

CIVIC TRANSFORMATION AND RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the work conducted by community-focused nonprofits working multimodally in the arts and civic improvement. Hardship and disadvantage are shown to have negative effects on social cohesion and prosocial behaviors, while a healthy nonprofit ecology, as well as arts education and participation, have been shown to increase these and similar indicators of civic health. Research into arts organizations working beyond traditional creative placemaking activities to support and develop their immediate communities is critical. This thesis contributes by reviewing and synthesizing data from the diverse literatures of economics, sociology, community planning, and arts management to explore how civically-minded nonprofits utilize principles from theories of social disorganization, social capital, and asset based community development. It reviews the effects of macroeconomics and nonprofit ecosystems on populations, while summarizing critiques of current community improvement initiatives in the arts sector. A case study of Project Row Houses illustrates these theories at work in a disadvantaged, minority-populated urban area.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis seeks to explore the work conducted by community-focused nonprofits working multimodally in the arts and civic improvement. Community development through the arts is currently a popular research topic and funding niche. Organizations throughout the field are creating fresh and tweaking existing programming to further creative placemaking work. The collaborative ArtPlace America and the National Endowment for the Arts' OurTown program are two high-level initiatives participating in research and funding for community planning and development through creative placemaking. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation has just announced a new national initiative seed-funded by the Kresge Foundation driving arts and cultural activities in distressed communities. It is critically important that national emphasis on creative placemaking does not act prescriptively or overshadow the important work already being done by locally led, grassroots organizations, especially those organizations working multimodally to address the distinct and complex issues faced by communities beyond the bounds of cultural place. Community-focused nonprofits often leverage principles described in sociological and planning literatures. Social disorganization theory, social capital theory, and asset based development theory can be utilized to clarify the activities and impact of organizations working for community gain and improvement, especially those working in multiple fields and spheres of influence.

Since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, economic downturn has hit hard across America. Every aspect of civic life has been affected, and citizens, businesses, and communities have all felt the squeeze. Economic hardship and disadvantage are shown to have negative effects on social cohesion and prosocial behaviors. Communities across the nation have experienced effects of the downturn in terms of both economic and social capital. Current crime and unemployment levels are contributing to civic unrest and the social issues associated with poverty are at critical levels. The prevalence of income inequality

and gentrification in urban areas are perceived as threats to civic society and social justice.¹ The relationship between the arts and gentrification is contested, but critical to consider. Community development initiatives, especially those utilizing the arts, are at risk of being prescriptive, top-down, and externally-led. As such, research into arts organizations working multimodally or using integrated approaches to support and develop their immediate communities is critical in filling a research gap and positioning the field as useful in the community development sector.

This thesis assists in filling the research gap by reviewing and synthesizing data from the diverse literatures of economics, sociology, community planning, and arts management to explore how civically-minded nonprofits utilize principles used in theories of social disorganization, social capital, and asset based community development. It reviews the effects of macroeconomics and nonprofit ecosystems on populations, while summarizing critiques of recent and current community improvement initiatives in the arts sector. Finally, a case study of Project Row Houses illustrates the work and activities of a values-based community-focused organization in an impoverished, minority-populated urban area.

Project Row Houses has been working for community transformation and human empowerment in the greater Third Ward of Houston, Texas for twenty years, combining innovative contemporary art programming with needs-based educational and civic activities. An artist-founded organization, it leverages an art historical narrative for community gain in a historically African-American residential and commercial area experiencing a range of social and economic issues. The Public Art Program encompasses artist exhibition rounds, a summer studio program for emerging artists enrolled in local universities, a residency program, affordable artist studios, and incubation projects, which encompass an artists' collective retail space, food co-op and radio programming. In 2003, a sister organization called Row House Community Development Corporation emerged to maintain and manage the low-income housing properties built through PRH's Architecture Program, which included partnership with Rice University in which architecture students worked to develop innovative and readymade housing solutions for urban communities. Row House CDC is now a fully independent organization, which maintains a strong programmatic bond with Project Row Houses while managing affordable housing in four locations.

¹ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 514.

In addition to the Public Art Program, Project Row Houses maintains a Young Mothers Residential Program and an Education Program. PRH's campus also includes a community park and the restored historic Eldorado Ballroom, a former social club and entertainment venue in which many famous blues and jazz artists played.

Project Row Houses radically engages with its community to effect positive change. Formal interviews with staff and informal interviews with participants in the incubation and community programs, as well as attending artist talks, a community market, and the opening of the current exhibition round will make the theories of social disorganization, social capital and asset based community development concrete rather than abstract, putting a real face on both the personnel and participants of this multimodal community-focused nonprofit. In context with the current economic and development climates and historically concentrated disadvantage, this civically-minded nimble nonprofit utilizes qualities like local leadership, community connection and unique founding vision to empower underserved populations and foster creative practices.

Importance of Study

This study will be helpful to community-focused nonprofits working multimodally in the arts and community improvement, which often utilize, consciously or not, principles described in social capital, social disorganization, and asset based development theories. Applying diverse literatures to a study of the governance, structure, values and community constituency of Project Row Houses contributes to the platform of understanding on multimodal community improvement work in arts organizations. A sociological background allows current arts activities to be placed in a historic narrative of urban community values and behaviors. This will enable leaders in the arts and other fields to make better informed decisions regarding the utilization of diverse programming to meet specific community needs and reach attainable, locally-desirable goals.

Additionally, this study contributes to the general understanding of locally led community-focused work in arts organizations outside of traditional creative placemaking bounds. An increased understanding of locally led organizations offer the arts as a field an alternative to the top-down, universal

‘toolkit’ model in preference of full partnerships and co-created solutions between communities and organizations, thought to be critical to long term success of initiatives.² It contributes to understanding of integrated programming addressing multiple issues as well as the importance of community-based, long term investment. Engagement with critics’ concerns about placemaking activities and exploration of the practices and programming of a proven-sustainable organization will allow the field as a whole to improve its efficacy and authenticity in community relations, expanding the potential of the arts as a mechanism to effect positive change in different kinds of communities.

Research Methodology

This paper brings together the languages of economics, sociology, urban planning, and arts management through a literature review. It uses qualitative research methods, including a tour of Project Row Houses’ campus and overt observation of the artist talks and opening of Round 41: Process + Action and the Third Ward Community Market and Talent Showcase. Additionally, it utilizes formal interviews with high-level staff members of Project Row Houses including the Executive Director and Public Art Director, and informal communications with members, visitors, participants in incubation projects, and other staff. Data is also gathered from multimedia communications and materials associated with Project Row Houses.

² Pedro R. Payne, *Youth Violence Prevention Through Asset-Based Community Development* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006), 30.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Communities are complex networks of residents, businesses, and civic organizations. These players are in turn affected by a multitude of factors including the economy, criminal activity, and social cohesion on both national and local levels. As such, in order to accurately explore the possibility of leveraging the arts for social gain, diverse literatures must be consulted and synthesized. This review will bring together literature from economics, sociology, criminology, urban planning, and arts management to present a multiperspective assessment of the current climate in community improvement.

Economic Downturn

The global financial crisis of 2007-2008 has hit hard internationally, and most every field and community has felt the effects of economic hardship. The American economy has experienced a massive shift, fundamentally changing employment and opportunity across the country. A decline in manufacturing has had a significant effect on rates of non-employment from 2000-2011.³ A concurrent shift towards a FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) economy has not exhibited any measurable trickle-down benefits to those communities and populations left without livelihood from declining industry.⁴ In the aftermath of the Great Recession, individuals, households, and communities are all feeling economic strain. It is estimated that 90% of the American population are experiencing personal

³ Kerwin Kofi Charles, Erik Hurst, and Matthew J. Notowidigdo, "Manufacturing Decline, Housing Booms, and Non-Employment," *National Bureau of Economic Research Digest* (April 2013): accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18949>.

⁴ Thomas Frank, "Dead End on Shakin' Street," *The Baffler*, no. 20 (2012): accessed December 5, 2014, www.thebaffler.com/salvos/dead-end-on-shakin-street.

economic decline.⁵ For the first time since the Great Depression, social mobility is trending downward, meaning individuals typically make less than their parents did at the same age.⁶

Effects on Population

The United States has the highest percentage of low-wage workers of any developed nation.⁷ Additionally, as recently as May 2014 was rated lowly on the International Trade Union Confederation in relation to legal and actual protection of workers rights.⁸ Fifteen percent of Americans, and twenty-two percent of American children, live below the poverty line.⁹ Minority populations, specifically African Americans and Hispanics, have the highest poverty rates as well as being disproportionately affected by joblessness.¹⁰ Data compiled by the National Poverty Center show that from 1996 to 2011, the number of American households living in extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as less than \$2 income per person per day in any given month, rose from 636,000 to 1.46 million, an increase of approximately 130%. These households are estimated to include 2.8 million children. When those numbers are adjusted to tally government-issued SNAP benefits as income, the increase is approximately 67%, from 475,000 households in 1996 to 800,000 households, with 1.4 million children.¹¹

Domestically, income and wealth distribution is dramatically skewed. In 2007, a critical year in the financial crisis, the wealthiest ten percent of Americans possessed eighty percent of all financial

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sabrina Tavernise, “Soaring Poverty Casts Spotlight on ‘Lost Decade,’” *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 13, 2011.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “ITUC Global Poll 2014,” *International Trade Union Confederation*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.ituc-csi.org/ituc-global-poll-2014?lang=en>.

⁹ Sabrina Tavernise, “Soaring Poverty Casts Spotlight on ‘Lost Decade,’” *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 13, 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ H. Luke Schaefer and Kathryn Edin, “Extreme Poverty in the United States, 1996 to 2011,” *National Poverty Center*, Policy Brief #28 (February 2012): 2.

assets. Current levels of income inequality are perceived as a danger to democracy and social stability.¹² Economist Thomas Piketty writes that “the risk of a drift towards oligarchy is real and gives little reason for optimism about where the United States is headed.”¹³ Income inequality and high rates of unemployment affect crime levels, including homicide rates. Kubrin and Weitzer write: “Deindustrialization of inner-city areas has depleted the number of blue-collar jobs, which increases economic deprivation and, in turn, homicide rates. It has also led to the growth of illegal drug markets in disadvantaged neighborhoods, further exacerbating homicide rates.”¹⁴ Economic issues such as low income and unemployment and social issues such as crime and poor housing are linked.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory is a sociological perspective concerning the effect of ecological characteristics in a community on criminality and deviant behavior. An organized community is classified as exhibiting social networks, community ties, collective efficacy, and informal social controls, while a disorganized community is characterized by an inability of a community to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls.¹⁵ SDT suggests that macro-level structural changes brought about by de-industrialization undermine social networks and collective efficacy, thereby concentrating disadvantage.¹⁶ Sociologists in the Chicago School found as early as 1925 that weak social ties and controls result in increased community crime rates, drug and alcohol addictions, prostitution and

¹² Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (2014): 564-81.

¹³ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 514.

¹⁴ Charles E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer, “New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 40, no. 4 (2003): 385.

¹⁵ Sampson and Groves, 1989 via Pedro R. Payne, *Youth Violence Prevention Through Asset-Based Community Development* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006), 13.

¹⁶ Pedro R. Payne, *Youth Violence Prevention Through Asset-Based Community Development* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006), 15.

mental illness,¹⁷ and numerous more recent studies give evidence that social ties and informal social controls help to lower neighborhood crime rates.¹⁸ However, the research also shows that the effect of social ties depends on the persons involved and their motivations. That is, social ties exist among criminals as well as among law-abiding citizens, and the effects of these social ties vary according to the actor's intent.¹⁹ In practice, positive effects of social ties appear to be related to the activation of those ties and the mobilization of social resources to enhance informal controls, known as purposive action. In turn, purposive action among motivated citizens leads to collective efficacy, which largely reduces the effects of concentrated disadvantage and residential instability on violence and is negatively associated with neighborhood rates of violence.²⁰ Collective efficacy also works to mitigate the effects of neighborhood disorder, thought to both have a causal relationship and function as an outcome of high crime areas.²¹ In areas of high poverty, Kubrin and Weitzer write that:

concentrated disadvantage not only deprives neighborhoods of resources that may be mobilized to control crime, but also increases social isolation among residents, which impedes communication and interferes with their capacity to pursue common values.²²

Since collective efficacy relies upon common values and goals, social isolation undermines the possibility for informal social control of this type. Formal social control, such as police activity, is also undermined in areas of concentrated disadvantage. High rates of incarceration and underpolicing in traditionally high crime areas create a disconnect between residents and those systems ostensibly designed to maintain order, fostering a culture of disenchantment with the legal system.²³ As social controls are predicted on trust, mutual dependence and support, this disconnect is significant.

¹⁷ Robert Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925).

¹⁸ Bellair 1997, 2000; Elliott et al. 1996, Markowitz et al. 2001; Sampson 1997, via Charles E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 40, no. 4 (2003): 376.

¹⁹ Charles E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 40, no. 4 (2003): 380.

²⁰ Ibid, 377.

²¹ Ibid, 378.

²² Bruce, Roscigno, and McCall 1998; Sampson and Wilson 1995, via Ibid, 380.

²³ Ibid, 382.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory is defined by Robert Putnam as the elements of social life which enable individuals to act together more effectively and pursue shared objectives. These elements include social norms, networks, and trust.²⁴ Behaviors generally associated with social capital development include involvement in civic and community organizations, voting, newspaper readership, church membership, and volunteering. The benefits of social capital, for any given population segment, depend on connection and trust, similar to the functioning of formal and informal social controls in social disorganization theory.

Social capital can be differentiated as either bonding or bridging capital. Bonding capital connects people and populations which are similar in some aspect or aspects, while bridging capital connects people and populations which are distinct from one another in some aspect. Additionally, linking capital can be understood as a subset of bridging capital. Linking capital connects people and populations with a player with authority for the purpose of gaining resources or perspective from outside the immediate community.²⁵ Community connection and trust foster the development of social capital, benefitting those populations involved in bridging or bonding and their civic environment.

Putnam wrote about the decline of social capital in America in his seminal work, Bowling Alone, published in 2000. He attributed this decline, expressed through a decrease in civic engagement and associational behaviors, to demographic transformations such as fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children, and lower real wages, as well as a technological transformation of leisure, widely understood to reference a shift towards in-home media versus external entertainment.²⁶ This research has been criticized as focusing solely on certain forms of social capital while ignoring others, and thereby recording merely a shift, rather than a decline, in social capital behaviors.

²⁴ Robert Putnam, "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28, no. 4 (1995): 664.

²⁵ "Social Capital Glossary," *Harvard Kennedy School Saguaro Seminar*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/glossary.htm>.

²⁶ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000): 170.

Asset Based Community Development

Asset based community development is a model formed with the intent of identifying and leveraging existing assets within a community for purposes of overall improvement. Relying on residents and local associations as agents of change, the model can be best understood through the lens of both social disorganization theory and social capital theory. In the words of Pedro Payne, concerning the use of asset based community development in the prevention of youth violence:

The purpose of the ABCD model is to mitigate the effects of concentrated disadvantage on social capital by promoting neighbor-to-neighbor trust and cooperation. It is theorized that if social capital is not used for negative goals (such as exclusionary tactics that discriminate against ethnic minorities), then collective efficacy returns to the community as social networks are re-established thereby re-introducing in the lives of youths the social control mechanisms that were diminished by the processes of social disorganization in the community.²⁷

In asset based community development, individuals represent one of the greatest assets of any community.²⁸ The model calls for an asset survey as an initial step, identifying the special skills and expertise already existing in the community but previously likely unrecognized. Organizing and leveraging existing assets is the first step to self-starting community empowerment. Payne writes:

The ABCD model provides the opportunity for local residents to look to one another for solutions, while the local government acts as an infrastructure to help provide for solutions that are outside the scope of local individuals or community groups. The model does not ignore the limitations of the community, nor does it seek to absolve local government of its social responsibility to the community. Instead, the local municipality joins hands with the local community to find solutions to help improve and develop collective cooperation and social capital. By developing social capital, the model mitigates social disorganization in the community.²⁹

Asset based community development is designed to be a path to grassroots, rather than vertically or externally identified, solutions. Assets can be individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections. The capacities and activities of each of these categories, once identified, can contribute in unexpected ways.

²⁷ Pedro R. Payne, *Youth Violence Prevention Through Asset-Based Community Development* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006), 31.

²⁸ Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, via Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 30.

Arts Education and Participation

Arts education and participation have documented positive effects on all populations. Longitudinally, students with high arts participation are more likely to attend and finish high school and continued educational institutions.³⁰ High-arts students also tend to have significantly higher standardized scores like the SAT, and tend to longitudinally be more likely to be gainfully employed and civically engaged than their low-arts peers in young adulthood.³¹ The data also show that students of low socioeconomic status with arts rich experiences, while tending to do better across the board academically, exhibit characteristics of active and engaged citizens like voting, volunteering and participating in their communities at statistically significantly higher rates than their low arts participating socioeconomic peers.³²

Arts participation is shown to positively affect persons of all ages, having benefits like increased risk-taking, the exploration of new ideas, self-expression, capacity building, teamwork skills and peer support.³³ Arts participation is also shown to connect families and individuals to their communities.³⁴ In student populations, arts participation increases performance for all groups of students in all subjects and data show that underserved populations benefit most dramatically from participation in the arts.³⁵ When

³⁰ James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, “The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies,” *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2012.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, and Sandra S. Ruppert, “Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement,” *National Assembly of State Arts Agencies*, 2006.

³⁴ Sandra S. Ruppert, “Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement,” *National Assembly of State Arts Agencies*, 2006.

³⁵ James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, “The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies,” *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2012; Sandra S. Ruppert, “Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement,” *National Assembly of State Arts Agencies*, 2006.

initiated in high-risk populations, arts participation has been shown to have the potential to close the achievement gap widely recognized as a result of systematic social inequalities.³⁶

The studies referenced here should be taken with a grain of salt, as both were intended, to some degree, as advocacy materials to be used by the constituents of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the National Endowment for the Arts. Their specific focus on particular segments may not paint a complete picture, and impact evaluation strategies across the field are inconsistent at best. A key shortcoming in impact evaluation in the arts and community initiatives is the tendency of funders to selectively utilize information with the intent of suggesting instrumentality.³⁷

Nonprofits and Civic Health

Studies show that social goals and civic health can be supported by a healthy nonprofit climate. Data from the National Conference on Citizenship appears to show that civic engagement in a population can protect against unemployment, and contribute overall to economic resilience.³⁸ Additionally, a community's nonprofit infrastructure and social cohesion are strongly connected to economic resilience, and also tend to protect against unemployment within a population.³⁹ The data also show that communities with strong cultural and nonprofit ecology that engage directly with residents tend to have lower unemployment rates,⁴⁰ and successful arts organizations are shown to generate business, jobs, and

³⁶ James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumaïs, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, "The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies," *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2012.

³⁷ Eleanora Belfiore, "The social impacts of the arts- myth or reality?" in *Culture Vultures*, ed. by Munira Mirza (London: Policy Exchange, 2006): 27.

³⁸ Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Chaeyoon Lim, and Peter Levine, "Civic Health and Unemployment II: The Case Builds," *National Conference on Citizenship 2012 Issue Brief* (September 12, 2012): 4.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kyoko Uchida, "Arts and Community Engagement," *PhilanTopic* (blog), October 20, 2012, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/2012/10/funding-for-the-arts-month-arts-and-community-engagement.html>.

tourism dollars.⁴¹ Place-based cultural attributes are positively related to inspire community pride, economic growth, civic dialogue, and local identity-building.⁴² Critically, cultural events work to attract new dollars while retaining local dollars. When surveyed, 41.9% of local and 52.4% of nonlocal cultural event attendees said that if the event they were attending was not occurring, they would have traveled to a different community to have a similar experience.⁴³ While the social impact of cultural tourism on existing local populations is contested, the economic impact is evident. In the words of Americans for the Arts President and CEO Robert Lynch in the most recent Arts and Economic Prosperity study:

If a community fails to provide a variety of artistic and cultural experiences, it will not attract the new dollars of cultural tourists. It will also lose discretionary spending by local residents traveling elsewhere for an arts experience. When a community attracts nonlocal arts attendees and other cultural tourists, it harnesses significant economic reward.⁴⁴

Nationally, the arts and cultural sector generated \$135.2 billion in economic activity, of which \$61.1 billion was attributed to nonprofits. The industry supports 4.13 million full-time positions, generates \$86.68 billion in household income, and generates \$22.3 billion in revenue to governments on the local, state, and federal levels. Americans for the Arts describes this as “a yield well beyond their collective \$4 billion in arts allocations.”⁴⁵

The Arts and Economic Prosperity study surveyed 182 organizations who answered a call for participation made by Americans for the Arts. While the variety among participants is estimated by the authors to be diverse enough that results are transferable to most communities, it is important to consider that only organizations with enough capacity and national connection to easily respond to high level research calls and data projects participated. Nonprofits with less organizational capacity would not have participated. The study is also intended as an advocacy resource, and as such pays particular attention to

⁴¹ Carl Grodach, “Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighborhoods, Artists and Cultural Economy,” *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 31 (2011): 74.

⁴² Ibid, 76.

⁴³ Robert L. Lynch, “Arts and Economic Prosperity IV Summary Report,” *Americans for the Arts* (2010): 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 2.

outcomes that can be leveraged for that purpose. It is evident that the impact of the arts on local, state, and national economies is not yet fully explored. This will be expanded upon in the upcoming section.

It is important to note that Americans for the Arts is active in practice as well as research. Their Animating Democracy program is intended to elevate knowledge and attention to arts for change work, by demonstrating the public value of creative work contributing to social changes and fostering synergy across arts and other fields.⁴⁶ With an emphasis on inclusive practices, building capacity, and collaboration, Animating Democracy is an important institutional leader in the current climate.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is an affirmative action strategy popular in the United Kingdom and Europe, defined by the World Bank as both the process and the outcome of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society.⁴⁷ It arose in response to social exclusion, the process by which certain groups are denied access to social rights, opportunities, and resources.⁴⁸ Social exclusion is generally assumed to be the result of structural features of society like laws, public policies, institutional practices, organizational behaviors, and dominant ideologies, values, and beliefs.⁴⁹ The Social Exclusion Unit, a governmental task force in the United Kingdom, defines social exclusion as “a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family

⁴⁶ “About Animating Democracy,” *Animating Democracy*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://animatingdemocracy.org/about>.

⁴⁷ *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity (Advance Edition)* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2013), accessed December 5, 2014, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1265299949041/6766328-1329943729735/8460924-1381272444276/InclusionMatters_AdvanceEdition.pdf.

⁴⁸ “About Adler Institute on Social Exclusion,” *Adler School of Professional Psychology*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.adler.edu/page/institutes/institute-on-social-exclusion/about>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

breakdown.”⁵⁰ It contributes to a multidimensional view of poverty and disadvantage, which broadens available alleviation strategies.

Social inclusion strategies related to the arts are often community-based. The Social Exclusion Unit found that supporting participation in leisure activities, such as arts and sports, can contribute to neighborhood renewal, measured through improved performance on indicators of health, crime, employment and education.⁵¹ However, there is an evaluation issue. Specifically, community-based arts projects are difficult to assess due to the large numbers of stakeholders and the multiplicity of possible outcomes.⁵² Additionally, positive stakeholder outcomes such as an increase in training or employment are difficult to positively attribute to social inclusion interventions due to a lack of evaluative data.⁵³ In the words of Eleanora Belfiore, “The quality of the evidence on the social impacts of the arts is generally poor, and evaluation methodologies are still unsatisfactory.”⁵⁴ Impact evaluation measures are extremely varied in design and execution, and often funder-driven. Methods of evaluation which are common in other fields may or may not accurately measure impact in the arts, especially the social impact. However, research consistently points to the arts as having community benefits, including positive economic, educational, social and personal changes, and increased capacity to break down barriers.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Eleanora Belfiore, “The social impacts of the arts- myth or reality?” in *Culture Vultures*, ed. by Munira Mirza (London: Policy Exchange, 2006): 22.

⁵¹ Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 1999, via Tony Newman, Katherine Curtis, and Jo Stephens, “Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of the literature,” *Community Development Journal* 38, no. 4 (2003): 310.

⁵² Landry et al, 1995, via Tony Newman, Katherine Curtis, and Jo Stephens, “Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of the literature,” *Community Development Journal* 38, no. 4 (2003): 312.

⁵³ Tony Newman, Katherine Curtis, and Jo Stephens, “Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of the literature,” *Community Development Journal* 38, no. 4 (2003): 312.

⁵⁴ Eleanora Belfiore, “The social impacts of the arts- myth or reality?” in *Culture Vultures*, ed. by Munira Mirza (London: Policy Exchange, 2006): 29.

⁵⁵ Weitz, 1996; Lowe, 2000, via Tony Newman, Katherine Curtis, and Jo Stephens, “Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of the literature,” *Community Development Journal* 38, no. 4 (2003): 313.

Sharp, Pollock and Paddison examined the intersection of social inclusion and public art in urban areas, finding that the process through which public art becomes installed into the urban fabric is critical to inclusion. They define public art as:

...art which has as its goal a desire to engage with its audiences and to create spaces—whether material, virtual or imagined—within which people can identify themselves, perhaps by creating a renewed reflection on community, on the uses of public spaces or on our behavior within them.⁵⁶

Sharp et al also talk about cultural viability, emphasizing the potential of public art to work on multiple levels, such as increased visual attractiveness, aestheticized urban spaces, and acting as a signal that authorities are willing to engage with social and environmental issues.⁵⁷ Public art also can function as a space for contradictory voices, representing the diversity of people using the space.⁵⁸ Fraser suggests that the processes through which cultural or symbolic injustices tend to arise are fundamentally “rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication.”⁵⁹ It follows, therefore, that communication and inclusive decision making processes can mitigate injustices and foster inclusion. In terms of public art, Sharp et al claim that the visibility of the medium makes it “a prime vehicle through which minority groups can firm their history and physically mark their place within the layered histories of the urban space—the past being a keystone upon which to build for the present and the future.”⁶⁰

Additionally, Ron Griffiths notes that:

...an important part of the experience of exclusion is a weakened or non-existent sense of identity and pride. A key step in integrating excluded populations into the social mainstream, therefore, is to assist them to find their voice, to validate their particular histories and traditions, to establish a collective identity, to give expression to their experiences and aspirations, to build self-confidence.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Joanne Sharp, Venda Pollock, and Ronan Paddison. “Just Art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration.” *Urban Studies* 42, nos. 5/6 (2005): 1003-4.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 1004.

⁵⁸ Hall and Robertson, 2001, via Joanne Sharp, Venda Pollock, and Ronan Paddison. “Just Art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration.” *Urban Studies* 42, nos. 5/6 (2005): 1004.

⁵⁹ Fraser, 1995 via Ibid, 1006.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 1007.

⁶¹ Ron Griffiths, 1999, via Ibid, 1007.

This emphasis on history of marginalized populations raises concerns about the validity and authenticity of narrative-building in contemporary communities. The visibility of public art, in combination with historic social exclusion, necessitates an authentic and democratic approach, as social inclusion can become a means of projecting a city's image, especially in urban areas wherein economic restructuring has been accompanied by deepening socioeconomic inequalities and segregation.⁶²

A Legacy of Community Initiatives

There are many community improvement initiatives relevant to the current climate in the field. For the purposes of this paper, three are introduced here. The Mayor's Institute on City Design is an ongoing leadership initiative in partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Architectural Foundation, and the United States Conference of Mayors. It operates through sessions organized around innovative feedback and solutions to case study problems presented by attending mayors. The MICD began in 1986 and has worked in 41 states as well as Puerto Rico, intended to transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities.⁶³

Beginning in 2002, Richard Florida popularized, through his writing and consulting, the idea of the creative class. He proposed that the class of workers comprised of professors, scientists, engineers and "people in design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content" would take root in post-industrial cities across America, revolutionizing local economies and heralding a new age of technological advances and culturally superior cities.⁶⁴ A key strategy was attracting large corporate headquarters and financial players, who would in turn then attract and recruit the best and brightest of the creative class from across the nation. Tweaking cities' infrastructure and activities in order to attract this class of individuals was the goal and

⁶² Ibid, 1005.

⁶³ "What is the Mayor's Institute?" *Mayor's Institute on City Design*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.micd.org/about>.

⁶⁴ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 8.

method, and as the most attractive cities were ideally full of cultural activities and open, tolerant populations, artists necessarily played a part. The creative class movement was wildly popular in literature and media, and served to link the creative professions to economic development and community improvement, positing a kind of trickle-down creative economy.

More recently, creative placemaking has taken up the consciousness of community improvement through the arts. Encompassing a wide range of activities and organizations in and outside the arts field, creative placemaking is defined by Roberto Bedoya as “those cultural activities that shape the physical and social characteristics of a place.”⁶⁵ The NEA describes creative placemaking as:

Partners from public, private, non-profit and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.⁶⁶

Creative placemaking is an inherently activity-based strategy, versus the more passive theorized trickle-down of the creative class. These activities include a wide range of strategies ranging from mixed-use real estate development, cultural districting and festival planning to mural painting. Spearheaded by the National Endowment for the Arts’ OurTown program and the ArtPlace task force, creative placemaking is growing in influence and momentum.

A common placemaking tool is adaptive use. In adaptive use projects, existing community assets, often vacant or underutilized civic or industrial buildings, are converted and repurposed to host organizations, collectives, live-work spaces, studios, and more. Research suggests that adaptive use projects are most successful when they are reputable, affordable, trust-based and work closely with diverse, local partners.⁶⁷ Artists of all disciplines are often attracted to vacant and industrial spaces due to

⁶⁵ Roberto Bedoya, “Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging,” *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2013), accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.giarts.org/article/placemaking-and-politics-belonging-and-dis-belonging>.

⁶⁶ Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking Executive Summary* (Washington DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010), <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Kong, 2009 via Carl Grodach, “Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighborhoods, Artists and Cultural Economy,” *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 31 (2011): 76.

low rent, historic charm, and flexibility in renovation. Studies suggest that adaptive use spaces can function as neighborhood anchors, outreach venues, and incubators, while increasing opportunities for and accessibility to the community at large, including marginalized and low-access groups.⁶⁸ Renovation and conversion, rather than demolition and reconstruction, can offer significant cost and tax benefits, especially in historic or blighted areas. Existing community infrastructure can thus be transformed into highly productive creative capital. Increasingly, literature in urban studies and planning embraces “artists as agents in neighborhoods where arts and culture plant the seeds of local empowerment.”⁶⁹

Gentrification and Justice: Policy Critiques

In recent years, the creative class initiative has been harshly critiqued. A common theme is that it appears to be self-perpetuating. That is, those individuals and populations already benefiting from being members of the creative class tend to continue to benefit when initiatives are put in place, while other segments do not experience trickle-down benefits. Furthermore, critics claim the creative class movement has been shown to have undesirable effects on established local populations, especially in Rust Belt cities and cities with ethnic populations.⁷⁰ These recent criticisms and concerns drive home the importance of authenticity in relations between artists and communities. In the words of Thomas Frank, it is not enough to “repackage [cities] as a sort of prosperity gospel for Ivy League art students.”⁷¹ Studies suggest that

⁶⁸ Carl Grodach, “Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighborhoods, Artists and Cultural Economy,” *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 31 (2011): 76.

⁶⁹ Borup 2006; Grams and Warr 2003; M.R. Jackson and Herranz, 2002; Stern and Seifert, 1998; via Karen Chapple and Shannon Jackson, “Commentary: Arts, Neighborhood and Social Practices: Towards an Integrated Epistemology of Community Arts,” *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 29 (2010): 490.

⁷⁰ Joel Kotkin, “Richard Florida Concedes the Limits of the Creative Class,” *The Daily Beast*, March 20, 2013, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/20/richard-florida-concedes-the-limits-of-the-creative-class.html>.

⁷¹ Thomas Frank, “Dead End on Shakin’ Street,” *The Baffler*, no. 20 (2012), accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.thebaffler.com/salvos/dead-end-on-shakin-street>.

local leadership and community partnerships seem to be key to the efficacy of community improvement initiatives and the community's relationship with them.⁷²

Creative placemaking and gentrification are commonly conflated, especially in relation to the role of artists. Gentrification is defined as increasing property values in traditionally working class urban areas through property purchase and occupation by middle and upper class citizens and development corporations.⁷³ Increasing property values increases property taxes, and can create a financially untenable situation for working class populations experiencing economic hardship. Economic displacement is generally assumed to be a consequence of gentrification. Domestically, historic issues associated with population displacement are concerning to professionals in the arts, including Roberto Bedoya, the Executive Director of the Tucson Pima Arts Council. Bedoya writes in an essay originally published by *Arts in a Changing America*, and expanded upon for *Grantmakers in the Arts*:

One needs to reflect upon US history and its troubling legacy of 'placemaking' manifested in acts of displacement, removal, and containment. This history is long and horrible, from the forced movement of American Indians from their lands and their confinement to reservations, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, to the urban redevelopment movement of the 1960s and 1970s that destroyed working poor and ethnic neighborhoods across American cities using the language of blight alongside bulldozers. ... If Creative Placemaking activities support the politics of dis-belonging through acts of gentrification, racism, real estate speculation, all in the name of neighborhood revitalization, then it betrays the democratic ideal of having an equitable and just civil society.⁷⁴

Anne Gadwa Nicodemus writes on *Createquity* about the tendency in America to view the artist as privileged other, and therefore separate from the community.⁷⁵ There is a general assumption of the artist as complicit in the negative effects of gentrification. New York based nonprofit Project for Public Spaces

⁷² Carl Grodach, "Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighborhoods, Artists and Cultural Economy," *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 31 (2011): 84.

⁷³ gentrification, Dictionary.com, *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, Random House, Inc., accessed December 5, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gentrification>.

⁷⁴ Roberto Bedoya, "Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2013), accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.giarts.org/article/placemaking-and-politics-belonging-and-dis-belonging>.

⁷⁵ Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, "Artists and Gentrification: Sticky Myths, Slippery Realities," *Createquity* (blog), April 5, 2013, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://createquity.com/2013/04/artists-and-gentrification-sticky-myths-slippery-realities>.

writes in its series on placemaking, which calls for inclusivity and recognition of pluralistic communities rather than a singular community, that artist-led projects likely lead to gentrification and limited community outcomes.⁷⁶ Nicodemus disagrees, asserting that artists' role in community development is recent, spurred by NEA and ArtPlace funding and interest, and that artists' traditional underfunding makes them ideal pawns of developers and general development pressure.⁷⁷ Certainly additional research must needs be done to clarify the multitude of factors associated with gentrification and placemaking, both generally and specific to the arts.

Summary and Synthesis

Current economic conditions are causing a high percentage of the American population to experience both new and sustained hardship. Social exclusion, the process by which certain groups are denied access to social rights, opportunities, and resources, is thought to be a result of the linked problems of unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. For historically underserved communities, the effects of concentrated disadvantage are being exacerbated by current levels of income inequality, poverty, and working conditions. Organized communities can serve to mitigate these negative effects through purposive action and collective efficacy, elements described in both social disorganization theory and social capital theory. Asset based community development posits that residents are valuable agents of change, who can promote neighbor-to-neighbor trust and cooperation, thereby developing social capital and collective efficacy, thereby mitigating the effects of concentrated disadvantage.

The positive effects of arts participation and education are documented in student and adult populations, and include increased civic engagement and social capital behaviors. In context with data from the National Conference on Citizenship positing that civic engagement in a population can protect

⁷⁶ "All Placemaking is Creative: How a Shared Focus on Place Builds Vibrant Destinations," *Project for Public Spaces*, 2013, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.pps.org/reference/placemaking-as-community-creativity-how-a-shared-focus-on-place-builds-vibrant-destinations>.

⁷⁷ Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, "Artists and Gentrification: Sticky Myths, Slippery Realities," *Createquity* (blog), April 5, 2013, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://createquity.com/2013/04/artists-and-gentrification-sticky-myths-slippery-realities>.

against unemployment and contribute to economic resilience, it follows that arts education and participation can be important factors in overall civic health and social bonding. Studies also show a community's nonprofit and cultural infrastructure, as well as social cohesion, are strongly connected to economic resilience and protect against unemployment. Arts organizations are shown to generate business, jobs and tourism dollars. Nonprofit cultural organizations are critical in retaining local entertainment spending as well as attracting cultural tourism dollars from outside the immediate community. As such, nonprofits are critical for both the civic and economic health of a community.

Creative placemaking, and its predecessor, the creative class movement, seek to strategically shape communities. Creative placemaking is inherently activity-based, and supported on the local and national levels through a variety of institutional research and funding opportunities. Critics' concerns about both movements tend to focus on inclusiveness for all segments of a population, particularly in diverse communities and those experiencing economic hardship in the wake of deindustrialization. Concerns about population displacement as a result of gentrification go hand in hand with creative class and creative placemaking. Public art can utilize a socially inclusive process to build local identity and pride, key to a positive sense of place in established populations, particularly minority groups whose histories have been marginalized. Issues of representation, interpretation and communication contributing to cultural or symbolic injustices can be addressed through the vehicle of public art, which also serves to aestheticize urban spaces. A positive sense of place is shown to inspire community pride, economic growth, civic dialogue, and local identity-building, critical elements of organized communities. Although identifying a causal relationship between nonprofit cultural activities and positive civic outcomes is challenging, research consistently identifies community benefits including positive economic, educational, social and personal changes, as well as increased capacity to break down barriers. In context with an understanding of social exclusion and disorganization, this is significant.

CHAPTER 3: PROJECT ROW HOUSES

A CASE STUDY

Third Ward | Houston, Texas

“The mission of Project Row Houses is to be the catalyst for transforming community through the celebration of art and African-American history and culture. [...] PRH is a unique experiment in activating the intersections between art, historic preservation, affordable and innovative housing, community relations and development, neighborhood revitalization, and human empowerment.”⁷⁸

History

Founded in 1993 as a guerilla-style project inspired by a set of derelict 22 shotgun-style homes, Project Row Houses exists simultaneously in multiple spheres of influence. Project Row Houses’ mission and activities encompass programs in Public Art and Education as well as the Young Mother’s Residential Program and an Architecture program, now almost entirely incorporated in a separate sister organization, Row House Community Development Corporation. The founders’ vision was to “establish a positive, creative and transformative presence in [the] historic community,”⁷⁹ which many of them called home. That vision has manifested itself into an organization which is comprised of 71 structures and houses a vibrant creative community in a historically African-American neighborhood.

Project Row Houses leverages an art historical narrative for human empowerment and community transformation. Inspired by the German artist Josef Beuys’ (1921-1986) concept of social sculpture and the muralistic paintings of the African-American artist Dr. John Biggers (1924-2001), the current activities of PRH literally utilize the community as material. Beuys’ social sculpture broadened the definition of art practice, reinforcing the artistic validity of social engagement and transformation

⁷⁸ “About PRH,” *Project Row Houses*, accessed December 5, 2014, projectrowhouses.org/about-us.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

outside the bounds of traditional studio work, while Biggers' paintings celebrated the aesthetics of the shotgun house, a staple in post-war Southern architecture, as well as the cultural and spiritual significance of those who inhabit them. In 2014, Rick Lowe, the artist-founder of Project Row Houses, was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, and in 2013 was appointed by President Barack Obama to the National Council on the Arts. Within this art historical narrative and an artist-centric value structure, Project Row Houses can be thought of as an organization engaged in both art-making and art-presenting.

Community Constituency

Houston's third ward is described by Ryan Dennis, PRH's Public Art Director, as "a rich African American historical space for Black residents and Black lives."⁸⁰ The Third Ward contains what was once a diverse and strong African-American financial and cultural district, which fell into aggravated distress following the end of housing segregation, when more affluent residents moved away. The area has a population of approximately 16,000 residents, with a higher population density of nearly 2,000 residents per square mile than Houston at large.⁸¹ The majority of homes in the area were constructed before 1950, with new home building practically stalling from 1950-2005.⁸² Most residents are renters. The majority of employed workers are employed in the service industry, with approximately 30% of males and 20% of females employed in service.⁸³ Median income in 2011 was \$35,148, compared to \$42,877 in Houston at large.⁸⁴ 46% of the population is above the poverty level, meaning 54% of residents live below established poverty

⁸⁰ Ryan Dennis (Public Art Director) in discussion with author, October 2014.

⁸¹ "Third Ward Neighborhood in Houston, Texas, 77004 Detailed Profile." *City Data*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Third-Ward-Houston-TX.html>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

norms.⁸⁵ Nationally, approximately 15% of residents are below the same poverty line.⁸⁶ The poverty level for a household of two, the most common demographic in the Third Ward, is \$15,730.⁸⁷ Third Ward real estate includes many vacancies and poorly maintained properties symptomatic of blight. It is classified as a food desert, with limited or no access to natural and healthy foods, especially fresh produce. The crime index is 540.1, versus a nationwide average of 266.4.⁸⁸ Rates of absenteeism among fathers are high, between 70 and 90%.⁸⁹

The Third Ward is, sociologically, an area of concentrated and sustained disadvantage, exhibited by the high rates of poverty and crime and exacerbated by economic changes related to deindustrialization and urban sprawl. The high percentage of low-income workers, taken in combination with the low domestic rating of legal actual protection of workers' rights, indicates a large percentage of the population whose social ties are likely weak. The combination of poverty, crime, and blight increases social isolation, which lowers collective efficacy and in turn purposive action, limiting the ability of residents to identify and mobilize common values in order to make changes in their community.⁹⁰

Governance

Project Row Houses is a 501(c)3 registered non-profit organization. It has a Board of Directors with 22 members, including its executive director and director of finance. The executive director is not a voting member. The current board president has increased full-board meetings from every two months to monthly. She is a Harvard-educated attorney and a Houston native,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Sabrina Tavernise, "Soaring Poverty Casts Spotlight on 'Lost Decade,'" *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 13, 2011.

⁸⁷ "2014 Poverty Guidelines," *US Department of Health and Human Services*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/14poverty.cfm>.

⁸⁸ "Third Ward Neighborhood in Houston, Texas, 77004 Detailed Profile." *City Data*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Third-Ward-Houston-TX.html>.

⁸⁹ "Issues," *Forge for Families*, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.forgeforfamilies.org/issues>.

⁹⁰ Charles E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 40, no. 4 (2003): 380.

described by the executive director as a dynamo who runs a very tight ship.⁹¹ Her law practice specializes in tax-exempt finance, tax-exempt organization issues, and urban development. In the last fiscal year, monetary concerns have decreased. PRH's lines of credit have been paid off, and the Kresge Foundation has helped to establish a cash reserve and a building fund.

The board is comprised of mostly young professionals in a variety of fields, including several attorneys, one of whom is a graduate of the Young Mothers Program. There are additionally professionals in community planning, a curator, and artists. At this time, there are no policies regarding term limits. As such, a few members have been with Project Row Houses, or on the board, since its inception in 1993. Like the organization, PRH board members "run the gamut"⁹² of interests and activities, with interests in art, affordable housing, community development, activism, and social welfare. The board members are described as being very conscious of the intersection of and play between these distinct areas, and the current dynamic of the board as being very successful.⁹³ The only demographic not necessarily represented is that of a young and fresh artistic voice. The artistic representation on the board comes from an older generation, and it is generally understood that a younger perspective will also be necessary. This kind of generational, long-term thinking is characteristic of Project Row Houses, as is the deference to and respect for the artist's voice.

Staff Leadership

Project Row Houses' executive director is Linda Shearer. She has been at the helm for six years, and the organization is currently undergoing a long-term search process for a new ED in anticipation of her retirement. Ms. Shearer has a strong arts background, primarily in New York City and the Northeast. She came to Texas to be interim director of the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, and ended up relocating more permanently to spearhead Project Row Houses. Until the summer of 2013, marketing and communications were handled collaboratively, often by short-term employees funded through grant

⁹¹ Linda Shearer (Executive Director) in conversation with author, October 2014.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

money. A part time Marketing and Communications Manager was permanently hired only a few weeks before Rick Lowe was awarded the MacArthur grant, and now coordinates these functions between programs as well as handling media inquiries, which have dramatically increased. PRH finances are spearheaded by a Finance Director and the Financial Committee on the Board of Directors, which meets monthly. Development activities are typically the purview of the executive director, while grant writing is handled by another staff member. There is a demonstrated need for a full time development professional and other staff expansions.

Facilities

Project Row Houses' campus is comprised of 71 structures. It includes historic buildings, new construction, informal green spaces and a formalized park. Less accumulated depreciation, at the end of fiscal year 2013, PRH's assets were valued at \$1.7 million. The original 22 shotgun-style row houses, which comprise the houses intended for exhibition and the Young Mothers homes, are arranged on the north side of Holman Street, across two blocks. The Young Mothers block is closed to the public, while the artist block is open seven days a week from 12:00 to 5:00 pm. Docents are available in the administrative building, known as the two-story, for walking tours and information about the campus, exhibition, and programming.

Programming

Project Row Houses is divided up into four program areas. These programs are Public Art, the Young Mothers Residential Program, Architecture, and Education. The Education program is currently undergoing strategic overhaul, and as such will not be further analyzed in the scope of project. The Architecture program has a rich history of establishing innovative and affordable housing solutions using modern, readymade components, in partnership with architecture students at Rice University in Houston. Row House Community Development Corporation, founded in 2003 as a sister organization, has taken over administration of the low-income housing properties.

The Young Mothers Residential Program supports low-income, single mothers between 18 and 26 through the provision of housing and counseling on personal growth and parenting skills. Accepted Young Mothers are offered up to two years of subsidized housing. The program consists of weekly meetings, volunteer opportunities, and is offered to low-income women with physical custody of at least one child, willing to be employed part or full time, who are pursuing education part or full time at a university or in an accredited training program. Children must be enrolled and attending classes in age appropriate school or daycare, and program commitments must be honored. The Young Mothers' homes are row houses visually identical to the houses used for artists' rounds and educational program, located on a separate block for privacy, but connected to the common backyard area, where it is common to see children squeezing through the fence and playing pick-up football. This common area also houses a number of kittens and chickens.

The Public Art program encompasses a number of different projects, including artist rounds, a summer studio program for emerging artists enrolled in local universities, a residency program associated with the Glassell Core Fellowship and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, low-cost artist studios, and incubation projects. The Artist Rounds are the core of the Public Art Program and have been running since October 1994.

The Summer Studios Program is open to art students from local colleges and universities, nominated by their professors. Seven emerging student artists are selected by a panel of professional artists to “create and exhibit work that responds to, engages, and/or is reflective of community.”⁹⁴ These students often continue to have a relationship with Project Row Houses, as in the case of Jessie Anderson, a 2013 Participating Artist from Rice University, whose installation ‘Frame-Work’ was showcased in PRH’s Round 41: Process + Action: An Exploration of Ideas, open October 2014-March 2015.

For established artists living and working in Houston, Project Row Houses offers affordable studio space and a dual residency. Currently artists Lovie Olivia, Rabea Ballin, Robert Hodge, and Philip Alan Pyle II work in PRH’s studios. Rabea Ballin’s installation ‘What is

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Natural?’ is also showcased in Round 41: Process + Action. In partnership with the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, a second-year Glassell Core Fellow is offered the opportunity to live onsite at Project Row Houses, participating in PRH programming and creating original work responding to or engaging with the Third Ward Community. The current Core Resident is Ronny Quevando.

Project Row Houses’ Public Art Incubation Program projects are provided with space, time and mentorship during development with the intention that they become self-sustainable. At this time, NuWaters Co-Op, OurHouse, and All Real Radio are in the incubation stage. NuWaters Co-op is a member owned and operated retail food market in the same building as the Eldorado Ballroom, a historic Third Ward staple now operated as rental and event space by PRH. The Third Ward is classified as a food desert, defined by as communities with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or healthy, affordable food retail outlet.⁹⁵ It is estimated that nationally 23.5 million people, more than half of whom are low income, live in food deserts.⁹⁶ NuWaters seeks to change this through its operation seven days a week, providing affordable and healthy food in any area whose main local food sources are gas stations or fast food restaurants. At present, produce is sourced from “locally grown organic, transitional and conventional individual and commercial farmers,”⁹⁷ but in the future will be grown on-site in the space between NuWaters and the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association, a nonprofit community-based athletic and recreational resource center run by Reverend Ray Martin. The Market Garden project will provide jobs as well as increase local access to healthy foods.

OurHouse: The House That Artists Built is a community arts collective of approximately seventy members, occupying one of PRH’s shotgun houses and both studio and retail space. Facilitated by Teaching Artist in Residence PK McCary, OurHouse is intended to create revenue streams for individual artists, support a network and assist artists in developing and enhancing their

⁹⁵ “Food Deserts,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, accessed December 5, 2014, apps.ams.usda.gov/fooddeserts/fooddeserts.aspx.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Artist Incubation,” *Project Row Houses*, accessed December 5, 2014, projectrowhouses.org/artist-incubation.

products. Member artists operate in a number of disciplines, including jewelry-making, dollmaking, and fine arts mediums like painting or drawing. Some individuals involved in the project include a spoken word artist who also crafts earrings, a mother of two from Saint Thomas who has recently left her former career to participate more fully in OurHouse activities, and a jewelry-making grandmother who joined at the suggestion of her teenaged grandson in order to connect with other crafters, with an added benefit of creating a revenue stream off her longtime hobby. OurHouse is described as “a different kind of collective,”⁹⁸ and operates alongside the monthly PRH Third Ward Community Market.

All Real Radio is a product of Houston artist and radio personality ZIN, and exists with the intention of utilizing radio culture to “inform, educate and entertain a worldwide body of socially responsible individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic brackets.”⁹⁹ A recording studio space for ARR is currently being developed as a portion of the Public Art Incubation Program.

Values

Project Row Houses responds to its community and constituency by living the words ‘it takes a village,’ which are emblazoned on PRH projects around the Holman Street neighborhood. The multitude of projects allows the organization to work nimbly in response to the needs and desires of their community, including supporting young mothers, assisting children with schoolwork, providing a safe park space, affordable housing, a highly localized healthy market, and artist incubation as well as professional and revenue development. The organization provides outlets for self-expression and community identity building through workshops, arts education programs, and the upcoming radio broadcast focusing on community and justice issues. The founding values have been carried through in five guiding principles: Arts and Culture, Education, Good and Relevant Architecture, Economic

⁹⁸ Brandy Shields (OurHouse member) in discussion with author, October 2014.

⁹⁹ “Artist Incubation,” *Project Row Houses*, accessed December 5, 2014, projectrowhouses.org/artist-incubation.

Sustainability, and Social Safety Net. These principles are utilized to assist leadership in strategic and programming decisions, and are evident in every aspect of PRH's work. They are influenced by Beuysian social sculpture, Biggers' values, the evolution of the organization and the adoption of the mission by staff. If new or proposed projects fail to address all five values, they are not pursued.

Organizational Life Stage Analysis

In terms of nonprofit life stage, through the framework of Susan Kenny Stevens, Project Row Houses is hovering between growth and maturity. Characteristics exhibited from the growth stage include the continual expansion of the board with particular attention to professional skills and community contacts, the development of a strategic plan, and formalization of management functions like marketing. While these milestones are classic growth stage, PRH also exhibits characteristics from the mature stage, including partnership and mutual ownership between the board, strong partnerships and alliances, institutional attention, the establishment of cash and other reserves, and strong, recognizable programming. With a strong institutional culture supporting the arts in Houston, new national recognition for the organization and artist-founder, increased ability to guard and leverage existing physical assets, and a strong, dynamic board, Project Row Houses is well equipped with the capacity to continue formalizing management functions, develop stronger systems and policies, and balance stability and improvement.

Strengths

Community Partners

Houston is a city characterized by low density and urban sprawl. Despite this, Project Row Houses has strong community partners, both in the Third Ward and in Houston at large. They have a longstanding relationship with Chevron, which provides volunteers as well as having a high level employee on PRH's Board of Directors. An ongoing partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Arts contributes to the Public Art Program through the Glassell Core Fellowship, in which second-year fellow have the opportunity to live on PRH's campus for a year to make work engaging with or responding to the community. Within the Third Ward, the Shape Community

Center and the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association have been longtime community allies. The PABA has been operating since 1970, and is run by Reverend Ray Parker, described as “the only fightin’ preacher in Texas.”¹⁰⁰ The Shape Community Center has been operating since 1969. A group of Unitarian Universalists administer free weekly tutoring for schoolchildren and provide childcare during the Young Mothers weekly meetings. These and other longtime, established community partners increase social capital and community connections, allowing a strong nonprofit ecosystem to develop and sustain in the face of concentrated disadvantage and changing demographics. PRH has reciprocal relationship with these other community organizations, deepening existing social ties and strengthening a local network. Public Art Director Ryan Dennis describes the benefits of community partnerships: “Partnerships, if they are in their truest form of a partner, they can really just take something to the next level, with both organizations invested and understanding what we’re doing at the table together. It’s wonderful.”¹⁰¹

Personnel and Leadership

Project Row Houses has a small, dedicated staff, and strong board comprised of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. The board is comprised of leaders in the corporate world, several attorneys, and individuals from the arts, both traditional and community-based. The board boasts one hundred percent giving. Giving levels are individualized to ensure across the board contributions and a diverse range of leaders. Several members have been on the board or involved with Project Row Houses is some capacity from the beginning, and they are described by the executive director as a passionate, dynamic group dedicated to both the arts and community development aspects of PRH’s work. The staff is similarly described as dedicated and passionate. Although staff is small, individuals work across programmatic boundaries to support the organization as a whole, strengthening the organization in its present and future forms.

¹⁰⁰ Linda Shearer (Executive Director) in conversation with author, October 2014.

¹⁰¹ Ryan Dennis (Public Art Director) in conversation with author, October 2014.

Rick Lowe, the artist-founder of Project Row Houses, is still actively involved in the work and vision of the organization. His recent award of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship and appointment by President Barack Obama to the National Council of Arts solidify his significance in broadening artistic practice to encompass social action, as well as the importance of his work at PRH and beyond. The significance of having, in essence, a permanent artist in resident not only elevates the art historical narrative but solidifies that the work of PRH is inherently multimodal, at once artistic and social practice.

Physical Assets

Project Row Houses exists on a campus comprised of 71 structures, including a low-income housing, exhibition spaces, artist studios, a community park, and the historic Eldorado Ballroom. At the end of the last fiscal year, the total value of land, buildings, and equipment, less accumulated depreciation, was \$1.7 million. These assets allow for a diverse range of programming, including housing and incubation projects. During each of the artistic exhibition rounds, artists are given a shotgun house in which to install their work. The artists, in a sense, take up residence in their structure, and they are referred to by the artist's name throughout the round. In addition to the exhibition space, the structures give the organization capacity to house the Young Mothers Residential Program. The common outdoor space behind the artist houses holds a field in which children play, concerts and talent showcases are staged, and picnics are held, fostering the tight-knit community characteristic of the campus and organization.

In addition to the shotgun houses, PRH owns the building which houses the historic Eldorado ballroom. The Eldorado opened in 1939, a part of the commercial district on Dowling Street which sprung up between 1900 and 1920 to support the residential boom in the Third Ward. It provided a space for upper and middle class Black residents to demonstrate their wealth and sophistication, as a social club and music venue which hosted locally and nationally known artists. The Eldorado closed in the 70s, due to the decline of social clubs, competition, and widespread migration out of the inner city following the desegregation of housing. The building was gifted to Project Row Houses in 1999 by oilman Hubert Finkelstein, and is one of the few historic buildings

remaining in the former commercial district of Third Ward. The Kresge Foundation has recently assisted in establishing both a cash reserve and building reserve fund, ensuring the maintenance of these assets in the present and future. This ensures that PRH will be able to continue to utilize existing structures for expanding programming, create new opportunities for incubation and artistic projects, and leverage the Eldorado ballroom as a space for rentals, events, and members.

Values-Based Programming

Josef Beuys' concept of social sculpture is a strong guiding force in the programming and activities of Project Row Houses. Beuys was a German artist associated with the proto-Conceptual Fluxus art movement, with works in traditional physical mediums ranging to process-oriented action art and happenings. These movements are considered to have been a reaction against traditional heroic, monumentalized artworks and commercialism in a post-war world. Beuys popularized the concept of social sculpture, in which art has the potential to transform not only the experience of the individual observer, but the entire social context and culture in which the artist and viewer live. Project Row Houses utilizes art as social engagement, capable of transforming the existing environment.¹⁰² While PRH is not the only example of this type of work, it is distinct as a multimodal visual arts organization in its renowned artistic leadership and commitment to the empowerment of every constituent as a potential artist.

The organization operates under five guiding principles, which are used to determine strategic and programming decisions. The specific principles are: Art and Creativity, Education, Good and Relevant Architecture, Social Safety Net, and Economic Sustainability. This "solid ideological foundation"¹⁰³ gives the organization a clear and purposeful identity, especially when making decisions about potential projects and partnerships. Collaborators and projects must resonate strongly with each of these principles. This values-based decision process requires

¹⁰² "About PRH," *Project Row Houses*, accessed December 5, 2014, projectrowhouses.org/about-us.

¹⁰³ Cavan Leerkamp, Leslie Gauna, and Bianca Carpenter, "The Art of Community," in *Community Education for Social Justice* edited by Cameron White (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2014), 100.

programming to remain true to mission and purpose, increasing and maintaining ownership in the organization over the diverse range of activities. Additionally, it expresses itself as connection and cross-pollination between programming, connecting residents, young mothers, artists, and the public in unexpected ways.

Weaknesses

Community Connection

Project Row Houses is reasonably well known in the art world, in Houston and beyond. However, in the immediate community of the Third Ward, knowledge of and connection to their programming is limited by non-pedestrian geography and demographic constraints. Concentrated disadvantage and the social symptoms that come with it, including criminal activity and substance abuse, are abound immediately surrounding, and in some cases intersecting, parts of the campus. In particular to organizational operations, some of the low-income housing managed by Row House CDC, particularly those located on Anita Street and Spring Street, are disparate from the main campus, thereby vacating any automatic programmatic or personal connection between CDC residents and Project Row Houses. While this can be mitigated to some extent, the constituency of the community of Greater Third Ward is a target market for PRH that is not being reached to the satisfaction of its leadership. A strategic plan is currently being developed to address this and other issues associated with a changing community constituency.

Staffing Gaps

Although the staff and leadership of Project Row Houses is dedicated and passionate, there are gaps which must needs be addressed for the future of the organization. Project Row Houses is currently seeking a community liaison officer, to engage with Third Ward residents on the streets and on their level. The area is undergoing demographic shifts, including an increase in the number of Hispanic residents. At present, no one on Project Row Houses' staff is fluent in Spanish, a significant gap in a city with a large Hispanic population close to the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, the maintenance staff consists solely of a facilities manger and a contracted groundskeeper, which is extremely small for a large campus of

historic buildings requiring constant repair and attention.

PRH hired their first ever Marketing and Communications Manager during the summer of 2014, shortly before Rick Lowe was awarded the MacArthur fellowship. This staff person is extremely competent, but as yet part-time. The wide network of artists and professionals involved are not yet accustomed to having a specific liaison for that work, and do not naturally communicate their activities. Another significant gap is a Development Director. At this time, the executive director, a grant writer, and the Special Events Manager handle development activities in tandem. There is a demonstrated need for someone devoted at a high level exclusively to development, in particular to membership. Additionally, each program is led by a single person. There is a need for a program assistant to work between programs, supporting the multiple program directors and streamlining the process. If filled, these staffing gaps will enable PRH to move forward in its existing programs and expand with capacity.

Board Capacity

The diversity of professionals on the board is a strong strategic asset for PRH. However, community leaders and practicing artists have less of a financial capability than lawyers and corporate professionals. The PRH board works with each member to establish a benchmark attainable within their financial reach. As such, there is a wide disparity in giving levels, ranging from a give-or-get arrangement with less liquid leaders to a member who has, between cash gifts and purchasing tables at the 20th anniversary gala, given upwards of \$15,000 during the current fiscal year. The main focus of the executive director, in terms of board giving, is one hundred percent participation, which is achieved through this tailored program.

Opportunities

Leveraging Assets

Project Row Houses' physical assets are substantial, and utilized across all program areas. The campus includes shotgun houses, two-story buildings, green spaces, and more. With the establishment of a cash reserve and building fund by the Kresge Foundation, these assets are now

more secure and enduring. A strategic plan related to the future of the organization in the changing community is currently in the works. In context with the stabilized financial situation, PRH has increased opportunities to leverage its existing physical assets through membership, rentals, and increased partnership activities.

Threats

Community Changes

The Third Ward is undergoing demographic and systematic changes, including increased interest from developers and a \$33 million renovation of Emancipation Park. While staff and leadership are confident that their programming and intentions for authentic community development and representation are strong, other historically similar areas of Houston have given way to real estate led development initiatives. In particular, the neighboring Fourth Ward has become heavily gentrified, leading to severe displacement of traditionally present demographics and all but token physical reminders of historic significance in favor of increased property values, an influx of middle and upper class residents and businesses, and the erasure of historic architecture. Project Row Houses is currently undergoing a long term strategic planning process to prepare, among other things, for the shifts that will naturally come as a result of the renovation of Emancipation Park and other developer-led pressures in a largely renter-occupied area, where residents have little bargaining power or influence over intended outcomes.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis synthesizes the diverse literatures of economics, sociology, urban planning and arts management to explore the impact of nonprofit arts organizations working multimodally in the arts and community development, and engages in a case study of Project Row Houses to bring theories from the literatures into observable practice. Informal member, participant and visitor communications, observations from attendance of the Third Ward Community Market and Talent Showcase and the Round 41: Process + Action opening, as well as formal interviews with the Public Art Director and Executive Director and multimedia communications and materials associated with PRH and its founders have shown that PRH leverages physical and personal assets to foster neighbor-to-neighbor trust, engages radically with the needs of their specific community, and increases opportunity for cultural representation of a neglected narrative in a historic community. The guiding principles allow the organization to practice values-based programming and maintain tight boundaries around their mission and purpose, avoiding projects which stray from their radically multimodal intentions. Additionally, the emphasis on diversity in leadership, evidenced through the variety of professional artists, lawyers, and corporate leaders on their Board of Directors, demonstrates a commitment to inclusive representation of all elements within the community of the Third Ward and Houston at large.

While it is difficult to determine a causal relationship between any arts intervention and community outcomes, Project Row Houses has a twenty year history of radical growth and expansion within a changing community. Operating in the long term in a community experiences financial and civic hardships presents unique challenges, especially for a contemporary visual arts organization. However, PRH's inherent multidimensionality has allowed for diverse programming to develop as community needs changed and continue to change. Organizational partnerships, institutional support and individual passion have been contributing factors in the success of the flagship years of Project Row Houses. One of

those partners, Row House CDC, has evolved from a seedling program within PRH to its own distinct organization, respecting existing capacities in both organizations. The demographics, activities, and physical nature of the Third Ward have changed a great deal since PRH's inception, and yet a strong connection is maintained to the art world and the immediate neighborhood. In the words of executive director Linda Shearer, "[PRH] didn't parachute into this community, but evolved in. We recognized the value of the existing community and culture, especially the architecture, and stayed here."¹⁰⁴ This attitude, and related activities, have created a ripple effect encompassing a six block campus of historic buildings in a community with a long history of marginalization and concentrated disadvantage. Every day, Project Row Houses works to leverage its existing resources and programming for the overall improvement and benefit of its community, linking historic as well as innovative architecture with social causes, community networking, resident empowerment and quality contemporary arts programming. It is unique in its commitment to multimodality, and has shown itself to be a viable and sustainable step beyond the limits of traditional creative placemaking activities.

Project Row Houses' ability to sustain and expand in a challenging economic times in an area of concentrated disadvantage with limited resources, both financial and in terms of personnel, are due to the unique founding vision, the passion and dedication of the employees, and their adherence to their guiding principles, which allow them to deliver work relevant to their constituencies and organizational mission and vision. Combined with a strong connection to the contemporary art world and institutional support, Project Row Houses' value-based decision-making and passionate personnel have been critical in the development of a unique and sustainable organization working simultaneously in the arts and community improvement for transformation in their civic environment through celebration of a historically neglected cultural narrative and the empowerment of individuals in their own communities and lives. A review of the literature and PRH practices emphasize local leadership, cultural viability, inclusive processes, the leveraging of existing assets and community partners as best practices for organizations working with public art for community benefit.

¹⁰⁴ Linda Shearer (Executive Director) in conversation with author, October 2014.

The literature emphasize that economic deprivation can affect civic life, crime levels and is perceived internationally as a threat to American democracy. It presents theoretical support for activities like purposive action and collective efficacy, which allow populations to organize communities and depend on the kind of civic engagement and peer support behaviors thought to be related to arts participation and healthy nonprofit ecosystems. It additionally investigates how social exclusion and concentrated disadvantage, which affect certain segments more than others, can be alleviated through nonprofit organizations working multimodally in the arts and community improvement. Project Row Houses' uses Beuysian social sculpture, the subject matter of Dr. John Biggers, and Rick Lowe's artistic practice to affect resident- and artist-powered change in an area of concentrated and sustained disadvantage, and their programming and practices can be clearly linked with concepts in social disorganization theory, social capital theory, and asset based community development. Although it is not possible to determine instrumentality of the arts in improving community outcomes using existing evidence and evaluation methods, a diverse literature review applied to a case of an existing, sustainably multimodal organization seems to indicate that it is possible to leverage the arts for social gain. This finding, and the identification of effective best practices, raises exciting possibilities for broadening the scope of art practice and administration.

Recommendations

The development of a shared epistemology and language between fields is key to integrating the arts and community improvement. A specific epistemology related to how communities experience concentrated disadvantage and how that can be affected by arts and cultural operations will allow diverse fields and stakeholders to benefit from the experience and practices of the distinct practices of these organizations. Broader identification of working habits and the development of an overall theory of change could unify the subfield and allow multimodal organizations with smaller capacities to apply theory to their practice. Institutional and governmental support for multimodal projects can be complex and opportunities are varied and can be difficult to identify. In order to easily navigate between fields and

institutional support opportunities, community organizations working multimodally would benefit from identified theories and language concerning their particular programming and work.

The recently announced new national initiative between the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Kresge Foundation intended to fuel arts and cultural investments in low-income communities is an important step forward. Key is the high-level acknowledgment of the difference between gentrifying strategies, and their outcomes, in distinct types of communities. The Kresge Foundation is described by Linda Shearer as recently shifting to a more whole-person, whole-community support model¹⁰⁵. Their recent and continuing assistance of Project Row Houses is a testament to PRH's sustainable programming, impact, and national importance. It seems clear that the field as a whole is moving away from a one size fits most model, towards more specificity in institutional support paradigms. This is sure to benefit both organizations like Project Row Houses and the communities they serve. Increased understanding and support of integrated community-led redevelopment will allow for greater advancement in actionable theory as well as increased efficacy and authenticity in resident-organization relations.

¹⁰⁵ Linda Shearer (Executive Director) in conversation with author, October 2014.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW WITH PUBLIC ART DIRECTOR

MB: I have a couple sort of like framing questions that I want to get out of the way and then we can into the meat of it. The first is that I have in my notes that the community that you serve, I'm defining as Houston's third ward. Is that accurate? Is there a better way to describe that?

RD: It's accurate in terms of geographic location. It's Houston's Third Ward and it's an African American, a rich African American historical space for Black residents and Black lives.

MB: That is a much better way to describe it. I saw in one of your 990s that you have a number of up to 10,000 visitors annually. Is that up to date, is that accurate?

RD: I would say that, I would say probably 10 to 15.

MB: And that includes individuals served in your geographic location as well as external visitors, right?

RD: Yes.

MB: Cool. So the first question I had is that the mission statement and program materials talk about human transformation, community empowerment, and affordable housing, all within the context of art practice. ... You're in the public art program, so obviously you come from the arts side. So what is unique or challenging or interesting about working with the social practice as well as the artistic excellence thing?

RD: I think for me and for public art the challenge is just the balance, right? The working with artists to realize projects that speak to or can be assisted by our local community, be that CDC residents or the broader Third Ward residents, in addition to keeping the kind of quality and being able to have conversation about art with the larger art community. Cause that's a huge challenge, a big challenge. But I also see that as an opportunity. It is an opportunity to really have some deeper conversations, because sometimes things need to be explained more, and it opens up dialogue in very interesting ways. It also allows us to kind of share between folks who might have economic handicaps in our neighborhood but also there's very affluent people who come through Project Row Houses as well. So some kind of cross-economic conversations that are happening between people that might not ever do that outside of being in a space like PRH.

MB: So that sort of complication, and dedication to the conversation and the dialogue, and bringing together disparate worlds seems really prevalent in your organization.

RD: Yeah. It's really great to watch. It's really great to see and it's really wonderful to really have art being that conduit to really make this happen. Sometimes I feel like things can get really superficial in the art world, like, yeah, this exhibition is going up and it's talking to all these people, but are those people talking to each other? Maybe not. But, at Project Row Houses, there is an opportunity for people from really different worlds to be able to have conversations with other people, you know? And I think that's when art has more impact. Like, it's about the art but it's also about the people. It's nice to be able to be in the middle of all that, to be in the center.

MB: So, in Project Row Houses, there's a bunch of different programs, and obviously you're the Public Art program. In terms of organizational culture, how separate are the programs? Do you deal with the Young Mothers program, or the Education, or the Architecture?

RD: Yeah, so those are all... We think about Project Row Houses as a quilt. A quilt is PRH, and then you have all these different sections that make up the quilt. And they all somehow touch, right? Like each section touches another section, it's impossible for it not to. And that is all Project Row Houses. So for example, I have a round, which are our version of exhibitions, that is opening on the 18th. And so

the artists that are present locally, and we have one from Florida this round, so we have a program with the young mothers, so there's five mothers in the program each year, and they have a moment to sit down and have a conversation. The artists share about what they're working on and the mothers share what's happening in their lives. The mothers are in this really creative community, and the ideas about motherhood, in terms of people's perceptions, are very much like an artist, right? Like when you grow up and tell your mom, or your dad, "I want to be an artist!" That's not really encouraged. Certainly it's not encouraged for women. When a single mother is like, "I'm pregnant!" at 18 or 19, just trying to navigate the world as a single mother or as an artist is very challenging, and we're hoping to give some light, and have some moments for the artists and the mothers to kind of share and understand their similarities, all while just learning from each other, as well. Mothers can learn and continue this idea of creative problem solving. So there's this kind of back and forth exchange. Sometimes the mothers and the artists continue their relationships throughout the rounds. And other times we have programs throughout the rounds that artists will engage the mothers to participate in or just be there. And same goes for the after school program, right? Right now we're in the process of revamping our education program, right, so this will start in the spring of 2015. But how it worked in the past is that we have a number of youth who come into the after school program. And they do workshops every Friday with the artists and create activities for opening with the artist and the director or manager of the education program. And then, you know, our residents are always just a part of everything, that we really try to do. There's a lot of weaving and intersection that happens. I'm really invested in cross-programming for the young mothers and the education program and even really thinking about how to engage our residents is just really important to the fabric of the quilt. Again, art is that starting point because it at least allows for some curiosity, it allows people to engage with it in different ways. The beautiful thing is trying to come up with multiple entry points to engage so many people with different backgrounds, right? It's the artists, it's the mothers, it's the youth, it's the residents, families. It's also just the neighborhood. That is also part of the quilt and um, and I think we are doing a good job. We have some improvement to work on and we are trying to address this by working with a community engagement liaison, who can really kind of strengthen our ties with everything that's going on, cause there's the programmatic activities that go on at Project Row Houses which can really kind of bog us down because that takes a lot of administration, and coordination, logistics, etc, but if we have, we had a community engagement liaison who was really out walking the streets and being able to speak with residents of the larger Third Ward community about the work and the resources that Project Row Houses has available. And, you know, the resources that PRH offers to the larger community, too, is just another slice of pie. And that's an entry point for them to continue their engagement with PRH. It's a safe space for a lot of our residents, you know, and what's been challenging is quantifying this idea of "How many people do you affect on a yearly basis?" with numbers, because this is what funders want us to always answer. But we see our effects every day. And it might not be like, okay, this person came in and we first started giving them water, and then we started talking to them about, you know, resources in the neighborhood, and then they had housing, and then they went on to Texas Southern University! Sometimes these things just don't happen like that, but, we can say that there is evidence of providing a safe space for individuals to be free, come and learn, there's tutoring, there's computers accessible, there's opportunities to just do different things with your day, you know? And so, sorry, that was really a long answer. That's, yes.

MB: So, the community relations is really huge thing, obviously, because you guys are sort of really radically engaged in the community, as I understand it. So, if citizens want to become involved specifically in your programming, what are the avenues that are available for them to do it? Like obviously they can walk in the door and be a part of the space, but what are the avenues for sort of impact within your organization?

RD: Direct impact... I mean the first thing is just that, walking in the door. We really try to also meet people where they are. I spoke about this community engagement liaison who really was going out, like part of his job was walking in the neighborhood. It's like this kind of approach that politicians have when they're running for city council and they have the block walk, that idea of block walking

that is very strong strategy to talk to your neighbor. So even me, I sometimes get out and just go out and talk to people. It also fuels my work, you know? I am a curator and I organize programs, and it's important for me. That also informs how I think about things and how I can make working with artists more accessible to a layman. To someone who has no idea about art context, art history, you know, like, that's important for me in my work. That's just a sidebar. But in terms of the direct engagement, going out to meet people, you know, and participating in volunteer opportunities for what's happening in the neighborhood. There's a lot of kind of community meetings that happen in Third Ward at different organizations so we are part of those things, and we share, and it's done as a kind of a reciprocal relationship, right, like community meetings that we have individuals come to and vice versa. And with the changing of the neighborhood, we're at those tables, so, I think it's just important to kind of be everywhere and stay centered at the same time. Our first focus is our residents. So you understand that we have residents that live in low income housing at Project Row Houses, right? They are on site. And it's through the Community Development Corporation, right, Row House CDC. So those residents on site, in addition to the new residents that we have living on Anita Street and Drew Street, those are our, that's our first community. And then the second tier is kind of like, Third Ward at large. And so we are always outreaching to them, and then also we just go out to the neighborhood and see what's going on.

MB: So, I've seen some stuff about you guys using sweat equity and volunteers for your building projects specifically. Do you have a large volunteer program? Do you have interns? How do you deal with that?

RD: Yeah. We have all of that. So you have to understand that a lot of these things are like informal, but they're formal, they work for us, right? We have a volunteer program that like, a lot of volunteers, because of the way we were founded, a lot of volunteers started working with Project Row Houses in the early 90s, right? So Chevron is a big group that still comes to work with Project Row Houses, one of our board members, Andrew Speckhard, works at Chevron and he really keeps that relationship for volunteer opportunities open. I think I just said, he's a board member, and he's been around since Project Row Houses opened, a dear friend of Rick Lowe's. And so Chevron is a really big group and they come and still like help with infrastructure. They just laid a slew of grass in our courtyard as we get ready for our gala. So, volunteer groups coordinated by staff at Project Row Houses. And then we have an internship program that's really spearheaded by individual departments. So we have two things. One is a work study program with the University of Houston, where every semester each program will have a work study student that's paid through the University of Houston and they come and work at Project Row Houses and work under the leadership of each program director. That's one. And then the second is just internship program, where, mm, that's kind of informal. So for me for example, if there are, I will reach out my colleagues, to see if there are people who have come through who are still in school or maybe not in school but want an internship because they are interested in alternative spaces, alternative curatorial models, etc., and I will, you know, do that kind of outreach. And they work specifically with me for research, for artists files, and just some help with administrative things.

MB: So you talk about a partnership with Chevron, and I looked around your website and there's a lot of organizations listed as major long term partners. Can you talk to me about some of the benefits and challenges associated with that, with community networking in that way?

RD: Yeah, sure, I mean, I can't, I honestly since I've been at Project Row Houses for the past two years, partners and challenges are not really... I don't actually have any. They're always kind of opportunities. I am very clear with our partners that it has to be a true partnership, right? So we're both offering, we see the benefits of whatever we're organizing together or partnering on, and we're both providing the same type of support. These things are kind of laid out from the beginning. Not many challenges. Maybe the challenges come from internally, because we might not have all the resources we need to have a large scale performance in the Eldorado ballroom because we don't have lighting or we don't have the crazy HD projector, you know what I mean? Things like that are

challenging, but that's when it's wonderful to have a partner who does have the financial resources that can support those things. And the partnerships are really helpful because they help us to continue to do our work, and things like larger scale projects that we might not be able to do at such a small staffed organizations. The partners I've had over the last few years have really been wonderful. And it's really nice to see that partnerships, if they are in their truest form of a partner, they can really just take something to the next level, right, with both organizations invested and understand what we're doing at the table together. It's wonderful. And we've had, gosh, I mean, we just continue to have really great partners. I use my background in that I'm from Houston, I went to undergrad here, at the University of Houston, and I graduated from there, I worked at the Menil Collection for some time, and then I moved to New York and went to Pratt and did a fellowship at the Laundromat Project and some different spaces in New York and then worked at the Museum for African Art and then came back to Houston. And also while I was working at the Menil I was volunteering at Project Row Houses. I say that because there's a lot of opportunity, that I worked with so many people in this city that the partnerships become more stronger, my relationships with colleagues become more stronger and they also all very much support Project Row Houses in the work that we do, and so there's equal kind of investment on both ends.

MB: So the local thing is really important, right, because you guys are a geographically based organization, but the local networking seems like something that is like, really big.

RD: Yeah! And you know, you have to understand that, what we understand is, that there's local kind of equity, but in addition to, when I say local, I kind of mean like, I mean Third Ward, but I also mean a broader kind of Houston arena as well. Assata Richards, who is the facilitator of the Young Mothers program, she's very connected, and invested in Houston and in the Third Ward. These partnerships come from multiple angles, right, through the art, through civic associations, through other community organizations, it's from the Mayors office, it's a number. And then there's Rick Lowe, who, you know, that's a whole another level. And our executive director Linda Shearer comes from another well-respected, tapped-in to the art scene in Houston. We have so many partnerships that benefit, even the housing development, you know what I mean? There's so many organizations and opportunities to deepen our relationships and partnerships in the city and outside of the city. Now that I'm talking about it, it's really kind of great how supportive people are to our work. There's just a mutual kind of respect that allows us to continue with what we do, with our partners.

MB: In terms of the community, I was really interested in your artist incubation projects. So you have the sort of more traditional arts program, you have the rounds, you have the summer studios for emerging artists. But I'm really interested in the incubation programs, they're more community oriented. Can you talk to me about how they started, how long they incubate, and how sustainable you expect them to be in the long term?

RD: So, the incubation projects... a lot of things at Project Row Houses is experimental. We want to keep on being fresh. We want to keep on having opportunities for people to come and explore! When you explore and you're curious and you are starting things, you also need to feel like you're part of something to keep you going, right? The incubation projects started, maybe in 2008, 2007? But you can also unofficially call artist studios an incubation for an artist, right? That's always been part of Project Row Houses' fabric. But in terms of us incubating an artist who is interested in opening a new space, or really organizing other artists to come do experimental projects, or, for example, now we have NuWaters, the co-op. It's the second certified co-op in Texas, and it sits in the ground floor of the Eldorado ballroom building at the corner of Elgin and Dowling Street. And Project Row Houses, or Third Ward, has been considered a food desert in the past, meaning that there's not accessible fresh foods in walking vicinity that's affordable. And so, NuWaters Co-op is really this kind of incubation that's come in and done an amazing job at providing food and affordable foods for people in the neighborhood and outside of the neighborhood. And that's an incubation that is, when it's not at Project Row Houses, because of what has been done and the kind of foundation that is laid, it will continue to kind of grow as it moves forward. So the incubation is really something

that allows small businesses or artists to have a base, and move their project to the next level when they leave. We want it to be sustained, we want to kind of check in and see where we can do better with them, or just get some feedback. Ayanna McCloud is an artist in Houston and a musician and opened this thing called labotanica for artists who are interested in experimental sound and have a series of programs for artists, musicians, dancers, and just kind of like intellectuals to have a space to just talk and discuss and impromptu perform. And that space is needed just to kind of keep up the creativity, intellectual kind of rigor, and just practice as a whole. So those incubations typically last for two years, and, it's on an agreement, there's an official contract, there's agreement, we support typically through the promotions and check in with them periodically for what resources they need and other support we can offer. And also give them a space to do this for free.

MB: No small dice, there. So, I have to ask you about gentrification. Obviously gentrification is sort of a buzzword, and it's not always a positive buzzword. Can you talk to me about the role of Project Row Houses, obviously part of the mission is community development and improving the lives of your citizenry, but I've been reading some things about changes in the neighborhood and sort of the changing role of Project Row Houses associated with increasing property values in your area and all of that stuff. So, can you? Yeah.

RD: So, yeah. With any neighborhood under an economic bracket, they're at risk for developers coming in and buying properties and the land becomes, you know, it's affordable, Houston is an affordable place to live and Third Ward has become this space where people want to dwell. You know, there's two universities that have had major impact on the changing of the neighborhood, and I think ultimately the goal is to just keep the historic richness of the neighborhood. Change is going to happen. We're not under threat because gentrification is happening, we have a stake in the neighborhood, we have a stake for supporting our residents, and we respond by creating affordable housing for residents in Third Ward and some from outside of Third Ward. It just has to be that continued investment in the neighborhood, and that's where Project Row Houses is. We're not going to be able to stop developers from coming in, however, we can respond with saying like, this area is for and has a cultural kind of richness and historical kind of presence that we want to remain in Third Ward and totally not be erased, right? What we don't want is a situation like what happened in Fourth Ward which was a freedmen's town, really developed by emancipated or freed slaves, and that neighborhood is totally gone now. What's left of it is a cobblestone street from Freed Slave Lane, that cobblestone, and a historic marker from the city. Everything else is totally developed. For people that are new to that neighborhood, they have no idea what has come before them because there's no preservation. Our duplexes architecturally are designed and inspired by the original shotgun houses that are on site, and we just want to continue to build on that and do it in different pockets in the neighborhood. Gentrification, change, is going to happen. It's about how you respond and how you keep on your investment in that neighborhood so people won't feel like, okay, it's totally hopeless.

MB: I think you guys are in a unique position because one of the terrible things about gentrification in a lot of places is population displacement, so I think that you guys are in a really interesting position because you do have the affordable housing and you have this connection to a historic population.

RD: Right. And you know, we keep up, the historic preservation is what's also important. It was intentional to design duplexes that are in the same kind of architecture vernacular as the original shotgun houses, right? It makes you think, like, okay, it opens up some curiosity, like, these duplexes look like this, why do they look like this? Oh, they're shotgun houses that are you know, very present in Black neighborhoods, and that goes all the way back to West Africa. The hope is to lead with a visual that then inspires more questions for people to learn and understand where this kind of Black precedence was set from and where its moving in the future.

MB: In terms of your leadership and your founder, I've been reading about the MacArthur Fellowship, obviously, and reading a lot about Rick Lowe. Can you talk to me about his legacy, and the legacy of the other founders? And how active they are in the artmaking and administration?

RD: Sure. So Rick Lowe is the one that's most present, he's at Project Row Houses when he's in town, and he's still very much a part of our vision and we look to him, we have meetings with him, he's just present. He really kind of is a continued kind of visionary for the organization. The other founders, so two of them have passed away, James Bettison and Bert Long. Jesse Lott is still present and he is like, our wizard. He is a sounding board for Rick, and myself, and others in the organization, and he is more of like a voice of reason and offers feedback. Bert Samples is also active, he sits on our board. So they kind of come in in different capacities. Rick is there all the time, and he works closely with us, right. Jesse is the sounding board and offers support and feedback and so does Bert and he also sits on our board. But they all serve very important roles in the organization.

MB: So, sort of bouncing off of that, are there certain core values that you think are widely held in the organization?

RD: Yes, I would say all of our principles are core values for us.

MB: In your opinion, are these values, these principles, that are deeply held by your organization, are these things that came directly from the founders or were they something that sort of evolved as the work evolved and the project shifted?

RD: I would say both. I mean, the core values are something that were established by our founders and we kind of continue that and then we add to it in different ways. The core values are kind of our heart and soul, and we kind of build from there.

MB: I have one more question for you, which is, what is your favorite thing about working with and for Project Row Houses?

RD: What is my favorite thing! You know, it's funny, cause I tell people all the time like, I love my job, right? I wake up in the morning and it's never a moment where it's like, ugh! I have to go to work. So I really love the fact that I truly have a genuine love for the work that I do and the work that we do at Project Row Houses, and I love the fact that I don't ever have a dull moment. Like, sometimes it's very overwhelming and stressful as with any organization but it keeps me on my toes, it keeps my ear to the ground, it just fuels my understanding of what is possible in the arts, and how art can be this conduit for deeper understanding and conversation and creative sustainability for neighborhood revitalization. I just love it. I'm always learning. I think that if you're in a position where you can always learn from, and learn with, people, everyday people, in addition to people who have just like honed in on their craft, obviously artists and other curators and just neighborhood conversations, it's beautiful. So, I love the spontaneity, I love the experimentation, I love the intellectual rigor that comes out of the work that we do.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MB: I wanted to start off by asking you about the Community Development Corporation. So I understand it functions as a sister organization and you guys provide administrative support. Do they manage the housing properties? Do they manage the park?

LS: I don't know where you got that information, but that's wrong, so, let me give you, I'll give you a little background and bring you up to date. It was officially founded in 2003, with the four houses on Division Street. It had actually started, the test building, was a one story residence on Division Street, which I believe was 2419 Division. And that was done in, I wanna say 1998. They're all based on the shotgun house style, or format, with very simple style and design, good materials. This has all been done in conjunction with a long term partner, the Rice Building Workshop at Rice University. And so we've gone on to do many, many different projects with them. So, the eight units, they're all duplexes now, the eight units went up in 2003. The organization itself was a separate 501(c)3, but we were, as you said, sister organizations. We were really joined at the hip. But they had their own board, and they had their own staff. Then, I wanna say 2008 was when the units went up on Francis Street, and those were, the units on Division Street are all two bedroom one bath, and the Francis Street units are a combination of two bedroom one bath and three bedroom two bath. And that was in 2008. And then in 2010, eight more units opened up offsite, on Scott Street and Anita Street, which is like a couple miles away. Did you go by there?

MB: I did, I drove in on Scott Street as I was coming to the campus. I guess I was in the area.

LS: You were definitely in the area. So, they're much closer to U of H. Then what happened as time was evolving and the CDC wanted to expand, it became very clear to us that it had become time to spin it off. Oh, I'm sorry, I missed a step. At a certain point, and I want to say about 2010, the CDC staff was reduced and integrated into the PRH staff. And we shared office space, so we were very much communal, everything was coming out of this building, so to speak. It was in this past year, the beginning of this year, the early and spring of 2014, that this all got resolved. So now, the Row House CDC is a completely separate organization with its own board and its own staff. They're not housed here, they're housed elsewhere. One interesting thing from your perspective possibly is it used to be, until this split took place, it used to be that we had to do a shared audit. Our audit encompassed both organizations, whereas now, there's separate audits. And this really, I mean, our attitude, everyone's attitude is, this is a great next step because the organization has grown. And wants to grow more. And we don't have the capacity, and when I say we I mean PRH, doesn't have the capacity to continue to be the ones to administer it, but where we do have the capacity is to maintain that programmatic bond between the two. The ultimate goal being that residents of Row House CDC have a unique and special kind of experience that is not common for a CDC, and that's because of their connection to PRH and being involved in our activities, our art activities, our marketplaces, our openings, etc etc. Does that help?

MB: Yes, absolutely, I'm so glad I asked about that. So where I had gotten that phrase about the administrative support, I was looking at the 990s from your organizations, and that was the language that was used in there, which I guess would have to do with the audit.

LS: I think that's right.

MB: So I wanted to talk to you in particular about staffing. How do you identify staff that are good to work with? Do you have special needs associated with, because you are working in this multimodal fashion? Is there particular backgrounds or expertise you really look to?

LS: Oh, boy. One, it really depends on what the job is. I mean obviously if we're looking at a community liaison position, we're looking at someone with a community background, maybe less so than if we're looking for a Public Art Director, we're looking for someone with a strong art background.

What is challenging for us, and one of the many challenges for us, is this unique kind of, and it's not unique, I mean it's really all over the country in different ways, but this combination of arts and community activism. And so, a lot of, there are a lot of organizations now that have picked up that, how do you revitalize a community? Well, you go back to New York City in the 70s and SoHo was where all the artists were, having taken over the light industry and manufacturing. And the artists go all have their studios and then the next thing you know the commercial galleries start opening there, and then there are boutiques and cafes, and before you know it it's been priced out for the artists, and the artists have been priced out. So there's that. We know there's a strong history of the arts revitalizing a particular community, but what we're doing is totally different. We came into this community. We didn't parachute in, we evolved into it. We recognized the value of the existing community and the existing culture, especially the architecture, and stayed here. We've grown, of course, well, not of course, we've been fortunate to grow. But we're very much a part of this community. And as the community has changed, that's a big challenge for us. It's now 20 years. So what were issues and priorities and what was relevant 20 years ago, really isn't the same now. And so that's, this is a very long winded way of talking about what the staffing needs are.

MB: Yeah, no, it's perfect though.

LS: So, right this moment, if I were to look at our current staff, I would say that we need a Development Director. Because the staff, the development work is done by me, our Grants Writer/Manager, and our Individual Giving/Special Events Manager, and a lot of her time is taken up with special events. So we're very weak at this point on our membership numbers, and we need someone devoted at a high level to development, and we don't have that. All the programs are led by a person of one. And we need an assistant, a program assistant to help those programs, that's critical at this point. We do now have, we just hired a part-time Communications and Marketing Manager. And that's been critical, that's been a huge hole. And it's fantastic to have Michael here.

MB: And he said, I spoke to him when I was down there, and he said he's the first communications and marketing guy your organization has had, right?

LS: Right, yes, yes. We've had a few short term grants, but nothing like this. And I tell you, in mid-September, when Rick got the MacArthur, the shit hit the fan with phone calls. And, if Michael hadn't been there to field all of that, it would have been me and CeeCee and Ryan and it would have been crazy. So that's made a huge difference. And then the other, I'm really just talking to you about what's needed I think, but a key thing that's needed is that, none of us, I feel, both staff and board, have fully grasped the enormity of the physical plant that we have. We have one facilities manager, and we have a contracted groundskeeper. And it's crazy. I mean, we have six blocks made up mostly of old buildings that need constant repair and attention. And we have grounds, we have parks, we have green spaces, we have lawns, we have flowers, we have trees.

MB: You have chickens, for that matter!

LS: We have chickens, exactly! So, it's crazy that we have gotten this far with one person, one full time person. So we do make a big effort for non senior staff jobs, to hire people from the neighborhood. When we do openings, we have our DJs, we rotate between various local DJs. We really want to be able to support the community in that way. So that's another aspect of it all. So, back to your question of what do we look for, it just depends. And then I think in terms of personality, what you have to have are people who can communicate with just about anybody. I mean, you can tell. ... And you know what I tell people, and you're obviously an example of it, is, you can read articles, you can go to the website, you can Google as much as you want, but it isn't until you're actually physically here experiencing it firsthand that you really understand it.

MB: Absolutely.

LS: And you know, we get people, people will say, we don't understand what you do. Are you an arts organization or are you a social service and community organization? Well guess what, we're doing both. And we're juggling as fast as we can. And our goal is to make it all click together. And for the most part it does. It doesn't always, you know. But I think for me in so many ways, it all goes back to the authenticity of the houses and the mission. It's like, it's simple, it's real. We turned this neighborhood around. Is it devoid of problems? Of course not. Two blocks, I'm looking out my window at the corner of Live Oak and Holman, and two blocks down Live Oak or even a block down Live Oak just beyond the Trinity Church, is apparently a huge, huge gang and drug corner, that we, you know, I don't think there's anything that we can really do about that. In other words, we're in a different mindset. And one of the big issues, as you probably gathered, is the major renovation taking place at Emancipation Park.

MB: Seriously, it's like a pit! I drove by it, it's crazy.

LS: Yeah! It's crazy, it's really crazy. Even just this past week when I drove by it, like, the whole thing is like dirt, piles of dirt. But it's a \$33 million renovation. I think they're going to be doing it in stages, but nonetheless, it's going to have a huge impact on our neighborhood. And we take a position of, yes, neighborhoods change. We accept that and welcome the change. At the same time, we don't want it to be destructive to people who are living here. And we don't want to see longtime residents displaced. One of the issues is most of the people in this neighborhood rent, they don't own their houses. So depending on the sort of mindset of their landlord, you know, people can get very greedy when they see dollar signs, as we know. And, already I think, not so much around us per say, but near the Eldorado and around Emancipation Park, I think lots are being sold for a lot more money than they would have gone for two years ago. So it's a really really interesting time right now, and I think you know that I'm stepping down to retire, and that will probably be at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, presumably once they hire a new executive director. So one of the big question is, what do you want in a new executive director? My background is exclusively art and art museums and artists. So that's worked well, but I think the next person is going to have to be, as hard as I've tried to take in the bigger picture, I don't have that background of community based work. And I've learned a great deal, and I've enjoyed it, but again, what I think we, they will be looking for is someone who really is passionate both about the art and the community. And I think that that's a combination that maybe ten years ago you wouldn't necessarily have found, but I think now I think you can. So does that answer your question?

MB: Yes, very very much! And the new ED was actually my next question, so you went ahead and answered it for me. So, obviously Rick Lowe as a founder is still involved in your work, and I wanted to ask you about core values. I think that the mission is fairly widely held within your staff, everyone I talked to was very passionate and very, sort of, effusive about the work that you do. So, are there certain core values that sort of resonate through your organization?

LS: Yeah, I think so. Did anyone talk to you about the five principles? This is... It's on our website somewhere, and it came really from John Biggers. We use it as a matrix, in a way. You can imagine we're constantly being bombarded with ideas of, oh, I've got a great project for you! And what we look at is, the first one is art and creativity, the second is basically good education, the third is relevant architecture, the fourth is a social safety net, and the fifth is economic sustainability. [...] So I think it's that Beuysian social sculpture component is very important to us. That we understand, and I think this is a core value, we understand that art does not have to take the traditional form of painting on a wall or sculpture on a pedestal, but it can be the interaction and the dynamics that take place within a context or a setting between people, and that can be as strong and powerful an art statement as a work of art.

MB: I think that's one of the things that's really unique about your organization, is sort of your ability to leverage that really strong art historical narrative and have that exist on an equal plane as the community development work.

LS: Exactly, exactly. And that's, it's true, it's not easy. And I think one of the benefits for arts, I, I actually worked with Josef Beuys-

MB: Oh! Wonderful!

LS: In late 70s, at the Guggenheim! So I'm very passionate about that aspect, that it's not about the work you do in the studio that then gets put into a gallery and then gets bought by a collector. That's not it for me. And everybody, everyone seems to be really on board. And part of the reason, I think, has to do with the fact that Rick has never succumbed to the commercial appeal, not appeal but attractiveness. He has actual objects. He has photographs that speak volumes. But he's not, he is not represented by a gallery, he doesn't show his work in galleries. So he has maintained a very pure kind of belief system in terms of what his art is. And, you know, it's on the street. He's been talking a lot recently about helping people to become entrepreneurs, and that's, to a certain extent what our marketplace is about, or to a large extent. And really giving people encouragement and support to really delve into their own talents, their own creativity, and then to learn from a business perspective, how to market it, how to get it out there. It's a DIY motivation in many ways. Again, it all goes back to the Beuysian notion that everybody can be an artist. And that, I think that, in many ways, is the core core value of what goes on here.

MB: Yeah. Absolutely. So, I wanted to ask you a little bit about constituency both in the Third Ward and in the larger community of Houston. How do you identify people? Obviously, within the Third Ward, the community is your audience and the community is your constituency.

LS: Right.

MB: But how do you identify people, how do you target people in Houston at large? And do you have connections with them? Do you have the people coming through your doors that you want to have coming through your doors?

LS: Let me go back to the community first, because yes, that's a large constituency. At the same time, I know that if you go a couple blocks away, and knock on a door and say "What do you know about Project Row Houses?" They'd probably look at you and say "What?" We are not that well known in our own community, and so that's something we're really trying to work on. Where we're known is in the art world. Both the art world in Houston, and the art world nationally and internationally. That turns out to really, I think, be our main constituency. We need to be working harder on this immediate community. And we have had, this is through an initiative of Rick's, we have had a community liaison staff position, you know a term staff position, and that person who, we're in transition right now but, that person worked very very hard with the residents of the CDC and living over on, say, Anita Street, they had very little grasp of what the connection was with PRH. So that's a huge challenge. The other change that we're seeing, whereas it used to be an exclusively African-American neighborhood, we're seeing more Hispanic families coming in. We don't have anyone on staff who speaks Spanish. And that's a deficit. So in other words we really need to be, um, I hate the term reach out, reaching out just, I don't know exactly, it sounds so, um...

MB: Well, yeah, it's directional, it's just-

LS: Exactly, exactly. But we need to be doing more, and that's, I think, I mean that is exactly what the market and the talent showcase is about, to really engage more with our immediate neighbors. Then in terms of larger Houston, we're not well known. It's very interesting, and we get a lot, this year we've gotten a lot of publicity, both for the 20th anniversary and Rick's MacArthur. It's been a lot, which is fantastic. Has it paid off in some way in terms of numbers? Hard to say. I mean I think it has, ultimately. We just had the gala on Friday. There were a lot of art world folk here, and a lot of African American professionals, and creative types, and it was fantastic, just fantastic. There was

one couple that I've not... I came to Houston to be the interim director at the contemporary art museum. And that was in 2007. So my first engagement with people was all through this contemporary arts museum. So this couple, I think one of them is on the board of CAMP, for instance, but she came as the guest of one of our board members. And they're big collectors. I know she was totally blown away, completely like, she had no idea. She lives ten minutes away probably, but she hadn't been here before. It's just... Is it an uphill battle? It's what every organization has to deal with. And we want people to come here and we want people to interact with our community and the artists and so I think it's fair to say that in this past year, there's been much greater exposure both locally and nationally, but especially locally. But still, it's something we have to continue to work at, for sure.

MB: So we touched on this a little bit, you spoke about this a little bit earlier, but what are some of the biggest challenges of working in an area like the Third Ward, and in an area sort of surrounded by places that have become very gentrified? Do you have strategic goals associated with gentrification or-

LS: We actually are, as we speak, we are working on a long range strategic plan.

MB: Oh, nice.

LS: We're not there yet, but that is key. That issue of dealing with the changing community. That's definitely a priority, no doubt about it.

MB: Um, so this actually isn't on my list, but I'm thinking about it. I was really curious about how close TSU is. But it seems very, and maybe it's just, I'm just coming in from the outside obviously, but it seems very separate from the neighborhood, but it's like right there.

LS: Well, you know, the funny thing, I mean, did you go over there?

MB: I went over there just because I was like driving up and down being a creep trying to get a feel for the land, and then I ended up by the stadium and some of their student housing and the Methodist organization.

LS: What's happened, I think, is, we actually do a fair amount with TSU.

MB: Okay.

LS: But, the big issue, which I think you're responding to, is that you can't get on campus. It's like there are these barriers. Where I really experience it and am upset by it is, it's very hard to get to the museum. There's no real parking, there's... there's no way. Unless it's an opening and the guards have the gates up, but to just go to the museum on an off day, when it's open, you know, when it's definitely open, is a real challenge. So that's, I hear exactly what you're responding to, and I think it's really unfortunate. But we do have a range of different partnerships and activities with TSU between the museum, the art department, urban planning, there's a wonderful guy who's been doing a lot with us, it's urban planning, but particularly in terms of gentrification and Emancipation Park. We do a lot with U of H. We have quite a number of work study students. We do a lot with the Cythnia Woods Mitchell Center, again the art department, creative writing, you know. There's a lot of back and forth with them, and to a certain extent to Rice. And the one thing that I didn't want to forget to say to you is that we do have, a good, I think it's partly just the ecology of Houston, that there's a really strong collaborative nature. I spent many, many years in New York City, and you know, you don't, you're not collaborating with your competitors. I can remember a couple times the Guggenheim would do something with the Modern and it was like, oh my God that's amazing. Whereas here, it happens all the time. It happens all the time. So, you know, we do a lot with, oh

gosh, Aurora Picture Show, the Art League, we're about to do this huge beading project. They're doing this huge project that will be beads from artisans from South Africa.

MB: Oh! Very cool!

LS: Yeah, and we have a very, because of Eldorado, and because it's such a magical space, people often want to use that. It's both a revenue producer for us, but it's also another way that we partner with other nonprofits. And so, again, I think that's the nature to a large extent of Houston. Houston's very unusual that way.

MB: Can you talk to me about your relationships with other community actors, like city council members or other community organizations? Is there something there?

LS: Yeah, definitely. We have a close relationship with SHAPE Community Center just down the street. It's forty five years old and Deloyd Parker has been a mentor for Rick, and actually Rick discovered the houses here on Holman when he was volunteering at SHAPE Community Center. So that has a very, it's a very different organization than ours, but it's a true community center that has been a support for forty five years! And apparently, I guess that's where Beyonce first started with her group, Destiny's Child, and they started there. And they played in one of our festivals apparently.

MB: Oh, cool! Little celebrity connection there.

LS: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And then we've got this wonderful, you must have seen it, the PABA, the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association, that's right next to the Eldorado. And that's been there since 1970, and that was founded by the only fightin' preacher in Texas, Reverend Ray Martin. And it's a program for both youth and adults in terms of sports and exercise and boxing. And Reverend Ray fought on several occasions with Muhammad Ali, and going into that space is like being transported to another world. And then there are bunches of community centers around that we do different things with. In terms of the community partnerships, I would say we're most active with our Young Mothers program. Assata has connected with a wide range of organizations that engage in one way or another with the Young Mothers program. And for instance another group, and I could get you a list if you like, because it's fairly impressive. ... Another group that's been extraordinary with us has been the Unitarian Universalist church. The branch that we work with that's close by, there seem to be quite a few retired teachers. So they helped start a whole Monday night tutoring program. ... And on Thursday nights when the moms have workshops we get volunteers from there to help with our childcare sitter, and they take care of the kids when the moms are in the workshops. So it's all, we have a wide range of support and help of people who really believe in what we do and what happens. We're very very lucky that way.

MB: So I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your board, and sort of the functioning. Are you a voting member on the board?

LS: No, no.

MB: And is the board very involved in your day to day activities? Do they participate in fundraising? All that.

LS: Yes, yes and no. The current board president is a young African-American lawyer, and she is a dynamo, absolute dynamo. So, definitely not involved in the day to day, but very involved, and they run a very tight ship in terms of the board. So for instance, the board was meeting every other month with committee meetings in between. It nows meets every month, the board and the finance committee. And the finance committee always met every month. And I think when there's any kind of, what do I want to say, tension of any sort, it's got to do with money. When we're seeing, we're going to have a cash flow problem in December, how do we deal with that. When things get tight,

that's when everybody gets anxious. When things are good, which they have been for roughly the last year, I mean, we're completely without debt. We've paid off our lines of credit, we've started a cash reserve, which we've never had before. One of the foundations that's been just wonderful is Kresge. And they've helped, they've started the cash reserve and the building reserve. And those are two things we really really need. So the board is, I'd say there's maybe one person on the board with deep pockets. I think in the beginning days there were more, but now it's a very much a board of mostly kind of professionals. You know, finance people, engineers, one of the board members is one of the founders, that's Bert Samples, we have Valerie Cassel Oliver who's the senior curator at the contemporary arts museum, she's on the board. The incoming president is a gentleman named Andrew Speckhard, who's been involved for probably almost 19 of the 20 years, and he works for Chevron. And Chevron has been a very generous supporter all along. So it's combination. Did you ever go to Doshi House when you were here, the coffeeshop on the corner?

MB: Yes, I stopped in.

LS: Deepak Doshi is on our board. So it's a really nice, it's a combination, but for the most part, they're young and they're professional. So they don't necessarily have the means to help us out financially whenever there's an immediate issue, or, oh, gee, we need money for this program, we want to partner with the Menill and they don't have funding for us, and oh, well here's a couple of thousand dollars. We don't have that, which is unfortunate. But we do have, we've had great leadership from the board. And the only, maybe what we need, cause we've added some people, we technically added three people this past year. And what we need is a younger arts, someone who represents a younger generation from the founders and can speak to those issues at a board level. Valerie can as a curator, but I think we also need the artists voice. Bert Samples is terrific too, but again he's an older generation. And I think we need a younger generation. So, it's a dedicated board, there's no doubt about it. I just wish they had more money.

MB: That's always a thing with board members! So do you have terms limits, for how long people are involved?

LS: We work on having term limits, but we've not implemented that policy. There are, I'd say about two or three people who have been on, and it's both positive and negative. I fully appreciate the value of term limits. And if you want someone, someone like our Chevron guy for example, so say he goes off for a year, and we get him back on. I don't think we're going to lose him. But we haven't done it yet. We've talked about it but we haven't.

MB: So, you've spoken to this a little bit- the professionalism, the passion, but what characteristics would you say are the most valued in your board members?

LS: I'd say, and what's interesting is it's like the organization, it's definitely the constituents of the board cover all these areas. In other words we have people with an interest in art, people with an interest in affordable housing, we have people with a strong interest in community development and activism. We have people interested in social welfare and community building. It literally does run the gamut of the areas that we cover as well. We seem for some funny reason to have, I don't know why, we have a lot of lawyers. And for instance, one of the former Young Mothers who is now an attorney, she's on the board.

MB: Yeah! That's awesome.

LS: There are people who are very interested in the different programs, and they take a particular interest in whatever that may be, but they do run the gamut. I think the trick for the leadership is to understand the play between all those different areas. And that it's a balance, one doesn't overshadow the others. And I think we've been very successful that way.

MB: Do you have board dues? You said it's not a ton of deep pockets, but do you have financial dues?

LS: Yes, we do. Our main thing is, we want 100% participation. And we get 100% participation. With some of the people, some of the artists, we know we can't ask more than, say, \$100. But we do set goals with each board member, so at the beginning of the fiscal year, it's been a little screwed up this year because of the gala, which was in March the previous times and now it's in October and I think we want to stick to October. And all the board's been caught up in that, selling tickets to their friends or getting their company to buy tables. But there's always a pledge form from the board in terms of what they will get or give. And everybody, I mean obviously we have some people capable of much more, and do give more, and so for instance I think this past year one of the new board members with resources, so far between the gala and general donation, I think it's been almost \$15,000.

MB: Oh, wow.

LS: Yeah, so that's great. If everyone were like that we'd be golden. But we do have expectations, and we kind of work with the individual. So there isn't a set amount, but there is an expectation that they will give.

MB: That's a nice way to do it, I think.

LS: Yeah, I think it works.

MB: Yeah, especially if you're, you said you're committed to having people from all these different areas, like for artists in particular I think that's a really nice way to do that.

LS: Yeah, definitely.

MB: So, I wanted to talk to you about institutional funding. You said the Kresge Foundation has been really helpful. What kind of funding, or what kind of conditions on funding, have been most helpful or would be most helpful to organizations like yours?

LS: Huh, that's a tough one.

MB: I know, it's kind of a huge question.

LS: The easy, sort of obvious answer is general operating support.

MB: The golden goose!

LS: Exactly, exactly. And we get a fair amount of that. But equally we need to, we know what someone's interest is. By someone I say either a foundation or an individual. If their interest is more along community lines we would talk to them about the education and young mothers. We're not actively raising money for the CDC, but again, it's part of who we are, so it enters into it. It enters into the discussion. The other would be if we know someone is specifically interested in the arts... And I would say, looking at our funding, that we've had a couple of individuals who either believe like totally in Rick's vision, and they're sort of like Rick's funders in a way, nothing to do with the MacArthur but people who have funded specific projects that he's been involved with, but again the foundations, I mean, we're fortunate that Houston is very rich in good, solid foundations who are interested in the arts. So there's the Houston Endowment, the Brown Foundation, the McGovern Foundation, and there are an awful lot of small family foundations. So you'll often know somebody and just know them individually, and any support that they send comes from the family foundation. So there's that side of it. And then we've gotten funding from Kresge and Warhol. In the past we've gotten Ford Foundation money. So we obviously can have an avenue into the larger foundations as well. It's interesting because Kresge, I don't know if you know, they were known in the sort of

nonprofit cultural world, they were known really primarily to capital funding for new buildings and additions, until obviously the museum world was, you know, kind of growing up in the museum world whenever you heard Kresge it always had to do with a capital campaign for a new building. And so it must have been, let me see, we first got money from them in 2010, and it must have been around 2008 or whatever, they started to change their whole mission. So they completely left behind the capital stuff, and started, because the general feeling was, you're building all these buildings but what the heck is going on inside them? So they took on a much more, I think they use this terminology as well, a much more holistic approach to what they would fund. What we've done obviously appealed to them enormously because it's about the whole person. It's their family, their education, their well being, their curiosity, their companionship and sense of a network and support system. So in other words for us, the person is at the center, and the programs help support that person. But it's not just one program, you know, you just don't move on the art program alone. So I think they really appreciated what we were doing in terms of trying to revitalize an entire community, and it's not just done through bricks and mortar. You've got to have programs and heart involved in it all. So, does that help?

MB: Yes, absolutely, that's perfect. So I have one more big question and then one little question. We're coming up on the hour so I want to be respectful of your time. So my one more big question, and it is a big one. It's about impact, and how do you measure impact?

LS: Well that is the big question that everybody's asking.

MB: It's a classic.

LS: Yeah. It's interesting, I think both Kresge and Houston Endowment are hiring new positions exactly for that purpose. To inspect, okay, how do we measure this? As the organization that's funding these people, we're telling them we want them to measure the impact, but what do we mean? And do we even know what we're talking about? And I think some of them are recognizing the fact that they don't know what they're talking about, they're just saying it, and putting huge pressure on the organizations. I think what that we need to do, and this is something that's come up again and again in our strategic planning, you know, how do we do that? And it's really tricky, and I think what we should do, because it isn't a skill set that any one of us has. I mean obviously, you can, people say just start small and give stories. Just start with stories. And that's one way to do it. And we have lots of stories which we haven't really codified, or, not codified, but documented in a coherent way. But we also know that's not enough. And I think what we should do is probably bring on board or hire temporarily some kind of a firm that actually can do this work. Because we really need, we're really on a learning curve. And I don't think we're alone. It's a big issue that everybody is grappling with and it's not just the grantees, but the funders as well. And they're saying it, but what do they mean? I don't think they know. And also, one of the issues is, and especially now that you've been here, it's very hard for us to track our numbers. And again, we know that numbers aren't really the, that's just one aspect of it. We can certainly guesstimate with an opening. But on a regular day, when our houses are open, a person could start at the other end, not come into the two story and sign in, and it's entirely possible that their visit could happen without our knowledge. We did have one in particular, one art house, that was for writing and Spanish literature in particular. It was collaborative and there were two of them. And one of them was in the house every day that it was open to the public. And tracking and being there to talk to people, which is great. It would mean that people who are reading both Spanish and English, the Spanish speaking kids would come by and chat with them. So that was a great introduction on both sides. But he documented, I think he had come through his house a total of like 1600 people. Now that's not a lot, but it's also not a small amount either. And probably close to 800 of these people he did engage with in some way. And it's down to, is it the quality or the quantity? And both tell a picture, no doubt about it. But it's a real area that I think not only Project Row Houses but I think everybody has to come to terms with.

MB: So, my last question is, what is your favorite thing about working with Project Row Houses?

LS: Oh! I think, and this is going to sound silly, but without a doubt, the people. And frankly, every place I worked that's kind of been my response. I'll just tell you briefly, I grew up in the Northeast, I grew up on Long Island, my dad was a race horse trainer for Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, so I grew up on the periphery of great wealth. And then I got interested in art and started working when I was 17 at the Museum of Modern Art bookstore. And then my first little job after college at the Guggenheim, and then I ran Artists Space in New York, and then I was curator of contemporary art at the Modern, and then fifteen years at the Williams College Museum of Art. So it's all been about art, and it's been the Northeast, you know. So to be here, in Houston, which I think is the most diverse city in the country, with huge populations of Vietnamese and Nigerians, and, you know, it's amazing. ... I have been exposed to a world I didn't know. I'm working in this Black community, and it's an amazing world. And I've been totally embraced by the artists, by the community, by our neighbors. We'll be eating lunch, because we often eat lunch together, and you know, we just tell such funny stories, and they love my stories and I love their stories, and I've learned so much about Black culture. ... We have so much fun. So that's what I'm going to miss. And I'm going to miss the environment. The walking around, and we have people, really great people working here. Wonderful people, kind and smart and funny and talented, and really terrific. It's been great.

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