Wilson for the first time, prompting criticism that during his 31 years at Actors, Jory had ignored "theater's poet of Black America."[38] Author Jeffrey Ullom writes that "A perception was created that Actors Theatre would produce work about African Americans only if it was either a local story (*Ali)* or a musical that might also appeal to all audiences."[39]

In addition to an historic dearth of artistic directors, playwrights, and audiences of color, Ullom writes that Actors relied upon the free labor of interns:

> With the growing reputation of the festival and the theatre, the administrative leaders seized the opportunity to stabilize the rising costs of hiring short-term labor/artists for the festival by recruiting the best young talent in its Apprentice/Internship Program and allowing these younger artists and administrators to participate in the operations of the theatre. The growth of the festival, however, also necessitated the enlargement of the program while not becoming a financial burden to the theatre; as a result, the theatre relies on the free labor of these interns to help shoulder the responsibility of organizing and running the festival, ensuring its smooth operation and success. As a reciprocal benefit, the larger Apprentice/Internship Program also helps further the theatre's reputation and influence by training young talents who then disperse around the country, assuming a variety of positions and roles in professional theatre.[40]

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[36] Adrien-Alice Hansel, "Rings around America: Wellman and Mee Wax Allegorical," *Theater* (2002) 32 (1), p. 111.
[37] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville*, 2008, p. 147.
[38] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival*, p. 151.
[39] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana* Festival, p. 152.
[40] Jeffrey Ullom, *Theatre History Studies*, June 2005, p. 30.

Over half a century old, the longstanding apprentice/intern company at Actors employed approximately 20 performers and 20 interns who worked on a six-show season that was separate from the theater's mainstage season. This company worked for free for years until 2015, when Actors received a $1.2 million grant from the Roy Cockrum Foundation earmarked for the apprentice/intern company. Cockrum was an actor and stage manager who received $153 million from a winning Powerball ticket, which prompted him to establish a foundation to support nonprofit theaters. The funding provided grants of approximately $5,000 to each apprentice and intern for living expenses for 10 years as well as helped underwrite year-round employment for the apprentice company's leadership.[41]

During the virtual season of 2020, Actors cut the apprentice program to 10 people. Fleming's idea was to take the Cockrum Foundation stipend and divide it between 10 instead of 40 apprentices because he did not have the staff to instruct or foster the apprentices and interns. He felt it was irresponsible to take on 40 interns with a staff of 30 people.[42] As a result of Fleming's division of the Cockrum grant money among fewer interns, the Foundation pulled the grant money.

With Fleming's arrival, the new director also inherited the responsibility to balance the institution's severe financial deficit. During Fleming's first year at Actors, due to the "financial mess he inherited," he laid off one eighth of the staff.[43] To address the budgetary shortfall, before the pandemic took hold in the United States, Actors announced that nine full-time employees were laid off as "part of what officials say is an 'organizational restructuring.'" Fleming stated, "Actors is moving toward building a "financially sustainable

[41] Elizabeth Kramer, "Actors Theatre receives $1.2 million grant," *Louisville Courier Journal*, June 16, 2015.
[42] Jessica Wortham, personal interview with the author, November 13, 2023.
[43] Jessica Wortham, personal interview with the author, November 13, 2023.

business model" and "We found it necessary to reorganize our administrative and operational staff and reallocate responsibilities in a manner that foregrounds interdepartmental collaboration and enhances patron experience."[44] Long-term employees such as Allison Courington were devastated by the news. In a Facebook post, Courington wrote, "So, the rumors are true. I've been ousted from the old bank vault. I'm luckier than most because I have various safety nets in place and should be able to find another place to land soon. I am sad for the others who have experienced today's bloodbath and will miss the wonderful volunteers and my exceptional staff."[45]

Then when the pandemic hit, more staff were laid off or furloughed. Downsizing staff and the apprentice program, the Theatre put its mission statement into practice to "operationalize" its values in "staffing, governance, and programming."[46] As dueling existential crises unfolded in its own backyard, Actors radically broke with tradition to re-invent itself as a more financially viable, creatively inclusive, locally indispensable activist platform and digital city stage.[47] With Humana Insurance foundation funding still earmarked for the Humana Festival season of 2020-2021, Actors assembled multi-disciplinary artists, multi-racial, multi-ethnic communities and Louisville-based business leaders and constituents who articulated relevant, ethical, and creative performances and public discourse online.

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[44] Kyeland Jackson, *Louisville Public Media*, January 27, 2020, www.lpm.org/news/2020-01-27/actors-theatre-says-layoffs-part-of-organizational-restructuring.
[45] Allison Courington Hammons, Facebook Post, January 27, 2020.
[46] Actors Theatre of Louisville website "About Us" https://www.actorstheatre.org/about-us/.
[47] Actors Theater of Louisville, "Protesters: Who's on the Frontlines? A discussion with protesters who've risked their lives daring to stand on the front lines of the protests," *Unscripted* conversation series, moderated by Erica Denise, livestreamed on July 1, 2020. This was one of several *Unscripted* online discussions between 2020-2021.

2020-2021 Virtual Placemaking

Through virtual placemaking, Actors staff, artists, and guest speakers produced an online social infrastructure for mutual aid and meaningful "face to face" communication. Many speakers pointedly denounced the Louisville Metro Police Department while mourning the tragedy of Taylor's death, and collectively grappled with the traumatic effects of anti-Black racism in the late capitalist context. On June 3, 2020, Actors announced the company's new multi-channel approach to virtual storytelling, which explored how "theatre can be shared and of service to those continuing to process the tragic murder of Breonna Taylor and a weekend of protests and violence during the ongoing disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic."[48] To illustrate its virtual placemaking, I specifically profile Actors' *Unscripted*; *The Ali Summit*; and *Community Conversations* series; however, the Theatre also offered several other programs, including a collection of one-act plays entitled *COVID Classics* and a virtual production of *Romeo and Juliet* featuring a cast of young, non-binary, racially and ethnically diverse inhabitants living in a fractured society at war with itself.[49]

Additionally, responding to the pandemic's pressure on healthcare workers, Actors also announced a new partnership with nurse and dancer Tara Rynders, artistic director of The Clinic, to support frontline nurses in the Louisville region through artistically immersive experiences.[50] In the midst of the pandemic, Actors' turn to healthcare-related programming in a local context laid bare the challenges of essential workers in the neoliberal city. In the theater's past, healthcare was a taboo subject for Actors who had received funding from a corporate health insurance foundation since 1979.[51] According to Ullom, in all that time

[48] Actors Theatre, https://www.actorstheatre.org/archive/2021-lineup/.
[49] Actors Theatre, https://www.actorstheatre.org/search/.
[50] Actors Theatre, https://www.actorstheatre.org/humana-festival/.
[51] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival,* p. 70.

Actors had never produced a play that was critical of health maintenance organizations or the business of Humana, Inc., and Artistic Director Jory claimed that he never received a "well-written" play that criticized America's healthcare system.[52]

During the pandemic, however, Actors directly tackled the subjects of health and wellness, healthcare worker burnout, and compassion fatigue. In this period, Fleming asserted that Actors was "able to accomplish something no other theater has been able to with their streaming options: create a custom hosting/streaming solution that fulfilled the distribution parameters outlined by our union concessions."[53] The latter were temporary agreements that the national labor union representing professional actors and stage managers in live theatre—Actors' Equity Association—crafted to loosen theater restrictions on streaming due to the Covid crisis.[54] The new remote work agreements allowed "select producers to capture and make a performance available online for one-time viewing to ticket buyers."[55] As a result, Fleming continued, "We've seen strong ticket sales . . . from "new to file" audiences, folks who are experiencing Actors Theatre and the Humana Festival for the first time, thanks to the low barrier of digital access."[56] The same article announced that the

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[52] Jeffrey Ullom, *The Humana Festival,* p. 72.
[53] Shea Van Hoy, "Actors Theatre Leader on the Weight of Canceling the Humana Festival of Plays," *Bizjournals.com,* April 24, 2020.
[54] Alex Ates, "Reports From the Field: How Regional Theaters Are Responding to COVID-19," *Backstage.com,* April 9, 2020.
[55] Actors' Equity Association, "Actors' Equity Makes New, Temporary Agreements Available to Producers in Areas With Limits on Public Gatherings," press release, March 19, 2020. The release quotes Mary McColl, executive director of AEA: "These new remote work agreements help protect the economic security of Equity members with additional weekly salaries and health care contributions," said Mary McColl, executive director of Actors' Equity Association. "When theaters go dark, actors and stage managers face tremendous economic uncertainty. A remote work agreement can be a win for everyone, from the audience to the actors and stage managers."
[56] Shea Van Hoy, "Actors Theatre Leader on the Weight of Canceling the Humana Festival of Plays," *Bizjournals.com,* April 24, 2020.

2020-21 Brown-Forman season "rigorously reimagined the role of the arts during a turbulent moment of global uncertainty."[57]

In the catastrophic year of 2020, Brown-Forman Corporation and the Brown-Forman Foundation's combined charitable contributions totaled $13 million, and their investment recipients included Actors Theatre of Louisville, the YMCA, and Volunteers of America, et cetera.[58] Through Brown-Forman's and other financial gifts, Actors effectively leveraged the crisis moment to sell the new digital season to protestors, people living in quarantine, BIPOC, LGBTQ, and nonbinary audiences. However, during this time, Actors also did not feature any new virtual plays that were critical of the urban bourbon gentrification, ecological, and health impacts of global whiskey production in the state of Kentucky. These negative effects of the bourbon industry were seemingly offset by the corporation's philanthropic donations to non-profits like Actors. The Theatre in turn endeavored to heal local communities through its ameliorative programming generously funded by "Big Bourbon."[59]

Unscripted: Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century

On June 10, 2020, Actors Education Director Erica Denise hosted an *Unscripted* conversation, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art and Protest in the 21st Century," on Facebook Live. It featured local leaders and activists who voiced specific perspectives on the Louisville protests.[60] Embodying multiple subjectivities and prominent constituencies, the panel included artistic director Fleming, poet Hannah Drake, Louisville Pastor Corrie Schull,

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[57] Shea Van Hoy, "Actors Theatre Leader on the Weight of Canceling the Humana Festival of Plays," *Bizjournals.com*, April 24, 2020.
[58] "Brown–Forman Makes Donation to Foundation," brownforman.com, July 30, 2020.
[59] "Big Bourbon" is my neologism for Brown-Forman as a hegemonic bourbon industry.
[60] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century" June 10, 2020. https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK.

and Attorney and social justice advocate, Sadiqa Reynolds. Actors' public sphere discourse reflected knowledge of oppressed communities and the Theatre's commitment to serving those communities in acute crisis. Denise and Fleming's efforts to mobilize Actors as a virtual gathering site allowed people to express their anger, grief, and critical understanding of the protests. Fleming stated that the social contract to honor peoples' individual humanity had been broken and questioned how protestors could move beyond their rage without a place to contain it.[61] Drake offered that her motivation to protest stemmed directly from the police killing of Taylor in her home: "This is why we are protesting. Not rioting. What I'm fighting for is justice—I don't care how you label it."[62] Pastor Schull asserted that "a racist, capitalist system" had deprived people from basic human dignity and resources.[63] In response to Schull, Reynolds contextualized the "righteous rage" of protestors as emblematic of the compound nature of traumatic events, including the pandemic and police brutality. She maintained that Black people have "no approved way" to "let this country know how we feel, what we need."[64] To exemplify her point, she cited how even the nonviolent gesture of civil

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[61] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century." June 10, 2020, https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK. Fleming specifically stated, "People are angry, justifiably so. As a 56-year-old queer black person, I have a specific paradigm for understanding what is useful and complicated about the nature of protest and rioting. Like there's a right way to revolutionize? I don't know that there's a handbook for that. A social contract has been broken, and people want to have their humanity honored and seen, having a ubiquitous compromise to that, the appropriate response to that is rage. How do we move forward when there doesn't seem to be a container for that rage?"

[62] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century" June 10, 2020, https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK. Hannah Drake remarked, "For Louisville, we are protesting for Breonna Taylor. She was a Black woman, 26, killed in her home by LMPD, which is why I wear this shirt that says #nomorenoknocks. Police shot and killed her. I think America, and certainly Louisville is at the point that enough is just enough."

[63] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century," June 10, 2020, https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK. Pastor Corie Schull offered, "Some of the anger is because many people, for the entirety of their lives, have experienced deprivation at hands of a racist, capitalist system that has stripped from them basic human dignity—basic resources needed to have a livable and sustainable life. So you're starting to see that anger boil over."

[64] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century" June 10, 2020, https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK. Sadiqa Reynolds said, "When I think about Colin Kapernick kneeling, he kneeled quietly on that football field, and people were outraged, said he was disrespectful, disruptive, and so there is no approved way for Black people to let this country know how we

rights activist Colin Kaepernick taking a knee on the football field to protest racism in 2016 caused outrage.[65] Denise queried the panel if they had "any suggestions for white allies" to which Drake replied, "White people should talk to white people. They know they have resources."[66]

During this agonistic public discourse, Actors assisted in channeling Louisville's outrage to align with the theater's goals to diversify and expand its digital audience. As a non-profit institution performing during crisis, Actors' board, staff, artists, and local panelists labored to serve, recognize, and in turn, produce an increasingly local digital constituency. In its 2021-2022 Impact Report, Actors reported that 73% of members were new to the Theatre while 27% had previously subscribed.[67] Yet even before the pandemic, Fleming began to cultivate local communities. Jessica Wortham, an actor who worked with Fleming, told me in an interview that "Robert is very concerned with serving the theater's mission statement to the community–and is very aware of what a narrow lane in the community Actors had actually been serving."[68] Actors' pivot to virtual placemaking during catastrophe dovetailed with Fleming's pre-pandemic/protest mission of restructuring and moving away from its economically privileged, yet underpaid apprentice labor, its season

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feel, what we need. They just don't really want to hear from us, and I know there are good people of all races, but the power base says to us, your life does not matter, and we don't want you to interrupt our football game, not even w/ a knee. I have seen mostly peaceful protest, some property damage, which is not violence. Part of our challenge is to think about our economy, what has been built on the backs of Black Americans. We need to think about the structural issues. I feel like I am watching a volcano, I am watching it and I am in it. I am being burned. We have a right to our rage; I don't condone violence, but I understand, and so I don't condemn. Think about our community. With Covid 19, you got a pandemic and police brutality and you wonder why people are angry? So this is a righteous rage that we have and I hope we move to policy change; but it is good to see the diversity, to see so many white people standing with us.

[65] "What's taking the knee and why is it important?" *BBC*, https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53098516, Nov 21, 2022.

[66] Actors Theatre *Unscripted*, "Why We Riot/Why We Write: Art & Protest in the 21st Century" June 10, 2020, https://youtu.be/vDIY1x6bOLA?si=C68a0pujuXI3b7VK.

[67] Actors Theatre of Louisville Impact Report, 2021-2022, p. 4.

[68] Jessica Wortham, personal interview with the author, August 25, 2022.

subscription sales, and Eurocentric theater canon historically serving an older white upper middle-class audience. Yet when crises struck in 2020, the non-profit further platformed not only a proud theater community of queer, BIPOC artists and workers but solicited new customers through the deployment of activist and entrepreneurial discourse and novel technologies such as Augmented and Virtual Reality.

A Virtual 45th Humana Festival: *The Ali Summit*

As the protests and pandemic continued through 2020, rather than assembling bodies in physical space, the *Ali Summit* assembled audiences online. The *Ali Summit* began as a curated website, became a launching pad for a conversation on Black and Brown wealth building, then transitioned to an on-demand Virtual Reality experience that people could access on Actors' website, and concluded as a residency with local youth in schools.

The formerly Louisville-based playwright Idris Goodwin characterized his *Ali Summit* as a Humana play-in-progress, inspired by Muhammad Ali's famous 1967 conscientious objection to serving in the Vietnam War. Actors first advertised *The Summit* on its website, and then linked visitors to Goodwin's individual site where the self-identified scriptwriter and breakbeat poet's *Ali Project* displayed several videos, spoken word poems, audio recordings, iconic photographs, and text. "Welcome to the *Ali Summit*: A New Play in Progress" read the Actors' website title heading. "In this new play with deep local roots, acclaimed playwright and poet Idris Goodwin explores a defining moment in the story of a Louisville icon, collaborating with Actors Theatre to catalyze a dynamic community-building initiative."[69] A portrait of Goodwin appeared next to accompanying text that announced "A New Process For Changing Times" due to the Covid-19 impact of the

[69] Excerpted text from *The Ali Summit* on IdrisGoodwin.com, http://www.idrisgoodwin.com/alisummit.

performing arts, which prompts theater makers to "think about process and presentation in new ways."[70] Goodwin explained that he had initially approached new play development with the live stage in mind, with a 90-120 minute run time and eventual premiere on a physical stage.

On Goodwin's *Ali Summit* website, the artist archived his iterative creative process in a demonstration of how he attempted to build and communicate to audiences during social distancing mandates and a city in crisis. The *Ali Summit* signified an extension of Actors' stage to city streets and audiences beyond those with an expensive box seat. Goodwin's stylistic approach to the Humana Festival reflected a breakbeat cultural tradition that influenced Hip Hop, a movement that arose out of a predominantly African American economically depressed South Bronx section of New York City in the late 1970s.[71] Breakbeat usually refers to styles of music that use a section of a song in which the drums and/or rhythm section takes over from the melody, creating a rhythmic "break" in the music.[72] Goodwin's *Ali Summit* content reflected both a breakbeat aesthetic and pedagogical style; in particular; his *1967* and *Say My Name* video performances carried the breakbeat aesthetic into the online *Ali Summit,* bringing the Hip Hop aesthetic tradition to Actors' virtual stage.

Goodwin's website displayed a video recitation of his breakbeat poem entitled *1967* under the *Ali Summit* which the playwright coupled with a thematic question: "What Does it Mean to Fight?" Clicking on the video, we heard his poem over iconic footage of civil rights

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[70] Excerpted text from *The Ali Summit* on IdrisGoodwin.com, http://www.idrisgoodwin.com/alisummit.
[71] Abbie Fentress Swanson, "The South Bronx: Where Hip-Hop Was Born," *WNYC News*, August 2, 2010, https://www.wnyc.org/story/89709-south-bronx-hip-hop-year-zero/.
[72] David Drake, "Review: The BreakBeat Poets on How Hip-Hop Revolutionized American Poetry," *Gawker*, July 27, 2015.

movement protests and countercultural moments foregrounding those in Louisville throughout 2020:

> 1967 / a number / before the summer / 1967 / a number before the summer / sounds of revolution / Jimi Hendrix hands and heat / melting strings / a cascade of insanity / oh my country tis of thee / red / white / napalm red / frying wet jungles / 1967 / a number / before the summer / of sex, drugs and Marx / sound of the sparks / 1967 / bodies move across concrete / pursued by blue red lights / baton-clutching white / officers / counting 8-9-10-11 / all poor folks go to heaven / 500,000 American troops stationed on the ground in Vietnam / 11,000 would be killed in the course of a year / 1-1-0-0-0-1 / young / fast /quick-tongued / footed / swift / hard-hitting Louisville son / was a hero to most until / 1-9-6-4 / Cassius Clay no more.[73]

The *1967* video illustrated in images what the spoken word text described: street protests, Hendrix playing guitar, napalm bombs exploding in Vietnam, burning buildings in the city, white police officers arresting Black citizens, U.S. troops enlisting to fight in the war, and lastly, famous images of Muhammad Ali in the boxing ring. "1967," Goodwin said, was "the year of the summit—a year of major protests across cities. *Sound familiar?*"[74] His video's juxtaposition of archival period photographs and contemporary breakbeat poetry presents a powerful vignette that "set the stage" for contemplating the protests in Louisville in 2020. Ali's momentous decision to change his name from Cassius Marcellus Clay to Muhammad Ali served as the next thematic subject heading and description that Goodwin posted on his website: "'*What's In a Name?'* Ali certainly 'shook up the world' as a fighter with a unique style inside and outside the ring. He was what we now call a disrupter. When he rejected his 'government name' Cassius Clay Jr and renamed himself Muhammad Ali, after joining the Black empowerment focused Nation of Islam, the world gasped. In many ways this change of name and consciousness struck a harder blow than an uppercut."[75]

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[73] Idris Goodwin, *1967 Excerpt*, Idrisgoodwin.com, posted to YouTube, June 11, 2020.
[74] IdrisGoodwin.com.
[75] IdrisGoodwin.com.

Goodwin posted two additional videos, entitled: *I shook up the world* and *Say My Name*. Named for a proclamation after a fight when Ali also famously shouted, "I am the greatest," *I shook up the world* featured footage from Ali's 1964 heavyweight title fight at the Miami Beach Convention Center in which, as a challenger, he beat champion Sonny Liston. Ali biographer Jonathan Eig writes, "This is more than a boxing match, and at least a small percentage in the Miami Beach Convention Center understand that. They sense there are brutal, romantic forces building beneath the placid surface of American life, and that Cassius Clay is a messenger for the change to come, a radical in the guise of a traditional American athlete. 'He fools them,' Malcolm X says of Clay before the fight. 'One forgets that though a clown never imitates a wise man, the wise man can imitate the clown.'"[76] Ali can be understood as the wise man who knowingly appeals to the audience by performing the role of a bombastically entertaining sports figure. While wearing many masks, however, he was never a clown.[77] Rather, he was an intelligent fighter who understood the power of his public persona.[78]

Say My Name demonstrates how Goodwin interprets Ali's struggle. Filmed in Louisville in 2019, the video follows the playwright walking into a Louisville café to order a cup of coffee. Goodwin tells the barista his name but when Goodwin retrieves his order, we see that the barista has misspelled Idris as "Edreese" on his coffee cup, an error that prompts Goodwin to narrate how his mother selected Idris from a book of African names. As Goodwin continues this story, he exits the coffee shop and walks around an area known as "NuLu," a gentrified arts district located a few blocks down from Actors Theatre.[35] His

[76] Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. xiii.
[77] "The Wise Man And The Clown: The Masks Of Cassius Clay," *Medium*, Feb. 18, 2016.
[78] Dave Zirin, "The Hidden History of Muhammad Ali," *Jacobin*, June 4, 2016.

sanguine narration is a rehearsed breakbeat spoken word poem, delivered with such ease that it seems improvisatory. The scene unfolding behind Goodwin shows parked cars and a row of industrial buildings and stylish boutiques as he recounts the story:

> I always thought the name came out of a book. My mother still has it. It's crude and it's orange and it says *African Names*. Now inside *African Names*, it says something like "Idris means immortal" but I don't think that's right. My mother's name's Patricia. My father's name is Donald. Their parents are named Thelma, James, Ruth, and also James. They wanted us to have names with throat and vowels. In Detroit the name was a minority. The Black church asked, "Why you give that boy that Muslim name? Why you give that boy that African name? There are names in the Good Book—strong Apostle names.[79]

Goodwin could not have predicted that in July 2020, coinciding with the local Black Lives Matter movement, protestors would march in his footsteps against the unjust treatment of Black people in NuLu, causing The *Louisville Courier Journal* to report:

> Several protesters confronted a local restaurant operator outside his establishment Thursday after he publicly denounced a list of demands that activists have issued to dozens of businesses in NuLu. . . . The protesters say business owners in the area have benefited from years of gentrification following the demolition of a public housing complex that displaced many Black families. And they put forth the demands during a demonstration last week, calling on the owners to employ more Black people, purchase more inventory from Black retailers and undergo diversity training.[80]

The NuLu protests were among dozens happening all over the city throughout 2020. Approximately one year following the killing of Taylor, aspirants for social justice remained in a state of acute crisis ordinariness. Extreme structural inequality in neoliberal Louisville produces the context for crisis ordinariness among citizens and activists who strive for basic access to stable housing and jobs.

Beneath the *Say My Name* video, Goodwin posed another thematic question on his *Ali Summit* web page: "What does it mean to protect someone?" Two poems responded to

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[79] Idris Goodwin, *Say My Name*, video, Idrisgoodwin.com.
[80] Bailey Loosemore, "'Mafia tactics' or 'legitimate' demands? NuLu businesses respond to protesters," *Louisville Courier Journal*, July 30, 2020.

this question, poems which the artist noted that he co-created with Louisville middle school students: "To have their back / To give your life / To trust / To sacrifice / To love." The next thematic question is: "What is the difference between a Hero and a Champion?" underneath which website visitors could click to listen to Goodwin's *Ali Summit* Monologue #1 performed by Quinn Marchman, Denver-based co-founder of The Black Actors Guild. The poem is performed in first-person as if the speaker personified Muhammad Ali. It begins with Ali's memory of comic book heroes who influenced him and how GI Joe was the most relatable:

> GI Joe. He was it. He was an average Joe, ready for everything. I identified with him. Thing people need to realize is, I been a soldier. All of us really. Enlisted since birth. The signs that read "white only"—that's the barbed wire; water hoses, dogs, tear gas, batons, we're all in the trenches, we go out in them courts and fields, we obey rules of engagement, shot clocks, the bell, no low blows, no hangin' on rims, no mask pullin,' and we bring back gold for them. Championships and glory. We do that.[81]

The monologue continues to detail the cruel optimism of Ali's having represented the U.S. at the Olympics in Rome, only to return home to a country that discriminated against its own people. Marchman continues Goodwin's monologue, stating, "When I got back to the United States, I still saw barbed wire in my home. How am I supposed to be a champion when I'm in the trenches?"[82]

Goodwin's poem interrogates the double meaning of "fighter" by demonstrating how Ali performed both on and off the boxing stage. Ali's athleticism made him a star, and it did not preclude his political critique of U.S. imperialism and white nationalism. Goodwin effectively illustrated Ali's reasons for activism in the face of crisis and provided a historic frame to help audiences understand the gestures of contemporary athletes like Kaepernick

[81] Idris Goodwin, *The Ali Summit Monologue #1*, on IdrisGoodwin.com.
[82] Idris Goodwin, *The Ali Summit Monologue #1*, on IdrisGoodwin.com.

who along with other NFL members raised awareness of racism and police brutality through national anthem protests from 2016 to the present.[83]

With its mixture of thematic provocations, archival photos, video performance, and spoken word poetry, Goodwin's *Ali Summit* website content demonstrated both the artist's and Actors' responsiveness to the theater-in-crisis context. Centering Ali as a locally known, world-renowned sports hero and civil rights era activist, Goodwin connected international audiences to Louisville and Louisville to national and international audiences. Goodwin inserted himself into the storytelling process, appealing to a multiplicity of theater audiences through his narrative content.[84] As Ali performed his ethical stance against white hegemonic institutional oppression, Goodwin utilized Ali as a vehicle to perform his own artistic dialogue with local middle school students about different meanings of heroism. The curated selection of content helped visitors understand the historic underpinnings of the *Ali Summit* and bridged the past with the present on Goodwin's website. The *Ali Summit* performed a relevant institutional response to the contemporary crisis by expanding theater to Louisville audiences inspired by breakbeat aesthetics in an online, mediatized theatrical space. Goodwin's embrace of the audience as part of a city dialogue surrounding social justice and civil unrest was evident through his contextualization of the *Ali Summit*. He wrote, "I am opening my process up, using this site to share inspiration and work as it comes. In doing so I will be inviting others into the process as well. Perhaps we can answer some of those questions together."[85]

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[83] Kurt Streeter, "Kneeling, Fiercely Debated in the N.F.L., Resonates in Protests," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2020.
[84] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays,* "…ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects," p. 89.
[85] IdrisGoodwin.com.

In a socially distanced city, rather than hosting a final performance, Goodwin shared his creative process virtually with an audience in crisis, a fact that demonstrated Actors' commitment to storytelling off stage, beyond the black box and building, and in lieu of dogmatic adherence to the traditional in-person performances of literary and dramatic scripts. The institutional decision to specifically attend to Ali's legacy of conscientious objection to U.S. imperialism and racism while the city of Louisville reeled from a deadly show of institutionalized oppression and simultaneous health crisis demonstrated the theater's ethical position. Writing in 1993, Read asserted, "the only thing that can distinguish theater now is an ethical stance. An ethics of performance is an essential feature of any philosophy and practice of theater. Without it, a set of cultural practices, which derive from a very specific arrangement of power relations between people, are unhinged from responsibility to those people."[86] Read's theory of theater and everyday life hinges on the city as site of creative production, where the "polarity of producer and consumer gives way to a web of interconnections that bring the relation of productions about in the first place. . . . This quality the good street shares with the good image in theatre."[87] Read expounds upon philosopher Henri Lefebvre's concept of the urban semantic field and applies it to his expanded approach to theatre and urban quotidian life.[88] Read's emphasis on theater's connection to the city and everyday life offers a critical lens to assess the direct impact of daily protests that took place in the city on Actors' pandemic performance and the *Ali Summit's* development.

[86] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.
[87] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life*, p. 118.
[88] Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life*, p. 118.

Actors touted Black and Brown wealth- and community-building as part of the *Ali Summit* and on May 20, 2021, the Theatre hosted a Community Conversation on Zoom. It featured Fleming, Goodwin, Tawana Bain (a Louisville entrepreneur and owner of a regional women's magazine); Dr. Angelique Johnson (a local engineer and founder of an implantable electronics company); and Dave W. Christopher Sr. (local founder and director of a creative non-profit for youth called AMPED). Actors provided an interactive digital environment for these Black entrepreneurs to share information and devise strategies of mutual empowerment in a demonstration of the Internet as theatrical public sphere.[89] Fleming posed questions to the speakers such as: "Ali's legacy is legendary; What impact do you still hope to make?":

> **Dave Christopher:** I want to put Black and Brown in a position to do what I know they can do. If I wake up, I either win or I learn. . . . The impact I want to make is on families and community . . . to make them independent . . . to give a man a fishing pole by not questioning his ability; to make them believe that *you can* from the top.
>
> **Tawana Bain:** Because so many others are given that belief without a doubt, those outside and within our culture don't believe we can; so many entrepreneurs and young people are never given that trust. Somebody once trusted me and who am I to look at someone and feel that you don't deserve that trust? We must put people around tables they don't normally have proximity or access to: who you might date, what colleges kids are accepted to…I struggle with Black people dissing LGBT [for example]: You're missing out on a lot of access because of close mindedness that determines what access you and those around you can have; your religious views can be your views; you being friends with LGBT won't make you LGBT.
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> **Robert Barry Fleming:** As a Black queer middle-aged artist, I appreciate that; it's always great to be reminded when we can come together to recognize we're better together.[90]

This virtual conversation among participants utilized Ali's legacy to center Black and Brown wealth-building in Louisville while also referencing the city's history of urban renewal that displaced Black centers of wealth and business ownership. Rather than creating a binary between the international Humana Festival and Actors' local programming, under Fleming,

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[89] Actors Theatre of Louisville, "Community Conversation," May 20, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ActorsTheatreofLouisville/videos/community-conversation/4284169164978858.

[90] Actors Theatre of Louisville, "Community Conversation," May 20, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ActorsTheatreofLouisville/videos/community-conversation/4284169164978858.

the Humana Festival's *Ali Summit* dialogue served both an international *and* a local community deeply invested in cultivating inclusion and greater equity in economic participation in Louisville. Using Ali as a catalyst for a community conversation, Fleming asked discussants about what impact they hoped to make respectively. The free conversation that the *Ali Summit* held online illustrated how Actors strategically positioned the traditionally international Humana Festival as a local community-building endeavor during a period of crisis and economic downturn.

Over the course of its development, the *Ali Summit* was advertised in a one-minute 2021 YouTube trailer, which featured narration of Ali's 1967 draft objection and child-friendly animated graphic art by illustrator Andy Perez.[91] The *Summit* was then rolled out as an on-demand immersive VR experience, which I purchased for $15.00 in 2021 despite not owning a VR headset; however, it was not necessary if one chose to view the *Summit* as a desktop or audiovisual experience. Actors' website informs audiences that they can experience *Ali Summit* in VR by "using a VR headset (such as the Oculus Quest and Quest 2) or a PC-connected VR headset that can run SteamVR (such as Oculus Rift & Rift S, HTC Vive & Vive Pro, Valve Index, and all Windows Mixed Reality Headsets)."[92] Feeling overwhelmed by the array of choices, after clicking the purchase button through Actors' website, I received an email with the subject line, "Thank You for Your Order with Actors Theatre of Louisville."[93] The email was also supposed to contain a link to instructions for accessing *Ali Summit* as a VR, desktop, or Audiovisual experience, however, it did not, and I was unable to access the digital content. I wrote the Guest Services Coordinator, stating that I

[91] Actors Theatre, *Ali Summit* Trailer, YouTube https://youtu.be/Rw-fV9k6HDE?si=C4SHMvkXE6oTLFNL.
[92] Actors Theatre, *Ali Summit* FAQs https://www.actorstheatre.org/ali-summit/faqs/.
[93] Thankyou@ActorsTheatre.org, "Thank You For Your Order With Actors Theatre of Louisville," Received by Maiza Hixson, May 22, 2021.

should have received a link to view the show, but the link was never sent. I also received a QR code for the ticket which I clicked on only to receive an error message, and I never heard back.[94] At a time when Actors and other regional theaters faced a failing subscription model, pandemic, and crisis of relevance, digital streaming became one of the Theatre's only, albeit imperfect options.[95]

Goodwin admitted that due to the expensive equipment and other barriers, "VR remains not a widely accessible format." "Nor is theater," he added.[96] When I asked if, in retrospect, he would have created the *Ali Summit* as a VR experience, Goodwin responded, "I'm about process. The point to me is that we kept going. There was no real 'if I had to do it over again' . . . there couldn't have been."[97] His response reflects an attitude of openness, flexibility, and innovation that the theater crises of 2020 required, and that the present context still demands. Critic Peter Marks writes, "Still reeling from the pandemic, many of the country's nonprofit theaters of various sizes are in deep financial trouble, in what is rapidly turning into the most severe crisis in the 70-year history of the regional theater movement."[98] Creating novel technological inroads into Louisville communities during after the Covid outbreak was a way that Actors could respond to this period and even bring younger generations into the fold.

In Actors' 2021-2022 Impact Report, a photograph of several youth and a teacher appear above the description, "Students experiencing *Ali Summit* through Virtual Reality

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[94] Jordan Dos Santos, "Ali Summit VR," Received by Maiza Hixson, Sept 8, 2023.
[95] Peter Marks, "Theater is in freefall and the pandemic isn't the only thing to blame," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2023.
[96] Idris Goodwin, personal interview with the author, February 13, 2024.
[97] Idris Goodwin, personal interview with the author, February 13, 2024.
[98] Peter Marks, "Theater is in freefall and the pandemic isn't the only thing to blame," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2023.

headsets."[99] According to the same report, *Ali Summit* was part of a residency that served 190 students at four schools and in May 2022, Actors also partnered with Louisville's Doss High School to pilot the integration of *Ali Summit* in VR into the residency program. Commodifying and sharing the *Ali Summit* experience as both online discourse and in-person VR content, Actors supported and platformed a community of entrepreneurs, playwrights, and technologists. With Brown-Forman sponsorship, Actors marketed and sold the virtual Humana Festival as a creative product to educational communities and younger demographics.

The Non-profit Paradox

Writing about non-profits in a US context, Joseph states that non-profit organizations serve desires not met by capitalism for specific goods, such as the arts and social services.[100] In the US economy, non-profits are framed in terms of American exceptionalism, as grassroots institutions, predicated on altruism, voluntarism, and democratic ideals to which the rest of the world should aspire.[101] Countering the grassroots narrative, other critics have described non-profits as instruments of capitalist states. However, Joseph argues that non-profits are hegemonic institutions that articulate the altruistic desire for community with a desire for capitalism.[102] In this sense, non-profits can be understood as organizations that assist in the formation of willing capitalist subjects through their deployment of romantic communal discourse and activity as a supplement to the non-profit's capitalist subject formation.[103]

[99] Actors Theatre, "2021-2022 Impact Report," p. 21
[100] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, p. 27, p. 73.
[101] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, p. 87.
[102] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, pp. 89-91.
[103] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, pp. 3-13

Non-profits appear at moments of "capitalist expansion, instability, and crisis" to indicate that "something, or rather someone—the subject of capital—is missing."[104] In keeping with this function, in 2020, Fleming mobilized online community discourse to pointedly address the missing subjectivity of Taylor and more broadly, that of Black and Brown health, land ownership, and wealth in this highly segregated city. According to Goodwin, "Fleming is about an approach that is not just pretty but that's more sustaining and finding the souls and wellness of people who are oppressed."[105] Black communities in Louisville have particularly suffered from the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow laws, mid-20th century urban renewal measures, redlining, and most recently, gentrification efforts in NuLu and the West End.[106] In organizing a virtual space for ongoing civic discourse throughout this crisis period, Actors provided a public sphere for community activists, artists, thought leaders, and business professionals to amplify not only justice for Taylor but for people of color in Louisville.

As a non-profit, Actors wedded digital theater and catastrophe in a makeshift entrepreneurial strategy to economically survive the moment and create a space of increased local relevance for the theater. Goodwin asserts that Ali, Fleming, and HipHop exemplify how Black cultures innovate to survive: whether a theater company or recording studio, he said, "that's what we do."[107] In the idiom of Joseph, I assert that, rather than inscribing Actors' and its community participants as capitalism's puppets, whose strings are pulled by a variety of structural ghosts, Actors' artists and community participants were enabled in their entrepreneurial projects. Under a capitalist system, the Theatre's non-profit communities

[104] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, p. 73.
[105] Idris Goodwin, personal interview with the author, February 13, 2024.
[106] Brentin Mock, "Louisville Confronts Its Redlining Past and Present," BloombergNews.com, Feb. 21, 2017.
[107] Idris Goodwin, personal interview with the author, February 13, 2024.

performed within the neoliberal hegemonic regime.[108] Accordingly, between its careful curation of speakers, artistic programming, subject matter, and tech innovation, throughout 2020 and 2021, Actors sought not only to serve Black and Brown businesses and audiences, but to produce younger constituencies while incorporating them into the theater's virtual placemaking performance.

The *Ali Summit* underscored Goodwin's position: "You have to get in the game, learn the rules, replace the game, win, and change the rules." He urged people not to "take the game and go home" but to be a part of a coalition.[109] Participants in Actors' virtual programming and discourse were not instrumentalized in the theater's commodification of art and crisis discourse. Rather, the voices of Goodwin, Fleming, as well as other artists, activists, and leaders, were vital to local theater audiences who sought to heal from and keep fighting the catastrophes unfolding in Actors' own backyard.

Actors' community-oriented, anti-racist mission statement illustrates the non-profit paradox in relation to the funding environment in which the theater operates. Indeed, in the Louisville context, a form of plantation urbanism exists wherein Brown-Forman bourbon sponsorship brands the city through multiple arms, particularly, through arts and cultural institutions. The city's legacies of plantation culture continue to play out in the form of social management in the urban context. The neoliberal development of Black neighborhoods creates wealth through what scholars Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy describe as "racial banishment, dispossession, and policing of Black residents."[110]

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[108] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, p. 69-118
[109] Idris Goodwin, personal interview with the author, February 13, 2024.
[110] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal,* December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 145.

Actors' mission fully acknowledges this urban funding environment.[111] Yet in acknowledging its location in Louisville's funding ecosystem, Actors stops short of naming the Brown-Forman whiskey oligarchy as one of the global brands that emerged and still profits from urban plantation capitalism in the Louisville context. Currently, several members of the Brown family, including heirs and philanthropists, Christina Brown and Gill Holland, fund downtown urban development and environmental projects. Brown is known in Louisville for using new "green" environmental amenities to market and develop downtown.[112] Indebted to her financial support, Fleming stated, "We're . . . continuing to investigate partnerships that are sustainable; we've got an extraordinary philanthropist, Christina Lee Brown."[113] Brown's son-in-law Gill Holland has been dubbed the "Godfather of New Louisville" because he has "laid the groundwork for future investment in Louisville's West End," and leveraged "philanthropic and public capital for the development of the Russell neighborhood" in the West End through a $30 million Housing and Urban Development grant, and "massive public investment from Louisville Metro Government and philanthropic donations."[114]

The city is run by dynastic bourbon wealth and neoliberal urban policy, wherein public housing contracts are given to private developers and non-profit organizations, to gentrify low-income Black neighborhoods.[115] The Congress for New Urbanism held their annual conference in Louisville in 2019, describing it as a place where "New Urbanism

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[111] Actors Theater, https://www.actorstheatre.org/about-us/.
[112] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal,* December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 151.
[113] American Theatre Editors, "Robert Barry Fleming's Sense of Scale," *American Theatre,* July 14, 2022.
[114] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal,* December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 152.
[115] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal,* December 2020, Vol 2(2).

meets the New Bourbonism."[116] Once a thriving Black-owned business district, the West End's Russell neighborhood suffered from fiscal abandonment until it was recently targeted for re-development by local government and private real estate interests.[117] Taylor's murder focused renewed attention in Louisville on the direct connections between Russell's gentrification and police violence.[118]

The gentrification of the West End Russell neighborhood, backed in part by Brown family wealth, was well underway prior to Taylor's murder. A Russell home with which Taylor had been affiliated was located in an area set for development, a home that had been in violation of nuisance codes and was then turned over to the city through a sequence of place-based police investigations and surveillance of the Russell neighborhood.[119] In August of 2020, Taylor's attorneys announced, "The no-knock search warrant that catalyzed the invasion of Taylor's home was part of a broader police operation aimed to enable West End urban development plans" "instigated by the city and real-estate developers."[120] When the argument came out that Taylor was possibly inadvertently killed as a result of West End gentrification, Brown immediately published an op-ed in the *Louisville Courier Journal* registering her disturbance over the allegations.[121] Louisville dynastic wealth and real estate

[116] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 145
[117] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 146
[118] Phillip M. Bailey, Tessa Duvall, "Breonna Taylor warrant connected to Louisville gentrification plan, lawyers say," *Louisville Courier Journal*, July 5, 2020.
[119] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2), pp. 157-159.
[120] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2), p. 146
[121] Josh Poe and Jessica Bellamy, "Plantation urbanism: Legacy, property and policing in Louisville," *Kentucky Radical Housing Journal*, December 2020, Vol 2(2).

development projects in the West End led some to believe that development and gentrification of the West End indirectly led to the killing of Taylor.

Fig. 3. (left), Fig. 4. (right). Whiskey fungus grows on trees and property near bourbon storage and aging facilities, Louisville, KY. Photos: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Fig. 5. Whiskey fungus grows on a bourbon aging facility in Louisville, KY. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

In an “ecosystem” of plantation capitalism, global bourbon production in Kentucky also exercises negative environmental impacts. As a result of the lengthy aging process of bourbon, ethanol escapes from the liquid in aged oak barrels kept in storage facilities known as barrelhouses, the loss of which is referred to as the “angel’s share.”[122] In an article in the Lexington Herald-Leader, an attorney, Jason Helleman, stated that in Kentucky, "if you go on a distillery tour, they proudly reference the angel's share . . . but the angel's share results in the devil's fungus."[123] The fungus is an insidious mold identified as *Baudoinia compniacensis* that grows on and destroys trees and properties adjacent to the barrelhouses (see figures 3, 4, and 5). Because whiskey production has significantly increased by 465% since 2000,[124] whiskey maturation warehouses have proliferated in Kentucky and Tennessee, contributing to the uncontrollable growth of the fungus in neighborhoods.[125] A *New York Times* article from March of 2023, for example, reported that Jack Daniel’s received approval to build two barrelhouses in 2018 in Lincoln County, Tennessee, but the brand now has six and plans to build up to 20.[126] A Jack Daniel’s representative said that that 14 barrelhouses would generate $1 million in property taxes for the county of 35,000 residents, yet residents must live with the resulting environmental and property degradation.[127]

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[122] Anne Marshall, “The Dark Side of the ‘Angel’s Share’: Kentucky’s bourbon industry is covering its neighbors in black fungus,” *Atlas Obscura*, October 30, 2019, www.atlasobscura.com/articles/what-is-whiskey-fungus.
[123] “Whiskey fungus suit: Court orders county to halt Jack Daniel’s barrel warehouse,” *Lexington Herald Leader* March 1, 2023, https://www.kentucky.com/news/business/article272633801.html.
[124] *KentuckyBourbon.com*, https://kybourbon.com/industry/impact/.
[125] Michael Levenson, “Whiskey Fungus Fed by Jack Daniel’s Encrusts a Tennessee Town,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2023
[126] Peter Weber, *The Week US*, “Black, sooty whiskey fungus is spreading through bourbon country, pitting homeowners against distilleries,” March 2, 2023.
[127] Michael Levenson, “Whiskey Fungus Fed by Jack Daniel’s Encrusts a Tennessee Town,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2023.

Actors' deployment of virtual community discourse during the crisis registered the desire to care for the health and wellness of local communities and to keep fighting for the missing subjectivities of capitalism, yet Actors' institutional performance simultaneously supplemented Brown-Forman's exploitative capitalistic function. The corporate patronage of the arts enabled Actors to produce new subjectivities and digital theater consumers, but during crisis, the theater was also tasked with repairing devastated local communities. The weight of that task fell on the shoulders of charismatic Black theater leaders, artists, and committed staff. Had the non-profit institution explicitly critiqued the Brown dynasty as contributors to structural racism and local environmental problems, it might have risked losing that funding stream.

As of 2022, local, national, and international theatre communities were shocked to learn that Actors had lost Humana Festival funding and would not produce the festival again. Actors reported that their net assets with donor restrictions went from $750,000 from Humana in 2020 to $0 in 2021.[128] A new CEO replaced theater lover and Humana founder and CEO David Jones who died in 2019, and in 2022, the company faced federal lawsuits alleging that it committed fraud by overbilling for Medicare Advantage and over-diagnosing their customers to receive government tax funds.[129] The loss of the Humana Festival in 2022 represents yet another attrition from a fantasy of well-funded experimental theater in Kentucky. Fleming responded to ensuing criticism that he alone was responsible for ending the Festival: "Like, if two kings, Jon Jory and David Jones Sr., make a decision to do a Humana festival, do you really think I have enough agency to just say, 'Oh, I've decided I'm

[128] Independent Auditors Report, "Actors Theatre Financial Statements 2020-2021," p. 21.
[129] Reed Abelson and Margot Sanger-Katz, "How Insurers Exploited Medicare for Billions: 'The Cash Monster Was Insatiable,'" *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2022.

changing this?' That's not actually aligned with anything that would be recognizable in North American society, as if a Black queer just gets to make whatever decision he wants, independent of discourse."[130]

Fig. 6. Bourbon signs line Main Street in front of Actors Theatre in Louisville, KY. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2023.

Through Brown-Forman philanthropic gifts and sponsorship of Actors' 2020-2021 season, the Brown-Forman brand would be plugged by the Theatre during a year of civic crisis. While committed to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and re-building Black and Brown

[130] American Theatre Editors, "Robert Barry Fleming's Sense of Scale," *American Theatre*, July 14, 2022, https://www.americantheatre.org/2022/07/14/robert-barry-flemings-sense-of-scale/.

community wealth, Actors also facilitated the incorporation of local activist communities and the arts into the city's hegemonic bourbon regime (see figure 6). Actors performed strategically throughout the 2020-2021 season within the existing dynastic power structure of Louisville, while also working to artistically channel local rage, performing advocacy for community access to the capitalist economy. The performance demonstrates that artistic production in the neoliberal Southern city is complicated by wealth streams that continue to capitalize on the exploitation of human bodies and nature. Rather than reify binaries between artistic autonomy and institutionalized art, Actors furthers the fight for social justice and economic advancement for Black and Brown communities through the ostensibly non-profit theater.

Ch. 5 Epilogue: *Artistic City* as Agonistic Model

According to the agonistic approach, public spaces are always plural and the agonistic confrontation takes place in a multiplicity of discursive surfaces. -Chantal Mouffe[1]

Louisville's efforts to address the legacy of racial and spatial segregation were too little too late as Breonna Taylor's death in 2020 laid bare the realities of ongoing structural racism in the city. Subsequently, as Louisville pursued a capitalist return to bourbon tourism and "urban order," it removed much of the Taylor protest archive from public space. My work in this dissertation has been to perform against such historical erasure and forgetting by enabling readers to re-visit lost moments and spaces of the movement.

I offer *Artistic City* as an agonistic model for analyzing aesthetic production within specific urban political contexts and philanthropic funding ecologies. In this epilogue, I consider how we might sustain radical, agonistic placemaking to resist dynastic wealth and corporate funding infrastructures that spatialize social, racial, and class divisions. By we, I mean self-identified artists who seek to counter urban inequality while trying to earn their living from local hegemonic institutions, dynastic collectors, and federal government funders. How can simply "surviving in the art world," reinforce or refuse urban stratification and inequality?

Contemporary artists seeking commercial success in a competitive urban economy may not prioritize social critique but rather the rare chance to live off one's aesthetic labor. As critic Ben Davis writes, "The position of the professional artist is characteristically middle class in relation to labor: the dream of being an artist is the dream of making a living off the products of one's own mental or physical labor while being fully able to control and identify

[1] Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007), p. 3.

with that labor."[2] Selling work to a billionaire collector may signify personal artistic success, yet it also affirms the hegemony of the ruling class. In contrast to a capitalistic orientation, agonistic artists may see themselves as more than individual hustlers striving to "make it" and more as civic actors conjoined to larger social, racial, and class struggles.

Agonistic artists who understand their civic roles and practices within larger neoliberal city performances, for example, may even temporarily resist hegemony. Like Usonian countercultural artists of the 1960s radically contested the conservative capitalistic American society of the 1950s, artists of the Black Lives Matter movement profoundly countered Trump-era white supremacy and racial capitalism in the United States. Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe writes, "Contrary to the various liberal models, the agonistic approach . . . never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices and that it is never a neutral one."[3] The potential re-election of Trump to the 2024 American presidency threatens yet another reactionary return to right-wing, white, patriarchal hegemony. Like the '60s countercultural movement was "captured" by liberal elites,[4] so too was BLM often coopted by a more privileged class.[5] Agonistic artists must grapple with the fact that progressive movements often fail within a capitalist context. Author Fredrik deBoer writes about the impact of 2020 radicalism in *How Elites Ate the Social Justice Movement*:

> Where was the change that had been demanded? Yes, many from Black and other minority backgrounds found themselves with scholarships or jobs that did not exist prior to the civil unrest, but they were drawn largely from the upwardly mobile professional and managerial classes to begin with. Cultural institutions relentlessly

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[2] Ben Davis, *9.5 Thesis on Art and Class*, 2013, p. 28.
[3] Davis, p. 3.
[4] Ben Davis, "Ch.2: Elite Capture and Radical Chic," in *Art in the After-Culture: Capitalist Crisis & Cultural Strategy*, 2022, pp. 28-54.
[5] Fredrik deBoer, *How Elites Captured the Social Justice Movement*, 2023.

> looked to reward people from marginalized groups, but the impact of these efforts is hard to see."[6]

Drawing from deBoer, if elite institutions and wealthy neoliberals continue to stage-manage art—and particularly social justice-oriented art—then the political power of that art can be diminished.[7] In allowing their artwork to be represented by dynastic oligarchs who control the political process, the individualistic capitalistic artist reaffirms conspicuous art consumption and artistic power hoarding within a particular city.[8]

Agonistic artists should therefore identify and define the steps and procedures of neoliberal art choreographies and endeavor to choreograph against them. Specifically, they may walk and wander against physical sites, museums, institutional texts, and visual designs. Moving and reading against the signs and signifiers of dominant city narratives of art and placemaking, people and bodies can attempt to re-claim their own neighborhoods and spatial stories. The artistically agonistic citizen rigorously interrogates the city's myths and monuments orchestrated by political elites.

Importantly, counterhegemonic aesthetic choreographies do not require permission. Critically assembled artists, scholars, and protestors may transgress corporate or institutionally planned space to creatively re-signify it. As evidenced in #Breeway, artists worked collectively in civic space rather than in artistic isolation. In contrast to the modernist conception of artists as privileged beings who can individually overthrow hegemony, agonistic artists recognize the political efficacy of working with and alongside diverse

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[6] Fredrik deBoer, *How Elites Captured the Social Justice Movement*, 2023, p. 7

[7] See Chapter 3 of *Artistic City* in which I analyze how *She Ascends*, an Augmented Reality memorial to Breonna Taylor, was absorbed in the corporate placemaking of Museum Hotel 21.

[8] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899. Veblen defines "conspicuous consumption" as a leisure class display of opulence. "Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure," p.47.

groups. Mouffe asserts that "linkage with traditional forms of political intervention like parties and trade-unions cannot be avoided. It would be a serious mistake to believe that artistic activism could, on its own, bring about the end of neo-liberal hegemony."[9] Indeed, as 2020 confirmed, creative agonists can leverage their collectivity and access to public space to better care for marginalized communities. *Artistic City* insists on a democratic society that reflects a plurality of voices, which need not universally align.

UnKnown Project

A creative placemaking initiative begun in 2020 called *UnKnown Project* embodies the tensions and future promise of agonistic artistic practice in the neoliberal city. Two blocks from *The Louisville Knot* at 9th and Main Street, *UnKnown Project* is a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)-funded initiative that honors, visualizes, and places the hidden names of formerly enslaved Black people along the Ohio River.[10] It features a public art installation entitled *On the Banks of Freedom*, which is strategically located on the riverfront near Peerless Distillery at 10th and Main Street. This grandiose sounding but modest looking artwork consists of two limestone benches engraved with the first names of anonymous enslaved peoples (see figure 1). Sets of black footprints sandblasted into a concrete platform surround the bench and point toward the historically free side of the river in Indiana (see figure 2). A related poem by Hannah Drake called "Finding Me" is also printed into the concrete ground near the benches.

[9] Fredrik deBoer, *How Elites Captured the Social Justice Movement*, 2023, p. 5.
[10] Creative Agents of Change Foundation Inc (aka IDEAS xLab), 1863057-42-20, Louisville, KY, National Endowment for the Arts, March 11, 2024.

Fig. 1. Hannah Drake and Josh Miller, *UnKnown Project*: *On the Banks of Freedom*, with benches by William M. Duffy and Dave Caudill, Louisville, KY. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2024.

The area is a designated cultural heritage site and symbol of African American history, but visitors would not know it given the abandoned garbage cans overflowing with trash and refuse strewn around the artwork. *On the Banks* is also dwarfed by a towering web of highways and fenced in parking lots beneath them (see figure 3). Unhoused people once lived there but were recently replaced by the city's strategic chunks of stone—a form of hostile architecture.[11] The public art installation appears as another aesthetic object plopped in civic space and reviewed in the *New York Times* as a foregone success.[12] Yet the Project delivers more than its media advertising and neglected appearance would suggest.

[11] Winnie Hu, "'Hostile Architecture': How Public Spaces Keep the Public Out," *The New York Times*, Nov. 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/nyregion/hostile-architecture-nyc.html.
[12] Maggie Jones, "On a Kentucky Riverbank, a Path to Remembrance," *New York Times*, June 9, 2021.

Fig. 2. My father, Clarence Hixson, standing by the Ohio River near *UnKnown Project* footprints, Louisville, KY. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2024.

Fig. 3. Hannah Drake and Josh Miller, *UnKnown Project*: *On the Banks of Freedom*, benches by William M. Duffy and Dave Caudill. Photo: Maiza Hixson, 2024.

UnKnown Project was funded by a $75,000 NEA "Our Town" grant. Our Town is a creative placemaking grant program that "supports activities that integrate arts, culture, and

design into local efforts that strengthen communities over the long term."[13] Our Town projects require artists to apply through a non-profit organization and partner with local "stakeholders" to "advance local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes in communities."[14] To qualify for Our Town, the Louisville-based applicants Josh Miller and Hannah Drake applied as a non-profit called "IDEAS xLab" and partnered with Metro Government, the Frazier History Museum, and Roots 101 museum. The funding supported their artist fees, research, and public art installations for a two-year period between 2020 and 2022.[15]

On June 19, 2022, as part *UnKnown Project's* programming at *On the Banks*, the public was invited to read the names of unknown formerly enslaved peoples procured from Kentucky family records during the Project's run. The momentous Juneteenth event was held under a tent canopy on a sunny day and livestreamed on Facebook by a white Louisville television and radio personality Tara Basset.[16] Drake and Miller introduced the project and passed out the names which were typed onto pieces of paper. Drake welcomed individual audience members to read the names aloud:

> The names that you all have are the names that people have submitted to me. They went looking in their family records and wills and other documents and sent us the names. So these are names of people that were enslaved. And this is our way to honor them and let them know that they are not unknown. They existed, they were here, and as we celebrate today, Juneteenth, this is for those 250 thousand people that were enslaved in Texas, the 80,000 people that Louisville shipped down this river, for the 169 people that this state lynched. This is for all of them. You breathed, you had children, you had a life. And this is our way of honoring them. So we are going to read these names, and it may take a little time, and that's the least we can do. Drummers will play as we read the names. . . Tara will read the names . . . that came forward from her family, of people her family enslaved. This is our way to start on a

[13] National Endowment for the Arts, "Our Town Grant," www.arts.gov/grant/our-town.
[14] National Endowment for the Arts, "Our Town Grant," www.arts.gov/grant/our-town.
[15] Creative Agents of Change Foundation Inc (aka IDEAS xLab), 1863057-42-20, Louisville, KY, *National Endowment for the Arts*, March 11, 2024.
[16] Tara Bassett, 502LiveStreamers, "UnKnown Project Juneteenth Program," *Facebook*, June 19, 2022.

> road to some type of reconciliation, and Tara came forward and said these indeed are the names of the people, and so they are no longer unknown . . . The Emancipation Proclamation did not free slaves in Kentucky and so our people here were still enslaved but we still rejoice for those that did have their freedom and that's how it is today . . . We all were here in 2020. We saw what happened to Breonna Taylor . . . Ahmaud Arbery . . . and George Floyd. So this is still an ongoing thing—that Black people are still searching for freedom.[17]

After each member of the audience stood up to read the names into a microphone that Miller personally held up for participants, I heard people quietly recite the word "Ashe." Ashe, I later learned is the equivalent of "Amen" from the Yoruba àṣẹ.[18] The performed reading of the names was a solemn, agonistic ritual that held former enslavers to account for their ancestral histories. Drake's invitation to Basset to furnish and read the names from her family archives allowed for a raw public reckoning with the truth of racism buried in individual family ledgers.

Eventually it was my turn to stand up and read the names from the small pieces of paper I was given. "Ellen: Unknown; Unknown Female, age 13; Jane: Unknown; Maria: Unknown; Poppy: Unknown."[19] After my recitation, I was asked to place the names in a set of sandblasted footprints before taking my seat. The experience of standing before my fellow artists and Louisvillians in mutual recognition of the tragedies of slavery, white supremacy, and police murders was productively awkward and emotionally affecting. Rather than decorate the waterfront for neoliberal developers, Drake and Miller instantiated a critical ritual, "*On The Banks,"* to come together and find a way forward through past and present pain.

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[17] Facebook, 502LiveStreamers, "UnKnown Project Juneteenth Program," *Facebook,* June 19, 2022.
[18] The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought, "Àṣẹ," Oxford Reference, 2010, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095427961.
[19] 502LiveStreamers, "UnKnown Project Juneteenth Program," *Facebook,* June 19, 2022.

More than its concrete brutalist platform and visually underwhelming public art benches, *On the Banks* functioned as an alternative open-air theater for the embodied performance of democratic citizenship.[20] Although the Project dovetails with downtown revitalization near Whiskey Row and the 9th Street Divide, it is a federal grant initiative that must legitimately demonstrate, rather than prematurely celebrate, its success. Our Town grants for collaborative city art projects seemingly hold the promise of greater accountability to the communities they are meant to connect. Unlike *The Louisville Knot*, in which political agents and out of town architects promised that plop art would deliver a better quality of life and more neighborhood integration, *UnKnown Project* actualizes bodies assembling in public space through collaborative creative placemaking. Drake and Miller literally and metaphorically stand by their project to forge interactions that have and will continue to re-shape the future of the agonistic, artistic city. Their model inspires democratic participation and meaningful discourse in local communities, but it is also one that can be exploited.[21]

Future agonistic artists must continue to address the dangers of codifying placemaking in urban arts policy scripts and city plans. Ersatz plop art simply cannot be installed on the sidewalk as a panacea for decades of racist housing policy and post-Jim Crow era segregation. If more is not done to address ongoing structural inequalities, Louisville and many other cities can expect both more civil resistance and more tragedies

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[20] Fred Evans writes in *Public Art and the Fragility of Democracy*, "A particular advantage of voice is that it helps us understand a key sense in which public art can be an act of citizenship. Specifically, we will call public works of art "quasi-voices" as a mark of their agency in public spaces," 2021, p. 8.

[21] Andre Toran, "Footprints on the sidewalk? They're retracing the journey of Kentucky's forgotten slaves," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Feb. 3, 2021. Curator of metro government Sarah Lindgren said, "when Miller and Drake came forward with the idea, the city saw it as a perfect opportunity to connect the project to the planning stages of the River Road Corridor Project, a plan to strengthen the scenery on River Road underneath the interstate and provide safer access to the area for bicyclists and pedestrians." *UnKnown Project* was instrumentalized by the city to "strengthen the scenery" or decorate the riverfront as part the River Road Corridor Project, another urban development plan of the West End.

like those of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Although their discourses and placemaking performance can be instrumentalized by hegemonic regimes to further bourbon placemaking in the West End, Drake and Miller's collaboration helps to relieve the apartheid conditions of the city. We will need many more agonistic artistic projects like theirs as the U.S. continues to grapple with the legacies and resurgence of white supremacy, racism, and social inequality. With or without self-identified artists, agonistic and anti-hegemonic performances will continue to arise spontaneously and radically re-make the artistic city.

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