

UC Santa Cruz

UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Conjuring Blight in an Urban Landscape: Market Farms and Aerosol Murals in Oakland, CA

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/96p6w17t>

Author

Watson, Jessica Weston

Publication Date

2014

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**CONJURING BLIGHT IN AN URBAN LANDSCAPE:
MARKET FARMS AND AEROSOL MURALS IN OAKLAND, CA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Jessica W. Watson

June 2014

The dissertation of Jessica W. Watson
is approved:

Professor Shelly Errington, Chair

Professor Andrew S. Mathews

Professor Lisa Rofel

Professor Mary Beth Pudup

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by
Jessica W. Watson
2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vi
Acknowledgments.....	vii
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Who Moves In When the City Moves Out?.....	1
 CHAPTER TWO	
Bureaucratic Dreamspace.....	42
 CHAPTER THREE	
Domesticating Space and Cultivating Subjects.....	70
 CHAPTER FOUR	
Flipping the Script.....	108
 CHAPTER FIVE	
Concrete Imaginings: Claiming Space Through Aesthetics.....	138
 CHAPTER SIX	
Conclusion: The Blight Within.....	173
Bibliography.....	183

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Photo Montage header for the City of Oakland's West Oakland Specific Plan Newsletter.	29
Figure 2. Blight notice classification in Downtown Oakland.	59
Figure 3. A satellite photograph of the neighborhood before urban farm development.	75
Figure 4. A closer view.	75
Figure 5. A closer view of the parks before development by City Slicker Farms.	76
Figure 6. Union Plaza Park with new sign and fence installed.	100
Figure 7. CSF Farmstand opens at Union Plaza Farm.	104
Figure 8. Lupita's El Salvadorean mural depicting key moments in the nation's history, completed with the involvement of El Salvadorean youth.	116
Figure 9. Piece by Desi W.O.M.E., Tin Pan Alley, SF, 2010.	121
Figure 10. MLK Cultural Corridor entrance mural in progress.	131
Figure 11. Parkway Mural by Ras Terms and Desi W.O.M.E.	134
Figure 12. The same repeatedly buffed wall, with protest messages	135
Figure 13. A self-portrait of Emory Douglas featuring food-centered protest and highlighting the Panther's People's Free Food Program, collaged over coupons for cuts of meat.	147
Figure 14. An example of Douglas' bold graphic style featuring thick outlines and radiating background lines.	147
Figure 15. Logo for People's Grocery c. 2014.	148
Figure 16. Logo for City Slicker Farms c. 2014.	148

Figure 17. CSF's Organizational Sustainability Chart, 2011 Annual Report.	155
Figure 18. West Oakland Eating Guide, 2009.	158
Figure 19. WEST OAKLAND Postcard, produced by In Good Company.	162
Figure 20. Sign for the Harvest Festival.	163
Figure 21. Community Lunch table presentation.	164
Figure 22. S.W.E.A.R Magazine cover.	166
Figure 23. Different views of City Slicker's truck, covered with aerosol murals painted by the Community Rejuvenation Project in 2012.	177
Figure 24. Tomatoes and houses both sprout along the side of the truck.	177
Figure 25. Mural by Community Rejuvenation Project (crpbayarea.org).	178

Abstract

Conjuring Blight in an Urban Landscape:
Market Farms and Aerosol Murals in Oakland, CA

by

Jessica W. Watson

This dissertation, *Conjuring Blight in an Urban Landscape: Market Farms and Aerosol Murals in Oakland, CA* examines collaborations between the City of Oakland and several nonprofits to cover key city functions in the face of a fiscal crisis precipitated by the national recession (2008-2011). Based in eighteen months of ethnographic research, this work shows the ways that bureaucrats, gardeners and aerosol muralists are all actively inscribing spaces and claiming ownership over them, through their actions and material interactions; this process of co-creation defines the legality, subjectivity, and economics of the people and institutions involved. This dissertation explores the public power of imagination in creating shared worlds and how the material effects of these imaginings co-constitute space. These transformations of space are driven by the need to transform people - the poor, the unhealthy, the disempowered - to encourage behaviors desired by the City and nonprofit organizations in their collaborations. Blight is a central metaphor used to create categories, effect imaginings, and produce certain types of space, with far-reaching effects on the lives lived within it.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my Committee, Shelly Errington, Andrew Mathews, Lisa Rofel and Mary Beth Pudup. I would especially like to send deep thanks to Shelly Errington, for believing in me enough to push me to finish my dissertation when I didn't believe in myself, a decade after I began. She has been a constant sounding board, willing to read early drafts and help me reconceptualize the major architecture of the document. I wouldn't be here without her help. Many thanks as well to Andrew Mathews, for generosity and patience throughout the process, from the days of my qualifying exams until now. His detailed input grounded the work theoretically and improved the final work immensely.

My fieldwork was funded in part by the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant and a STARS grant (Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students) supported by the UCSC Women's Club. My research with City Slicker Farms, and particularly focused on the Union Plaza Urban Farm Project, was supported in part by UC-Irvine's SAREP Program (Sustainable Agriculture, Research & Education Program). Many thanks to the organizations with whom I worked, particularly to Desi W.O.M.E. and Barbara Finnin for the time and words you generously shared with me. Thank you to all of the organizations and individuals who made this work possible.

Thanks to Aviva Sinervo, Carla Takaki Richardson, and Nikki Patel, for

attempting baby-friendly academic writing groups with varying levels of success. I always appreciated the willingness to try and benefited from your careful readings. I drew inspiration and models from the dissertations of Hilary Melcarek and Heath Cabot. Heath, thank you for encouragement at crucial turning points, opening up your home to me and extending and your warm friendship and intellectual engagement. Your graceful example in life and work has been something to aspire towards.

A million thanks to my family, both my parents, Carole and John Watson, and my in-laws, Wanda and Tim Michels, for supporting us on so many levels. I would never have felt it was possible for me to switch from being a stay-at-home mom to finishing my PhD without knowing that my son was in the best possible hands.

The person I need to thank most is my amazing husband, Aaron Michels. He has been a true partner in every sense of the word. Thank you for putting your own goals on hold to allow me to pursue my own. You believed in me and supported me every step of the way. I love you endlessly.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Who Moves In When the City Moves Out?

My research examines what on the surface appear to be new forms of collaboration between the City of Oakland and several local nonprofits to cover key city functions of park maintenance and graffiti abatement. These projects would not have been possible 15 years ago. The city, in the midst of financial woes, is looking for creative solutions that may save them money. They have cut staff, and no longer have the reach they once did. They are willing to make a deal.

My work follows two nonprofits, a collective of graffiti artists called the Community Rejuvenation Project, and City Slickers Farms, an urban farming organization. Both have won contracts from the City of Oakland to take over pieces of city function; each in their own way strikes a cautionary tale and is a success story. Each group has their own vision of how to make the world a better place and their own ways of enacting those imaginings materially on the world around them. They co-produce space through these material imaginings, through their garden design, the layout of a mural, the choice of a vegetable variety. I analyze the aesthetics of space in each project, and the cultural messages communicated through those visual cues. These transformations of space are driven by their belief that material changes in space can change people, and they are centered around the concept of blight, a word that surfaced again and again in my research. It's a term used by all players, sometimes wielded as a sharp tool, spoken with irony, fenced off

with air quotations, demonized, redefined, reborn. Transformations of space are driven by the need to transform people - the poor, the unhealthy, the disempowered - to make them into the ideal subjects imagined by the City and nonprofit organizations in their collaborations.

The City Slicker Farm - City of Oakland partnership in the Union Plaza Farm project explicitly drew inspiration from then-Mayor Ron Dellums' pledge to transform Oakland into a "Model City" that is "based on the notions of environmental and ecological integrity" (Ellis 2007), as quoted in City Slicker's own 2009 Annual Report. The city-funded murals by the aerosol artist collective have a goal of engaging local youth and transforming neglected space through art. Despite these other stated goals, a primary motivation for each was always financial savings, as acknowledged by all parties.

The Great Recession's effects have been felt keenly in Oakland. The City of Oakland's General Fund declined every year from 2008-2012, with a whopping 8.36% decline (24 million dollars) during 2009-2010, as the effects of the 2008 financial crisis were widely felt (East Bay Express 2013). When I began my fieldwork in 2010, politicians and city officials in Oakland were scrambling to cut costs where they could. It was a story that was playing out in cities across the country, who were similarly affected. My fieldwork examined some of the results as the city gutted many of its services and searched for creative cost-cutting with a neoliberal fervor.

The Materiality of Imaginings

The future happens as we imagine it into existence. This dissertation explores the public power of imagination in creating shared worlds and how the material effects of these imaginings co-constitute space. In my research, bureaucrats, gardeners and aerosol muralists are all actively inscribing space and claiming ownership over it, through their actions and material interactions; this process of co-creation defines the legality and subjectivity and economics of the people and institutions involved.

The work of shaping worlds is in large part what to make visible - and invisible. These imaginings become a way of making people see - a *constitutive vision*. Aesthetics matter. I pay attention to the material effects of imaginings by turning to documents: photographs, pamphlets, magazines, videos, websites which contain visual representation of all kinds. These are the minions of imaginings, the workers which create the constitutive vision and birth new worlds.

Imagination is no longer regarded as a synonym for fantasy or illusion but an increasingly common analytical trope in anthropology in the last few decades (Sarewitz 1996). It is a way to maintain a lively multiplicity and agency for the groups we study by producing systems of meaning that enable collective interpretations of social reality (Castoriadis 1987) but allowing for the possibility to project goals and seek to attain them. Nor is imagination understood as simply residing in individual minds in the form of aesthetic considerations. Anderson uses

imagination as the basis for a shared sense of belonging and attachment to a political community (1991); many others have used the terms to explore the categorization of human subjects so as to govern them more efficiently (Foucault 1979; Bowker and Star 2000; Scott 1998). In short, imagination, viewed as “an organized field of social practices,” can be seen as a key ingredient in making social order (Appadurai 1996; Taylor 2004; cf Jasanoff and Kim 2009).

However, we must avoid a clear trap in the term itself. It is no coincidence that the term "imagination" came into use just as anthropologists were straining against the term "culture" for its fixity, lack of agency, and turns toward essentialism (Strauss 2006; Sneath et al 2009). In my work I do not want the term to be a mere vague, holistic placeholder and to avoid the same pitfalls I have focused on the material effects or concrete processes through which imaginaries are enacted upon the world, an analytical emphasis which I've appreciated in the subfield of Science & Technology Studies (STS).

In STS, the concept of imagination is often combined with technology to form "sociotechnological imagination" (Jasanoff and Kim 2009) or "technologies of the imagination" (Sneath et al 2009), referring primarily to the "diverse manners or indeed styles by which imaginative effects are engendered" (2009). I will use a simplified definition of technology as "all aspects of action upon matter" (Lemmonier 1992). I find STS to be a fruitful starting point because of its rootedness in materiality (Jasanoff 2001; Jasanoff and Kim 2009; Sneath et al 2009). Imagination is, by nature, a somewhat ineffable concept, and I find it most useful to

think about and track imaginings through their material effects on the world. Jasanoff and Kim examine the concept of "sociotechnical imaginaries" through contrasting examples of how different state powers have created national imaginaries relating to their conception of nuclear power. These varied imaginaries produce vastly different results when it comes to policy focus and conceptions of risk. They define national sociotechnical imaginaries as “collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects.” Imaginaries, in this sense, at once describe "attainable futures and prescribe futures that states believe ought to be attained." However, Jasanoff has been more interested in the effects of imagination at the national level (as a function of the politics of the nation-state) or at a global level, in an attempt to explain how scientific representations of the natural world acquire a hold on people's beliefs.

I would like to apply their use of the term to describe the imaginings of city governments, for example, but also preserve its use for much smaller entities, more suitable to the scale of the ethnographic work I undertook. So for instance, I discuss the imaginaries of formal entities such as nonprofit organizations, but also less formal groups such as homeless or scavenger populations. Imaginaries are not simply dictated by the nation or city state - these groups are simply one among many competing to materialize their imaginings. Neither does imagination reside only in the strivings of the individual mind. The concept has the potential to bring together the collective yearnings of a group which shares a collective set of values, and

articulate the process of moving a shared vision into material reality. I appreciate the concept because of its preservation of the possibility of individual subjectivity while honoring the power of the collective to effect change; these poles are held in productive tension within the concept of imaginaries.

Some STS theorists feel strongly that the technology, the material process, engenders the imaginary, not vice versa (Sneath et al 2009). If this were the case, it would be through the act of digging and harvesting and creating fences that the gardener's imaginary would be produced. Through the act of walking the pre-dawn streets, sifting through recycling bins, the scavenger's imaginary would coalesce. I feel that the creation of the imaginary is more of a mutual process, where material and discursive processes co-produce imaginings; in this way I am closer to Jasanoff. Imaginaries encode collective visions of the good society and they "project visions of what is good, desirable, and worth attaining for a political community; they articulate feasible futures" (Jasanoff and Kim 2009). They are not simply master narratives, which are often extrapolated from past events and serve explanatory or justificatory purposes. Imaginaries create the future.

These imaginaries map the world in ways similar to those described by Ramaswamy in *The Land of Lemuria*, in which she traces the history of the fabled island of Lemuria, a place thought by most to be akin to the sunken island of Atlantis. It has never been corroborated scientifically, yet it is taught as factual history in Tamil schools and firmly embedded in Tamil identity as their flooded homeland. Ramaswamy asserts that:

Place making in the modern world, I insist, cannot ignore the colonization of imagination itself, and the numerous contradictions and conflicted intimacies of power, contestation and resistance in an age dominated by capitalism, imperialism, and the postcolonial condition. (2004:5)

Lemuria's shape morphs dramatically as its place-makers work to map a vanished space. Similarly, each of the groups I worked with imagine their own world into existence, based on their identities and needs, which are often at odds with the worlds constructed by others who may share their space yet inhabit an entirely different lived experience. Some are already mourning lost spaces, while others are busily unleashing their imaginings on the spaces around them. These worlds layer over one another and rub itchily at their points of contention.

Ramaswamy can be grouped with other scholars of what I will call imaginings of destruction. In these ranks we can include Joe Masco, who explores nuclear imaginings demanding new forms of governmentality to deal with altered interactions between nature, nuclear waste, and people in New Mexico. Another scholar who tracks the aftermath of destruction and its effects on the imagination in Japan is Lisa Yoneyama in *Hiroshima Traces*. This work examines how struggles over memory and history are expressed materially in the cityscape through processes of urban renewal and how the manufacture of space attempts to produce only subjectivities which emphasize societal stability (Yoneyama 1999, 34). My work fits into this line of material imaginings of destruction because the blight-inflected conversations I document include the ultimate threat of eminent domain: gardens are frequently bulldozed in the name of development and murals disappear under a coat

of gray paint overnight.

A Turn Towards Spatiality

Spatiality emphasizes the production of space, its discursive and material practices, and its related cultural understandings (Moore 2005). A focus on spatiality is rooted in a belief that changing one's material surroundings can change the way a person thinks or acts - a surprising common denominator for many of the actors in my research, who may disagree wildly on almost any other subject. The devil is in the details: how and when and in what ways?

Space provides an essential lens in thinking about race and class in an urban context because histories of racism, exclusion, and limitations of mobility result in tell-tale patterns on the landscape. As Laura Pulido notes, "An appreciation of spatiality . . . encourages greater attention to race, as it is one of the key social forces shaping our cities (and the U.S. as a whole)" (2000). These marked spaces are more than just a backdrop to the lives of the people I worked and talked with and observed; these spaces are active players in and of themselves.

Cultural geography has been criticized for a focus on "dematerialized and desocialized geographies" (Philo 2000). Space as an analytical tool must be grounded in theories of power and how it manifests materially as well as in discourse. In my work I focus on transformations of space but attempt to temper its abstractions with a blend of materiality and imagination. Imagination provides the specificity, the heart, the motivations, the detail necessary to understand motivation.

Materiality grounds the discussion and keeps us focused.

Geographies and histories of the present pivot on how past struggles gain traction, gain material and discursive fields of action, and enable emergent conditions of possibility. Power relations influence how possible past, present and future become linked. (Moore 2005)

I want to come back again and again to the material tangibility of the spaces I inhabited - the empty paint cans, the shells embedded in the mural, the collard leaves harvested from the outside-in, the symphonic rattle of a shopping cart with the high tinkling of bottles, dull clinks of aluminum, the rustle of layers of plastic, and the solid metallic rhythm of the loose wheels against the pavement.

Keith Basso, in his classic study of the storied landscape of the Western Apache of Arizona, shows how mountains and arroyos take over from grandmothers and uncles in the moral education of younger generations (1992). They are active players in the Apache world. The anthropologist Morten Pedersen argues that the way the Darhad, an ethnic group in Northern Mongolia, think about the landscape of the taiga is essential to their concept of personhood (2012). In my work with gardeners and muralists in West Oakland, the neighborhood landscape is not a backdrop for building planters and painting pieces, it is a force of resistance, threat, engagement, support. The lead and other chemicals sometimes found in the soil attest to long-forgotten industrial pursuits that must be wrestled with and faced head-on. Systematic disinvestment and disenfranchisement creates toxins - both physical and emotional - that can be buried but tend to be exposed at the surface in unexpected ways and times.

Space becomes categorized and labeled in ways that have far-reaching ramifications. In Oakland, competing groups see some urban areas as empty or blighted, which they feel leads to certain logical responses: that it should be made useful and ordered again. However, dueling definitions of both blight and order are at work. In the dense urban environment, there is never “empty space” - every place on the map is an individuated place, with a unique history and quite often current uses which may not be fully visible, or when visible, may not be legally sanctioned. As in the totemic landscape of Aboriginal Australia (Myers 1986) or the homeland of the Koyukon of Alaska (Nelson 1983), a place that some would consider wild is woven as a gathering of stories, of the comings and goings of diverse human and other-worldly beings (Ingold 2000). In the urban farming and homesteading movements, there has been a recent focus on identifying all of the areas on the urban grid which would be possible for agriculture, and setting policies and incentives to create more of a hyperlocal foodshed. Some organizations express big dreams of supplying large percentages of the food an urban area needs from its own “wasted spaces.” (McClintock 2013; City Slicker Farms Annual Report 2006-2009). My work looks at what happens next, when an urban farming group starts a farm in one of these spaces. It's not actually uncontested space, but a particular place with childhood memories and livelihoods attached. A farming project can easily be a form of colonization, through which well-meaning organizations come in with big ideas about how to help people, but end up exacerbating neighborhood divides instead. The idea of “homesteading” itself can have overtones of racial domination,

hearkening back to the pioneers staking claims in the “empty land” of the Western United States, land which had prior uses and claims from indigenous groups (Cronon 1983).

Landscape is not merely terrain, or the ground beneath our feet, but is inextricable from the vision of the viewer. John Berger described landscape as a "way of seeing," focusing on the links between the genre of landscape painting and the underlying class, race and power differences that the term may obscure. A painted landscape expressly removes the material labor necessary to create that vision. I find the analogy useful in considering how imaginings create a constitutive vision by making certain things more or less visible, towards a co-production of space. Bruce Braun examines the Western Canadian forest landscape to determine hidden systems of knowledge embedded therein:

To question the forest of forest politics is therefore also to attend to the subjugated histories and buried epistemologies – often colonial epistemologies – that are hidden by, or within, the terms and identities through which forest politics in the province is organized and understood. Finally, and perhaps most important, to break apart the forest is also to potentially open space for a more informed and inclusive public debate over what sorts of futures we want, a debate not constrained by the binary terms of contemporary forest politics. (2002)

This project examines spaces within a history of redlining, systematic disenfranchisement and pervasive poverty. How do different groups assert their own imaginations on to landscapes in material ways? Why do some seem to predominate over others?

There Goes the Neighborhood

We enter an urban landscape of startling juxtapositions. The West Oakland streets are a mix of houses, warehouses, and condominiums separated by an elevated freeway from a major commercial district across the border in Emeryville, a strip of Big Box stores such as Home Depot, Best Buy, and Office Max. Some houses in the area have well-kept, beautiful gardens, and some are expanses of weeds, but many contain dogs of various sizes and colors. This is the neighborhood of Dogtown, a historically low-income, African-American neighborhood in West Oakland, which one informant assured me was not due to the current ubiquity of canines but instead “because that’s where they used to have dog fights.” Small Jack Russell Terriers and white fluffy Westies on leashes skitter wide of fences emitting the resonant barks of guard dogs. The underlying conflicts of the neighborhood emerge even in the bodies of their animal proxies (Herzog 2011; Haraway 2008).

Viewed from above, two small triangles of park land are an anomalous green in a sea of concrete. One triangle of park space offers an expanse of trees and lawn broken by a picnic table, a wooden platform, and small dots of humans and shopping carts filled with glinting bottles and cans moving in various configurations. A larger adjacent triangle, separated by a wide street, offers more botanical possibilities. Lemon trees and lavender plants draw a line across one side, tasty blueberry bushes along another. Moving inward is a border of wood – a fence, now locked with a combination code preventing human entry. Inside are 20 or so raised beds inside, islands of dark soil and nutrient-dense greenery amid lighter gravel paths. These

parks are meant to be an oasis in the midst of what many consider to be an urban food desert. But an oasis for whom?

One block away is a major raised freeway, feeding minutes later into the Bay Bridge, and emitting a dull roar at all times of day or night. Small residential homes line two sides of the parks, and one corner holds Alliance Metal and Salvage Yard (whose name has recently changed to Alliance Recycling), which is the destination for all of the shopping carts nosing through the surrounding blocks. Small waterfalls of clinking glass bottles, dissonant squeals of metal on metal, and rumbles of heavy machinery can be heard at the park Monday through Saturday, and industrial-sized smells periodically waft out of the plant.

At an opposite corner of the park is a sleek box of metal and glass, with professional landscaping in the small entrance way – a condominium complex built in the last ten years. Behind it, one block over, a highrise condo complex is visible. The third side of the park faces a block-long high fence of corrugated iron covering a boarded up warehouse: a development project halted by the recession. This side of the park, the north side, contains much less landscaping and the street and sidewalk are littered by discarded food wrappers. Here, vans and trucks that double as homes permanently rotate through, including an impressive creation tacked together with boards of different sizes and colors, resembling a houseboat on wheels.

Many of the park's business transactions happen on this quieter, more shaded side of the park. I have overheard conversations about cars changing hands, been offered a cell phone charger in its original packaging from a homeless man pushing a

shopping cart, and witnessed drug deals. It is also at times a space of sociality: periodically, a folding table emerges from a truck, four chairs appear, and a domino game commences.

These triangular parks are Union Plaza Park and Fitzgerald Park, and since 2009 Union Plaza has been a working urban farm run by City Slicker Farms, a West Oakland-based nonprofit. This is one specific field site that became a touchstone, but I worked at mural sites and gardens in several different Oakland neighborhoods which shared many of the attributes described above: all were in predominantly low-income neighborhoods with a striking mix of housing types and businesses, and holding the ever-present possibility of a condo or a Big Box store appearing. East Oakland mural sites may have had a different demographic mix with more of a Latino presence, but shared many commonalities: shopping carts, corner drug sales, foreclosed Craftsman bungalows and new Condos (next to the Fruitvale Metro). Sandwiched between the sea and hills with constant demographic pressure from SF exiles, people of different classes and races live in close proximity and neighborhoods can change seemingly overnight.

Material effects of various imaginations indicate the liveliness and relevance of the struggle over space, whether it be graffiti/art, scrap metal/sculptures, weeds/nutrient-dense vegetables. All are signifiers of who belongs. People's pathways layer on top of one another, encompassing history and habit and creating the city anew each time they are traced. This piece is about the colonization of space and how these organizations use metaphors of space in order to mark territory. Food deserts, blight

and war are some of the metaphors circulating that are constantly used and countered, and I explore these metaphors in the following sections.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Blight

The term blight was originally used to describe plant disease that "causes rapid and extensive discoloration, wilting and death of plant tissues."¹ It can be used as either a noun (the disease itself) or a verb (to cause to wither or decay). In its application in an urban context, the word retained much of the original sense. Blight has a long history of use in urban contexts to signify a state of physical, social and, at times, moral illness (Taylor 2009). It was first used prominently to describe deteriorating urban conditions by the 19th Century Progressive Movement, which wanted to catalog and quantify urban poverty and its causes (Walker 1938). Reformers such as Jacob Riis, author of the report on urban poverty *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) described blight as a disease, akin to cancer, which created slums (Yadav 1987).

The passage of the Housing Act of 1949 gave the concept of blight a national spotlight, as politicians and city planners argued over the best ways to support urban redevelopment and create affordable housing. The law aimed to create "decent housing for every American family," but its aims were in many cases at odds with its effects in the world. The types of concentrated public housing and "urban renewal" which it supported became notorious for instead creating the kind of blight which the

¹ blight. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved December 06, 2013, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blight>

Housing Act was created to address (von Hoffman 2000). It sought to increase the housing supply by offering loans for construction by developers and cities as well as underwriting home purchases for individuals. However, the loan terms offered from the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) were based on a neighborhood ranking system (A to D) which, although intended to protect small homeowners from foreclosure, effectively institutionalized racism in lending (Pulido 2000). "A" ratings tended to be more prosperous, all-white suburbs, while neighborhood ratings explicitly followed racial make-ups of a neighborhood - for instance, if a neighborhood became integrated, its rating could be downgraded. Today we refer to the illegal practice of refusing to make residential loans or imposing more onerous terms on any loans made in an area because of the predominant race, national origin, etc., of the residents of the neighborhood in which the property is located as "redlining." Overall, less than two percent of the housing financed with federal mortgage insurance was made available to blacks (Anderson 1996). The policies enshrined in the 1949 law still influence our cities today. The Act's major contribution to national urban policy was the program for urban redevelopment, which allocated over a billion dollars in loans to help local governments acquire slums and blighted land for public and private development projects. The law resulted in accelerated "blight clearance" in cities across the country by providing federal funding mechanisms to support it. These policies reached their zenith in New York City through the work of Robert Moses, an urban planner who emphasized wholesale clearance of neighborhoods he deemed blighted (von Hoffman 2000). The

bulldozed spaces were then redeveloped to encourage one use -- such as high-rise apartment towers or a district focusing on cultural institutions -- with a unified modernist architecture. One criticism of his work (among many) is that he gave the needs of automobiles -- and the people rich enough to own one -- more weight than the needs of the poor and working class residents whom he removed by pioneering the use of eminent domain laws. Ever a pugnacious and controversial figure, near the end of his life, he said, "I raise my stein to the builder who can remove ghettos without removing people, as I hail the chef who can make an omelet without breaking eggs" (Dim 2012). Moses utilized strategies that were replicated across the country. A 1966 National Commission on Urban Problems study noted that of 1,555 urban renewal projects funded by the Housing Act, 67% were predominantly residential before urban renewal, but only 43% were residential afterward. To many, urban renewal began to appear as a form of class and race warfare (von Hoffman 2000).

Jane Jacobs, in her masterwork *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* refers to blight in a unique way - she uses the term "the great blight of dullness" (1961). In many ways, her book was written in direct opposition to the policies of Moses, whom she saw as decimating the New York she knew and loved. One of her techniques was the subversion of the term "blight," which Moses used as a tool to mark an area for clearance. Her book is an impassioned plea to create vibrant, diverse, active street life, which she believed is encouraged through mixed use planning - co-mingling business, light industrial and residential uses in the same

neighborhood. She believed that a busy, attractive street built on a human scale is a safe street because people want to be using the sidewalk, want to be patronizing businesses there, and want to live there. She was very much against segregating uses (a goal for Moses and a priority in much of the history of urban planning) such as creating a suburban development of *only* houses or a downtown filled with office buildings where all of the sidewalks are deserted after five pm. Both the suburb and the downtown described would suffer from "the great blight of dullness" in Jacobs' eyes. Jacobs use of blight fits surprisingly well with that of the aerosol muralists I worked with.

At the center of the Housing Act of 1949 was the belief that physical dwellings could change the behavior of people and thereby accomplish social goals. It was based in the belief that changes in physical environment would influence values: by placing lower-class people in improved housing, they would be motivated to "improve" themselves, or adopt middle-class behaviors (von Hoffman 2000). Histories of architecture, city planning, and public works contain many examples of physical arrangements with implicit or explicit political purposes and desired behavioral modifications. For instance, Baron Haussmann's broad Parisian thoroughfares were engineered at Louis Napoleon's direction to prevent any recurrence of street fighting of the kind that took place during the revolution of 1848 (Winner 1986). The belief that spatial arrangement influences human behavior would probably be one of the few points Moses and Jacobs could agree upon.

Blight, however, is not simply a metaphor - it is also a legal definition with

real-world consequences. Both the Union Plaza Farm project and mural projects undertaken by the Community Rejuvenation Project were financed in large part through Redevelopment funding, with its roots in the aforementioned Housing Act of 1949. Redevelopment funding came from a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) structure that kept property taxes within the city where they were paid instead of paying them out to other entities. Taxing agencies continue to receive the same property tax revenues they received when the redevelopment plan was adopted (in 1952). The local Redevelopment Agency is allocated any increases in property taxes resulting from a reassessment of property, which they can spend to try to raise property taxes in areas they have labeled "blighted." As Jon Kindleberger of the City of Oakland's Community & Economic Development Agency explained in a 2011 interview, "The rationale is that by spending money on Redevelopment projects, the property values will eventually go up, so redevelopment areas kind of borrow against that increase in property taxes." City governments bear much of the risk and cost of infrastructure development for these projects, in the hopes that property taxes will increase after the new development.

Areas targeted for use of Redevelopment funds must fall under their definition of blight in order to qualify for funds. The Community Redevelopment Law was enacted as part of the redevelopment reform legislation contained in AB-1290. Under its blight definition, a blighted area is one that is "predominantly urbanized and in which the following four components are met:"

1. The combination of statutorily enumerated conditions (which

contribute to blight) are prevalent and substantial.²

2. The above conditions are the cause of a reduction or lack of proper utilization of an area.

3. The area constitutes a serious physical and economic burden on the community.

4. That burden cannot reasonably be expected to be reversed by private and/or governmental action, without redevelopment.

Those enumerated conditions include both physical blight, primarily "unsafe or unhealthy buildings," and economic blight which includes stagnant property values, high crime rates, lack of necessary commercial facilities "normally found in

2 Enumerated physical conditions include the following:

- Unsafe or unhealthy buildings that may result from code violations, dilapidation and deterioration, defective design or physical construction, faulty or inadequate utilities, or other similar factors.
- Conditions preventing or substantially hindering the effective use or capacity of buildings or lots, which may be caused by substandard design, inadequate size given present market conditions, lack of parking, or similar factors.
- Adjacent or nearby uses that are incompatible with each other and prevent economic development of the area.
- The existence of subdivided lots in multiple ownership of irregular form and shape and inadequate size for proper development.

Economic conditions of blight include the following:

- Depreciated or stagnant property values or impaired investments, including, but not necessarily limited to, properties containing hazardous waste and requiring redevelopment remediation authority.
- Abnormally high business vacancies, abnormally low lease rates, high turnover rates, abandoned buildings, or excess vacant lots in an area developed for urban use and served by utilities.
- Lack of necessary commercial facilities normally found in neighborhoods (e.g., grocery stores, drug stores, banks/lending institutions).
- Residential overcrowding that has led to public safety and welfare problems.
- An excess of bars, liquor stores, or other businesses catering exclusively to adults that has led to public safety and welfare problems. A high crime rate constituting a serious threat to the public safety and welfare (Goldfarb & Lippman 2006).

neighborhoods," vacant properties, residential overcrowding. Another key category in designating an area blighted can be that the area is unlikely to attract economic development without public help, which we discuss below (Goldfarb & Lippman 2006).

The effects of what is termed "economic blight" are cumulative over decades and generations, and embed long-term effects of racism in neighborhoods. As Pulido says, "Since landscapes are artifacts of past and present racisms, they embody generations of sociospatial relations, what might be called the 'sedimentation of racial inequality'" (Pulido 2000; Oliver and Shapiro 1995:5). In many cases, areas labeled blighted under the Redevelopment definition are those which historically had been "redlined" by banks, as discussed above. Redlining was outlawed in subsequent years and the practice violates both the Fair Housing Act and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (FDIC Policy, 2013), but the process often continued more informally. In some forms it continues today, illustrated most recently by the \$125 million settlement by Wells Fargo in 2012 for charging higher fees and rates based on race (Savage 7/12/2012). Of course, in many cases, what is termed "redlining" was less about individual acts of overt racism and more about patterns of large-scale structural racism, where individuals may or may not have been aware of the overall effects of their actions (Pulido 2000). Redlining effectively segregated many American cities long after more overt forms of segregation were deemed illegal, and also led to disparities in neighborhood amenities such as banks, supermarkets or other businesses. It also led to a systematic lack of investment in the housing stock in

these neighborhoods because residents did not have access to credit. In short, blight is often a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The legal use of the term blight has shifted under the program from meaning primarily substandard housing to a broader definition of "sub-optimal" local economic development, in large part due to intense competition among municipalities for TIF funds used to attract large corporations to their city (Gordon 2003). It is, in effect, public financing of private economic transactions and in some cases has been described as a "tax grab." As California Assemblyman Phillip Isenberg lamented in 1995, "Somewhere along the way. . .defining blight became an art form."³ Funds originally intended to address deteriorating housing conditions and the alleviation of poverty are now routinely used to create suburban shopping malls, in the process often defunding local schools and publicly-funded social services (Gordon 2003). The term blight in this legal context has been carried over from Progressive Era reform movements, where blight was viewed not as synonymous with "slum," but as a set of conditions often analogized as a disease or a cancer, which resulted in slums (Walker 1938). California pioneered the adoption of TIF-funded Redevelopment programs, but I do not mean to imply that California is an exception in using this type of funding to support "urban revitalization" projects. By 2000, only three states had not passed laws supporting TIF-funded Redevelopment

³ Letter from Phillip Isenberg, Assemblyman, Ninth District, Cal. Legislature, to Hon. Tom Campbell, Chair, Cal. S. Hous. & Land Use Comm., and Hon. Charles Calderon, Chair, Cal. S. Select Comm. on Redevelopment (Dec. 13, 1995), reprinted in *Redevelopment and Blight: Joint Interim Hearing Before the Senate Comm. on Hous. & Land Use & Senate Select Comm. on Redevelopment, 1995-1996 Leg., Reg. Sess. 831-S (Cal. 1995)* (as quoted in Gordon 2003)

Agencies (Gordon 2003). Gordon argues that the inclusion of "economic blight" into the qualifying definition which originally was solely focused on health and welfare concerns, effectively diluted and undermined the original purpose of the laws (2003). Instead of focusing on inner-city poverty alleviation, they could then be used to grant tax cuts to large corporations, with minimal positive impact on the lives of those living in poverty, but major impacts in the form of land clearance through eminent domain and the de-funding of local schools and social services, which also rely on property taxes for their funding, many of which were effectively capped due to Redevelopment Funds.

The friction inherent in the term "blight" is evident in its wide variety of definitions. Use of the term blight can quickly shift from talking about unkempt places to unkempt people. Both City Slickers and CRP had projects funded by the Redevelopment Agency that were in effect hoping to change the behavior of those living in the surrounding neighborhood. CRP's murals were funded in the belief that local taggers would respect them more due to incorporation of local themes and community involvement - and therefore, tag them less. City Slickers's Union Plaza Urban Farm was funded in the hope that surrounding residents would be encouraged to eat more vegetables but also, I argue, because it was believed that their presence would have a "domesticating" effect on the neighborhood.

One part of the legal definition of blight, discussed above, allows the label to indicate the result of systematic disinvestment in an area to the point that basic services are unavailable such as banks and supermarkets (Short et al. 2007). Garden

programs from the 1970s onward have been framed as proactive grassroots responses to “the abandonment of urban land in the face of suburbanization, disinvestment and decay” (Kurtz 2001, p. 658).

While supplemental production of food may be a goal, many modern urban garden programs are also motivated by neighborhood improvement, empowerment, social networking, and bringing nature into the city. Thus, they use localized, complex solutions to fight poverty and food insecurity (Kurtz 2001, cf Melcarek 2009).

Other scholars such as Pudup (2008) argue that this is a response to the neoliberal “roll-back” in social services during that time, and that garden programs can unintentionally aid the neoliberal agenda by placing the emphasis on personal responsibility over organizing for large-scale political change.

Due to concerns over systematic disinvestment in California schools, whose funding is also tied to property taxes in California, Governor Jerry Brown ended Redevelopment funding in 2011. The Redevelopment program from the State of California was discontinued and Oakland's Community & Economic Development Agency was subsequently dissolved as of February 12, 2012. My research explores some of the final effects of Redevelopment policy before its demise, effects that will continue to influence Oakland's landscape long into the future.

The Metaphor of Desertification

The nonprofit groups I followed, CRP and City Slickers, both use images of deserts and barrenness (food deserts, bare expanses of gray concrete) to dramatize

and highlight the problems their actions alleviate. The term "food desert" is one that was first reportedly used by a low-income housing activist in Scotland in the early-1990s, and quickly moved into policy circles in Great Britain (Cummins and Macintyre 2002; Beaumont et al 1995). The term became more widely used in the United States in concert with the rise of the food justice movement in the mid-2000s and is a term now widely used in Oakland, especially among activist circles but also now part of the vocabulary of many community members (Chung and Myers 1999; Hendrickson et al. 2006; Williams, et al. 2008). Its use can in some locations belie its outsider status because some long-term residents resent the judgment it implies and do not see their neighborhood as a desert. Several studies have begun to question the assumed link between lack of access and low consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits (Boone-Heinonen et al 2011; An & Sturm 2012). Evaluations of the health of neighborhood residents in a Philadelphia food desert added no increase in fruit and vegetable consumption or improvement in the health of local residents after a grocery store was added (Cummins et al 2014). The term "food desert" has in some areas become a convenient shorthand for a complex problem (Wrigley 2002). Some studies have concluded that if getting vegetables into low-income neighborhoods doesn't make people healthier, that food is not the problem - poverty is (Gilligan 2014). I believe that is again a simplification which elides the important cultural component. While my research did not directly seek to elucidate the cultural components of the makings of a food desert, in examining nonprofit efforts to engage with such neighborhoods, I saw a clear cultural basis for why certain efforts

were more well-accepted than others and did or did not lead to behavioral changes.

Therefore my research can shed some light on why a family's vegetable consumption (or lack thereof) can be about more than simply access.

CRP and City Slickers see themselves as cultivating color and life in the midst of barrenness, concrete expanses, and wastes of blight. City Slickers explicitly works to rectify what they see as the problem of food deserts, or the lack of access to healthy foods within certain neighborhood due to the absence of grocery stores and markets offering fruits and vegetables for sale. They would see desertification, or the process of creating deserts, as the flight of grocery stores from and a lack of green spaces in low-income urban neighborhoods; as the city stops maintaining parks and they get closed and fenced off the desertification metaphor becomes more apt. CRP would see the process of desertification as the painting over of urban artwork, both legal and illegal, which the city has seen as one of its maintenance tasks labeled “blight abatement.” However, CRP has a different definition of blight, and sees their murals and aerosol artwork as rejuvenation for neighborhoods. They've successfully proposed the creation of murals as an alternative form of blight abatement.

How is space marked and claimed by these different groups? How do material effects of imaginings, rooted in contrasting theories of order and disorder, remake the world?

Mapping Imaginaries

The process of transforming and inscribing space and people begins through

imaginaries that are enacted to varying degrees depending on the power and resources of the groups in question. As people imagine the world around them into existence, they alter their surroundings in order to insert themselves within it. In Oakland, the imaginaries of each of the players are in conflict. Here, I outline the contentious visual imaginaries at work. I will first delve into the visual imaginaries of the organizations with whom I worked most closely: the City of Oakland, the Community Rejuvenation Project, and City Slicker Farms. Then I discuss the visual imaginaries of some of the groups of people these organizations must engage with in order to transform spaces and some of the people they hope their spaces will transform.

The City of Oakland, as with most cities, has a fundamental purpose of maintaining order and cleanliness. The City sees one of its major roles as upholding or increasing property values. In practice, one of the ways of upholding values is through combating “blight,” which manifests in many forms: trash-strewn lots, abandoned buildings often indicated by broken windows or graffiti tags, or crime such as drug dealing, panhandling or prostitution. The visual imaginary for the city, in order to combat this blight, would include rows of well-kept houses, with beautiful plantings (but usually not edible plants, due to the messiness involved), and when artwork is considered it is officially sanctioned, such as a sculpture on a corner or a mural on a school wall. Murals they envision are usually on a square or rectangular surface (akin to a “canvas”), showing imagery of people and recognizable design elements. People are allowed into the landscape, but only if using public space in

anticipated ways: swinging on swing sets, sitting on benches, walking fluffy dogs. The City strives for a clean, orderly, legal, pretty space. They are the upholders of safety, and they are the official definers of space, so they work within their own definitions: contained walls, contained people, projecting symbolic safety through visual/spatial arrangements and signifiers. A representation of the City's visual imagination can be found in the photo montage header for the West Oakland Plan Newsletter, which gives updates on the process of creating the City's West Oakland Redevelopment Plan (to be released in July 2014). It shows four photos: (1) a closeup of the West Oakland BART sign (rapid transit); (2) an architectural rendering of their vision for 26th Street from Mandela Parkway, showing a new condominium/commercial development prominently, with a few tiny people, whose heads appear at the very bottom of the drawing; (3) the historic Oakland Train Station, long abandoned and fallen into disrepair (and ironically, a favored tagging location, although none is visible); and (4) another architectural rendering of a new commercial development on Seventh Street, where the historic center of African-American culture is referenced in the Blues Cafe. People are crossing the street and using the sidewalks in this vision, but the focus is clearly on attracting new commercial development. In all of these pictures, homes and families are conspicuously absent; the people who are portrayed are so small that race and class indicators blur. The new architecture portrayed is very reminiscent of the condos which surround Fitzgerald and Union Plaza Parks.



Figure 1. Photo Montage header for the City of Oakland's West Oakland Specific Plan Newsletter

The City of Oakland routinely paints over what they consider to be graffiti with standard gray paint as part of their abatement program. The Community Rejuvenation Project is an organization of aerosol artists who create murals reflecting disappeared neighborhood history as they create artwork both City-sanctioned and illegal. To the artists, a gray wall cries out for a mural, whereas for many city officials, that is their ideal and the state they put time and money towards creating. For instance, Jon Kindleberger, a City of Oakland urban planner in the Community Economic Development Agency which funded several of CRP's murals, recalled driving with Desi W.O.M.E., founder of the artist collective, to check out possible mural locations:

Driving around with Desi, there's a big wall at a CalTrans facility on San Leandro street, and they totally paint everything out, so it's just gray, and Desi's like "Oh yeah, we've got to do something about that wall." Which -- that's just such a divergent way of thinking from where this funding is coming from. Which is to say, that wall is fine the way it is, that's the way it's supposed to be. (2/4/11)

The visual imaginary for the aerosol muralists highlights reclamation of space, in what they see as a colonized landscape. The murals capture the after-fade of light on the retina. Their artwork itself is ephemeral, fading either from the city painting over

their illegal murals within a few days or weeks of their execution, or through the process of sun and rain, peeling after a few years. They are beautifying precisely not to gentrify but to assert ownership claims to territory, so in a larger sense it is tagging – our community, our population, our space. This is also in part about self-aggrandizement. Desi W.O.M.E has in a sense, incorporated himself into the Community Rejuvenation Project (CRP) - he is its embodiment. Therefore he can move from the illegal tagging of his own name, to the legal tagging of his name writ large, now CRP. This manifests in highly stylized forms of writing: murals often include large-scale (perhaps eight foot tall) letters done wildstyle, which to the untrained eye are illegible, a complex tangle of lines, corners, shadows. This writing is tagging taken to the level of an art form, and aerosol artists engage in a constant competition to push stylistic boundaries further. They see the blank, gray walls of the City's abatement team and want to superimpose color – a literal way to assert the presence of communities of color – and reflect the vibrancy of the cultures living in the neighborhood surrounding the mural, and the histories of the spaces. While the city does sometimes sanction murals, they have ideal content requirements. One that overlaps with the city's imaginary is memorial images of people who have recently died in the area, often youth caught in the crossfire of drug and gang conflicts. CRP tries to include “archetypical images” of people representing different cultures, and often searches the internet for cultural images to convey their message, which they then bring to the mural painting, squinting as they compare blurry printouts to the scaled up versions half-finished on the wall. Aerosol writers seek out big walls in

blighted spots, places with clearly absent landlords, that correspond with areas of high visual impact. Spots viewed by many people are prized: those visible from a freeway, or at the intersection of busy streets. They see the city as a canvas, one not bounded by flat square walls, but extending through doorways and around corners.

The visual imaginary for the urban farmers is an urban oasis with orderly rows of deep green, nutrient-dense vegetables, cute borders with flowers (which also offer beneficial pest encouragement & herbs). In theory, people are included in this urban oasis but they are not fore-fronted. This point is highlighted by the fact that it took so long to put tables in at Union Plaza & Fitzgerald Parks after seating areas were removed during park construction; it was something that was not central to City Slicker Farms' mission, yet it affected the experience of the park users tremendously. In practice, all City Slickers gardens are locked and people are only allowed inside during specific days and times and under supervision. The nonprofit understandably has a need for control, because they measure their production, weighing their harvest and recording the stats. As a nonprofit, they must constantly prove their effectiveness in reports to their donors. Blueberry bushes outside the fence are the concession: their weight goes unrecorded, because they are put in place for anyone who might need a snack and the cupboard is unlocked.

As Anna Tsing asserts, "Biological and social diversity huddle defensively in neglected margins. In urban jungles as well as rural backwaters, the jumble of diversity that imperial planners tend to consider excessive still teems." (Tsing 2014) Other groups huddle in the margins with strikingly different imaginaries. Scavengers

congregate in Fitzgerald Park and earn money by collecting bottles and cans from recycling and trash bins and bringing them to the scrap metal dealer, Alliance Recycling, located across the street. Their visual imaginaries are centered on maximizing resource acquisition while still staying under the radar of vigilant homeowners or police who may object to this technically not-fully-legal activity. Their day starts long before dawn, with most scavengers working on foot, slinging a bag over their shoulder, or using shopping carts or bicycles, which allows roaming slightly farther from the recycling plant to find treasure. Use of a car increases capacity and distance exponentially, but not many have them. Scavengers have clear routes they've worked out based on their home base, transportation constraints, and power dynamics. They finish their routes for the day and then socialize in the park across from Alliance Recycling, adjacent to the urban farm, in patterns similar to those noted by Gowan in her ethnography of San Francisco homeless scavengers (2010). Not all scavengers are homeless, but many of the homeless are scavengers.

The visual imaginary for the homeless shares an appreciation of weedy edges. Their imagined landscape prioritizes invisibility, seeking it out. It is marked by places they can rest where they won't be harassed and can escape notice, places where they find temporary safety: seating areas, dry places to sleep under highway bridges, almost invisible paths leading to secret canopies under bushes. They look for wild spaces. The homeless embody the wildness in our cities, which is one reason why the forces of order - the police, the homeowners, the Condo Associations, the developers - are scared of them. They look for the black holes in the urban

landscape, the places where rules are bent. Anything can happen there (Gowan 2010). For a long time, Union Plaza & Fitzgerald Parks were one of these places – a place where rules were suspended, outcasts congregated, possibilities multiplied. Proximity to wildness makes a lot of people nervous; those who were unnerved turned to the ultimate civilizing influence: agriculture. They sought a cultivated, orderly space.

The visual imaginary for the condo owners who live around the urban farm is in stark contrast with the scavengers. Condos project an aura of newness and hipness; people who buy them generally care about design and have more money than time. They can expect to have fewer repairs on new construction, and their monthly condo association dues pay for landscaping and external maintenance. They therefore have professionally landscaped yards, containing only ornamentals, no edibles. By design, newly built condos provide no encouragement of scavengers or foragers, and because the sites were generally bulldozed and newly built to the edges of the lots, the lots don't tend to include mature trees – the buildings often erase the botanical history of anyone who has lived there before them. The designs are modern and sleek, ranging in quality from Architectural Digest to strip mall design. Everything is legal, orderly, and there are no people. None of the condos in the neighborhood have lawns, front gardens containing space to socialize, or stoops to sit on; all social life happens in individual units or individual backyards. Condo owners generally have defined trajectories in space. They exit their houses, get in cars: car to house, house to car. They walk their small dogs around the same blocks. It is an

orderly existence, designed to be so. Video cameras and home security measures are prominent. When surveyed about their use of the only park in their neighborhood, many of the condo owners didn't feel that they could say they had actually been to the park, and when asked would reply, "Well, I've driven by the park," or "I've walked my dog past the park. Does that count?"

The last visual imaginary is that of the long-term resident, often but not always African-American, who looms large for each of the organizations we have discussed (the City, CRP and City Slickers). Each is uniquely attuned to them as a key part of their mission - the long-term resident is who each seeks to assist, appease and ultimately, discipline. Residents are to be respected for their long-term status in the community, yet as a group they inspire anxiety - over whether they're eating enough vegetables, whether they're politically empowered, how they earn a living. All three groups hope their projects result in behavioral changes and new discipline, new subjectivities (Li 2007; Moore 2005).

Clearly these imaginaries are in conflict, in some cases at war: over landscape and visual markers indicating race, class, gentrification; war with visual markers of territory, over who gets to inscribe space (Brown 2005); a war of categories (Bowker & Starr 2000); a war of habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

New collaborations between city government and non-profits do not appear on the surface to be driven by a central profit motive and seem outside the main current of the capitalist model, if perhaps still caught in a side eddy. Painting murals? Giving away low-cost vegetables? However, the idea of cities turning over portions

of their functions and services to outside organizations has a long-standing precedent within a neoliberal push towards smaller city governments. The city-nonprofit collaborations are conceived of by the politicians involved as creative, progressive solutions, and they are presented as such to their constituents. The City Council voted unanimously to turn a city park into an urban farm by giving control of it to City Slicker Farms. But from another angle it could be viewed as turning public property and public space into private property, thereby changing who has access and rights to that space (Pudup 2008). This is a deeply capitalist mode of thinking. In terms of a mural, although some might object to its content, most feel that the addition of art to a neighborhood is an improvement. However, does the presence of a mural mean an abdication of city function – is it no longer the city's job to pick up trash, remove gang symbols, keep the city beautiful? There is a direct correlation between murals being funded and cuts in Public Works, especially a reduction in city staff assigned to abatement. So while on one hand it seems progressive for a city to support more art, from another it is a deeper entanglement in a more neoliberal model of government.

In this war, food and art, space and signs are tools. Condo owners have the tools of power and law on their side: police, property developers, and Council members support them. Condo owners are tax payers, they are the people who show up to community meetings, they are the squeaky wheels. The tools of the scavengers and homeless are their ability to be inconspicuous, by moving around in early morning hours or late at night. When their bodies become visible, they are targets.

They have their feet and their mobility as tools. When a space becomes problematic, they move on and find a new one. The aerosol writers have their imagery and spray cans as tools, and their ingenuity in choosing locations. They have their political savviness as a tool. When they are painted over by city abatement employees, someone goes out at night and scrawls up phone numbers of city officials to call in protest. The urban farmers have literal tools: trowels, hoses, wheelbarrows. The garden produce itself is a tool, both in the way they intend it – as a tool to fight food insecurity in the neighborhood – but it is also a tool that serves to justify their control of the space. They argue that they grow food for the community good, so their use trumps other possible park uses. Other tools are their nonprofit status, their innocuousness, their aura of goodness. They inscribe the space, cultivate it, erect fences, signs, plant perennials, put down roots. They are disciplining the space and by extension the people who use it simply by their presence. Their race and middle-class markers tame the space and make it acceptable for capitalist investment to rush in.

The visual imaginaries of the aerosol writers and City Slickers are aligned in their bid to bring color and life to areas they see as deserts, but they diverge in important ways. Both are clearly in conflict with the imaginaries of the city government and condo owners, who use language such as “cleaning up” a space, “bringing it back” (from where?) or maintaining order, to talk about their ideals for urban spaces. Blight is a key catchphrase in all of the imaginaries, used in different ways and to enact different purposes. These are spaces of friction – imaginaries are

enacted in clashing and conflicting realities. Certainly ideas of neoliberalism and colonization engage here with local questions of poverty, food insecurity, and gentrification in a sticky local encounter. Every mural site and urban farm exemplifies “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (Tsing 2005).

Food organizations such as City Slicker Farms see themselves as aligning with the forces fighting gentrification, a debatable principle. It's their mission to bring food to people who can't afford it and don't have access to it. City Slickers sees themselves as wanting to include everyone who used the space before, and see themselves on the side of the poor. But in creating Union Plaza Urban Farm they also inadvertently bring up property values and make the area much more desirable for those with higher incomes and levels of education, and align with the motives of Council members to change the area and remove the homeless and scavengers from the neighborhood.

The Community Rejuvenation Project is much more aware of how visual inscription of space affects the use of space, how much the visual matters, and how it sends signs to their audience. This heightened awareness is understandable in a group of artists with explicitly political motives. City Slickers Farms is an organization of people earnestly wanting to help those in need, whose motivations are not in doubt. They are gardeners with a background in plants and nonprofit specialists with a background in social service – and they are not as aware of how the visual imagination manifests, how to send a message through art and design, or how

culture is unconsciously inscribed and broadcast in space. To me, even City Slickers' name feels racially biased, cute, apolitical. Their aesthetic is painting signs in a pastel aqua blue, using chalkboards, using galvanized steel containers to display vegetables. It's a pleasant aesthetic, which would not be out of place in any farmer's market or a homesteader's blog, but it is important to realize that it is a culturally loaded perspective. Farmer's markets in general have been a space for middle- and upper-class white families, not necessarily a space targeting people of color or low-income families (although that has shifted somewhat in the last five years since EBT (food stamp) dollars can now be spent at participating farmer's markets). The font choice on City Slicker posters and banners for their events, their website design, and their educational handouts at the time of my research had yet to include colors or styles that would reference urban hip hop or graffiti-inspired designs. I believe that this is partly due to the fact that most of their employees and financial supporters have tended to be white and middle- to upper-class, and they do not want to alienate them. At the end of my fieldwork, I saw signs that this awareness was shifting.

Methodology

Fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted for a period of eighteen months between March 2010 to September 2011. I conducted participant observation with the Community Rejuvenation Project, attending meetings, mural painting, block parties, and fundraisers. I volunteered as a grantwriter and also ended up being an unofficial chauffeur, even called upon to take CRP's founder to the emergency room

in the middle of the night when he suffered a head trauma after a biking accident. At the mural sites, I organized donated food, helped with community clean-up (trash pick-up) and very occasionally painted (mostly buffing background areas that would be painted over). I'm not much of a visual artist. I conducted informal and semi-formal interviews with Desi Wome, CRP's founder, as well as many of the other artists in the collective, city officials with whom they worked, and community members and other volunteers.

I began volunteering with City Slicker Farms in June 2010 in their Community Market Farms and their farmstand, eventually becoming a Backyard Garden Mentor (which I continued until November 2012). I was an official intern in the fall of 2010 at the Center Street and Secret Gardens, but also volunteered regularly at the Herb Garden and of course, my main field site Union Plaza Urban Farm. I conducted participant observation by volunteering in the gardens, working at the Saturday morning farmstand, attending workshops and any public events with which CSF was associated. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the organization's Executive Director, Apprentices, and many of the volunteers. I also conducted an evaluation of the Union Plaza Urban Farm and focusing on the process of community outreach and impact on food insecurity in the neighborhood; for this study I designed a questionnaire which included short responses, multiple choice and Likert scale questions. I conducted the survey with 36 community members on the blocks surrounding the urban farm during three months in the summer/fall of 2011.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into six chapters focused on bureaucracy, urban farming, the aerosol art movement in Oakland, the aesthetic commitments of each of these organizing forms and the ramifications of those choices, and then a concluding chapter viewing each entity longitudinally over the course of my fieldwork. Themes illustrating the material co-production of space, the uses of blight categorization and subjectification re-occur in each chapter.

In Chapter Two, "Bureaucratic Dreamspace," I discuss the effects of an idealized bureaucratic landscape in creating zones of obscurity in its engagement with nonprofits, in the areas of: strategic ignorance; the tool of classification; encoding race, class and ethnicity in bureaucracy; and its inability to recognize itself. I also discuss how these collaborations between cities and nonprofits, while seemingly new and progressive solutions to the lack of funds during a recession, in fact fall into a larger pattern of neoliberal governmentality. In Chapter Three, "Domesticating Space and Cultivating Subjects," I examine City Slicker Farms' urban farming project at Union Plaza Park in the context of historical trends in urban gardening movements. I discuss their role in transforming the space and, without it being their intention, disciplining the former users of the park space, many of whom are homeless or scavengers. In Chapter Four, "Flipping the Script," I delve into the attempts by the Community Rejuvenation Project, a cooperative of aerosol artists, to change the narrative surrounding blight and Broken Windows Theory by proposing their own alternative. Chapter Five, "Concrete Imaginings," examines the aesthetic

commitments of each of the organizations with whom I worked (as well as several others as comparisons) by focusing on theories of documents and visual culture analysis. It argues that the materiality of documents is one of the primary ways groups enact their imaginings, claim space and create the world they wish to see. Chapter Six shows how all of the previous chapters highlight shifting power differences in public-nonprofit relationships which re-constitute Oakland's landscape in tangible and intangible ways. I reflect on how the organizations I followed changed over almost five years of my involvement, and how Oakland itself is being reshaped before our eyes.

CHAPTER TWO

Bureaucratic Dreamspace

As I waited to interview the Director of Parks and Recreation, Audrey Jones-Taylor, I gazed around her spacious office, trying to get a sense of what it would be like to be in her shoes, managing 2,500 acres of open space spread over 100 city parks, as your funding erodes from underneath you. My eyes settled on a quotation printed out and taped to her white board: "Just because you are working hard does not mean your hard work is of quality" --Audrey V. Jones-Taylor, September 6th, 2011. Jones-Taylor had a quote from herself, on her wall.

Below it, taped to the same whiteboard, was a further unattributed quotation:

THINK ON THIS!!
Excuses, excuses, excuses
Excuses are the tools of the incompetent
Those who use them build monuments of
nothingness, nothingness, nothingness.

These two quotations together clearly show the strain the city is under to accomplish basic tasks while being defunded and understaffed. They are heartbreaking and comic at the same time, seemingly acknowledging problems with incompetence (a classic problem within bureaucratic structures) while showing the frustrations of those working within the system and struggles to overcome these problems.

The collaborations I am examining with nonprofits are a way for city officials to feel that they are creatively dealing with the problems they have been handed, and even to feel that they are creating progressive solutions, while continuing the

decades-long trend towards neoliberal governmentality. Whether the collaborations are effective and who benefits in the long run is an open question.

+++

While bureaucracy is commonly associated with control and order, fantasy and imagination are in fact at the center of all bureaucracy; their imagined landscape *is* control and order. Utopian longing is an integral part of city government, encased in brittle accretions of systems, protocol accumulated over years. Bureaucracy is the combination of the two; it is the fantasy that there is an ideal, friction-less way to control knowledge - the city as all-seeing eye - when in fact it has papered over its view with forms in triplicate. It would be more accurate to think of the state "as a set of institutions where officials and their clients manage categories of transparency and obscurity" (Mathews 2005). The fantasy of the all-seeing eye, or panopticon (Foucault 1975), is maintained both within and without city government, when in practice the State is a much more fractured entity. However, things that are perceived as real (even if actually quite fractured) have real consequences in the world (Thomas & Thomas 1970 [1917]). This chapter explores how the imagined landscape of the State, its fantasy of order, discipline and cleanliness, interacts with other visions of reality to create blind spots and zones of obscurity that affect who has access to power structures, and who doesn't.

James Houston's 1989 ethnography of Brasilia, *The Modernist City*, examines the unusual case of the State's imagined landscape being made real, all at once, in the

project of building a new capital in the middle of what was considered a wasteland in the center of Brazil. He outlines the intended and unintended effects of architecture on social structures and bureaucratic processes, analyzing how the paradoxes of constructing an imagined future subvert its utopian premises (Houston 1989). In Oakland, we are far from starting with a blank slate. However, we can draw parallels from the idea that State imagined landscapes contain in-built paradoxes to their realization in an urban context. Oakland's government imagined landscape is utterly without broken windows or unsanctioned graffiti, an impossible dream. In order to move towards the realization of that unified landscape in a situation of actual fragmented State power as funding sources dry up, many city departments have turned towards a neoliberal model of dispersed power. Instead of centralized regulation, it is a turn towards self-regulation.

James C. Scott's classic *Seeing Like a State* has many comparable insights to offer, with the general summation of his argument being that "the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the leveled social terrain on which to build" (Scott 1998). However, I resonate with Donald S. Moore's critique of Scott's formula as locating power spatially and institutionally inside a unitary state. Moore found a more complicated relationship between space and power within Zimbabwe's state planned "villagization" in which "power relations and spatialities were multiple, entangled, and not monopolized by a sovereign state rationality"

(Moore 2005).

Wrapped up in the fantasy or imagination of the city, its ideal landscape, is the hope that new forms of knowledge are possible and new solutions can be achieved.

The hope is always for social progress to be made through the bureaucratic processes outlined by city planning departments. Brenneis suggests that:

. . . bureaucracies provide arenas within which imagination is crucial: New knowledge is produced, new problems are recognized, new languages sought for their definition, new options pursued, foreclosed or not even considered for their comprehension and, occasionally, remedy. (1999:123)

Brenneis pays attention to bureaucracy as a nexus for the creation of new knowledge, and in both of the case studies we're focusing on, new ideas and structures are coalescing, if only after after extreme birthing pains. However, as we will explore in this chapter, new state knowledge creation (Foucault's *savoir*) is often paired with the creation of corresponding zones of obscurity. Mathews (2005) describes zones of obscurity or illegibility which are created in the wake of increased rules and regulation on the part of state bureaucracies; if followed to the letter, these rules would often create an unreasonable burden on both state officials and citizens, so at many levels in order to allow basic functions of everyday life to continue, knowledge is disavowed. Mathews applies the term to small-scale forest fires in Mexico which are used to clear land for agriculture; if farmers followed the law to the letter, they would be unable to farm, and if forestry officials enforced the law equally, they would do nothing but arrest small farmers. In both cases, knowledge of such activities is simply disavowed. I saw many similarities in Oakland city government: in order to

get projects off the ground zones of ignorance or obscurity were often necessary.

The recession from 2008-2013 hit city governments hard across the country, and Oakland was no exception. By 2011 the city had reduced gardening and graffiti abatement crews significantly. Stephen Miller, Community Gardening Program Coordinator for the City of Oakland, says that the city has lost half its gardeners. "So it's tough, it's really tough. People are bound to see parks overgrown. . . A guy might only be able to come mow that spot maybe once every 2-3 months where it used to be once a month. There's a list of parks that are designated to receive less attention now that we've had all these budget cuts." When asked about the City's motivations for pursuing urban farming in parks, Miller's boss, Director of Parks and Recreation Audrey Jones-Taylor confirmed that funding was a major factor. For instance, several young nonprofits have proposed creating gardens in public parks. "We like them, since we don't have the money for maintenance." She specifies, "There's about forty mini-parks where maintenance has been halted. In some cases, they've removed trash cans. When parks cannot be maintained and become magnets for illegal activity such as drug sales and prostitution, they have been fenced off." Jones-Taylor in principle opposes this tactic.

They wanted to fence them off - I refused. I think it contributes to blight. I'm trying to make those spaces community gardens in communities most in need, in the most impoverished communities. There's a direct link from decreased funding for parks maintenance to getting community members involved.

Clearly the city sees a strong financial incentive in empowering local groups of citizens, volunteers, and nonprofits to increase their presence in the parks as the

Public Works and Parks & Recreation departments are forced to decrease theirs. In order to analyze these interactions, we must tease out the combined strands of the concepts governmentality and neoliberalism, which I argue, are both at work here.

The Mentality of Rule

Foucault enumerates the ways in which European governments in the eighteenth century moved towards new systems of rule which systematized the collection of information on their populations and emphasized forms of surveillance and control over the welfare of that population. He defined government not only as political structures or the management of states, but rather the ways in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed in order to influence their field of action (Foucault 1991, cf Moore 2005). "Governmentality works through the agency of subjects, encouraging conduct and forms of self-discipline that target improvements in welfare and security. Subjects' conduct both sustains and challenges regimes of rule" (Moore 2005).

Neoliberalism, on the other hand, only emerged as a trend within governments in the late 1970s, championed by Reagan and Thatcher and quickly spreading to countries around the world. It is a term widely used in a variety of disciplines from economics to urban planning to anthropology, with many shades of meaning depending on context. For our own purposes, I have taken my lead from Peck and Tickell's widely cited article "Neoliberalizing Space" (2002) and David Harvey's work on neoliberalism. Harvey would define it as a set of politically-sanctioned

economic practices that tries to improve society by strengthening individual freedoms:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005).

According to Peck and Tickell, neoliberalism seeks to maximize social good by increasing the reach and frequency of market transactions. Its goal is to bring all human actions into the domain of the market (2002). In terms of urban development, it is resolutely focused on economic development, with a "growth-first" mentality which is often seen as in opposition to policies focused on social welfare, redistribution, or social investment. The "embedded logic of capitalist spatial development" can be seen as enforcing a race to the bottom, leading to the lowest common denominator of social responsibility or welfare provision (Harvey 1989).

Governmentality examines the "mentality of rule" - or any relatively systematic way of thinking about government, in which the exercise of power is rationalized. The neoliberal mentality of rule would rationalize the exercise of government based on the internal rule of maximum economy (Lemke 2001).

Neoliberalism is in essence an attempt to link a reduction in state welfare services and security systems to the idea that subjects are free, enterprising, autonomous individuals. It is then the duty of the individuals to live up to their potential within this limitless freedom, and if they fail to do so, responsibility has been shifted away

from the State. A neoliberal governmentality would produce knowledge to support the construction of auto-regulated or auto-correcting selves (Foucault 1991). The form of collaboration I observed in which the City cedes power over certain functions to nonprofits can be seen as an example of organized groups of citizens self-regulating, and enacting programs to change the use of space in order to encourage others to self-regulate.

Therefore when we think about a neoliberal model of governmentality, we have an approach to governance based predominantly in market mechanisms and in the restricted action of the State which pushes a new conception of individual responsibility - to the extent of groups of citizens feeling compelled to mow lawns in public parks (Foucault 1991).

While much of the academic literature within the social sciences over the past few decades has been skeptical about neoliberalism's possible positive effects, in the last few years "there has been a growing recognition of neoliberalism's potential to evolve, mutate, and even 'learn'" (Peck and Tickell 2002). It is important to approach the concept not merely as the demon in the room, but take its claims to "maximize social good" and "improve society" as seriously as any liberal cause. Could citizens feeling obligated to take over aspects of park maintenance be a good thing? Absolutely. Increased citizen involvement can lead to a host of positive social effects such as deepening relationships among neighbors and an enhanced sense of community. However, when access and control shift, particularly to nonprofits who may have different long-term goals from the City or who may serve slightly different

publics - what are the ramifications?

City officials who sponsored the Community Rejuvenation Project's mural also specified lack of funding for abatement as one motivating factor for the project. This financial incentive played a key role in the birth of city-nonprofit collaborations in the case of the the Community Rejuvenation Project's (CRP) mural projects and City Slicker Farm's Union Plaza Urban Farm. By tracing the shifts in how city government manages its citizens' relationship with certain public spaces during a period of economic strain, I attempt to link the material and discursive production of space to subjectivity and discipline.

The Spatiality of Governance

The state can be seen as a collection of loosely linked institutions of varying unity and strength (Sivaramakrishnan, 1994), which are spatially discontinuous and exert only patchworks of influence (Winichakul, 1994) as well as being discontinuous in time (Anderson, 1991). Matthews (2011) would describe the the state as neither monolithic, nor completely diffuse. City departments are often isolated in their own silos which both complicates communication between them and results in frequent power struggles. As an example, each of the competing city departments I examine creates its own (sometimes contradictory) set of rules and regulations, so the city government as a whole could not be termed monolithic; however, nor is it diffuse. Bureaucracy is a series of entrenched and idealized systems designed to manage power and access and is therefore inherently resistant to change. It resists raiding

parties from the friction-filled streets who try to move it away from these ideal systems. I saw frequent examples of overlapping spheres of influence in the City of Oakland resulting in power struggles or confusion between departments who each felt that they had responsibility for something and that they should be the ones in control of it. For instance, Community Rejuvenation Project murals commissioned by the Community Economic Development Agency (CEDA) drew fire from the Public Arts Advisory Committee because they technically had jurisdiction to approve all new City-sponsored public art in Oakland. I heard frequent discussion (and confusion) about who has jurisdiction, or control, over the city parks: the Public Works Department or the Department of Parks & Recreation. Stephen Miller, an employee of Oakland Parks & Rec (OPR) said casually "OPR owns the property but there's Public Works employees who probably think that they own the property." When I mentioned to David Phrine (a former OPR employee) that City Slickers had in some cases been confused about which city department was responsible for what at their Union Plaza Urban Farm space, he said, "Everybody has that problem . . . In the City of Oakland it's always this interesting dichotomy between Parks & Rec and Public Works on who is supposed to do what on what property." It often comes down to money; as the overall budget of cities across the country shrinks, the individual departments fight to protect their dwindling piece of the pie. All of these examples show the city as a set of interlocking institutions who each had their ideal vision, or imaginary, of what the city should look like and shaped their bureaucratic processes to support that vision, with these visions regularly coming into conflict. Their ability

or inability to enact that imaginary is largely resource-dependent.

Public-nonprofit collaborations live at the edge of two opposing pulls within City government: the desire to maintain control (through overt forms of state discipline) versus the pressure to cede control under financial constraints. The City is ostensibly the keeper of order and upholder of property values, yet due to the City's money woes, they simply can't control as much, and have to give up control to other players. Cities have cut staff, again and again, and no longer have the capacity to take on as much. This internal conflict is resolved by cultivating a neoliberal model of citizen and nonprofit self-discipline and responsibility. Over the last few years, nonprofits have stepped into the space, yet the solution can create further problems when staff do not have the capacity to manage these new types of relationships. In one case, a city official expressed frustration that he didn't have more time to manage his relationship with a nonprofit and hoped that it could be improved by the creation of a citizen advisory board to his department. This would be a case of a volunteer managing the communication between city and nonprofit officials on a project designed fill gaps caused by the lack of city staff in the first place -- a perhaps extreme example of neoliberalism at work. One wonders at its ultimate efficacy.

My research sits at the uncomfortable and friction-filled point of contact between City officials and nonprofit employees, and from that vantage point I noticed repeated patterns that I would group under the term "zones of obscurity:" strategic ignorance; classification as a tool to create invisibility; ways that race, class and ethnicity are overlooked yet encoded in bureaucratic processes; and the inability of

those within bureaucracy to see bureaucratic processes clearly. I end the chapter with an examination of whether we should view public-nonprofit collaborations as a new form of neoliberalism - and whether it is new at all.

Strategic Ignorance

In some cases, bureaucratic rules are so bizarrely byzantine that they seem meant to be broken. City officials in these cases must consciously or unconsciously maintain a facade of ignorance so that things can actually happen, creating zones of obscurity. The city aspires to a unified system of knowledge control (Boyer 2003) but the sheer volume of its own required documents and contradictory instructions can mean that regulations themselves are sources of official ignorance (Mathews 2008; Hull 2012).

In the case of City Slicker Farms' project to create an urban farm in Fitzgerald and Union Plaza Parks, work began without a clear legal agreement, which was still being finalized at the time of my interviews, more than a year after the project began, and years after the project was approved by City Council. Audrey Jones-Taylor, said, "The project was funded through the Redevelopment Agency in Fiscal Year 2008-2009. But no formal agreement was made - we don't know how we missed it." The City's bureaucratic process for this type of nonprofit collaboration was impenetrable to its outside partners, but unclear even to its own officials. Jones-Taylor herself laments, "We were equally frustrated because of the bureaucracy. Purchasing & Contracts, the Redevelopment Agency, the City Attorney, Public Works -- we needed

agreements for *each*." The city departments had to confer amongst themselves to streamline the process for creating an agreement within the City bureaucracy. Yet at the same time, when I interviewed Stephen Miller, the Parks & Rec liaison to the Union Plaza Urban Farm project, he actually wasn't aware that they didn't have an agreement:

Miller: Strengthening communication is a good thing for us all to do. But it's hard because everyone is strapped for time. So we're just doing our best. I am really happy that we have an agreement.

Watson: *It's my understanding that you guys don't have an agreement. I know City Slickers really wants an agreement.*

Miller: I would have to look. You may very well be correct. It would be great if Barb would call our office, to try to move something with the agreement and I would do my best to get the ball rolling.

This was a surprising statement because I had just interviewed Barb Finnin, the City Slicker Farms' Executive Director, and from her perspective, she had done everything in her power to move the process along and felt that she could not have communicated more around the issue. Her viewpoint was given credence by the sheepish tone Jones-Taylor took when discussing the still incomplete agreement. State institutions generate forms of knowledge and ignorance which are not uniformly spread even among their own officials (Mathews 2005), and this is clearly a case where even intra-departmental communication on the complex regulations required for such a collaboration was lacking.

City Slicker Farms' dilemma at this point was whether they should halt all operations because they were in a legal gray zone. They were mid-stream within a

project, working on public land, yet they had no legal agreement or contract to do so from the City. Their decision was to simply proceed as if they had one. Barb Finnin mused, "Do you hurry a process up if all your partner's ducks aren't in a row? Or do you wait? If we had just waited for that contract what would have happened? I do think the best way is to engage and have a presence." Finnin reports that they attempted "due diligence" by sending emails to the City officials informing them of their plans but received limited responses, so they moved ahead. At many points in the project, strategic ignorance was employed by everyone involved in order to keep forging ahead.

Another thorny bureaucratic issue was who exactly had oversight for the project within City Government. From City Slicker Farms' perspective, it wasn't clear whether they should be working with the Oakland Parks & Recreation Department or Public Works for project management, and in fact it was initially unclear who was responsible for what in the project within the City as well. Jones-Taylor again cites basic communication problems: "Very early in the process, we should have sat down with the multiple agencies involved to . . . clarify everyone's role." Here we see more evidence of city departments each positioned in their own tower claiming ownership of overlapping domains, one day claiming power and the next day denying responsibility. Some days a department would be able to see a problem, and some days they would simply look right through it.

Many City interactions with the Community Rejuvenation Project required strategic ignorance of a different sort. Members of city government representing three

different departments all communicated to me in one form or another that they understood that Desi was an aerosol artist and that on his own time was possibly creating "graffiti" that would technically be illegal. However, they chose to remain officially ignorant of that fact in order to achieve community development goals which they perceived to be more important.

At a graffiti abatement seminar for public officials and nonprofits (which I discuss in greater depth in Chapter 4), I sat next to the volunteer coordinator for the City of Oakland who was in charge of graffiti abatement supplies and had known Desi for years, because she supplied plastic garbage bags for litter clean-up at murals. She was aware that Desi is not just a muralist, but a graffiti artist on his own time, but seemed fine with it. She discussed a mural Desi completed technically without the owner's permission near her house, then laughed a bit while telling me that her husband also created some of his own graffiti recently: a stop sign near their house had been altered to say "Stop Snitching," so he re-altered it to instead portray the message "Stop Itching." I spoke with several City officials who were aware of Desi's dual role as both a paid muralist for graffiti abatement and an aerosol artist on his own time, but seemed unperturbed. It's almost as if people like to feel "in the know" and unless their hand is forced, are happy to look the other way.

While strategic ignorance, looking the other way and wanting to be "in the know" may seem to be different types of zones of obscurity, they are all willful forms of "un-knowing" that are strategic in that they allow a chosen activity to continue. They are not simply forms of inertia, but occur in situations where knowledge would

create a block to activity; in order to choose forward momentum, zones of obscurity provide cover, one might say camouflage, and allow the activity to continue.

Internal Zones of Obscurity

At times, city officials seemed to be creating their own internal forms of strategic ignorance, or zones of obscurity, in order to reconcile the cognitive dissonance resulting from conflicting aspects of their jobs - specifically their mandate to work towards the ideal city's imagined landscape versus ways they were forced to compromise that vision in their constrained everyday reality. In fact, I propose that this process of reconciling this dissonance is a part of "how one acquires . . . a bureaucratic self" (Brenneis 1994). When the contrast between living in their imagined versus real city became too great, some creative definitions, if not self-deception, were required.

For instance, city officials pointedly did not like to use the word "bureaucracy" with all of its negative connotations. When Stephen Miller, the Community Garden Project Coordinator for the City of Oakland, used the term in our interview, he immediately backpedaled. He was discussing a nonprofit group that was taking over part of a neglected City-run community garden which meant that their approval process was much simpler than the process for other groups wanting to farm on public land: "[It] doesn't require the conditional use permit and a lot of the bureaucracy involved with - or not *bureaucracy*, but all the due public process - that's generally involved with a community group gardening on public land." The

avoidance of the word leapt out at me. There was a sense that he felt that "bureaucracy" impedes progress, which was very much against his intentions, so he had to reject the term, even though by most definitions he would certainly be an enactor of bureaucracy and therefore a bureaucrat.

David Phrine held Stephen Miller's position as Community Gardens Project Coordinator several years before, at the time of the Union Plaza Urban Farm's project conception. He helped to shepherd the project through the City's process, and acted as an advocate for the project from the inside. He ended up bitterly disappointed with the entrenched bureaucracy. "It's frustrating because if they [the City] would just step out of the way, City Slickers would have been fine. All you have to do is do nothing and you can't do that." However, he was the representative of the City government in the scenario he is describing, and it was he who wasn't able to "step out of the way."

In a later discussion, he said:

Phrine: I became very furious with the city at different points in time because of how little they support their staff. It's not a good place to work. And when you treat your employees like that it's very hard to expect them to do anything out of the ordinary, other than keep your head down and don't cause problems. My biggest frustration was dealing with the city.

Watson: What do you mean, "dealing with the city," because you were a part of the city?

In his response, Phrine distinguished between the "process" one had to follow -- essentially the bureaucracy -- and the individuals such as himself who work within it. But in doing so he ended up essentially defining himself against the city, setting up an antagonistic relationship, and therefore not feeling that he

was a part of the City itself although he was an employee of the City of Oakland. In this case, although Phrine worked for the City of Oakland, he had strong resistance to acquiring a "bureaucratic self," so it is not surprising that he ended up leaving his position soon thereafter.

The Power of Classification

In some cases, zones of obscurity can be created by particular forms of classification (Bowker and Star, 1999). Yadav discusses the unpredictable consequences of the label of blight:

. . .in some cases it could provide the inspiration required to arrest the blight and revitalize the area. However, under other circumstances, the blight label could become a self-fulfilling prophesy that worsens the condition of the area or contributes to its complete destruction. (1987)

The label of "blight" on a neighborhood can obscure legacies of disenfranchisement



Figure 2. Blight notice classification in Downtown Oakland. Photo by Eric Arnold.

and redlining that were used to segregate populations based on race and ethnicity. These practices resulted in disparities in further income gaps as populations in these areas had dramatically less access to credit, which also resulted in less investment in housing stock and the deterioration of older homes. Businesses, including basic resources such as banks or grocery stores, fled or simply decided not to locate within these redlined areas, resulting in increased disparity in access to resources.

Blight as a legal categorization (used to designate California Redevelopment Funds, as discussed in Chapter 1) then uses the existence of these inequities as a justification for whether an area should be marked as such, which opens it to a host of consequences. In a sense, an area becomes invisible with the designation of blight, canceling it with the stroke of a pen. It is "invisible" in that what is there suddenly matters less than the imaginings of its future. After a blight designation, buildings are already ghosts waiting for the wrecking ball and residents live with a sense of impending doom. The classification of blight is a form of erasure.

City Slicker Farms would never have been given control over a park unless the park itself and the area around it was designated as blighted. In some sense, the city park was "taken away" from local residents in that their access to the space decreased dramatically after the City ceded control of the park to City Slicker Farms and construction began on the urban farm - a perspective that some long-term local residents articulated clearly and felt keenly.

Designation of an area of East Oakland as blighted also set wheels in motion to make the Community Rejuvenation Project's murals possible. CRP certainly would

never have been paid to paint a mural if the area had not already gained that classification and garnered the attention of Oakland's Redevelopment Agency. The label of blight is an invitation to erasure, but what replaces it can have consequences that are viewed as be positive or negative depending on your perspective.

The label of blight has been a key tool in cities for as long as urban planning has been a recognized field of endeavor. Yet blight is a concept without a clear definition - even its legal definition enumerates conditions without defining the term itself - so blight is often in the eye of the beholder.

Therefore, no matter how sophisticated an appraisal might be, blight is still a subjective appraisal, an opinion. However, since most observers of a situation assume that their images of an area reflect reality, blight appraisals flow freely. Many of these opinions are rendered with little thought to their possible negative consequences (Yadav 1987).

An official designation of "blighted" can set powerful wheels in motion, including eminent domain, sending bulldozers in to completely clear whole neighborhoods. Classification schemes such as the label of blight can be used to construct "this person as a viktim or this house as an encroachment -- or even this as a house" (Hull 2008). Its definition is hotly contested on all sides of this story, as artists, farmers, and city officials invoke the word in a variety of contexts to lend support to their actions.

Bureaucracy as Color-Coded

Both City Slicker Farms and the Community Rejuvenation Project were successful in part because of their ability to negotiate city bureaucracy and grant-

making, which is due in large part to their education and ability to engage with culturally white power structures. If poor and uneducated people are unable to master the conventions of bureaucratic documentation (Cody 2009) or recruit for themselves a capable agent, they remain excluded even from programs aimed to help them (Sharma & Gupta 2006). Gupta (2012), has also emphasized the role of bureaucratic documentation in generating and sustaining inequality through his analysis of governmentality and bureaucracy in Uttar Pradesh. Engagement with the City of Oakland in order to gain support for projects is a thorny, time-consuming process. The success of both CSF and CRP can be at least partially attributed to their privileged cultural, class and ethnic positions. If race, class and ethnicity are encoded in bureaucracy both in the degree of difficulty to navigate and the unconscious expectations of its gatekeepers, then it can have significant effects on who has access to power structures. Privilege is itself a method of creating invisibility.

In my interview with Jon Kindleberger, the Community & Economic Development Agency employee who has worked closely with Desi to gain approval within the City for the Community Rejuvenation Project's paid murals, he made it clear that Desi's extraordinary ability to pull together different stakeholders - including those in power - played a major role in getting the commission. Kindleberger discussed the process for getting approval to put up a mural on the side of a Smart & Final store on a busy street which had been heavily tagged, repeatedly.

He's very proactive about talking to people in the community and business owners - it's great that he got the President of Smart & Final to sign off on it. He did a lot of the legwork which really made this

possible, because right now the city is having to lay people off so there's not really . . . [he broke off]. I have a big load of different projects that I'm working on, so that's why it's really great that he did this extra work.

I would argue that Desi's cultural background, education and his ability to appear white (or not, as necessary) makes his approach to someone like the President of a major corporation more likely to be received positively. He successfully navigated multiple City of Oakland bureaucratic structures in part because of his perceived ethnicity and cultural background.

City Slicker Farms had many "friends in high places" in order to get the Union Plaza Urban Farm project off the ground. They had the backing of their local councilperson, who made it one of her personal causes, and strong enough support from local developers that they initially even pledged financial support for the farm (which was withdrawn as the recession hit). Then they had a dedicated advocate in David Phrine, a Parks & Recreation employee who was also friends with CSF's founder and who shepherded the process through thickets of the City's red tape. These are all huge advantages that allowed them to even be heard initially and then to navigate the bureaucracy to create a special exemption relationship with the city. It's hard to imagine all of those powerful stars aligning without the white, middle-class orientation of the organization, which were perceived as apolitical, non-threatening and trustworthy.

The Pace of Knowledge Production

At times the role of a city bureaucracy can be to serve as a catalog for the possible ramifications for a course of action -- protecting all rights, listening to all viewpoints, safeguarding access. This can feel like a roadblock for idealistic, progressive, change-oriented groups at times. It was interesting to watch as people within city government who came from an activist background changed their views over time as they understood fully what was at stake and the array of rights that needed to be protected by the City. For instance, within progressive food justice organizations in Oakland there was much support for the work of Nathan McClintock, an academic in the UC Berkeley Geography Department who cataloged all of the public land in Oakland and argued that a huge amount of the local food system could be supplied by converting public land into gardens and farms. Stephen Miller describes the evolution of his thinking on the topic.

The whole idea of gardening in the parks that Nathan wrote about, when I first read it, I was like Amen to that, man, we could have so much food growing in Oakland. But now a year into my job, I look at it and I think to myself that's not really realistic. Parks are very political spaces. There's a myriad of community groups that would love to run projects on parks. Gardening groups might be vocal and sort of activist in nature, but because of all the public works issues. . .It's really a big challenge to change a use of a park into gardening.

This anecdote conveys the complications inherent in trying to pursue reforms within city government and create new structures, new processes, new forms of collaboration. The State moves slowly and attempts to remain balanced and even-handed, and hear all voices, which means that change is usually slow if it happens at all.

Both Stephen Miller and Audrey Jones-Taylor were clear that the Union Plaza Urban Farm had catalyzed discussions between City departments and sparked a review of the process towards simplification and standardization. They both seemed hopeful that real change had occurred (or was in the process of occurring) and that creating gardens as collaborations between the City of Oakland and local nonprofits would be much smoother in the future. In some ways, this was seen as the most positive outcome to date. The forced contact and negotiation between departments also reportedly improved relations between the departments, and perhaps positively impacted the "feudal" effects within city government of each department in its own tower vying for control. Stephen Miller feels the City has been pushed in a new direction:

We're in the process of coming up with a standard operating procedure to follow when groups contact us and they want to start a garden on public land. So I think we're definitely making big steps and I think that what's happened at Fitzgerald has helped us do that. It's sort of groundbreaking stuff for our department to be doing, it's something that hasn't happened in the past.

Jones-Taylor also remained optimistic about the new process and regulations which had been created: "Now we have one basic template, and we're clear about what has to go to Council and what doesn't." However, it remains to be seen whether the new rules are in fact a simplification and an enhancement to communication on all sides, or if new unintended problems arise. Progressive new policy or fast-tracked neoliberalism? When describing the process of creating new forest regulations in Mexico, Mathews (2005) concluded that "the effect of official strategies of regulation

and legibility was to inspire many people to create zones of illegibility and ignorance; official knowledge resulted in official ignorance." We have already started to see cases where groups of neighbors simply make vegetable gardens in a city park, ignoring all city regulations, or fruit trees are planted on the sly. Perhaps new regulations necessarily create new zones of obfuscation and invisibility, as a sort of balanced equation of bureaucracy.

At the very end of writing my dissertation, I received a disturbing but not entirely unsurprising communication from City Slicker Farms on official channels of bureaucratic oversight at Union Plaza Urban Farm, via CSF's website:

[Recently the] Department of Parks and Recreation discovered that the parks were not zoned correctly. These two parcels are not zoned as parks to be managed under the Department of Parks and Recreation, with whom City Slicker Farms has been working in partnership to create the urban farm and open space. The impact of this is unclear at this moment and we are waiting to hear from the City what their next steps are for oversight of the parks. (Accessed 5/11/14)

Although the officials with whom I spoke in Parks and Recreation had high hopes that they had solved the inefficiencies and gaps between departments, resulting in overall knowledge creation and clear bureaucratic channels for future projects, it seems those hopes were premature. The pace of knowledge production has slowed once again.

Neoliberalism and Governmentality

Foucault's concept of governmentality dovetails neatly into the more modern concept of neoliberalism; in each, citizen-subjects are asked to play an active role in

their own self-government (Foucault 2008). Foucault's conception of governmentality was often interpreted (incorrectly) as the work of an all-powerful centralized State, a misinterpretation which Matthews (2005) emphasizes. Instead of an all-seeing state, the conception of a fractured state (also supported by my fieldwork) fits much more neatly into neoliberal conceptions of the state.

The neoliberal trend within city governments in the past decades to outsource essential city functions such as garbage collection to a corporation is clearly recognized and documented. But is the pattern of governments ceding control of basic functions such as graffiti abatement or park maintenance to nonprofits part of the same trend? Does the fact that nonprofits have a mission to serve the public good make this a comparison invalid? Pudup (2008) and Peck and Tickell (2002) would say that voluntary and third-party (such as nonprofit) initiatives focused on moral responsibility and changing behaviors or improving selves are directly related to processes of neoliberalism. As state sponsored policies and programs designed to minimize public risk declined since the 1970s, programs (often run by nonprofits) focused on encouraging individual responsibility flourished. With this shift of responsibilities, many questions arise: Are the publics served by cities and nonprofits necessarily the same "public"? How does access or representation change when city functions are assumed by nonprofits?

Conclusion

Bureaucracy sets a framework for much of the material work and contested

imaginings I examine in the dissertation. It sets a structure which groups can try to work against, adapt themselves, or to which they can demonstrate alternatives -- but they are always inextricably in relationship with the City's bureaucracy. It sets the limits on the field of action and many of the discursive possibilities as well.

All of the organizations examined have a main goal of increasing social good through attempts to change the material behavior of citizens. Both the gardens and aerosol art projects funded did so with the express promise of creating more ideal subjects, by encouraging the consumption of healthier food or decreasing the occurrence of tagging on public property. These smaller behavior changes, and the physical changes to the city meant to encourage them such as gardens and murals, change the landscape of the city in ways that are meant to specifically combat "blight," in both its economic and physical forms.

The "zones of obscurity" discussed in the previous chapter are tools employed to accomplish these transformations of blight spaces through: strategic ignorance; classification as a tool to create invisibility; ways that race, class and ethnicity are overlooked yet encoded in bureaucratic processes; and the inability of those within bureaucracy to see bureaucratic processes clearly. These are both active and passive, conscious and unconscious ways in which difficult relationships are navigated.

Should we view public-nonprofit collaborations as a new form of neoliberalism? Although these collaborations are presented as new and progressive solutions, I think in large part they replicate the overall neoliberal push in local (and national) governments since the 1970s. A key question is whether the publics served

by cities and nonprofits necessarily the same "public." I would argue that although they attempt to be the same public, nonprofits simply do not have the reach nor the mandate to ensure the full participation of all aspects of society, and when they attempt to employ city-mandated community outreach in good faith (as these nonprofits did), they necessarily only reach a small slice of the public. Access and representation cannot help but shift under new control of space, usually towards those publics who choose to engage with the nonprofits. The City must maintain at least an attempt at protecting the rights and access of all of its citizens; the nonprofits are less compelled (and have less ability) to do so.

Governmentality links race, space and power, using the tools of blight classification and neoliberalism. Bureaucratic imaginings have material effects and co-produce space, often reinforcing racial divides with or without the intention to do so because these imaginings occur within an already existing framework of structural racism and privilege.

In the next chapter, we see how our bureaucratic framework was applied on the ground in a city-nonprofit collaboration. We examine in more ethnographic detail the Urban Farm project that arose from Union & Fitzgerald City Parks, and how material changes to the landscape impacted neighborhood race and class divisions.

CHAPTER THREE

Domesticating Space and Cultivating Subjects

City Slicker Farms was founded in 2001 in response to a perceived crisis. Willow Rosenthal, a white, middle class resident of West Oakland was incensed by the lack of grocery stores providing healthy food options.⁴ As one of the most low-income neighborhoods of Oakland, many West Oakland residents lacked transportation to take them further afield to buy their groceries, and relied on the junk food they found in one of the area's 53 liquor stores. Decades of disinvestment in the neighborhood meant that basic amenities such as access to fresh foods or grocery stores with healthy food options were lacking. This level of disinvestment was seen as a crisis, but it was also seen as feeding into other crises: the obesity epidemic and high rates of diabetes and heart disease among the predominantly African-American West Oakland population. City Slicker Farms was conceived as an antidote, not only offering access to more fresh foods but teaching residents how to grow their own food and how to integrate vegetables into their diets.

A Turn to Gardens in Times of Crisis

This history of community gardening and urban farming as recognized movements has always been associated with periods of social and economic crisis - and with a process of subjectification (Pudup 2008). Laura Lawson's *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (2005), identifies seven eras of crisis

⁴ West Oakland is 8 square miles in area and has a population of approximately 26,000 people. <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/West-Oakland-Oakland-CA.html>

which sent people to vacant lots and backyards and gives an overview of the history of community gardening from an environmental planning and landscape architecture perspective. The first identified gardening movement was a response to the Panic of 1893 and included Detroit's mayor encouraging individuals to plant "potato patches," to great success (Melcarek 2009). The city of Detroit cultivated 455 acres of vacant land and provided seed potatoes to 945 families, after which the idea of potato patches were replicated in several large cities throughout the country (Hynes 1996). Even in this earliest instance of a gardening movement as a solution to a crisis, we see the beginnings of gardens as a form of discipline and the production of subjects. The movement's organizers conceived gardens as a form of "work relief" (i.e. land instead of direct food or cash assistance to the poor and unemployed) and a way to instill self-respect and independence among the poor (Bassett 1979, Kurtz 2001, Lawson 2000). By "instilling self-respect," a phrase that frequently arose during the next century of gardening movements, they meant cultivating an Anglo-Saxon work ethic along with the cultivation of potatoes. Gardening was deeply intertwined with race and class anxieties over immigration and overcrowding during the 1890s, which were deemed a threat to social order and national identity. A gardening proponent in 1910 argued that gardens were used "to teach [the poor] in their work some necessary civic virtues: private care of public property, economy, honesty, application, concentration, self-government, civic pride, justice, and the dignity of labor and the love of nature . . ." (Bassett 1979, cf Pudup 2008). Many of these benefits would still be cited by community garden boosters of today, perhaps using slightly different

terms; the most relevant to the study at hand is the first listed, "private care of public property," seen at Union Plaza Urban Farm. Gardens were repeatedly seen as a crucial "buffering mechanism," softening the blow of economic collapse as social service networks were strained to their breaking point (Bassett 1979). Other surges of national gardening occurred successively in response to twentieth century crises. During World War I, patriots were encouraged to create Liberty Gardens through a massive national marketing campaign. Relief gardens were created as a response to the Great Depression, with some individual plots created and others set up according to an "industrial plan," which attempted to mimic factory work with the goal of preparing gardeners for such work when it became available, a clear use of gardens in the creation of capitalist subjects. Individual allotments during the Great Depression were intended to instill responsibility and independence and help delay application for direct poor relief (Kurtz 2001; cf Melcarek 2009). During World War II, supporting the troops abroad meant creating Victory Gardens.

Government funded programs established victory gardens in order to 1) lessen the demand on national food supplies, thus making them available for soldiers overseas; 2) increase the consumption of fresh vegetables and therefore reduce the need for industrial canning materials; 3) free up railroad transportation for war munitions; 4) maintain the health of the U.S. population on the home front; and 5) produce enough for families to preserve for future use when shortages became even worse. Again, gardens were advertised using militaristic propaganda and slogans, such as "Vegetables for Victory" and "Food for Freedom" (Melcarek 2009).

Victory Gardens were another example of gardens used for instrumentalist purposes by the State, in this case turning gardeners into the equivalent of a patriotic army on

the home front.

The most recent community gardening movement has occurred since the seventies, which Pudup (2008) argues is not coincidental with the simultaneous emphasis on neoliberal ideologies and the decreasing role of the government during this time. A key part of neoliberalism is to cultivate an ethos of individual responsibility, and the trend towards nonprofits taking over key functions of state and city governments, as I examine in this dissertation, is an important part of this ethos. Community gardens can be a perfect example of "when voluntary and third sector initiatives organized around principles of self-improvement and moral responsibility stand in for state sponsored social policies and programs premised on collective responses to social risk" (Pudup 2008; Peck and Tickell 2002). While community gardens today are often portrayed as an apolitical space of unalloyed positive benefit or a space of resistance against an industrialized food system, historically they have repeatedly been used as sites for the creation of desired subjectivities in the maintenance of the status quo. It is certainly possible that a garden can be of positive benefit to (some) community members, a way of resisting an industrialized food system, and simultaneously a method of subjectification which reinforces the positions of those in power. I would argue that the Union Plaza Urban Farm Project achieves a complex mix of all three results.

The Birth of an Urban Farm

When City Slicker Farm decided to use gardens to address perceived social

ills in West Oakland, the model they turned to was what they call the Community Market Farm. Vacant lots (donated or bought) were fenced with posted volunteer hours and farm apprentices would plant beds using biointensive methods to produce high yields of nutrient-dense vegetables. The produce was weighed and measured, and then distributed at a weekly Saturday donation-based sliding scale farm stand. A tension over access was there from the beginning, built into City Slicker Farms' chosen model where gardens were fenced for most of the week and only accessible with the mediation of someone from the nonprofit, yet still labeled "community" space. Rosenthal bought a vacant lot which she and a group of neighbors converted into a vegetable garden. Rosenthal became the first Executive Director, and the nonprofit eventually created seven community market farms in West Oakland, mostly on land loaned to the nonprofit. Eventually, City Slicker Farms also created the Backyard Garden program to train residents to cultivate their own gardens. The mission of City Slicker Farms is "to empower West Oakland community members to meet the immediate and basic need for healthy organic food for themselves and their families by creating high-yield urban farms and backyard gardens."

The Union Plaza Urban Farm project eventually became the largest of these community market farms. In 2006, as recounted by City Slicker Farms' Executive Director Barbara Finnin, the nonprofit was approached by West Oakland's Councilperson, Nancy Nadel, who proposed a unique collaboration between City Slickers and the City of Oakland. The farm would create a special relationship between the city and a nonprofit, essentially allowing the nonprofit to take over a

park owned by the city, which was unprecedented. Nadel offered City Slicker Farms control of two parks, Union Plaza & Fitzgerald Parks, in a traditionally low-income area of West Oakland near several scrap metal recyclers.



Figure 3. A satellite photograph of the neighborhood before urban farm development. Note the two central triangular parks and the proximity to a major freeway.



Figure 4. A closer view. From the upper left-hand corner and moving clockwise, please note a large, newly built condominium development, more condos on the northwest corner of the park, a row of older houses along Fitzgerald, the Alliance

Metals recycling plant on the east side of Fitzgerald Park, a few older houses, and then a former school which has been converted into condos. Note the newly built condos behind it (the row of identical gray roofs) which are more infill condominiums.



Figure 5. A closer view of the parks before development by City Slicker Farms. Note the group of people on the sidewalk of Fitzgerald Park on 34th Street. This was a frequent location for church groups and Food Not Bombs to distribute food and other forms of aid to the local homeless population.

It had been used by primarily African-American local residents who would gather to play dominoes or chess. Scavengers and those who were homeless would also congregate in the park. In the last decade, several condos have been built in the neighborhood, attracting a more affluent and mostly white population. Local developers and owners of the new condos were concerned about crime and homelessness in the area, and didn't feel comfortable using the park themselves, so they had been pressuring Nadel to “clean up the park.” David Phrine, who was the City of Oakland's Community Garden Project Coordinator for the Department of Parks & Recreation at the time, described how the project was pitched within his

department - with a focus on idea that the space was "a hangout for people doing nefarious things." He also used the blight card:

We definitely leveraged that by saying, You know, look, we've got a blighted property that you can't manage. It's a serious liability. I'll go in and make sure that things are ok up to a base of standards and things are safe. I think that really - [the City is] getting something positive for very little investment. I mean ultimately it [will be] a fantastic deal for the city.

Several times in the interview, Phrine referred to the idea that the City wanted the space "clean." Nadel, based on the idea that this was a "blighted" area, gained City Council approval to use public Redevelopment⁵ funds to allow City Slicker Farms to turn a city park into a market garden; the produce would then be distributed free or sold on a sliding scale to neighborhood residents using their existing farmstand model. The Oakland City Council unanimously passed a resolution on March 31, 2009 allocating the redevelopment funds to create a community market farm at Union Plaza, administered by Oakland Parks & Recreation (OPR).⁶

As recounted by Barbara Finnin, City Slickers realized that they were entering into a neighborhood where tensions ran high between older and newer residents, across race lines, and along class divides. Before deciding to pursue the urban farm conversion, City Slicker employees met with local residents and park users to ask how they would feel about an urban farm in Union Plaza. CSF formed a Community Advisory Panel to involve local residents. As we will see later in the chapter, CSF

⁵ The sources and uses of Redevelopment Funds were explained in Chapter 1.

⁶ City Slicker Farms was awarded a \$100,000 matching grant from the West Oakland Project Area Committee (WOPAC) and secured the matching funds from Pacific and Forest Watershed Lands Stewardship Council, Community Development Block Grants, and Nancy Nadel.

employees themselves had varying perspectives on whether (or which) communities were actually engaged. However, they decided that the project would be more beneficial than detrimental to the neighborhood, and would transform the nonprofit's vegetable production capacity by increasing their area of garden space by 40%.⁷ Finnin sums up the nonprofit's rationale in this way: "This is a park where people are seeing problems and it's an opportunity for actually community-building. Instead of fingers pointing, bad, bad, bad, how can we use the situation that has struggles from different perspectives and use it as a community engagement piece?" She gave the approval to move forward.

After funds were approved and all parties had decided to move ahead, CSF hired an architect familiar with community design and conferred with the Community Advisory Council before plans for the urban farm were drawn up. In 2009, the nonprofit hired a farm manager to oversee the project, Makena Scott, who was one of very few African American CSF employees at the time. Her job description included coordination of the site construction as well as on-the-ground community outreach. City Slicker Farms attempted to solicit input from park users, especially the homeless and scavenger communities, by asking Scott to consult with them, a task she found challenging logistically. Multiple CSF staff, in later interviews, asserted that a top priority for the organization was that everyone who used the park before their development would still be able to use it. This stated goal caused some conflict with

⁷ With 3,245 sq ft in raised beds, the Union Plaza Urban Farm is much larger than the other garden spaces currently in production for City Slickers, which total 1937 sq ft (Secret, Herb and Ralph Bunche gardens). Therefore CSF has calculated that Union Plaza has a high potential to increase yields and therefore to impact food distribution and food security in the neighborhood.

local neighborhood associations, who were concerned about crime and homelessness in the area. Yet because the garden's initial construction took away the park's seating area and didn't immediately replace it, the itinerant populations who were regular users of the park also felt pushed out and angry. The nonprofit attempted to be responsive by holding community meetings, but these meetings did not completely resolve tensions. The working poor rarely have time to attend meetings, or may not feel comfortable speaking in them. Homeless and itinerant populations rarely attend such meetings. In my later conversations with the itinerant population in the parks, they did not feel included. The project broke ground on November 1, 2009.

In 2010, City Slickers held a barbeque at the site to try to bring together all sectors of the neighborhood and get them talking to one another, which several attendees reported was successful for the evening but didn't seem to have lasting effects on community relationships. CSF at this point had run into significant problems in navigating city processes, especially in receiving a legal agreement, accessing their money when they needed it and hiring laborers and contractors. Their initial time line was delayed and neighbors and members of the Community Advisory Panel were upset by the lack of communication. Instead of conveying some of their roadblocks to the community, they remained silent. Community outreach during this time was very low. By the fall of 2010, when I spoke to homeless men in the park who were relaxing after finishing their recycling for the day, I met Antony, who was not happy about the Union Plaza Urban Farm across the street. When asked about the motivations of the nonprofit, Antony told me, "They don't give a fat fuck."

Race and Space, or How to Harvest Collard Greens

In September 2010, Union Plaza's raised beds were built and filled with rows of seedlings, the fence was in place and some fruit trees had been planted. City Slicker Farms felt confident enough to organize a Harvest Festival marking the Grand Opening ceremony for Union Plaza Urban Farm and Fitzgerald Park. On the day of the festival, rain was threatening but when I arrived everyone seemed to be in good spirits. I helped unload tables and chairs on the grassy triangle of land called Fitzgerald Park, and laid out fliers at an info booth for City Slickers Farm next to tables piled high with orange Baby Bear pumpkins for Jack-O-Lantern carving. The pumpkins are small and portable – perfect for a child to carve. In the adjacent triangle-shaped park, Union Plaza, rows of raised beds were visible through the four-foot high wooden fence, whose gate was propped open.

I had been volunteering with City Slicker Farms for five months at the time of the Harvest Festival, watering and weeding and planting in their gardens, seeding flats in their greenhouse, feeding the chickens, and selling produce at their weekly farmstand. I helped out in the office and attended a workshop on the problem of lead in soils. From the beginning I noticed that the majority of volunteers were white and well-educated. Yet the neighborhood surrounding them was mostly African-American and low-income, a disparity I grew more and more curious about as I spent more time at their garden sites.

City Slicker Farms has had a fraught relationship with race from its inception.

For years the nonprofit was run by a predominantly white staff, and has struggled to find ways to connect with its targeted audience in the West Oakland neighborhood that surrounds them. Much of the labor to run their farms was supplied by year-long Apprentices who are offered housing in West Oakland and minimal pay. This apprenticeship model is common among more rural organic farms, but created unique problems in an urban context, setting the organization up for further racial disconnections and barriers to relationship building with the community. Apprentices were some of CSF's most visible faces in the community, interacting on a daily or weekly basis with neighbors and volunteers. The fact that the apprenticeship was a very low-paid position meant that they tended to be possible mostly for idealistic young people coming from a fairly affluent background, or with some sort of safety net in place; it is no surprise that most of the Apprentices ended up being white. The year-long timeframe of the apprenticeships also created barriers to creating long-term relationships between CSF and the neighborhoods in which they work, because as soon as trust began to form, a new Apprentice would arrive. Working under the Apprentices was a shifting network of volunteers, providing much of the needed labor to tend the market gardens, most of whom were also white.

I spoke with Rebecca Sirna, a former Apprentice and at the time the Backyard Garden Manager, about why it has been so difficult for CSF to attract and retain volunteers and employees who are people of color. When I began my research, Rebecca (whose parents are Caucasian and African-American) was the only visibly non-white full-time staff member, although interestingly, Rebecca was raised in a

predominantly middle-class, white environment. In explaining the barriers to the involvement of people of color in CSF, she mentioned the status of farm work within the African-American community, and its historical association with slavery, as well as the unattractive economics of nonprofit work.

A lot of that is about not having very many resources and who is available to do a lot of work for very little pay . . . it takes a certain amount of willingness to have downward mobility to do this sort of work. And that's not where your average West Oakland resident wants to be, or should be, necessarily. [laughs]

When people of color have been hired by CSF, it has often been hard to retain them. I noted several times over my years of involvement with CSF when they announced they had hired someone of color, sending out an email to their supporters including a photo and short bio, but within a matter of weeks or months their new hire had quietly disappeared. Rebecca gave some perspective on this process as well, on difficulties that went beyond their nonprofit pay scale.

Another piece is training. So... let me think of how to say this best. Because we all do wear a lot of hats, but a lot of them are specialized kinds of work, so to do any number of positions at CSF we often need people who've had either some breadth or depth of agricultural experience but also people who are comfortable working in our nonprofit environment, in the office, comfortable with computers, all of these pieces that those of us do who come from a place of privilege, who have that background, have those tools and skills already, right? And it's really easy to get integrated from there. Training is pretty quick from that point on. But that's not necessarily true if we look at long-term West Oakland residents. And so there's that. That definitely comes up as well.

Often when I spoke with CSF employees and other volunteers about race relations, they would bring up the fact that there weren't many volunteers from the West

Oakland community in a slightly puzzled, or almost hurt, tone. They reasoned that with high local unemployment and low access to food, why wouldn't people want to volunteer with City Slicker Farms? However, this is clearly an assumption, and one that many types of poverty alleviation programs make: that people might not have money, but they have time to give. Often poor families are working a variety of part-time jobs and busy with side projects and so are actually not able to give their time away for free, and may be offended by the assumption.

This trend continued during the Harvest Festival – the majority of the volunteers helping to run and staff the CSF booths were white. However, the Harvest festival was an explicit attempt to address these conflicts and involve more members of the surrounding community, park users and local residents, in the project. One way they hoped to diversify the crowd was by inviting other Oakland food justice groups to participate. Other booths around the park perimeter represented an array of other food-justice-focused nonprofits that CSF had invited to the festival. They had collaborated with Jason Harvey, the African-American founder of the Oakland Food Connection, who was offering a healthy vegetarian meal out of his food truck, with veggie dogs, cabbage salad and a chili topping. Kijiji Grows, founded by a Kenyan man, was there to promote their installations of aquaponics systems in gardens. Several other green Oakland nonprofits such as People's Grocery also had booths. All of the nonprofits mentioned are run by predominantly African-American or African staff for a predominantly African-American audience, and CSF seemed to be deliberately reaching out to them, thereby ensuring more visible diversity in the

nonprofit workers at the site.

I stopped by the face-painting booth. The tiny, cold brush tickled my cheek as a cheery pumpkin surfaced, stroke by stroke. City Slickers had set up their farm stand, as always, with fruits and vegetables for sale at a sliding rate, with flowers and herbs in vases and eggs stacked on one end of the table. They offer three categories “Free Spirit” - no money exchanges hands - “Just Getting By” - reduced rate – and “Sugar Daddy/Mama” - which they liken to Whole Foods prices for organic vegetables. Several homeless collectors of scrap metal who usually hang out in the park, all African-American, had showed up and were partaking of the free food. One of them, a thin, rather young woman named Keisha was either in a manic mood or high on something, and kept trying to talk to the City Slickers staff in rapid staccato sentences. A CSF staff member quickly wearied of the near-monologue, to the point where she said, “I am done with her.”

Walking around the edge of the park and poking my head into the booths, I ran into a white local resident who brandished a petition to close Alliance Metal, the scrap metal dealer across the street. He passionately spoke of the noise, pollution, and what he saw as the effects on crime in the area. I could see that the CSF employees nearby were respectful but hadn't signed the petition and didn't seem to want to be overtly supporting his cause, a stance which was later confirmed by the Executive Director. I thanked him for his perspective on the situation but did not sign the petition.

By the time formal presentations began, rain hoods were up and umbrellas had

sprouted around the patch of grass used as a stage. The diverse crowd was of a good size for a drizzly day, perhaps 30-50 people. Nancy Nadel spoke, the local Council member who was a strong supporter of the project. The CSF Executive Director, Barbara Finnin, spoke and then turned it over to a clown show by the kids in Prescott Circus troupe, a longtime West Oakland nonprofit. This was a huge hit with the crowd, which cheered as a trio of eight-year-olds juggled and danced. During the kids' performance, Diedre got up and started dancing, and the laughter got a little more nervous, though still indulgent. During the break-down of the tables after the Festival ended, an African-American neighbor who hadn't attended came out to ask if he could have a pumpkin for his kids, and since one of the main reasons for holding the festival was to reach out to the neighbors, they were more than happy to give him a few. All in all, CSF staff judged the event a success.

All during the Festival, City Slicker employees had been giving tours of the actual farm space across the street. CSF employee Rebecca Sirna talked about the challenge of educating residents about how to harvest. CSF reports repeated problems with people coming in and uprooting plants, for instance collards, which nonprofit employees believe was an attempt to harvest them. The plants were pulled up while still immature, but if allowed to grow to full size and harvested by taking only a few mature leaves at a time from each plant, they will produce much more food over a longer time. Therefore CSF is attempting to ask local residents and people who want to use the food from the site to harvest only during the hours when employees are working there, which at that time was about eight hours a week, over the course of a

few days. Finnin and other CSF staff repeatedly mentioned in interviews that it has been difficult to communicate this policy clearly to other users of the park. Posted signs didn't seem to help. "People don't read them," says Finnin. Instead, the policy seemed to be interpreted in many different ways, passed by word of mouth, and many local residents and park users with whom I spoke seemed confused about whether they were able to harvest from the garden, or angry because they felt excluded from the space.

For instance, I was told a disturbing story circulating in the neighborhood about a homeless African-American woman who was picking greens inside the fence, the gate of which was at that time only secured by a loop of rope, and easily slipped off. A Caucasian man ran over and into the garden, from the direction of the condos on the corner, according to one version. The man slapped her and took the greens away from her. I was told this story twice by different parties, and am not sure what to make of the truth or fiction contained within. One group of African-American men who hang out at the garden regularly, "entrepreneurs" who sell a variety of goods in the park, initially relayed the story to me shaking their heads angrily and looking pissed. The second time I heard the story from a homeless man, Kenny, who was in tears. He said, "A black woman was harvesting and a man ran out of the condo at the corner and hit her, slapped her. A white guy. Kenny cried. We was gonna do something real bad to [the man who hit her]. She just wanted some greens for the Fourth of July." (Interestingly, he referred to himself in the third person.) When I relayed the story to the white CSF employee in charge of maintaining the urban farm,

she was disbelieving. The “truth” of the story matters less than what it reveals in the telling: clear tensions between the local residents of newer, more costly housing and those who live in the adjacent spaces and who may sleep underneath the nearby overpass or in the garden itself.

The story illustrates racial tensions inscribed in space. It is an overt telling of the policing of space along race and class lines, projecting the idea that material changes in the space result in changed regimes of discipline for local residents - with that discipline reinforced physically if necessary. Neighborhood power and race divides are embodied in the nameless African-American woman and Caucasian man.

Although City Slicker Farms tries to maintain a neutral stance and explicitly and repeatedly states that they don't want to displace anyone, this tension is played out in a structure – both the physical infrastructure and the rules of use – laid out by the nonprofit. Thus they are seen as inevitable arbiters, and have drawn ire from all sides. They strive for a neutral stance, but I would argue that even the attempt to remain neutral is a political stance in and of itself, embedded in a place of privilege. Many of their attempts at neutrality ended up directly affecting the access of various groups.

Users/usability/usefulness – neighborhood voices

Confronted with a cacophony of voices and opinions, often at odds with one another, I fell back on some traditional social science methodology: the survey. For years, I had been volunteering and walking neighborhood streets, chatting with

residents and park users, and attending neighborhood meetings. To reach a different segment of the population and ask a broader group a consistent set of questions, I abandoned any attempts to "blend in" and explicitly took on the mantle of the social scientist, with credentials on my name tag. I designed a 34 question survey to try to tease out who used the park and their understanding of the park's purposes. I completed a survey of 44 park users and neighborhood residents from July – September of 2011, focusing on those within a two-block radius of the park. Survey topics included the nonprofit's community outreach, understanding of the urban farm's purpose, attitudes towards the project, access to fresh food, and demographics. I talked to homeowners, renters, people I encountered on the street, and people actively using the park, taking care to vary survey times and days of the week to be inclusive of a wide variety of people. It became clear early on in the survey process that any assumptions which I had held – with regards to race, class and length of time in the neighborhood, for example – did not easily map onto people's opinions about the park. Survey responses showed shifting categories of “them” versus “us.”

I completed most of the surveys while hugely pregnant, which I believe was an asset. Without the belly, I was just a white girl with a name tag. A face would peer at me reluctantly from behind a door open just a slit, and then change expression dramatically after glancing downward. The door would open wider, and people would want to talk. I didn't look dangerous, and the belly created a visible point of connection.

My survey research showed that many residents who live within a few blocks

of the urban farm do experience food insecurity. While almost half of local residents and park users never experience food insecurity, a large portion do: 39% lack money to buy food on a monthly basis, and in that group 21% lack money for food on a weekly basis. Over a quarter of respondents reported eating fresh fruits and vegetables less than once a day. Therefore, the survey determined that a large percentage of those surveyed were food insecure and their diet could possibly benefit from increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables grown at the Union Plaza urban farm.

As I completed the surveys, I met an Asian-American filmmaker who had been making a documentary following several of the scavengers in the area. Clearly well-educated and from a middle-class background, he had spent a lot of time with the scavengers, interviewing them, getting their life stories and following them in their daily labor. He felt aligned with them, and angry on their behalf. He commented that an urban farm is essentially a perfect front - innocuous, hard to criticize - for wealthy and educated (condo-owning) new residents to use to push out scavengers and homeless people. He alleges that Nadel, in order to represent the condo owners, is using CSF and their good intentions to drive out people the Council member sees as “undesirables” and to gentrify the neighborhood. He thinks Nadel sees the garden as a “progressive solution for a non-progressive problem. It's brilliant in its deviousness. It's conservatism in the guise of progressivism.”

These sentiments were echoed by several respondents that might be categorized as a “hipster” presence in the neighborhood. These tended to be young

people, mostly white, who dress in distinctively styled clothes often culled from thrift stores. In gentrification literature, “hipster” and artist presence in a neighborhood is often a precursor to changing demographics and rising real estate prices, but these groups are in turn often resentful about the more affluent and older condominium residents who follow them into the neighborhood (Freeman 2006). A self-identified Caucasian youth living across the street from Fitzgerald Park in a cooperative house identified the biggest problem in the parks as “displacing people.” Specifically: “Make sure there's still places for people to use the parks. That it's not just exclusively for gardening.” Every Thursday, the organization Food Not Bombs hands out a hot meal, and is often staffed by those who might be categorized as “hipster.” The organization has a strong anarchist presence and the folks involved tend to be skeptical of authority in all forms. The young, Caucasian, dreadlocked and pierced folks handing out food were initially very hesitant to talk to me or give any information to a survey, and had to be assured that I wasn't from either the city government or the nonprofit who ran the local garden. But after being assured of their anonymity, they proceeded to express doubt about whether the garden was helping folks or merely nudging them out.

Use and access in the park is important to City Slickers; it surfaced repeatedly in interviews with their Executive Director and several of their employees, and it continues to be a sticking point. A question I heard again and again from employees and neighbors was: If you don't use the park, should you have a say in what happens there? Perceptions of illegality and danger persist, especially among more recent

residents, and are repeated as a justification for not using the park. The creation of the Union Plaza Urban Farm increased self-reported use of the park substantially: 39% used the park before the urban farm was built, but 66% report visiting the park after its construction – a 27% increase. Park use increased for sitting and walking dogs, with slight increases for games and meeting with friends, but organized sports such as football, baseball, or kickball were no longer possible in the space. (These sports were mentioned in oral histories of the park with local residents from the 1960s and 70s, but did not appear to be happening with regularity in the last decade). Park uses also changed when the public water fountain was removed and when new park rules forbid barbequing. Both changes occurred at around the time that the urban farm was constructed. It is my understanding that these were city-level decisions, yet they coincided with and therefore became connected to the appearance of the urban farm project and any disgruntlement the new rules generated was directed at the nonprofit.

I completed several more in-depth interviews with CSF employees and former employees, including Makena Scott, an African-American woman who had formerly been coordinator of the Union Plaza and Fitzgerald Urban Farm project. For her, only actual use of the park justified who should be in control of the space, a point she returned to again and again.

I continued to push people and say, if you want to really own the park, and have ownership of the park you have to use it. “Well, we can't use it, because these people are using it and it's dangerous.” I'm like, I walk down there everyday, it's not dangerous. We threw a BBQ for National Night Out to try to mend - at least get conversation going, so people could see that it's not dangerous. I had guys who hung out in the park, who actually helped to cook the food and were there. People from the

Condos came out with their kids. It was a nice time. But that idea that there was something dangerous about the park kind of persisted.

My survey, conducted after Makena Scott's tenure at the organization, seemed to show that park use by the neighborhood was increasing – while older residents continued to angrily express their feelings of exclusion.

Domestication of space, colonialism and conquest

I wanted to understand more about why Makena Scott had left her position managing the Union Plaza Urban Farm project. In response, Scott recounted an interaction with one of the regular park users, an African-American man:

So there was a guy Walter who would hang out with his friends and play chess in the park. He told me that I was being a tool of the white folks and that I was a token. And it really upset me. Because that's not how I felt. I didn't feel like I was in a powerless position. I'd been given this responsibility, I was being asked to do this job, I was spearheading it, and that I knew that I would make the historical community, those groups of people who had been there recently for the longest, a priority.

The encounter stayed with her, and as the job became more stressful over months, she kept coming back to it. “It just got to be too many jobs. It's just too much for me. And I just did not believe in the organization. I started to see all the things that people said before I took the job. And Walter's just sitting there telling me I'm being a token and being used, and I came to see that he's right. And that's why I quit.” I conducted in-depth interviews with both parties on the topic of Scott's departure. Finnin was unhappy with her outreach and management of the project, and many CSF employees found communication difficult with her because her style was more confrontational

than what they were used to. Scott was unhappy with her role in what she came to think of as a project aiding gentrification of the neighborhood.

Hayden Stewart, an educated white woman who was a former CSF employee and who initially coordinated community outreach for the project before Scott was hired to create the farm, looks back on her own involvement with mixed feelings.

I would have liked to see some kind of better outreach and communication and really making sure that the concerns of people who were currently using the park were being valued. It's hard when you have a situation of people who feel really empowered and have access to email and listservs and to some extent do have political power and you're dealing with people who really don't have a lot of political power like homeless people and elders who might feel like I'm not involved in this project that's going to happen.

While she was disappointed with the kind of community outreach that happened prior to the project's start, she wasn't sure how they could have done it better. Again and again, I heard these mixed feelings from CSF employees. Several apprentices, office staff workers and volunteers who I interviewed over the period of my fieldwork expressed reservations about the project and worried that they had been a part of a process to remove long-term users of the park.

Barbara Finnin answers some of these criticisms of the process by emphasizing the imperfect nature of City-CSF interactions and the difficulties of communicating with a transient population. When asked about whether CSF's urban farm has contributed to the gentrification of the neighborhood, she replied:

Sure. Of course. A garden adds value. It's awesome for everyone, not just development. We were clear we were not here to clear people out. We were not here to move the salvage yard. That's why gentrification is really complex. People deserve safe spaces where they live.

A question on my survey of neighborhood residents and users regarding the purpose of the park elicited a wide variety of answers, some of which addressed gentrification directly. A Caucasian man in his 30s answered a query about the purpose of the park in this way: “To make white people feel better about the ghetto.” He spoke sarcastically but with underlying seriousness and discomfort. I heard speculation from several longtime black residents that the underlying purpose of the park was really to speed the process of gentrification by helping to rezone the area around the park as residential instead of industrial, and wait out the recession with the land used as a garden but with plans to develop it as condos when the economy brightens. Gentrification is an incredibly complex word, a loaded term in and of itself, and it must be pointed out that significant development which could be considered "classic gentrification" - four large condominium developments - had already been built before City Slicker's urban farm project began. In many ways, they entered into a process with a much longer neighborhood history, but which has had a stark polarizing effect (Freeman 2006; Chapple 1999; Atkinson & Bridge 2005).

A common criticism of urban agriculture is that it encourages gentrification. Stephen Miller, the City of Oakland's Community Garden Project Coordinator and a white male in his mid-30s, in some ways felt gentrification was inevitable with beautification projects. He seemed somewhat surprised by the question, as if he hadn't encountered it often before, and also disturbed by its implications.

Honestly, it's hard to comment on. I don't know. I've been an Oakland resident for six years. I wasn't born and raised here. I moved here when I was older. I own a condominium now. Did I gentrify my neighborhood? I don't know. I'm totally sensitive to those who feel that their neighborhood landscape or culture-scape is changing and they're unhappy about it. I'm sensitive to that and I understand that. I grew up in a little town in Maine, that definitely changed over the course of my growing up there. What was a pristine property maybe got turned into condos right by the ocean and it totally changes the feel of the space. Anybody there who's lived there a long time isn't happy about it. And then there's all the new condo owners who fall in love with the area, are super excited about it. So I don't know. That's just an example that I've lived through. I think sometimes change is hard to accept. So I don't know. That's really just a challenging concept. I'm sorry for not giving you a very good answer.

Miller then switched from a personal voice to speak from a more formal perspective as the garden coordinator for the City of Oakland.

Our nine [public] community gardens in Oakland all exist in the flatlands⁸, quote-on-quote, so we're trying to serve all the communities. We don't need a community garden in Montclair⁹ because all the people up there probably have a little gardening space up there already or if they want some they can get some. We're trying to serve communities where there isn't access to that. I certainly haven't felt that community gardens are a source of gentrification, necessarily. I think they're a source of beautification of neighborhoods. If gentrification is an indirect result of that, that may be. It is an interesting question to consider. I think a garden going in or any beautification project is bound to raise home prices and attract newcomers to an area, because they're attracted to it. It's a beautiful area. It's an exciting project so they feel driven to move in there. There might be locals who don't like to see all the neighborhood changing.

In order to get a better idea of the range of opinions on the connections

8 The "flatlands" is a term encompassing the area of Oakland close to sea level that tends to include the low-income areas of the city. In the Oakland hills, on the other hand, property values are much higher, with homes often selling for a million dollars or more.

9 In the Oakland hills.

between gardens and gentrification, I spoke with several other Oakland-based food justice organizations which were predominantly run by people of color, on the specific topic of City Slickers' work. David Roach of Mo' Better Foods in West Oakland feels that everyone deserves a garden. "I think it's long overdue for monies to be allocated into urban farms." However, he worries about disparities in who ends up with access to the land. "As these communities have been redlined for so long and neglected, a lot of these blighted areas are now open season for organizations to say, 'Hey, we have a good idea,' and then they get it, when other people have had good ideas for a long time and haven't gotten anything," he says. CSF had a more successful history of navigating large-scale funding requests perhaps due to the education and background of its employees and its political connections, as discussed in terms of color-coded bureaucratic processes in Chapter Two. This caused some jealousy with other local organizations also working in the areas of food and poverty. At times, this could create an us/them situation among local nonprofits who were all vying for what was perceived to be a limited funding pool. The perceived racial disparity in which organizations get funded then influences whether a gardening project is viewed as gentrification.

Hank Herrera sees his organization, Dig Deep Farms & Produce, which is located in unincorporated townships to the east of Oakland, as a way to organize against gentrification by creating jobs in the community. "The answer is to ensure that people have enough power and wealth on their own to maintain those places for themselves."

Max Cadji, founder of Phat Beets Produce, another food justice organization in Oakland, takes the issue of gentrification very seriously.

Any time you improve a community [it] can be seen as a first step of gentrification. What it comes down to is community organizing. If the community has a say, it's not gentrification, it's community improvement. Everyone wants healthy food, clean neighborhoods, and green spaces. Gentrification happens when you work for a community, not with a community. It's always in the back of our minds, and we're always speaking about and thinking about it. If gentrification is the result, the process is wrong.

The question is whether CSF is working *for* the community or *with* it.

The Politics of Space

By rearranging physical space in order to install a garden, CSF has reordered racial and class relationships within the neighborhood, highlighting and therefore heightening them. Their presence makes more visible in contrast people whose main tool is invisibility, thereby creating a situation where it becomes more and more uncomfortable for them to be in the space over time.

I am struck by the ways that small material changes can dramatically reorder space, behavior and relationships. City Slickers built a wooden platform in the Fitzgerald Park space, outside of the fenced urban farm, nearer to Alliance Recycling, for the eventual purpose of environmental education. It was part of the City Slickers imagined landscape, and a way that they were trying to increase interactivity and incorporate people and education into their design. I was told that the initial plan was to cover it with a trellis - they

envisioned beautiful, vine-covered classroom - but it was not a top priority amid many competing needs and was left unfinished, with only the low, bare wooden platform completed. There remains much less seating in the parks than before the urban farm was constructed, so understandably this platform has proved to be a magnet for homeless and scavengers who use it for sitting, sleeping and talking. However, if they do lie down on it, they are technically breaking the law and can get ticketed by the police, who regularly come through to remove them. They are also much more visible there as opposed to stretching out in bushes or under freeways. But it is in some ways irresistible – a clear, open space elevated off the ground in the area they gravitate towards daily after selling scrap metal to Alliance. And while it may be easier to ignore someone sleeping in a less visible place, the police don't feel they can ignore people sleeping on the platform, a few feet away from the sidewalk. It is a natural focal point for sociality as structures such as bandstands, platforms and stages are meant to be in parks around the world, yet because it results in a congregation of homeless and scavengers, most of whom are people of color, police and some neighbors perceive it as a threat to social order. In this case, the imaginings of City Slickers, local homeowners, the police, and the homeless were at odds due to material enactments of those imaginings. It does not seem an overstatement to say that, while unintentional, CSF created a situation of increased conflict between the homeless and the police by the way they structured the space.

Fences are another clear example of ways that landscape mediates relationships; choices about space send clear messages about social interactions. Even when unlocked and not physically a barrier, fences create an inside and outside. Because most of CSF's staff and volunteers are white, and they control the inside, it is hard to avoid the visual appearance of white in/black out. A homeless man who calls himself the Mayor of the park, Kenny, was emotional about feeling excluded, and argued that homeless people were using the space first and therefore deserved more input in its ongoing use. "I don't have a problem with the garden. I have a problem with the way we get treated if we go over there. We've been here before any of this and now we get treated like we ain't supposed to be here." Perhaps based on the previously recounted story circulating of the black woman who was slapped by a white man, he feels that: "We can't never get nothing and if we go over to try to get a little bit of greens, the police is called on us. As long as we aren't white. Police come and give us a ticket if we lay down on the platform. We don't go over there. It's uncomfortable." He returns to the idea of the fence, which he feels as a personal affront: "Don't fence us off like we ain't nothing. Give us our respect. We're humans also." He concluded, "It hurts our heart."

An African-American former resident, now in his 50s, who grew up in one of the houses facing the park, said: "The fencing gives an unwanted atmosphere because it was once open and spacious. It causes a separation: them and us. It's a definite barrier." When asked for ways to improve the park,

he said, “Return it back to its former openness so that the current children in the neighborhood can enjoy the freedom of play that I enjoyed in the 60s, 70s



Figure 6. Union Plaza Park with new sign and fence installed. June 2011.

and 80s.” On the other hand, some other African-American residents seemed fine with the barriers created, and eager to erect more. As a suggestion for improvements to the park, one African-American man said “Run all the niggers out of there,” referring to the scavengers and homeless people who hang out in the park. Another African-American woman said, “Fence it off. Put a lock on there.” Yet the categories were not simple. Another African-American woman who had lived around the corner from the park for 43 years said, “Unlock the gates. Inform neighbors when produce is ready for picking. You don't get any information.” Everyone saw the fence as a meaningful barrier which changed the nature and use of space - both for renters,

homeowners and the homeless and scavenger population. Some saw the increase in rules and regulations as a positive, others didn't, but all clearly recognized the new disciplining of the space.

Gathering Momentum/Farmstand Relocation

In April of 2012, a local condo owner sent out this email to the Dogtown community listserv:

Neighbors,

I want to encourage all of you to take a walk over to our beautiful Union Plaza Park this weekend.

City Slickers Farms and a bevy of volunteers have transformed this once awful, neglected space into an absolutely beautiful gateway to our community.

For those of you that have lived here more than five years, you will remember that this space was once a cesspool, literally used as a public toilet and overrun with drug users and sellers, prostitutes, etc.

Thanks is large part to a brave, determined group of local residents, [Councilperson] Nancy Nadel, Audrey Jones-Taylor (Director of Oakland Parks and Rec), the Oakland Police Department, Barbara Finnin and City Slickers Farms, we took our park back, and a long five years later, we have a farm that will generate organic produce for everyone, and a beautiful park that has transformed the gateway to West Oakland at 34th and Peralta streets.

Volunteers are needed tomorrow, Saturday, April 23, from 9 - 5 to put the finishing touches on our park. If you can't stay, bring some cold drinks or a cold snack for these hard-working volunteers!

Please take some time to go and enjoy your park!

I want to highlight a few points from this email. First of all, this neighbor was on the CSF Advisory Board for this project, and when I spoke with him at the Harvest Festival he was feeling very frustrated by the slow pace of work – but he is clearly back on board to marshal neighborhood support at this point. He says that the park was “an awful, neglected space” and represents its history as such: “this space was once a cesspool, literally used as a public toilet and overrun with drug users and sellers, prostitutes, etc.” But through much effort “we took our park back” - with a clear demarcation between us/them. He is also clearly familiar with the relevant power structures and wants to publicly acknowledge the decision makers involved – Council members and Directors are the people he chooses to mention. He also includes two calls for email readers to go out and *use* the park – exhibiting sensitivity to the idea that local residents at times have not wanted to use the park, and that physical presence and visual occupation correlates with ownership. It was a clear call to substitute the people who used to use the space with a new crowd. The email seems targeted at other people like him – condo owners or home owners – because of the appeal at the end to people who might be likely to drop off

“cold drinks or a cold snack for these hard-working volunteers,” or those who have more money than time.

In May 2012, City Slickers moved its Saturday farm stand to Union Plaza Farm from its previous location at Center and 16th Streets, about 15 blocks away, where it had been located for a decade. This was not a decision that was made lightly, because the farmstand is the primary distribution point for all of the food raised in all of CSF's market farms. Many families rely on the produce provided by it, so there was a long process of informing the public before the move.

The move of CSF's Saturday Farm Stand to Union Plaza had a large impact on community relations and micro-local food security (within the surrounding neighborhood). I volunteered at the Farm Stand before and after its move, and noticed that quite a few regular customers made the move successfully, and that the neighborhood response from local residents and users seemed hugely positive. Many of the homeless people and local homeowners and scavengers who had previously been negative about the project in private conversation did start to get free produce from the stand and seemed quite happy about it.



Figure 7. CSF Farmstand opens at Union Plaza Farm. May 2012.

Crucially, prior to the farmstand's move, many park users and local residents had expressed confusion or disbelief that the produce from the farm was going to feed West Oakland residents, so moving the farmstand there provided direct proof that it was feeding local residents, allowing them to tangibly benefit.

City Slicker Farms has recently changed organizational strategy and decided to shift away from the dispersed community market garden model, reducing the number of gardens they have planted in vegetable gardens, and transitioning some land to orchards (which are much less labor intensive). Their plan is to produce the vegetables needed at fewer, larger sites, chief among them the Union Plaza Farm, and then redirect resources towards their Backyard Garden Program. The Backyard Garden Program installs two raised beds in the backyard of West Oakland residents

and provides them with seedlings and mentorship over the course of two years, creating a sense of ownership and connection with their food. This appears to be an implicit acknowledgment of the inherent flaws in the Community Market Farm model, as well as the problems with their Apprenticeship system, which both tended to create barriers within the community, economic and racial as well as physical barriers, instead of breaking them down. They are attempting to adjust their imaginings - with tangible, material effects - in response to longtime patterns of interaction with the community.

Union Plaza Urban Farm and Fitzgerald Park Today

During a recent conversation with Barbara Finnin, I asked for an update on my field site. With admirable understatement, she said, "There's been a bit of community drama at Fitzgerald." The platform they built for outdoor education was finally completed with a roof over it, to make a gazebo-like structure. "We always knew being over there that we were the epicenter of - I don't want to use the term gentrification because I want to be more specific . . ." She described being at the epicenter of community tensions around some people moving in who had "not ever been around black and brown people," and didn't know how to relate, as well as ongoing problems with open-air drug use. Putting the roof over the platform changed the dynamics because it concentrated people visually even further, says Finnin. "People were always hanging out there, with shopping carts, and on the corners but [when we built the roofed platform] now all of them came into the center. *They were*

elevated and framed in a way they weren't before." [Emphasis added]. The fact that it now appeared that people were congregating in a larger group created a lot of fear for some residents. Finnin received multiple texts in the days after gazebo construction was completed from irate neighbors, including one saying: "In 24 hrs you increased prostitution 50%," after the roof was added to the structure, which Finnin dismissed as ludicrous. Finnin said:

People are sending me photos of black men sitting. Not doing anything. I have to explain to them that it's not illegal to sit. And people aren't getting that. It's been crazy, because the people who were most upset also have the most privilege and tried to take us down. They know how to work the system. It's ended up stressing us and the City. It has taken a lot of our psychic energy and time. (Personal communication, 1/27/14)

Eventually, the residents who "know how to work the system" got their way, and the City ordered CSF to close the structure. "We were told by the City of Oakland we'd have to board it up or they'd tear it down." They complied, and now CSF can't use it for their weekly farmstand, it's inaccessible to other homeless outreach groups which had used the structure for distribution of food and other items, and of course it is no longer available as a hang-out or sleeping spot.

CSF has scheduled two community meetings in early February 2014, so the story continues to evolve. They walked into a tinderbox, and it has blown up. CSF was chosen by the City councilmembers, employees, and even local commercial interests in part because they were seen as ideally nonpolitical, nonthreatening and trustworthy. These qualities also happen to be indicators of palatability to the status quo. Government and commercial interests were seeking a way to discipline the

subjects of the space - that is clearly indicated through interviews with city employees during the project's inception. It was a space outside of the law and a threat to local investment, and an explicit reason the project was approved for the space was because it was hoped that the project would be able to regulate and control how the space was used and who would use it. Instead, they unintentionally created in the gazebo a covered space which resists government control by not being fully visible. However, such a publicly prominent blank space on the map could not be tolerated and was required to be removed.

CSF finds its position in the situation a squeamish one. It fully believes that it is working with and not for the community in which it is located. The gazebo incident lays bare the fact that those in positions of power will only accept their role if it is seen to be a domesticating and disciplining one. This role does not fit its image of itself, but it has a long historical precedent. The incident of the gazebo highlights the fact that line between working with/for a community is an extremely fine one.

In the next chapter, we explore another nonprofit-city collaboration which attempts to work with community members to create murals through the Community Rejuvenation Project, contrasting the differences in their positioning and community outreach. The murals, however, could also be seen as a method of discipline by encouraging certain behaviors and shifting public duties to private control.

CHAPTER FOUR

Flipping the Script

We are trying to justify where we write, [by saying] 'It's abandoned....'
But it's our nature. We don't need to justify it. Canvases are there to
limit us. Right now we have a proliferation of walls. How do we define
where we're supposed to be writing? The answer is everywhere.

The idea that it's the landlord that should be deciding - that's the old
feudal system where only the landowners had power. Anyone who is
colonized and has their land stolen from them no longer can determine
what's in their visual radius, their visual arena. The wall is for the
people who are sitting there looking at it all the time, not the owner. We
have a right to take back our visual spaces.

-Desi W.O.M.E.

This quote is from Desi W.O.M.E., an aerosol artist who founded the
Community Rejuvenation Project in order to paint murals with a mission to "cultivate
healthy communities through public art, beautification, education and celebration."
They call themselves a pavement to policy organization and are actively trying to
reshape the public conversation in Oakland on theories of urban blight and urban
renewal. Many City of Oakland officials, along with their counterparts in cities across
the country, are heavily influenced by Broken Windows theory, which targets graffiti
along with other "quality of life" crimes in the belief that it halts what proponents see
as a "spiral of urban decay." Desi and his associates actively challenge this theory and
seek to flip the script and turn accepted concepts of blight and Broken Windows
theory upside-down through what they term Painted Windows Theory.

The Uses and Abuses of Blight

Oakland has a long history of displacement of its citizens through centralized "urban revitalization" projects targeting blight. West Oakland, a historically black, low-income neighborhood, has been the city's testing ground for city planning experiments. As the end point of the transcontinental railroad, during the first quarter of the twentieth century it housed a thriving, ethnically diverse community. Seventh Street was a vibrant jazz and blues district, and Marcus Garvey's West Coast headquarters of the Universal Negro Improvement Association was located one block over (Self 2003). While we can remain skeptical of so-called "golden ages" - which of course contained many social problems that become glossed in hindsight - the point is not whether we accept the narrative but simply that the narrative of history texts, today's urban planners, and West Oakland residents regards this period as an apex. This impacts today's imaginings of Oakland's landscape by various groups - for instance, in current redevelopment plans for the area, which consciously try to recreate the art and music enclave on the 7th Street block today.

Descent follows a pinnacle. The neighborhood experienced an initial decline during the Depression, and again after the Second World War, some areas became dilapidated (Self 2003). The construction of the Nimitz freeway to San Francisco in 1955 as an explicit part of the city's "blight-removal" program displaced many African-American residents and, according to the city's own reports, destroyed many more sturdy structures than uninhabitable ones (Rivlin 1995). Vibrant African-American commercial districts and hundreds of homes were further decimated by two

projects in the 1960s and 1970s to build the Bay Area Rapid Transit System connecting Oakland and San Francisco, and then the large central US Postal Service Facility for the region. Victorian homes from the turn of the century were replaced with concrete pillars, beige walls, and identical rows of public housing. Today, the neighborhood has the highest concentration of poverty in the city, is cut off from the rest of the city by freeways on three sides, and suffers from disproportionate rates of pollution-induced environmental illnesses.

Each of these projects used the language of blight as its reason for existence. Why do some areas get labeled blight, and not others? Could blight call itself into being through the label itself? As we have already explored, the classification of blight is often a self-fulfilling prophesy. Neighborhoods with legacies of disinvestment, disproportionately communities of color, are further stigmatized by the label, which can result in a cycle of further disinvestment and alienation. The city's response is to acquire the land - at rock bottom prices - and historically has often created less affordable housing than it destroyed.

I would frequently ask the people I encountered during my fieldwork about their personal definitions of the word blight, and found that they varied dramatically depending on their context. Christine Rawls, City of Oakland Senior Clean Community Specialist, defined it in this way:

Blight is any evidence that community standards of cleanliness are not being upheld. Litter, graffiti, unabated weeds, abandoned houses that aren't being taken care of, those I all consider urban blight. Also cars parking on front lawns, those are considered urban blight in our city too and I agree with that.

Brian Beavers, a representative from Kelly Moore Paint had a purely commercial definition of blight, which had surprisingly positive connotations for him because it provided him with job security:

It's negative, I guess, but I'm in the painting business, so we kind of have mixed emotions about it. I mean, we sell coatings that make us money because of graffiti artists - or not graffiti *artists*, but whatever you want to call them. So on one hand it's kind of good because it generates jobs and products that we can sell. But the negative side of it is obviously what it looks like. So I've kind of got mixed emotions about it.

I suspected that he might have been more supportive of graffiti as an art form in a different context - he was at a Stop Urban Blight! Seminar, where he would have been shunned for recognizing "graffiti artists." Adele Coe, a Public Works Director, interestingly focused on the feelings that are generated in residents by certain activities or maintenance:

Urban blight, I would define it as anything that if I'm a resident there makes me not feel good about my neighborhood. Anything that makes me not proud of my neighborhood. So then it could be dilapidated buildings, it could be graffiti, it could be crappy landscaping, it could be weeds, it could be lousy roads. All those things are things that when I go into my neighborhood, I have a certain feeling, and if things are nice, I feel proud. So there you go, that's my definition.

One of the more disturbing tendencies I noticed in definitions of blight was the tendency towards slippage from blight as things - abandoned houses, weeds, broken windows - towards blight as people. For instance, Jennifer Christensen, Public Relations & Director of Membership for the nonprofit organization Stop Urban Blight, equated blight with vagrants: "My definition of urban blight is just ugliness,

just neighborhood ugliness. It doesn't necessarily limit to graffiti, it could be trash, it could be vagrants, it could be anything that makes the neighborhood ugly." If blight is defined as vagrants, panhandlers, or the homeless, it provides rationale for clearing the space of "the wrong sort" of people. This is the underlying suspicion by many communities of color who have been targeted when city redevelopment projects across the country repeatedly seem to use the label of blight to remove not just run-down properties, but to remove residents who often happen to be people of color.

Desi, through CRP, has a radically different conception of the concept of blight, and is indeed attempting to redefine the term altogether - or as he terms it, flipping the script. He is using the same concept to justify funding artwork in urban spaces and as the basis for a radical reimagining of the urban landscape.

Broken Windows Theory

The fields of law enforcement, urban planning and sociology were stirred up by a 1982 article in *The Atlantic Monthly* by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling on the causes of crime in urban environments, which they termed Broken Windows Theory. They felt that disorder perpetuates further disorder; the central metaphor in the theory is the idea that if you let one window on a vacant house get broken, very quickly all of the windows will be broken. Therefore, they argue that the city should work to fix that first broken window, or that first graffiti tag, before all hell breaks loose. The theory establishes the idea that by focusing on small quality of life issues - a broken window, a graffiti tag - cities will prevent larger crimes such as drug

dealing, burglary, or gang activity. The idea is to create the feeling: "We won't allow that here." This manifests itself in policies which increase penalties for petty crime such as graffiti, loitering or panhandling. As Wilson puts it in the forward to *Fixing Broken Windows*, the book that grew from the original article, "As the number of unconventional individuals increases arithmetically, the number of worrisome behaviors increases geometrically." The original article was widely cited and the hypothesis became influential in sociology, and spread quickly to urban planning departments across the country. Broken Windows Theory was applied in New York City, with Kelling hired as a consultant to the New York City Police Department from 1984 to 1990, resulting in harsher penalties for "quality of life" crimes and pursuit of petty criminal offenders, such as aggressive squeegee men, fare dodgers, and graffiti artists. This initiative produced between 40,000 and 85,000 additional adult misdemeanor arrests per year during the period of 1994-1998. Although crime rates did drop in New York City, the underlying causes for this drop in crime are passionately disputed. The theory remains a dominant guiding force in many city planning departments. During interviews, several City of Oakland employees indicated that they believe strongly in the theory, and it has guided their departmental policies on blight abatement, such as allocating resources to repeatedly buff walls where graffiti frequently occurs.

Desi's definition of blight includes very different categories than what others mentioned: police are a blight on neighborhoods as an outside occupying force that criminalizes residents; the dumping of all kinds of things, including inferior food and

consumer products, actual trash, and toxic chemicals; and the blight of drugs. So is this what CRP is working against, I asked?

I mean, CRP is not created to combat blight. Combating blight is kind of a secondary part of what we do. The biggest blight is the blight that's on our spirit and our souls, so the murals are there to affect that and change the negativity in our realms, to a healthy environment spiritually and mentally. But we also want to deal with it physically, and people having a clean, safe environment to walk around in is something that we are addressing. I mean, do you consider it blight to have people who are hungry in your neighborhood, who are starving?

At this point, Desi specifically challenged Broken Windows theory for the blurring of the line between criminalizing actions towards criminalizing categories of people - the homeless, the indigent, people who might be seen as "different" - and how this perspective in effect criminalizes poverty.

When you think about it, like in Broken Windows Theory they're always offended by panhandlers. People panhandle less if they have food in their bellies. You know what I'm saying? Then they'll just chill. The problem is, a lot of people who are afraid of panhandlers are just afraid of people. They don't know how to interact with people period. Anyone who looks other, who looks foreign, who looks old and dirty, or whatever, they get scared of. But when they're actually up in your face, asking for stuff, people get really nervous. So I want to address the issues in our community, from our community, through feeding people artwork, feeding people physically, feeding them with medicinal plants and fruits and vegetables and gardens. But I also want to clean up the space to make room for that. So that people feel that this is a space that is valuable. Desi W.O.M.E 12/7/2010

Desi and his fellow graffiti artists are well aware of the potency and history of Broken Windows Theory, and take it personally. They have developed a contrasting theory they call the Painted Walls Theory. This theory avers that buffing walls actually encourages more tagging and what they see as "negative" graffiti by creating

in essence a huge blank canvas. They also believe that an expanse of beige brings nothing positive itself, merely creating an absence - of color, of history, of cultural representation. Their approach is to instead paint large-scale, planned aerosol murals covering the entire wall. They are extremely colorful and try to incorporate themes which they deem as culturally appropriate to the neighborhood where the mural is located. They often involve local youth and incorporate community feedback and suggestions in the murals. For instance, I witnessed people whose family members had been killed near the site of a mural coming up to speak to the artists, and in several cases their portraits were worked into the overall composition of the mural, based on photos their family members were carrying. Public spraypainting is often a magnet for local youth, who come out to ask what's happening, and CRP muralists try to let the kids help out however they can, showing them a few tricks, letting them fill in a background area. In one case, local residents objected because an African-American woman in a head wrap looked "too Aunt Jemima" - a commercial, racialized image deemed exploitative - so her image was altered somewhat in response. It is a fine balance - at times, the artists chafed at receiving too much feedback, because they felt it hemmed in their artistic freedom.

Advocates of both Broken Windows Theory and the muralists opposed to it define the conflict as between liberty - personal freedoms and civil liberties - and community. However, they define those terms in oppositional ways.



Figure 8. Lupita's El Salvadorean mural depicting key moments in the nation's history, completed with the involvement of El Salvadorean youth.

Wilson sees the crux of Broken Windows Theory as a problem of society protecting individual rights over a community's right to take control of its public spaces against "unconventional persons" such as unruly teenagers, aggressive panhandlers, "disheveled vagrants."

Advocates of Painted Walls Theory, such as Desi and other writers, would instead include those teenagers, panhandlers and even drug dealers as part of the community. They believe that the problem lies in the militarization of these public spaces, resulting in profiling and targeting individuals. Instead of telling these groups to "move on" (to where?) they want to include them in the process of reclaiming these spaces. They are both arguing for more community ownership of public spaces, but who is included in the "community" and whose individual rights need to be protected by the police and courts are radically at odds in the two theories. Both theories spring from a common belief that people's behavior can be affected by their material

surroundings, but the details of *how* that influence occurs are at odds.

CRP has begun actively trying to influence policy on graffiti abatement and blight removal in the cities of Oakland and Berkeley. In an op-ed piece published under the byline Community Rejuvenation Project in Oakland Local on 3/30/12, they argue their case:

There are other, less costly, alternatives. Over the past five years, CRP and its community partners have successfully transformed numerous blighted neighborhoods throughout Oakland into vibrant mural districts at a fraction of the cost the city has paid for abatement. In that time, we have developed techniques and practices for maximum visual and cultural impact, cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and community engagement, which could easily be implemented on a larger scale throughout the city.

A truly holistic approach to blight reduction would entail more permanent, economically efficient solutions, combined with youth development, education, and anti-violence programs, while incorporating eco-sustainable, community-oriented components.

Some academic analysis of the Broken Windows Theory has been conducted. A political scientist at Northwestern University, Wesley Skogan, examined the theory as applied in more than 40 cities and concluded that causal links exist between disorder (littering, public urination, public drunkenness, turnstile jumping) and serious crime, supporting the idea that by repairing broken windows quickly or prosecuting quality of life crimes can slow what he calls "the downward spiral of urban decay" (1994:6). However, other academics find the causal evidence weak, and in particular have questioned linking the dramatic crime decrease in New York City

to broken windows-related policies, instead positing that the decrease in crime in the early 1990s was part of a larger decrease in many large cities across the country, regardless of whether the cities' police departments followed strategies based in broken windows recommendations. Harcourt's 2001 review of the available social scientific data found that it did not support the theoretical expectations set up by the main thesis of broken windows (see Sampson & Raudenbush 1999:637). Harcourt further attacks the failure to be critical of the categories produced by this type of policing categories of order, disorder, and the disorderly which have much larger repercussions on ideas about human nature (2001:22). The theory separates the world into "decent folks" and "disorderly people" and sees anyone stepping out of the social norm as a threat. It creates categories "decency" and "disorder" which may be more rooted in class or race assumptions than in verifiable social scientific research. For instance, it would classify people hanging out on a stoop or a corner as "loitering," but this is an activity much more likely to be engaged in by those without other public meeting spots or large yards; for these reasons among others, stoop-sitting is much more common in the African-American community. Should a group of people gathered on a sidewalk necessarily be classified as disorderly? Do we accept the racial and class profiling that inevitably results from these precepts? As Harcourt asserts, the costs of Broken Windows Theory come down to: "increased complaints of police misconduct, racial bias in stops and frisks, and further stereotyping of black criminality" (2001:7). In many cases, Broken Windows Theory can easily become an example of social science used to encode and legitimize racism. It is a way for the

edifice of structural racism to be constructed before our eyes while being labeled "safety," "decency," and "order" (Pulido 2000).

Adventures of a Cultural Chameleon

When I first met Desi, he had a different name. He was presenting at the City of Oakland Cultural Funding panel for his nonprofit arts organization, the Community Rejuvenation Project (CRP), coming across as professional yet streetwise in his clothing and speech, both of which referenced African-American styles. With his shaved head, goatee, and mid-range skin tone, he came across racially as either Latino or perhaps a mix of African-American and Caucasian. In the presentation, CRP was introduced as a collective of ten to twelve mural artists and assorted other volunteers who produce large-scale murals designed with neighborhood input and youth involvement, followed by a community block party and mural dedication. Five artists were highlighted, including Desi W.O.M.E., described in the grant proposal as "a prolific Oakland muralist and community organizer" who would be coordinating the project. The panel loved their model and thought it had the potential to be replicable in other locations, even across the country. They approved the project, and CRP ended up receiving over \$10,000 from the City of Oakland Cultural Arts & Marketing Department. Afterward, I introduced myself and told him I was interested in volunteering, and he said he would call me in the next few days. He wrote down his contact info as Desi, which I found confusing because he spoke to the Panel under

a different name. I asked "But I thought -----¹⁰ was your name?" and he said "That's my government name."

When Desi called, his first question was whether I worked for the City of Oakland, and when he was clear that I didn't, we had a long conversation about my motivations. He grilled me about whether I might be an FBI plant, or might be trying to entrap them. I laughed and told him I understood his concern. In the end, he seemed flattered by the idea that an anthropologist was interested in documenting his work.

At some point in the conversation I must have used the term graffiti, because he corrected me. "I'm a writer," he said. He prefers the term "writer" to graffiti artist, because he sees graffiti as a disparaging term. However, in my research I find it hard to avoid completely. Most of the time I use "aerosol artist," but since graffiti is the most easily recognizable term in some situations, it does appear in this work.

It took me a long time to find out Desi's background. Of course alter egos and disguised identities have a long history in aerosol art and writer culture. Part of the allure is to step outside of oneself, to become someone else. One's name is a central, stylized, fetishized part of one's identity as a writer (Mailer 1974; Castleman 1982). Kids who become interested in graffiti start out experimenting with styles in school notebooks, and migrate to shoes, light posts, stop signs, and walls, writing their chosen name over and over, hundreds and thousands of times, driven by a goal of being famous yet anonymous, invisible. Tagging is hugely public, yet clandestine,

¹⁰ Name withheld.

and the tension between the two is a large part of the thrill.

It's no coincidence that one of Desi's signature art forms is painting masks in murals. They are stylized, indigenous-influenced (particularly from the Aztec tradition) and are sometimes superimposed over a recognizable face, while at other times are purely abstract. The intricate angles in the masks themselves at times mirror the beautiful, abstract letters in aerosol art. Masks within masks within masks.



Figure 9. Piece by Desi W.O.M.E., Tin Pan Alley, SF, 2010.
Photo by Desi W.O.M.E.

Desi has worked under a variety of names over time but eventually chose Desi W.O.M.E. because of the layers of connotation embedded. He at times says

W.O.M.E. stands for Weapons of Mass Expression or With Out My Ego. He likes the fact that W.O.M.E. sounds like womb. On a grant application or a name tag at a formal event, it can turn into Desi Wome, and no one looks twice. Desi is a name which could come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, and blends in well in his Oakland surroundings. At the time of this writing, Desi's name has changed again, dropping the W.O.M.E. to become Desi Mundo on Facebook - so his name now encompasses the world.

In fact, he's from a white, middle-class family from Hyde Park, in Chicago. Both of his parents are teachers. He went to university, where he said he was having an "identity crisis" and trying to fit in to mainstream culture, which he seems to regret now. From an early age, however, Desi was fascinated with "writing," which he saw as getting his name out there, and he instituted an ambitious plan of tagging. He developed his style over time, under the mentorship of mostly older African-American writers, and gradually worked on bigger, more prominent walls in more daring locations. He got sick of hiding from the police, though, and decided to use his skills and background working within the system to find a better option - to hide in plain sight. The Community Rejuvenation Project (CRP) is Desi's ultimate way of working the system -- by incorporating *himself* as a nonprofit.

He's had success in convincing the outside world of his legitimacy, and has shown skill in negotiating the paperwork and bureaucracy in order to do so. He's obtained fiscal sponsorship from a nonprofit in order to hold 501(c)3 status, and he's assembled a Board of Directors, if not a very active one. He's secured grants not only

from the City's Cultural Funding grants but from Oakland's Community & Economic Development Agency (CEDA). Jon Kindleberger, who was his liaison within CEDA, explained their department's rationale for paying CRP \$15,000 to paint a mural:

It's just that people are going to not tag these murals - at least not as much - because they're going to respect the art that's on them. That's the basic idea. But also, that's why there's been a community involvement piece with all of the murals as well. . . . Different artists have worked with the community in different ways. I think with the CRP it's a little bit more of an ad hoc kind of thing, but they try to draw people in that are in the neighborhood, and I think they're pretty successful at that too. So to the extent that there's community support for the art, it's not just something imposed, I guess we're thinking that that will help with people respecting what's there.

Some CRP murals are officially sanctioned and even paid for, but many others remain unsanctioned.

Certainly part of writer culture is driven by illegality and actively seeks it out (Mailer 1979; Ferrell 1993). Under the aegis of CRP, illegal writing looks more plausible, even legitimate. "You tell cops it's a Block Party & Mural Dedication, they stay away. It's like hiding it in plain sight - if you act all clandestine, they'll be interested," Desi commented. "If you act like all your papers are in order and you're celebrating it with a party, of course it seems like it must be above board." How much of the political language of colonization, terrorism and freedom is a justification for the fuck-you thrill of marking your territory in a forbidden zone, and how much of the work is truly driven by a communitarian ideology? With Desi, it's an inextricable blend of motivations from ambition to altruism.

Stop Urban Blight! Nor-Cal City Greet Seminar

Many officials within City governments see it as their mission to eradicate blight, which they conceive of as an all-out war on graffiti. I did not fully grasp the extent to which many of these officials internalize that metaphor until I attended a day-long seminar targeting these officials and graffiti-removal specialists, called Stop Urban Blight! Desi wanted to "infiltrate" the seminar, as he put it, and asked me to attend with him. I include my field notes, below, in order to convey the full flavor of these surreal proceedings.

Desi contacted Rob Boyles, who has a fearsome reputation in the aerosol art/graffiti world as the man who almost completely eliminated graffiti from San Jose, where it had been viewed as an endemic problem. Boyles now runs a consulting business helping other cities fight what his bio describes as "the war on graffiti and litter." Desi called him while he was researching graffiti abatement measurements and techniques, and in his phone conversation, Desi positioned CRP as the proactive approach to graffiti abatement, advocating placing murals in heavily tagged locations instead of waging an endless pitched battle to erase tags. From this conversation, Desi was invited to a conference in December 2010 in Livermore on graffiti abatement, called the Stop Urban Blight! Nor-Cal City Greet. He signed us both up - himself as the Executive Director (true, in a strict sense) and myself as the Development Director (less true, although I have been writing grants for them). I was part of his cover.

Desi drove to the seminar, one of the few times he has ever driven me

somewhere because one of my key attributes and things I can offer has been rides for him. But he had recently acquired a used car, on a trade with a friend. When he showed up at my house I was still having breakfast and told him to come in while I finished. He and my husband evaluated my get-up and told me I looked too much like my everyday self, not enough undercover. I had been wearing leather boots, a wool pencil skirt, sweater and dangling necklace so I changed into high heels and a braided silver choker, which they felt looked more professional. Desi was in khakis with a thick key chain hanging from the belt - it must have had 20 keys on it - a white shirt and a fedora, which was hilarious and made him look more Cuban than government employee. He was very proud of his outfit, especially the touch of the keys. He told me that the key chain was meant to look like a property manager or an employee in a city's Public Works department. He was having fun with the disguise. Normally he wore radical political t-shirts, or hoodies covered with graffiti art, and baggy pants, usually jeans or hemp which he chooses as a sustainable material. Today he was trying his best to blend into a white working world.

When we parked in the lot for the conference, Desi spotted a few guys spray painting a white SUV next to the entrance. "Oh, cool, they're writing all over the fucking car," he said. I did a double take, and laughed when a split second later I realized from their tidy clothes and leather loafers that they probably weren't actually tagging the car for kicks. "Holy Shit, can I do that?" Desi said, practically salivating in the driver's seat next to me. "I wanna.... Oh god, you know what though, this is the thing, this is how they'll get me. Like let me write on that motherfucker... Watch it

not come off, wouldn't that be hilarious?" They were in fact paint sales reps from This Stuff Works, Inc, a graffiti removal company who was sponsoring the seminar. They sprayed solvent over the defaced car and - voila - it wiped off like whiteboard marker.

We made our way inside and stopped at the welcome table outside the seminar entrance to get our name tags. We were each gifted a white 5-gallon empty paint tub filled with swag, including a Stop Urban Blight! Tshirt, which Desi was gleeful over (and subsequently wore at public presentations of his graffiti murals, relishing the irony), rubber gloves that came up to my elbow, a scrub sponge, and various product samples. We were also handed a bound packet with a clear plastic cover and a picture of a boarded up house covered in all sorts of tags, including Jesus Saves. The packet title is: IF YOU LIKE GRAFFITI IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, DON'T READ ANY FURTHER. STOP URBAN BLIGHT. Desi and I exchanged Significant Looks and smiled. We *do* like graffiti in our neighborhoods.

We entered the room and red, white and blue was everywhere. The amount of patriotism on display made it feel like Fourth of July - and this was December. The seminar was held in a large room with at least 20 tables set up facing a wide stage, with food and drinks around the side and back. The tables were covered with alternating blue and red tablecloths. The music over the speakers as people got their coffee was Sousa-style bandstand marches, one after another, rolling forth solidly.

As people trickled in, I saw from a perusal of name tags that the seminar seemed mostly attended by members of local city governments from within a few

hours radius who were responsible for abatement - mostly people working in public works, law enforcement, and volunteer programs. We had tried to dress conservatively, and are in the end a little over-dressed. Other attendees are wearing hoodies, Carhart jackets, down vests, or golf shirts.

The first person on stage was Drew Lindner, founder of Stop Urban Blight!, a graffiti abatement nonprofit in Livermore, who not coincidentally, also owns the conference sponsor This Stuff Works, Inc. He opened by noting the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, and then proceeded to call up the insignia of each branch of the US Military one by one in PowerPoint. As each appeared, the full theme song of the branch played over the auditorium speakers (more military marching band-style tunes). He started with the Coast Guard and ended with the Marines, his own branch, as he noted. He then asked us to stand and led us in singing the Star Spangled Banner, and the woman next to me spoke the lyrics in a low voice in time with the music. Hands over hearts, now. Desi absented himself for this portion so he wouldn't stick out when he refused to do it.

When the Mayor of Livermore came up to speak next, he started by saying, "Sorry, I'm a little choked up, the Star Spangled Banner always gets me." The patriotism in the room was palpable.

Rob Boyles, the keynote speaker, stepped up to the podium. He felt strongly that the presence of graffiti is a call to war that must be waged by an army of volunteers. The metaphors were all war-related:

I think most of us when we see someone in our city [who] comes

along and tags that wall, tags that building or tags that playground, it's an attack. That's kind of how I like to think of it, as a war. It's an attack that has to have a counterattack.

He had no sympathy with the idea that graffiti could be an art form, and found it frankly offensive: "I get really upset when people tell me, 'Well, these are just artists. These are just kids that are trying to express themselves. They're not doing any harm.' That's all baloney." I saw nods around the room - his viewpoint is fairly mainstream in city government, in my experience.

His remarks were also grounded in the idea that graffiti is an affront to a city's "quality of life," an idea that is at the center of Broken Windows Theory, as discussed previously.

What is it about graffiti that disturbs us so much? What is it about graffiti that makes your citizens so nervous? It's quality of life. Quality of life is what every city employee is all about, and graffiti is an insult to that quality of life. I don't think there's anyone in this room that would disagree with that. People who feel they have the right to destroy property, to commit vandalism as a crime, is absolutely an insult to every one of you in this room that works so hard to bring that quality of life to the citizens of your towns.

Boyle's language is suffused with militaristic language, mirrored by conference's aggressively patriotic decor and the soundtrack of brass band marches.

In the past 10 years, fines and jail time for graffiti-related crimes have risen across the country, an outcome lobbied heavily for by anti-graffiti crusaders. Under California law, vandalism (or malicious destruction of property, which graffiti falls under) is considered a "wobbler," or a crime that can be charged as either a misdemeanor or a felony, depending on the situation. If it is charged as a felony, a

single act can result in one to three years in prison and/or a fine of \$10,000 or more. Even if considered a misdemeanor, the penalty can be up to one year in jail and/or a \$1000 fine (Penal Code 594 PC).

On the ride home, as we drove by the elevated BART station next to the freeway, Desi opened up about being arrested for graffiti for painting on the BART tracks soon after he moved to California. It really scared him. He was in jail for a few days. He was both defiant about the police and seemed determined not to be arrested again. This is another reason he won't use his "government name" - and sticks to Desi W.O.M.E. or Wome as the situation demands.

The emphasis on "quality of life" mirrors Broken Windows Theory closely and is likely taken directly from it. It is a vague term which can be defined in the eye of the beholder. Rob Boyles' imagined landscape, which he is paid as a consultant to materially enact in cities across the country, would seem sterile to the artists with whom I worked -- creating a life distinctly lacking in quality. Here we see the clashing of imagined landscapes elevated to a battleground, with paint sales, city budgets and even physical incarceration in the balance.

Winning Battles and Waging Wars: Strategies for Marking Space

If graffiti artists and CRP in specific have reason to believe that they are at war with elements of the State who wish to discipline the space of city streets, they also bring many strategies and tactics of their own to the battle. CRP has painted many murals without controversy, but they do not shy away from controversial

situations. In fact, in some cases they seem to court it. CRP has had several conflicts based on creating murals without the prior consent of the property owner. One eventually involved the Oakland Council member for the neighborhood in which they were working.

As a strategy to try to legitimize their art and keep it from getting painted over, CRP began painting multiple murals down one street at a time. They would then label the area as an “arts district” or “cultural corridor” which could be a destination to view the murals. This happened down blocks of Martin Luther King, Jr Way from West Grand to 23rd, with five murals painted on MLK or within a block of the street. At the westernmost mural, labeled the entrance to the series, the words “Martin Luther King Cultural Corridor” were painted above large portraits of Civil Rights-era heroes. This mural remains, while several others were painted over by local property owners or the City.

Across town CRP completed another series of murals, close to the homes of several core CRP members. The area had been hard hit by the closure of the Parkway Theater, a beloved Oakland landmark and neighborhood anchor business. CRP initially painted over the boarded up front of the theater itself, and initial reactions were fairly positive by business owners and residents in the area. An owner of a nearby business in the neighborhood discussed the boarded up building. "People would tag it, the owner would paint it, a couple of days later it would be tagged again," he said. "I could speak for the majority of the business owners, we all enjoy the mural - we're tired of looking at the tags. The majority of my customers, they love

the mural, they compliment it all the time."



Figure 10. MLK Cultural Corridor entrance mural in progress. The title will be painted across the top of the mural.

CRP persuaded the local business district association to co-sponsor a block party renaming the area the “Funktown Arts District.” An Auto Repair Shop on the same block invited the crew to use his buildings as a canvas, and his mural was begun during the block party. CRP brought Roots & Branches in to provide the sound system and music for the party, they served food such as roasted sweet potatoes, and by all accounts the party was very successful. It was well attended by a wide cross-section of people in age, race, ethnicity, and class.

Pushing Public/Private Boundaries

Buoyed by the positive feedback, CRP kept painting. They expanded the murals to property of existing business owners without their approval, including painting a low retaining wall around the edge of a Kragan parking lot. When Kragan objected, they painted the wall inside the parking lot, next to Kragan's entrance. When Desi encounters resistance, a common tactic is escalation. Within a few months, a prominent local business owner and officer in the Business Association (LMBA) had changed his opinion of the neighborhood murals. He sent an email to a member of the Community Rejuvenation Project as well as a youth minister in a local church, with a plea to try to reason with Desi.

Hi -----,

How have you been? My apologies for not being around lately, work keeps getting in the way.

Well, I am writing to you about Desi & the recent issue with the retaining wall at the Kragen parking lot.

Several months ago, as you know, Desi promised us at the LMBA meeting that he would work with us on any future projects. Needless to say, that did not happen.

I have been advised by the managers at Kragen, that they had asked him to stop, and he refused. They subsequently asked him to leave the property and he refused as well. They then called OPD and an officer arrived after Desi finished and a report was filed. According to the Kragen managers, OPD informed them that if he returns, he will be arrested for trespassing and other related charges.

The owner of the property is also looking into taking legal action against him as well.

In my humble opinion, you do not enter someone's property and paint

without their consent. His actions might be interpreted as arrogant and disrespectful, but last thing anyone wants is this confrontation to escalate.

If you are still in touch with him or if you think it might make a difference, he needs to know that the LMBA's area is not his canvass to do as he pleases.

From a later letter:

Thanks for sharing with me your insights. Also, great suggestion on clearing the air, so to say with Desi.

With the impending opening of the Parkway Theater and Kragen's desire to return its retaining wall to the original state, perhaps this issue may be a mute [sic] discussion.

However, one concern I believe may have been lost in my email, is that unlike his past projects in the LMBA District, Kragen & the land owner are opposed to what was done and are exploring legal remedies separately. Regardless of how I or the Business owners feel about Desi's work, this is an individual's own property and it should be respected as such.

The fellow aerosol artist encouraged Desi to attend the next meeting of the Business Association to try to clear the air.

Then the City of Oakland buffed one of the murals on the Parkway (below). Desi took it personally. At this point, someone painted the following words on the now uniformly gray wall: Mural Destroyed By City of Oakland. Call Art Watson (510) 434-5112. Art Watson is a Public Works employee who is in charge of Graffiti Abatement.



Figure 11. Parkway Mural by Ras Terms and Desi W.O.M.E. Photo by Desi.

When Desi spoke with public officials about the situation, he had no idea who might have written the protest message and no control over what someone wanted to paint there. Within hours, the wall was buffed again. In the morning, these words emerged: MURAL DESTROYED BY CITY OF OAKLAND. WHY? CALL ART WATSON (510) 434-5112, PAT KERNIGHAN (510) 238-7002. Pat Kernighan was the Council Member for the area. Again, the wall was quickly buffed, and for a third time the words and names and numbers showed up, including job titles this time.

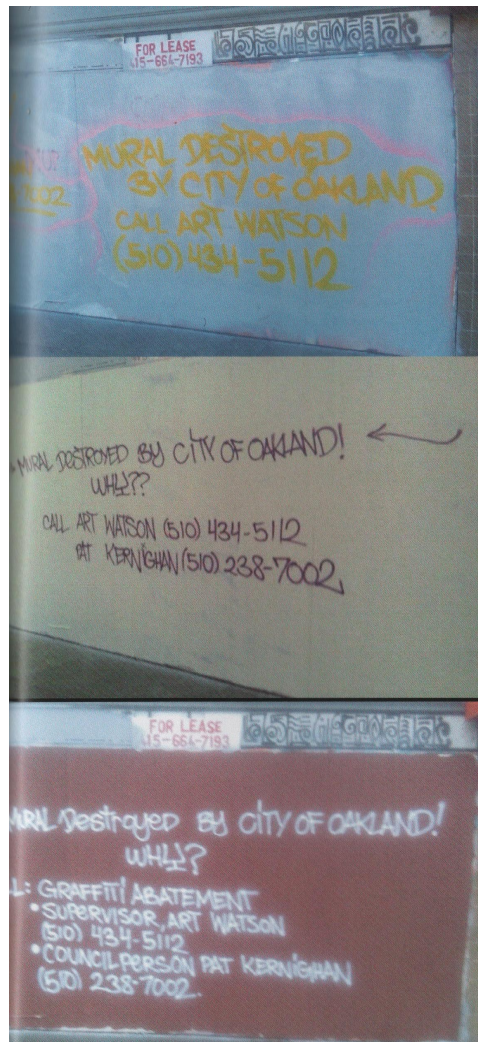


Figure 12. The same repeatedly buffed wall, with protest messages.

I spoke with Pat Kernighan at this time, and she was quite incensed about the situation, putting the blame on Public Works. She kept saying, "I am horrified. I loved them. I am flabbergasted as to why anybody would take them down. They don't look like graffiti, they're clearly murals." I asked her whether she would be in favor of murals painted on vacant buildings owned by absentee landlords who are difficult to track down, especially if the building itself is not being maintained? She said:

Generally speaking, yes, there might be certain reasons that would make it appropriate or not in certain situations, but if there is a blight and the mural will beautify the neighborhood, I'm in favor of it.

Her office eventually donated \$500 to pay Desi and CRP to repaint the mural. Desi saw this as the ultimate victory. Not only did he "win" in his fight against the city's graffiti abatement crew, he got a Council Member to pay him to re-paint an illegal mural on private property (which they had originally done for free). He had used his political prowess and his ability to shift personas to browbeat the system into shifting gears and even changing positions, if temporarily. He was loving it.

Conclusion

Broken Windows Theory and Painted Walls are both fundamentally about changing space through material enactments of imagination. They inscribe space in the image of their mind's eye - their imaginings - through gray housepaint, a rainbow of aerosol cans, planting a garden, or by filling up a trash bag. They lay claim, mark territory, and take ownership in ways both legal and illegal. People create space, they don't just wander through it. They are claiming space in ways both legal and illegal as they bring their different resources to the project. What is blight to one group is order to another. They are responding to what they perceive to be blight by imagining worlds into being and enacting them materially through what is made visible - and invisible.

The next chapter examines how the imagined landscapes of each of the groups

studied emerge through a different material practice - the documents which each produce.

Chapter Five

Concrete Imaginings: Claiming Space through Aesthetics

Thus far, we have examined several strategies for claiming contested space through material enactments of imaginings, particularly through physical transformations of space, such as fences, murals, gazebos or garbage removal. Another way claims are made is not a physical occupation of the space but rather an aesthetic communication. It is a different, and no less material, way of enacting imaginings - the use of visual culture as tool. Organizations can't always physically be in a space, so they turn to documents of all sorts to state their claim. In the same way that the term "art" has broadened into an emphasis on visual culture since the 1990s, the discipline of anthropology has had a shift in the way it thinks about documents. They are not just text, or transparent objects, or even communicative devices employing visual signs in order to achieve a goal; they do concrete work in the world - in this case, to mark or claim space.

We started with an examination of bureaucracy, so it is fitting to end by delving into documents: how each organization measures its idea of self. It is the physical record of the imagination we have sought to define, concretely before us in black and white and color. These documents chronicle their hopes for the future and the ways they seek to change the world. Yet they are tricky and can say more or less than they mean to. They convey much more than their bald words set down on paper, through their aesthetic commitments. They cannot always be taken at face value.

This chapter focuses on the matter of aesthetics or how aesthetics matter: how

the materiality of aesthetics marks space and creates worlds by attempting to elicit certain responses in its readers and calling certain types of subjectivity into existence. My shorthand for the politics of aesthetics is style, a word of supreme importance to the aerosol writers I followed, but a category which is less attended to by the gardeners and bureaucrats with whom I spoke. Style is an industrious worker in the creation of imaginings or constitutive vision. Style influences documents of all types which eventually have physical ramifications. In order to analyze the aesthetics, or style, of these groups, I examine photographs, fundraising materials, pamphlets, self-published books and magazines, and a host of other materials which fall into the category of documents. The kinds of documents produced by each of these organizations turns out to tell us quite a lot about their imagined landscapes and the transformations of spaces and people that each seeks to elicit.

What is a document? Philosopher Suzanne Briet defines a document as organized physical evidence in support of a fact of any kind. In a beautiful series of questions she expands the category's boundaries while setting some limits: "Is a star a document? Is a pebble rolled by a torrent a document? Is a living animal a document? No" (Briet 1951). However, the photograph of a star, the collected stone, the animal in a zoo are all documents.

The inclusion of documents in ethnographic work is as old as the discipline of anthropology itself, and the production of documents might be an alternative definition for the profession. Documents were originally used (and continue to be, in some cases) with an assumed transparency, simply as documentation of a set of facts

taken at face value. Anthropological research using documents quickly moved to analyze the social processes influencing their production and reception, as well as how social relations are mediated by documents, as opposed to being mere conduits for information flow (Smith 1990 216). Theoretical approaches to the study of documents in this vein have used a variety of terms: seeing documents as "cultural texts" (Bloomfield & Vurdubakis 1994; Inoue 1991); documents as evidence of a wider "cultural logic" (Miller 1984, 125); "reading" narratives of modernity such as trauma, loss or nostalgia (Ivy 1998; Morris 2000; Siegel 1997); considering images a kind of text, with interpretable meanings (Burke 2001). These methods see the contents of documents as implicitly non-transparent and seek to de-code a hidden message; at the same time, the category of "the document" itself remains unexamined.

One more recent approach to examining documents within the field of Anthropology has been a renewed, reflexive interest in examining the category itself. The anthropologist and legal scholar Annelise Riles has galvanized work in this area. Documents can be "good to think with" for both informants and ethnographers. Examining documents is a way to study how ethnographers themselves know. Recent work has delved into the role of the document in epistemology and the epistemology of document production. It is also a way to achieve a meta-level of reflexivity in a way that I believe many anthropologists find highly pleasurable, not least because of its high value within the discipline. As Riles puts it: "To take other people's knowledge practices as an ethnographic subject is also necessarily to think

'laterally' about epistemological and aesthetic commitments of one's own knowledge" (Riles 2006 17).

Another new theoretical approach pays attention to the materiality of documents and treats them as an artifact in the sense in which the document is treated as a found object as opposed to enmeshed within a web of symbols (Strathern 1988, 1990). In this approach, Riles would define documents in a way that emphasizes material effects in the world: "A document was an idea committed to material form such that it could be used--it could become a technology of its own" (2006). A focus on the materiality of the document rejects the modernist fantasy of a document as a transparent conveyer of information and the ideal of documentation as the seamless central function of a bureaucracy. Like the bureaucratic structures we examined, the document is always simultaneously living in the worlds of the ideal and the material. In many ways, the document is a central component to a utopian modernist vision, but its materiality provides an ongoing critique of that vision (Riles 2006). At the same time that documentation is a technological tool with a modern, rational, universalist vision it is also made of material subject to decay, and prey to smears of food, human fingers hitting the wrong key on a keyboard, and all manner of weaknesses.

Earlier anthropological research on documents that focused on reading them as "cultural texts" and decoding their signs still treated the document itself as somewhat transparent - a vessel to fill up with signs. Hull summarizes newer approaches succinctly in his review of the study of documents:

Just as discourse has long been recognized as a dense mediator between subjects and the world, newer anthropological scholarship on bureaucratic documents treats them not as neutral purveyors of discourse, but as mediators that shape the significance of the signs inscribed on them and their relations with the objects they refer to. (Hull 2012)

Recent scholarship on documents invites us not to focus on their instrumental uses, but to instead practice a form of listening which pays attention to how their form might mediate their inscriptions. It entails a focus on their aesthetics, status as an artifact and aspects of their design. They are more than an instrument to achieve an end or a symbol of something else - what if we were to try to encounter documents on their own terms? (Reed 2006)

Social science research has shown that thinking and processing information are deeply influenced by race/ethnicity, social class, and language. Likewise, the preferred way of receiving information is also closely tied to social constructs: the audience response to teaching tools (classroom instruction and documents) and an individual's learning style is in many cases strongly influenced by the aforementioned categories (Villegas & Lucas 2002; Crichtlow, Goodwin, Shakes & Swartz 1990). Linguistic anthropologists Ochs and Schiefflin argue that the process of language acquisition among children in various parts of the modern world differs across cultures. They show that white, middle-class models of language acquisition are not generalizable to other parts of the world in their work in Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa (1984). If we think of visual representation as a culturally-loaded language which requires its own acquisition and includes layers of embedded

meaning, we can infer that visual language acquisition would also be culturally shaped. Therefore, it would be incredibly important for organizations whose mission relies on connecting with an audience who might be culturally different to pay attention to the visual language with which their message is presented. These organizations are attempting to reach people where they are - this chapter looks at the materials they produce in this difficult attempt to reach across chasms. They are attempting with various levels of success to create a contact zone.

A contact zone is an arena where cultures from differing levels of privilege and power are interacting and mixing, and cannot help but influence one another. A space where gentrification is in question cannot help but be a contact zone. As Mary Louise Pratt says,

A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized . . . not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power (1992).

One reason to pay close attention to how the language of style is transmitted and communicated is because it is always seeking to spread, cross-pollinate and create new worlds in its image. In many of the instances we explore in this dissertation, visual cultures are colliding. Both the gardeners and the aerosol artists with whom I worked are striving mightily to create contact zones, and have a vested interest in avoiding the situation of cultural domination described by Marcyliena Morgan in *Language, Discourse and Power in African-American Culture*:

. . . when two or more languages come together, two or more peoples have come together and the result is always about power and identity. If the result is that one language becomes the lingua franca, it means that the ideology of a dominant language/people has overwhelmed the other languages/peoples and they must deal with the marginalization (Morgan 2002).

These organizations are hoping to avoid replaying relationships of marginalization in the ways that they attempt to reach out, but it is a difficult balancing act.

Movement-Based Style

The East Bay (Oakland, Berkeley and Richmond) is a national epicenter for urban gardening and food-focused nonprofits. At first glance the organizations have many similarities in their goals: they are all focused on getting healthy food to people who don't have access to it. However, the seeming similarities obscure some basic differences resulting from the organization's origins. The Community Food Security Movement and the Food Justice Movement were two urban food-focused movements that arose within a decade of one another, from disparate roots. The Community Food Security Movement began in the early 1990s with a commitment to provide:

. . . access to healthy food such that all are able to obtain a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local, community-based food systems that support the goals of sustainable agriculture and support family farms (Melcarek 1999).

Food security was a term championed by international NGOs and through a series of United Nations conferences. It was brought into US communities predominantly by

white activists, working from an international context. The Food Justice Movement grew from the Community Food Security Movement in the early 2000s (and only officially formalized and defined itself as a movement in 2008) with a similar emphasis on the unequivocal right to access healthy food, but with a much different analysis of the roots of the problem and more of a focus on the historic inequities of racism and classism built into the US food system. In Food Justice, Robert Gottlieb, a professor of Urban Environmental Policy, identifies the basic tenets of the movement as “equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts and a different, more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten” (Gottlieb & Joshi 2010). Movement leadership mostly came from people of color (Melcarek 1999).

City Slicker Farms was an organization that began as a part of the Community Food Security Movement, with founder Willow Rosenthal originally becoming inspired after traveling in Latin America and witnessing collective urban farming, particularly in Colombia under the early days of Hugo Chavez' tenure (personal communication, Barb Finnin, 1/27/14). So the inspiration for the work was translated from an international context by a white, middle-class woman who was herself an outsider in the West Oakland neighborhood in which the nonprofit focuses their efforts. The organization still struggles with this effort of translation and whether they are an outsider or an insider within the community. This problem was compounded by an ongoing lack of staff members of color, a problem which they are continually attempting to rectify (with more recent success). CSF has also learned

much from the food justice movement and from their collaborations with organizations such as People's Grocery. The entire community food security movement has moved towards using food justice language and in many ways the movements have morphed at this time.

Other Oakland food-based nonprofits such as People's Grocery, Planting Justice and Phat Beets see themselves as clearly arising as part of the Food Justice Movement. The Food Justice movement in Oakland is rooted in the historical presence of the Black Panthers in the area (partially due to the birth of the Black Panther movement in North and West Oakland) and many would trace a primary inspiration for their work back to the Panthers' Free Breakfast Program. In fact, Planting Justice, another Oakland-based Food Justice nonprofit, explicitly organized its January 2014 motivating principles into a 10-Point Platform in homage to the original 10-Point Platform written by the Black Panther Party (BPP). People's Grocery has a list of resources on Anti-Oppression and Allyship, which includes links to "The Legacy of the Black Panther Party" and to its 10-point platform. Phat Beets has a workshop series called "Decolonize your Diet" and an explicit anti-gentrification platform. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they were also influenced by the striking visual style of the Black Panther Party, epitomized in the work of Emory Douglas, artist, graphic designer and the BPP's Minister of Culture from 1965 until the 1980s.

[Douglas'] distinctive illustration style featured thick black outlines. . . .and resourceful tint and texture combinations. Conceptually, Douglas' images . . . construct[ed] a visual

mythology of power for people who felt powerless and victimized (Gaiter 2004).

Douglas' work was featured in almost every issue of the party's weekly "Intercommunal News Service," *The Black Panther*, as well as in countless posters and other artwork.



Figure 13 & 14. Left: A self-portrait of Emory Douglas featuring food-centered protest and highlighting the Panther's People's Free Food Program, collaged over coupons for cuts of meat. Right: An example of Douglas' bold graphic style featuring thick outlines and radiating background lines.

People's Grocery logo took inspiration from aspects of Black Panther Party visual style, showing people of color in powerful stances including a raised fist, serious (non-smiling) visages and with radiating lines behind the figures. City Slicker Farms' logo does not show people, and overall has a fairly neutral affect; however it is clear that it is not coming from the same tradition of visual culture.



Figure 15. Logo for People's Grocery c. 2014.



Figure 16. Logo for City Slicker Farms c. 2014.

CSF's logo has a casual appearance, as if it's just been sketched, which references graffiti fonts while clearly not coming from that tradition (no aerosol writer would ever be so casual with his or her lettering, since every line has meaning and registers stylistic allegiances). Food justice organizations such as People's Grocery are much more strident and use more militant language than City Slicker Farms, which also emerges in their more in-your-face visual style. CSF's visual style focuses on being

more winning, or welcoming, showing smiling children, and featuring people of color prominently, but not exclusively. Part of the purpose of the Black Panther Party's visual style was in fact to convey threat, thereby emphasizing the seriousness of the problems that needed addressing, whereas CSF's style is obviously non-threatening.

The Community Rejuvenation Project's aerosol muralists are rooted in a graffiti culture which grew into a recognized movement - with glimmerings of recognition as an art form - through NYC's subway train graffiti and NYC youth culture in the 1970s. The movement was dominated by youth and was closely aligned with communities of color. It arose simultaneously with hip-hop culture (with which it shared mutual influences) so it is not surprising that its style still resonates with these groups. Graffiti's recognition as an art form culminated in several high-profile exhibitions in the Brooklyn Museum of Art (2006) and LA's Museum of Contemporary Art (2011), resulting in more mainstream recognition and the ability of graffiti artists to gain more institutional support through grants and commissions.

CITY SLICKER FARMS

Creating a Hopeful Pause: Material Imaginings in Annual Reports

Annual Reports assemble a range of materials, from data-driven tables and charts to personal anecdotes, in order to project the organization's imagining of the future and a narrative about an organization's history that it hopes will be "official."

As City Slicker Farm Executive Director Barb Finnin put it, "It tells our story." They are a perfect example of documents as "socially mediated textual performances with norms of interconnectedness between texts, readers and authors" (Kaplan 2002, 347, cf Brenneis 2006). They are grounds for the creation of new knowledge: the image of itself that CSF wants to represent to the world, ways that imaginings become concrete. Their Annual Reports generally included the following categories: basic information such as a listing of staff positions with a photo of current staff, Board of Directors and their affiliations, and a list of Farm locations and their Volunteer Hours; a Letter from the Executive Director and Board President; pages outlining Need, Vision & Mission, and What We Do; an overview of their Community Market Farm achievements and stats, with supportive quotations from community members; a similar page on their Backyard Garden Program; other achievements of the year (community outreach or new gardens); intermittently, a graphic on Organizational Sustainability (every two to three years); Income and Expenditures with tables and pie charts; Participant Demographics comparing West Oakland demographics with CSF participants broken down by income and race/ethnicity; and a Thank You page to Volunteers, Apprentices, Interns, Collaborators, donors, and some participants.

Annual Reports are driven by a hoped-for response: a gift. Annual Reports almost always hope to inspire a gift of time, expertise, goods, or most especially money. The question of response through documentation - and particularly the response of hope - was discussed in Miyazaki's (2006) ethnographic account of Fijian lists documenting funeral gifts for the purpose of reciprocity, which analyzes

how the structure of the tabulated document created a "hopeful pause." In the same way, the structure of CSF's Annual Reports sets up an argument for a responsible, effective vision of itself with an audible question: Will you offer your support? A hopeful pause is built into the genre. Here, we examine not the response itself but how the organization hopes to get there, the struggle to connect.

Proof and rhetoric are inexorably intertwined (Ginzburg 1999, 57). An annual report is a document used as a "rationality badge." Clarke, a sociologist of organizations, terms a rationality badge a "symbol organizations use to signal they're in control . . . they are usually set in a rhetoric of technical competence" (Clarke 1999 16). A primary goal of any Annual Reports is to prove that the organization has spent its money well, and therefore would be worthy of more donations. For this reason they are mostly targeted at donors, at the individual and institutional levels. When I asked Finnin about their audience for their Annual Reports, she said, "That's a good question. We have this idea that it's for everybody, but the primary people that we mail it to are donors, funders, partners. As far as community members, there are folks we're sending it to but it's not like we're blanketing our community with it." It's not a document made to appeal to their program target population - low-income, mostly African-American, with mixed levels of education - it is a slick, formal document aimed at a mostly white and highly educated audience. Annual Reports prove cultural competency in the world of mainstream financial institutions; they prove an organization is trustworthy to banks, governments, foundations. They do the crucial work of making the organization exist as a thing of substance. That work

is partially accomplished at a material level - heavy glossy paper, integrated color schemes, professional graphic design - with a final result of a small present or a chapbook sitting in your two hands, enticing you to open it.

I examined CSF's published Annual Reports from 2006-2012, first focusing on analyzing the rhetorical trope of the "Letter from the Executive Director" and/or Board President. I noticed an interesting shift in assumed audience from a more narrow focus on donors towards eventually including community members on a more equal footing. Early reports exclusively focused on fundraising, with final sentences such as this: "We humbly ask you to lend a hand and to please give what you can" (2006). Other letters through the years explicitly addressed their audience and even named the categories of people and responses envisioned: "For those of you new to City Slicker Farms, we hope you'll join us . . . as a donor, Board member or volunteer" (2009) or "Our continued success is made possible by you - our community of supporters, allies and donors" (2011). The audience for the Annual Reports was specifically not envisioned as West Oakland Community members or program participants. However, there was a shift towards a possible audience of community members in the last Reports produced, in 2011 and 2012. Although in 2011 they asserted their "continued success" rested on mostly on groups defined not as program participants ("supporters, allies and donors"), the letter ended with an appeal that included participants: "If you are new to us, we hope you will be inspired to join us as a donor, volunteer and/or participant." The "and/or" inclusion

signals unconscious conflict about whether or not these categories can be overlapping. By 2012, any conflicts were resolved, and the Report ends with: "If you are new to us, we hope you will be inspired to be a part of our journey as a donor, volunteer and participant." The document has progressed from Annual Report as fundraising appeal to essentially Community Report Card, with a range of uses, including but not limited to fundraising. These changes can be seen in the font change to serif in 2011 and 2012; while sans-serif is generally considered more "modern," many other food justice organizations and aerosol artists groups use serif fonts more frequently, which can seem "edgier" in the right context. Their use of bright colors inside and out (as opposed to primarily on the cover), use of named (as opposed to anonymous) pulled quotes, and simplified data presentation attempt to include a wider variety of folks.

The Annual Report is not only a material reflection of self, but a way to make their imagined futures concrete. Imaginings can suddenly seem more possible when they are set down in print, in a convincing font, on good quality paper (Jacob 2007; Komito 2009). Every Annual Report through 2009 contained an interesting section titled "Our Long Term Vision," - which could be termed a "fantasy document" (Clarke 1999). Clarke, a sociologist, used the term fantasy document to refer to organizational planning for disaster, but I adapt the term outside of the confines of catastrophic event planning because it aptly describes the impetus of an organization to make a public plan which is fundamentally rhetorical with little or no chance to succeed, yet serving a symbolic function. CSF's "Long Term Vision" discussed the

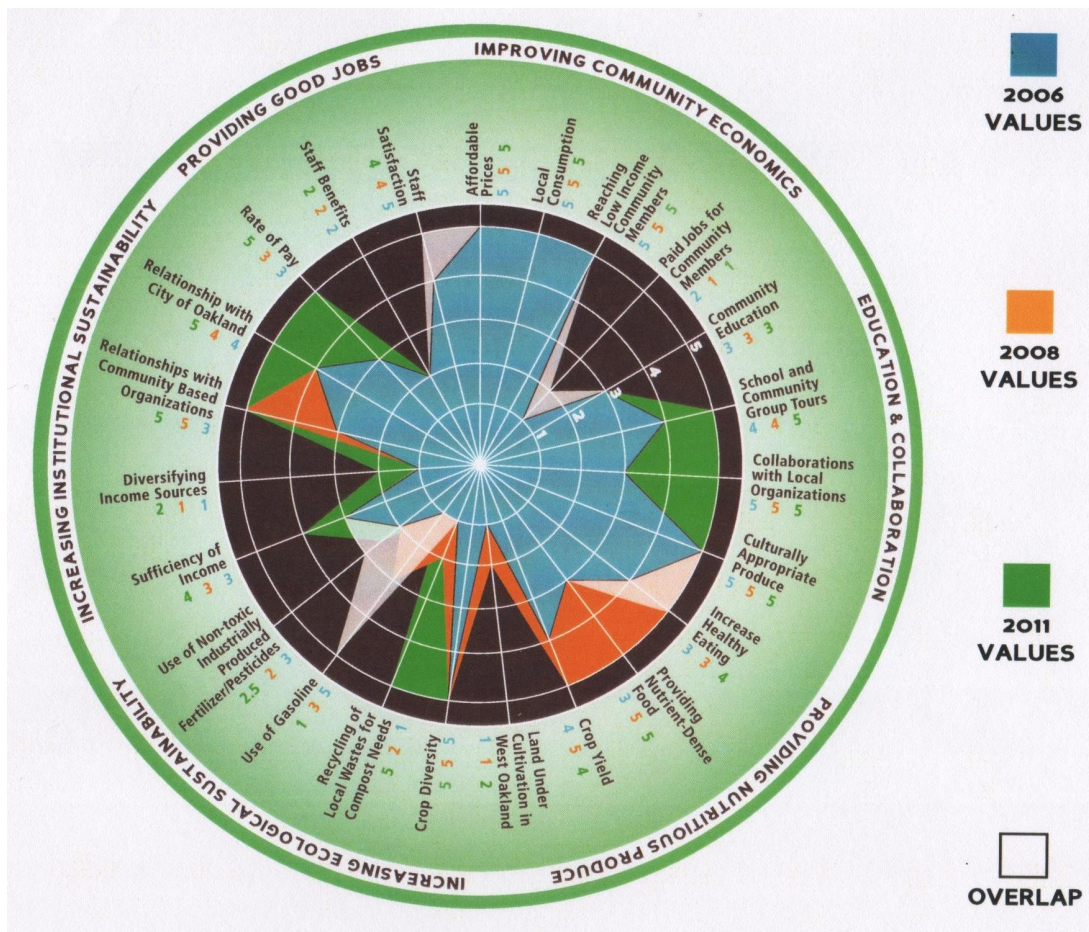
amount of land that would need to be under cultivation in West Oakland in order to grow 40% of its produce in the community. The number was 77 acres until 2008, but in 2009 the calculations had changed - more than doubled, in fact, to 158 acres needed to achieve 40% food self-sufficiency. The changing calculation was based on updated sources for yearly produce needs, which resulted in more acreage needed to achieve the 40% goal.

This means that through our programs and support for partner projects we are working towards developing 77 acres, or 3% of the total area of West Oakland. With .86 acres under cultivation, we have only begun to tackle this goal. (CSF 2006)

While Lee found fantasy documents to be a dangerous tool in disaster preparedness because they lull us into a false sense of security, CSF's vision is problematic for other reasons. The explicit goal of developing over a hundred acres of land in West Oakland into urban farms has overtones of colonization, and might particularly feel that way to populations dealing with histories of being uprooted for the latest development project. The language was removed after 2009, because they realized that the goal was so unrealistic that it became demoralizing - every year they would evaluate their progress and by 2009 they were still only 2% of the way to their "goal." As Finnin said, it was "always so small" and yet the organization did not have the resources to manage any additional plots.

Documents can also seek to take proactive protective measures for an organization. CSF includes a graphic in several of its Annual Reports (2006, 2008, 2011) on Organizational Sustainability which looks like a globe, complete with

longitude and latitude lines, but bristling with labels around its circumference. It is not a quick and transparent conveyor of information, but a dense and rather opaque one. It is however beautiful in its glorious complexity, and yields layers of information as one delves into its multiple colors, legends, numerical evaluations and spatial relationships.



17. CSF's Organizational Sustainability Chart, 2011 Annual Report

CSF's Organizational Sustainability Chart could be seen as what Strathern refers to as a "protective aversion tactic." She tells a story of Naparama's army in Mozambique recounted by the Comaroffs (1992) which goes up against well-armed

government forces protected only by markings on their chests which they described as "vaccinations" against bullets. The government forces fled. Strathern describes their markings as a protective aversion tactic and likens their actions to those of Cambridge University writing its own nonsensical-phrase-filled Mission Statement. Its use is not to be understandable, but rather to ward off government intervention by proving "good governance" and adherence to "best practices." (Strathern 2006).

The Organizational Sustainability chart feels similar in that the words themselves have less meaning the more you try to pin them down. What is meant by sustainability? They are putting forth the chart as their definition of sustainability. However, the non-specificity of an over-used term is not elucidated by breaking it into a multiplicity of individual parts which in themselves have ambiguous meanings. Its very complexity is a protective aversion tactic. When an organization gets questions about the thorny concept of sustainability, it's nice to be able to show a complicated graphic reflecting many rounds of evaluation, which immediately conveys: "Ah, they've given this some thought; they're clearly taking the concept seriously." I would also venture that the rich complexity of the graphic might take away from the accessibility of the information, which leads me to the conclusion that, although it may be useful as an internal tool to assess progress on various smaller goals (as explained by Finnin), community accessibility and legibility is not their top goal with their Organizational Sustainability chart.

West Oakland Healthy Eating Guide

If the Annual Report is a document aimed at an audience outside of West Oakland, CSF produced another document which explicitly targeted the neighborhood, as one can deduce from its name, the West Oakland Healthy Eating Guide. Although specifically targeted at community members and covering important content, it chronicles attempts to reach out to its target audience which were deemed unsuccessful by the organization itself. For instance, although the guide was present at many of City Slicker's farm stands and informational booths where I volunteered, I never saw a community member take one or flip through it. Eventually they stopped appearing. Here I analyze the guide's visual content and material emphasis to understand what attempts were made to connect and why they may not have been deemed successful. In the end, was the Guide speaking *for* community members or *with* them?

The Healthy Eating Guide is smaller than any of the Annual Reports (it is half of a standard A1 page, 5.5" x 8") and clearly meant to be mass produced on standard copy paper. The cover is a color copy, and the inner pages are black and white copies. While the Annual Report was created by a graphic design firm (an in-kind donation), the Healthy Eating Guide was put together by in-house interns and volunteers. Internal sections include a "Greetings!" page from the Executive Director, profiles on participants in the Backyard Garden program, recipes, opportunities to be an Intern or Apprentice, a Kids Fun Page, a listing of CSF's gardens and volunteer hours, and information on other programming from food-centered West Oakland organizations (other gardening organizations, food pantries,

soup kitchens, and locations for free groceries).

Some choices on design and content of the Healthy Eating Guide seemed to be targeting African-American community members, by using bright colors on the cover including a strip of abstract design down the spine featuring red and black triangles which was reminiscent of Kente cloth. The font chosen for the title is meant to look hand-lettered, is in all-caps and each letter uses an alternating bright color,

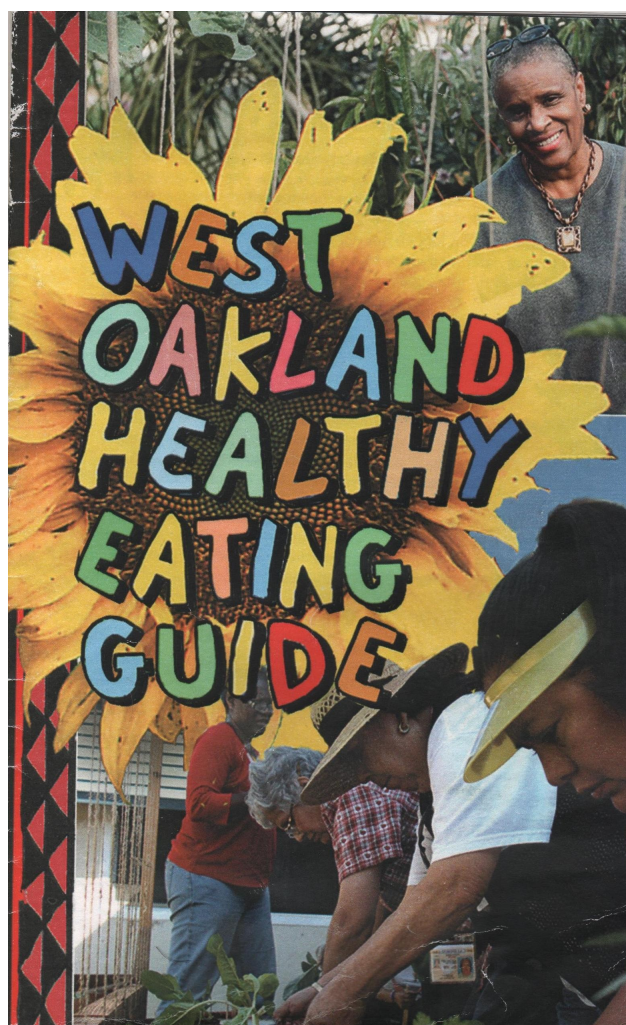


Figure 18. West Oakland Eating Guide, 2009.

which creates a friendly, child-centered impression. The font raises questions about the target audience for the publication, because although they include a Kids' Fun Page at the center of the publication, most of the writing is not targeted towards kids at all (using words like "holistic" and "sustainable food movement"). The choice of font is a perfect example of the importance of style and aesthetics in the ability to communicate a message. A child's colorful hand-lettering in a title reaches out to an audience of children and parents; a slight shift to a font that is colorfully hand-lettered in a graffiti-inspired font reaches out not just to kids and parents but teenagers and a wide variety of other demographics in the neighborhood because it signals its own cultural competence, or "insider" status.

The first page is entitled "Greetings!" from Executive Director Barbara Finnin, and again exhibits confusion about its target audience. It is written in a similar manner to an introductory letter to a grant proposal or an annual report, and instead of using more casual language accessible to people from a range of educational backgrounds, it seems written for an educated audience. It does not seem to be addressed the community directly but instead speaking about them.

Since 2001, City Slicker Farms has been partnering with West Oakland residents, specifically those facing economic hardships, to increase their access to healthy organic food through the creation of organic, sustainable, high-yield urban farms and backyard gardens.

Instead of saying "we are partnering with you," the language has a distancing effect. She also mentions that "we keep tons of carbon emissions from our air" as one of the reasons they do the work, as well as providing a place to "connect with the earth"

both of which seem to be motivations and goals stemming more from the environmental movement. The goals of the Healthy Eating Guide seem to be to connect people to where they can get healthier food in their community and to educate them about why it's important and how to prepare it - goals squarely within the community food security or food justice movements. The initial letter of welcome indicated a lack of clarity in how goals were being presented, the language used, and the target audience.

The Healthy Eating Guide profiled several African-American Backyard Gardeners in their own words with photos included. This is a real departure from many of the organization's earlier Annual Reports, where although they are quoted extensively, it was usually in an article written from a third person point of view or even an anonymous quotation. Letting community members themselves talk about why they enjoy eating their homegrown vegetables and how their lives are better seems like the best possible way to connect with multiple parts of the community: children will look and see faces that mirror their own or are neighbors or family members; adults can read the reasons behind their involvement and the tangible benefits incurred.

One goal of a healthy eating guide is to offer education and encouragement on how to incorporate more vegetables into the diet of community members. In an attempt to use slang as a way of presumably being less formal and trying to connect with their audience, one section is entitled "What's Cookin'?" which is not an expression common among younger African-Americans. The title introduces a page

of recipes using locally grown vegetables. However, their recipes are not responsive to the cultural background of their target audience. The recipes are for Grated Beet & Carrot Salad with balsamic vinegar & tamari sauce, Roasted Sesame Seed Sauce, and Zucchini Curry Soup, none of which seem influenced by African-American culinary traditions. In an attempt to introduce some new flavors or techniques, they missed the opportunity to build on a rich African-American culinary tradition. The omission reflects a lack of effective participation by African-Americans in the creation of the Guide.

At the center of the document is a colorful, hand-drawn Kids' Fun Page - which was bisected by a fundraising envelope attached to the center staple. This created a startling juxtaposition and a visual interruption of the drawings on the Fun Page - in effect creating a blank spot on the page and a barrier to engaging in the kids games included. It was surprising to see a fundraising envelope in a publication specifically trying to engage a low-income community, running the risk of alienation.

CSF's 2007 Annual Report stated that three Healthy Eating Guides are produced a year, but this was the only one I saw during my several years of fieldwork with the organization (2009-2011). Finnin says, "The idea was to produce one per quarter, but we weren't able to find the funding to make that feasible. Then it ended up being once a year." Eventually, around the time that my fieldwork began, they decided to stop publishing it because, she says, "It wasn't producing an impact that we saw." Other institutions such as the Alameda County Health Department

began to produce similar guides with higher production values so CSF chose to spend their time and money elsewhere - namely, in the garden.

By contrast, I have a postcard sent with some volunteer paperwork CSF asked me to fill out. The front shows a picture of lush, in-focus purple collards and mustard greens, with an out-of-focus man tending to them. Although he appears to be white, he is wearing baggy jeans and a white baseball cap and does not look immediately "out of place" with regard to neighborhood residents. The edges have a ragged effect and WEST OAKLAND is written in a bold font in the lower right-hand corner.



Figure 19. WEST OAKLAND Postcard, produced by In Good Company.

The overall effect is tough, yet farm-focused. Another important difference reveals itself on the back of the postcard, which contains a recipe for Citrus Collards with Raisins - an update on a classic dish from African-American cuisine, credited to a local African-American chef (in marked contrast with the recipes included in the

Healthy Eating Guide). The whole effect seems an effort to reach out to groups from varied backgrounds, not just from a white, middle-class one. The postcard was not produced directly by City Slicker Farms but they chose to use it and distribute it.

Beyond Paper

I would now like to examine the way CSF's aesthetic manifests in the world through documents that are not just on paper. Prime examples are their normal farmstand setup and signs, as well as their promotion of the Harvest Festival they organized at Union Plaza Urban Farm. In all things, there is a desire to be cute. The writing on the banner has rounded edges, homespun appeal, and a lack of edginess. It is hand-lettered on a burlap background, which seemingly references a more rural farmstead aesthetic.



Figure 20. Sign for the Harvest Festival.

The photo below shows a Community Lunch table at the 2012 Harvest

Festival, which is rather formal including a flower arrangement, a beautiful glass carafe and a white woman in a black chef's coat and apron spooning out the lunch. This set-up was visually in marked contrast to the lunch served at the Harvest Festival the previous year, when City Slickers asked another African-American run food justice organization, Oakland Food Connection, to provide the lunch. That year, lunch was served out of their graffiti-covered food truck by local youth.



Figure 21. Community Lunch table presentation.

Another example is an online video posted by CSF in August 2013 and entitled "Backyard Gardens - Growing Food and Community!", which shows a sped-

up vision of a Backyard Garden Installation. 12 volunteers and two staff members were present in the video and listed in the credits, but only two people of color are visible in the video. The musical choice for their promotional video was bluegrass, which is usually thought to resonate more with a white, rural groups rather than urban Latino or black communities.

COMMUNITY REJUVENATION PROJECT

When Legitimacy Means Cultural Competency

The Community Rejuvenation Project's approach to documentation tends to focus on cultivating acceptance and attempting to reflect the culture of the community with whom they are interacting. Documents can be forms of proof not only to funders or a wider institutional culture but to the targets of a nonprofit's programming. Such was the case with the Community Rejuvenation Project's S.W.E.A.R. Magazine, Issue #1 (and only) - Summer 2009. It was created in collaboration with a Summer Youth Employment program run by the nonprofit, so its goals were multifaceted.

Documents can be used to connect with a wide range of groups - and just as Desi's cultural chameleon status allows him to negotiate a wide range of social situations successfully, CRP artists designed the major documents that I am analyzing to fulfill a wide variety of roles. This is a document that was designed to have a long and varied "career," which Brenneis (2006) describes as the changing forms of a document as it moves between settings. The magazine was both a training

tool for the youth (who took a lead role in writing editing, photographing, designing the layout, and every aspect of the production), a memento of their time in the program, a work documenting how project money was spent given to funders, but then an ongoing physical proof for CRP showing that they could work with youth of color and were culturally competent enough to create a document that reflected the youths' very multicultural backgrounds. An official with the City of Oakland cited the magazine to



Figure 22. S.W.E.A.R Magazine cover.

me as proof that they could put together future programs working with city youth. SWEAR was also submitted as part of CRP's grant application to the Oakland Cultural Funding Panel (where the group successfully obtained funding).

The graphic design of the magazine itself is very graffiti-inspired. The title, S.W.E.A.R., is an acronym rendered in graffiti-style font, which stands for Student Warriors Enacting Artistic Revolution. It contains many pictures of the aerosol murals co-designed and executed by the youth. The magazine includes fiction, article and poems from the youth and forefronts their voices almost to the exclusion of adult voices entirely; the first-person voice of the youth was maintained throughout. There is no Letter from the President, no voice of authority offering a meta-narrative on goals or achievements, except a short paragraph on the inner cover on how CRP was founded, which is presented next to one of the student muralists explaining the summer projects undertaken by the students. The student editorial staff was listed above the CRP staff. The magazine was divided into subsections based on the five weeks of the program and labeled: plant, sprout, photosynthesis, flower and blossom -- obvious metaphors for the growth of the kids' skills over the course of the program.

The next document I'd like to examine from CRP is entitled REJUVENATION: A PHOTO ANTHOLOGY OF THE 2010 MURALS. BY THE COMMUNITY REJUVENATION PROJECT ARTIST COLLECTIVE. The serif font in all-caps gives a "tough" vibe. The book is hard-bound, using an online printing service. The focus on inclusiveness and diversity is stated on the first page:

CRP murals always reflect the broad diversity of Oakland's cultures, and are generally prayers for peace and empowerment within the community. The images we use reflect a balance of ancient/modern, cross-generational, cross-cultural, and the spectrum of sexual orientations that are found within Oakland. Murals always reflect the

cultures of the people living within the immediate vicinity and incorporate social justice themes and local neighborhood history.

This document is absolutely CRP's Annual Report, if not billed as such. The attribution on the cover is to the Artist Collective, and the text inside isn't signed as from any individual - it is always the "voice of the collective." While the book was a collaborative process with other artists, the writing was mostly done by Desi; however, the impression is to promote the collective and not any individual within it (although the murals themselves are "signed" and the artists who contributed to them are always listed on the wall itself).

The second page lists 2010 Accomplishments, and can be seen as the equivalent of CSF's Letter from the Executive Director and Board President. It, however, is unattributed and therefore dispenses with the hierarchy explicit in the genre. It also contains no specific funding appeals. However, the document was designed to be useful in a funding context while still being a document a community member or artist would relate to. The book primarily consists of photos, but captions provide a running commentary for the year. It was also sold as a way to generate revenue at some CRP events, positioned as a coffee table art book. The difference between CRP's mural anthology and CSF's analogous Annual Reports are striking. While CSF's documents struggle to reach out to any one audience (outside of an institutional donor), CRP's documents effortlessly span genres and audiences.

The Community Rejuvenation Project has a YouTube channel containing about ten videos. Fascinatingly, one of them is about City Slicker Farms. It

chronicles the rebuilding of a garden in the back courtyard space of United Roots: Green Youth Arts & Media Center where CRP was headquartered. It is almost entirely filled with people of color (except a CSF Intern) and backed by some very urban electronic beats. Most interestingly was that the volunteers for the garden were almost entirely young black men, a demographic very scarce at CSF programming in general. Community members who are involved with CSF programming tend to skew towards older African-American women. I couldn't help but reflect on the fact that this could equally well have been a promotional piece for either organization, yet it was the Community Rejuvenation Project who chose to produce it and claim it as its own. I wonder if it had been produced by City Slickers instead, how it would look different? It's certainly in stark relief against the bluegrass-soundtracked CSF video I described in an earlier section. Both videos were presenting the building of a garden through the Back Yard Garden program (separate from the community market farm program). Yet the choice of music and the demographics of the participants shown seem to be striving to connect with two very different audiences.

Imagination Gathers Weight

My point is that style matters. Aesthetics are important in very concrete, basic ways. It's a language that takes work to acquire. When an organization's mission hinges on community acceptance and ownership, style puts up barriers or builds bridges. And it sets out an organization's imagining of how it wants the world to be. My dissertation returns again and again to the making of space and the creation of

worlds through these imaginings. In this chapter, I examine documents as workers that create these imaginings and implement them in a material form. They achieve this goal by solidifying imagination into something that has weight and form. Documents encode assumptions that shape and limit options or permit flowerings in directed ways.

These documents help us identify the groups with whom an organization hopes to have a conversation. They all want to be in conversation with the communities they hope to serve - but are they talking with them, or to/at them? Some documents I have examined in this chapter invite community participation and actively use these interactions to help construct their imaginings in a co-created contact zone. They attempt to connect in the style of the community they are engaging, using specific aesthetic norms and accepted community conventions. Based on the analysis in this chapter, documents can be important part of co-creating an organization's imagination with a community, but even within one organization, certain documents (or even parts of documents) may strive for connection with multiple groups, while others may be narrowly or mis- focused. These documents then have important ramifications on long-term visions and imaginings which reverberate through the landscape they are engaged in transforming.

If studying documents are a way of "thinking about questions of ethnographic epistemology, ethics and aesthetics 'through the grain'" (Shaw 1999), I am left wondering how much, through my field work, I am complicit in supporting the "fantasy documents" produced by both City Slicker Farms and the Community

Rejuvenation Project. I used my own skills in document-preparation to create relationships of reciprocity at both of my field sites. At City Slicker Farms, I wrote articles about them for local news outlets, creating stories that covered some of their program activities. I was also the photographer for many of my stories, so I took photos of CSF garden sites to accompany these stories. As a volunteer, I was well aware of the central problem of lack of community involvement as reflected visually in their predominantly white volunteers and staff, and how much they agonized over this and tried to change their image. Therefore, for the photos, I was uncomfortable with the fact that there happened to be only white volunteers and a white apprentice in the garden during the photo shoot. I walked the block to their office and recruited the two staff people of color, neither of whom would normally be working in that garden, by saying that I was taking photos for an upcoming publication and I that because that day only young, white volunteers were present I was worried about the impression it would give. Both of them, as busy as everyone who works in a nonprofit always is, came with me there and then and even though one of them never worked in the garden (she was a Communications Coordinator) I took photos of them up to their elbows in the worm bin. I now think back and question the extent to which I was implicit in reproducing their chosen public image of themselves because I wanted to support them and their mission. For the Community Rejuvenation Project, I used my skills as a grantwriter to prepare several grants for them. I posed as their Development Director at the Graffiti Removal Conference, which benefited them by projecting the image that they were a more formal and organized entity than

they actually were. How much of fieldwork involves buying into and supporting the imagination of others? Riles discusses a reformulation of ethnography as a "modality of response" (2006) and I can see how it can be reconceptualized as the fieldworker as audience, evaluating documentations and projections of self made by informants, which are then absorbed and reflected back to the informants or others through documentation *ad infinitum*.

I hope that the organizations I worked with will see this analysis as a form of constructive criticism and perhaps use it as a tool to provoke thought about how to better connect with target beneficiaries of their work. Riles comments on the ways that anthropology as a discipline has changed, and particularly how the relationship between anthropologists and informants has evolved: "As anthropologists, we now want to share with our subjects a set of tools and thus become potential allies, critics or adversaries-- in sum, we see ourselves as actors engaged in a singular plane by virtue of our shared objects, rather than observers" (Riles 2006, 15). In supporting the mission of both City Slicker Farms and the Community Rejuvenation Project, I hope this research offers them some tools to conceptualize aspects of their work which may have been invisible to them up to this point.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: The Blight Within

Blight is a powerful shape-shifting label used to create categories, effect imaginings, and produce certain types of space. It is a stand in for everything that we fear; it is a label for all that we find dangerous, hard to define and hard to remedy. Jane Jacobs fears dullness. Desi Mundo fears the police. Many others fear poverty and "the Other." They all channel their definitions of the word "blight" to fit their fears, and call for future actions based on these conclusions. How we define the problem dictates what we see as the solution. What we categorize as blight determines what we call remediation or revitalization. How these categories are formed and interpreted, and who gets to form them, has far-reaching effects; it defines the field of possibilities for our urban landscapes and the lives lived within them.

This dissertation has explored the public power of imagination in creating shared worlds and how the material effects of these imaginings co-constitute space. This work builds on the insights of cultural geography, political ecology, and visual studies while bringing in a powerful lens of materiality from science and technology studies. By staying alive to the ways that a focus on materiality changes the analysis of race and class in the complicated encounters over urban space where I worked, new aspects of the conversation emerged. All actors are actively inscribing space and claiming ownership over it, through their actions and material interactions.

Understanding this process of co-creation is important because it defines the legality and subjectivity and economics of the people and institutions involved, in ways not immediately apparent on the surface. This process of co-creation has deep historical roots and far-reaching effects on future urban spaces.

I have traced the imaginings of various groups as they vie to enact themselves upon the landscape in material ways. Material effects can include blueberries, gazebos, trash (or the lack thereof), murals, fences, Annual Reports, videos and much more. The work of shaping worlds is in large part what to make visible - and invisible. These imaginings become a way of making people see - a constitutive vision - which constructs the imagined landscape around them. If you win enough people over to share your imagining, you are more easily able to manifest it in the world.

In the contest of imaginings, aesthetics matter, and they have a tangible impact. Some of the material effects of aesthetics in the world of imaginings are encoded in documents, photographs, websites which contain visual representation of all kinds. These documents - in every sense of the word - are the workers which help create the constitutive vision. The documents encode reflections of self and attempt to connect or erect barriers in ways both conscious and unconscious. This work traced the material strivings of these documents and their attempts to build their imagined landscapes.

Race and class drive so many of these conversations. A label of blight is often used to shuffle low-income communities of color around, like a giant index

finger stubbing down at the map, forcing people to scurry out of the way or else risk removal. And race is a factor in bureaucracy and access to space in the first place. Privilege is not only a phenomenon at the personal level, but also works at the level of the nonprofit. To attempt to divorce the production of urban space from the race and class histories necessarily embedded in the process is more than folly - it can result in deepening racial and socioeconomic divides.

On a basic level, shifting control of public space to nonprofits changes neighborhood power dynamics, access, and future possibilities. Although it may seem as if both cities and nonprofits are serving the same public good, they have distinctly different imaginings and goals, and can result in different urban futures. Cities should carefully weigh these considerations before entering into agreements that on the surface seem politically anodyne. Blight becomes a key tool in promoting neoliberal agendas if it is used to justify displacement.

A Longer View

It has been my privilege to work with the organizations in this dissertation over the course of five years, both up close and from a distance, and to see how they grow and adapt to new circumstances. Over that time, City Slickers Farms went from an organization with only one core staff member identifying as a POC to a staff made up of a majority of POC members. They changed their strategy away from a focus on many dispersed Community Market Farms to fewer, larger farms, which they hoped would translate into more staff presence, open hours, and community

involvement. They also shifted resources towards their Backyard Garden Program, which consistently showed positive evaluations from participants and increased consumption of vegetables and positive health impacts and money savings on the part of families who received gardens. They have also begun paid youth summer internships, which I see as important, since I believe that youth engagement is a key part of better integration of the organization into the community long-term.

In terms of a greater awareness of the visual impact of their methods of outreach or their presence in the community, I have observed mixed results over time. City Slicker Farms' Annual Reports seemed to be more consciously attempting to engage with community members over time. But as I mentioned in Chapter Five, only last year CSF created a promotional video for a program primarily targeting low-income African-Americans with a bluegrass soundtrack. On the other hand, when CSF bought a new truck in 2012 and asked Desi of the Community Rejuvenation Project to spraypaint it for them, with a gardening theme, in exchange for the installation of a garden in his own backyard. The results are below.



Figures 23, 24 and 25: Different views of City Slicker's truck, covered with aerosol murals painted by the Community Rejuvenation Project in 2012.



Figure 24. Tomatoes and houses both sprout along the side of the truck.



Figure 25. Mural by Community Rejuvenation Project (crpbayarea.org).

Note the lack of use of the CSF logo; instead, on the front of the truck their name is almost reminiscent of the elaborately decorated trucks you'd find on Latin American highways. Clever touches like vegetables on the side mirrors and mud flaps add levity. I can't help but feel that this truck will be a point of connection for CSF, especially with neighborhood youth, such as those with whom I commonly spoke with in my fieldwork with CRP's aerosol collective but who were largely absent in my volunteer work for City Slickers.

I am glad to see CRP and CSF beginning to collaborate on projects because I think they have a lot they could teach each other. CRP is better at direct communication with community members in a familiar aesthetic and CSF has a lot of organizational capacity which CRP could emulate.

The Community Rejuvenation Project, over the same period of the last five years, has tried to solidify its organization by hiring part-time staff people and entering more into policy debates in the region. They are continually painting murals but do not seem to have been awarded further city grants. Since their previous city-funded projects came from Cultural Funding Grants and Redevelopment Funds, both of which have been suspended or redirected, they have been seeking alternate sources.

In spite of the Community Rejuvenation Project's emphasis on cultural sensitivity and appropriateness, and their ability to incorporate feedback from some local residents into their imagery to a certain extent, a real question remains on whether they are working with or for the communities where they are located. Their artistic freedom and focus is seen as the primary goal, with their social mission secondary, so their uncompromising stance can ironically leave them at odds with the communities they are supposedly serving.

Organizations must be sensitive to both the existing web of uses and histories within the area, but also to the cultural baggage that they themselves bring to the project. It is a fine line whether an organization is working with the community they are seeking to serve, or working for it, and these create huge differences in a projects' results. The perception of belonging is important, as emphasized in a recent New York Times article on the challenges of combating food deserts in New York City.

"Making food available and affordable is not enough to attract some customers," Mr. Berg cautioned. "You've really got to put yourselves in the shoes of a single mother who's coming home from her job on the bus," he said. "Cultural compatibility is important, and whether you feel you belong to a place." (Yee 2/11/14)

It's a lot more complicated than just providing a grocery store - or a farmstand or mural.

Significant regional changes have occurred since I did my fieldwork. The influx of tech workers from San Francisco has increased gentrification pressures tremendously, and it is a word on everyone's lips. In West Oakland and other locations around the Bay Area, Google Buses transporting workers to their jobs have been held up by protesters, who are sometimes described as fair housing activists, holding signs ranging from "TECHIES: Your World is Not Welcome Here" to "Fuck off Google." The protests were largely peaceful but one included protesters smashing a bus window (Brekke 12/20/13).

The Alameda County Public Health Department, whose service area includes Oakland, put out a report on gentrification in 2014 whose policy recommendations go far beyond public health to include: baseline protections for vulnerable residents; production and preservation of affordable housing; stabilization of existing communities; non-market based approaches to housing and community development; displacement prevention as a regional priority; and planning as a participatory process. Their focus resonates with many aspects of my research, including problematic access to affordable housing, community stabilization, looking beyond neoliberal models to solve our problems (non-market based approaches), and

asking what constitutes true community outreach through a participatory process (Causa Justa 2014).

When planning processes do not include input from large segments of the community, such as those I observed, situations such as the gazebo standoff in Fitzgerald Park can occur. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, City Slicker Farms originally built a platform, and then in late 2013 finally built a shelter over the platform (or "gazebo"), to create an outdoor education classroom. It more visibly framed the scavenger and homeless population that frequented the park, creating the perception that the structure itself was increasing loitering and illegal activities. The Parks and Recreation Department asked City Slickers to close the gazebo, so they reluctantly boarded it up. After a series of community meetings, they decided to move the structure to another location. I am particularly interested in the rhetoric of participation used in the most updated statement on their website about the situation:

We are sad to say that we have decided to move the outdoor classroom. . . . We are heartened that so many community members are coming together to talk about the complex issues that have arisen and have embraced the uncomfortableness that comes when many viewpoints come alive. City Slicker Farms sees building relationships as an essential component to our work, and we now want to spend this time building unity and understanding. . . . We invite the West Oakland community to continue these important discussions. Please email us if you'd like to give more input about our Outdoor Classroom, or would like to be more involved with Fitzgerald Park. . . . We will send word on the exact day of the move so folks can be a part of giving gratitude for all that the outdoor classroom has taught and offered us. (Accessed 5/8/14)

It is clear that if nothing else, the major lesson they have learned with the Union Plaza & Fitzgerald project is the extreme importance of community

engagement across widely disparate segments of the population.

Facing our Fears

We circle again to that slippery term: What is blight? Blight becomes the scapegoat for all that is festering and unholy in our cities. But this obsession must speak to something in ourselves that we're trying to root out. Can we reach out to those we fear, or even the part of ourselves we might fear, and instead of working to obliterate it, create a relationship with it? How can we move beyond being ruled by our fears? Cities' futures should not be shaped by fear, but by closing gaps, forging relationships, and creating shared visions or imaginations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alkon, Alison and Julian Agyeman (eds). 2010. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- An, R. and R. Sturm. 2012. School and Residential Neighborhood Food Environment and Diet Among California Youth. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 42(2):129-135.
- Anderson, B. R. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso: New York.
- Anderson, S. 1996. A City Called Heaven. In *The City*, ed A. Scott and E. Soja, pp. 336-64. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Atkinson, R. and G. Bridge. 2005. *The new urban colonialism: gentrification in a global context*. Routledge: London.
- Austin, Curtis J. 2006. *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party*. University of Arkansas Press: Fayetteville.
- Bakke, Dan. 2013. Bus Vandalized as Protesters in S.F., Oakland Target Silicon Valley Shuttles. KQED News Fix. December 20, 2013.
<http://blogs.kqed.org/newsfix/2013/12/20/eviction-protesters-oakland-san-francisco-target-silicon-valley-buses>
- Bassett, T.J. 1979. Vacant lot cultivation: Community gardening in America, 1893-1978. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of California, Berkeley.
- Beaumont J, Lang T, Leather S, Mucklow C. 1995. Report from the policy subgroup to the Nutrition Task Force Low Income Project Team of the Department of Health. Radlett, Hertfordshire: Institute of Grocery Distribution.
- Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin: New York.
- Bloomfield, B.P. & T. Vurdubakis. 1994. Re-Presenting Technology: IT Consultancy Reports as Textual Reality Constructions. *Journal of the British Sociological Association*. 28:455-77
- Boone-Heinonen, J., P. Gordon-Larsen, C.I. Kiefe, J.M. Shikany, C.E. Lewis, B.M. Popkin. F. 2011. Fast Food Restaurants and Food Stores. Longitudinal

- Associations With Diet in Young to Middle-aged Adults: The CARDIA Study. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 171(13).
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press: London.
- Bowker, G. & S. L. Starr. 2000. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. MIT Press: Boston.
- Boyer D. 2003. Censorship as a vocation: the institutions, practices, and cultural logic of media control in the German democratic republic. *Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist.* 45:5115
- Braun, Bruce. 2002. *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture and Power in Canada's West Coast*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Brenneis, D. 2006. Reforming Promise. In Riles A, ed. *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Mich. Press.
- Brenneis, Don. 1999. New Lexicons, Old Language: Negotiating the "Global" at the National Science Foundation. In Marcus, G.E. *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*. School of American Research Press: Santa Fe.
- Brenneis, Don. 1994. Discourse and Discipline at the National Research Council: A Bureaucratic *Bildungsroman*. *Cultural Anthropology*. 9(1):23-36.
- Briet, Suzanne. 1951. *What is documentation?* Industrielles et Techniques: Paris.
- Brown, Jackie. 2005. *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.
- Castleman, Craig. 1982. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. The MIT Press: Cambridge.
- Causa Justa :: Just Cause. 2014. *Development without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay Area*. Alameda County Public Health Department. <http://cjjc.org/images/development-without-displacement.pdf>
- Chapple, K. and Strategic Economics. 1999. *Gentrification: causes, indicators, and*

- possible policy responses for the San Francisco Bay Area*. Urban Habitat: Berkeley, CA.
- Chung, C. J. and S. L. Myers. 1999. Do the poor pay more for food? An analysis of four low-income food deserts communities in Minnesota. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 23: 371-383.
- City Slicker Farms. 2006-2009. City Slicker Farms Annual Report. Oakland, CA.
- Clarke, Lee. 1999. *Mission Improbable: Using Fantasy Documents to Tame Disaster*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Cody, F. 2009. Inscribing subjects to citizenship: literary activism, and the performativity of signature in rural India. *Cult. Anthropol.* 24(3):3470
- Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes & Swartz. 1990. Multicultural ways of knowing: Implications for practice. *Journal of Education*. 172(2), 101-11
- Cronon, William. 1983. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*. Hill and Wang: New York.
- Cummins, S. and S. Macintyre. 2002. "Food deserts"—evidence and assumption in health policy making. *British Medical Journal*. 325(7361)
- Cummins, S., E. Flint, S.A. Matthews. 2014. New Neighborhood Grocery Store Increased Awareness Of Food Access But Did Not Alter Dietary Habits Or Obesity. *Health Affairs*. 33(2):283-292.
- Dim, Joan Marans. 2012. *Barrons*. Published 3/17/2012.
<http://online.barrons.com/news/articles/SB50001424052748704759704577271393988247900>. Accessed online 4/10/2014.
- Dorst, Stephen. 1989. *The Written Suburb*. University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia.
- East Bay Express. 2013. Infographic: OPD Spending Outpaced General Fund.
<http://www.eastbayexpress.com/imager/source-oakland-city-budgets/b/original/3560594/9b23/feature-2.jpg>. Accessed 2/5/14.
- Ellis, John W. Jan/Feb 2007. Meet Mayor Dellums. *Oakland Magazine*.
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. 2013. FDIC Law, Regulations and Related Acts. <http://www.fdic.gov/regulations/laws/rules/5000-3860.html>. Accessed

November 19, 2013.

- Ferrell, Jeff. 1993. *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality*. Garland Publishing: New York.
- Foucault, M. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures At The College de France 1978-1979*. Picador: New York.
- Foucault, M. 1991. Governmentality, trans. Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds). *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, pp. 87-104. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books: New York.
- Freeman, Lance. 2006. *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia.
- Frohlich, David M. 1989. On the Organization of Form-filling Behaviour. *Information Design*. 5:43-59.
- Gaiter, Colette. 2004. The Revolution Will Not Be Visualized: Emory Douglas in the Black Panther. *Bad Subjects*. Issue #65.
<http://bad.eserver.org/issues/2004/65/gaiter.html> Accessed 12/29/2013
- Gandy, M. 2006. Urban Nature and the Ecological imaginary, in *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*, eds. Heynen, N., Kaika, M., and Swyngedouw, E. London: Routledge. Chapter 4, pp. 63 – 74
- Gay, G. 2000. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*. Teacher's College Press: New York.
- Gilligan, Heather T. 2014. Food Deserts Aren't the Problem. *Slate*. February 10, 2014. http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2014/02/food_deserts_and_fresh_food_access_aren_t_the_problem_poverty_not_obesity.html Accessed 2/12/14.
- Goldfarb & Lippman LLC. 2006. A Legal Guide to California Redevelopment. City of Menlo Park. (p111).
<http://www.menlopark.org/departments/bus/Blight.pdf>. Accessed November 19, 2013.

- Gordon, Chris. 2003. Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*. 31(2):305-337.
- Gottlieb, Robert and Anupama Joshi. 2010. *Food Justice*. MIT Press: Boston.
- Gowan, Teresa. 2010. *Hobos, Hustlers and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Grimshaw, Anna. 2001. *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gupta A. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press
- Gupta A. 1995. Blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. *Am. Ethnol.* 22(2):37502
- Haraway, D. 2008. *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 2001. *Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. OUP Oxford.
- Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hendrickson, D., C. Smith, and N. Eikenberry. 2006. "Fruit and vegetable access in grocery store availability and food price disparities." *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 33(2): 276-296.
- Herzog, H. 2011. *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat*. New York: Harper.
- Houston, James. 1989. *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Hull, Matthew. 2012. Documents and Bureaucracy. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 41:251-267.
- Hull M. 2008. Ruled by records: the expropriation of land and the misappropriation of lists in Islamabad. *Am. Ethnol.* 35(4):5018
- Hynes, H. P. 1996. *A Patch of Eden: America's Inner City Gardens*. Chelsea Green

- Publishing Company. White Water Junction, VT.
- Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perceptions of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Routledge: New York.
- Inoue, Kyoko. 1991. *MacArthur's Japanese Constitution: A Linguistic and Cultural Study of Its Making*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Jacob, M-A. 2007. Form-made persons: consent forms as consent's blind spot. *Polit. Leg. Anthropol. Rev.* 30(2):2498
- Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House: New York.
- Kaplan, Sam. 2002. Documenting History, Historicizing Documentation: French Military Official's Ethnological Reports on Cicilia. *Comparative Studies in Society & History*. 44:344-69.
- Keane, W. 2003. Semiotics and the social analysis of things. *Lang. Commun.* 23:4095
- Kempson, Elaine and Ian Rowlands. 1994. *Designing Public Documents*. Public Policy Institute: London
- Komito L. 2009. The culture of paper, information and power: an Irish example. *Anthropol. Action* 16(1):415
- Kurtz, H. 2001. Differentiating multiple meanings of garden and community. *Urban Geography*. 22(7):656-670.
- Lawson, L. 2000. Urban Garden programs in the United States: values, resources and role in community development. Unpublished doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Lawson, L. 2005. *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Lees, L., T. Slater and E.K. Wyly. 2007. *Gentrification*. Routledge: London.
- Lemke, T. 2001. The birth of bio-politics: Michael Foucault's lectures at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society*. 30:2:190-207.
- Mailer, Norman. 1974. *The Faith of Graffiti*. Praeger Publishers: New York.

- Masco, Joe. 2006. *The Nuclear Borderlands: the Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.
- Mathews, Andrew. 2011. *Instituting Nature: Authority, Expertise, and Power in Mexican Forests*. MIT Press: Boston.
- Mathews, Andrew. 2008. Statemaking, knowledge, and ignorance: translation and concealment in Mexican forestry institutions. *Am. Anthropol.* 110(4):4844
- Mathews, Andrew. 2005. Power/Knowledge, Power/Ignorance: Forest Fires and the State in Mexico. *Human Ecology.* 33(6)
- McClintock, Nathan, Jenny Cooper, and Snehee Khandeshi. 2013. Assessing the potential contribution of vacant land to vegetable production and consumption in Oakland, California. *Landscape & Urban Planning* 111:46-58.
- McClintock, Nathan. 2013a. Radical, reformist, and garden-variety neoliberal: Coming to terms with urban agriculture's contradictions. *Local Environment Geography*, 22(7): 656-670.
- McClintock, Nathan. 2010. Why farm the city? Theorizing urban agriculture through a lens of metabolic rift. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy, and Society* 3(2):191–207.
- Melcarek, Hilary. 2009. An Examination of Three California Urban Garden Organizations: An Activist Response to Food Insecurity. Doctoral Dissertation to the Department of Environmental Studies, University of California - Santa Cruz.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2000. Faith and its Fulfillment: Agency, Exchange and the Fijian Aesthetics of Completion. *American Ethnologist.* 27(1):31-51.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2004. *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford University Press:Stanford, CA.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2006. Documenting the Present. In Riles A, ed. *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Mich. Press

- Moore, Donald S. 2005. *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place and Power in Zimbabwe*. Duke University Press: Chapel Hill.
- Morgan, Marcyliena. 2002. *Language, Discourse and Power in African-American Culture*. Cambridge University Press: London.
- Myers, F. R. 1986. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Nelson, Richard K. 1983. *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Neumann, Roderick. 2001. Disciplining Peasants in Tanzania: From Coercion to Self-Surveillance in Wildlife Conservation. In Peluso, N.L. and M.J. Watts (eds.). *Violent Environments*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca
- Nieto, S. 1996. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Education*. Longman: White Plains, NY.
- Oakland Food Policy Council (2010). *Transforming the Oakland Food System: A Plan for Action*. OFPC, Oakland, CA.
- Ochs and Schiefflin. 1984. Culture Theory. *Cultural Geography*.
- Ogden, Laura A. 2011. *Swamplife: The Entangled Lives of Hunters, Gators and Mangroves in the Florida Everglades*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Peck, J. and A. Tickell. 2002. Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode*. 34:204-380.
- Pedersen, Morten. 2012. The Taiga Within. In Laura Feldt's (ed) *Wilderness and Mythology: Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature*. Walter de Gruyter: Copenhagen.
- Pink, Sarah. 2006. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Pudup, M. B. 2008. It takes a garden: Cultivating citizen-subjects in organized garden projects. *Geoforum*. 39:1228-1240.
- Pulido, L. 2000. Rethinking environmental racism: White privilege and urban development in southern California. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1): 12-40.

- Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Riles A, ed. 2006. *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Mich. Press
- Riles A. 1998. Infinity within the brackets. *Am. Ethnol.* 25(3):3788
- Riles A. 2000. *The Network Inside Out*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Mich. Press
- Rivlin, Gary. 1995. *Drive-By*. Holt and Co: New York.
- Sanjek, Roger. 1998. *The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London.
- Savage, Charlie. 7/12/2012. \$125 million settlement by Wells Fargo in 2012. *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/13/business/wells-fargo-to-settle-mortgage-discrimination-charges.html?_r=0. Accessed November 18, 2013.
- Scott, James C. 1999. *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT.
- Self, Robert O. 2003. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.
- Short, A., J. Guthman, and S. Raskin. 2007. Food deserts, oases, or mirages? Small markets and community food security in the San Francisco bay area. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 26(3): 352-364.
- Sharma, A. and A. Gupta. 2006. *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell: London.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. 1994. *Modern forests: Statemaking and environmental change in Colonial Eastern India*. Stanford University Press.
- Skogan, Wesley. 1992. *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Smith, BC. 1996. *On the Origin of Objects*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Strathern M. 1999. *Property, Substance, Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things*. London: Athlone

- Strathern, M. 2006. "Bullet Proofing: A Tale from the United Kingdom." In Riles A, ed. *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Mich. Press
- Strathern M. 2005. Robust knowledge and fragile futures. In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. A Ong, SJ Collier, pp. 4641. Malden, MA: Blackwell
- Strathern M., ed. 2000a. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*. London: Routledge
- Strathern M. 2000b. The tyranny of transparency. *Br. Educ. Res. Bur.* 23(3):3091
- Tate, G. and L. A. Randolph (eds). 2006. *Black Urban Community*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.
- Taylor, Dorceta E. 2009. *The Environment and the People In American Cities 1600s -- 1900s*. Duke University Press: Chapel Hill.
- Thomas, W.I. and Dorothy Swaine Thomas. 1970 [1917]. Situations Defined as Real are Real in their Consequences, in Gregory P. Stone and Harvey A. Farberman (eds) *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*. Xerox Publishers: Waltham MA. 54-155
- Tsing, A. 2014. Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species. In blog, Party Writing for Donna Haraway! <http://tsingmushrooms.blogspot.com/> Accessed December 27, 2013.
- Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Tsing, A. L. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way- Place*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Villegas, A.M. and T. Lucas. 2002. Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 53:1, 20-32.
- Walker, Mabel. 1938. *Urban Blight and Slums: Economic and Legal Factors in Their Origin, Reclamation, and Prevention*. Russell & Russell: New York.
- Williams, E. M., B. M. Tayo, E. Smit, C. T. Sempos, and C. J. Crespo. 2008. Where's the kale? Environmental ability of fruits and vegetables in two racially dissimilar communities. *Environmental Justice*, 1(1): 35-43.

- Wilson, James Q. 1968. *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Winichakul, Thongchai. 1994. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. University of Hawaii: Honolulu.
- Winner, L. 1986. Do Artefacts Have Politics? In *The whale and the reactor: a search for limits in an age of high technology*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 19-39.
- Wrigley N. 2002. Food deserts in British cities: policy context and research priorities. *Urban Studies*. 39(11):2029-2040.
- Yadav, C.S. (ed) 1987. *Slums, Urban Decline and Revitalization*. Concept Publishing Company: New Delhi.
- Yee, Vivian. 2014. Food Co-ops in Gentrifying Areas Find They Are Not to Everyone's Taste. *New York Times*. February 11, 2014.