

*this must be the place*

Brent T Aldrich

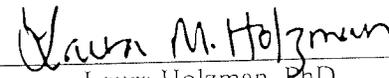
Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art and Public Life  
in the Herron School of Art and Design  
Indiana University  
May 2018

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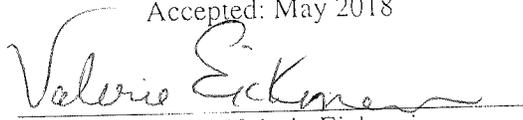
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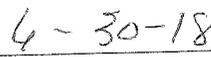
  
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Where to begin?  
With you, and with me.  
This place.  
This city/this bedrock. It's Devonian Era limestone over here.  
"There's coffee for those who want it."



*"Home is where I want to be / but I guess I'm already there.  
I come home / she lifted up her wings  
I guess that this must be the place.  
I can't tell one from another  
Did I find you or you find me?  
There was a time / before we were born  
If someone asks, this is where I'll be  
Where I'll be."*

—Talking Heads

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As my practice has evolved, it has become deeply rooted first in my own experiences in the world, and navigating the ways I'm part of a neighborhood, a place, communities and sub-cultures, city. It's rooted in a desire to connect deeply with other people and the particular places I care about—in this sense, it begins with experiences that are affective and empathetic, even as they are necessarily filtered through my own perceptual-experiential-relational understanding. The primary locus of these projects is centered on experiences in which I have direct exchanges with other human beings, or a particular place, and fabricate contexts for those experiences to be made visible, shared, and expanded. In this way, the aesthetic act can be shared; content can be produced by anyone willing to be a part; possibilities for engagement and relationships makes people (including myself) more connected; and experiences can be potent and long-lasting, proposing future experiences (and thus transformational). Creating the space for shared experiences and creation of artworks, based in my own everyday engagement, proposes that aesthetic experience could happen on a bicycle, or in a conversation, or anywhere.

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***Ride Forever • Indianapolis City Market / Bike Hub / YMCA • 100 ribbons and flower bouquets for 100 bicycle riders***

*Stationed outside of the City Market and the Bike Hub, near multiple bike racks, and a Bikeshare station. Yellow ribbons with the words Ride Forever; bouquets of flowers; a small platform with yellow fabric and text matching the ribbons. I'm wearing a suit jacket, yellow ribbon, and flower pinned to my lapel. Often I am accompanied by a partner, in which case I secure ribbons to bicycles, and she hands out flowers. As anyone on a bicycle approaches, we tell them we have an award for them, "congratulations," tie the ribbon onto their handlebars or basket, hand them flowers, and ask to step onto the winners' podium for a photograph. The exchange is complete.*



*I was interested in intercepting a specifically everyday action—bicycling in the city—and framing it, making it visible for a moment within the course of that very activity; in that sense, it's not exactly advocacy; rather, it's looking at a place (City Market) and action (bicycling) that I care about a lot and think are significant and meaningful experiences, and then highlighting these through a form that makes them visible—in relation to me, and to that place. The everyday action and place can be cast as political inasmuch as they are actions performed by people in public space (Rancière).*

*Like Anda, the third person to show up, who had no idea I would be there, but who was—guess what?—riding her bicycle to eat lunch at the City Market. This was especially perfect, since not that long ago I'd spent a long day-turned-night with Sarah Fries and her at the Market, eating lunch, then drinking. It was actually Valentines Day that year, and the three of us left school to go have lunch; at some point we shifted over to Tomlinson and settled in. Anda called Ben, and then we had an endurance drinking Valentines Day, starting before the couples who had tables reserved, and ending after they were gone. I made a drawing on a Hike Brown County coaster, which looked like a dog-headed man. Scruff McGruff. When Anda rolled in on her bicycle during Art in Odd Places, especially being one of the first to arrive, it was the best possible moment. She was in some ways exactly the right audience—someone headed to lunch at the Market, on her bicycle; someone who loves that place and bicycles and all that. So to intercept her, give her flowers, a ribbon, stepping onto the podium—it felt appropriate and warranted. If there was an ideal audience, it was certainly her (others as well, I just share a history of place with her).*

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## In Place

Here are the places and the relationships I care about: my participation with them over time first generates the ideas and contexts to share these significant experiences with other people, in what have increasingly come to look like public, participatory or relational projects. In these projects, people are able to be together, both with each other and with me, in a place, with the potential for shared experience. I'm situating my practice in the place where it is, in places I love, and with and for other people to share experiences and places and things I care about deeply—we can come together around riding bicycles or science fiction or diners. The projects create a potential for new experiences and for love: it's the way any place becomes *this place*. It's getting situated from a place in the world.

The ways projects are developed requires my sustained relationship over time with places and communities. So there are particular places, like the Englewood neighborhood, like Pogue's Run, like the City Market, which provide contexts and relationships to locate my practice. This context is the means by which a place or community can be clarified within the scope of a project, and effectively narrates the work as others engage with it. Locating my practice within existing contexts brings these other histories, mythologies, geologies, and has become a crucial part of how I work. And there are also communities or sub-cultures related to all of these, like bicyclists, or neighbors, with whom I identify.

My practice has different strategies for how an audience might engage: most often, these projects require me to be physically present, offering a possible relationship. There are other ways I can suggest a new context (and new relationships) using familiar objects like science fiction books, or a diner booth. Or, lastly, there's ways to make objects stand in for me, pointing back to the places I care about and to me, such as drawings of maps, or a plaque hung on a diner wall.

Some specific instances: I have a long relationship with bicycles and with the City Market: I bicycle there all the time. I love it there. I then created a winner's platform, ribbons, bouquets, and recognized others who do the same: isolated the action as significant. Those who want to participate in this version of the world do; and in this sense it is political because it offers a certain version of the *polis*, freely chosen (or rejected). In this project the action and the place were shared directly through my interaction with other people on-site. Similarly though importantly different, I have a romantic, dreamy relationship with the moon, and I set myself a task of waking on a lunar calendar, filming it, and then creating a video installation as a way to approximate that experience.

Many of the places I'm working are relatively under-noticed as well, which means a lot of asset-based thinking and looking derived from work in community development. The neighborhood where I live, for instance, physically looks pretty different than the way I describe it, mostly because of years of looking at it, and walking, and bicycling, creating deep affection. Usually for projects, there's a place I have in mind, a part of my everyday, and eventually a new form becomes apparent to match the place: carrot cake becomes sedimentary rock layers, or picnic blankets map a creek. In this regard, it is a very place-based process. At the same time, I'm usually thinking about ways to place myself in-relation-to another person, in this place, and around the idea of a certain community. So I can award bicyclists, which is an identity I assume, in a place I care about, the Market. It conflates the people with the place. Or like the Sc-Fi Book Club Podcast, in which there's a premise for conversation (aka community, aka politics) around a certain thing (science fiction), and the conversation creates the universe.

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## Definitions

**Communities:** A group of people, sharing a part of the world together. The most basic elements include a relationship and some element in common, which could be geography, a love, or otherwise.

**Place:** The geology, topography, climate, history, streets, sidewalks, neighborhoods, buildings, and stories that provide a context for communities (see above). There is attachment and belonging provided by each distinct location, which can take years to explore in depth. Relevant places include the Englewood neighborhood; the Near Eastside; Indianapolis; and the bedrock community of the Devonian-era Muscatatuck Group limestone and dolomite that sits underneath most of my neighborhood. (Lippard)

**Place, public:** Places that are open to everyone and shared by everyone—democratic in their use—can provide a context for art, making it open and shared as well. Working ‘in public’ allows interaction with anyone else using that place, in ways impossible in private. Relevant places include the Indianapolis City Market; East Washington Street; Englewood and Holy Cross neighborhoods. (Jacobs)

**Collaboration/cooperation/participation:** Working with other people who bring their skill sets and loves with them, creating projects together that *could not* be made alone. A relational model built into the making of projects themselves. (Finkelpearl)

**Bicycles:** “The century’s greatest invention” (*Cyclen* magazine, Denmark, 1899).

**Coffee:** I drink a lot of it. It is as simple and nearly as ‘universal’ an object as I can get. It offers a specific sociability, and is part of the everyday; having a cup of coffee with someone presupposes conversation. Though I prefer my single-origin South American French-pressed freshly-ground beans, I’ll drink the crap that’s been on the burner all day too.

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## **In-relation-to**

In defining a participatory or relational art practice, I'm interested in a model of reality that is primarily defined by these same characterizations, that is, a universe marked by relationality. In this schema, we all shape the world we live in, even as we're also shaped by it. Following physicist Carlo Rovelli, who writes that, "the best description of reality is the way things affect one another," humans exist *in-relation-to*, both to one another, and to the places we inhabit. Beginning with a description of reality that starts with the moment of exchange as fundamental to how the universe holds together, the movement to an art (or any) practice that is inherently relational is more a distinction of kind.

This exchange or relationship implies two—a self and an other, and each is clarified in-relation-to. This implies getting situated, a context. Nothing exists in a vacuum. And it is also a process of unfolding, a duration which isn't static or fixed, but tends toward evolution, adaptation, and requires a back-and-forth. That is, it's an experience. Experience happens in a context, and it's this experience/context relationship where I can isolate a *potential*, and share it with other people, in ways that are participatory: we can *be a part* of each other's lives, of an activity, of a place; we can be fans, we can be part of a shared world. In the moments of exchange, when things affect one another, when we share what we love, we self-identify, we share experience, we shape the world, together. Janelle Monáe captures the exact moment: "Oh what an experience / Baby when we're heart to heart I can really, really feel it."

Bicycling, walking, eating, having conversations, digging a hole; having experiences tied to places, to people, to actions, situate my body in-relation-to the places and people around me—these are the relationships by which I define an existence—*it's actually the relationships*. Which means that the context of *everything* matters because it's situating person-ness and action in-relation-to: to everything: the place we're at, who we're with, how we're together. In this regard, I'm the first participant, always (*as are we all*). My participation with particular places, with people and communities, with the things I just love grows out of sustained engagement (aka *conversation*) with these things, usually long before projects are ever begun.

Participation in anything—take a city, for instance, or a quantum particle—inherently changes the thing, simply by *being a part*. My participation within my neighborhood or city (as an, artist, neighbor, community developer, or observer) affects the way the place exists. Interestingly, John Dewey puts forth art as experiential and relational in a way that prefigures current participatory practices, suggesting that, "the work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it" (Dewey, 106). This implies both a perceptual engagement with the work to actualize it, but also a relational dialectic between human beings.

It also recognizes the need for another human being to fulfill such experiences, necessitating relationships in the form of partners, neighbors, collaborators, or participants; their experience suggests identification and affect with a project. Shifting some of the agency to others creates contingency and co-creation. The contingency allows flexibility for others to author a project according to their interpretation and experience, creating room for a multiplicity of experiences, potentially conflicting. As co-creators, others are enlisted to share ownership, and hopefully do things they didn't know they could do.

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***Pretty Good Breakfast* • Plaque, Steer-In diner, two pancakes and coffee**



The *Pretty Good Breakfast* took years of eating pancakes before it could ever even be possible to conceive of as a project. It came from a place-based practice, sustained over several years as a “community”: you could call us ‘the Wednesday morning breakfast eaters,’ for, every Wednesday, we eat breakfast. I am the first participant in this piece. I’ve eaten the pancakes to prove it. And inasmuch as that diner’s been a part of me and my experience, I’ve also been a part of that diner: the pancakes have changed me. When I go to eat the same pancakes every week, it becomes a personal practice—it’s one of the measures by which I define an identity—I eat pancakes every Wednesday! The context and the duration are crucial. I go to this place every week, but by the same token, I’m part of what *is* this place. It has changed me (I wake up at a certain time, eat certain food, sit at a certain place), but at the same time, I have changed it (I’m a regular who shows up and doesn’t order—I’ll be the one over in the corner booth, by the window). The Steer-In and I could be defined in our relationship to one another—each to some extent defining the other. This relation is what the plaque I hung represents—functions at the moment of affect, of exchange—it captures a history of engagement, of eating, of conversation, of a native form (plaque wall), of specific order (the bill), and percept (it’s “pretty good”). Likewise, I added the plaque to the wall, but it now changes the space around it. And I never would have conceived to make this had it not been for years of breakfasts (literally hundreds of pancakes at 2 per breakfast), being in that context, leading to this object.

Pogue’s Run is similar: first of all, I was personally doing historical research related to it. Because I love this place. I specifically wanted to know early Indianapolis history and development, and Pogue’s Run creek is significant for the earliest story of Euro-American settlement with the Pogues. I did more research because this is the creek that runs through my neighborhood. So I was pretty well invested in this geo-historical research—in addition to bicycling over it daily—when there was an invitation to focus more intentionally via a committee, of course I joined. And given time, and walking it, and research, and conversation, a mural was developed. And now a series of picnics inspired by the Run is underway. These are resultant of a sustained engagement with this creek, this place—and it’s significant that it’s *here*—it’s my stream. I’ve walked the underground tunnel. I bicycle over it daily. The projects could conceivably be adapted or dropped in anywhere, but I don’t care about *anywhere*, I care about this place. Projects such as this then become a way to share *here*—for it to be truly *of* the place, but also shared more broadly, or to invite others into the experience of this place.

## Let's Be Together

I'm working in places that are my places, with experiences formed and negotiated over time. This context and duration cannot be overstated, and they are resultant of thinking hard about a place and being in it, then developing appropriate forms to make it legible in a new way. The projects are "highly authored situations that fuse reality with carefully calculated artifice" (Bishop, 39). I'm interested first in experiencing things myself, repeatedly, and then appropriately developing ways to make that solitary experience a shared one. My participation with a thing (like Pogue's Run) then becomes an experience (participation) with other people, plus the thing. I love Pogue's Run for many reasons, tied to direct experience/participation/relationship with it; when we come together to paint a mural, I get to shift my participation, making it available with others, plus Pogue's Run. My participation goes from just with a thing (or experience), to with other people plus the thing. I love Pogue's Run—here's a bunch of reasons and ways and let's do it together because it's better that way. Let's be together.

It often becomes *another* thing too, in that translation, in order to make the initiatory experience visible. So painting a mural together makes the creek visible. Eating a carrot cake makes visible the sedimentary bedrock underneath our feet. Read science fiction, but talk about it as a podcast, with its own invented narrative and universe. These participatory events bring people together, and become ways to translate experience. This is why the process of *working* on the mural is often better than having a finished mural—when we work on it together, we can experience *this place*, together. And so the invitation to come paint a mural at/about Pogue's Run is a way for people to have meaningful experience in/about this place (the body of water)—and effectively *change* the place as well (with the mural). So places change them/they change the place back and forth forever.

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### ***Pogue's Run • Mural + Trail***

*Dorman is one of my favorite blocks, not least because of all the time spent with Pogue's Run projects right here. And Flat 12 of course. That alley we cleaned, and working on the mural—not to mention the months of planning and meetings, many at Flat 12, like the one on Fat Tuesday, connected me with that Holy Cross neighborhood in some serious ways. Just a lot of hours spent right there—and Pat Dubach and Kelly Wensing both living right there, and Bob and Greta at Flat 12. There was awhile where I'd just walk in the Annex or the brewery or the grounds like I worked there, to get my paints or ladder or whatever. And that mural—talk about an unnecessarily long time to finish, no thanks to grad school. But it's pretty amazing, especially because of this—seeing it every day when I'm on my route downtown; it's a part of this world that occupies a special place for me, both outwardly—the place literally has my fingerprints all over—but also inwardly in familiarity and time spent with people and a place. That little block of Pogue's Run I've spent more time in—and it's had more care here recently than probably any other. I've shown it off to Mary Miss, and now her installation is next to mine. I ride over Pogue's Run on the bridge almost daily.*

*Getting ready for the mural project was the result of ROW showing up at the right time. I was actually deep into research for animations I wanted to make of George Pogue when ROW was announced, and so of course I joined the steering committee. I don't remember how long we met before working on the trail and mural, but I do remember those early meetings as some of the most productive meetings I've ever been a part of. Maybe just the right people at the right time—Tracy Heaton, Kelly Harris, Pat Dubach, Bob Weaver... As it became apparent that we would do a project in Holy Cross, start the Pogue's Run Trail ourselves, and paint a mural, all the research I was doing came together in this epic historical mural, wanting to show any Pogue's Run history we had—essentially four good stories...*



## In the City

My practice also finds its context in the city itself. A compelling human-scaled vision that embraces the inherent benefits of cities, scaled to the dimension, senses, and speed of people, has provided fertile ground for complex and varied relationships. Great cities have built-in opportunities for human relationships and communities to flourish, in which people come in contact daily with other human beings, in formal and informal settings. Particularly at the scale of the neighborhood, we can know by the senses of our bodies; meet our neighbors and strangers in common, shared spaces; and work for the good of our places. The city and neighborhood become vital contexts for individuals to become situated in communities and places, “where the design of the houses with their private and common rooms, the layout of streets...the rhythms of work, study, commerce, dining, recreation, and conversation, the grounding reality of sun, breezes, rain, and mosquitoes—[a] place where these and a thousand other factors can come together to say, ‘Here you are. Your name is written into this place. You belong here, and you are safe’” (Talbot, 263). And describing this potentiality inherent in the city, Jane Jacobs writes, “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” (Jacobs). The city is seen as a space open for negotiation, but also for human flourishing through a multiplicity of contributions.

The public places in cities and neighborhoods—the streets and sidewalks, plazas, parks—are places where anyone can potentially gather in informal settings, meet other neighbors, and together negotiate the shape of the city. The public places I’ve worked in allow for interaction with anyone else using the place, in ways that are impossible in private. For me, places such as my block of East Washington Street, the Indianapolis City Market, or the Pogue’s Run Trail have allowed me to work with hundreds of people—many friends, and even more strangers—on projects.

Working in public also creates a space for relationships and conversations to develop organically because of the context. And inasmuch as we are in-relation-to one another in a particular place (Pogue’s Run, or a diner booth with a map), there are some conversations more likely as a starting place. But it also doesn’t matter the specifics of conversation (these are intrapersonal and sweet); what matters is creating a space to *be in relation*, and only that: so I can tell stories I’ve read about historical Pogue’s Run, or BW can tell me about how he got drunk on the Fourth of July and fell over the retaining wall, into the ‘living room’ of the guy who lives under the bridge. Neither conversation is ‘more valid.’

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## **To Market**

*Going to the Market is one of my favorite things—either to eat, or to go to an event at LISC, or to go to the bike shop. Or to work on stuff, or to go to Tomlinson. I've spent a lot of time there now, partly because it's one of my favorite places to work. It's a perfect public/private space. I can sit at that table at the end of the Market, next to the railing, and look at things happening, or focus on work in front of me. And go back and forth fluidly. And see people I know, casually, and talk, and work. I can get food or beer.*

*What's most important is that seat with a view—like Calvin Fletcher, in that it offers another one of the best seats in the city, that's in public, yet private, unless you want it to be public, in which case it is. I would sit there all day at the Market if only there was a power outlet. That's the one upside of Calvin Fletcher and what really makes it the perfect seat: A window view, with lots of activity outside, people walking and biking. Comfortably inside, but next to the door (the side behind where it opens, so the cold doesn't blow in when it's cold out, and also I can see who is coming in), also I can see the entire inside of the shop, as well as outside so everything is active, and for that matter, everyone can see me, often before I see them. There's food, and coffee of course. Of course. And there's a potential to see anyone, have conversations, unexpectedly.*

*When I stopped at City Market the other day, I was planning to go there already. Because I intended to get a haircut. So I biked in on Market, and of course there's construction on both sides right now, leaving that narrow access down the middle for people not cars—great actually if it would stay this way. As soon as I was at New Jersey I could see the tents and remembered it was Wednesday morning, meaning the Farmer's Market. Which also closes the street to cars and is even better. What I hadn't planned on was staying for 3 hours—but that's exactly what makes cities and specifically this kind of place great and magical. First I rolled over on the bike shop side but decided I'd park over by LISC—but saw Jim sitting and eating so I stopped and got talking to him—about Great Places and Mile Square Coffee and whatever. He was leaving and I walked inside to look in the barber shop, but it looked pretty full so I wandered outside to the farmer's market and bought some coffee beans from that Mile Square truck—I needed to get these specifically for the diner booth, so this saved me a trip to the food co-op. Then I saw Kathryn at the next booth over, and walked around with her for a very long time. During that time, I see Julie Jackson at a booth, and catch up with her for quite awhile. Apparently she's working at Amelia's which—while I hate it on principle of killing my old barbershop—it was really fortuitous to see her then, considering I had been thinking and writing (and even drawing) that window seat at Calvin Fletcher's, which has a lot to do with her as well. And going to get my hair cut at that old barber. Now she's working 2 doors down, where my barbershop used to be, and I'm at the Market to get a haircut now because the old one closed. And here we are at this perfect space on a beautiful morning, and all seems right in the world (which is a feeling that certainly has something to do with what I'm after as an artist as well as a community developer and neighbor).*

*I've attached memories to places that rise when I'm there—these places are loaded—haunted like de Certeau would say—in ways that enlarge the places in my mind. That old barber shop has everything to do with Saturday mornings and going to Calvin Fletcher and sitting in that window seat, hoping to see and chat it up with Julie Jackson, etc.*

*I walked back the other way again with Kathryn and looked at every booth, and waved to some other people, and talked for a long time at the end of the block. Kathryn did finally leave at some point, and I went back inside then and did decide on a haircut—what I'd come for after all. I can't remember if I saw anyone else, but a new barber Robby cut my hair and had a story about getting his ear bit off in a cage fight. I must have after that, but it was a perfect long unplanned morning.*

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## ABCD

In many of my own projects, while I'm working in public spaces, I'm a neighbor as well as an artist, which suggests a set of relationships and responsibilities to the work. For one, when the project is over (the mural done, for example), I'm still a neighbor who lives there and is accountable to the neighborhood and to the work. I've often had the opportunity to do my work as an artist because of my relationships as a neighbor; often when this happens, the work can 'belong' to the place because it's truly 'from' or 'of' the place.

Related to this, my years of work in community development, beginning in roughly 2000, has allowed me to work directly in my own neighborhood with neighbors and civic partners, finding motivation in the health and flourishing of this city.

Specifically, the process of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) takes these local places seriously over long periods of time, and builds relationships that are the basis of any project. This discipline has led me to consider my art practice in similar ways; primarily, I'm functioning within existing social contexts, with a broad range of partners, and building relationships. Though by no means would all the art projects I pursue be described as community development, I'm using many of the same skill sets, and three principles of ABCD are immensely relevant to my working process. Kretzman and McKnight describe:

The first principle that defines this process is that it is "asset-based." That is, community development starts with *what is present in the community*, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area...

It is by necessity "internally-focused"... this strong internal focus is intended simply to stress the primacy of *local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control*...

If a community development process is to be asset-based and internally focused, then it will be in very important ways "*relationship-driven*."  
(Kretzman and McKnight, 9, emphasis added)

In my practice, these three ABCD principles find almost direct correlations in my process, in first defining what already exists in-place: What is here? What do I love? Secondly, defining how those experiences are clarified, whether by bicycling, collecting fossils, drinking coffee. And thirdly, asking how I can share those experiences with another, crossing the threshold of self to identify with another, through a conversation, a game of basketball, or an award.

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## ***In Indianapolis***

*Indianapolis has no reason to be here—that's essentially our founding story. George Pogue disappeared, our State legislators haphazardly picked it on a map, Alexander Ralston made a grid that ignored the place as it actually existed, and our un-navigable river led to a series of canal-building, just as that technology was being replaced, and bankrupted the state. That's Indianapolis.*

*I think this version of the history, with an emphasis on poor decisions and anti-heroes partly tells the story of where we're at—almost to a Bicentennial, figuring out how to work with what we've got—and how to take this place seriously, in a way that demands affection, care, and sustained attention over years. Not that some things weren't done right, and not that many people before didn't care deeply for this city—they certainly did. Just walk down James Whitcomb Riley's back alley to see a block lived in and loved from the start. But it does demand looking at this place—with everything we have, the failures and assets—as a site of potential, given time and care. Pogue's Run is just one example of this, and it's a particularly potent one because of its role in the early history of the city. Approaching it now as an underutilized asset is to see something that's been there all along, unnoticed. It makes it visible for a new use. I think that Kessler's Parks and Boulevards plan treated the waterways similarly, with affection, which is why we have parks like Spades and Brookside today.*

*Pogue's Run behind Flat 12 was essentially unnoticed. It goes subterranean in a block, and it's hidden behind a strip of light industrial buildings, and totally overgrown, to the point of being invisible. Our plan was to begin the Pogue's Run Trail ourselves—a city project never begun. When all the other waterways got their trails—Pleasant Run, White River, Fall Creek—Pogue's Run never happened. Our ROW committee had several of us who were very familiar with the frustration, and Pat identified this vacated alley as a perfect site to stage the first strip of the Pogue's Run Trail, on our own, as neighbors. Which, we like to point out, is really the Near Eastside way. The block between Vermont and Michigan has become a mainstreet for Holy Cross. Flat 12 moved in several years ago, the Smoking Goose. There's a garden store in the works. We bike down it because of the Dorman Street bridge across Michigan. But Pogue's Run is back there too, in a mess of honeysuckle and Mulberries. It also became apparent that the big blank wall of Brinks would just be ugly once we cleared out overgrowth, and Pat knows the building owner, so it was no problem to be able to paint back there. The drawings I made were all deeply based in historical research.*

*We did get a lot done on the first workday, and it was a beautiful day. And they got even more done with the invasive removal along the creek—for the first time, there was the creek. Pogue's Run was visible, from a trail we made, and it was beautiful. A few massive old Sycamores were left, and the sun hit the water, and it was an amazing new thing. We spent a lot of time in the weeks after walking and biking there. I would come over just to see it, or continue painting the mural, and often Pat Dubach would be there doing the same. For weeks after, I would get over there as often as possible to keep painting, and Flat 12 kept my ladder and paints. I was in and out of there so often, people assumed I worked there. Greta was still taproom manager, and I usually caught up with her, and she'd bring people out to see when I was working. It was some of the best times.*



### Third Things

This is also why I continue to fabricate objects to act as catalysts, much like ‘third things,’ as used by Jacques Rancière or ‘third places’ as defined by Ray Oldenburg. Both writers posit objects or places that bring dissimilar people together around a shared item, while still maintaining their difference. And both use the idea of being ‘alone together’ as a mark of this type of third space, in which a different world can exist within but apart from the order or logic of the larger world, as in: “the feeling of being “apart together” is an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, or mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game...” (Oldenburg, 38)

Rancière identifies a ‘third thing’ as an object in the process of intellectual emancipation, to which both parts can refer but which prevents any kind of ‘equal’ or ‘undistorted’ transmission. It is a mediation between them. That mediation of a third term is crucial in the process of intellectual emancipation. To prevent stultification there must be something between the master and the student. The same thing which links them must separate them. Jacotot posited the book as that in-between thing. The book is that material thing, foreign to both the master and the student, where they can verify what the student has seen, what he has told about it, what he thinks of what he has told.” (Rancière, 278)

In a similar way, Oldenburg (and others since) define ‘third places’ as those apart from ‘first’ and ‘second’ places—the home and the workplace—in which

third places counter the tendency to be restrictive in the enjoyment of others by being open to all and by laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society. Within third places, the charm and flavor of one’s personality, irrespective of his or her station in life, is what counts... The great bulk of human association finds individuals related to one another for some objective purpose... In contrast, what Georg Simmel referred to as ‘pure sociability’ is precisely the occasion in which people get together for no other purpose, higher or lower, than for the ‘joy, vivacity, and relief’ of engaging their personalities beyond the contexts of purpose, duty, or role.” (Oldenburg, 24-25)

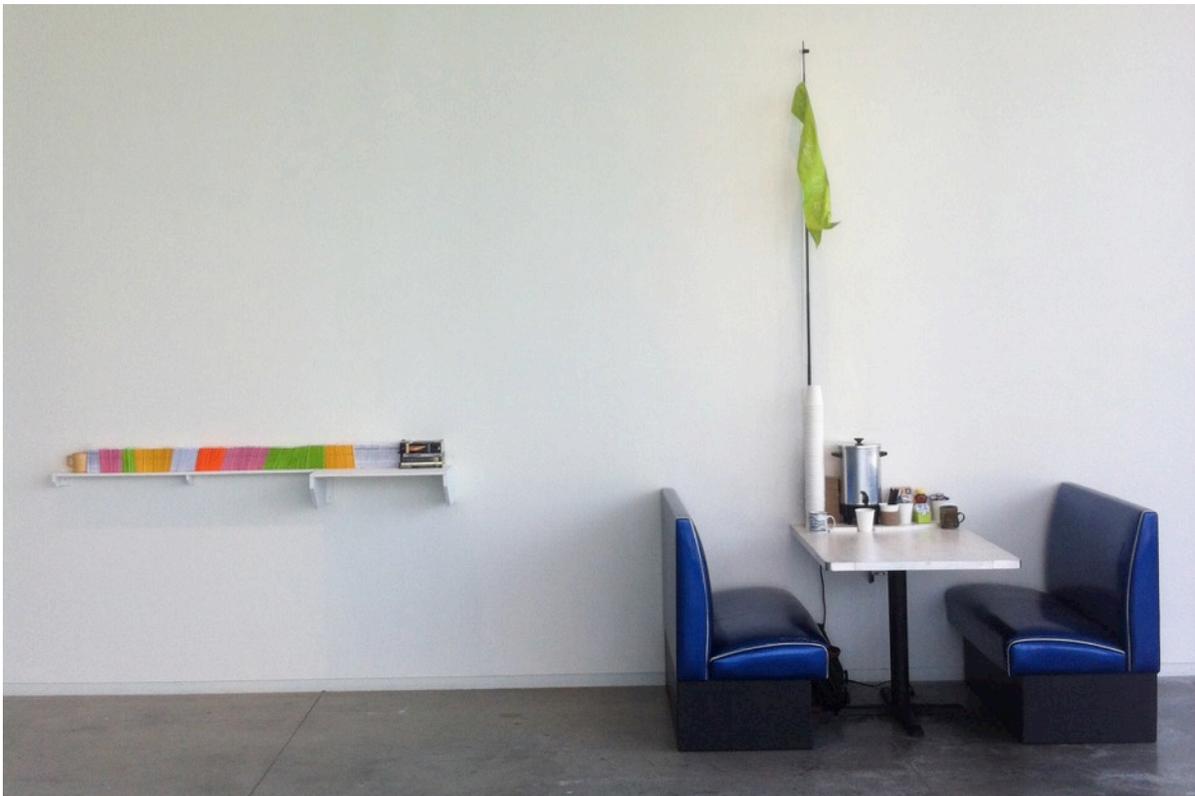
In my projects, the material ephemera most often act as props for the staging of meaningful experience in a place, and provide an initiatory reason to be together in a particular place, such as painting a mural, or giving people flowers and a ribbon because we both ride bicycles, sometimes to the City Market. That experience (riding bicycles to the City Market) is everyday, and I’m isolating a context to call that experience something that is significant and shared; though the physical items are inexpensive and common, they allow for experiences larger than themselves. In this way it’s similar to eating a meal together, or having coffee. Turns out it’s not actually about the coffee; it’s instead about seeing another person, the give and take of conversation, sociability. The ribbons and flowers are props for a shared experience to unfold—my gesture places a context around the action, clarifying and expanding it.

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## The Third Place

The diner booth functions even more as a third place, and in the weeks it was installed, it worked, creating its own space that functioned in a way apart from home/work. It took on all of the elements that define a third space, including becoming Neutral Ground, acting as a Leveler, Conversation as the Main Activity, there are Regulars, the Mood is Playful. The simple set-up of booths, table, coffee is a familiar form to which visitors have responded naturally; it's a space specifically inviting conversation: "The third place is largely a world of its own making, fashioned by talk and quite independent of the institutional order of the larger society. If the world of the third place is far less consequential than the larger one, its regulars find abundant compensation in the fact that it is *a more decent one, more in love with people for their own sake, and, hour for hour, a great deal more fun.*" (Oldenburg, 48; emphasis added)

A few details, like the map on the tabletop, and the flag to indicate coffee levels placed it in a context I'm specifically interested in: here's a map of everywhere I care about, and why. It is a map in which my memory is literally the center of the universe. The tabletop version of the map is a thing to gather around and includes a smaller geography and detail given the size. People sit at the table to get oriented on the map, in exactly the same way as getting situated in the booth. It's *this place*. The tabletop map is a surface to gather around, and is a potential conversation in itself. And as the coffee stains accumulate, they become another history of use on top of my lines describing the city.



### ***In the Gallery***

*When I really noticed it working though was when Suzy started stopping in regularly, because at the time we were familiar (as in the second place, school/work)—but given this form of the booth, she would stop in, sit down, work, talk, drink with me and Jon a lot. Which led to some way late nights. Eventually there was a night Brittany and Ashley came over, Jon happened to be there (he's a regular), Suzy was in and out, and eventually the studiomate pulled up a chair—Suzy said something like, "I can't believe I just found this place" which was the best. It made it this place—and apart from the institutional order of school. A place of sociability, conversation, friendship. And the way she said it made it seem even bigger in my mind—because although versions of this third place had existed, this was different—it went beyond a regular crowd of friends, and let others in.*

*In the gallery, it's a little different. And opening night was obviously different. That evening, I think I primarily connected with friends. Given the crowd, friends were practically lining up to sit down with me, like when Kathryn was sitting there and the gang of photo women was hovering. Though everyone who sat down was pretty conscious of the time they took, and others waited to be seated. And others would come around back and slip in some words with me when the booths were full. And newcomers were there too, like Kara's mom or Sarah's friend, though they came with a familiar. And often though I knew everyone at the table, strangers were introduced to one another, like Molly and Emma, who live across the street from each other, and I was able to introduce (also because of my map drawing skips over their neighborhood entirely). Or Tom to Kaylyn and Charles, who seem like they all should know each other already, but didn't. And I really got to be in that zone, the room within a room, alone together, where I don't know entirely who else was around or taking all the books, or who I missed, etc. And even within that space (apart together), it could on occasion get even smaller. And also I could have conversations with people who I wouldn't care to elsewhere (in a first or second place). But in the third place, this place, it worked, and was good.*

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### **this must be the place**

The map drawings are a way to trace the places I love. Like recalling a loved one's face in my mind, the images are fleeting, specific, fragmentary, and make the desire to see them in person greater. So too with the maps. I'm drawing from memory, outlining the contours of places I go, routes I take, in my mind, and putting them down on paper (or windows, or a table). As such, they're imperfect, partial, tentative, and expand, contract, or disappear based on my memory and experience of a given place. They're based on memory, which itself is based in experience. The maps also tie together everything—the projects, the art practice, daily life—in relation to each other, and also as dependent on each other. So projects at the City Market or in Holy Cross or Englewood are also seen as part of my regular bike routes, or next to the grocery, or near Pat's house. Nothing exists in isolation, though some places do exist larger in my mind and therefore on the map, like my own block, which I can draw to the individual parcel, or the block of Pogue's Run at Vermont Street. Portions of these maps could possibly be used for navigation, though more than pointing to the places depicted on the map, it points back to me, and how I understand and care about these places. Each street and place is a choice, and an indication of care and affection. It could be no other way. In this way, I create the city.

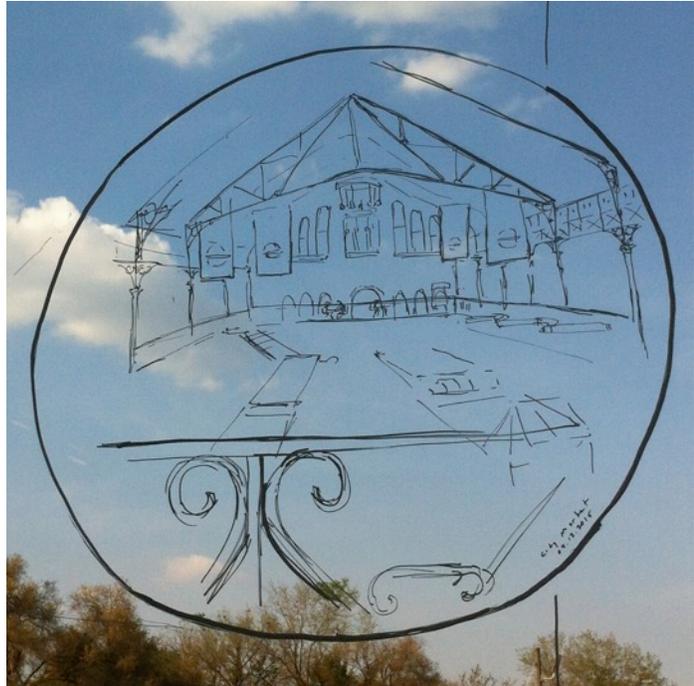


Each map mutates based on what I can recall at the time and place given—notably where I've been recently, the places I care about most deeply, routes I've been on that very day, people I've seen or visited. Though all the maps are similar, none are identical; the scale and detail changes based on care and affection (or disaffection, as in that awful underpass). Each drawing begins with my block, the center of the universe, which is fleshed out in great detail, down to each building, most of the sidewalks, some trees and even floor plans. Houses and trees are named. The block between Rural and Oxford is a self-contained island, bordered by sidewalks and floating in space. Around the edges, things begin to fall away—some buildings are drawn and

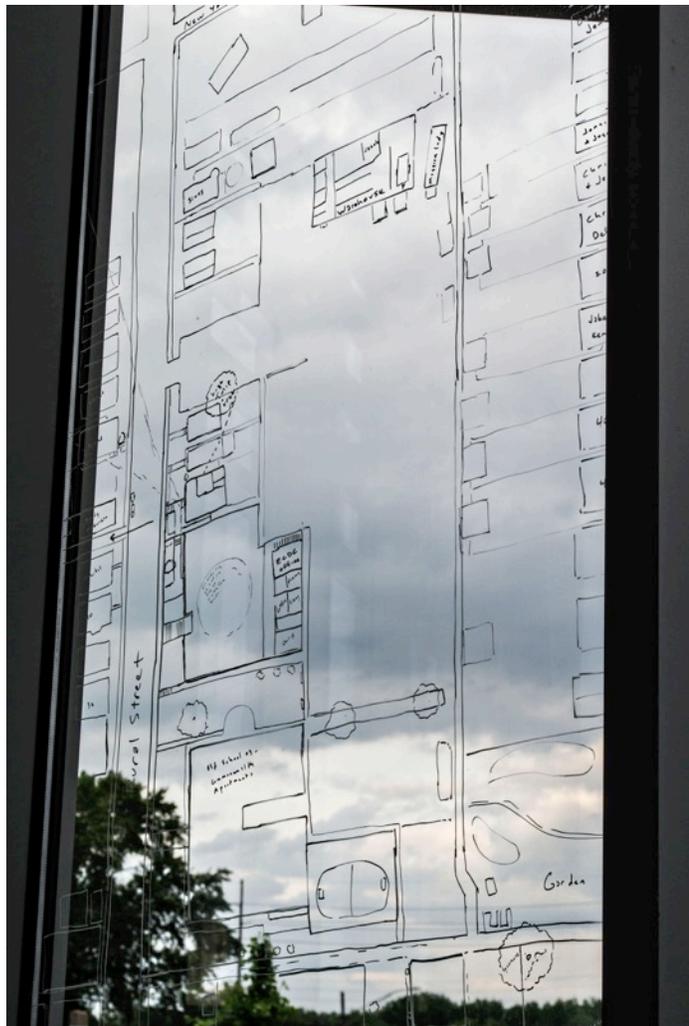
labeled on the other sides of Rural, Oxford, and Washington; then the streets turn into single lines, and landmarks become scarce, and then the world meets its edges.

Scale here is a measurement of care, even as appearing on the map at all is the first indication of importance. Each map is generated based on routes taken or not, and so each corresponds to decisions made in time and space when recalling it in my mind to draw. In this way, they represent to some extent how Michel de Certeau describes walkers in the city:

Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. *They weave places together.* In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these 'real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.' They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize." (Certeau, 97, emphasis added)



The places are visualized, some in great detail, and transferred to an overhead 'map view.' Others are assumed (if I cross a railroad *here*, it's must the same one I cross over *here*); and other places I cannot see down in my mind (where does Ohio Street go before the railroad?). I make the city. It appears and disappears as it's used or experienced. Inserted into the window version of the map are four circle call-outs with drawings made on-site: very particular seats at the City Market, Calvin Fletcher Coffee, my Front Porch, and Pogue's Run. Each is significant for their public/private capacity—the possibility of being 'alone together' or privately in public. Two of them are fantastic third places: the Market and Calvin Fletcher. Pogue's Run is a public place, though it tends towards solitary usage; and there's my front porch, the border between public and private life—though functionally the most private of these spaces, it's still in-public in the sense of seeing and being seen by the world.



These maps are primarily tied to bicycle geography, and I draw based on routes I take—so that crappy alley is always first, and labeled in-detail, though it doesn't connect to the same streets further north at St Clair (which in actuality, it 'should'). Some places only exist going in-town, like certain parts of Ohio Street, and others only going home, like much of Woodruff Place (this was actually one of the last things I drew, because it's a very specific route that only happens coming home, from the north end of downtown, like 10<sup>th</sup> Street or above. And even still, it's pretty rare, because I'll often just cut down Dorman rather than making it all the way to Woodruff). A few places get fleshed out in a lot more detail, like around Pogue's Run at Vermont Street, which is a place I care about a lot, have spent a lot of time there, and see almost daily. A few other landmarks are called out, like Where My Grandparents Lived, or Brick Streets. Or otherwise identified for a reason such as where the Monument Lady Is Visible From Ohio Street, or the statue on the war memorial, or the balcony at Bourbon Street. Fragments of text indicate importance, and often a value statement: 'best' or 'worst' are common. Times of day, people, names locate certain places.

On the windows, the white chalk marker shifts legibility constantly based on the outside light and what is visible through the window—there's a give and take between what is on the window (the drawings of the city from my memory) with what's outside the window (the city itself). The affective memory scale overlaps the physical city—each affects the other; it is the moment of affect, the in-relation-to. In this schema, my qualitative and selective map is overlaid on the physical city (or the physical city provides a ground for the memorable)—it's the exact way *any* place becomes *this place*. This map also has many drawings and text that describe certain places only as I might recall them: 10<sup>th</sup> Street is a *cluster*; William Henry Harrison is *here* (I think now that it's actually George Rogers Clark); Katie Hannigan lived over *here*, (years ago, but I still cut down that street, and still drew a heart on it). Maybe informative, maybe misleading. It's the way places hold together.

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### ***This Crappy Alley***

*By far, the most common route is between my neighborhood and downtown. It most always starts the same though—that alley directly across the street from me, which lines up with the tallest building in the skyline—maybe it's the Chase Tower now? Those several blocks of the alley are some of the worst stretches of road in the city. It's half dirt and half potholes. But it's direct, which on a bicycle is one the most important things, up there with routes where cars don't drive. So I ride this alley most every day, until there's snow or ice because then it's just a sheet of ice—over dirt and potholes. So every time the alley meets a street, I have a name for the intersection—not the street name itself, which I could probably figure out, but there's no street signs here, so other names are more descriptive. At first, I had just named a few of these, but one day as I was riding in, I realized all but two or three had a name—at which point I had to complete the set. It's mostly small houses and vacancies, like most of my neighborhood: houses built for a working class population back when we had thousands of manufacturing jobs. This neighborhood (I live on the border street) is by far one of the hardest-hit in terms of vacancies (probably still close to 40 percent). Though there are lots of people still here—and some clearly doing a lot of work—there's so many lots where houses were demolished, boarded houses, and of course, this crappy alley. In some places, it's led to the innovations of just-getting-by—dumping fill dirt to try to fill holes in the alley (at The Swamp, which may have made it worse), or installing a fountain over the course of the summer, in the same yard where two big mastiffs live, where no grass can grow, and the block reeks (Dogshit Fountain). Or there's that one property (The Secret Garden) that's sort of magical—The small gate in the back drive, the rusted-out steel pergola barely visible through the Rose of Sharon hedge that lines the alley and makes that stretch of alley shaded and significantly cooler than any of the rest; or then that gigantic goat—with horns—that genuinely startled me one day the first time I saw it, like a minotaur in there. There's Coffee and Cigarettes where most mornings in the spring and summer there's an old couple sitting on the porch, smoking, having morning coffee, seemingly the perfect morning. And On the Border, where the house on the right has those pretend country silhouettes of cowboys and dogs on their garage, a cow-painted mailbox, a body shop in the garage, and the house to the left, a Hispanic family parks their car in the now-destroyed muddy front lawn, and has laid down field turf on the front porch. It's an alley no one would ever think to drive in its nine-block entirety, and yet here I am, biking the route, avoiding the potholes, reciting the names.*



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