

TAKE SHAPE

TAKE SHAPE

NO.2

COMMUTE

2

The commute is the daily, individual experience of transportation. It's the perfect fodder for small talk, its technicalities infinitely relatable, sometimes even mythical (uphill in both directions). Yet for many, engagement with the commute stops there, allowing the complex systems of politics, urban planning, and architecture that govern daily movement to remain hidden. At a time when most cities' public transit systems are failing to meet the needs of residents, billionaires are whimsically proposing hyperloops and space travel. In this issue, we seek to understand how transit can be improved by community-driven planning and increased state funding rather than by entrepreneurial investment.

Features essays by Jesse Barron, Luiza Dale, Kyle Chayka, Michael Abrahamson, Vanessa Kowalski, Eliza Levinson, Patrick McAndrews, Carlos Kong, and Wendy's Subway.
Includes conversations with Lynda Lopez and Alex Karner.
Plus, visual proposals by LA-Más, Danya Sherman, : (colon), and Robert Prochaska.



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The second issue of *Take Shape* looks at the daily, individual experience of transportation—the commute. At a time when most cities' public transit systems are failing to meet the needs of residents, billionaires are whimsically proposing hyper-loops and space travel. A remedy to this disconnect would be transportation systems created by community-driven planning and increased state funding rather than entrepreneurial investment. These systems would recognize the varied determinants of human movement including mourning, leisure, protest, and migration, as well as labor and study. This is especially urgent now, when 2017 data from the US Census Bureau indicates that commute times are rising, while only 5.1 percent of adult workers regularly use public transit to get to work.

New technology has made it possible for workers to be on call for longer hours, but the commute remains a pervasive part of our lives, sometimes even taking on mythical proportions (uphill in both directions). It's the perfect fodder for small talk, its technicalities infinitely relatable. Yet the commute remains in many people's minds as nothing more than an unpleasant obstacle in the day. Its habitual nature and its role as an extension of the workplace make it difficult to engage with on a deeper level—it's inevitable or invisible. In popular media, portrayals of commutes rarely show actual travel time, instead cutting when a character travels between two locations. This lack of engagement hides the complex systems of economy, urban planning, and architecture that govern daily movement. We must start asking questions like: Why does car ownership remain the default and desired position in our globalized world? What work is necessary to reverse laws criminalizing turnstile jumpers and subway performers? How do we create a new system that holds the state responsible for making sure public transit actually serves its public?

In this issue, three short essays look at how design serves the interests of the wealthy on the move. Luiza Dale reflects on design manual reprints, especially the *New York City Transit Authority Graphics Standards Manual*, and their complicated relationship with authority and power. Kyle Chayka revisits his concept of Airspace, our present-day landscape of sameness and flyover country made manifest by the global elite. Jesse Barron interrogates Jeff Bezos' desire to travel to outer space, using the lens of 'pataphysics to understand what the pursuit of an impossible goal might mean.

Four pieces present images of transit that are utopian and dystopian by turns. LA-Más presents its collaborative community redesign of a Los Angeles train station, which altered a busy street to be more pedestrian friendly. : (colon) uses a dialogue between Kafka and airport security to challenge the accessibility of travel. Danya Sherman gives us a passionate proposal to reinvest in a national rail system through new train routes, and Robert Prochaska shows part of his photographic archive of entrances to underground New York City subway stations.

Two interviews look at the economic and racial histories of new metropolitan transit projects. Benjamin Good talks with Chicago-based activist Lynda Lopez to discuss the politics of bike lanes and the effects of the 606, an elevated path that raised rent prices in its vicinity and pushed out longtime residents. *Take Shape* editor Cole Cataneo talks with researcher Alex Karner about the dual roles of analytical research and community activism in improving transit infrastructure in Atlanta.

Deeply researched essays examine the dual and often conflicting roles that the state and industry can play in daily travel. Eliza Levinson takes a golf cart ride through Kraków to reconcile her Jewish identity with a city that today has only between 180 and 300 Jews. Despite this, Kraków's streets are thronged by tourists visiting ghettos and concentration camps, creating a thriving death tourism industry. Another piece on Poland by Vanessa Kowalski looks at a unique state-funded hitchhiking system instituted after the Warsaw Uprising; to remedy the country's lack of transportation infrastructure, individual drivers were given incentives to pick up strangers.

Unfortunately, such large-scale state programs often only live on paper, leaving a vacuum that profit-seeking corporations are all too happy to fill. Michael Abrahamson considers two visionary proposals by architect Gunnar Birkerts meant to alleviate the transportation woes of Detroit in the seventies, concluding that public investment in research must go beyond the limitations of existing transit infrastructure. Turning to the present, Patrick McAndrews examines the role of government, corporations, and individuals in regulating boundaries between the home, the workplace, and the commute. Using sociologist Ray Oldenburg's theory of "third places," he argues that these boundaries are collapsing through sharing economy empires like WeWork and WeLive.

The commute isn't just something to be shaped by government funding and corporations—it's a topic that has also been taken up by artists, authors, and academic activists. In an essay on *Shipped Ships* by Turkish artist Ayşe Erkmen, an artwork taking the form of a temporary ferry service, author Carlos Kong looks at how migration narratives implicitly address the geopolitical aspects of daily travel. Finally, Corinne Butta, publications fellow at nonprofit design library Wendy's Subway, presents a reading list of independent publications on power and movement.

By taking the commute from a personal daily journey to a broader political narrative and back again, we hope to suggest its full potential. Sitting at the intersection of obligatory movement, capitalism, and loneliness, the commute can be a source of harm for multifaceted reasons. However, transit also provides a key lens through which to envision and enact more equitable and joyful ways of moving through the world.

—the Editors

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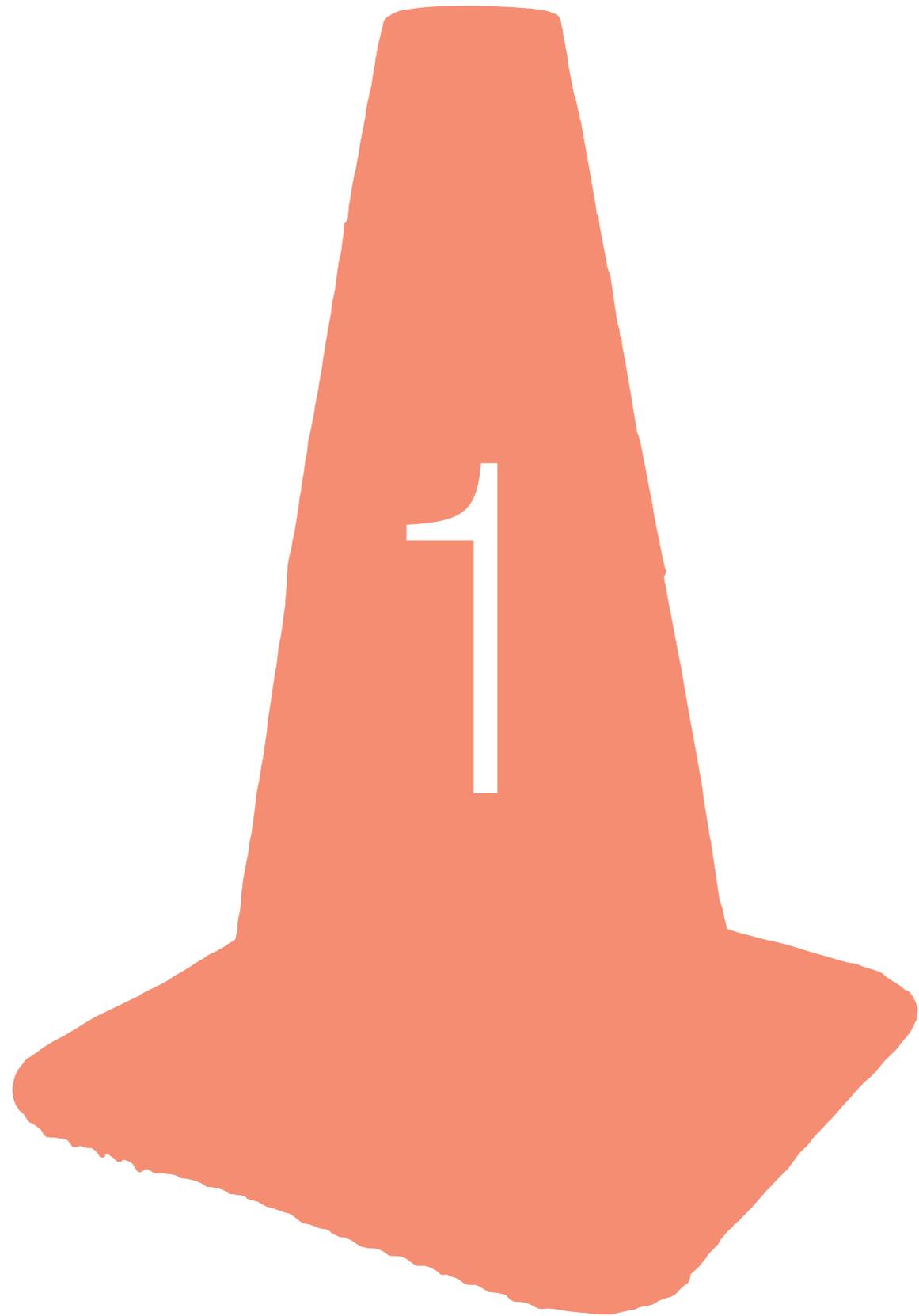
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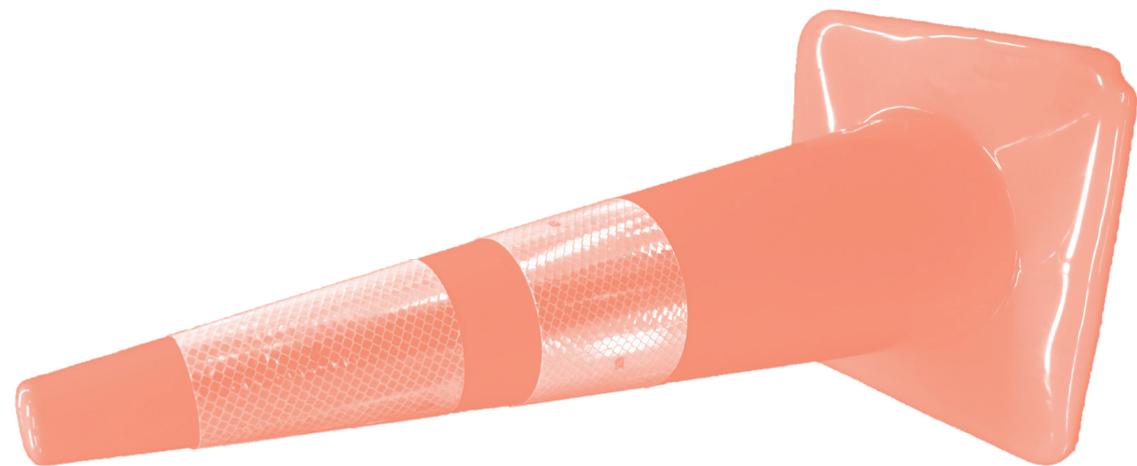
JEFF BEZOS' PRIME SPACE

by Jesse Barron

This piece is only available in print.



This piece is only available in print.



This piece is only available in print.

GRAPHIC PERSUASION

by Luiza Dale



In 2012 two designers from Pentagram, self-described as “the world’s largest independently owned design studio,” found something they had never seen before in person: an original copy of the *New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) Graphics Standards Manual*.¹ Jesse Reed and Hamish Smyth already knew it outlined the type, color, and sign layouts for the New York subway system, but they were particularly surprised by its text—rigid instructions for every inch of a new wayfinding system. They felt they had struck gold. Reed and Smyth scanned every page of the book and shared it all online. Their website received 250,000 visits in the first week, and a year later the duo proposed a reprint of the book on Kickstarter. Because the New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) was a client of Pentagram’s at the time, it allowed the designers to go forward. With their blessing, Reed and Smyth exceeded their financial goals and were able to print almost eight thousand copies of the book. The campaign was a huge success. In 1967 the New York subway signage system was in a state of disarray. There were a multiplicity of signs that not only looked different from one another but had contradictory directions and were made out of

a variety of materials.² To clean up the mess, the MTA hired the international design firm Unimark, known for its modernist approach to corporate design. Soon after, founding partners Massimo Vignelli and Bob Noorda delivered the *NYCTA Graphics Standards Manual*. Their cinder block–sized book contained all the specifications for the production and use of signs, instructions, and logos.³ The new visual identity helped the city reclaim its subway. This was an important moment in the history of graphic design—it was arguably the first time modern principles such as mathematically constructed grids, objective copy, and left-aligned sans-serif typography were used to create a complex visual identification system for a subway in the United States. The publication was a binder, so workers could easily take out pages to refer to designs as they were making plaques and printing signs. At that time technology did not make it easy to keep things consistent, so a detailed guidebook was necessary for quality control. Additionally, these precise standards meant economy in materials and time. As a recent design graduate in 2014, I desperately needed the Reed and Smyth reprint. My classes *made me want that book*: I learned

about grids, typographical hierarchy, iconography, and color coding. I was taught to be free from any personal expression and to make work with the utmost clarity and legibility, an almost scientific approach to designing. I supported the reprint on Kickstarter and began receiving campaign updates from the book’s printer in Italy. But as time went by, I began to feel confined by my modernist design upbringing. I started defining my role as a less objective designer than the one I was trained to be: I wanted to show myself in the work.⁴ I don’t remember when the book finally arrived, but I remember having it on my bedside table, under an Ikea lamp.⁵ When I moved apartments two years later, I gave that book away along with some others—I was no longer a devotee of modern graphic design. Reed and Smyth were selling the MTA’s old internal rulebook, and in doing so, they appropriated a good of menial value and turned it into a product that six thousand people—including designers, libraries, and collectors—eagerly purchased. Once a guide to executing subway wayfinding, the rulebook now exists as a coffee-table book for fans of how modern design looks. One definition of the word *fetish* as offered by the *Oxford*

NO.1
New York City Transit Authority
Graphics Standards Manual

NO.2
8TH AVENUE
INDEPENDENT SUBWAY SYSTEM
DOWNTOWN TO FULTON ST.
AND TO BROOKLYN
FOR WASHINGTON H'TS., THE BRONX AND QUEENS TRAINS USE UNDERPASS

NO.3

NO.4
A.
WORK ME
B.
WORK ME

NO.5

NO.6
"THE RULES"
Grid systems
Raster systems
JAN TSCHICHOLD
THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY

NO.7
THE CYCLE OF FETISHIZING STANDARDS MANUALS
REPRODUCTION
CONTROL + PRESERVATION
FUNCTION
COFFEE TABLE BOOK
SPECTACLE

NO.8
NASA

NO.9
NASA -VS- NASA

English Dictionary is “an inanimate object worshipped by preliterate peoples on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit. . . . Something irrationally revered.” In graphic design, fetishism is frequently incited by publications that establish rules or manifestos, like Josef Müller-Brockman’s *Grid Systems in Graphic Design* or Jan Tschichold’s *The New Typography*. This is maybe due to the love that many designers have of things neatly organized—the modernist rule that design should always be functional. **6** Both books are examples of design in the machine age, but nothing is quite like the hype that followed Vignelli and Noorda’s manual.

In the 2016 book *The Politics of Design*, author Ruben Pater explicitly notes this quality of the *NYCTA Graphics Standards Manual*. He writes, “A technical manual that was used to instruct low-skilled workers to implement design rules has become a design fetish object today.” Pater is right that there was a shift in readership from blue-collar workers to graphic designers who know what to expect from brand manuals. Designers must understand how to organize information so they can respond to the industry’s requests and receive commissions. Still, this audience isn’t buying Smyth and Reed’s reprint to consult the rules of the New York subway signage. (I didn’t even read the book after I got it.) Why then are designers interested in owning a new copy of the *NYCTA Graphics Standards Manual*?

One possible reason is provided in a *Vanity Fair* article in which Smyth explains that “at the core of [wanting the book] is designers . . . having control.” Modernism, after all, means order: systems and clarity of information. We want to be in control because we’re taught to believe the world shouldn’t be messy. It is easier if there are answers to questions and if graphic solutions can be provided as services. Cleanliness is more commercial, too. Another potential reason is that we like to say we’re preserving history. On Reed and Smyth’s original Kickstarter page, all of the reprint’s details are explained: book specs, additions such as a new foreword, even a new typeface commissioned especially for the reprint. Very little suggests why such a project is necessary. The intent here is to sell the book, and history is really for those who pay for it. **7**

A few years after Massimo Vignelli worked on the *NYCTA Graphics Standards Manual*, he designed the New York City subway map. Inspired by Harry Beck’s London Underground map, his version was an exercise in

organized design. Train lines were at forty-five and ninety degree angles. Every line had a color, and every station had dots for stops. But when actually put into practice, New York subway riders were confused by Vignelli’s design. The water was beige and Central Park was a gray box closer to a square than a rectangle. The designer’s decision to simplify the city’s geography caused the map to be disorienting to its users—an example of modern design working for designers but not for commuters. After many complaints, the design was edited to look like the one we use today.

In the movie *Helvetica* (2007), Vignelli says, “I probably should have done what they’ve done in London—not have any indication of the geography. It’s a completely blank, white background so that there is no suggestion of geography whatsoever.” Then he says, “Otherwise, it’s perfect—I think it’s the most beautiful spaghetti work ever done. It’s terrific. And it’s so clear, it’s unbelievable.” One can see how rigorous Vignelli is: to him, there is no option besides modernism. What a lot of designers take from his sort of highly systematic work is that modern design is “correct”—just like I was taught in college.

Modern design is culturally known as “good design.” It’s readable and straight to the point. Many corporations use it and, for the most part, people trust it. It usually requires very little interpretation for the viewer, and therefore it is good for communicating messages. For example, I’m not going to doubt an official map that tells me where I want to go—I’m going to follow its authority. But if pushed to the extreme, it can make you believe something that may not be true. We can be manipulated by modernism’s authority and believe information that might not prioritize our best interests. Moreover, there is a danger of only applying modernist rules to complex systems such as transit. The homogenization of such information gives little room for what doesn’t fit within the lines. What happens if a stop on the new *W* train doesn’t fit in the artboard? To achieve a better image, do we then decide to skip it?

With the success of their first Kickstarter campaign, Smyth and Reed went on to crowdfund the reissue of another manual related to transportation, one with a name just as long as the first: the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Graphics Standards Manual*. **8** The original book was designed by Richard Danne and Bruce Blackburn (of the well-known firm Danne & Blackburn). It was commissioned by NASA



with funds from the Federal Design Improvement Program, a federal initiative born in 1974 from the increasing awareness that design could be a tool for achieving national objectives.

The program aimed to upgrade all parts of federal design, including architecture, landscape, interior, and graphic design. The Graphics Improvement Program, an offshoot of the Federal Design Improvement Program, set out to make sure government messages were communicated clearly to citizens. It was no coincidence that the design firms commissioned by the program were led by modernist designers like Massimo Vignelli, attesting to the political power of modern design. Standards manuals established cohesive visual systems and templates for production that resulted in efficient applications, with typography and grid systems very similar to the ones used by the New York City subway. The government had become an advocate for corporate identity following the industrial expansion of the fifties and sixties.

The *NASA Graphics Standards Manual* presented the visual identity

for NASA and all of its applications, from stationery to spaceships. It is in this binder that Danne & Blackburn presented “the worm”—NASA’s zigzagging logo inspired by rocket nose cones, which replaced the earlier one well known as “the meatball”: a crest-like blue circle with the acronym NASA in a thick serif font. In the Kickstarter video for the reissue, Richard Danne describes the book in voice-over while its pages are shown alongside the dramatic image of a rocket going into space. By comparing a rocket launch to a book launch, fetishism is fueled through marketing. In the end, Smyth and Reed raised \$941,966 from 8,798 backers.

The reprint was a success, but the worm has been retired since 1992 and is only used sporadically today. Even though it was a hit among designers, it turns out NASA’s engineers hated the modern logo. NASA’s meatball is a graphic mess: hard to scale and reproduce. But it feels friendly enough to the average American to have a comeback and still be used today. The “meatball” is an example of design standards in the twentieth century serving their purpose without being

modernist. NASA is a memorable brand even with a wacky logo. **9**

Smyth and Reed made a business out of reprinting standards manuals, or so-called “design bibles”—a term that conflates the ethos of modern design with religious authority and influence, suggesting that straying from modern design is sinful. But maybe it’s time to give up control and allow for an open way of designing that represents more voices than the modern rules of the past once did. There are other ways to make form that are idiosyncratic, historical, social, and subjective (to name a few qualities). Designers can speak to the complexity of content instead of its reduction. Graphic design has a reputation for solving problems by delivering clear solutions, but what if it asked more questions, or if it were purposefully confusing instead? Consider what “correct design” means to you. In the spirit of Vignelli, I like my spaghetti lines with meatballs. ▲

AIRSPACE FROM A TO B

by Kyle Chayka



Today's global nomad moves through a space devoid of discomfort. A trip from his—or her, but usually his—glass-walled apartment complex in a major city begins with sliding into an Uber, its tan seats and neutral smell anesthetizing the journey to the airport. He breezes through security with a Clear membership, skipping the usual line. The plane rises and falls, then he decamps. He takes another on-demand car to an Airbnb in another condo tower at the destination and orders Seamless delivery for dinner. In the morning he looks up a recommended cafe on Yelp or Foursquare and orders the same cortado or flat white that he'd get at home in a similar mottled ceramic cup before commuting to a WeWork for investor meetings. He flies back home but might as well have never left in the first place.

This is a realm of app-enabled geography that I've labeled "AirSpace," a term I first used in an essay in 2016. It's a space of cafes, restaurants, startup offices, and coliving/coworking spaces that share a certain set of aesthetic details no matter where they are: Edison bulbs, reclaimed wood, floor-to-ceiling windows, and faux midcentury modern furniture. This stage set can be found in places as

far-flung as Brooklyn, Berlin, and Bali, reassuring occupants that they can "belong anywhere," as one Airbnb slogan ran.

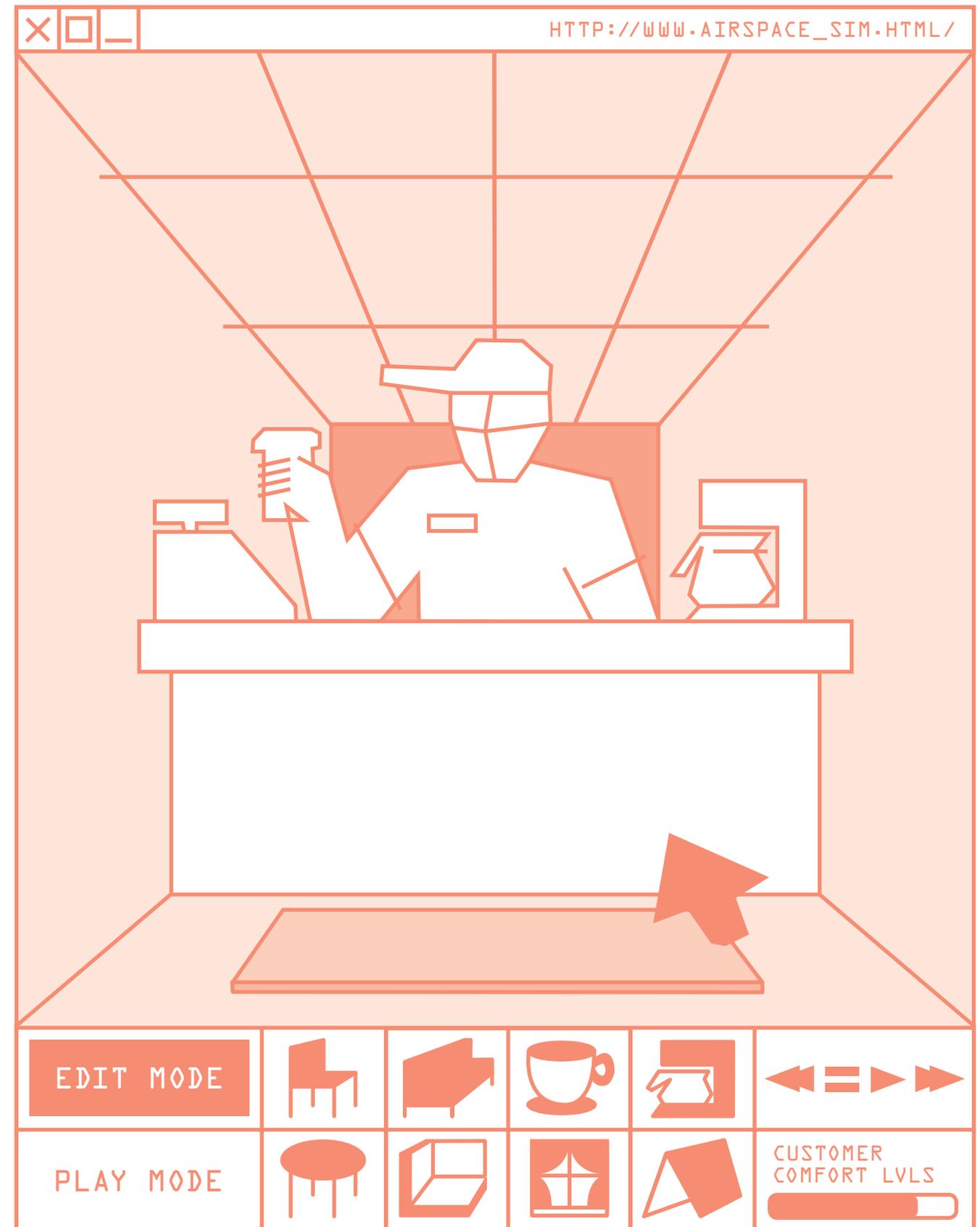
Beyond a specific interior decorating style, AirSpace is the twenty-first-century version of previous attempts to define transnational geography. These include Rem Koolhaas's Generic City, in which all urban centers are homogenized; Marc Augé's anonymous non-places, which are transitional and devoid of unique signifiers; and Manuel Castells' Space of Flows, in which digital technology allows for "simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity." These ideas, as well as the contemporary phenomenon of AirSpace, suggest an erosion of physical space and location-specific detail in favor of ambient virtual community and placelessness.

AirSpace is dependent on transportation; cheap plane tickets and uneven economies mean more travel than ever, as long as your wealth and passport allow it. Travel is also enabled by the new ease provided by ride-sharing apps, nomad-specific housing companies like Roam, and sharing economy platforms like Airbnb. This constant movement is reminiscent of the world imagined in the "Manifesto

of Futurism," but instead of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's calamitous violence—"the beauty of speed" and cars like frenzied dogs—there is only a serene kind of safety, like the hermetic capsule of a Japanese bullet train car.

Mobile places can be inserted into static ones, or else absorb what they need and then leave. Such is the idea behind MAD Architects' hypothetical 2008 Superstar project, a spiky spaceship designed as a moveable, hypermodern Chinatown of fifteen thousand residents able to land anywhere. The Superstar remains the same in each place, but it influences the geography at its site, "exchanging the new Chinese energy with the environment where it stays."

Various forces have already made placelessness an ideal, from businesses like Airbnb and the rise of a global creative class, whose aesthetic is epitomized in the magazine *Monocle*. This imagined ideal takes over more of our reality every year. The hyperloop, a vacuum-tube transportation mechanism recently popularized by Elon Musk and his company SpaceX, promises to disrupt geography even further by moving people between cities at 750 miles per hour. The effect will likely be to segregate space, cutting



off hyperloop stops from the interstitial areas it runs through: the future equivalent of flyover country.

It's an intensified version of what already happens with subway stations or even the app Waze, which directs cars through whichever neighborhoods it deems most efficient, impacting the surrounding areas without benefiting them. Like the hyperloop, Waze treats local geography (anywhere besides pickup and drop-off points) as an annoyance that should be overcome wherever possible rather than a space of possibility in which people live and work. A parade of rumbling cars escaping a traffic jam can disrupt a residential neighborhood the same way the mechanized tube of the hyperloop could intrude on the natural landscape.

Aspects of life that used to be static are increasingly changeable. As lifelong careers at single companies have become vanishingly rare, jobs have fallen to a mélange of gig-economy work, the individual forced into defensive entrepreneurship. This is the economy of AirSpace, in which labor is as contingent as space. Companies like Airbnb and Uber profit from instability because they do not have to pay hosts or drivers as full-time employees; they also don't have to own real estate or cars. They accrue billions simply by controlling unregulated marketplaces. The system is also self-reinforcing: Once you start using Airbnb, it becomes easier to see yourself as a host as well, gambling commitment to the system for the ability to afford a nicer apartment as long as you rent it out a few nights a month.

These changes have impacted our sense of the home as a stable place. While digital nomads might move between hostels or Airbnbs on a whim, a Texas company called Kasita has designed a modular apartment that can itself be installed anywhere: a smart device-equipped steel box. The box can be installed as a single unit in a backyard or as multiple units stacked into towers. Such flexibility was conceptualized in the 1960s by the Japanese Metabolists, who imagined skyscrapers growing and shrinking with demand. The technology has caught up to make on-demand growth a reality, though shrinking seems unlikely.

The convenience and profitability of AirSpace forms an attractive prospect for those who can afford to cultivate it either as providers or clients. The aura of placelessness is upheld as a contemporary ideal, from the interchangeability of Apple stores or WeWork offices to the working habits of tech CEOs such as David Karp, who was said to travel with only a tiny duffel bag.

AirSpace represents the constant availability of escape and change; travel is seen as a mark of accomplishment, even if you experience nothing new. For the creative class, the ability to move anywhere and consume anything wherever you land is presented as an unalloyed positive, a symbol of capitalist success.

Yet AirSpace also produces anxiety. In San Francisco, it seems like delivery app gig workers sometimes outnumber local shoppers in grocery stores, denuding the stores of any sense of community. The popularity of certain natural landmarks on Instagram has turned the obscure swimming hole into an international selfie destination. Airbnb has gutted buildings and neighborhoods, hollowing them into bland fronts for temporary residents. (Do you live here? Me neither.)

I don't think we can stop AirSpace—it's backed by some of the world's largest tech companies and promises to be a strong investment for decades to come as globalization continues to accelerate—but there may be policy decisions that could soften its impact. Cities like Berlin and Paris have taken steps against Airbnb by restricting who can become a host. As Uber's corporate policies and worker abuses have been uncovered, users have also been motivated to stop using their service (a backlash Airbnb has not yet experienced to the same degree). A more drastic step could be to confine travelers in each city to a kind of nomadic quarter, a role that generic downtowns or business districts once played. The zones would look the same the world over, but by design rather than default, allowing other urban areas to remain devoted to permanent residents.

Transportation could be used to preserve local geography rather than to disrupt it. Future self-driving cars could be forced to avoid certain neighborhoods or only use highways. The prevalence of taxi apps like Uber makes public transportation less of a default. Less funding from ticket sales means public trains, subways, and buses will continue to be neglected and will worsen in quality for those who either can't afford or choose not to use cars. Uber is currently losing billions of dollars a year; its business model depends on either creating a monopoly and raising its prices from its unsustainable current rates or switching to driverless cars and laying off its contractors. But by then the damage will be done.

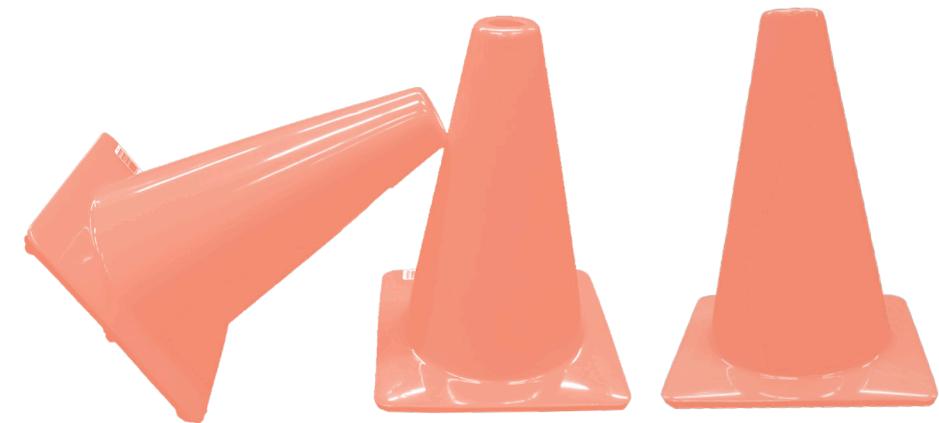
To push back, these services could be relegated to specific areas, leaving dense residential neighborhoods to public transit by banning cars. Changes must

happen at the level of local urbanism, through active community organizing. The question is whether one should be able to opt in or opt out of Airspace, now that avoiding it is an increasingly impossible option. If we opt in, then this generic, frictionless space will continue to spread. The aesthetic will change, but its mobility will only accelerate. If people opt out, then we can focus more on building our own permanent place-based communities.

As I write this, I'm sitting in a cafe of Australian import in Williamsburg, a district that I now label in my head as the Paris of Brooklyn, not for its abundance of stately architecture or romantic streets but for the predominance of young European families. They're presumably wealthy enough to afford the ballooning rents, clustering in the new condo developments on the crumbling East River waterfront like it's the Seine. The same international retail brands have invaded as anywhere else; the new heart of the neighborhood seems to be the Whole Foods grocery store with a WeWork installed above it, a fresh Blue Bottle down the block.

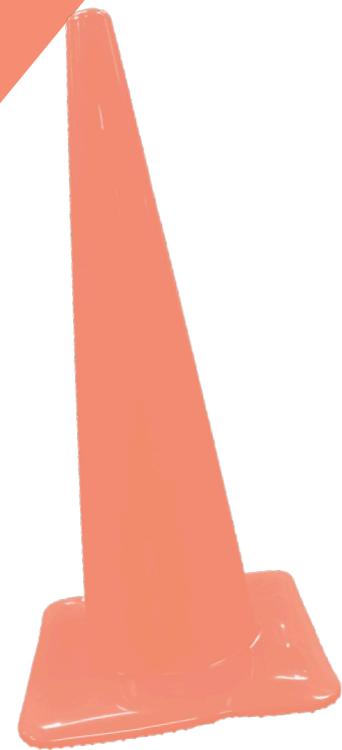
All day, every day, we office-less freelance workers cluster in one sunlit cafe or another with our laptops, contributing from afar whatever we can to the digital economy. There is no way of knowing who is a tourist here and who isn't because everyone is a visitor in this ephemeral zone that is for now at the car crash of cultural and economic capital. Yet geography has a way of making itself felt. Hurricane Sandy eroded the subway tunnel that links Williamsburg to Manhattan, a major reason for its gentrification over the past decade. The subway line that runs through this tunnel will be shut down for repairs in 2019, severing this hipster Xanadu from the mainland and casting it back into the realities of physical space.

The commuters will be stranded, the populace marooned, new residents of the city or Airbnb renters incentivized to look elsewhere for convenience. But perhaps I underestimate AirSpace. Shared Ubers will flow over the bridges while the truly mobile decamp. Despite the challenges physical space may present to AirSpace, it seems likely that this strange, generic geography enabled by digital technology will persist, at least until its negative consequences become blatant enough to inspire action. ▲





Way-
finding



GO GIVE- NUJE 26

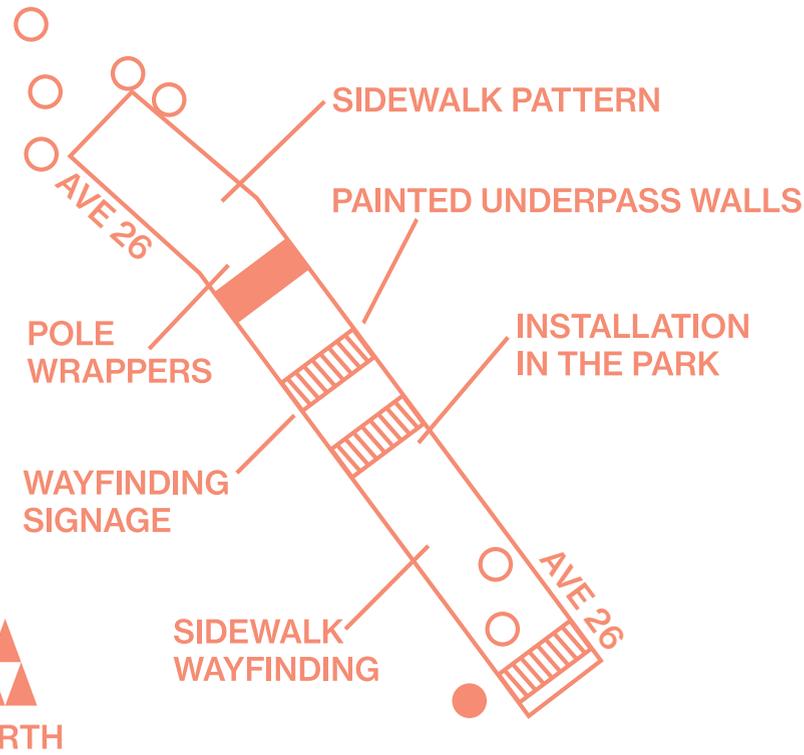
by
LA-Más



Above: To provide seating and create shade, LA-Más designed art installations at Lacy Street Neighborhood Park, the most recognizable open space around the Lincoln/Cypress Metro station.

AVE 26

INDEX



-  UNDERPASS
-  OVERPASS
-  BUS STOP
-  METRO

There are roughly 7,200 miles of sidewalk in Los Angeles. Sidewalks form a public canvas, an abundant resource that offers exciting opportunities to make LA streets more welcoming to pedestrians. However, they remain underused, poorly maintained, and subordinate to the road.

Go Ave 26 is a project to support pedestrians and public transit users near the Lincoln/Cypress Station on the Metro Gold Line in Northeast Los Angeles. Avenue 26 is a car-centric corridor—marked by freeway on- and off-ramps, speeding cars, narrow sidewalks, and minimal pedestrian-oriented signage—that is extremely difficult to navigate as a pedestrian. These conditions are emblematic of streets throughout Los Angeles and Southern California at large. This yearlong project featured community engagement and physical design interventions to inform policy and programming that make getting to and from public transit stops along Avenue 26 easier, safer, and more welcoming.

Northeast Los Angeles is a collection of seven neighborhoods along the Los Angeles River, about ten miles northeast of Downtown LA. The area is undergoing rapid development and change, which is causing inequity, displacement, and gentrification. Transportation is key to ensuring that residents are able to continue to live and work in the area. In a region where the cost of living is rising, inadequate access to public transportation may limit one's access to affordable food, employment opportunities, and public space. While the Metro Gold Line runs right through Northeast Los Angeles, there is a lack of other transit connections available to those who work and live a significant distance from a subway stop in the area. Pedestrians must navigate through treacherous intersections without properly painted crosswalks and with narrow

Above: To engage the community and address a lack of clarity and safety, LA-Más installed a variety of physical design interventions along Avenue 26.

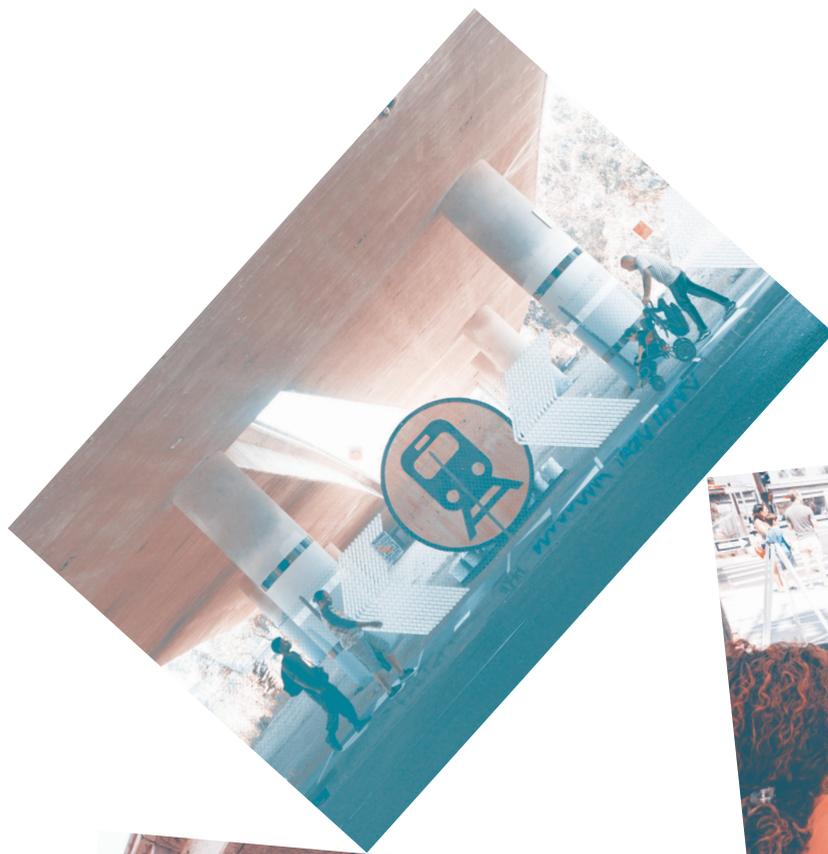


Above: Bikers as they pass murals and sidewalk patterning designed by LA-Más.

sidewalks. Moreover, even within one block of the Metro station, there is no signage indicating there is public transportation nearby. These conditions need to be improved in order to promote equitable growth, traffic mitigation, and community health. The Go Ave 26 project area touches three communities that surround the Metro station: Lincoln Heights, Cypress Park, and Elysian Valley (where the LA-Más office is also located). More specifically, Avenue 26 is a main transportation corridor that provides direct access to multiple transit stops but lacks pedestrian amenities.

Go Ave 26 featured temporary design installations along Avenue 26 between Figueroa and Lacy Streets intended to support pedestrians and bolster the first/last mile connections (the portions of the trip before or after riding the subway) to local transit stops. The designs were informed by a thorough community outreach and engagement process, which included intercept surveys, online questionnaires, community events, social media outreach, and direct site analysis. This engagement process helped the designers better understand the communities and identify the most pressing local needs.

The early stages of the project involved in-depth site research, resulting in a community findings report that would guide future design proposals. The communities of Cypress Park, Lincoln Heights, and Elysian Valley are mostly working class, Latinx, and young (the average age across the area is thirty-one or younger), although the areas are ethnically diverse and growing quickly. Most residents in the project area drive, and the percentage of people that walk, bike, or use transit is only between 10 and 20 percent, according to surveys we conducted. Through questionnaires, La-Más heard that the majority of community members don't feel safe along



Opposite, clockwise, starting at top left: Signage designed by LA-Más aims to reclaim the sidewalk for pedestrians and indicates the way to the nearest train stop.

LA-Más conducted programming to receive feedback from community members about their experiences as pedestrians.

Children walk by an underpass painted and designed by LA-Más to bring a sense of play and light.

Avenue 26. Many said they want to see Complete Streets enhancements in the area as outlined in California's Complete Streets Act of 2008, including bicycle infrastructure, wider sidewalks, better lighting, speed bumps, murals, and better crosswalks. Residents reported that they want to feel safe and welcome along the Avenue 26 corridor, with clear pathways to transit and key destinations that create a sense of place.

The community engagement process led to the development of design interventions including seating and shade in a small park; wayfinding signage; placemaking murals that aimed to lighten the dark freeway underpasses; and surface patterning on the sidewalks, fences, and poles to reclaim space for pedestrians. The project focused on low-cost, high-impact design strategies that could transform the public right-of-way and serve as precedents for other projects throughout the region. The designs took existing visual symbols from the street and appropriated them for the pedestrian, working to create clearer paths for people walking and rolling through the area. The LA-Más team partnered with several local fabricators to install a series of low-tech, off-the-shelf design strategy options including paint and vinyl stickers for the sidewalk, plastic weave for chain-link fences, and acrylic latex paint on the underpasses.

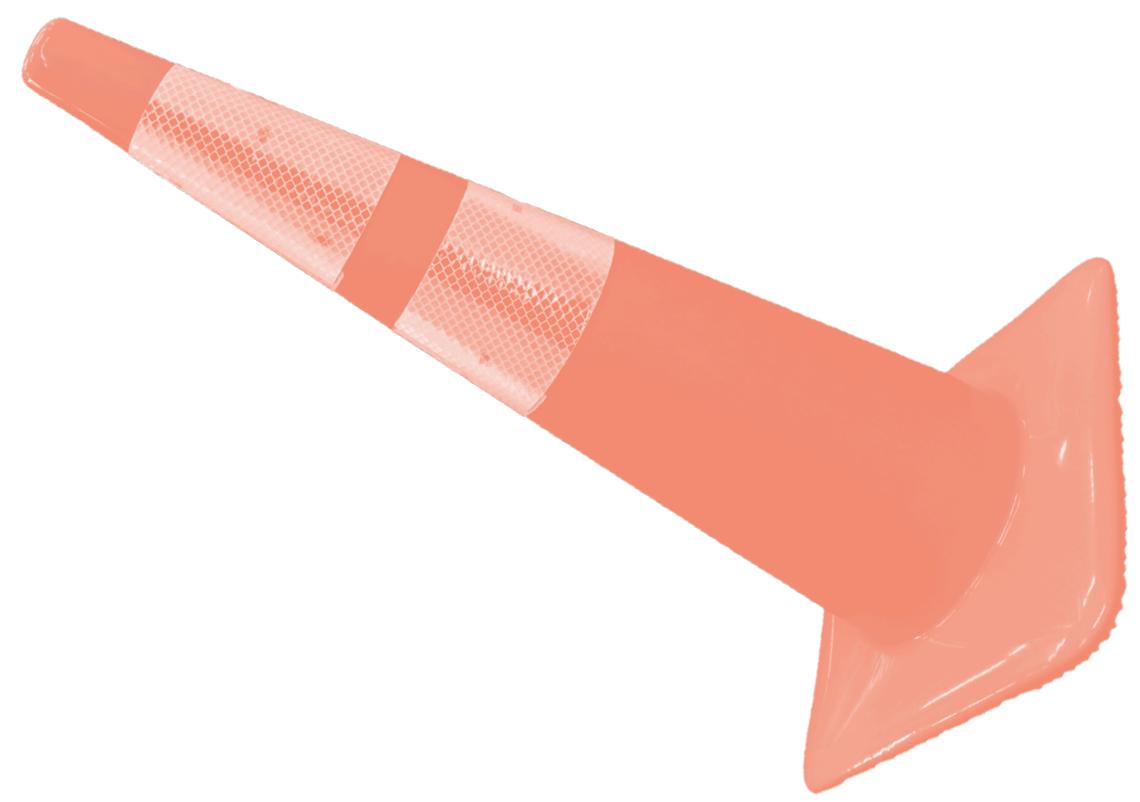
Go Ave 26 serves as a pilot project that aims to transform the public right-of-way through an informed community engagement process and cross-agency approach. Los Angeles is undergoing a transportation transformation, but the different sectors affecting and addressing these changes (government agencies, transportation advocates, and community-based organizations) are often working independently with minimal communication. This project aimed to bring together various sectors to create conversations and actions based on the shared value of making transportation access better for all Angelenos. LA-Más worked closely with city, county, and state agencies not only to get permission for the design interventions, but also to prioritize other government-led improvements, including new fencing, new high-visibility crosswalks, and two permanent picnic tables in the park.

Go Ave 26 was funded by TransitCenter, a national foundation focused on urban mobility, and led by LA-Más, a nonprofit urban design organization with a mission to help communities shape their growth through policy and architecture. The project was conducted in partnership with numerous government entities, including the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and Council District 1. Go Ave 26 would not have been possible without collaboration with transportation advocacy groups Los Angeles Walks, Investing in Place, and the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC). We also thank Community Arts Resources (CARS), who organized the block party event to unveil the project, and Special Service for Groups (SSG), who led post-installation evaluations of the project. ▲

Dispatch from the People's Movement for National Rail

From:
Danya Sherman

Date:
August 15, 2043



Fellow travelers, I write to you from a train passing through the beautiful prairies of Illinois—my home that was once the home of the Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Tamaroa, Peoria, and other tribes. With me are traincarsful of joyful, innovative passengers on a mission.

A radical reconfiguration of our social and physical infrastructure is underway. We are correcting past injustices and building a fairer future. As we ride, we are building a new national rail system in accordance with our values. We are creating cooperatively owned renewable energy systems to power our trains, paying a living wage to all those who construct and labor on our trains, and crafting transit routes that serve indigenous lands and communities of color rather than running through them.

As we ride, fellow travelers, we are shedding the chains of the unjust American infrastructure of the past and building a new society: a new national rail system that regularly and equitably serves small towns, tribal lands, and dense urban areas, while providing important spaces to encounter and connect with each other and our environments.

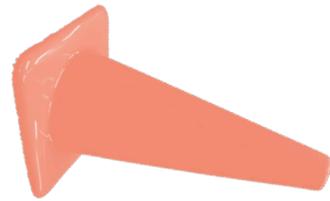


As you know, fellow travelers, the People's Movement for National Rail grew from the seeds of a peaceful uprising. Eleven years ago, in 2032, the president proposed a set of initiatives—increasing funding for highways that would continue to cut through tribal territories and low-income communities of color, displacing residents, and creating environmental hazards. But many in those communities said, ENOUGH—BASTA—no more!

A coalition formed between black liberation organizers, tribal activists, environmentalists, students across the country, and radical transportation and urban planners who wanted to use their technical expertise to undo the injustices their field had created in the past. This coalition was led by those who had been most negatively impacted by prior US infrastructure investments. They risked their lives and careers to build a movement. They occupied and shut down the US Capitol's transit center, Union Station, where many politicians take the train to and from homes in wealthier suburbs in Maryland and Virginia. For one month, they brought US government operations to a halt. In 2033 a compromise was won in which activists from this coalition were granted the authority to plan new train routes with increased government funding.

These activists realized that in order to decolonize our minds and our built environment, we needed not only to plan new systems, but also to build a new culture of healing and mutual understanding. In service of this vision, the coalition began organizing the People's Rides. These rides took inspiration from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has been tried with mixed intentions and results in South Africa, but still presents a very promising method for restorative justice on a larger scale. These rides served to reestablish an accessible national rail system of the type that

existed in the 1920s, before it was defanged and privatized due to oil, automotive, and airline lobbyists throughout the second half of the twentieth century. They also provided space for people across the country to collectively reimagine improvements to the rail system that could occur without the damage such infrastructure had historically caused both underpaid laborers and the communities tracks cut through. This process continues today as part of what we now call the People's Movement for National Rail.



Trains are an ideal place to conduct this type of healing and reeducation because they provide space for reflection and connection. They are regulated by conductors to ensure safety while still encouraging choice and autonomy. They allow us to move freely, with enough space for our bodies to be comfortable and relaxed. Providing intimate gathering spaces over food and conversation, trains are temporary living rooms, meditation spaces, parties, retreats, and more. The French political theorist Michel Foucault coined the term “heterotopias” to describe placeless places like trains. Heterotopias allow us space to reimagine and make new and unexpected connections outside of our everyday routines.

Our People's Rides are spaces of contemplation, conversation, and reeducation. People of all backgrounds come together as collaborators and comrades to explore US transit infrastructure firsthand, to converse with new neighbors and friends, and to learn about the connections between racism, capitalism, and harm to the natural environment. Slowly, we are coming to a shared understanding of what our ideal transit future will look like.

Trains provide the necessary space outside of daily life to remove barriers to open conversation. They also uniquely allow us to communally celebrate and appreciate place. As we ride, we connect with and learn about the landscapes and communities through which we pass. Sharing this unique experience with others creates shared meaning. As we stop along the way, we pick up musicians, chefs, craftspeople, religious leaders, and more, who share with us the cultures of their places. As we sing, eat, and play together, we are creating new rituals—a new American culture built on appreciation for difference rather than a system of borders, racialized barriers, and class division.

Fellow travelers, we are slowly reeducating ourselves through this process of culture-building as we ride through states, cities, and towns, seeing the patterns of injustice repeated everywhere we go, and hearing from those who have been most harmed. Riding trains generates new experiences and a sense of wonder and encourages us to tell our stories—and storytelling is the one of the oldest vehicles for building empathy with one another.

We hear stories of communities torn apart by highways and railroads and poisoned by oil, gas, and particulate matter; parents and friends denied equal rights to

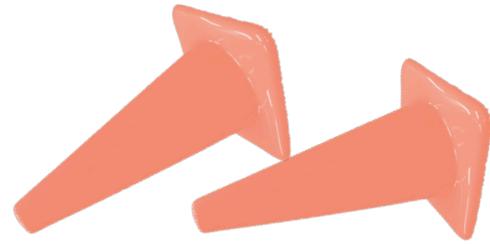
PEOPLE'S RIDES ROUTES

1		<p>FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL EXPRESS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quinalt Res 2. Standing Rock Res 3. Menominee 4. United Houma Nation 5. Choctaw Tribe 6. Navajo Nation 7. Hoppa Valley Res
2		<p>RUST/SUNBELT LIMITED</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Los Angeles, CA 2. Phoenix, AZ 3. Williston, ND 4. Dallas, TX 5. Houston, TX 6. Knoxville, TN 7. Flint, MI 8. Buffalo, NY
3		<p>SISTER SOUL TRAIN</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarksdale, MS 2. Memphis, TN 3. Chicago, IL 4. Detroit, MI 5. Atlanta, GA 6. New Orleans, LA

These routes were developed by participants at a planning workshop at the New York Transit Museum in October 2017, part of the Platforms program curated by Shaelyn Amaio.

education and access to living-wage jobs. We also hear stories of those who have benefited from this system—great-grandchildren of oil tycoons, railroad robber barons, and those who profited from the many housing foreclosure crises—and together we process feelings of guilt, inequity, trauma, and bias. Alongside these stories we learn about the policies and people who made this exclusion possible, providing an important systemic analysis to why the country developed in the way that it did.

The train network in America has historically embodied deep complexities, and trains provide vital cultural inspiration points to reflect on history and to imagine a new future. We build on the work of those brave movement leaders who came before us: the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, who organized for racial equality in the 1920s, the Freedom Riders of the 1960s, and other past activists who have used and appreciated the train for its highly visible role in shaping and carrying American society. While we recognize that a national rail system is only the beginning of the new America that we need, we know that equitable access to transit is an important step.



Fellow travelers, on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the People’s Movement for National Rail, we enter a new chapter. Over four million participants have joined our Rides, and we will now add a new mandate to our work.

Following the planned timeline of our work to increase transit infrastructure in an equitable way, we have added a new portion to the People’s Rides. Passengers and members of the People’s Movement for National Rail will collectively determine where stops should be placed and where tracks should be laid in order to maximize benefits for all, especially those from communities that have been harmed by prior US infrastructure decisions. We take a cue from some indigenous American cultures’ respect and consideration for seven generations in the past and seven in the future. In order to plan a national rail system that will respect those who came before us and benefit those who will come after, we must ensure that the routes, construction, and impact of our system consider our intergenerational physical, social, and psychological health.

The People’s Movement for National Rail has already completed plans for our first three routes. As we continue to ride and build a new America, we encourage you to join us. Visit Engines of Culture (enginesofculture.org) to join a People’s Ride and to help plan future routes and a new America, with justice and mobility for all. ▲

CONTINUOUS STATION- NARY

by
:(COLON)

In Franz Kafka’s parable “Before the Law,” a man from the country hopes to gain access to the Law. As he stands before the Law, he is confronted with a doorkeeper who tells him that he cannot enter yet: “‘It is possible,’ says the doorkeeper, ‘but not at the moment.’” As he waits, the man from the country is neither inside nor outside the Law—he is, rather, in front of it, submitting himself to its judgement. The man sits there for years; often and repeatedly, he asks the doorkeeper for permission to proceed. The gate to the Law is always open, yet permission is perpetually postponed—the possibility and promise of access is ever present. It is a promise kept open through social processes, through scrutiny and examination, and through the exchange of immaterial and material things. In fact, the mechanisms of power that distinguish the man as “from the country”—a distinction that positions him at a remove from the Law—also establish his doorkeeper and define their relationship before the open gate. The Law structures this condition of indeterminate deferral and implements it accordingly.

Kafka’s story resonates today, a century later, because of the familiar subjugation we endure in order to seek access. Through the gate, its guard, and the man from the country, we can better understand many forms of contemporary waiting

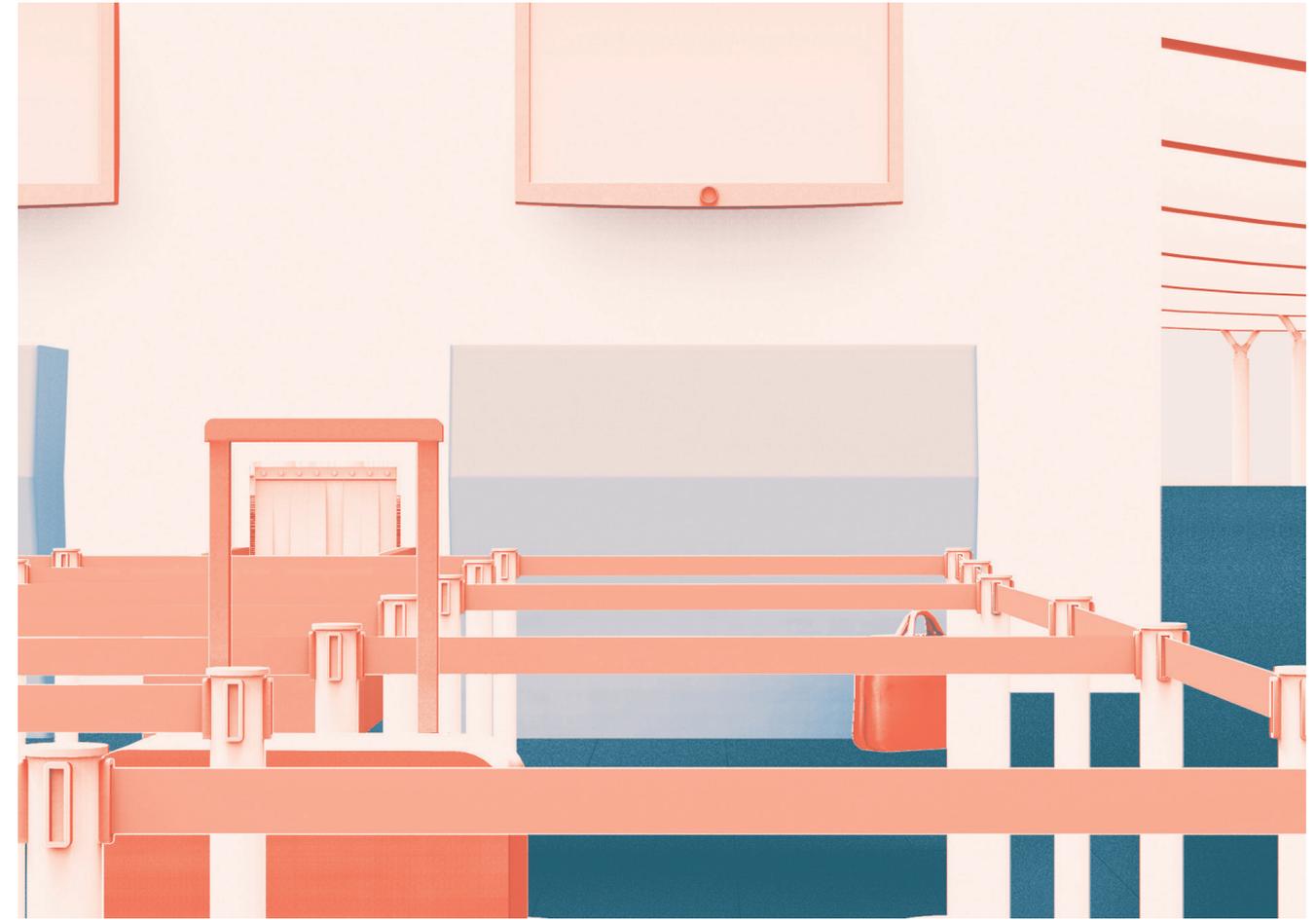
and contemporary gates: in lines, in traffic, in courts, in detention centers, and in the airport.

The airport is one extreme example of the ways the power differentials entangled with seeking access are performed, habituated, and maintained. Through the procession that is traveling through the airport, we encounter the architecture that structures these spaces of indeterminacy—that give form to the Law—but also the way in which these routine architectures work to obscure the violences of waiting. Like a continuous stationary machine, the airport processes and materializes a constant stream of information that feeds and determines access. It is a transitory space that manipulates time and filters the movement of bodies and information from one territory to another. As Frances Stonor Saunders' essay "Where on Earth Are You?" reminds us, all borders are a series of explanations of identity. The airport commuter is subjected to the same conditions of legitimization as Kafka's man from the country; at the airport, Kafka's doorkeeper is as much human as technological and architectural. Commands, declarations, signs, and sounds structure the ritualistic performance of passage through the airport, while mobility and accessibility are determined by where one comes from and what one brings with them. Everybody must wait to be processed, since the airport does not presume innocence, though it deems certain people less innocent than others. Identity has to be established through documentation and status verified against international norms. Bodies and belongings are sorted into categories—citizen, alien, refugee, suspect, crew member, and so on—activated at the airport through a set of pronouncements, such as "nothing-to-declare." Such verification regulates the *speed* at which one passes through the airport. To be processed means to wait seconds, minutes, hours, days. For the person from the country—more pertinently, the person not "from here"—this wait can even become years, stretching beyond the airport itself.

Where and how we wait in the airport is regulated by a system of objects that dictate movement, speed, and accessibility. These artifacts constitute the performance of travel and actualize the larger structure of governance in the airport. Our moments of *Continuous Stationary* examine the objects and performance that construct commute as immobility—stationary moments: the check-in line, before security, in front of the immigration booth, under the technological eyes of the scanner, and waiting at the gate. The duration of the commute is determined by the ability to make the correct declarations through the machine, in the face of the doorkeeper, and before the Law.

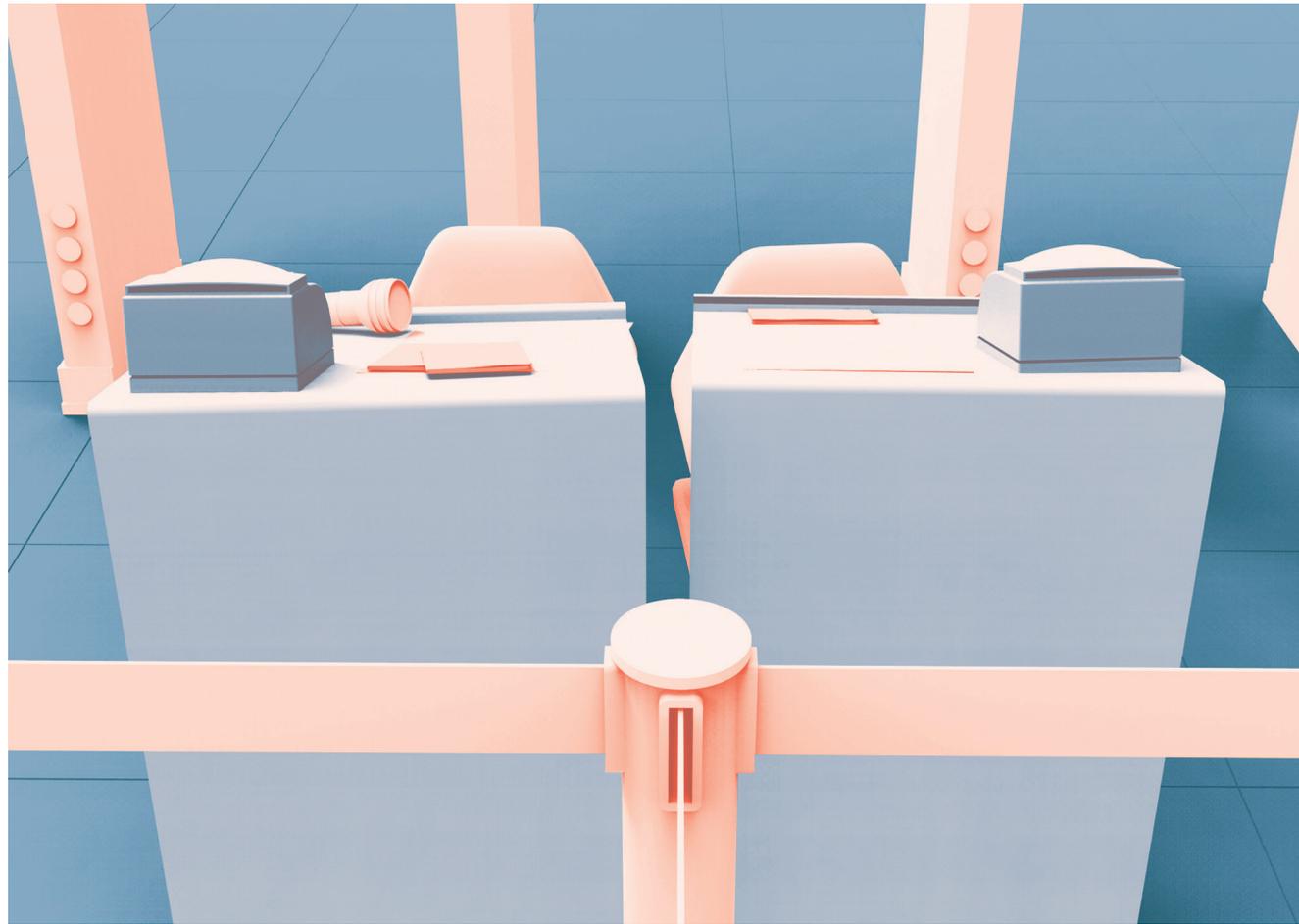
In order to exercise our rights to access, we must submit to the legitimacy of the Law, and its power is derived from this habitual abidance. Kafka's man from the country endures the state of indeterminate deferral because it appears temporary, neutral, and impersonal. Yet today this appearance runs extra thin (or doesn't exist at all). In actuality, the dragging, protracted process of obedience is highly predetermined and specialized based on the metrics of those in power. Wherever a speed differential exists, power will manifest to manipulate it—in line the access-seeker is left to toe the line, in a state of uneven and continuous suspension. Because, before the Law, we are all technically subjected to the prerogative of power: waiting. ▲

Quoted material from Franz Kafka, "Before the Law," in *The Basic Kafka*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), 174-181.



1

“Before the Law stands a doorkeeper on guard. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment.”



2

“The man bends down to peer through the entrance. When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs and says: ... ‘From hall to hall keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other.’ ... He decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door.”



3

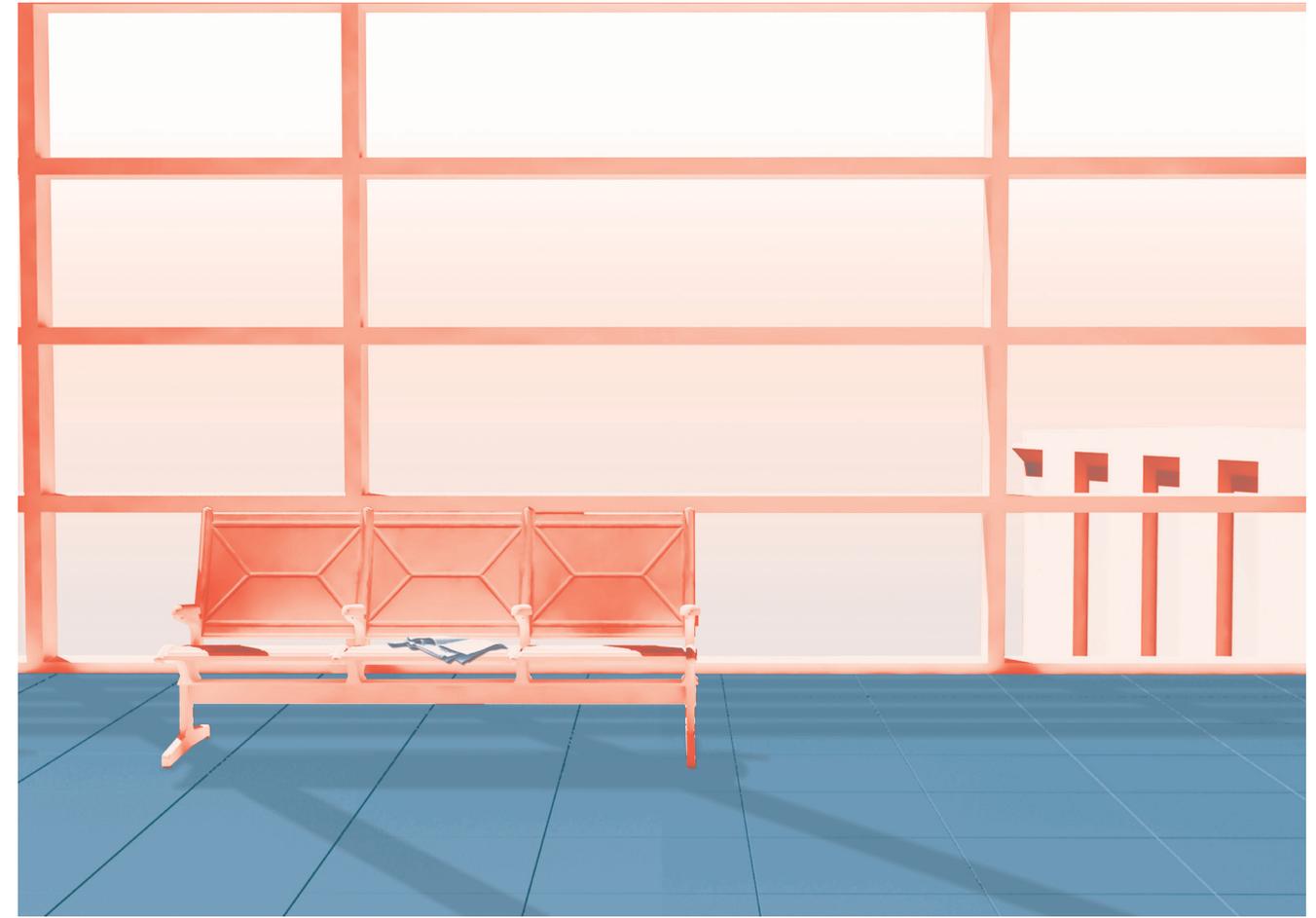
“The doorkeeper often engages him in brief conversation, asking him about his home and about other matters, but the questions are put quite impersonally, as great men put questions, and always conclude with the statement that the man cannot be allowed to enter yet.”



4

“The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in hope of bribing the doorkeeper.

The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift: ‘I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone.’”



5

“‘Everyone strives to attain the Law,’ answers the man, ‘how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?’ The doorkeeper perceives that the man is at the end of his strength and that his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear: ‘No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it.’”



POR- TALS

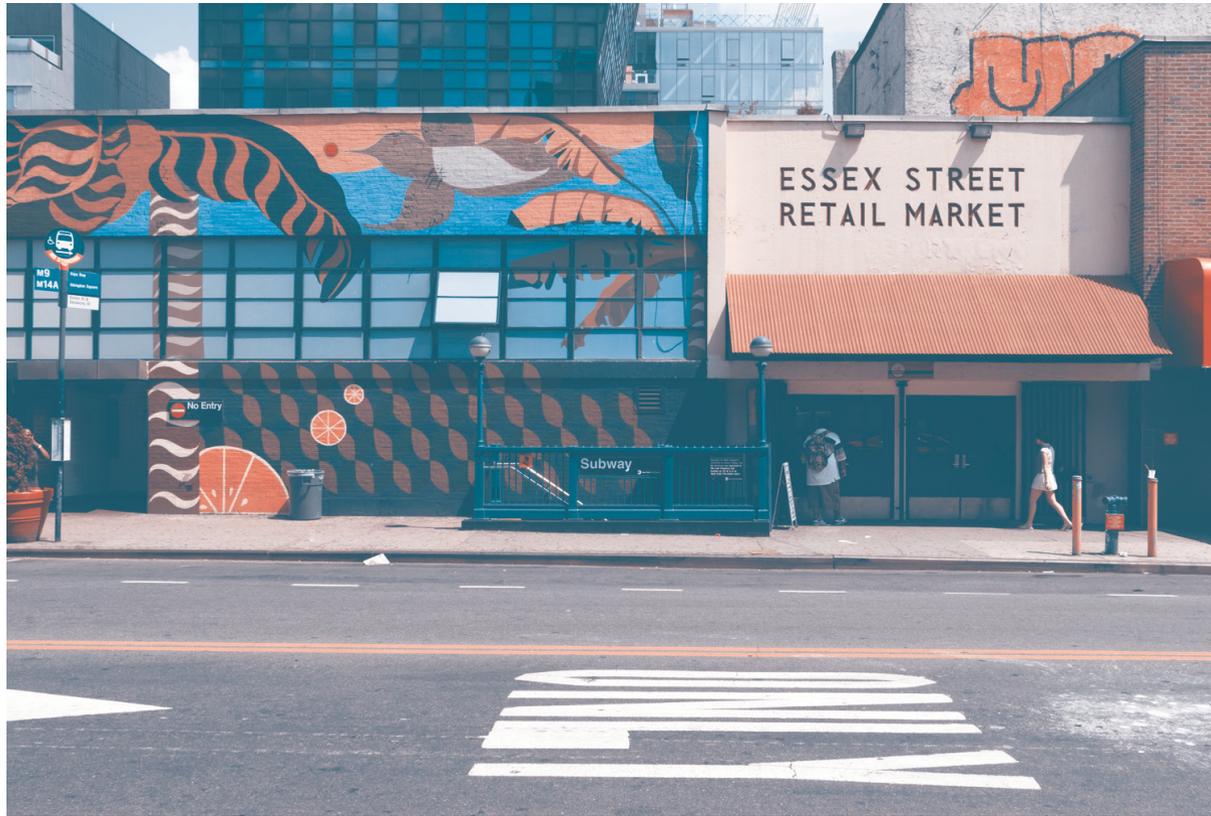
by Robert Prochaska

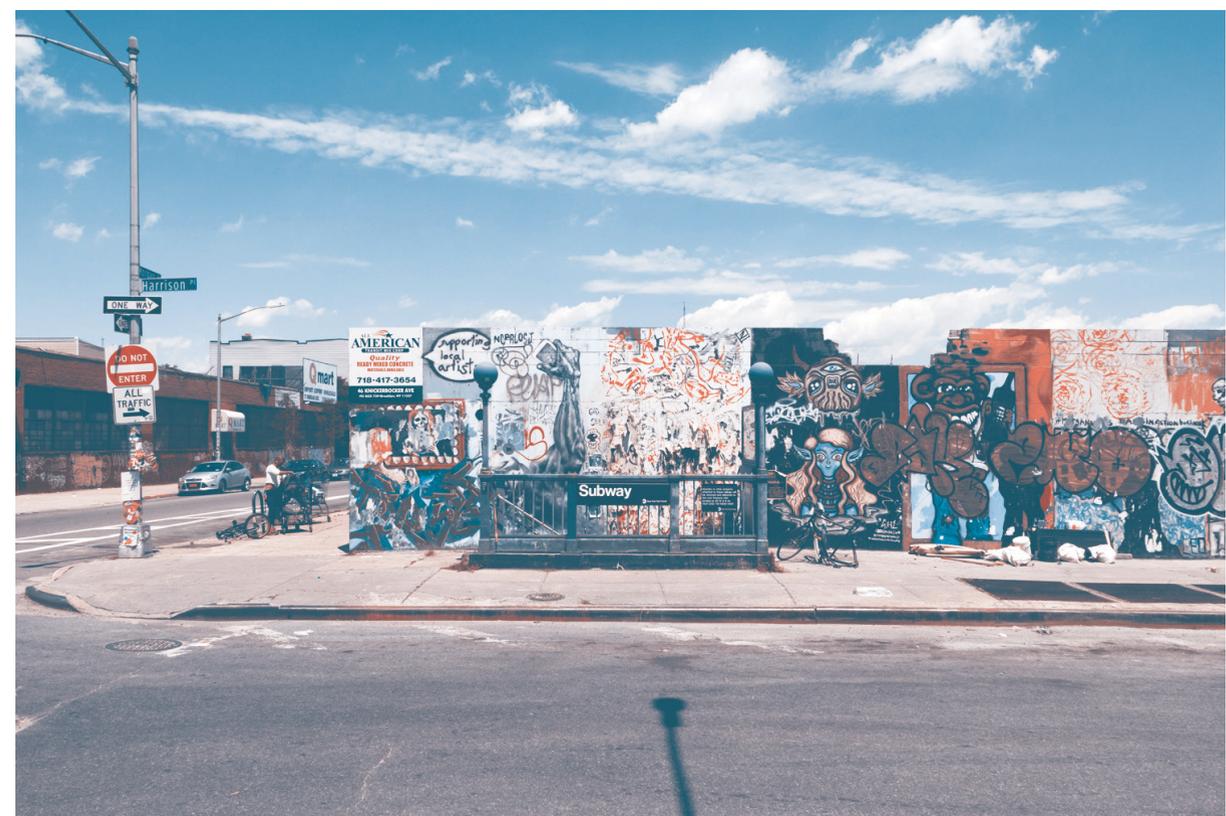
Portals are openings to somewhere else; their presence delineates two distinct physical spaces. In the context of the New York City mass transit system, the stairwells and elevator shafts distributed across the city's boroughs act as portals, signifiers of the border between the saturated environment of the metropolitan street and the standardized monotony of the subterranean landscape. These entrances act as the only form of navigational marker for an invisible infrastructure traversed by over five million passengers daily.

Portals is a photography series documenting the entrances of the New York City subway's underground stations. This transportation infrastructure features more stations than any other mass transit system in the world, and approximately 60 percent of it lies belowground. I photographed all 255 stations within the subway system that have one or more entrances to the underground. I position the entrance in the same location of each frame, accentuating the varied context of the city street. Every station has a varying amount of entrances ranging from one to twenty, though most stations have between four and six entrances. The underground stations featured in Portals were entered a combined total of 1,395,544,572 times in 2017.

Portals is the first in a series of projects collectively titled "Infrastructure of Americana." It documents infrastructure that has facilitated stereotypes of American culture through its role in shaping the built and natural landscape of the United States. ▲











Who's on a Bike?

*A Conver-
sation*

by BENJAMIN
GOOD

with

Illustration by
FANNY LUOR

*Lynda
Lopez*

Cutting across northwest neighborhoods such as Wicker Park, Bucktown, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square, the 606 is an elevated multi-purpose park that began construction in fall 2013 and opened in summer 2015. Housing prices in Humboldt Park and Logan Square (predominantly Latinx communities) have increased around 48 percent since construction began. From 2000 to 2014, from the approximate conception of the project to its near completion, the Hispanic population declined by approximately 35.6 percent. Remedies for the rapid displacement have been proposed. Council members have advocated for hefty demolition fees to deter developers and local community groups such as the Logan Square Neighborhood Association have condemned the construction of luxury transit-oriented developments around the trail. While many celebrate the increasing property values around the 606 and the growing prosperity of small businesses, others consider the trail a critical example of a project with a lack of safeguards against gentrification. Similar potential mixed-use trail projects, such as El Paseo in Pilsen on the Southwest Side and the Englewood Line Trail on the South Side, should view the 606 as a cautionary tale.

For concerned community members such as Lynda Lopez, these trail projects are the cause of simultaneous anxiety and anticipation. Lopez is a writer, educator, and activist who focuses on antidisplacement initiatives and housing policy in Chicago's rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. She previously served as a member of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and was on the steering committee for Grassroots Illinois Action-Humboldt Park Area (GIA-HPA). Lopez has coordinated two large property tax relief workshops for homes along the 606, led community meetings to create an affordability platform for Logan Square, and organized protests around luxury developments along the trail. A lifelong Chicagoan, she currently works for the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, coordinating scholarship programs, youth employment outreach, and educational programming regarding immigration issues for high school students. Lopez is a frequent contributor to *Streetsblog Chicago*, where she publishes articles on transit-oriented development and affordable housing in Latinx communities. She was recently moderator for a conversation on bike equity at the Illinois Bike Summit, and she is on the Sensible Growth committee of the Metropolitan Planning Council, and the Community Equity Advisory group within the Active Transportation Alliance. In Benjamin Good's conversation with Lopez, they discuss transit journalism, inclusive design practices, and the future of Chicago's bike infrastructure.

Benjamin Good:
Can you tell me about your work history and how you became interested in transportation issues in Chicago?

Lynda Lopez: In high school I started writing for local newspapers—I was a youth reporter for the *Chicago Tribune's* high school paper the *Mash*. They hired students from across the city. I think when you are writing about issues and interviewing people, you are really becoming more critical as you ask questions. That was probably my first introduction to many issues around the city, especially around issues of education. When I got to college at the University of Chicago, I joined a lot of organizing groups on campus like University of Chicago Coalition for Immigrant Rights and a local labor organizing group helping workers on campus assert their rights. Later, I created a group to get first-generation low-income students more resources. I would say that was my first real jump into organizing.

After college I moved back to my neighborhood, and I started to get involved with local community organizations like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association around the time of the municipal elections of 2015, when I was helping to get out the vote. From then on I got involved with Grassroots Illinois Action-Humboldt Park Area (GIA-HPA), working on a lot of different efforts in the community, one of the main ones being the 606 in Chicago. It is an elevated 2.7-mile trail that connects different

B: You touched on this a little bit before, but can you describe the influence of design on mixed-use transit projects such as the 606?

L: A lot of people have said that the initial idea for the 606 was at its core a low-stress path for residents to walk or to bike on, but I think it became a tool for tourism, something not for the community. Parts of the 606 are meant to be really extravagant. It takes on another level of design not for practical need but for aesthetics. There is something

B: I've been reading about proposed projects such as the Englewood Line Trail, and I'm curious about your understanding of these projects' aims to really serve communities, and how these projects might be different than the 606.

L: What was different about the 606 is that nothing like that had ever happened in Chicago. There are studies that show that home prices have gone up along parts of the trail, and now that people have that example, people

neighborhoods, and it has been a focal point of gentrification, with home prices going up along it. I was a member of the steering committee there, helping to inform residents about its opening, assisting residents in reviewing their property taxes, and figuring out a way to potentially prevent displacement along the trail. After college, I definitely did a lot more local organizing. This was all in my free time, I want to emphasize that. My formal work is at the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, which is a nonprofit on the Southwest Side of Chicago, where I'm doing youth programming. It doesn't really have to do with antidisplacement work, but this organization is committed to social justice on the Southwest Side, working within communities.

I always imagined myself working with local organizations, and after college I got a lot more interested in figuring out how to use an antidisplacement lens in my work; that's why I also write for *Streetsblog Chicago*. Whenever I write, I try to have the lens of antidisplacement and equity—and I think you can have that lens in whatever you do. I saw myself writing, but I never knew what that would entail. Over time my voice has become much clearer. I think when I write, my lens comes across clearly—I'm not really pretending to be neutral.

to be said about having nice things in your community, but it's sad that you have to have that reaction: "Well, it's too nice." Some people have said that it should be "just nice enough" . . . but I don't really know what that means.

are trying to get ahead of any potential displacement from future projects. I'm not as familiar with the Englewood Line Trail, but there is another one called El Paseo in Pilsen. Have you heard about that one?

B: I only know a little about it—can you give me some background?

L: It hasn't started; it's not elevated, but it would be a street-level path, proposed to connect Pilsen and Little Village on the Near West Side of Chicago. It's been called "The 606 of the Near West Side." There are some fears about gentrification; I know that a lot of discussions are happening in community meetings. Obviously that's not a

guarantee that these meetings will prevent gentrification, but the fact that people are already looking through that lens is promising. And I don't want to say people weren't thinking about that for the 606. There was just no example prior to that. I don't know if what it might become was clear then, but examples create more urgency.

B: The High Line in New York doesn't even seem relevant in this case because it's so much more expensive, and it's almost pure park rather than transit route.

L: That's the closest thing I can think of, but I've been to it, and it's very different. Have you been to the 606?

B: Yes, I have a few times. The price discrepancy between the High Line and the 606 is clearly drastic.

L: New York's concentration of wealth along the High Line is at another level. And I don't even know if the 606 has any of that—maybe around Humboldt Boulevard. A lot of the path is just simple. There is the part with the bridge and the lights at night, which I would say is one of the more extravagant parts of the trail. Aestheticism is really interesting. When I first heard about the 606, I lived right by it. Over time I started to go on the trail because I love to bike ride. I honestly think the trail is a benefit—removed from housing prices, I think it can be a benefit to

communities. It's a way that people can bike, walk, or run with no concern for traffic, which is really nice. The issue with it was no real plan for mitigating displacement—if it were coupled with real concern for housing and property taxes, would that have affected the design? Who knows. If it had been part of the conversation, maybe that also would have changed what it came out as. At the very least, people deserve green space and low-stress places to be—it's a good concept, but its implementation was not the best.

B: Specifically in the neighborhoods you work in, what are the social and political conditions around bicycle usage, and how might they differ from those of other Chicago communities?

L: I work often on the Southwest Side of Chicago, and you don't see heavy bike usage there—I mean we're not on the North Side. There is less infrastructure for biking and more trucks in this part of the city. It's definitely not as conducive for people who want to jump on a bike. You have to have a kind of fearlessness. Because I bike to work every day, I always tell people that you have to have a little bit of fear—you need to stay aware and can't get too comfortable. I see a lot of older residents I might not see in other parts of the city riding their bikes with little baskets, and you can tell that they are using it for errands. They might not be riding to work with their bikes, but they are using them. It's nice to see intergenerational bike usage. I think we have this perception of what a cyclist is, and some people get left out of that narrative. My work in this part of the city has really made me think, "Who's on a bike?" Some people might not have the most expensive

bikes, maybe some of the least expensive ones, but they are still using them, and they are still cyclists.

I'm deepening my understanding of what it means to be a cyclist specifically in the city. A lot of bikers are riding on the sidewalks, and I think that speaks to infrastructure needs. Sometimes groups of young people move through the streets, but probably 50 percent of people I see are on the sidewalk—the Southwest Side is a really high-traffic area with trucks, and even I don't like to ride on some of those streets. A lot of the concentrations of heavy bike usage are in other parts of the city, and I think this generally correlates to infrastructure as well as other things.

Right: Lopez poses in front of a soon-to-be demolished building in protest of luxury development in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Photo courtesy of Grassroots Illinois Action.

B: What are the issues generally surrounding the building of protected bike lanes?

L: Bikes are never neutral! When the 606 first came about, I was thinking about it through the lens of gentrification, but the more I have cycled daily, the more I think that we should have nice things like bike lanes. We should have low-stress paths to ride and to walk on. The association with hipsters and displacement has made it hard for bike lanes to come about for low-income communities of color. For example, there's the bike-share program Divvy, and my friend calls them "gentrification bikes." Divvy is concentrated in certain parts of the city. There are no Divvy stops in Brighton Park nor near my home in Pilsen. It is kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy: you concentrate stops in certain parts of the city, but then when you try to put stops in other places, residents might already distrust them. Whenever bike lanes are proposed, there are always concerns about gentrification, and it is interesting that cars aren't considered as well. I mean, they are more expensive. It seems like bikes are seen as a leisure thing even though people actually choose to use bikes because they are less expensive. The association with leisure is complicated and controversial, but bikes should be for everyone.

B: I will only use the term "gentrification bikes" from now on to talk about these bike share programs.

L: It's sad—but I think my perception has gotten more nuanced. Before, I used to think, "Oh, bike lanes, those are just for hipsters!" But now I commute in a place that has terrible bike infrastructure and I think, well, we actually need them! I'm always of the belief that if we need something in the neighborhood, we should ask, "How do we

go about advocating for this need while also being cognizant of other people's wants?" Rather than someone in the Department of Transportation bringing infrastructure here, how do we create an inclusive process where anyone can talk about what they want in their neighborhood?

B: I'm curious about the ways that designers and planners can better understand the neighborhoods they are working in. How can access to different kinds of forums impact a more democratic process?

L: The way that I have learned the most about communities is working in their neighborhoods. I work at a non-profit right now in the Southwest Side, and I used to do work with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, organizing property tax workshops and protesting displacement along the 606. Honestly, working in communities is one of the best ways to learn about them. As much engagement as you can be doing outside of your formal work within these communities helps you to gain a better understanding. It shouldn't all be for formal work; it should

be legitimate engagement, an interest in the issues. It helps if we have more people involved that are from the neighborhood. For example, people in the planning process often have a master's degree in urban planning and aren't from the neighborhood, which gives them a different perspective. If everyone in the room has only learned about these issues in the classroom, rather than in their own experience, it makes a difference in how the issues are talked about. Honestly, getting more people in these neighborhoods to become planners is one way to deepen



the conversations happening. Just in general, stop assuming you know what is best for communities. The example I gave for bike lanes is a good one: I have this need for a bike lane, but I can't just make it happen. There should be a process that is open to my idea being shut down, even if I really want it. I might be sad, but it shouldn't happen if the community sees no need for it. Even with the 606, there were a lot of people from the neighborhood that helped design it, but there were also a lot of people who didn't know about it! When I was knocking door-to-door, I'd ask, "Do you know about this trail opening down the street?" People would ask me what it was! It kind of speaks to the level of engagement that was done. It might not be called gentrification if the 606's planners engaged with communities, but how were these community members being consulted? Hosting community meetings, presenting plans, that's not real engagement. Developing design processes that get better feedback from people is difficult.

B: Can you discuss examples of people resisting displacement at a local level, possibly examples of resistance not sanctioned by local governments that are still effective in reclaiming agency for communities?

L: There are a lot of examples in Chicago right now. Pilsen is a really good example—there is the main road Eighteenth Street, and all across it you can see storefronts on lower floors with signs saying "Pilsen Is Not for Sale." It's kind of a subversive message, and it is all around the neighborhood. There was a coffee shop a couple years ago, and people put signs on the windows right away saying "White People Out of Pilsen." It shows that this is a very contentious space, and people have opinions about who should be there and who shouldn't. They are willing to get in people's faces for it. A lot of people believe that militancy is necessary if you are trying to prevent your neighborhood from losing its longtime residents of color. One of the most recent examples, which got a lot of attention, was in October 2017. There was a group from Boyle Heights and Pilsen. They walked them down Eighteenth Street, and it led to a big confrontation outside of this fancy restaurant in Pilsen, called S.K.Y. People were telling

B: You mentioned that you work for the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC). Can you talk more specifically about your role in this organization, as well as the organization's purpose as a whole?

L: BPNC is a nonprofit on the Southwest Side, and they do a lot of different kinds of work. A lot of people know them for education justice, so they are always at the forefront of different campaigns for education funding

the owner of the restaurant, "You're not really here for the residents," basically just saying that he was trying to gentrify their neighborhood. It got livestreamed, and people were willing to get into the face of the owner. It really shows that there is a militancy in Pilsen right now. I don't know if you can measure if it is keeping off gentrification, but it shows that people are willing to defend their neighborhood. There are a lot of examples like this happening. When working in the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, there was a lot of civil disobedience happening. On April 9, 2016, traffic was blocked on Milwaukee and California Avenues in Logan Square. We had these two towers that were being erected, ten or eleven stories, so people locked themselves together in the middle of the street to raise awareness, stop construction, and cause financial losses for the developer. Logan Square and Pilsen are two areas with lots of examples of militant organizing.

and creating equitable schools. They have a really strong organizing department. But, besides that, they offer a lot of assistance to the Southwest Side through accounting services, financial services, and a community schools

models. They really believe in providing resources for local neighborhood schools. I work with Kelly High School directly. I help run programming there, such as a scholarship and a college and career program for juniors and seniors. I mainly do that work at Kelly High School, but I contribute to many projects at BPNC, especially when there are bigger campaigns happening. We might all have to show up to rallies and provide support. The organization is focused on social justice in Chicago, specifically on the Southwest Side.

B: Can you explain how BPNC situates itself within the Brighton Park community?

L: A lot of the organization is made up of people who grew up in the neighborhood, and it's able to really address community needs because of that. I didn't grow up in the neighborhood, but you can tell a lot of people grew up in the neighborhood and went to local schools. It makes them more aware of what is going on in the neighborhood and also able to connect people to resources because they know the community. Schools are the lifeblood of neighborhoods, so they have a lot of people working in the schools who are able to connect students, teachers, parents, and tutors. Schools connect you to everything in the neighborhood, especially to resources for parents and families going through issues.

B: What do you see yourself doing in the next few years?

L: Ideally I'd be writing a lot more. That's kind of the direction I'm going in. I'm trying to figure out if it's more academic or journalistic writing. I considered working as a journalist after my experiences in high school and college; I've always thought about how to tie in all my interests. I haven't tried to write full time in a while. I'd like to focus on transit justice, environmental justice, displacement, gentrification—and use all the experiences I have had in organizations and nonprofits to inform how I write about people and how I write about communities. If I weren't to write, I'd like to somehow work on bike advocacy.

I definitely think about this through an equity lens, I want to figure out how I can use my interest in bikes and antidisplacement in my future writing and advocacy work. Even at my job at the school, I'm not doing anything explicitly on gentrification and displacement, but I feel like I have been able to bring it up anyway. My students have gotten to know my interests too and definitely know I love bikes. At the end of the day, they always watch me bike away from their second floor window. ▲



Performance of a Plan:

*A Conver-
sation*

by COLE
CATANEO

with

*Alex
Karner*

Illustration by
MOLLY FAIRHURST

In 1989 political scientist Clarence Stone published *Regime Politics*, in which he defined a new approach to understanding political decision-making and planning in metropolitan Atlanta. Responding to what he identifies as the shortcomings of postwar governing bodies, Stone notes that well-resourced extragovernmental coalitions must form in order to achieve the desired outcomes of a political agenda. Stone coins the term *regime politics*, the joining of forces between local officials, wealthy urban elites, and voting bases who share a particular goal but lack the means to achieve it individually. Stone argues that regime politics was instrumental in the development of Atlanta's downtown, almost exclusively serving wealthy or politically connected elites and failing to address Atlanta's racist legacy and resultant disparate socio-economic conditions. Nearly three decades after Stone's book was published, scholars and activists alike are revisiting the potential of regime politics to enact more just, incremental change.

South of Atlanta, Clayton was one of two core counties that opted out of joining the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) in 1971, meaning there would be no transportation system linking it to Atlanta. Then predominantly middle-class and white, Clayton embodied the suburban white flight mentality associated with fear-based, racialized decision-making. Since then, according to 2017 US Census data, the population in Clayton has shifted to nearly 72 percent black. While projects in Atlanta's core have flourished, such as the BeltLine—a former train line—turned—park system—projects in surrounding counties like Clayton have seen budget cuts, separating those communities farther from the city center. Following the discontinuation of the short-lived C-TRAN, a bus system serving Clayton between 2001 and 2010, residents began to collectively organize initiatives seeking transit justice. After attempts to fund MARTA expansion by increasing Clayton's sales tax by a penny, Clayton voters passed a 2014 referendum to fund the addition of MARTA service to the county.

Alex Karner is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin whose work reimagines Stone's original notion of regime politics. His article "'Pray for Transit': Seeking Transportation Justice in Clayton County, Georgia" discusses the impact of social and political actors left out of Stone's writings, such as community-based organizations, nonprofits, and activist groups. Karner, who assists organizers with both qualitative and quantitative analysis also collaborated with the Atlanta-based equity-focused nonprofit Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) on the report "Opportunity Deferred: Race, Transportation, and the Future of Metropolitan Atlanta," which analyzes the barriers residents face while seeking transit justice. Karner's writing on Clayton furthers the debate surrounding power disparities in transportation planning, emphasizing the lasting effects of institutional racism and the subversive potential of thinking regionally.

In addition to his work on Clayton County, Karner has written on the topic of transportation equity in the San Francisco Bay Area and elsewhere. His 2012 dissertation "Transportation Planning and Regional Equity: History, Policy, and Practice" traces the history of transportation planning in California after 1967. *Take Shape* editor Cole Cataneo spoke with Karner about his work in Atlanta and the process of supplementing historical research with traditional data analysis.

Cole Cataneo:

When looking at a city like Atlanta, or at least one comparable in size, what do you think constitutes a working public transit system?

Alex Karner: In general there are a couple of dimensions. I would define a good public transit system as one that is working well for the residents of a particular place. Efficiency can be misconstrued. A public transit system can be efficient in that it is generating a lot of revenue, but it might not actually be serving large portions of the region. For example, there might be a particular corridor in which public transit works very well, but few are able to use it. You can tell public transit is working well if people in a given place want to use it at a moment in time. To determine this, you might ask a series of questions: How many trips are happening on public transit? How do people talk about public transit? Are they satisfied with it? You might also look over time. For example, you might ask, In the last ten years, what happened to the share of people taking public transit? Is the number of trips per day going up, and is the mode-share going up? Things like that. These general aggregate measures of performance and use are pretty important.

C: How did you become involved in creating "Opportunity Deferred," your collaborative report with the Partnership for Southern Equity on the history of transit in Atlanta?

A: All of my work is broadly on transportation equity and justice. There are a couple different dimensions that I use to approach a problem. One involves a quantitative, spatial-analytical perspective. I do a lot of work with geographic information systems using available transportation data to understand how well a given system is getting at some of those issues I raised in the report. The second stream of my work involves my interest in advocacy organizations, folks that perceive injustice or unfairness in public transit systems across the country. I look at how they make their case, how they go about their work, and how they try to change the system to create more just outcomes. For my dissertation, I worked on a project that was going on in the Bay Area where there was a big regional transportation plan update happening. There was a civil rights, environmental justice, public health, and antidisplacement coalition that came together called the 6 Wins for Social Equity Network. Initially I was brought on to provide technical assistance for the coalition, and that set me on a path of producing more community-engaged work in the transportation

space. I find it rewarding to have my work engaged with by communities or advocacy organizations and to have the questions that I address come from those groups. When I finished my dissertation, I did several postdocs, and then I ended up at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. The first thing I did was start asking questions about who was doing work related to transportation equity. Through doing that I became connected with Nathaniel Smith at the Partnership for Southern Equity. They had this idea for a report, which ultimately became "Opportunity Deferred." I had only been in Atlanta for a couple of months at the time, and this was a great opportunity for me to engage with the history of Atlanta while producing this document they could use to support ongoing work. I had done this work in the past and I wanted to continue it in Atlanta.

C: How do you balance quantitative, analytical information with more direct forms of human engagement, such as conducting interviews, organizing, and creating forums? How has that factored into your current work?

A: I would say that I am an academic activist; sometimes I'm acting more as a professor, and other times I'm acting more as an activist and advocate. Right now I'm working with publicly available US Census data to understand how well public transit systems connect people to opportunities. I pull what I need out, do some data wrangling, and am then able to draw some conclusions as to who benefits from public transit and who doesn't. Hopefully other researchers or advocacy groups will pick up my findings once I put them out into the world.

This approach worked really well in the Bay Area. I would do a quantitative analysis, write it up in very accessible terms, and share it with my advocacy partners. Then they might take that work to a public meeting and make an argument about how the simulations used to look at the performance of a plan are insufficient. In that forum, it can be very powerful to use quantitative analysis. If I were just to send that critique in by myself, I could easily be ignored. When you actually have people in the meetings backing your conclusions, the quantitative piece can aid advocacy, though it's not enough on its own. In some cases the advocacy piece can be enough on its own, but to the extent that it can be bolstered with quantitative analysis, it can be more effective. It depends on the specific case, what the issue is, whether data sets are available, and how technical the particular exercise is.

C: I think that's why I'm attracted to your writing, it doesn't come across as research for research's sake. I enjoy the fact that you include a lot of personal and historical elements in your work that can be atypical of academic papers or reports. For example, you mention the history of segregation in Atlanta and the role that history has played in the city's public transportation system.

A: I think it's important to look at the history for a number of reasons. There is a tendency when confronting a social problem—say, access to opportunities (which is what public transportation is meant to solve), or public health, air pollution, you name it—to have a hard time seeing outside of the bounds of your own experience. If you go back and look at history, there are often great examples to draw upon where a very similar issue was confronted.

I became interested in historical perspectives during my dissertation. Instead of looking at the effect of the built environment (e.g. bike lanes or sidewalks) on rates

of cycling and walking, as many others were doing, I became very interested in asking why people aren't provided with more opportunities to use these modes safely. Who decides how much money gets allocated to roads versus public transit versus nonmotorized modes? Why do we have the structures, the laws, the agencies, and the institutions that produce certain built environments? I wanted to get my head around this problem of history.

C: How did you decide which moments in history would best augment your research practice?

A: I think it's particularly relevant to take a historical look into Atlanta, more specifically the history of segregation and the history of early MARTA, to show the system's originally proposed reach. MARTA was supposed to include five counties, but folks in Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett Counties did not vote to authorize the system or the funding. Only DeKalb and Fulton Counties voted to fund MARTA. Looking back, it is clear that there was a racial undertone to these decisions. There were strong ideas about race, about who uses public transit, and about how the public transit system would allow people to move throughout the region and reach the more suburban areas. Clayton and Gwinnett were

both over 95 percent white at the time, and this idea of racial fear was one of the key reasons why their residents opposed funding MARTA. It is important to look at that history, and say, look, this was the case before, and we want to recognize it. We don't want this type of sentiment to constrain the growth of public transit in the future. I think naming the problem and pointing to concrete examples in the city's history can help us move past it. If we want a world-class public transit system in Atlanta that provides connectivity for different areas across the region, we need to be able to move beyond that racialized history.

C: In "Pray for Transit," you spoke about scholar Clarence Stone's *Regime Politics*, and I was hoping you might expand upon his framework. It seems like Stone's writing is an appropriate reference in that it synthesizes your interest in both organizing and policy-making. How did his work serve as reference for your own?

A: I knew that the Clayton County case was important from a research and a transportation-equity perspective. It seemed worthwhile to document it, but documenting a single case study is not very valuable from the perspective of academic research. Academic research progresses from looking at what other researchers have done in the past, identifying gaps in their work, and trying to fill them in. Sometimes you are engaged with the research literature first and other times new cases point you to unfamiliar literature. Here I was motivated first by the Clayton County.

Whenever you think about regime theory, Atlanta looms large. Stone had this very specific argument in his book about how the private sector comes together with elected officials to marshal appropriate resources to meet desired ends. They establish an agenda, set

the agenda, and bring the means together to achieve it, whether it's funding, political capital, or whatever. It became clear that what happened in Clayton was quite different. There were still elements of regime theory, but it was different, specifically in that the actors that were involved were not just elected officials and private sector representatives—they also included folks from the nonprofit and advocacy sectors. Clarence Stone has written a lot about this; he says that the coalitions that needed to come together to advance an agenda like the one in Clayton are unlikely to form because they lack political power and tend to be fragmented in their agendas. But they did come together and were ultimately instrumental. The progressive organizations that exist today are pretty well resourced. In Atlanta we have the

C: What do you identify as the biggest difference between Stone's regime politics and the adapted version you have identified in present-day Atlanta?

A: Regime politics was about people coming together in the *city* of Atlanta to achieve ends, but what we've seen over time is that the regional scale is becoming more important than it was when Stone was writing in the eighties. The regional scale doesn't really respect existing geopolitical boundaries. The whole idea of a region is that it extends beyond the boundaries of individual cities and individual counties; however, more accurately, it is a spatial unit put together based on shared housing markets, labor markets, and transportation systems. Someone might live in Fayette County and work in Clayton County, or someone might live in Cobb and work in Gwinnett. They aren't necessarily dealing with Atlanta in those commutes. The importance of local-scale

C: I noticed you used the word *document* earlier, and something that stands out about your work is a documentarian aspect. At one point in "Pray for Transit" you break from a more academic tone and include descriptive, almost journalistic details of an event held by the Partnership for Southern Equity. In your experience, how important are organizing efforts facilitated by organizations like the Partnership for Southern Equity when campaigning for more equitable transportation systems?

Partnership for Southern Equity, which receives large amounts of funding from philanthropic organizations, we have the Georgia Sierra Club, which is also very well resourced, Georgia STAND-UP, and various labor unions. They are organizations that represent the interest of marginalized groups, but they are also backed by substantial capital. These groups were also able to forge key connections with local elected officials including state representatives Roberta Abdul-Salaam and Mike Glanton. This combination of resources and social connections helped them to achieve their goal of MARTA membership.

government diminishes as a region expands. In Atlanta we have the Atlanta Regional Commission, whose jurisdiction extends beyond individual county boundaries. Something that proved to be definitive in the Clayton County case was the presence of MARTA, a regional agency. MARTA had built up the expertise needed to operate a truly regional transit system over decades. They were the perfect target for advocacy efforts and the obvious choice to operate transit service in Clayton.

A: I think they are absolutely vital. There would be no Clayton County MARTA expansion without that grassroots organizing effort. There are different routes you can go. Let's say you perceive some kind of transit injustice, and you want to make some kind of change or make it right. You can go to the data, download public data sets, look at the transit routes and schedules, put together a very nice memorandum, and present it all at a public

meeting. What will often happen is that people will say, "Thanks for your input, we'll see you later." It is very easy for any individual piece of quantitative analysis prepared alone to be dismissed. Similarly, it's easy for an agency to come back and poke holes in your analysis. They can say, "Well, we conducted a different analysis and we see the situation rather differently, and in fact we see it as quite fair." They might claim that your analysis is invalid, and because they are an agency, they wield substantial power. What you see most often in the field is that if an agency conducts any analysis, it is considered to be sufficient for complying with antidiscrimination law and environmental justice regulations, so it's very difficult to challenge an agency on a qualitative analytical basis.

Based on my broad look at the transportation equity landscape over the past ten years, the people that

C: In your 2016 article "Don't Miss (or Overlook) the Bus," you identify that light rail is currently being prioritized over an expanded bus systems in a number of locations. As an advocate for buses, what are some of the challenges you've engaged with in this debate?

A: Debates about bus versus rail, specifically in the US context, are tied up with people's ideas of what effective public transit looks like. They think about the bus as something slow, stinky, and dirty. There's no reason for that to be the case. If you go to places like Curitiba, Brazil or Bogotá, Colombia, there are very effective bus routes and transit systems that have dedicated lanes, off-board fare payment, and all-door boarding. They basically achieve subway-like capacities using a bus vehicle. There is the potential for buses to meet very high demand for transit at a relatively low cost, but we tend to associate rail modes with a higher level of service. This came up in Clayton too. The deal with the sales tax increase is that half of it is going to run the buses, and half of it is being held in escrow for some future high-capacity transit expansion. People in Clayton want rail because

are most successful in achieving desired ends are those doing the hard work of community organizing. They are getting people out to public meetings, scheduling face-time with key decision makers, and organizing protests. There are a number of reasons why community organizing is so effective. It's very visceral, and as a decision maker, you are confronted with these people who are telling you personal stories about how a decision you are about to make (or decisions that you've made in the past) are affecting their lives. There is a much more human element that is easily lost in the data. If you are going to public meetings and providing input, I feel like there is more willingness to negotiate.

that's the existing high-capacity solution with MARTA. I think there was a tendency, at least in some of the discussions, to discredit a bus solution as second rate. But if we're going to make the best use of scarce transit dollars going forward, we're going to have to get over this. There are promising examples across the country to point to. Houston Metro did a big redesign of their entire bus network aimed at providing higher frequencies on key routes. Capital Metro in Austin just undertook a similar effort also aimed at making the bus network more useful to more people. Transit agencies are going to have to become more entrepreneurial and innovative in the face of constrained budgets. So I am hopeful that we will see more use of bus modes going forward. ▲



A Driverless Detroit: Public Roads and Private Goals in the 1970s



Michael Abrahamson

When the archaeologists dig us up after a thousand years and find entire postmodern cities, they will think we were pretty confused.

—Gunnar Birkerts

In 2015 the *Detroit Free Press* profiled James Robertson, a Detroit resident whose commute seemed to be pulled from urban legend. Because of shoddy bus service and exorbitantly high automotive costs, he was forced to walk more than twenty miles, and take the bus another twenty, every day from his home in Detroit's impoverished North End to his factory job in the suburb of Rochester Hills. This lasted nearly a decade, during which Robertson nevertheless set the standard for attendance at his workplace. His story is thankfully an extreme example, but this kind of injustice is the predictable outcome of decades-long trends in this most car-centric metropolis.

Spread over several hundred square miles, divided by a network of controlled-access highways and high-speed boulevards, the Detroit metropolitan area has never been served by robust mass transit. Since the decline of its streetcar system in the 1950s, Detroit's primary public transit mode has been the bus. Even as disinvestment, deferred maintenance, and declining revenues have left the city's meager bus system crippled, voters in outlying municipalities have spurned efforts to pool resources regionally since the 1960s, most recently in a proposal to establish a transit authority for Southeast Michigan that was narrowly defeated in 2016. This divide manifests in the direction of residents' commutes: about 112,000 Detroiters work in the suburbs (36 percent of whom make \$15,000 or less per year), while 158,000 suburbanites enter the city daily for work (59 percent of whom make more than \$40,000 annually).

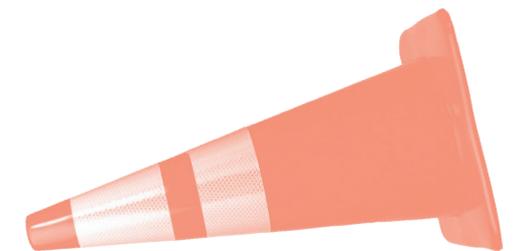
Today Detroit is not only synonymous with the worst effects of urban decline and white flight, but also emblematic of the country's pernicious dependence on the automobile. It's known as the Motor City not only because American carmakers

are headquartered there, but also because it has long served as a test site for the auto-first urbanization they continue to envision.

Efforts to modernize Detroit's transit system have occurred in recent decades, but instead of systematic solutions, they have been piecemeal responses to downtown congestion. The most visible outcomes have been the People Mover, an elevated monorail system running a circular route around the central business district that began operation in 1987, and the QLine, a nostalgically reanimated streetcar that runs in a straight line along Woodward Avenue's southernmost 3.3 miles (a path that intersects the People Mover's loop), installed in 2017. These baubles cater to the city's large sporting and conference venues, and they primarily move visitors rather than residents. Yet prior to these incremental and isolated upgrades, Detroit's sprawling form inspired numerous visionary transit projects. Looking back, these forgotten proposals reveal paths not taken and mark the evolution of an American transportation imaginary.

As Detroit continues to emerge as a locus of autonomous vehicle research—technology that has been positioned as the next frontier in transit accessibility and convenience (though not necessarily affordability)—a critical glance at two visionary ideas from the past can help us conceive transformations that aren't merely incremental. We must ask for more from this significant technological transition instead of taking our hands off the wheel. We must also be more specific with our calls for justice and equity. How will cities assure that new technologies don't exacerbate conditions that are already unjust and inequitable enough to create commutes like that of James Robertson? What form could and should a city dominated by autonomous vehicles take?

Opposite: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates, General Motors Transportation Studies: Dual-Mode Transit Study, 1973–76. Photomontage of elevated guideway for dual-mode buses, showing downtown Detroit along Washington Boulevard. Photographic slide, Box 84, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



The decline of Detroit's transit infrastructure foreshadowed the city's precipitous fall from its status as an economic powerhouse. When its last streetcars were phased out in 1956—abetted by the association of car ownership with freedom, independence, and success, which was a change in mentality orchestrated by the auto industry—Detroit's population had already peaked at 1.8 million some years prior. Postindustrial decline was already well underway by 1970. Perhaps the more telling statistic was that its white population had been cut nearly in half while the black population doubled. The Second Great Migration had brought more than 300,000 new black residents in twenty years even as the city's total population declined to 1.5 million. White flight had drawn nearly twice as many Detroiters into outlying suburban communities with their tax dollars in tow.

A driver of decline in both transit quality and population was the interstate highway system. Interstates with overgenerous easements had torn through Detroit neighborhoods—disproportionately inhabited by communities of color—in order to provide direct automobile connections from suburbs to business districts. This easy access encouraged commuters to move ever farther from the city center. Events such as the 1967 uprising and the 1974 election of Detroit's first black mayor, Coleman Young, exacerbated the racially exclusionary suburbanization that was already well underway.

Further problems resulted from Detroit's overwhelming economic reliance on the auto industry's Big Three (domestic automakers Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler). By the 1970s, the industry's reluctant detente with powerful autoworker unions was fraying under pressure from automation, imports, and decentralized production. Detroit's employment rolls were sapped as factories and many of their workers departed Detroit for municipalities with lower tax burdens. City services—particularly the transit system, which had been municipally operated since 1922—suffered as a result.

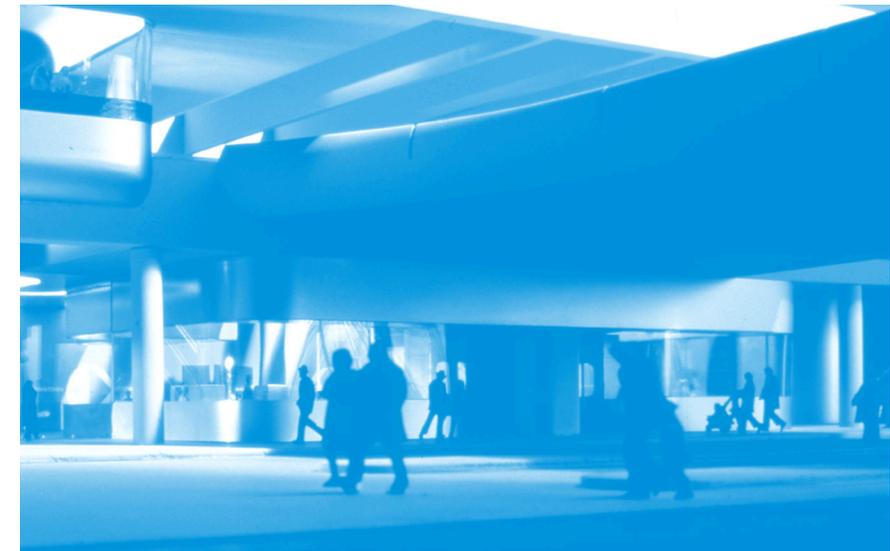
At the same time as these turns for the worse, several speculative transportation projects broadened the horizon of possibility for a city just beginning to perceive decline. In 1973 architect Gunnar Birkerts—an immigrant from Latvia who had lived in suburban Bloomfield Hills since the early 1950s—was hired by General Motors (GM) to provide designs for a federally funded “dual-mode” transit study. This public-private format was similar to the research arrangements that supported NASA's Apollo program: instead of promoting established technologies, it offered the chance to study new concepts. The funding supported research for a design then under development by GM and others to run specially equipped vehicles on both everyday streets and elevated guideways.

Meanwhile, Birkerts was also at work on a project with a team of University of Michigan students to explore the possibilities of underground infrastructure. Funded by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, this Subterranean Urban Systems (SUS) study imagined a model for urban development that buried unsightly elements of the American suburban landscape while reformatting its transportation infrastructure. These projects offered imaginative and aspirational visions at a time when optimism about American cities was crumbling.



Imagine, for a moment, a scenario. You're stuck in traffic again. This seems to be an everyday reality in your city, overrun as it is with large, smog-spewing coupes and sedans. Peering up through your windshield, you watch a vehicle glide by above you atop a raised guideway parallel to but separated from the traffic-clogged boulevard

Photograph of a model showing an entry to a transfer station. Photographic slide, Box 84, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Photographer unknown.



on which you and your car are trapped and immobile. The vehicle is not a train but a small bus—a bus, it seems, without a driver. Contemplating your plight, you resolve to try out this new system, which seems to offer a convenient alternative to your exasperating commute.

The dual-mode transit system developed by General Motors and visualized by the architects at Gunnar Birkerts and Associates was intended to bring about exactly this kind of realization. It would, by its sheer conspicuousness, show suburban drivers the benefit of commuting by bus. The layout of the system makes clear that it was intended to serve suburbanites with long-distance commutes instead of those residing near the urban center.

Convincing residents of pre-dominantly white, middle-class suburbs to consider public transit was a primary goal for much of the research conducted at the behest of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA, now the Federal Transit Administration) in the first decade after its founding in 1964 as one of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Transportation experts had begun to see the detrimental effects of interstates on urban population and public transit ridership. What administrators thought was necessary to curb these effects was a more convenient

commuting experience—less walking, less waiting, and quicker arrivals at one's destination. GM's dual-mode study was one of several projects funded by the UMTA that foresaw the convergence of two visionary ideas—self-driving vehicles and so-called “dial-a-bus” on-demand public transit—into a single system able to overcome convenience concerns and therefore compete with automobiles.

GM's dual-mode buses could switch from piloted to autonomous as they transitioned from surface streets to elevated guideways. On everyday streets, drivers would follow routes computed to respond to rider requests on demand, picking up riders at their doorsteps. Buses would collect groups of riders with similar destinations and proceed to a transfer station, where the driver would exit and the autonomous system would take over. Commuters would continue on to their destinations along the network of elevated guideways, barely aware of traffic conditions below.

Sited in Detroit but intended as a model for any American city, this system design was believed to have several virtues. First, its elevated separation would alleviate the frustrating reality of traffic congestion. Second, the dial-a-bus system (which at the time was not yet technically feasible) would do away with time spent at bus stops by eliminating fixed routes. Third, transfer stations were

designed to expedite boarding and limit station waiting time by adopting a turnstile-based ticketing system.

Though it offered clear advantages over conventional transit systems, the project was not as altruistic as it may appear. GM's motive was to diversify its product offerings, and it saw self-driving buses not only as a new frontier in technical development but also as a potential market niche. There was an industry-wide fad for "personal rapid transit" (PRT) systems at the time, which imagined something akin to the driverless taxi system that seems on the horizon today. In experimental PRT systems like France's "Aramis" (memorialized in a book by the sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour), transit pods would pick up small groups of passengers, then chain together and travel to a city center on elevated rails, where they would uncouple and deliver their passengers to their various destinations. In GM's more pragmatic version, these pods were replaced with small, maneuverable buses carrying up to seventeen passengers.

The project also had a questionable politics. Realizing this plan would have required a massive investment in a proprietary technology, casting a city's reliance upon GM in concrete. Seen in the afterglow of the Apollo program, the vision provided by this research was futuristic and attractive. But its purpose in the end was regressive—instead of proposing systematic solutions to the problems of Detroit's auto-first infrastructure, it offered a convenient but inadequate bypass.



Here's another evocative scenario. After your commute on a submerged interstate, you store your car in a parking garage and ascend by elevator toward your workplace. As you emerge from the underground, a new type of city reveals itself.

Where there was once an unsightly landscape—highways, railways, utility right-of-ways, parking lots, and big boxes—there is now mostly parkland. Where there was once a mosaic of individual buildings, each with its own plot of land, there is now a network of gleaming buildings suspended above ground level, connected by bridges.

Free from the corporate sales and federal research priorities that drove the dual-mode designs, Birkerts and his team of students took the entire urban landscape as the site for their Subterranean Urban Systems study. Their design resembles an ideal city in the Renaissance mode, one planned with contemporary transportation technology in mind. Undoubtedly, this sort of multilevel metropolis has proved to be a persistent and provocative concept from Leonardo da Vinci's Ideal City proposal in the fifteenth century to the raised pedestrian networks of contemporary Hong Kong. Typically such proposals have been pitched as fixes for congestion and pedestrian safety in dense downtowns; it's unusual for them to make propositions about life in sprawling suburbs.

But Detroit is an unusual city, and Gunnar Birkerts was an unusual urbanist. Repulsed by Southeast Michigan's unruly sprawl, he believed that a total rethinking of city form was necessary to overcome its inefficiency and ugliness. Despite his skeptical European perspective on American development patterns, he did not propose a mere densification of the urban center, but instead a more evenly distributed network of nodes and pathways. These would alleviate not only the negative consequences of sprawl, but also the congestion brought about by more concentrated development models.

Central to the proposal were multilevel, deep underground conduits strung along major transport corridors. In addition to highways and railroads, these conduits were to incorporate large, space-intensive urban places like factories, warehouses, parking garages, and malls, thereby lessening the impact these spaces have on the landscape. The concentration of these places within the conduits would make the city more

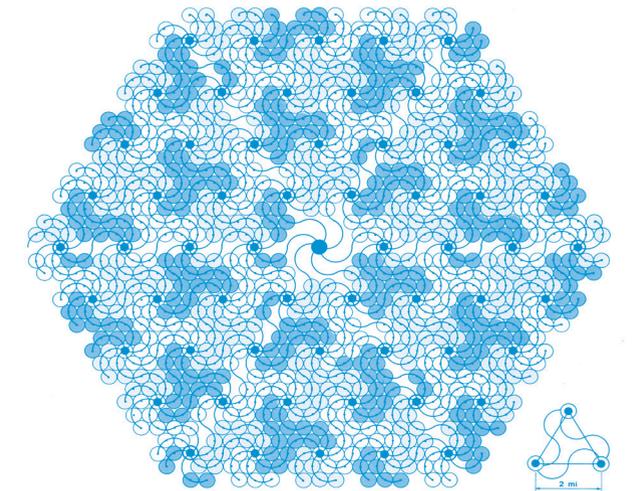


Photograph of a model showing a transfer station from above with the roof removed. Photographic slide, Box 84, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Photographer unknown.

logistically efficient and open up large swathes of land for beautification and redevelopment. Put in contemporary terms, the proposal was to implement "highway cap parks" over the entirety of a metropolitan area's transportation and logistical infrastructures.

Birkerts and his students' overall city design began with a Dymaxion-style hexagon meant to be adaptable to local context and geography. Conduits were splayed outward from the center, and between them was a distributed, redundant network of transit hubs located at two-mile intervals in a triangular grid. Transit was to run on serpentine, spiraling routes that located stations and stops more evenly than straight-line runs so that no one was more than a quarter mile from a stop at any time, a radius comparable to the spacing of New York City subway stations.

To make their findings more concrete, Birkerts and his team adapted the SUS to the Detroit metropolitan area. At the regional scale, conduits ran radially outward from Detroit's downtown. At the city scale, their serpentine transit routes were adapted to a sparsely populated but



Ground-level transportation plan showing serpentine transit routes and quarter-mile transit stop radii. Gunnar Birkerts, Subterranean Urban Systems (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1974).

highly industrialized site on the west side of the city, roughly centered on the Ford River Rouge Complex in Dearborn. This siting sidestepped issues of residential displacement and dispossession that would have arisen had the proposal considered a more highly populated area. Importantly, their design was indifferent to municipal boundaries—as suburban opposition to public transit has shown, these boundaries may be the primary impediment to progress in this particular metropolitan area.

Perhaps foreseeing a decline in demand for Detroit's aging housing stock, the project proposed a tactical erasure of existing buildings and infrastructure. What's proposed isn't, as one might expect, a restitching of neighborhoods chopped apart by highways, but rather something more akin to urban triage or managed decline; decentralization and sprawl were to be regulated rather than reversed. Straight-line connections were to be replaced with less direct but more evenly distributed transit pathways. With existing undesirable development relocated underground, vast new areas could be repurposed for the kind of



Transportation plan adapted to Detroit showing proposed development nodes and serpentine transit routes. Conduit was to run east to west between the four central nodes.

large-scale recreational facilities that are often economically unsustainable in dense urban areas. This would have placed the leisurely pastoral life-style Birkerts and his family enjoyed in Bloomfield Hills at the symbolic center of city life. Unlike Frank Lloyd Wright in his “Broadacre City” proposal—to which SUS nonetheless bears some resemblance—Birkerts saw how important shared spaces of encounter and exchange were for the maintenance of civil society. He envisioned that this kind of encounter and exchange would occur not, as Wright proposed, through telecommuting or in gas stations and farm co-ops, but instead within the multilevel urban nodes of the SUS design. Space for work remained distinct from the space of the home, separated by the all-important commute.

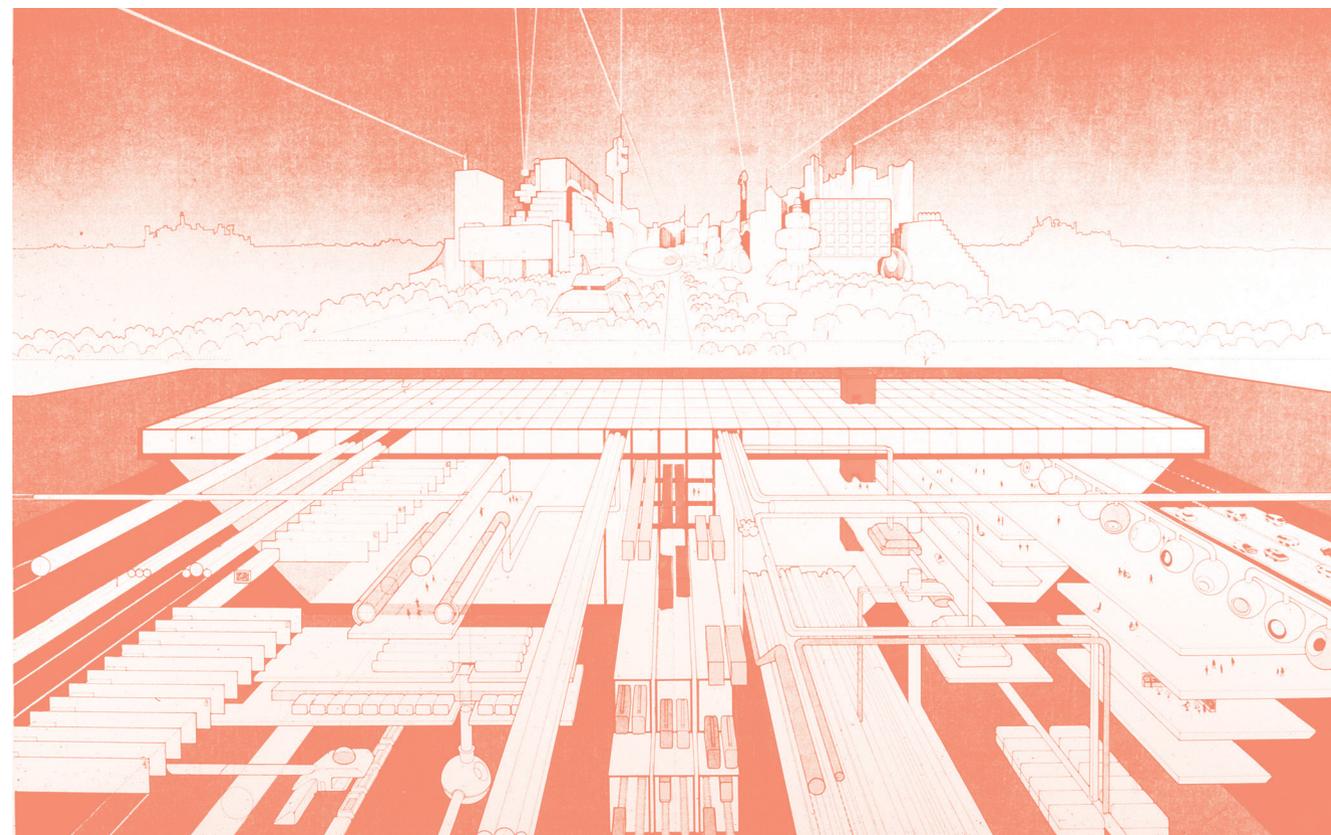
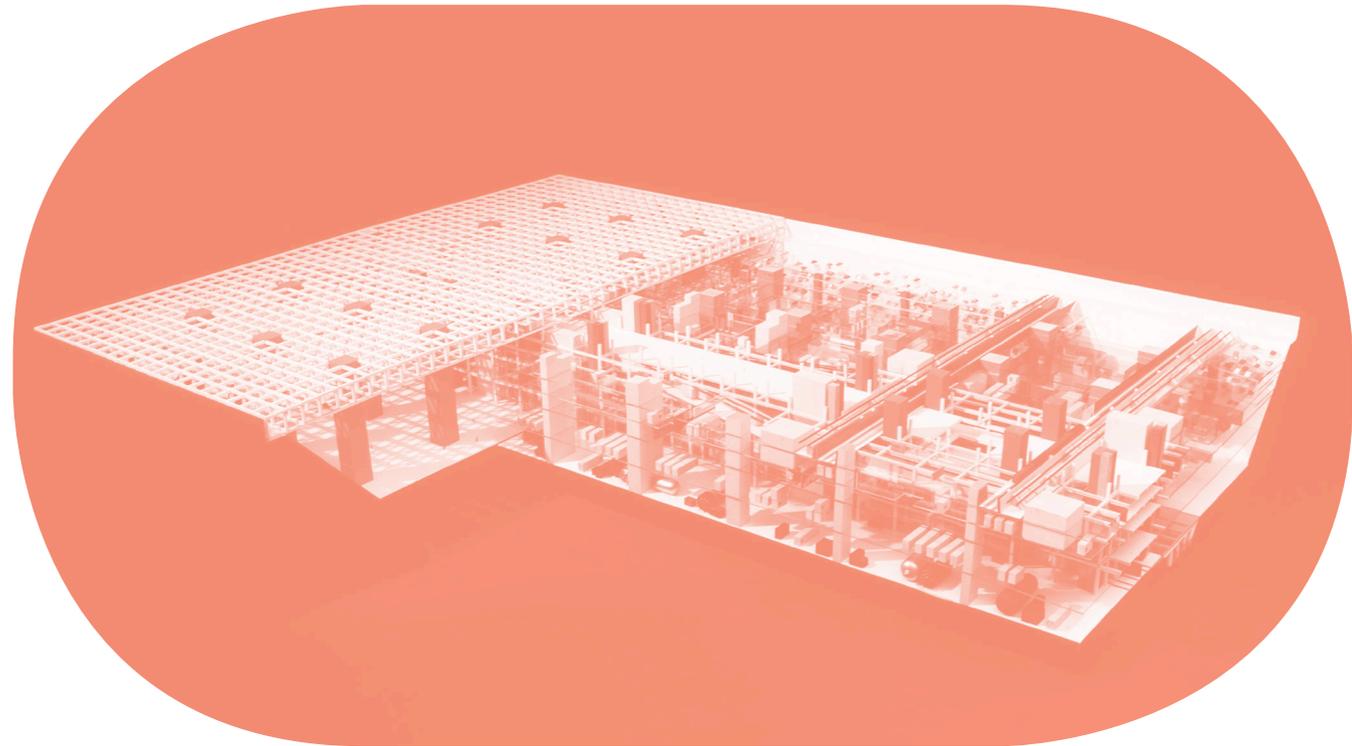
Above all, Birkerts saw the multilevel city as a way to hide the unsightly aspects of American cities while clearing acreage for more aesthetically desirable development. He was, as his son Sven Birkerts later reflected in a memoir, disdainful of “the trappings of our suburban life—the bulb-and-pennant extravaganzas of the car lots, the neon exuberance of the fast-food joints springing up everywhere.” This snobbish attitude wasn’t motivated by any particular distaste for cars in general—although Birkerts did favor European

brands like Jaguar over American ones—but rather by a dislike for forms of development that catered to drivers.

The SUS project was, in this sense, a negation of fellow architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, whose embrace of the everyday commercial strip was popularized in their book *Learning from Las Vegas*. Their cynical populism elevated the suburban commercial landscape into a kind of inevitability, a reality that architects must view nonjudgmentally. For Birkerts, on the contrary, suburbia’s large low-lying buildings and scenographic signage was far from “almost all right” (as Venturi and Scott Brown famously wrote of billboards). “We have to impose a form of public ‘birth control’ upon certain buildings,” Birkerts wrote in 1974, “to check the ugliness of urban sprawl.” Aside from Birkerts’ prickly metaphor, which alludes to coercive ideas at the time on abortion and contraception, his point is that we can choose to intervene in urban development rather than see our undesirable cities as the inevitable outcome of “natural” market forces.



What then might one’s commute look like in a Detroit transformed by autonomous vehicles? The technology’s innovators have offered their own rose-tinted visions, but current trends suggest less desirable scenarios might be in store. What if, for example, our infrastructure was not required to treat all autonomous vehicles equally? What if cities offer better-maintained, proprietary fast lanes so that those using particular technologies can reach their destinations faster? If so, where might this leave those less financially fortunate or less willing to cede control to an algorithm? As with recent debates about the internet, the neutrality of



our streets is at stake. The best way to avoid these outcomes could be firm and targeted government regulation, though the political will necessary to enact it may be difficult to amass due to the influence of industrial lobbying.

Birkerts' projects imagined two ways to escape from Detroit's existing street network. The SUS project, on the one hand, proposed a new city form that was consciously and logically designed; rather than incremental improvement or dystopian cynicism, it sincerely promised an egalitarian transit ideal. The dual-mode study proposed bypassing the consequences of unruly urban development on an elevated guideway. And yet, seen through more cynical eyes, the dual-mode study shows a fixed infrastructure designed for specific technology that might ultimately have had a short lifespan.

Both the powerful promise and ultimate limitation of autonomous vehicles is that algorithmic calculation permits them to maneuver efficiently through the messy, illogical street systems we have inherited. This unfortunately discourages the kind of transformative thinking embodied in Birkerts' proposals. Would renewed government commitment to transit research foster thinking that is not beholden to the profit motive? Perhaps. But proprietary fast lanes, like those in GM's dual-mode proposal, must be avoided so that the neutrality of our present street infrastructure is maintained—those able to afford the convenience of autonomous vehicles shouldn't be able to buy their way out of traffic.

During its first decade, the UMTA fostered an emerging technocracy that aimed to bring logistical expertise and computerized data to bear on the problems of America's cities. The outcomes were not entirely positive. At times these projects drew local funding away from improvements to existing systems or were used to justify a racialized distribution of resources. Government-funded research is far from a panacea.

In 1974 Congress gave the UMTA an expanded mandate that permitted grants not only for new transit systems but also for day-to-day operating budgets. Subsequent UMTA support saw many existing systems through lean years.

Unfortunately, this effectively took the UMTA out of the research and development realm, leaving support for the visionary process of imagining new transportation systems to corporations and universities.

Historians have looked back on this era of technocratic, top-down planning mostly with derision, but it did foster an experimental, idealist mode of thinking that is absent in our era, an absence that results in what cultural critic Mark Fisher calls capitalist realism. And yet, despite a supposedly realistic perspective, many municipalities remain starved for transit funding while corporations find evermore ways to privatize or enclose. The present atmosphere of austerity too often offers free reign for capitalists.

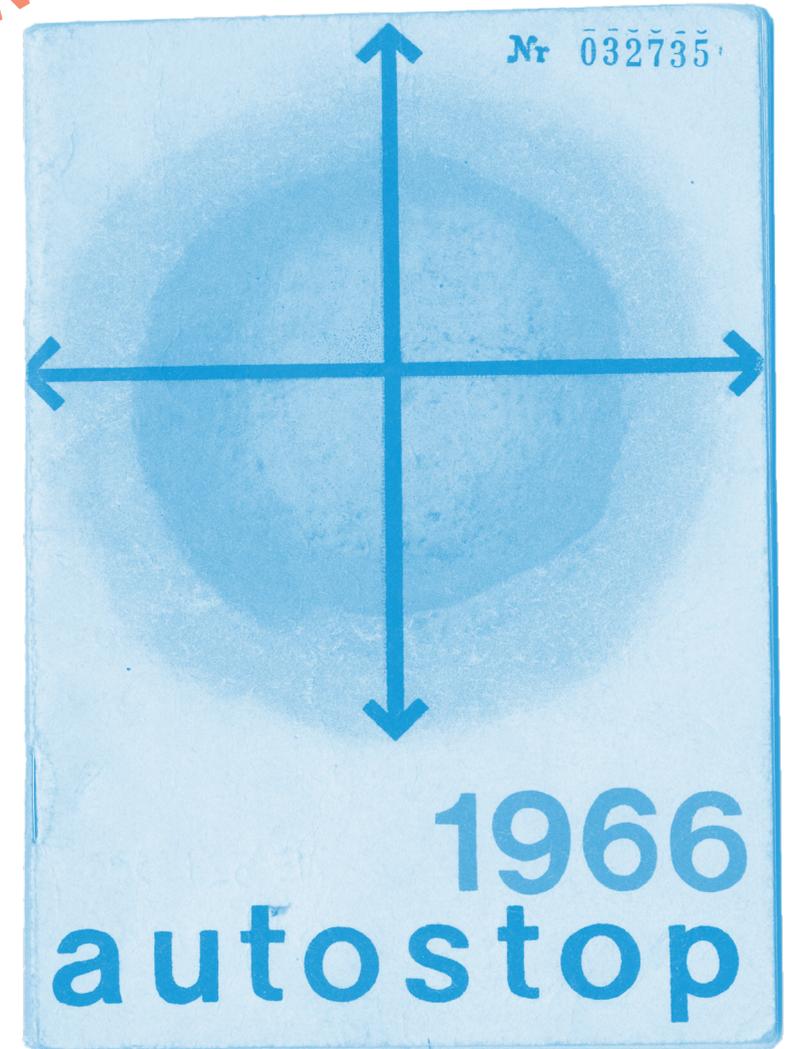
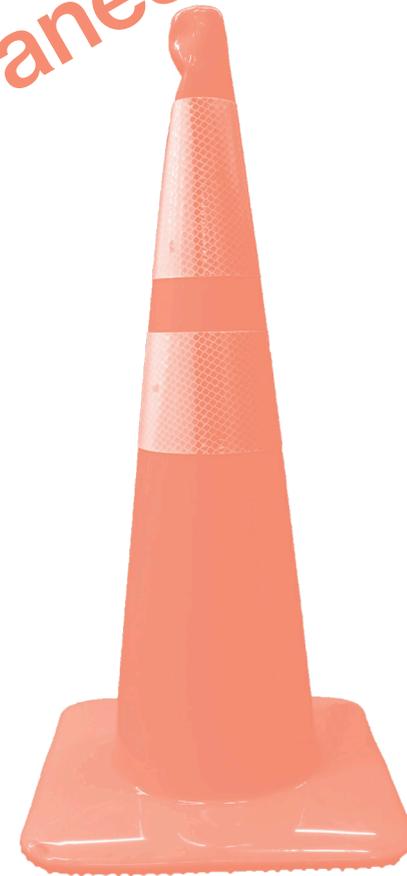
Rideshare companies, for example, are essentially privately owned transit systems that run on public roads, while passing as much of the tax and maintenance burden as possible onto their precarious "private contractor" employees. More inclined to ask for forgiveness than permission, rideshare companies have freely experimented with autonomous vehicle technologies that may have profound impacts on urban life as we know it. So far, municipalities from Palo Alto to Pittsburgh have bowed to corporate requests for regulatory leniency. (Regulation has been less of a concern in Detroit because of existing research and testing facilities built there decades ago by the Big Three.) Such shortsightedness is typical of our current moment, but it should be seen as neither necessary nor inevitable.

It may only be a few years before we see how the shift to autonomous vehicles has affected our transport systems. Here's to hoping that by then we have a better idea what we want our cities of the future to look like, and what steps we need to take for them to live up to our hopeful expectations. ▲

Previous page, top: Photograph of a model showing a conduit with ground-level green space removed. Photographic slide, Box 86, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Photographer unknown. *Bottom:* Exploded section perspective drawing of conduit. Photographic slide, Box 86, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Autostop: Lessons from the Polish Hitchhiking Program

Vanessa Kowalski



Giuseppe was already starting to grow impatient only some minutes after we had been dropped off at a petrol station somewhere near Mâcon, France, where the eastbound A40 merges with the northbound A6. I too was starting to lose patience with his impatience. We had flown from Lisbon, where we'd both been studying, to Geneva, and we planned to spend the next month thumbing our ways home; he was heading to Italy, and I was going to southern Poland to pay my family a surprise visit. After several friends had recounted their successful round-trip Portugal to Morocco hitchhiking journeys with ear-to-ear grins, I found myself jealous and thus started hitching my way up, down, right, and left around Portugal—but this was my first multicountry odyssey. I had been collecting reviews and experiences for several years already on my profile on Couchsurfing, a platform where hosts can offer their homes to travelers at no cost. The shift from staying in strangers' homes, empty rooms, beds, and treehouse floors across both the United States and Europe to hitchhiking empty seats in a car felt natural and surprisingly overdue. Couchsurfing or hitchhiking was something like a barter economy. Those opening their living spaces and cars to strangers, me included, often felt that while their gestures may not be repaid in the same currency by the same person, they might be returned in another form tenfold. As a young exchange student without a source of substantial income at the time, I, and many others like me, had applied for the karma credit payment plan by signing with our thumbs.

Although we were in no rush, asking for rides in fueling stations had proved to be a lot easier and faster than sticking our thumbs out on expressway

Page 77: Illustrated front cover of an autostop (hitchhiking) booklet from 1966.

Above: Illustrated back cover of an autostop booklet featuring a red circle that mimics a design used by the military. It notes that the total cost of the booklet including a map is forty-five zloty, which goes toward a camp fund.



shoulders and on-ramps—we could choose whom to approach, having quickly learned that those our age were more likely to make room for us and our bulging backpacks. We shared no common language with a driver that Giuseppe and I rode with, despite the six between the two of us. He had given us a twenty euro note, a pack of cigarettes—half of which we had smoked together while trying to hide our billowing clouds from his wife and children, who were trailing behind us in another car—and a scratched CD of religious music he'd been blasting throughout the duration of our ride. At the next stop, Giuseppe went inside to refuel himself and spent his half of the twenty on a candy bar. Adam approached me outside. He had seen us unsuccessfully asking around for a lift and welcomed us to join him and his daughter, Julia, on the way to Paris, some 250 miles away.

Julia must have been about ten years old; her thin, light blonde hair fell at her shoulders, and she didn't so much as smile at me when I sank into the passenger seat, grateful and delighted to part with my bag in the trunk, if only momentarily. Giuseppe, making a home wherever he went, leaned his head on the window in the back seat and fell asleep almost instantly, while Adam started to make small talk with me. What brings you here? Where are you heading? What have you seen? Before I could decide whether to bullet point my remarks in a well-rehearsed monologue or indulge in the details, he nodded to the analog camera I had strapped across my chest like an additional safety belt. He spoke for Julia as though she were not sitting right behind me, kicking the back of my seat. "She likes photography too—I just got her this new video recorder." I swiveled around in my seat to see a pair of averted eyes and a camcorder taking shelter in her lap. Two hours had passed, and my plus-one had started snoring when Adam shifted gears and switched from small to big talk. Julia's mother had recently passed away, and with a welling tear, Adam disclosed that Julia had become far more reserved

ever since. He admitted that he had approached us because he wanted to show his daughter that she could be open-minded toward unexpected encounters and kind to strangers, and because he thought that my camera might make us click. I passed the camera back to her for the remainder of the trip and heard her firing the shutter and winding the spool, unsure of whether she was photographing the landscape whizzing by out the window or the exchanges transpiring within the car's interior. The film I developed several months later evinced both.

We were somewhere on the outskirts of Paris when Adam said he could drop us off at another petrol station before heading in a different direction. When we exited the car, Giuseppe was well rested and oblivious to all that had transpired. Adam eagerly asked to take a photograph of us all together. We nodded in agreement, and he propped his own little digital camera on the hood of the car, set the timer, and darted into place. We had exchanged contact information before waving goodbye, before the rain pummeled the curbside. A year later I received an empty-bodied email with only the photograph we had taken attached; in it, Julia was not only smiling, but she was gently hugging my side like a properly fitting backpack.

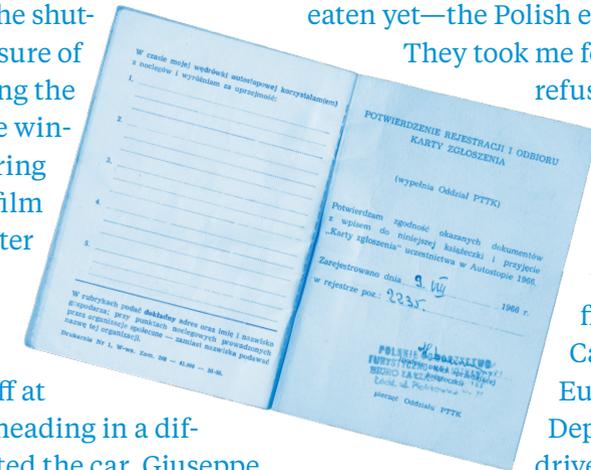
I was relieved to leave the heaviest of my baggage, Giuseppe, at a *liftplaats*—a designated hitchhiking stop—in Amsterdam. A week later a man in a smart car stopped to offer me a ride, and he only had one seat. I solo-thumbed my way through Germany and stayed with an architecture student I had met back in Lisbon who had given me a pair of socks with her name stitched into them. From the city of Braunschweig, I sped up the autobahn with another driver in a Mini Cooper to

Above: A list for travelers where they could fill out the names or addresses of the places where they had stopped overnight and had an exceptional experience. On the right-hand side, a registration receipt is stamped and dated by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society office in Łódź.

Berlin. Eventually I was rescued from the summer heat of high noon by a Polish couple crossing the Germany–Poland border to go furniture shopping. They couldn't believe they'd met a Polish-American girl alone on the curb of a petrol station in the middle of nowhere, and that she hadn't eaten yet—the Polish equivalent of blasphemy.

They took me for a pierogi lunch and refused to get back in the car until I ate all eight. They also bought me a beer, a map of the area, and a burrito for later. Soon they hailed a taxi at a traffic light to follow us to the Castorama parking lot (the European equivalent of Home Depot), where they slipped the driver some *złoty* to take me

to another station. I wrote down their address so that I could send them a postcard when I reached home. Drained by the midday libations, I later fell asleep in the passenger seat riding through Wrocław, even though my driver had offered to pay for an overnight stay in a hotel. My last ride before reaching my family home in the small village of Dąbrowa, about a thirty-minute drive from the center of Poland's old capital city Kraków, was with a man twice my age who called his own family to tell them he'd be late for his dinner because he was helping me get to mine.



The history of hitchhiking, also called lifting, thumbing, or autostop, may be as old as the invention of the wheel, but the act isn't limited to motor vehicles, and many have hitched boats, airplanes, trains, animals, and snowmobiles. Essentially anything that moves from point A to point B can be hailed and hopped onto. While hitchhiking remains a common practice worldwide because it is both economically and ecologically friendly, a few local governments in the United States have outlawed the practice. Hitchhiking remains semilegal in forty-four out of fifty states, though in most of those, people aren't allowed to thumb directly on the road. In Europe and elsewhere, however, while hitchhiking laws may vary from country to country, it is often not only legal but encouraged; in the Netherlands, for example, travelers can wait at liftplaats to catch a ride, or in Israel, *trempiasts* (hitchhikers) point their fingers to the ground instead of sticking out their thumbs at *trempiadas* (designated places for soliciting rides at highway junctions or main roads).

In Poland, my final destination on this particular trip, the practice of autostop was legalized in 1957, the same year that Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* hit bookstore shelves. Prior to its legalization, hitchhiking was already a popular way to get around, but in the 1950s media outlets and other organizations convinced the government to approve a formalized hitchhiking program. From the time of the program's implementation to its ultimate dismantling in the early 1990s, hitchhikers purchased tens of thousands of travel booklets with insurance, which cost about twenty dollars and contained coupons representing a set number of kilometers that riders could exchange with drivers for travel.

Above: Personal information page of the autostop booklet asks individuals to print their first and last name, birthplace, and home address, as well as their work or school address. Booklets were only valid when purchased with proper ID.



Drivers could in turn receive reimbursement for the cost of gasoline.

Just a year before the practice of autostop was officially recognized and promoted, workers in Poznań had taken to the streets demanding bread and better wages in a series of mass protests that later became known as the Poznań 1956 Uprising. Although it would be another thirty-three years before the Polish People's Republic would formally vote in democratic elections, the Poznań 1956 Uprising signaled the start of a chain reaction that led to significant changes in Polish policy. The subsequent 1980 workers' strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk birthed the trade union Solidarity, the first independent labor union in a Soviet-bloc country. Solidarity was led by Lech Wałęsa, a former shipyard electrician who would become president of Poland in 1990.

Why would Poland promote an autostop initiative, while neighboring Communist countries like Czechoslovakia outlawed the practice? For one thing, autostop embodied the symbolic wealth and individual freedom associated with automobility in a country characterized by shortages on every level. During World War II, alongside the loss of infrastructure and territory, Poland had suffered the most devastating of human losses, about 5.8 million people, or nearly 17 percent of its total population. In 1944 the country was desperately struggling to rebuild—its capital city had been left in ruins after the Warsaw Uprising, and its territory was about a fifth smaller than before the war due to border renegotiations with Germany and the Soviet Union.

Poland's musicians and writers encouraged autostop as a practice that symbolized individuality and modernity, while government officials used the opportunity to exert a form of control over individual travel. The booklets sold to hitchhikers contained not only coupons for drivers but also maps with suggested routes, encouraging

exploration of the newly redrawn territories of Poland after the war. These recommended journeys led travelers to locations including Red Army monuments and sites of former concentration camps, where hitchhikers, who were mostly university students, would be confronted with icons of nationalist pride. This was not only a cost-effective way to promote a particular nationalist agenda, but also a means to exert control over drivers' routes. The state-controlled Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK) sold autostop booklets and created a registry of all booklet owners, which served as a way of regulating who could hitchhike.

Although the sale of booklets was being monitored by the state, hitchhikers were not required to follow the suggested routes—they could choose their own destinations and drivers. Their routes were also always subject to the whims of weather and road conditions. Hitchhiking wasn't just about travel to a final destination, but about the promise of meeting new people and the unpredictable adventures to be had on the way. Polish hitchhikers were taking to the country's roads in hoards in search of perhaps nothing more than experiencing driving in a car for the first time, making new and like-minded friends, and letting the winds of momentary emancipation steer them.

In 1990 Wałęsa came into governmental power, and Poland transitioned to a free-market economy like a collision at full speed, leading to rapid if uneven economic growth. In 1994 the PTTK discontinued the sale of autostop booklets.

Above: A page shows tips for travelers, reminding those thumbing around Poland that there is a lot to see, especially in regard to forests, lakes, and architectural marvels. It says that for a successful trip, one must bring comfortable shoes, two pairs of socks, overalls ("although they shrink after the first wash"), a hat with a wide rim, a white T-shirt, needles and thread, safety pins, string, pasta, soup, spices, and cans of preserved meats. Aspirin, iodine, and Band-Aids are recommended as well. Travelers should note that drivers "really don't like" when hitchhikers are "lying in wait."



There were other factors, such as the impact of popular films like Ida Lupino's *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953), Roman Polanski's *Knife in the Water* (1962), and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), all of which emphasized the potential dangers of hitchhiking. But it's also possible that Poland's initial approach toward the practice of autostop was ill-suited to its embrace of capitalism.

Although the autostop initiative in Poland was discontinued in the midnineties, it remains known as one of the most successful initiatives to formalize and provide government support for hitchhiking. Decades later, this success at shattering people's fears of letting strangers into their vehicles has found new life with the exponential rise of ridesharing platforms such as Uber. While sites like Hitchwiki use the web as a forum for hitchhikers to share experiences and location-specific tips for others thumbing their way around the world, rideshare apps use the web as a

tool to blur the lines delineating the roles of rider, consumer, driver, and friend. Rideshare apps rely on the vernaculars of friendship, connection, community-building, and eco-friendly exploration. Lyft's website, for instance, proclaims, "Lyft is your friend with a car!" Yet these companies also profit by taking major portions of their drivers' earnings; a recent study found that Uber and Lyft drivers make a median wage of \$3.37 per hour. This capital-driven system usurps the language originally used by socialist ideologies, following Poland's route in reverse.

While unexpected connections can certainly be made between fellow riders and drivers in this system, especially with options like Uberpool, currency always occupies the ever undesired middle seat and creates the conditions that make disconnection not only acceptable but expected. Like the Polish government's attempts at mapping and data tracking, with ridesharing apps the route

is mapped, the ETA calculated, and every sharp left turn followed by the GPS. Researchers and governmental officials are already seeking to capitalize on this wealth of information collected by the private sector, which could show popular routes and destinations, problematic traffic areas, frequent accident sites, and common pick-up or drop-off locations. It's not a stretch to think such data may soon be used to inform new city and transit infrastructure.

Poland's forgotten experiment in ridesharing provides a lesson in how government, technology, and culture can shape one another, thus altering the nature of our movement and transportation systems. Although I continue to hitchhike and pick up fellow hitchhikers and to couchsurf and welcome others to surf on my couch, I also rent out my Helsinki flat on Airbnb and rent the homes of others when I travel for work. I use ridesharing apps or taxis whenever I find myself stranded on the curbside in the rain in cities like New York, or when the sun is too hot to bear another moment in the sprawling Los Angeles landscape. Traversing the binaries of point A and point B ad infinitum, whether paying for convenience and privacy or inviting others to join along the way, we might one day arrive instead at a balance between tech-bred impatience and the serendipity afforded by a will to wander, resisting the prescribed route and a final destination altogether. ▲

Of Carts and Cobblestones: Views on Jewish Identity in Present-Day Kraków

Eliza Levinson



It's bumpy in the backseat when a golf cart drives over cobblestones—this, I realize, I should have anticipated.

I'm hunching over my notebook in the middle of scribbling something—the driver has lived in Kraków, the Jewish quarter, her whole life—messy letters made by shaking hands. I smear a line across the page, crumple it slightly as we lean forward. From the front seat, the driver (Beata, as she's introduced herself, smiling warmly and extending a hand) turns and asks me if I'm sure I'm warm enough. I am, I say.

I'm in Kraków, Poland, and it's the middle of February. The air is cleaner than the last time I was here (*Early November; visiting a friend, I'd explained*). Back then, the coal dust that settles in the valley was so thick that even my host showing me around had to wear a pointed black mask over his mouth, the acrid air making us both dizzy. Still, when Beata asks what brought me here, I choke on the words to explain. *I'm Jewish, I'm American, I'm not from here—but sort of from here, I'm from here less than you are and maybe as much so, I'm lost, I'm somewhere, I'm looking.*

Kraków is an old city, one in which the average building has already stood for about four centuries. Like many European regions directly impacted by World War II, Kraków's impressive landscape of castles, narrow alleyways, and dim yellow lights is pockmarked by ruin, rubble, and graffitied buildings. To the modern tourist, Kraków feels stuck in time, trapped somewhere between the present and the craters of the past. (In my notes, I write what feels like a relevant synecdoche of this chronological dislocation: *a golf cart tumbling through cobblestone streets.*)

The peculiarity of Kraków's design—its indecisive temporal location and its unforgiving geographic one—has been exacerbated by a relatively recent development in the city's economy: a lucrative tourist industry following the fall of Communism in 1989. Shortly afterward, tourism boomed following the on-site filming of Steven Spielberg's now-classic Holocaust film, *Schindler's List* (1993). Ironically and fittingly, many of the locations used in the film are not historically accurate. Around this time, a non-Jewish Kraków citizen and a team of Warsaw-

based Jewish artists and academics established the Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków: a whirlwind of lectures, religious ceremonies, theatrical productions, historical exhibitions, and klezmer and klezmer-adjacent musical performances. It's an event so popular its annual iteration now spans ten days each summer. The popularity of the festival, paired with the departure of Communist rule, encouraged the Polish government and foreign beneficiaries to restore local Jewish sites that had been impacted in the years since the war, contributing to what many have called a Jewish "revival" in the city.

Thus, a tourist industry was born: buses to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Schindler's Factory, as well as a dramatic makeover of the depleted Jewish district, spearheaded by non-Jewish Poles. Kazimierz, an area some refer to as Jew-rassic Park, Jew Zoo, and Diaspora Disney, has transformed from a dangerous corner of Kraków into an uncanny diorama of post-Holocaust kitsch, built for an international paying audience. Restaurants, bars, and cafes have names like Ester, Ariel, and Rubinstein and are festooned with Jewish iconography and signs evoking Hebrew lettering, offering Jewish-style and kosher options (some of which are not, in fact, kosher) along with klezmer music (performed mostly by non-Jewish musicians). Many Jewish scholars who have traveled to Kazimierz since the area's "revival" have described startling confrontations with small wooden sculptures of bearded, dark-eyed Jews with *yarmulkes* and *payot*, as well as hook-nosed mascots grinning garishly from the labels of self-proclaimed Jewish-style vodka: grim caricatured flotsam churned up from the currents of history. The last time I was in Kazimierz, a merchant at the local market square was selling a 1930s-era yellow star, a pointed green helmet, and dusty black-and-white photographs of somber families that look like old photographs of my own: European Jews with arms at their sides, curly dark hair, and dark, serious eyes.

Previous page: A visitor on a Kraków golf cart tour takes a photo of one of the historic Jewish synagogues in the Kazimierz central square.

Technically speaking, this is the opposite of a ghost town—a phrase conjuring dilapidated buildings, overgrowth, and the last remnants of a place as it crumbles into the void. Kazimierz, by contrast, glimmers and shines. Everything is for sale and packaged—fresh and ready for constant consumption. Still, there's something about the idea of ghost towns that won't stop reverberating through my head while I'm here: a monument to something that could have been, that was, that itself echoes endlessly, gesturing toward the vanquished possibility of a murdered people, impossibly.

The perennial flowering of tourists in this graveyard of a city fascinates me. What is it they—no, we—are getting out of this place? How does a city build its identity around making an absence present, and then offering that absence to the masses for a price? There is something about this ruptured temporality in a haunted city that fascinates me—it says something about our modern economy, about spectacle and comprehension, and about the ways we choose to have a dialogue with painful history. Kraków, which at first I hated—this twisted ode to a traumatic past—started to come to me in dreams, beckoning from behind my eyes if I stared into space long enough. In that ethereal tugging only ghosts can conjure, I was pulled back before I could help it.



When I first come up to Beata in Kazimierz, next to the pastel-pink Jewish library and Israeli-inspired cafe Cheder, she looks at me and sizes me up, not unkindly. She's in her thirties, probably, and has long dark hair and pleather leggings. I've made an appointment with a company called City Tours for noon, so when I see a cart waiting outside our agreed meeting spot, I assume I'm in the right place. Beata takes care to zip and unzip the plastic walls of the cart for me, and she offers me a blanket. She's sorry for her limited English, she says, and it's a ten-minute drive to our first stop, so she'll play me a short recording to explain what we'll be seeing today. She has long fake fingernails that clack when she presses one to the screen of her phone, plugged into the AUX cable of the cart. There's a tinny crackling sound, and a woman with a thick Polish accent starts speaking. *Welcome to Kraków*, she tells me, *a city with a very rich history.*

Leading up to World War II, Polish Jews occupied an ambivalent place in the national culture. Both within and outside Polish-Jewish communities for centuries, Jews were integral to Polish culture and also decidedly removed from it, a segregation both self and state imposed. This was not insignificant to the overall city culture: as of 1931 there were 56,515 Jews in Kraków. Due to the pogroms, the devastation of the Holocaust, and subsequent violence between survivors and their non-Jewish neighbors, the total Jewish population of Kraków today is estimated to be between 180 and 300 people.

I'm having an impossible time concentrating, staring at the city that looks slightly fuzzy through the cart's plastic walls: a vantage of Kraków shared by so many other transient visitors, whirring past in their own plastic cases. The streets around me melt from foreign into familiar, and I try to remind myself not to get comfortable: *Something terrible happened here.* Infuriatingly, it almost feels that the more I try to focus on them, the more the relics blend in with shiny dress shops and teens with fat headphones around their necks. The recording ends, and Beata and I are silent. She tells me we're going first to a fragment of

the ghetto wall, and when I ask her if she's from Kraków, she says yes—in fact, she was born and raised in the Jewish Quarter, where she still lives. She slows the cart to a stop and gestures for me to look to my right side.

The ghetto wall, or what remains of it now, comprises fragments of tall, dark gray concrete, curving in half-moons at the top, muddied-looking with damp mossy webs of lines from snow and time. I don't tell Beata that I've seen the wall before—in fact, it's the first thing my friend took me to the last time I was here. (*You don't understand what I've been living around*, he'd said while pressing my hand to the stone.) There's that tinny crackle again as Beata starts the audio recording, and I furrow my eyebrows at the wall: focus.

These walls used to run through the city. They divided Kraków's Jewish citizens from the non-Jewish citizens. They were built to emulate the gravestones of the Jewish people, says the recorded woman, though I know that last fact isn't true. Beata looks at me and says, *very sad*, and raises her eyebrows to emphasize that she understands the gravity of this tour that she gives multiple times a day. There is a pause and I say, *yes*. She asks me if I'd like to get out and take a picture. I shake my head. After a moment, she laughs and settles in her seat. We drive.



Death has been a spectator sport throughout history, from gladiator battles to public executions, but it is only in the last several decades that scholarship has given this phenomenon a name: *thanatourism*, as coined by scholar A. V. Seaton, also called dark tourism. Much has been written, too, about the peculiar phenomenon of Holocaust tourism, looking at its varied manifestations as Zionist propaganda, an act of diasporic Jews gesturing back toward a distant religious identity, or pure voyeurism of Holocaust-made kitsch.

There is something to the particularity of the driven tour that fascinates me, these golf carts with their plastic walls and package deals for two-day shuttles to Auschwitz and the famous Wieliczka Salt Mine (two UNESCO World Heritage sites in one go!). Somewhere the decision was made: these are the places people want to go, the places we will show them. Or perhaps it was thrust upon them: this is, for better or worse, for you or me, what our city is.

As scholar Glenn W. Gentry argues in his article "Walking with the Dead," driven tours of dark touristic sites offer a limited scope of a given landscape, perhaps because of their efficacy and convenience. For Gentry, who looks at ghost tours in Savannah, Georgia, these tours—and the macabre impetus that inspires them—are part and parcel of a larger understanding of place. He argues that the trips are useless without a nuanced, haptic interaction with a larger historical context in mind, something better achieved through a walking interaction with a city, as opposed to a driven one. As Gentry describes:

Some tour participants surveyed complained of becoming disoriented on motorized tours, left uncertain of the location of places visited. . . . Referencing the landscape through the window frame is similar to engaging place vicariously through print and video media. . . . The vehicle's roof and windows also frame and limit tour participant's engagement with place.

This is, perhaps, a generous interpretation of what tourists aim to get out of these haunted visits: not everyone is necessarily looking for nuanced understanding or education on, say, a family vacation. But such removed, leisurely views of a place take on a different context when the dominant tourist industry is predicated explicitly on genocide.



Next we go to Schindler's Factory. As we keep driving I ask, *Do you think this is very much what living in Kraków is like? All these landmarks?*

No, no way, she says. *It's a normal city; there are lots of fun things to do here*. After this she points out places she likes to go, tucked between plaques, stacked stones, and Segway tours: an ice cream shop that's perfect in the summertime and a good area for drinking with friends. We see a dog standing in the street, and Beata stops the cart. She stands up, says something in Polish to a couple across the way. The dog isn't theirs, they say, shaking their heads. She gets back in the cart, distressed. *I love animals*, she explains.

Schindler's Factory is mobbed with tourists, a line so long it stretches far outside and wraps around the building. A few small groups stand between the factory and the contemporary art museum next door, putting their arms around each others' waists; someone stands in front of them to take a picture.

Is it always like this? I ask. This busy?

Yes, says Beata. *During the summer it is even more*.

Do you find that very many people want to do these tours with you? I ask.

Yes, she says. *We do a very good business, it is a very good way to make money. Poland is very poor*, she explains. *You can make much more money driving a cart like this than you can owning a shop. Once you own your own cart, you can make your own money. I want to buy my own cart eventually*, she says. *Would you like me to take your picture here?*

No, I say. There is another silence.

I will get you a pamphlet from inside, she says. She stops the cart and runs into the building, returning a moment later with a black booklet emblazoned with red and white lettering: *Kraków Under Nazi Occupation, 1939–1945*. I do not open it, not in the cart nor afterward. I hold it in my hands the rest of the ride.

Now is a particularly salient moment to be studying the Jewish "revival" in Kraków, the way the city has built itself around the Holocaust. Two weeks before I arrived, the far-right Polish government passed a law that, according to *New York Times* journalist Marc Santora, makes it illegal "to suggest that Poland bore any responsibility for atrocities committed by Nazi Germany." According to this law, the phrase "Polish death camps" inaccurately depicts Nazi death camps in Poland as having been created and operated for ideological reasons by Poles, which the government opposes for historical inaccuracy. The legislation also outlaws statements that depict "the Polish nation" as having colluded with the Nazis. Violations of this new law are punishable by imprisonment for up to three years. Following the passage of the law, predictable opponents such as Israel and the United States chimed in to voice their vehement opposition. For Poles, of course, the law emblemizes an existential question of the state's self-identification and its reconciliation with history.

The day after my tour with Beata, I spoke with Adam, an American Jew of Polish descent living in Kraków and researching Jewish life there. I also talked with Ania, a Polish native, Jewish studies scholar, and tour guide for the Free Walking Tours company in Kraków. As Ania explained to me, contemporary Poland finds itself in a moment of crisis. From the occupation of the Nazis to the occupation of the Communists, Poland has had only about three decades to define its identity in a modern world. Poland's far-right government and its far-right supporters have latched onto the prevailing Holocaust narrative as one necessitating "clarification": something many believe will help Poland establish its name independent of its history.

There is an obvious irony in the government's attempt to deny this history, the very same history that has brought all of us to Kraków—me, Adam, Ania, Beata, and the tourists both in and outside of Cheder. From the ubiquity of the Holocaust industry in the city to its performative presentation of history, the weight of Kraków's past falls thick and dizzying as brown-gray smog.

In the Jewish faith we are taught to leave stones at the graves of those we have lost. Other markers of mourning—flowers, notes, even ourselves—fade or fly away, while a solid stone remains. While walking through the city I see two women poised on Segways in front of the city's central monument to the genocide of the Jewish people of Poland, a large boulder placed in the center of the Kazimierz square. I do not fault these women the ridiculousness their image provides. If Kraków has taught me anything, it is this, a ritual: bowing in the face of time, knowing that a single person alone cannot stop the rolling currents of history, however great or terrible they may be.

Kraków's Jewish history is essential to the city; it is the city itself, scattered like golf carts on a cobblestone street. These wisps and whispers of history reveal themselves in tendrils, walls, and cracked windows practically curled like beckoning fingers, reaching out, asking, *How will you remember me?* In the golf cart I am but a conduit in an infinite lineage of loss. I leave the stones I find to rest on other nonliving things. ▲

WeCommute: Corporate Control of the Third Space

Patrick McAndrews



In the foreground, two or three well-dressed young professionals sit on a distressed leather couch, enjoying themselves with coffees in hand. The background is populated by a floor plan of open ceilings, glass partitions, and warm wood surfaces; there are pops of color and a plethora of wood and metal seats inhabited by busy people working on their laptops or phones. These inhabitants appear to be somewhere between work and leisure. In this WeWork ad as well as others, the spaces feel comfortable, accessible, and approachable. They seem like scenes right out of sociologist Ray Oldenburg's description of "third places": cafes, clubs, libraries, bookstores, parks, and other spaces that encourage lighthearted and open social behavior.

The third place, as Oldenburg frames it in his book *The Great Good Place*, is distinct from the first place (the home) and the second place (the workplace). Oldenburg outlines eight characteristics of third places: neutral, leveling, conversational, accessible and accommodating, frequented by regulars, modest, playfully conversational, and understood by users as a sort of home away from home. Third places are "anchors" of community, as they encourage civil engagement between participants on equal footing. Often older spaces created for other purposes "are commandeered by those seeking a place where they can linger in good company." Within these annexed places, playfulness is the chief virtue, with participants looking forward to their next visit and conversation. Although a radically different sphere than the home, occupants of these commandeered spaces feel comfortable and supported. Unfortunately, these anchors of society are shifting in popularity and purpose.

The contemporary commuter still needs to get from "home" to "work," but the transition between these spheres is increasingly ambiguous. Trains and cars on millions of miles of bridges, overpasses, highways, and tracks carried the majority of the workforce in the twentieth century. The twenty-first-century commuter is constantly negotiating more ephemeral states of home, work, leisure, and the liminal spaces in between. Taking

advantage of these dissolved boundaries, the past roles of commuting and third places have been co-opted by companies like WeWork to track and capitalize on data about workers. Increased use of technology in the workplace allows employers to communicate with workers outside standard working hours and beyond the traditional workplace. Computers, smartphones, Wi-Fi, coworking spaces, coliving companies, and ride-sharing apps are all now important elements of the contemporary commute for a certain class of workers.

People in the United States are now expected to work longer hours than they used to, and individual spaces are expected to accommodate and transform for different uses and users. As companies like WeWork design their office suites with the coded ambiance of coffee shops and hip bars, the demarcations between home and work are being systematically erased. WeWork's subscribers are enticed to work longer, mix their work lives with their social lives, and spend as much time as possible within the "We" umbrella. In 2016 the company launched WeLive, a luxury apartment rental service that, according to their website, includes "mailrooms and laundry rooms that double as bars and event spaces" as well as "communal kitchens, roof decks, and hot tubs."

In this new vernacular, the commute is about observing details and understanding the signals and signs of these code-switched spaces. The veteran commuter seeks to discover the intended purpose of a space and the objects within it that have been designed to promote her work productivity. The free food and lounge areas may encourage her to work through lunch, or the happy hour event at eight in the evening may nudge her to stay at work late to save on travel time. The coliving apartments upstairs encourage her to come in during the weekend because of the proximity between home and work.

Even before WeWork's founding in 2010, businesses expanded the boundaries of the workplace in order to maximize profits. Omnipresent work duties precipitated the need for flexible and informal environments outside of the workplace.

The patterns of postwar commutes between suburbs and city centers gave way to beltway office parks, then to the daisy-chain patterns of disparate telecommuters and freelancers. Divergent commuters annexed available spaces to support their working needs throughout the day. By the early 2000s, many third places started to support Wi-Fi connectivity and installed convenience outlets at customer seating areas. This was followed by a steady uptick in the number of workers doing work on their phones and laptops in coffee shops, bookstores, and cafes that had previously only been done in the office.

Much of the contemporary market for third place aesthetics is divorced from Oldenburg's tenets in favor of affluent professionals and students looking for Wi-Fi and comfortable seating. The implicit requirements of such spaces are to make purchases and to not disturb other patrons. Under the pretenses of etiquette and respect, operators and patrons of these spaces foster implied and candid terms of use. "Restrooms for Customer Use Only" signs and similar messages are part of a more explicit campaign to cull participation by the undesired. Contemporary chains like Starbucks and Barnes & Noble as well as similarly oriented local businesses rely on these rules of decorum to make a profit, rather than to allow community to form. This lack of rapport is evident during midday workweek hours, when animated social interactions are discouraged as interferences and distractions for freelance workers. These businesses market themselves as third places, largely with an aesthetic veneer, while operating in ways that are actually antithetical to third place ideals. Many of Starbucks' twenty-first-century store rollouts, for example, use blackened steel, finished woods, and distressed leather mixed with local design flavor to attract well-heeled Gen Xers and millennials for work and play without actually being conducive to community building.

Starbucks and other third place look-alikes act as notorious and active sites of racism and exclusion throughout the United States. In a 2015 incident at popular cafe in Berkeley, California,

comedian W. Kamau Bell was told by an employee to leave while meeting his white wife and her friends. In the aftermath of the incident, the cafe owner labeled the encounter a result of unfortunate implicit bias. More recently, in April 2018, employees of a Philadelphia area Starbucks called the police on two black men who asked to use the restroom while waiting for a colleague. Implicit racism, among other biases held by both business owners and individual employees, has furthered the exclusionary practices of what should be open and accommodating spaces. Beyond places of business, people of color have long been excluded from involvement in public spaces more generally. These pervasive exclusionary policies erode the existential basis for community-anchored third places.

It is unrealistic to suggest that earlier third places lacked prejudice or racially motivated restrictions, but such effects have been exacerbated by the transition of existing third places to centers of profit that function as extensions of the workplace. Business owners seeking to cater to privileged patrons use exaggerated worries about safety and stolen property to police third places, targeting people of color and others seen as a threat to whiter, wealthier customers. As journalist Jamelle Bouie writes in *Slate*, "Everyone, eventually, finds themselves out of place. But it's only some people—raced people—who have to move with particular care through unfamiliar spaces, lest they bring ruinous scrutiny on themselves. And too often, even that caution is not enough." The American workplace has long been a hotbed of discriminatory hiring practices and normalized sexual harassment. As third place and traditional workplace spheres collide, the social and economic divisions fostered in the workplace have spread to cafes and bookstores, as well as coworking and coliving spaces.

The term "commute" took on its current meaning in the wake of the widespread adoption of rapid transportation. The regular rider "commuted" daily fares to a lower net monthly fee by purchasing prepaid bundled train tickets,

and thus became the “commuter.” Now, with the development and spread of coliving, coworking, and ridesharing companies, transportation occurs in a distinctly different way. Rather than just commuting public transit costs, the twenty-first-century commuter also may have to commute the use of space itself, navigating a shrinking work-leisure divide and negotiating quasi-public spaces. Many of the interactions required of this commuter assume participation in what is often called the “sharing economy.”

Companies and services within the sharing economy present themselves as peer-to-peer sharing networks. Terms like car-sharing, ridesharing, and office-sharing denote a two-sided role where the user is both the provider and the consumer of goods and services. On the surface this seems reasonable: Airbnb hosts supply rooms for guests to stay in, Uber drivers provide their vehicles for commuters to get to their destinations, and WeWork helps workers pool their resources for office space. But when we encounter others through a market-mediated interaction, we are no longer sharing within a community or a network. In a 2015 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, professors of marketing Giana M. Eckhardt and Fleura Bardhi introduce the idea that the sharing economy is a misnomer and that it should be understood more accurately as an “access economy.”

WeWork and other access economy services don’t depend on existing communities as much as their advertising may suggest. Even the companies whose models seem to depend on distributed property ownership are leaning more toward centralization. In some areas of Chicago, it is estimated that more than 70 percent of Airbnbs are not owner occupied, and an increasing number of hosts across the country are listing multiple rooms or properties. Airbnb is also investing in its own properties so that landlords put pressure on their tenants to rent out their spaces on Airbnb for up to half the year and then require those tenants to give them a significant cut of the earnings. Furthermore, many ridesharing companies operate vehicle

leasing programs, effectively making contractors more beholden to these companies.

Whereas services such as Uber and Airbnb attempt to create a misleading sense of community for the purpose of selling products or services, WeWork goes a step further by attempting to sell communities themselves as products or services. Ultimately these services are turning distributed ownership models into profit, which they reinvest into their own centralized ownership of the goods and services. Many of the spaces we occupy, as well as our social networks, are thus mediated and owned by centralized companies. In other words, we have lost significant abilities to participate in large swathes of the public sphere without paying recurring membership and subscription fees for access to spaces and services. Those who cannot afford access to these spatial services are not accommodated.

This tendency toward centralization is partially a matter of style, aesthetics, and layout. Designs that blend home and work have permeated more traditional office settings as well. Corporate furniture design and manufacturing giant Steelcase cites the influence of a coffee shop in the Googleplex in its decision to adopt the visual cues of third places to promote worker productivity. WeWork does this as well, making the transitions between home, work, and leisure as seamless as possible, disguising the office as a place one goes to by choice, to relax and hang out with friends. WeWork CEO Adam Neumann has been known to say, “Work to make a life, not just a living.” For Neumann, this is a mission to expand the power of “We” into every corner of its members’ lives. In the world of “We,” the commute, which signals the transition between home, work, and leisure, begins to disappear.

In addition to obscuring the possibilities of commuted escape, WeWork and WeLive are focused less on members’ individual needs and more on data collection. In service of this goal, WeWork has adopted the use of spatial analytics to quantify and analyze worker productivity. As writer Jessi Hempel puts it in *Wired*, “Is it that

much of a stretch to believe that soon, our workspace will be tailored exactly to us?” WeWork is already testing an adjustable desk that recognizes members’ phones when placed on its surface and subsequently raises or lowers itself to their preferred standing heights. The company is an early adopter of the newest sensors for networked temperature, humidity, and air quality, as well as detectors that record where WeWork members spend time in the space and for how long.

Last year, WeWork purchased community-building platform Meetup. Meetup’s services will allow WeWork to further identify members’ professional and personal preferences and provide tools to push that engagement. These metrics are valuable for WeWork to evaluate the performance of its members within its spaces. This analysis will be used for WeWork’s own growth and profit, especially as it targets more corporate clients. Members provide value to the company with membership fees and with the data collected about their habits and productivity.

The establishment of a “We” lifestyle that spans first place leisure, second place productivity, and third place public community categorically collapses all three into a single corporate-controlled environment. Barriers between these spaces allow us to keep certain activities private from our coworkers and employers and to carve out identities beyond our professions. Oldenburg characterizes the movement between spheres as an escape—commuting is a pivot from performative workplace behaviors to a more private sphere of relaxation, activism, or playfulness.

The third place can nurture individual openness in ways that are not possible under the second place framework of profit, performance, and efficiency. The separation between our work lives and personal lives has been an important part of our social, cultural, and even political engagement. Political movements are often organized in public spaces to avoid employer or landlord reprisal. If political groups that organize through Meetup are pushed toward using WeWork spaces, such groups may face retaliation for trying to

protest against WeWork or other companies that rent its workspaces.

WeWork’s ongoing model of consolidating members’ personal and work lives endangers the ability for traditional third places to remain open and fulfill community anchoring capacities. WeWork’s large venture capital investments and its recent junk bond sales have potentially given it more leeway to subsidize subscription fees to entice more membership to join the “We” community. At the same time, WeWork’s presence in a neighborhood raises surrounding rents, pushing out existing gathering spaces. As third places disappear and are replaced with WeWork offices, WeLive apartments, and Starbucks chains, access to gathering spaces outside of the home or workplace becomes a privilege for the few. It increasingly becomes the responsibility of individual commuters to share spaces they have access to with others. Regardless of WeWork’s desires, the commuter will always need a place to escape to. The need for a divide between home, work, and leisure is an emotional, intellectual, and social imperative. ▲



Micro-Migration:

On Ayşe Erkmen's *Shipped Ships*

by Carlos Kong

Throughout her artistic career of over four decades, Ayşe Erkmen insistently examines our migratory investments in commuting across distances, moving through spaces, and dwelling in the in-between. Varying greatly in scale, media, and overall aesthetic, her genre-defying sculptures contest the impossible neutrality of space itself. They excavate, disorient, and reimagine the social, economic, and symbolic values that structure the architectonics of movement, from the smallest gestures to charged migratory flows. Although her multifaceted investigations of spatial politics are irreducible to the level of biography, Erkmen's unique perspective on the commute as a micro-act of migration is framed by her relocation from Istanbul to Berlin shortly after the reunification of Germany, as well as her current practice of working from both Germany and Turkey to reimagine both countries' entangled migratory histories.

Several of Erkmen's key works have explored commuting in relation to migration, though always in oblique and defamiliarizing presentations. In *On (the) House* (1994), the piece that gave the artist widespread recognition, Erkmen installed black plexiglass cutouts of Turkish verb endings on the facade of a house in Berlin's Kreuzberg neighborhood, historically inhabited by Turkish guest workers brought to Germany for postwar reconstruction. The verb endings indicated a specific past tense largely absent from spoken Turkish but used in literature to convey an unwitnessed action in the past or a prior event experienced by an external group. By architecturally presenting a verb tense likely unknown to the second-generation

Turks who grew up speaking German, the public sculpture viscerally poeticizes the linguistic referents and cultural memories severed in the process of migration and re-experienced in quotidian encounters. Although the sculpture relates migration with loss, it paradoxically serves as a site of commuting by functioning as an unofficial landmark in the center of Kreuzberg that some Berlin inhabitants designate as a convenient meeting place. While *On (the) House* implicates migration with departure, its use as a place to meet affirms the arrival and community



inherent in commuting. Its permanence as a work of art (one of Erkmen's very few permanent works in public space) further oscillates with its status as a transitive placeholder.

Erkmen continually investigates micro-gestures of migration in her recent works, which depart from the static representational quality of *On (the) House* to accrue more performative possibilities. For *On Water* (2017), commissioned for the decennial Skulptur Projekte in Münster, Germany, Erkmen installed

a temporary bridge across the width of the city's harbor, submerged beneath the surface of the water. From a distance, those who traverse the bridge appear to be walking on water. Erkmen playfully conjoins walking on water's mythic connotations with the political stakes of this spatial connection. The act of crossing the bridge's north-south axis to commute from one side of the harbor to the other symbolically points to the politicized geopolitical flows between the Global South



All images courtesy of the artist and Dirimart, Istanbul; Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; and Barbara Gross Galerie, Munich. In addition to, left and below: Photos by Bärbel Högner



and Global North. The work subtly intervenes in the way the migration of people across water from the Global South to the European North is spectacularized and pathologized as a so-called crisis. As both a conceptual sculpture and a mere bridge, *On Water* institutes a simple commute across the harbor as a micro-act of migration that calls into question the

was commissioned for Frankfurt, Germany. Erkmen proposed and realized the possibility of shipping three passenger boats to Frankfurt to establish a temporary ferry service on the Main River. Envisioning the public transportation system beyond its extant infrastructure, *Shipped Ships* is both a sculptural choreography of boats on a river and a new, temporary means of commuting.

Shipped Ships began when Erkmen realized the potential use of Frankfurt's Main River for transportation. Erkmen arrived at the ferryboat, an iconic image from



hierarchies that both make possible and deny the privilege of mobility.

Of all of Erkmen's works, *Shipped Ships* (2001) remains her central artistic exploration of the spatial and social structures that position the commute as an act of migration. *Shipped Ships* emerged as the winning proposal of Deutsche Bank's first installment of Moment—Temporary Art in Public Space, for which an ephemeral public artwork



Istanbul and a ubiquitous mode of public transportation in the metropolis. Given the division of Istanbul by the Bosphorus Strait at the geographical borders of Europe and Asia,

commuting by ferry is both an essential quotidian reality for Istanbul's residents and a symbolic micro-action of migration between continents. Following the migration of linguistic forms from Turkey into the architectural landscape of Germany in *On (the) House*, Erkmen's *Shipped Ships* imports both the functional model and everyday experience of commuting by boat in Istanbul into the urban fabric of Frankfurt.

The artist's specifications for *Shipped Ships* underscore the migratory politics that underlie everyday acts of commuting. Erkmen selected three passenger boats used from cities that rely on waterborne public transportation—Venice, Italy; Shingu, Japan; and Istanbul, Turkey—and coordinated the shipping of the boats on large carrier vessels to Frankfurt via the Port of Rotterdam. The shipping of small ships on large ships from Japan, Turkey, and Italy to Germany is central to Erkmen's concept. Not only does the migration of boats on boats evince the elements of playfulness and absurdity central to Erkmen's oeuvre, but it also serves to reflexively highlight the invisible global circulation of migratory labor that makes possible the privilege of motion inherent in the smallest of commutes.

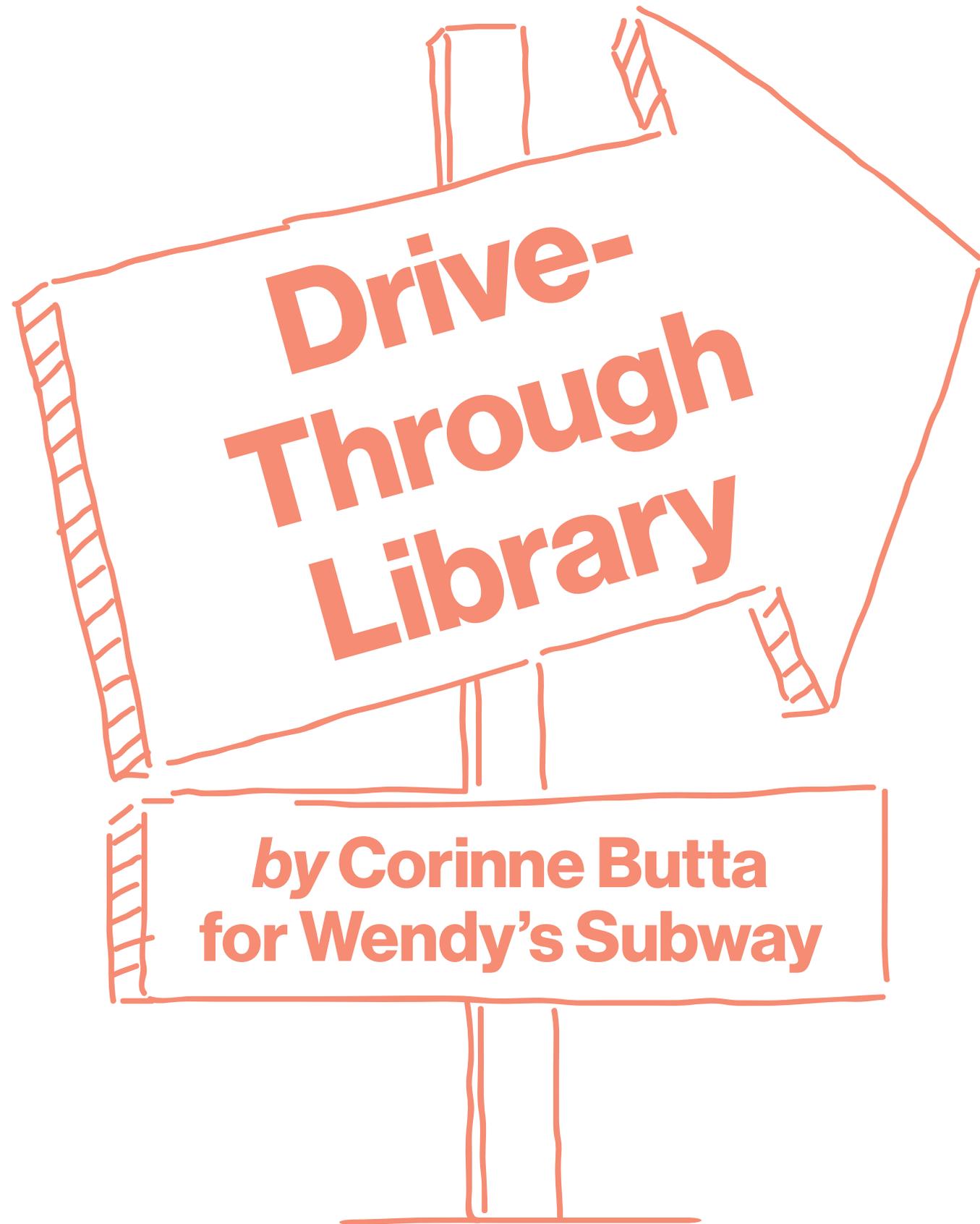
On the Main River, each ferry provided a commuting service that connected eleven piers in a zigzag pattern, moving from the city's western periphery to its easternmost limits and back again. The functionalization of the river with passenger boats for commuting challenges the entertainment role conventionally ascribed to the "river cruise" in Western economies as a tourist spectacle devoid of use-value for the working citizenry. The unspectacular ambitions of this commute on the Main additionally operate in tandem with the artwork's resistance to Frankfurt's traditional picturesque landscape. In conventional views of Frankfurt, the Main River serves as the foreground of the cityscape, the preserved nature from which the tall skyscrapers of Frankfurt's financial center rise—and hence the city's nickname as "Mainhattan," the Manhattan of the Main. *Shipped Ships* thus denies Frankfurt's urban picturesque as usually visible from its riverbanks and passenger bridges. Instead, the possibility of seeing the city from the river enables a defamiliarized, previously unseen view.

Moreover, the approximately six-mile commute of *Shipped Ships* from Frankfurt's urban peripheries through its financial center dramatizes the neoliberal financialization of urban space at the expense of a tangible public sphere. Taking place in Frankfurt, the major

financial center of the European continent, this commute on the river from the city's periphery and through its center (dominated by the presence of banking) calls into question the hierarchical capitalization of space, the expulsion of residents from the right to the city, and the unequal privileges of mobility and capital that underlie every act of commuting. Whether Erkmen's re-envisioning of Frankfurt's public transportation system enables a commute by boat to actually subvert the hierarchical organization of movement through urban space, or merely reinforces it, remains an open-ended question.

In addition to the shipping of ships, Erkmen hired each ship's respective Japanese, Turkish, and Italian crews, providing work permits and salaries. The presence of foreign ships and the linguistic and cultural differences of their crews signaled the geopolitical division of labor inherent to the movement of people in globalized economies, further developed in recent works like *On Water*. Moreover, the foreign workers directly alluded to the migratory history of guest laborers (*Gastarbeiter*) in postwar Germany, especially from Turkey, as previously explored in *On (the) House*. Both West and East Germany outsourced foreign labor for postwar economic, infrastructural, and urban reconstruction. The mobilization of the foreign labor force contributed to West Germany's so-called "Economic Miracle" (*Wirtschaftswunder*), the postwar economic regeneration to which the financial prosperity of contemporary Frankfurt owes its legacy. As paid performers in a temporary artwork, the laborers of *Shipped Ships* had no need to seek legal immigration status, separating their situation from that of many other workers who undertake cross-border migrations. Nonetheless, Erkmen's subtle recollection of German migration history in the space of *Shipped Ships* repositions commuting and migration as analogies that glimpse the necessary economic migrations and outsourced work that remain invisible beyond the neoliberal city's lustering facade.

In Erkmen's *Shipped Ships* and throughout her oeuvre, commuting is inseparable from the act of migration. When the commute is rethought as micro-migration, as Erkmen suggests, the hierarchies that structure the movement through space can emerge toward their possibility of reimagination. The shipping of ships to forge a new commute exhibits the geopolitical emergence of visible subjects and invisible labor—worlds remade and unmade in our daily migrations. ▲



The following list is composed of publications that examine the relationships between the public and its movement through the built environment. The first section focuses on academic and theoretical texts that confront and investigate systems of power and their impact on the routes we trace while traveling and commuting. Many also conceptualize alternate choreographies for navigating these routes. The collection begins with AGENCY, an architectural research duo created by Ersela Kripa and Stephen Mueller, whose book *Fronts: Security and the Developing World* investigates the graphic symbol manuals used in military breach training. It opens up a conversation on hidden, militarized wayfinding systems that map our urban environments from above and afar. This conversation on perspective is continued in Stephen Graham's *Vertical*, which investigates the political geography of infrastructure from myriad distances, beginning in the outer limits of Earth's atmosphere and working down toward its surface, chapter by chapter. Back on Earth, architect Eyal Weizman traces the history of roundabouts as places of social organization in his *Roundabout Revolutions*, examining protests from the Gwangju Uprising to the Arab Spring. This text brings commuting and the commons into contact, a relationship further explored through essay collections *The Flood of Rights* and *The Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*. These titles suggest that through grassroots organization, alternative modes of moving and occupying the infrastructural environment can be activated. Viewed collectively, these titles bring up questions such as: How can alternative uses of transit stand for altered mobility in social and political fields? How can the language of "the commons" open lines of inquiry into the privatization of spaces that we consider public?

The questions raised in the first section are echoed in the second, which features independent publications that use the form of publishing itself to encourage an alternative engagement with spaces of transit and travel. In the years and months leading up to May 1968, Guy Debord and the Situationist International—a collective of radical artists, writers, and intellectuals—used maps and graphic systems as sites for interrogation into the systems of power that steer navigation. This use of graphic systems continues in the printed matter of today. In the Center for Urban Pedagogy's educational zines on the New York City transportation system, created by middle- and high-school students working with teaching artists, and

Flavio Trevisan's self-explanatory graphic design booklet *Every Intersection on Yonge Street*, the design of transit infrastructure is introduced so readers might engage with these spaces off the page.

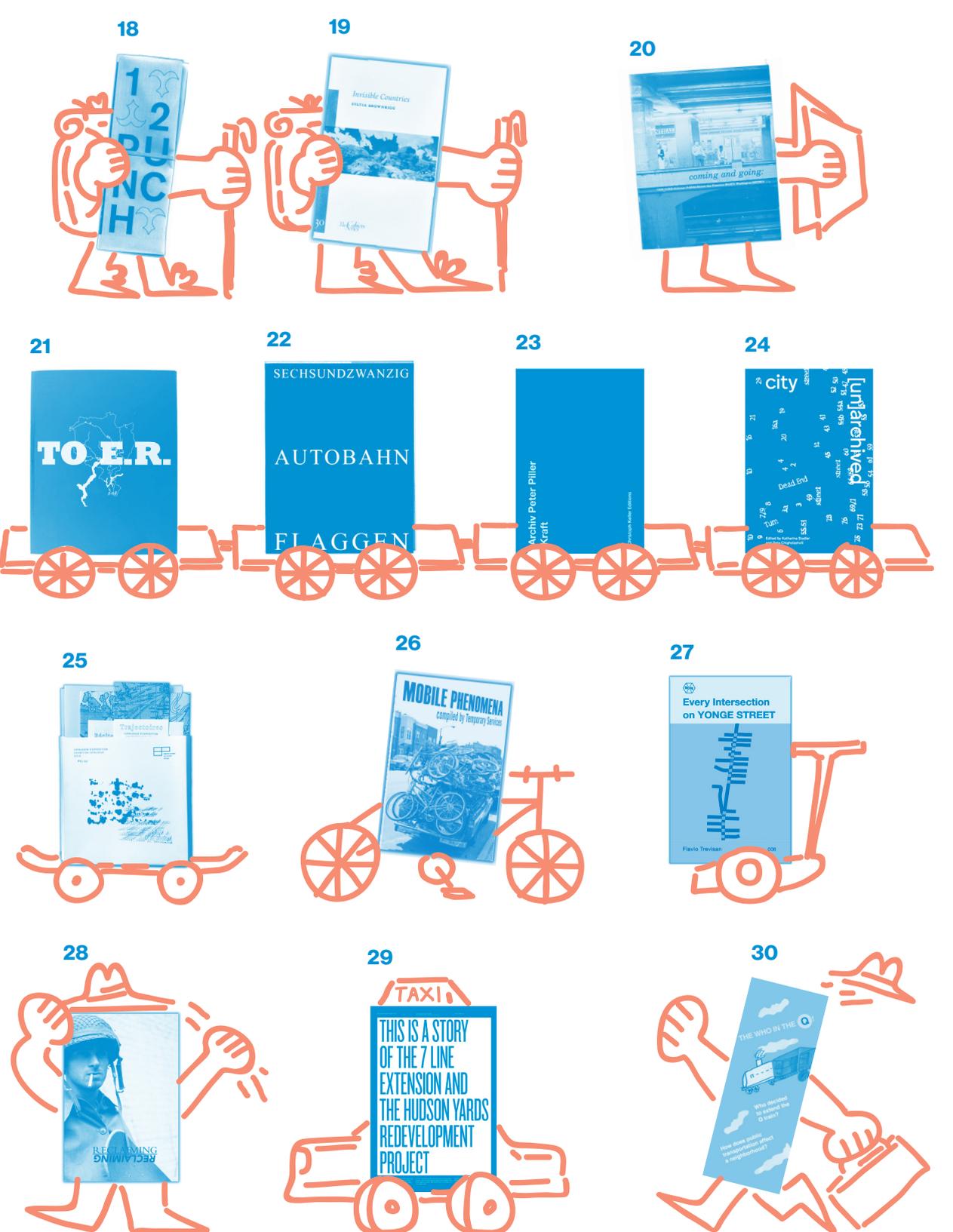
Instead of measuring the distance between one place and another by traditional metrics like miles or the number of interstitial cities, books offer the opportunity to map distance through narrative and pacing. In Sylvia Brownrigg's *Invisible Countries*, distance is represented by increasingly long passages detailing the narrator's time at the airport gate, in the shuttle bus, and in the waiting room. Michalis Pichler similarly retraces a drive in Berlin through discarded car flags along the highway in *Sechszwanzig Autobahn Flaggen*. These books, with their experimental and collaborative forms, help to demonstrate how the infrastructure of our daily lives might be reclaimed for personal and collective purposes—for activism, education, and experimentation.

Many of the books in the following list are available at Wendy's Subway, a nonprofit library, publisher, and writing space located in Bushwick, Brooklyn. This list includes a wide array of publications by artists, scholars, and journalists who use creative, independent forms of publishing to examine the space of commuting as equal parts social and infrastructural. In reframing these spaces, they ask how we might relate to them differently as users, community members, and publics. ▲

Academic & Research



Artist's Books



Academic & Research:



1. AGENCY Architecture. *Fronts: Security and the Developing World*. San Francisco: ORO Editions, 2018.
2. Andreotti, Libero and Xavier Costa, eds. *Theory of the Derive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996.
3. Baldauf, Annette and Steven Gruber, eds. *Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.
4. Bax, Sander, Pascal Gielden and Bram Ieven, eds. *Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016.
5. Choi, Binna and Maiko Tanaka, eds. *Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*. Utrecht, Netherlands: Casco - Office for Art, Design, and Theory; Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014.
6. Easterling, Keller. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2016.
7. Graham, Stephen. *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2018.
8. Hajer, Maarten and Arnold Reijndorp, eds. *In Search of the New Public Domain*. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2002.
9. Keenan, Thomas, Suhail Malik and Tirdad Zolghadr, eds. *The Flood of Rights*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017.
10. Keller, Patrick. *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2014.
11. Sandoval, Lorenzo and Regina de Miguel, eds. *Mountainlandglacier: Correspondence from Eyjafjallajokull*. Berlin: Broken Dimanche Press; Madrid: Ortomatica, 2011.
12. Stratis, Socrates, ed. *Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces*. Berlin: JOVIS, 2016.
13. Stavrides, Stavros. *Common Space: The City as Commons*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016.
14. Wark, McKenzie. *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2011.
15. Weizman, Eyal. *Critical Spatial Practice 6: The Roundabout Revolutions*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015.
16. ————. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2017.
17. White, Mason, Lola Sheppard, and Neeraj Bhatia, eds. *Coupling: Strategies for Infrastructural Opportunism*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015.

Artist's Books:

18. *1-2-Punch*. Seaford, NY: Other People Places Things, 2017.
19. Brownrigg, Sylvia. *Invisible Countries - Cahier #30*. Paris: The American University of Paris, 2017.
20. D'Agostino, Peter. *Coming and Going: New York (Subway) Paris (Metro) San Francisco (Bart) Washington (Metro)*. San Francisco: NFS Press, 1982.
21. Chietera, Giuseppe. *To E. R.* Lugano, Switzerland: Artphilein Editions, 2014.
22. Pichler, Michalis. *Sechszwanzig Autobahn Flaggen*. Frankfurt: Revolver, 2006.
23. Piller, Peter. *Kraft*. Zurich: JRP Ringier Editions, 2011.
24. Stadler, Katharina, and Data Chicholashvili, eds. *City [Un]archived*. Eindhoven, Netherlands: Onomatopee, 2016.
25. Steckelberg, Ludmila, and Catherine Barnabee, eds. *Trajectoires: Catalogue d'Exposition*. Montreal: Espace Projet, 2016.
26. Temporary Services. *Mobile Phenomena*. Chicago: Half Letter Press, 2012.
27. Trevisan, Flavio. *Every Intersection on Yonge Street*. Toronto: Hex Editions, 2013.
28. Urlus, Ariadne, and Clint van der Hartt, eds. *Reclaiming the Street*. Rotterdam: Showroom MAMA and post editions, n.d.
29. *Fast Tracked*. Brooklyn: The Center For Urban Pedagogy, 2011.
30. *The Who in the Q*. Brooklyn: The Center For Urban Pedagogy, 2017.