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Jessica McCallum Breen
University of Kentucky, jessibreen@gmail.com
Author ORCID Identifier:
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5370-8553
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Jessica McCallum Breen, Student

Matthew Zook, Major Professor

Matthew Zook, Director of Graduate Studies

PICTURING THE FUTURE CITY:
DIGITAL MEDIATION AND CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Jessica McCallum Breen

Lexington, Kentucky

Co- Directors: Dr. Matthew Zook, Professor of Geography

and Dr. Matthew Wilson, Professor of Geography

Lexington, Kentucky

2022

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https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5370-8553

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

PICTURING THE FUTURE CITY:
DIGITAL MEDIATION AND CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Creative placemaking is an arts-oriented community development policy that focuses on the potential for art, artists, and cultural organizations to generate social, economic, and cultural vibrancy in their communities and is a primary tool of culture-led (re)development practices (Markusen & Gwada, 2010). Despite the focus of creative placemakers on the local impacts of their work, creative placemaking is more than local, it is both translocal and transcalar. In this dissertation, I examine the role that digital mediation plays in creative placemaking and how it makes visible these translocal and transcalar connections. I begin by outlining a methodology for tracing replicated creative placemaking projects across networked space that results in a relational view of the work that they do. I then present two case studies: One looking at the transcalar connections created by street mural festivals as they link cities to global constellations of creativity, and the other focusing on how creative placemakers can curate and direct digital mediation by their audience to protect their own visions for the future of a place. In drawing attention to the potential for digital mediation to make visible the more than local impacts creative placemaking has on cities around the globe, this work suggests a way of approaching the study of creative placemaking relationally. By looking at creative placemaking relationally we are able to better understand and respond to the unintended consequences of the practice and in doing so move closer to creating more equitable cities that serve the communities that live there.

KEYWORDS: Digital Mediation, Creative Placemaking, Digital Geography, Public Art

Jessica McCallum Breen
(Name of Student)

12/09/2023
Date

PICTURING THE FUTURE CITY:
DIGITAL MEDIATION AND CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

By
Jessica McCallum Breen

Matthew Zook
Co-Director of Dissertation

Matthew Wilson
Co-Director of Dissertation

Matthew Zook
Director of Graduate Studies

12/09/2023
Date

DEDICATION

To Andy, who probably could have explained this better than I did.

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Thank you to my advisors, Matt Zook and Matt Wilson, a.k.a. the Matts, without whom this dissertation would have never gotten finished.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Figure 1.1 The 700 block of Bryan Avenue in the daytime. Source: NoLi CDC (NoLi CDC, 2013b)

When it was built in the 1880s, the former industrial complex that houses my apartment was on the outskirts of Lexington. Situated at one end of the historic Paris Pike, at an intersection that has vexed road engineers for nearly 200 years as Bryan Station Road (now Bryan Avenue/Bryan Station Road) veers sharply off from North Limestone (then Mulberry Street). A traffic realignment in the 1930s changed the route of the Paris Pike, which connects Lexington to nearby Paris, Kentucky, rendering the 700 block of Bryan Avenue adjacent to my apartment building vestigial, a cut-off tail of a street (Raitz & O'Malley, 2012). In the autumn of 2013, the block was home to the Lexington Rescue Mission and the thrift store they operated, several abandoned buildings, an antique store,

and an Army Surplus business housed in an old warehouse covered in ghost signs for cement and bricks. It was plain, dirty, and very little trafficked by anyone except the unhoused people served by the mission, which made getting the city's permission to cordon it off for a monthly block party an easy sell. The city was eager for someone, anyone, to improve the North Limestone neighborhood, and the North Limestone Community Development Corporation (NoLi CDC), having recently been awarded a creative placemaking grant from ArtPlace America, gave the city confidence in their abilities and so the NoLi CDC set about organizing the North Limestone Night Market.

The North Limestone Night Market was inspired by the work of creative placemakers in Seattle who organized a reoccurring pop-up night market, like those found throughout Asia, featuring street food vendors and small market stalls in a historically Asian-American community. The Seattle night markets were intended to support the existing culture and history of the neighborhood in a site-specific way (Kwan, 2002). Though the North Limestone Night Market lacked a similar historical or cultural linkage, the NoLi CDC still used the Chinatown-International District Night Market as a model.[1] They arranged for several food trucks and a local brewery to receive off-hours street vendor permits to set up at the event. They hired musical entertainment, recruited local artists to set up pop-up shops, and even brought in a live, event-style, photo booth. Then

[1] This is a recurrent theme with the movement of creative placemaking projects. The original projects are often site-specific (Kwan, 2002), focusing on an element of the original site, often cultural or historical, that is then lacking in the place(s) where it gets moved to. Sometimes the lacking element is obvious like this case or with Candy Chang's "Before I Die…" project that gave voice to New Orleans residents' hopes and fears concerning their own mortality following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. But sometimes it's not as obvious, like in the case of the Black Lives Matter mural in Washington, DC, where being painted in the street was a meaningful gesture in the context of a dispute between the DC Mayor's Office and the Federal Government over who owned the road, but meaningless in the dozens of cities that replicated it. These missing elements can lead to unexpected outcomes when a creative placemaking project is replicated in a new place.

they took to physically transforming the block, artfully arranging hay bales to act as temporary seating and direct the flow of foot traffic, bringing in potted trees to soften the harsh lines of the all-concrete streetscape, and festooning strings of bare Edison bulbs back and forth over the street to warm up the harsh light provided by the city's streetlights. Concerned that adding yet another diesel generator to the mix would overwhelm the space's already difficult acoustics, the strings of Edison bulbs were powered via a dubious linkage of extension cords that ran from my next-door neighbor's kitchen window.

Figure 1.2 Image of The Night Market posted by NoLi CDC to their Facebook page.
Source: NoLi CDC (NoLi CDC, 2013a)

Initial attendance at The Night Market was sparse, but the NoLi CDC was persistent, posting carefully cropped images of the space to social media that made the crowd look larger and denser, the area more inviting and safer, and documenting a must-attend event that did not yet exist. After a slow first few months, the crowds that NoLi

CDC's social media images so cleverly insinuated began to genuinely arrive. Some of my neighbors and I would sit in lawn chairs in our tiny, shared garden drinking beer and watching in awe as several hundred smartly dressed people streamed past us toward the lights and music on Bryan Avenue. At the end of the night, the food trucks and other vendors would pack up and leave. The trash would be hauled away and the hay bales and potted trees would be loaded into the bed of a pickup truck and taken back to the NoLi CDC offices a block away. In the morning only the pictures on social media and the strings of Edison bulbs strung overhead would remain as evidence of NoLi CDC's imagined future for the North Limestone neighborhood.

1.2 Creative Placemaking in Lexington

The North Limestone neighborhood, or "NoLi" (pronounced "no lie") as the neighborhood's community development corporation has repeatedly attempted to rebrand it, has been the epicenter of creative placemaking in Lexington. Not long after I arrived in the neighborhood in 2013, the NoLi CDC received a $425,000 grant from ArtPlace America to fund a housing redevelopment project called the LuigART Maker Spaces, which aimed to renovate 35 shotgun houses and a former industrial building, originally built in the 1880s to house a brewery and malting house, into "affordable housing and workspace for the creative class" (ArtPlace America, 2013). Then in 2014, the NoLi CDC, in partnership with the Bluegrass Community Foundation, the North Limestone Neighborhood Association, LexArts, the University of Kentucky Department of Community & Leadership Development, the city of Lexington, and the planning and design firm Lord Aeck Sargent, received a $75,000 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town grant, the flagship grant of creative placemaking in the United States. This grant aimed to develop a cultural plan for the North Limestone neighborhood that

would “set priorities and develop strategies for improving access to public art and cultural programming” (Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, 2014).

Figure 1.3 Images from the LuigART Makers Spaces project. On left, York Street as it was in 2013, and on the right, architectural firm alt32’s winning design for the project. Source: NoLi CDC (NoLi CDC, 2020)

As the former home of a Knight newspaper, Lexington was uniquely placed to engage in creative placemaking. The Knight Cities Challenge, launched in 2014, provided millions in annual funding for creative ideas sources from anywhere, but they needed to be undertaken in one of the 26 cities and towns where Knight once operated a newspaper. It was a nod to the idea that creativity is not sequestered in large and global cities but can come from anywhere. The largest of the Knight Foundation’s smaller tier of cities, Lexington quickly became a testing site for creative placemaking projects that the Knight Foundation wanted to roll out in other communities. These projects included MyCity, an app and website to “promote shared, vibrant public spaces by giving parks, libraries, and citizens the tools to crowdsource imaginative, expanded programming” and the Walk [Your] City toolkit, which aimed to support urban walkability efforts with wayfinding signs giving walking times, instead of distances, to local amenities (Knight Foundation, n.d.b); Knight Foundation, n.d.d)

Though it was locked out of the substantial sum of arts-specific grant funding the Knight Foundation offered to cities in the larger tier of their former locations, Lexington

was able to compete for the plentiful, smaller, open grants that the Knight Foundation provided. In 2015, the NoLi CDC received a $560,400 grant from the Knight Foundation to "support Lexington's talent retention and economic integration by repurposing a vacant Greyhound station into a market for locally grown food and goods, serving the community as a new business incubator and neighborhood hub" (Knight Foundation, n.d.c). Subsequent years saw Knight Foundation grants go to fund projects around Lexington that sought to reimagine public spaces including the city's historic courthouse, little-used surface parking lots, and a community garden. All told, between 2015 and 2017 the Knight Foundation provided ~$1 million in grant funding to small creative placemaking projects in Lexington, most of them in the North Limestone area (Knight Foundation, n.d.a).

But it wasn't only the NoLi CDC that was pursuing creative placemaking initiatives in the North Limestone neighborhood. The day I moved into my apartment there was an icing sugar mural in the style of Shelley Miller on the side of the building, the work of Transylvania University students enrolled in a course on Creative Engagement Through the Arts that regularly used the neighborhood as a canvas for their artistic interventions. On my daily dog walks around the neighborhood, I would often discover some new artifact of creative placemaking. A "Before I Die" board, based on Candy Chang's iconic New Orleans creative placemaking project, popped up outside the donut shop up the street along with guerilla way-finding signage directing people to nearby bike polo courts. A prolific property developer took to incorporating murals into each of their renovations and a collective of artists organized a "Free Art Friday," where they left clues on their Facebook page as part of an urban treasure hunt, directing people to pieces of art hidden around the neighborhood.

Figure 1.4 Placemaking in the North Limestone neighborhood (clockwise from top left): Mural painting at Lucy's Red Light; Love Locks outside Third Street Stuff; scarf from a yarn bombing in Duncan Park; part of a sidewalk mural welcoming people to the neighborhood. (Photos by author.)

Elsewhere in Lexington, the PRHBTN graffiti art festival was expanding to bring their first crop of international artists to paint murals in Lexington. Previously, PRHBTN had consisted entirely of a concert and a gallery show for local graffiti artists. The Lexington Tattoo Project, a multimedia love letter to the city of Lexington in which 253 residents had snippets of a crowdsourced poem about the city inked onto their bodies, and its accompanying photo project, had just concluded. The Lexington Tattoo Project had been very popular and ultimately spawned replicated projects in several other cities.

Replica tattoo projects popped up in Detroit, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Boulder, Colorado. At the same time the Lexington Art League, a membership organization for visual artists founded in 1957, had decided to shift its focus from support for local and regional artists to "getting Lexington on the artistic map" by bringing in a pair of Canadian artists known for their work at Toronto's Nuit Blanche arts festival to create an interactive light sculpture (Lexington Art League, n.d.).

Like many American cities following the global housing collapse and resulting recession of 2008, Lexington was in search of a way forward. The city had been designated as one of the "Top Ten Most Creative Small Cities" by Richard Florida in 2002, during the first wave of Creative Cities thinking (Florida, 2002). The city had even played host to a Creative Cities Summit in 2010 where Richard Florida and Charles Landry both made pitches for how a small city like Lexington might thrive in the new creative economy. The launch of the NEA Our Town grants and the formation of ArtPlace America, along with the creation of the Knight Cities Challenge, provided access to much needed funding and relied on a skillset that Lexington had already demonstrated a knack for. It was little wonder then that Lexington's political, economic, and cultural leadership embraced creative placemaking so completely.

1.3 Why Digital Mediation?

My original plan for this dissertation had been to write about Lexington and the North Limestone neighborhood specifically. I took a deep dive into creative placemaking in the city. I interviewed artists, city employees, event organizers, and non-profit staff. I helped organize and install guerilla way-finding signs when the Knight Foundation decided to prototype the toolkit for the Walk [Your] City project in Lexington. I volunteered at the Downtown Development Authority when the Knight Foundation sent Studio Gehl to Lexington to study pedestrian traffic and to create a plan for the redesign of the Lexington

Transit Center. I attended government meetings and committee sessions. I went to Open Houses, gallery shows, and artist talks, photographed creative interventions, joined social media groups, and followed hashtags to get information about what was happening that I could not get through the traditional, local media. I ended up doing an artist residency myself, curious about the day-to-day lived experience of artists working in creative placemaking. I even wound up as a finalist for the National Arts Strategies Creative Communities Fellowship for a creative placemaking project I designed.

But as I immersed myself in the world of Lexington's creative placemaking, I noticed that though the creative placemaking literature is full of stories about the uniqueness of place, I kept seeing the same or similar projects popping up in place after place. All the projects that I documented happening in Lexington came from somewhere else — the Walk [Your] City staff had arrived in Lexington from San Jose, New Mexico where they had been running another pilot project the day before, though they were based out of Raleigh, North Carolina. The Studio Gehl people were based out of New York City. Everything referenced something else that had been done successfully elsewhere — it was part of how it was sold. "This will be great for Lexington, and it has already worked in these other places." Of all the projects that I encountered in Lexington, there was only one that did not travel in — the Lexington Tattoo Project — and that one was carried away to other cities.

Creative placemaking projects arrived in Lexington with websites, dedicated social media accounts, and pre-determined hashtags. That these projects would be digitally mediated by their audience was expected and planned for, but in my conversations with placemakers, I found that this anticipated digital mediation was largely thought of as part of the marketing of the project and not part of the work the project did. How that digital mediation might shape audience responses to the project itself, or the work that it might do in advancing the spread of the project to other sites seemed largely unconsidered, even when the project was already mobile.

Given this disconnect between the "uniqueness of Lexington" and the "well-traveled" nature of creative placemaking, I saw an opportunity to better understand the work that these projects do across the places they travel through by paying attention to their digital mediation both by their organizers and their audiences. As a result, I decided to shift my focus, changed my research methods, and opted to analyze the role that digital mediation plays in the work that creative placemaking does more broadly.

1.4 Defining Creative Placemaking

The first problem that one organizing a study of creative placemaking runs into is trying to define exactly what "creative placemaking" is. Depending on who installed a project it might be referred to by any number of names including creative or arts-oriented placemaking, DIY urbanism, guerrilla urbanism, or even simply as an urban intervention. This has been a continuous difficulty for both practitioners and scholars of creative placemaking and has been attributed to several factors, including the variety of organizations that engage with the concept and their need to translate it into their own field's manner of speaking, as well as the vastly different ways that these projects have been enacted in communities (Jackson, 2019). As Redaelli (2016) has noted, creative placemaking, at least that based on the NEA Our Town model, is a transcalar undertaking that joins groups and lexicons across scale. Just in Lexington the diversity of groups involved in creative placemaking range from the federal government and private foundations (the NEA and ArtPlace America) to formal and informal artists' organizations (Lexington Art League & Free Art Friday) to individual citizens (the "Before I die..." board outside the donut shop).

There has been an attempt to describe creative placemaking in terms of what it is not or rather should not be. For example, the efforts of organizations seeking to distance themselves from the worst offenders of creative placemaking practice, the "place-takers."

These are the creative placemaking projects that do not make connections to existing history or community. The Knight Foundation's revised definition of creative placemaking (Jackson, 2019) is an example of this redefining to exclude projects that are viewed as harmful to existing communities and place identities.

The academic literature has also struggled to differentiate the organic (Lew, 2017), traditional form of placemaking described in the work of geographers Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Edward Relph (1976) from the "accelerated" (Foth, 2017), planned placemaking of creative placemaking projects, despite the widespread application of creative placemaking. The process is further complicated by the need to differentiate it from other forms of accelerated placemaking. Wyckoff (2014) has identified three types of specialized placemaking: strategic, which focuses on the physical form as well as land use and functions; tactical, which is concerned with land use and functions in addition to social opportunity; and creative, which is concerned with social opportunity and the physical form of places. All of these fit within a generalized concept of "standard" placemaking and overlap in their goal of creating what he terms "Quality Places" - the types of places that "people want to live, work, play and learn in." Lew (2017) suggests instead that the diversity of placemaking is better thought of as a continuum of practices with top-down, planned efforts at one end and bottom-up, organic efforts at the other.

Markusen and Gwada (2010), in their whitepaper for the NEA's Mayors' Institute on City Design, defined creative placemaking as a process by which, "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 culture activities. [It] 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." They also identified six elements common to successful creative placemaking projects: "Each effort starts with an entrepreneurial initiator; demonstrates a commitment to place and its distinctive character; mobilizes public will, both in local

government and the citizenry; attracts private sector support, either from cultural industries or place developers or both; wins the active participation of arts and cultural leaders; and succeeds in building partnerships across sectors (for-profit, non-profit, government, and community), missions (e.g. cultural affairs, economic and workforce development, transportation, housing, planning, environment, and health), and levels of government (local, state, and federal) (Markusen & Gwada, 2010). This definition places creative placemaking somewhere toward the middle of Lew's continuum of placemaking with a mix of top-down and bottom-up organizing possibilities.

In this work, I define creative placemaking as an arts-oriented community development policy that focuses on the potential for art, artists, and cultural organizations to generate social, economic, and cultural vibrancy in their communities (Markusen & Gwada, 2010). This definition is in the spirit of Markusen and Gwada's (2010) original definition, but broader to enable it to include projects that are not the product of public/private partnerships, are not intentionally economic and do not impact the built environment. Similarly, creative placemaking practice has been moving towards projects that put less emphasis on the built environment and are more inclusive of projects with social rather than economic goals (see Calderon & Takeshita, 2020; Courage, 2015; Hand, 2020). Where I break with creative placemaking practioners is with the focus on process and how the work is created, typically with the requirement for partnership. Because I'm largely working with historical projects in many places and not current creative placemaking projects, I am often not able to determine much about the actual process that produced the projects I'm writing about beyond the names of the people and organizations involved and what they self-reported in the media. There are certainly projects in Chapter 2 that were unilateral creations of non-profits, governments, and even some individuals and some of them might even fall under the title of "place-taking." I include these projects in my research not because process isn't important, but because process doesn't photograph well and I'm working with largely digital-visual mediation.

1.5 Reconnecting Process with Place Through the Digital

One of the important things that Markusen and Gwada's (2010) definition of creative placemaking does is to lay out a procedural framework for how arts and culture organizations are going to interact with civic and non-profit organizations to do this work (Frenette, 2017). The process of creative placemaking has become an important point for practitioners, particularly those who are working to make creative placemaking more inclusive and to distance themselves from the neoliberal history of the practice. Yet, two projects can have very different processes that led to their creation and yet have their digital mediation be indistinguishable from each other. Take for example two murals by Brazilian artist Eduardo Kobra, one in Lexington and the other in nearby Cincinnati.

Figure 1.5 Eduardo Kobra's mural for ArtWorks in Cincinnati, OH. (Photo by author.)

Figure 1.6 Eduardo Kobra's mural for ArtWorks in Lexington, KY. (Source: Street Art News (Street Art News, 2013)

Eduardo Kobra is an internationally known street artist from São Paulo, Brazil, who paints large-scale, color-blocked, portraits of famous people. In Lexington, he painted a mural of Abraham Lincoln, who was born in Kentucky and whose wife was a Lexingtonian, while in nearby Cincinnati he painted a mural of Neil Armstrong, an Ohio native, and former Cincinnati resident. The two murals are clearly in the same style, painted by the same artist, and even using similar color palettes. The images of the murals you will find on social media reflect this similarity of scale, style, color, and subject matter, but the processes that created the two murals are vastly different. PRHBTN, which facilitated Kobra's Lincoln mural, is a privately run graffiti art festival that celebrates "art forms that have been criminalized, marginalized, and under-appreciated in the mainstream" and aims to create an international-quality collection of street art in Lexington (PRHBTN, n.d.). While ArtWorks, the organization that facilitated the Armstrong portrait, is a non-profit

focused on arts workforce development, modeled after Philadelphia's well known mural program, that hires and trains Youth Apprentices along with professional artist Mentors to create a variety of public art installations around the city of Cincinnati.

The difference in process and how it is valued by the two organizations is visible in the digital meditation of the projects that they have posted to their respective Instagram accounts. PRHBTN's Instagram feed, as seen in Figure 1.7, consists mostly of unpeopled images of completed murals and the occasional image of an artist at work usually on an aerial work platform[2] with their back to the camera. While ArtWorks' Instagram feed, seen in Figure 1.8, also includes images of the artwork they commission, many of those use the art as a background to an image of the people responsible for creating the mural, and their feed is dominated by images of their Youth Apprentice artists working on scaffolding and engaging with community members.[3] Yet, this difference in process is lost in the subsequent digital mediation of the murals by the audiences who engage them (see Figure 1.9). Process certainly leaves a mark on the communities where the projects take place, but this mark is invisible in the digital mediation of the projects available on social media platforms.

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[2] The choice of an aerial work platform versus scaffolding also gives a glimpse into the process that creates the murals. Scaffolding requires time to set up, while the aerial work platform is ready to be used as soon as it arrives on site. The aerial work platforms PRHBTN uses are for use by a single individual who both does the painting and controls the platform's movement. The scaffolding used by ArtWorks enables multiple artists to work together on the mural at the same time.

[3] Due to the way that ArtWorks frames their process pictures, focused on the individual doing the painting and not the piece being painted, I was unable to find a pair of images for an singlar mural. Instead, I have used an image of the mural creation process that ArtWorks has shared multiple times on Instagram as an example of how they photograph process.

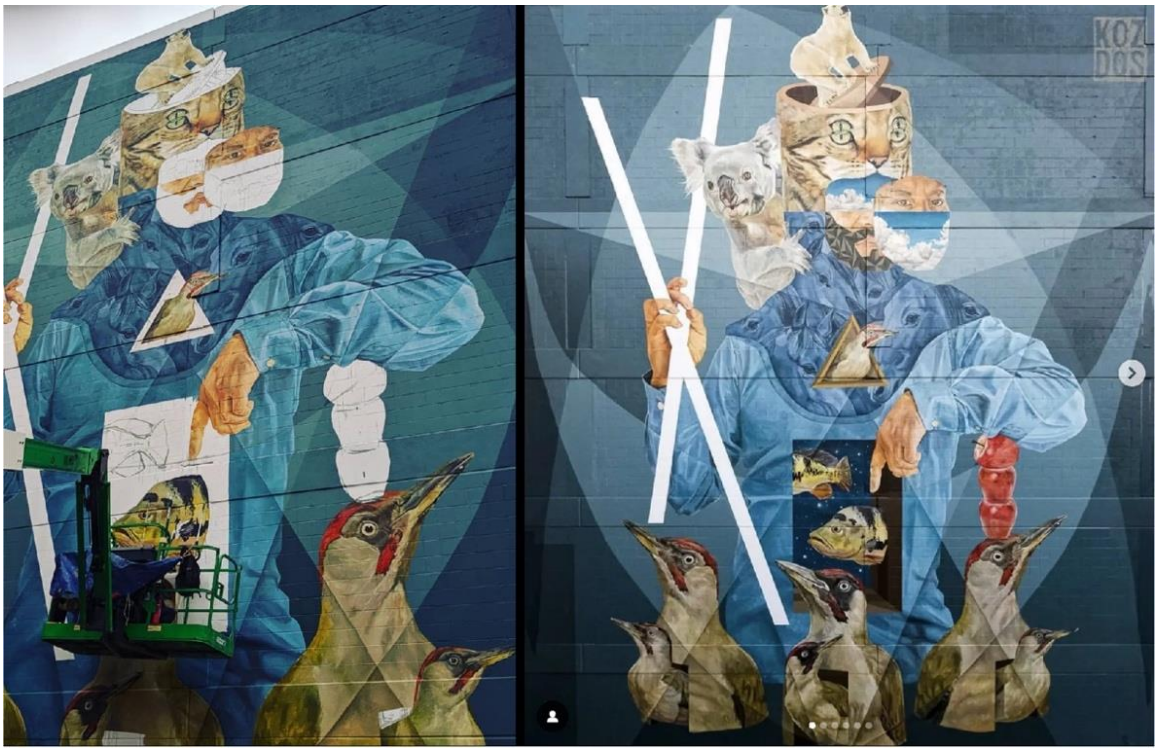

Figure 1.7 Images of KOZ DOS mural from PRHBTN in process (left) (PRHBTN, 2019a) and completed (right) (PRHBTN, 2019b).

Figure 1.8 Example images of Artworks process photos (on left) and completed mural photos (on right). Source: ArtWorks Cincinnati (ArtWorks Cincinnati, 2022a; ArtWorks Cincinnati, 2022b)

Figure 1.9 Instagram photos of the same murals, ArtWorks Cincinnati (left) and PRHBTN (right). Source: WordPlay Cincy (WordPlay Cincy, 2021) on the left and John Domine (John Domine, 2021) on the right.

Digital technology does offer some opportunities for reconnecting process with place in the digital meditation of these projects. Projects like Paint the Void in San Francisco, which provided paid work primarily for BIPOC and women artists during the COVID-19 pandemic creating murals on boarded-up storefronts, connected that work to its process with the inclusion of the hashtag #paintthevoid in its murals (Paint the Void, n.d.). However, this tactic was somewhat undermined by artists elsewhere, who, unaware of the specifics of the Paint the Void project, interpreted the hashtag as a commentary on the emptiness of urban space during the pandemic and included it in work unrelated to the organization. The Wall Hunters project in Baltimore created unauthorized street art murals on derelict and abandoned buildings in the city. Poster-sized QR codes were wheat-pasted to the murals providing information about the building's ownership and contact details for the city councilperson responsible for the area, drawing attention to the power dynamics of responsibility and neglect in Baltimore. While the unauthorized murals were seldom

disturbed, the QR codes themselves were frequently vandalized and removed (Woods, 2013).

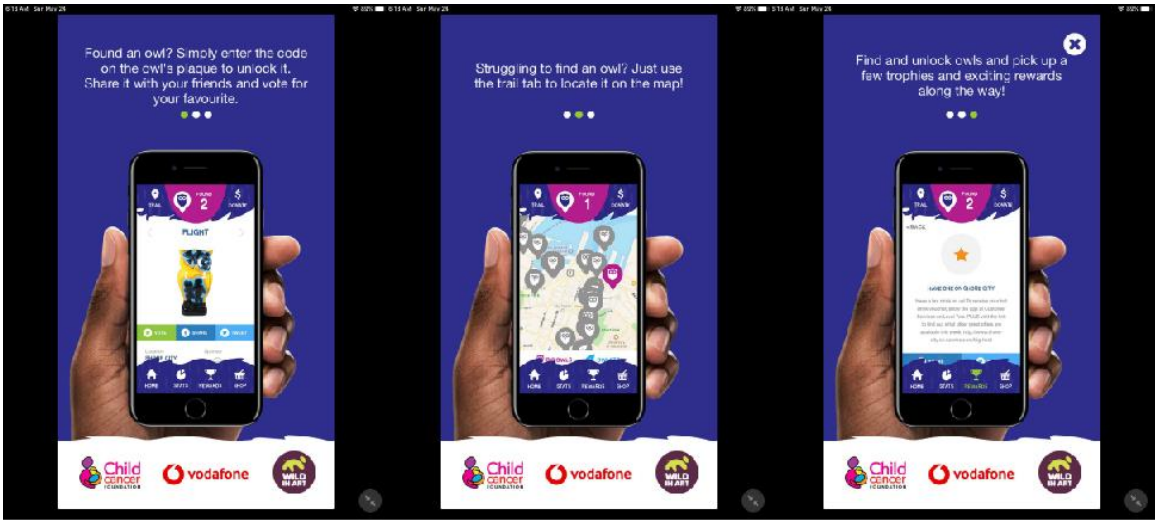

Figure 1.10 One of Wild in Art's branded check-in apps. Source: Wild in Art (Wild In Art, n.d.)

Additionally, there are platform-based methods including dedicated apps that allow viewers to "collect" or check-in at installations like those used by Wild in Art, a consulting firm based in the United Kingdom that specializes in art trails. Audiences download the project's app to their mobile device which then provides maps and contextual information for the art trail, creating the connection between process and place. There are also non-project specific apps like Art House that use a combination of augmented and virtual reality along with projection mapping to enable viewers to view mixed reality versions of an artwork through their mobile device. Many of these animate a piece of art, but some have been used to show videos of the artwork's creation or to provide narrative about the piece. Other projects have repurposed existing location-aware social media platforms by adding their project's artwork to the app. Through a project with the University of Kentucky's ICT Co-Lab, the statues of LexArts Horse Mania 2010 were added to Foursquare as check-in

locations including tips that provided visitors with additional information about the equestrian history connected to each statue (Lynch, 2010). The use of apps does silo the audience's digital mediation and that can work against the goals of organizations that need audiences taking and sharing photos of the artwork to help publicize it and digitally embed it into place. However, it has the advantage of creating a significant quantity of location-based user data about visitors, which can have a monetary value.

1.6 Evaluating Creative Placemaking

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." - William Bruce Cameron (1963)

A related issue to the difficulty in defining creative placemaking is the difficulty in measuring and evaluating it, especially as it was often intertwined with goals of redevelopment and economic change. Markusen and Gwada's (2010) white paper for the NEA's Mayors' Institute on City Design created a framework for how artists and arts and culture organizations could work with public and private partners to incorporate arts and culture into (re)development efforts (Frenette, 2017). The subsequent creation of ArtPlace America, an organization made up of multiple federal agencies, financial institutions, and several philanthropic foundations, including the Kresge, Ford, Knight, and Bloomberg foundations, dedicated to funding creative placemaking in American cities, increased interest in creative placemaking as an urban (re)development strategy. At the same time, the Knight and Kresge Foundations were undertaking their own creative placemaking funding efforts, with the Knight Cities Challenge and the Kresge American Cities program, respectively. Following the creation of the Our Town grants, arts funders across the country created grant programs that copied the NEA's format relying on the nation's foremost arts organization's judgment for how best to institute creative placemaking projects.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and ArtPlace America, with its mishmash of federal, for-profit, and philanthropic organizations, sought to create universal indicators by which to evaluate creative placemaking initiatives (Markusen, 2013). Before the creation of the Our Town grant framework, organizations involved in creative placemaking had determined their own evaluation metrics by which to judge their progress. This grab bag of metrics from creative placemaking projects that worked at a variety of scales had hindered attempts at comparative analysis with the use of vague concepts like "vitality" and "livability" (Markusen, 2013; Nicodemus, 2013) The formal fusing of arts and culture with governmental and economic goals required a shift in how the work of creative placemaking was measured and valued that better aligned with the ways of knowing familiar to government and for-profit partners. Markusen (2013) suggests that much of the drive for universal and quantifiable indicators was the work of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to whom, as a federal agency, the NEA answers.

The indicators that the NEA and ArtPlace ultimately selected suffered from a plethora of issues including being poorly described, requiring expensive or scarce data, and failing to understand the lived realities of creative placemaking and the work that artists do (Markusen, 2013). The types of data being relied on (census, housing, cell phone usage, etc.) are sparse in many places, often expensive, and require domain-specific knowledge that many art and culture organizations lack. Even after several attempts to align indicators with the metrics of the industries where the projects were being conducted and trying to make them easier to use, they still often did not measure what they were intended to measure or simply measured the wrong thing (Hand, 2020). Regardless of where the push for quantification came from, the result of the NEA designing their creative placemaking evaluation metrics around these types of data was to cause smaller arts organizations and funders to similarly begin requiring quantitative measurement of what is arguably largely qualitative work.

1.7 Creative Placemaking and Digital Mediation

Creative placemaking produces a wide range of impacts, some tangible and others intangible. Lew (2017) posits that the tools of placemaking can be arranged on a second continuum from those that impact the tangible, which he describes as "landscapes and builtscapes" to the intangible, consisting of "mindscapes and storyscapes." Between the two he situates those practices that impact a combination of the tangible and intangible, the "ethnoscapes and peoplescapes" of people focused processes. Instead of pushing creative placemakers to put an increased value on the tangible aspects of creative placemaking, the push towards quantification encouraged them to count anything that could be quantified.

Given the visual nature of much of creative place-making workflows tied to photos-taking and distribution of images were particularly useful. Social media can provide highly segmented data cheaply and easily that has salience to the for-profit sector, leading creative placemaking practitioners desperate for quantitative data to rely on the numbers available from social media platforms as a means of evaluating community involvement and project reach. For example, in the economic impact report published following the 2019 BLINK light art festival, discussed in Chapter 4, the organization devoted a quarter of the report to highlighting metrics derived from their social media presence, website, and app. Unfortunately, this doesn't account for a critical understanding of the ways that social media data is created or the implications of its use. The result is a virtuous circle in which successful digital mediation begets further digital mediation, and this seems to be a largely unconsidered aspect of creative placemaking and its mediation.

From the apps on our mobile devices to the code that operates urban infrastructure, our daily lives and the places we inhabit are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and content (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011; Ash et al., 2018; Zook & Graham, 2007). The scopic regimes and limitations of digital media platforms shape how we see and interact with the world (Leszczynski, 2019). The digital meditation of creative placemaking projects is in

many instances an act of mundane data creation, a photo taken and shared without particularly deep concern for the work that that image and its circulation will do, though it has been demonstrated that such acts and their resulting data shape our place imaginaries (Pink et al., 2017; Boy & Uitermark, 2017).

1.8 Pics or Creative Placemaking Didn't Happen

I call attention to this mundane practice to consider the work that the creation and sharing of the digital mediation of creative placemaking have on places. Images of creative placemaking are images of the material aspect of a well-traveled and oft un-questioned economic redevelopment policy, they are Trojan horses concealing an army of ideas about what cities should look like, who they are for and not for, what public space should be used for, etc. Many of the places that enact the types of small, replicated creative placemaking projects I write about in this dissertation will never receive an NEA Our Town grant, they may never see a dollar of Knight or Kresge funding, but it doesn't matter because the ideas about public space that those organizations promote travel through the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects.

Creative placemaking is an aspirational undertaking — it is a process that seeks to create a place or experience that its organizers desire to see in the future city. In Indianapolis, the Harrison Center for the Arts' PreEnactment Theater quite literally creates a future city with specially built sets and actors acting out what they want to see in a future city including specific civic behaviors (Calderon & Takeshita, 2020). In creating the North Limestone Night Market on a derelict street in a neighborhood suffering from chronic and long-term disinvestment, the NoLi CDC sought to deploy a vision for the future of the North Limestone neighborhood using creative placemaking. This vision was shared via digital mediation on a variety of digital platforms including Facebook and Instagram turning an event that occurred for only a few hours each month into an event that was

always searchable and shareable online. So too is creative placemaking an aspirational undertaking. Yet creative placemaking lacks a critique of the role digital mediation plays (Halegoua, 2020). Creative placemaking projects will have dedicated hashtags and websites along with social media accounts on several platforms, but this is uncritically considered part of the project's marketing or fundraising and not part of the work that the project does (McCabe & Harris, 2021).

One of the projects I undertook during my research was an artist's residency at The Plantory, a co-working space operated by a 90-year-old social justice non-profit. The Plantory had received a LexArts Community Art grant to conduct a creative placemaking project reflecting local sentiment regarding neighborhood change which they titled, "The Neighborhood Art Project." The co-working space itself was in a former bread factory that had been largely abandoned for several decades before being turned into a brewery and community space including the aforementioned co-working space, a bike co-op, artist studios, the practice space for the local roller derby team, a non-profit kitchen facility, and a distillery. The surrounding neighborhood was similarly seeing a burst of reinvestment as the area once again became a desirable place to live and work.

As part of the Neighborhood Art Project, I attended neighborhood association meetings in the Northeast sector of Lexington and asked attendees to draw their impressions of how the neighborhood had changed for current residents on a map using the colors and categories of the 1938 federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps, commonly known as "redlining" maps. It was a ham-fisted excuse to start conversations about gentrification and its links to the racist redlining tactics that had caused the area to become disinvested and that had helped enable its subsequent gentrification. I ultimately collected 32 hand-colored maps that I projected onto an 8' by 8' CNC cut MDF map of Northeast Lexington and used to create several smaller light sculptures. Both the projection piece and the smaller light sculptures were displayed at the coworking space, with the light

sculptures eventually making their way to another exhibition at nearby Transylvania University.

I submitted a proposal to the residency because I was interested in the experience of creative placemaking practitioners themselves. My research up to this point had been focused on the gaps between what creative placemaking practitioners sought to do and what their work actually did and I wanted to experience firsthand how those gaps came about, whether it was an outcome of myopia or something systemic to the creative placemaking process (spoiler, it's both). When the residency was drawing to a close, I was approached by the coworking space about applying for a second grant and extending my residency. By successfully completing the initial grant, we, both the co-working space and I, were deemed qualified by the funder to apply for additional and larger grants. It didn't matter that there had been multiple community meetings where no one had been willing to create a map, so the maps that were created represented only some of the neighborhood associations in the area, or that nearly all the people who had shown up to the installation's opening were personal friends. What mattered was that I had delivered the required art piece and we had photographs of people interacting with it.

This "pics or it didn't happen" ethos was one that came up repeatedly when talking to creative placemaking practitioners and funders. Part of my contractual obligation as the artist-in-residence, and this is a common stipulation of artist residencies, had been to produce and participate in documentation of the project, most of which was digital-visual and intended for use on social media. The documentation of the project, the images of its creation, and of people interacting with it, were all proof of its success, even if it wasn't particularly successful. These photographs become proof, evidence to be used in future grant applications, in publications, and on social media by funders and organizers alike touting their successful work in communities.

1.9 Outline of Dissertation

In the chapters that follow, I first propose a method of using digital mediation to study creative placemaking relationally and then present two case studies of creative placemaking projects and their digital mediation. The two case studies respond to Rose's (2015) call to cultural geographers to pay closer attention to the participatory aspects of digital cultural objects and build on the conceptualization of the work that digital mediation does for public art proposed by Zebracki (see Zebracki, 2017a; Zebracki 2017b; Zebracki & Luger, 2019).

Chapter two concerns the replication and movement of creative placemaking projects. In this chapter, I employ a "follow the thing" method borrowed from economic geography and policy mobility studies to trace the movement of a replicated creative placemaking project across space and time via its digital mediation. I argue that despite the focus of creative placemakers on the local and by the creative placemaking literature on one-off projects in large and global cities, that creative placemaking creates more than local connections. In the case of replicated creative placemaking projects, these connections are translocal and transcalar. By focusing on the creative placemaking project itself rather than the place in which it occurs, I suggest that we can gain a relational view of the work that creative placemaking is asked to do in communities without regard to urban scale. Such a relational perspective has been absent in the creative placemaking literature and could potentially help to explain why places counterintuitively collect and replicate creative placemaking projects.

Chapter three is the first of the case studies. Street art murals have become a well-recognized signal of urban redevelopment and consequently have become associated with gentrification and displacement. At the same time, street art has become a popular phenomenon on social media, in particular visual platforms like Instagram, where numerous user accounts are devoted to the display, creation, and consumption of street art.

In this chapter, I examine the digital mediation of Lexington, Kentucky's PRHBTN street art mural festival by VisitLex, the city's visitor and convention bureau. I argue that this digital mediation creates connections, both translocal and transcalar, that shape the urban imaginaries of Lexington for both visitors and locals alike.

In chapter four, I examine the physical and digital strategies employed by the biennial BLINK light art festival in nearby Cincinnati, Ohio to stabilize their vision of the #FutureCity. I argue that although digital mediation opens the potential for audience co-production and potential co-option, creative placemakers can strategically direct and re-purpose audience co-creation to support their own visions for the future. Through this curation, creative placemakers can shape the public's urban imaginaries to align with their own and create at least the appearance of public buy-in.

Together these findings provide a broad picture of the work that digital mediation does for creative placemaking, an understudied aspect of the practice. It is increasingly important to reexamine the way that we study and understand creative placemaking as the field shifts to better reflect societal change over the past 10 years.

CHAPTER 2. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL VIEW OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

2.1 Introduction

In the 15 minutes that it takes to walk across downtown Lexington, Kentucky, from Thoroughbred Park at one end of Main Street to Triangle Park at the other, you will pass by half a dozen brightly painted storm drains, four painted fiberglass horses, two fiberglass benches shaped like open books, several street art murals, an environmentally-themed sound art installation, a number of electrical boxes wrapped in colorful artwork, several stops on a history-themed walking trail, an array of benches made from repurposed pallets, and a neighborhood book exchange called, “The Carnegie Reading Room." In previous years, the walk might also have yielded two pairs of painted pianos, numerous guerrilla way-finding signs, and a pop-up beer garden. If the weather is nice or there’s a festival happening in the courthouse square, you’ll likely see people stopping to take selfies with the horses or on the benches. Were you walking in winter, you might find that the statues in Thoroughbred Park have been yarn bombed, yet again.

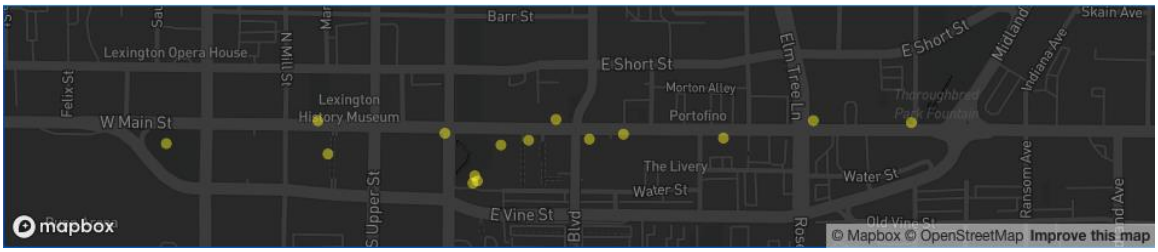

Figure 2.1 Map showing the locations of some of the creative placemaking projects present on Lexington, Kentucky’s Main Street. (Map by author.)

Figure 2.2 Images of creative placemaking projects on Main Street, Lexington, KY. Clockwise from bottom left: a yarn bombed horse in Thoroughbred Park; fiberglass Horse Mania sculpture; recycled pallet bench; The Carnegie Reading Room; painted storm drain; and an art wrapped electrical box. (Photos by author.)

Although creative placemaking practitioners focus on creative placemaking's potential to create a "unique sense of place," none of the numerous creative placemaking projects encountered on Lexington's Main Street are unique to the city. Every one of them is a replication either directly imported from another place, like the guerrilla way-finding signs from the Walk [Your] City project based in Raleigh, North Carolina, or inspired by projects elsewhere, like the fiberglass horses and book benches, which were themselves inspired by projects in Chicago and London, respectively. Of all the projects that I have encountered in Lexington, there has only been one that did not travel in from somewhere else — the Lexington Tattoo Project — and that was carried away to be replicated in other cities.

Figure 2.3 Walk [Your] City signs being installed in Lexington, KY. (Photo by author.)

2.2 Studying Replication

Creative placemaking is an arts-oriented community development policy that focuses on the potential for art, artists, and cultural organizations to generate social, economic, and cultural vibrancy in their communities and is a primary tool of culture-led (re)development practices (Markusen & Gwada, 2010). In their seminal paper on creative placemaking, Markusen and Gwada (2010) identified six elements common to successful creative placemaking projects. Successful projects are originated by (1) an entrepreneurial initiator, who has a (2) commitment to the distinctive character to the place where the work will be done. The project is able to (3) mobilize the public, (4) attract private sector support,

(5) get the active participation of arts and cultural leaders, and finally (6), succeed in building partnership across sectors, missions, and levels of government (Markusen & Gwada, 2010).

Despite a brief mention of the widespread replication of creative placemaking projects: "Some are modeling their initiatives on pathbreakers elsewhere, tailoring them to their own distinctive assets and challenges," Markusen and Gwada (2010) conceptualize the local as a bounded place: a neighborhood, a city, a region. That places are responding to and replicating projects done elsewhere is occluded but not prevented by this emphasis on the local and local connections. There's nothing in Markusen and Gwada's (2010) best practices that requires a project to be unique or novel to be successful as a creative placemaking project.

While creative placemaking has always been translocal and transcalar, these aspects of creative placemaking seen in the replication of projects in city after city and the connections it creates within and across them are understudied. Instead, studies of creative placemaking are typically focused on the economic aspects of singular projects influencing the built environment of post-industrial, large, and global cities (Edensor et al., 2010). The kinds of spaces that Brennan-Horley (2010) points out don't even exist in many smaller cities and towns. Smaller places and the non-economic aspects of creative placemaking receive far less attention (Lorentzen & Heur, 2012). Replicated projects, like those seen on Lexington's Main Street, which appear in cities and towns across urban scales, go largely unnoticed in the creative placemaking literature even when they number in the thousands. They are neither singular nor perceived to have a profound economic impact.

This all means that rather than study creative placemaking just via a lens of locally based creativity (examples above) it is important to also study it in terms of replication, part of (now) common approaches to redevelopment and community revitalization. Creative placemaking practice is part of a collection of culture-led (re)development policies, part of the constellation of creative city policies that have been circling the globe

for the past ~20 years. These policies are available as "off-the-shelf" solutions from a network of consultants, conferences, and websites, leading to a landscape cluttered with well-traveled, replicated ideas (see Peck, 2020). Creative placemaking practitioners, organizations, and funders publish white papers with detailed case studies, putting forth best practices. They produce and circulate toolkits facilitating the replication of projects and even toolkits for creating further toolkits like the Toolkit Toolkit published by Springboard for the Arts (Springboard Arts, 2016). There is a thriving cottage industry wherein the organizers of successful creative placemaking projects are sought after as consultants to replicate their projects elsewhere, yet the replication of creative placemaking projects is commonly overlooked in the literature.

On the rare occasion that replicated projects have drawn the attention of scholars, as neighborhood book exchanges have, the analyses focus on the examination of a popular, branded version of the project like the Little Free Library neighborhood book exchanges (see Schmidt & Hale, 2017; Beal Olson & Burrow, 2017; Sarmieno et al., 2018; Houghton et al., 2021; Houghton et al., 2022). Studying branded projects has the advantage of being able to make use of official data sets and records kept by the organization overseeing the brand, but this also results in a skewed impression of the work that replicated projects do that preferences people and places with the power, resources, and inclination to engage with the branded version of the project. It overlooks the work done by more local projects, like The Carnegie Reading Room in Lexington's Triangle Park or the many other neighborhood book exchange projects that Mattern (2012) documents in her overview of the topic.

For this reason, I argue it is important to use a relational understanding of creative place-making to both highlight the translocal nature of these projects as well as better understand how they touch down in particular places. This helps guard against accepting the "smoothing" effects of larger branding efforts and highlight the messy, contentious, disputed on-the-ground process that actually takes place. Furthermore, paying attention to

the replicated creative placemaking projects that dot the landscapes of so many cities and towns presents an opportunity to consider the work that small-scale, replicated creative placemaking projects do as an assemblage within a city (Sandler, 2020) or relationally across networked place (Pierce et al., 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2012). Such a view has been absent from studies of creative placemaking despite general acknowledgement that the practice has become highly replicative (Peck, 2014).

2.3 More than Local

Place is relational, multiple, overlapping, translocal and trans-scalar (see Massey, 1994). Urban geographers and others have expanded and built upon that conception of place, echoing Massey's insistence on understanding place as relational (Robinson, 2005). Yet, there is a persistent methodological gap between acknowledging place as relational and conducting research that addresses or makes use of that relationality. Even studies that purport to be interested in networked place commonly fall into the trap of focusing on "places as specific localities, which a priori draws attention to people and events within the place, thus obscuring the role of outside connections or activities as forces shaping conditions within a locale" (Pierce et al., 2011). Comparative urban studies have tended to organize themselves around scale which weakens and limits analysis (Ward, 2010). Given the emphasis that creative placemaking places on the concept of "a unique sense of place," looking to the local to understand the work that these projects do seems a logical choice. However, it ignores the translocal and transcalar nature of creative placemaking and it misses the opportunity to see the connections between places and how an outcome that might appear to be the result of some site-specific quirk is potentially a form of resistance within a larger system. It also reinforces the fractured landscape of creative placemaking that is already divided by geographic scale.

What would a relational study of creative placemaking look like? How does one actually carry that out? Pierce et al. (2011) suggests that the first step is to start not with site or scale, but rather with "a particular conflict over competing place-frames." McCann and Ward (2012) emphasize the concept of "following" in their work on policy mobilities. "Whether it is working `forward' from where a policy originates (if a single point of origin can be identified at all) or `backwards' from where it has arrived, this approach is about tracing — laying bare — the places a policy has traveled through and interrogating how the policy has mutated or been transformed along the way" (McCann & Ward, 2012). The practice of "follow the thing" comes from the commodity chain literature and has enabled the tracing of policies and policy actors through dynamic networks while recognizing these things as "complex and evolving social constructions rather than as concretely fixed objects" (Peck & Theodore, 2012). Though the policy mobility literature is flexible in regard to situation, the spaces it traces policy movement through are formal networks, even when they happen in informal spaces, like cafes and bars. Creative placemaking has formal networks of conferences, consultants, and funding organizations, but smaller cities and towns may have limited interaction with these spaces for a variety of reasons including having assessment methods stacked against them (Markusen, 2013).

This "follow the thing" approach, however, also comes with the downside that things that are most visible (e.g., formal networks and projects of creative placemaking) are the easiest things to follow. In other words, visibility will shape what we see, and where we see it. A focus on formal networks would serve to reinforce the scalar divide in the creative placemaking literature that already favors global and large cities over smaller cities and towns. It would also miss projects that are moving through informal knowledge networks like social media, blogs, Facebook groups, and YouTube. Research in DIY Urbanism has shown that the internet has a significant impact on the movement of projects and ideas among practitioners (Douglas, 2020). Reliance on formal networks and large places misses those places that were reached through informal networks or bottom-up

processes, which are common in the creative placemaking and DIY urbanism world, especially for replicated projects.

2.4 Toolkits of Toolkits

An example of how a "follow the thing" approach might be done, and how it constrains the research area of creative placemaking, is the practice and use of what are known as toolkits. One of the important ways that creative placemaking projects are packaged for translocation is through the creation of toolkits. A toolkit is an optimized set of mobile tools, and the use of the metaphor insinuates urban space is a machine that with the right set of tools, you can fix. Creative placemaking project toolkits are an attempt to turn individual creative placemaking projects into what Fujimura (1992) refers to as a "standardized package." In this format ideas can "move across social worlds to achieve enough agreement at various times for work to get done and to produce relatively [and temporarily] stable 'facts.'" This ability to move across knowledge groups is necessary due to the diverse collections of groups and scales that conduct creative placemaking projects.

For the 2015 fiscal year, the NEA added a new program funding category, "Knowledge Building," which was explicitly intended to 'build and disseminate creative placemaking knowledge more broadly' (NEA, 2015 cited in Hughes, 2020). Ultimately resulting in 44 proposals to produce toolkits being funded over the 5 years that the grant category was active (Hughes, 2020). One of these was "Sound Places: A Creative Placemaking Toolkit for Musicians" (2018) published by the Chamber Music America to share the results of their NEA Our Town grant-funded pilot study to "introduce creative placemaking to the chamber music field." This is a clear example of what Fujimura (1992) is talking about in terms of moving across knowledge groups.

Figure 2.4 Images of the covers of several creative placemaking toolkits. Sources: Chamber Music America (Chamber Music America, 2018), Springboard for the Arts (Neymark & Springboard Arts, 2019), and (Ansell et al., 2013)

Springboard for the Arts' Creative Exchange is a project funded by both the Kresge and Knight Foundations that hosts an online library of several dozen creative placemaking toolkits (Springboard Arts, 2022). These are all toolkits of projects that Springboard for the Arts or its partners have conducted. These toolkits tend to be far less technical documents in their content and their readership than whitepapers and more graphically oriented. A typical toolkit, like the "Mural Map and Community History Toolkit" (Neymark & Springboard Arts, 2019) contains detailed information from the artist who ran the project including sample grant documents, budgets, press releases, and information about materials used. Another toolkit, that for the Porch Light Program in Philadelphia is very clear in the purpose of their toolkit titling it, "Painting a Healthy City: A Porch Light Program Replication Manual" (Ansell et al., 2013). The Porch Light toolkit is extremely detailed down to describing specific job roles within the project and providing Artist RFQ text. So popular are the toolkits created by Springboard for the Arts that they have published a Toolkit Toolkit (Springboard Arts, 2016) to help other organizations write toolkits for their own projects to facilitate their replication in other cities and towns.

It isn't simply creative placemaking practitioners or professionals that create toolkits. In the case of the fiberglass animal art parades, it has been common for the

consultants who perpetuate the project, like Wild In Art in the U.K. and Cow Painters in the U.S., as well as the manufacturers of the fiberglass blanks that are used to conduct the project, to produce toolkits for organizing an art parade. The Fiberglass Farm of Belfast, Maine offers one-on-one consulting and sells an educational video and a "Binder of Useful Information," all aimed at helping towns to launch their own art parade based explicitly off the experiences of other towns that have already completed the project (Fiberglass Farm, n.d.). The creation of toolkits is not limited to material projects, non-material projects can receive the same treatment. When the staff from Walk [Your] City came to Lexington with their guerilla way-finding sign project it was specifically because the Knight Foundation was in the process of creating a toolkit for the project to roll it out in other Knight cities. Lexington and San Jose received the project, in the case of Lexington without even having a local partner selected, simply because there were bugs that needed to be worked out of the process and the Knight Foundation needed another town to try out the newly written toolkit.

So, while this could be a useful approach to study creative placemaking, it also means that one studies a more formalized version of it. After all, the creation and distribution of a toolkit presupposes a larger relational structure rather than a locally focused effort. Moreover, following toolkits via the formal listings offered up by their creators necessarily means getting a curated view (often focused on bigger and more noteworthy places) rather than seeing the larger variety of places enrolled.

2.5 Data Collection

Thus, I argue that a significant task for the study of replicated creative placemaking projects is simply locating them. To address this, I devised a means of data collection that leverages the digital-visual mediation of creative placemaking projects via social media and photo-sharing websites to trace where these projects have occurred. To document this

approach, I have opted to trace “art parades,” also known as “art trails.” Art parades are one of the oldest replicated creative placemaking projects and their continued popularity means that there is a robust quantity of images of these projects online. However, I argue that this method would work on other replicated creative placemaking projects that share a strong visual aesthetic such as Parking Day, “Before I Die...” Boards, Pianos in Public, Tiny Doors, etc.

Art Parades are creative placemaking projects typically featuring painted fiberglass sculptures that are publicly displayed before being auctioned off to raise money for a particular cause. The most well-known of these is CowParade, which has staged art parades in over 80 cities globally and has raised over $30 million dollars for associated charities since its launch in Chicago in 1999 (CowParade, n.d.). Like many replicated creative placemaking projects, art parades share a visual aesthetic which makes them discernable from other common uses of fiberglass statuary including playground equipment, fast food signage, and roadside attractions. This shared visual aesthetic allows for the use of image search to identify art parades without being reliant on hashtags or geolocation data, which might limit data collection (Crampton et al., 2013).

MacDowall and de Souza (2017) note how Instagram has created space for the documentation of street art creation (the painting, the sketches) and thus allowed for its commodification at every stage of its production. This similarly happens with art parades as project organizers and artists share design sketches as well as images of the painting and installation processes. Throughout this process, there are numerous instances where digital mediation might take place and multiple actors with an interest in doing so including the sponsoring organization, the artists, the audiences, the sponsors, and even local officials. This continuous digital mediation of the project allows audiences to consume the creation of these projects in physical and digital spaces as well as the final artwork itself. The result is that these projects are heavily documented on social media, image-sharing websites, as well as blogs, newspapers, and their own project-specific websites.

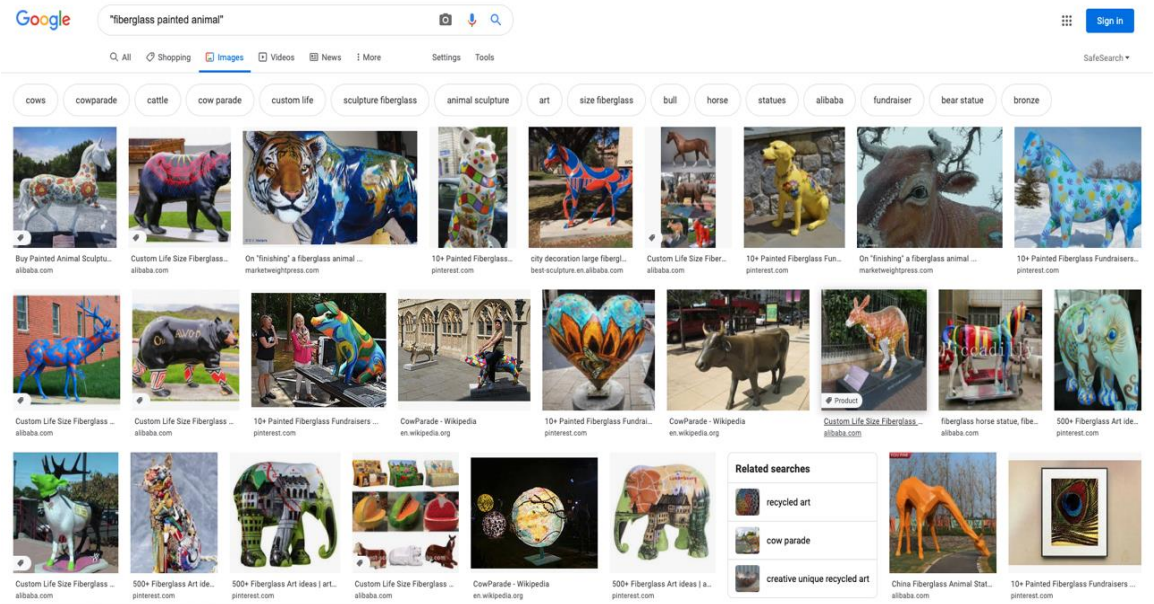

Figure 2.5 The result of an image search for "fiberglass painted animal," composed mostly of objects from art parades. (Image by author.)

Data collection began in February 2020 by running an image search for “painted fiberglass animal,” in both Google and Bing search engines, and then proceeded by selecting an image from the results that fit the general aesthetics of the CowParade project and following it through its trail of links until I located information about the location and date of the project it came from. Occasionally, this information took the form of user-supplied metadata, such as a caption or GPS location, this usually occurred when an image was located on an image-sharing site like Flickr, Pinterest, or Instagram. More often, I traced images back to a newspaper article or blog post. Once I located the source of a project, I collected any available images, articles, blog posts, or ephemera (i.e., maps, tourist pamphlets, certificates of completion) into a DEVONThink database, where they were coded and tagged. Given the age of many of the projects I traced, project-specific URLs had often lapsed in ownership, thus I relied heavily on the Internet Archive’s Way Back Machine to find contemporaneous information about the projects.

When an image did not lead me back to its source, I used a reverse image search to find other similar images. Art parades are extensively photographed both by the people who organize them and their audiences making this a viable method of finding other images of the same object or other objects within the same project. Once a photo had been traced back to its source, I moved to the next image in the search results. Searches were conducted on both Google and Bing search engines to increase the diversity of search hits. In addition to collecting location and date information, I also collected available data regarding the type and number of objects in the art parade, the names of organizers, consultants, beneficiaries, and projects named as inspiration. All this information was compiled into a spreadsheet for further analysis and mapping.

2.6 Results and Discussion

From the ~3,000 images of painted fiberglass animals I collected I was able to identify ~550 art parades. Of those, 415 took place in the United States, 70 occurred in the United Kingdom, and the remainder were scattered around the globe. I have a complete record including project title, location, year, and statuary object for ~400 of those, another ~100 are missing year data, and ~50 of them consist only of a location and an object. This last group is a combination of orphaned images and brief mentions in newspaper articles about other projects. It is possible that some of these are artifacts of art parades that were planned, but perhaps never carried out.

One of the issues that Rose (2015) brings up about researching digital cultural objects is the openness of methodologies that will require researchers to produce new methods to study them, a concept that is hindered by the volume of data. My method of data collection could certainly be improved through computation by making use of machine learning and training an AI to identify creative placemaking projects from images, but it works simply (if time consumingly) using image search.

Zook and Graham (Zook & Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2014) have written about the duplicity of search, and how it is different for different users in different places. I suspect that my dataset suffers from the same issues. Image Search is a black box and in frequent flux. I used both Google and Bing image searches in an effort to alleviate the impact of any one search algorithm on my results, but they are all black boxes. Someone else searching this same topic could come up with a different set of locations. The dataset collected in this chapter is meant only to be representative (though not in a statistical sense) and is like all data, always partial and incomplete. It was not my intention to collect all instances of art parades with this method, but rather to find a sufficient quantity to start tracing out the way that these projects work both within specific sites and relationally across sites.

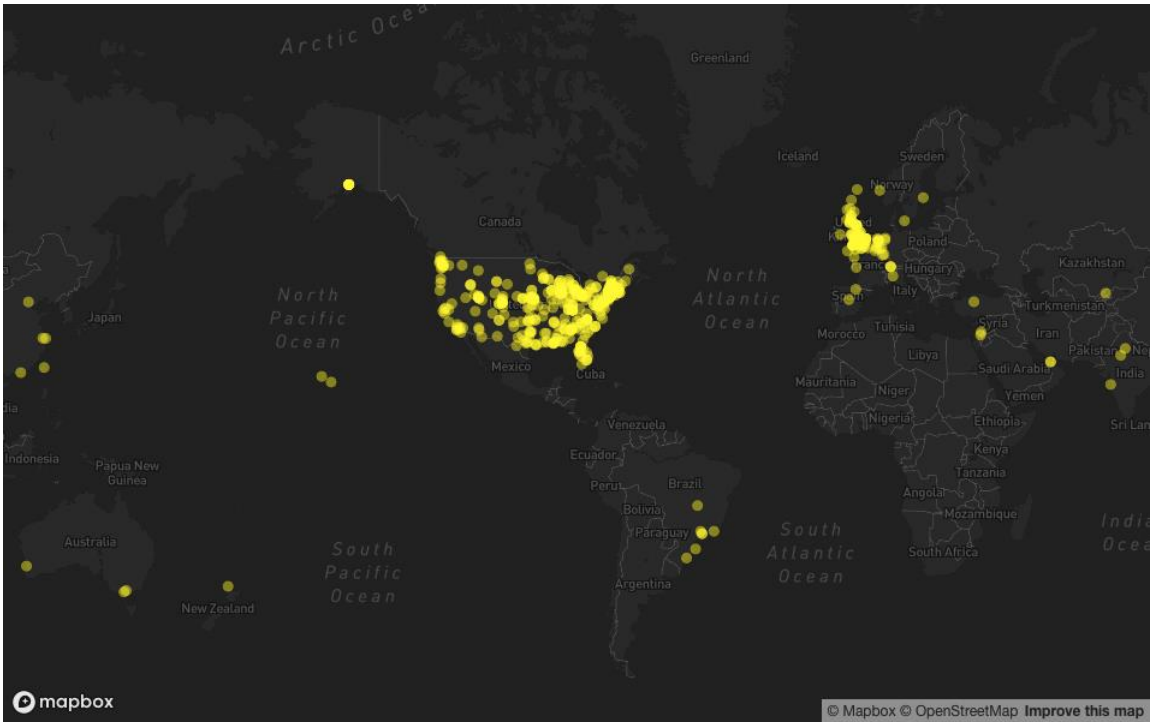

Figure 2.6 Map showing the global locations of art parades in the collected dataset. (Map by author.)

Though this map (Figure 2.6) gives the impression that art parades are a phenomenon primarily of the US and UK, it should be remembered that internet search is

a technological black box that is known to result in different search outcomes based on the location and language of the user (Graham et al., 2014; Zook & Graham, 2007). This dataset is not a complete image of art parades globally, but rather an incomplete set of digital footprints (Thatcher, 2014) from which I hope to be able to trace the relationships and networks through which these projects move.

Figure 2.7 Word cloud of statuary objects used in observed art parades. (Image by author.)

Art parades make use of a variety of statuary objects many of them with particular saliency to the site of the art parade. Figure 2.7 shows a word cloud of statuary objects in which the size of the word relates to its overall rank and the transparency reflects the number of times the object was observed being used. To appear on the word cloud at all an object needed to appear at least twice in my dataset. Elephants, with 47 observations, are by far the most used statuary object that I encountered followed by horses (27), cats (25), dogs (24), and bears (22). “Characters,” which appears 26 times, was a broad category of statues of licensed characters including Peanuts, Wallace and Gromit, Shaun the Sheep, Snowdog, and Elmer the Elephant, the latter two being characters from children’s books.

It is notable that cows are uncommon in my dataset, that is because my dataset does not include CowParades beyond the initial one in Chicago. If I had included them cows would have dominated with over 80 occurrences. Instead, there are only 4 cows in my dataset, the original Chicago cows, 2 cow themed parades that occurred before CowParade was a legal entity, and Cows About Cambridge from the UK in 2021.

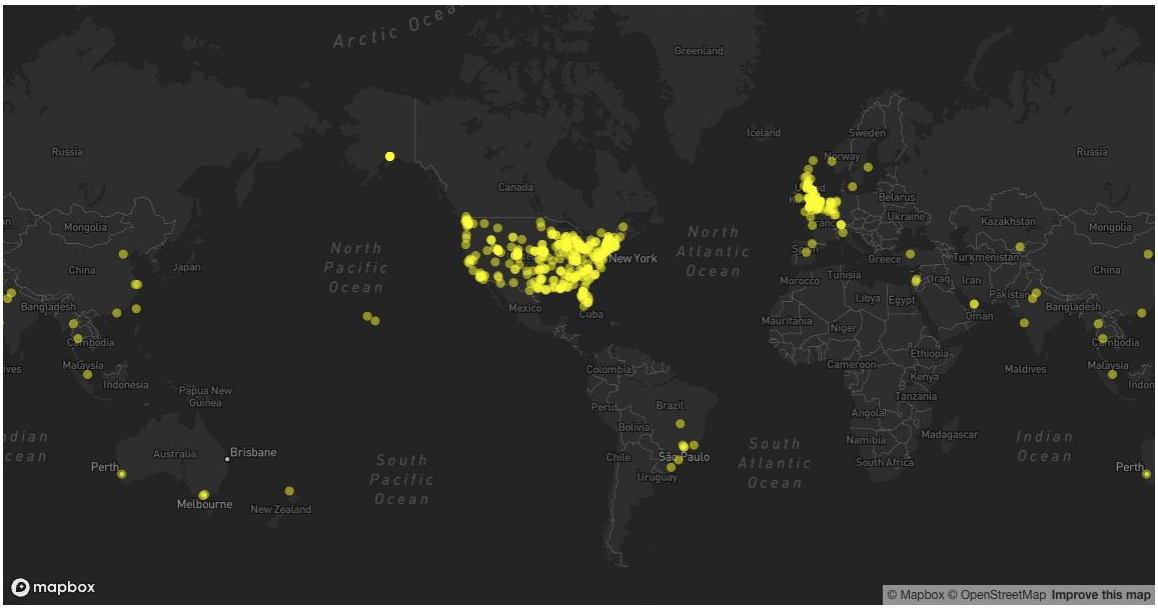

Figure 2.8 American Art Parades (1999-2021): This animation shows the expansion of fiberglass public art projects, beginning with Chicago's CowParade (1999). Chicago is indicated with the yellow marker surrounded by a red stroke. (Map by author. Available at https://observablehq.com/@jessibreen/american-art-parades-1999-2021)

This animated map (Figure 2.8) shows the sequential spread of art parades across the United States beginning with the Chicago CowParade in 1999. Following the 1999 Cow Parade in Chicago, we begin to see clusters of art parades emerging in some other areas. Further examination of the data shows that these clustered areas can be attributed to art parades that seeded events in neighboring towns like in Greene County, New York, where a successful art parade in the town of Catskill motivated several nearby towns to organize their own art parades. The clusters can also be attributed to a handful of highly dispersed art parades in predominantly rural areas where a few small towns each hosted

several statutes from a larger parade; examples of this strategy come from both Oklahoma and Washington.

Because the place markers are semi-transparent, they become brighter and more opaque as they are layered over each other on the map, causing the places that repeatedly host art parades to begin to stand out. Examples of places that have held multiple art parades come from around the country. Chicago, Illinois, after hosting the original American art parade, has continued to host a number of unrelated art parades sporadically over the past 20 years. Locations that host annual art parades include Cleveland, Ohio with their Lunar New Year-themed art parade where the sculptural object changes to a different Chinese Zodiac animal sign each year, and Aerlie Gardens in North Carolina, which seems to choose the object of their annual art parade at random. Catskill, New York once again stands out on the map, having held their "Cat'n Around the Catskills" art parade every year since 2007. Additionally, there are art parades that defy being categorized by year as the organizers continue to add new sculptures to the parade at uneven intervals over a series of years, examples of this practice include Dothan, Alabama and Steubenville, Ohio.

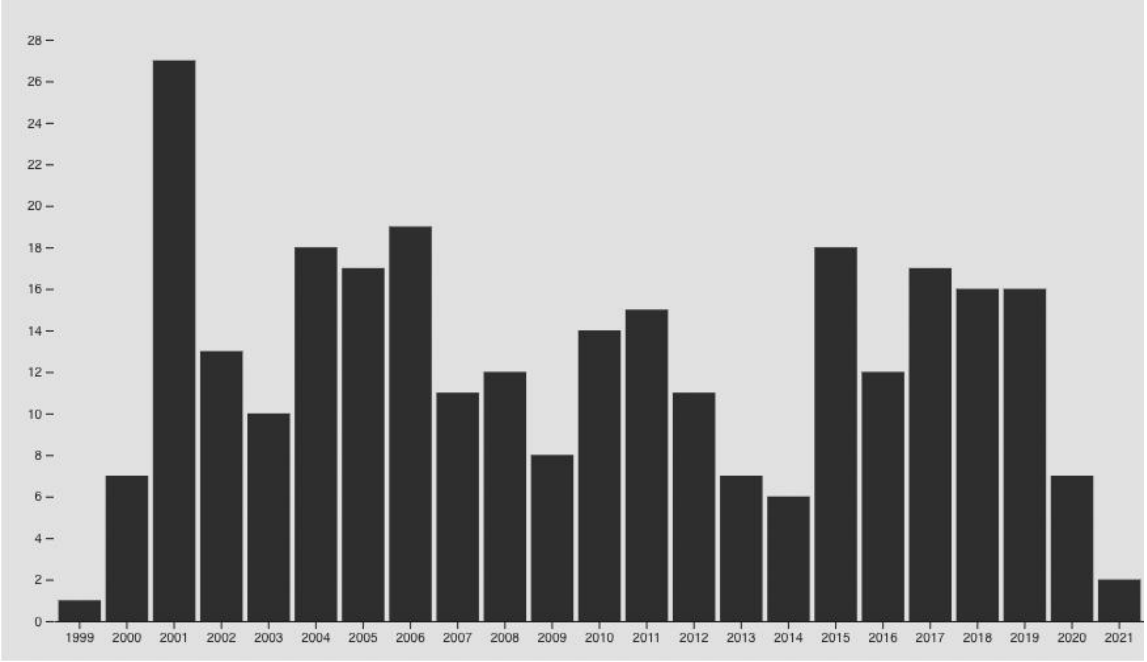

Figure 2.9 American Art Parades (1999-2021): This bar chart shows the number of art parades that occur each year in the dataset. (Chart by author.)

It seems that a bar chart may better represent the replication of art parades over time than the previous time lapse map does. In this chart (Figure 2.9), we see the number of art parades occurring each year in the collected dataset. It should be noted that there are approximately 100 art parades that I have been unable to determine year data for and there are those that defy annual categorization, as mentioned above, that make putting a precise year on them difficult. Still, we see a very clear uptick in 2000 following the original Chicago art parade and an even larger uptick in 2001. From the collected news articles and origin stories of the many 2001 art parades, it becomes apparent that these events were a first foray into public art for many cities and towns and it often took them 2 years to organize their events. We can also see the staying power of art parades in American cities and towns, with a significant downturn occurring only during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020.

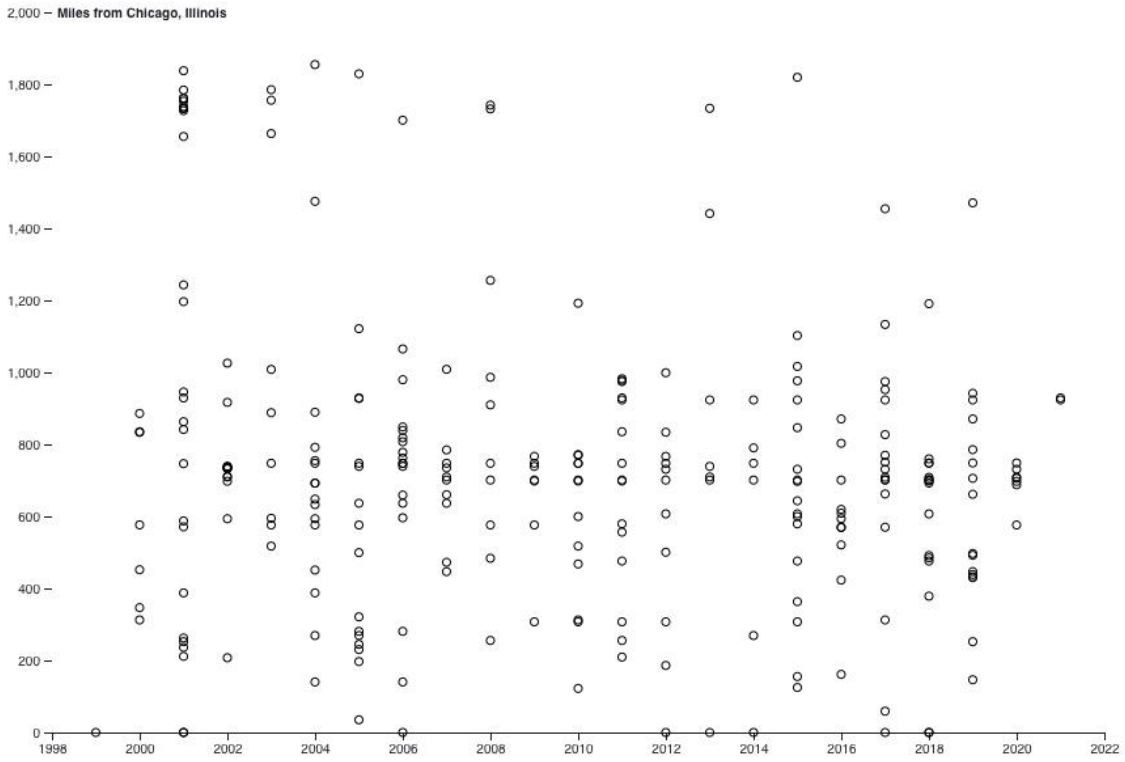

Figure 2.10 Miles from Chicago (1999-2021): This scatter plot shows the number of art parades that occur each year with their distance in miles from the original Chicago art parade shown on the y-axis. (Chart by author.)

This scatter plot (Figure 2.10) is another attempt to delve into the space/time aspect of the collected data. Here time is represented on the x-axis and distance in miles from the original Chicago art parade is shown in the y-axis. Because distance is not calculated directionally on this scatter plot, we can see clustering of art parades at various distances from Chicago, but we cannot determine their physical proximity to each other. Instead, what this scatter plot best shows us is that there does not seem to be a geographic pattern to how art parades moved out from Chicago. The lack of a geographic pattern is what we would expect to see from a work that is moving not through proximity, but through knowledge networks and digital spaces. In other words, it supports the idea that creative placemaking unfolds relationally rather than through proximate networks. Were we to see a rising curve with art parades expanding further and further away from Chicago over time, that would be an indication that art parades were being spread through physical or direct interaction with places that already had organized art parades.

Creative cities policies have already been a focus of the policy mobilities literature that has demonstrated them to be well-circulated (Peck, 2020). Though they are intentionally blended with creative cities policies (Gwada Nicodemus, 2012) and their movement has been documented in toolkits and white papers, creative placemaking projects themselves, the material outcome of arts led redevelopment, have not received similar treatment. Yet, my data gathering and analysis of the replication of Arts Parades replicated helps to reveal some surprising things.

First, many of these cities and towns are rather small, and they aren't looking to replicate projects because they were done in a large or global city but are instead looking to their peer places. A large number of the places where I located art parades acknowledge Chicago as the origin of the art parade concept but will cite another peer city or town as having been their inspiration for doing the project. Painted statues of Toto from the Wizard

of Oz in Wemago, Kansas inspired honeybees in Nehama County, Nebraska (Icon Poly Studio, 2019). Horse statues in Ocala, Florida and Germantown, Tennessee were inspired by the Horse Mania project (Schlenker, 2017; Bailey, 2017), while the 'Fear the Turtle' project at the University of Maryland was inspired by the Wildcat Madness project (Pachikara, 2006), both from Lexington, Kentucky. Project organizers in Cairo, New York cited the neighboring village of Catskill as the source of their inspiration and key assistance in conducting the project (Lekocevic, 2018).

Needing to see a peer location carry out the project successfully might indicate how risk aversion plays into decision-making around placemaking efforts. Art Parades provide a tried-and-true method for smaller cities and towns to participate in global trends of urban creativity. These projects are altered and mutated to fit local needs and desires while at the same time allowing these places to participate in urban creativity writ large. By creating their own fiberglass public art project in the style of Chicago's 1999 CowParade, cities and towns demonstrate their own desires for what creativity can do in their place and link themselves to the larger trend of creative cities, declaring themselves part of the network of creative places spanning the world. While the projects have different processes and outcomes, the goal to create community – however that is defined – and create a local sense of place are seemingly ubiquitous.

Second, there is a utility to replicating a creative placemaking project, to engaging in translocation instead of creation. It alters the skills and skill level required to do one of these projects. You don't need to be an artistic genius or even an artist, any reasonably creative group of people can replicate a project and that is the message that the project toolkits of these projects perpetuate. Replication of a project that has been successfully completed elsewhere is a confidence boost for risk averse civic governments and funders. Knowing that it has been done before, maybe even by the people who you've hired, and having documentation in a white paper or toolkit is as close to being able to predict the future as planners can hope to get. If the project being replicated is a project like

CowParade, there is already a known audience that knows the work and will seek it out in your space, automatic tourists! Potentially you're adding something to your city or town that your peer cities or towns – your competition – specifically already has and so replication of a project helps to level the playing field.

Third, creative placemaking practitioners describe creative placemaking projects as fostering connections to community and a unique sense of place. They are a form of micro-urbanism operating at the neighborhood level of the city that serve as a means of differentiation (Fisker et al., 2019). For example, in Lexington, these projects cluster in the downtown and North Limestone neighborhoods marking them as distinctive places within the larger city. While these projects are typically ephemeral, lasting for a few weeks or months, their digital mediation making its way onto the array of platforms that constitute our daily lives creates a form of permanence. Digital mediation embeds them into the hybridized landscape created by the interplay between physical space and its digital reflection and makes visible the linkages between places, strengthening them via transmediation as images of these projects are repeated across digital platforms (Oh, 2020).

As a result, creative placemaking projects also tend to be highly localized, often covering perhaps a few city blocks. Though they occur at the micro-scale of the individual neighborhood, these projects are in fact translocal and transcalar creating more than local connections across and within places. While many of these places aren't drawing inspiration for their projects from large and global cities directly, they are using these projects to connect themselves into the global network of creative places in which those large and global cities are the central nodes. The creative placemaking projects on Main Street differentiate the downtown area fostering a unique sense of place within Lexington, while simultaneously connecting Lexington to other cities that have hosted similar creative placemaking projects, themselves at a variety of scales. The fiberglass horses that contribute to Main Street's unique sense of place generate a global sense of place by forging transcalar links between Lexington and global cities like Chicago and London, but

also to smaller cities and towns like Brandon, Vermont, and Dothan, Alabama (Massey, 1994).

2.7 Emerging Theme: Co-option

2.7.1 Project Format

Altering the format of the project to work with local infrastructure and resources is a commonality among the many places that have held art parades in the past 20 years. Some art parades have made use of smaller objects, a smaller number of objects, and even indoor exhibits. This has also led to art parades that are annual occurrences rather than one-off events and many that tie into existing literacy and arts education efforts. Bradon, Vermont, which claims to be the smallest town to ever organize an art parade, has employed all of these tactics as well as explicitly seeking amateur and non-artists as participants in creating the art objects. In doing so, Bradon moves their art parade from a project that seeks to make the *appreciation* of art accessible to the public by putting it in public space, to one that makes the *creation* of art accessible to the public.

The auction portion of the CowParade model has also been frequently adapted. In some places, it has been removed from the project altogether as in Dothan, Alabama, and Steubenville, Ohio, where the art parade objects serve as business signage and the city's holiday decorations, respectively. In some cases, the art parade is organized by the non-profit organization that will benefit from the auction, demonstrating the flexibility of who organizes these projects. "Hearts in San Francisco" is an example of this, where the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation, rather than the city of San Francisco, organizes the art parade and the auction raises money for the Foundation's mission. In other places, the auction proceeds contribute to governmental funds for city beautification and arts and educational programming.

2.7.2 Materials

The choice of fiberglass means that these statues have a reasonable lifespan of 35 years and can handle weather extremes, though they still need to be sheltered during the winter in extremely cold climates. Repairs can be done by most auto body shops and marinas, places where fiberglass and fiberglass fillers are already in common use. It also means that the pieces can be refinished and repainted when their original coat starts to wear. In some locations, the use of mass-produced fiberglass statuary has been replaced with preference for the work of local fabricators. In Dothan, Alabama the fiberglass peanuts stationed around downtown are made in Dothan by a local fiberglass fabricator who specializes in replacement body panels for older cars. While in Steubenville, Ohio the town's nutcrackers statues are hand-made with each nutcracker being individually designed, carved, and glassed by a former woodworker turned fiberglass fabricator. Other places have rejected fiberglass entirely, opting for alternative materials including wood, concrete, and plaster to fit budgets, availability, and the skills of local craftspeople.

2.7.3 Statuary Objects

The Chicago CowParade used cows as their statuary object in part because a cow presents a large canvas, but also because they were able to source fiberglass cows from a 1998 Swiss placemaking project called, "Land in Sicht". A significant number of cities and towns have rejected the arbitrary statuary object and opted instead to connect their statuary object to their place, often with reference to local history and industry. This practice is reflective of contemporary best practices in creative placemaking that emphasize a connection to local history and existing communities. Examples of this include Washington, DC's cherry blossom-shaped benches, Lexington, Kentucky's thoroughbred horses, and Cincinnati's pigs. The issues around selecting an object to represent a place

reveal the way in which these projects allow organizers to impose their vision of the city's past, present, and future through these projects. By designating an object as representative of the area they select a particular story of the area that will be continued by the objects and their subsequent digital mediation. That so many places chose objects that they envisioned to be benign, points to how fraught place representation can be and the lengths to which these projects seek to be apolitical and purely aesthetic, though it's counter to the general history of public art (Deutsche, 1992).

2.8 Emerging Theme: Cooperation and Collaboration

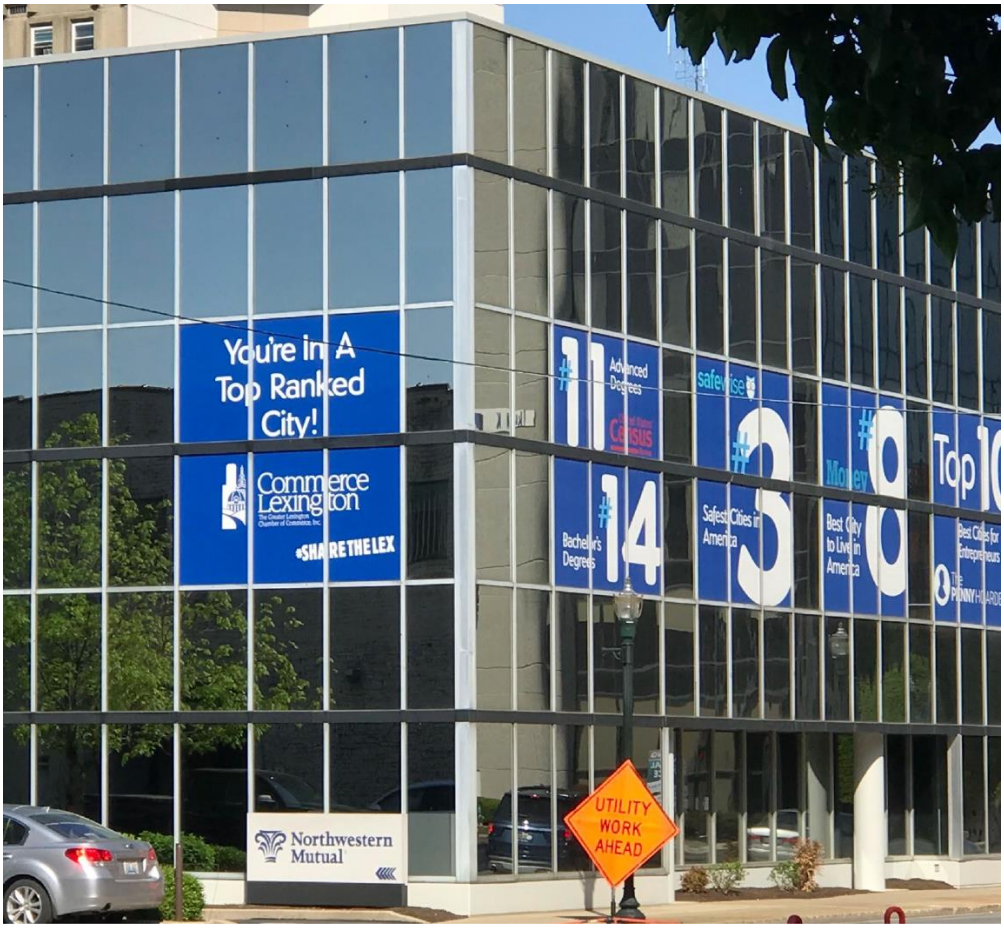

Figure 2.11 Image showing the collection of city rankings displayed on the exterior of the Commerce Lexington building. Photo by author.

The outside of Lexington's Chamber of Commerce is plastered with an ever-changing collection of signs declaring Lexington's current place in a variety of city

rankings (see Figure 2.11). Cities and towns like Lexington find themselves in an unceasing competition to outclass the places they consider their peers, whom they envision themselves competing against for investment and visitors. Places are conceived of as being locked in a zero-sum game where one place doing well means that another must do poorly, and this has been the ethos of the creative city paradigm since Richard Florida first started publishing his league ranking tables for cities (Florida, 2002). It isn't just the creative cities paradigm that pits cities against each other, the grant process fosters competition as well (Markusen, 2013) in a competition that prevents places from sharing their expertise and helping lift each other up. Yet from my data collection, I find instances of cities and towns cooperating and collaborating to improve their opportunity for investment and tourist dollars together. These replicated projects accomplish that with an "a rising tide lifts all boats" kind of ethos. It is a strategy that Kresl and Ietri (2016, cited in Richards & Duif, 2019) refer to as "borrowing size." By combining resources with other towns smaller cities are able to create a larger impact than they could alone. Richards and Duif (2018) also note that "in the network society, power is related not just to the content you have, but also to the use of networks and particularly the development of hubs and platforms to distribute knowledge and other resources."

The town of Catskill, New York has a long-running art parade, "Cat'n Around Catskill," and they have used their expertise to mentor three nearby towns to produce their own art parades. To encourage visitors to see all the parades, the towns host a statue exchange where each town sends ambassador statues to the neighboring art parades to create a material connection between them. Rather than treat each other as competitors, the four towns work together to hold their parades during the same time period increasing their draw on tourists and the length of time visitors might stay in the area.

2.9 Emerging Theme: Collection

An aspect of these projects that reoccurs over and over is an emphasis on collection. Many of these projects produced both temporary and permanent tourist trails with accompanying maps to enable participants to find all the art objects across a city. Often projects encourage visitors to engage in conspicuous mobility, photographing, aka "collecting," all the statues in a parade and broadcasting that consumption of place to their social media feeds using an official hashtag (Wilson, 2012). Some projects offer custom mobile apps that log and track visitors' progress towards visiting all the statues in a project. Several projects even offer certificates of completion or commemorative gifts such as t-shirts and tourist passports to people who manage to document their visits to all the objects within a parade or trail.

In addition to digital collection opportunities, many of these projects also produced material opportunities for collection. Certainly, in the projects that auctioned off their statuary to raise funds for charity, individuals were able to collect the actual art objects themselves, but the statues were not the only objects created for these projects that audiences were able to collect. Many projects created other collectible items such as t-shirts and totes bags, coffee table books, and in the case of projects like The Trail of the Painted Ponies and San Francisco's "Hearts in San Francisco," they created mass-produced, collectible miniatures of the statues and one-off objets d'art in more manageable sizes than those placed on city streets.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have enumerated a methodology for using the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects to trace their movement across place. By refocusing the "follow the thing" methodology adopted by policy mobility studies to the digital mediation of the material aspect of creative placemaking, I am attempting to get a fuller picture of the

everyday practice of creative placemaking, incorporating not just overlooked spaces, but overlooked actors and motivations. The policy mobilities literature looks at the movement of policies explicitly incorporating the "unofficial spaces" of policy making (McCann, 2011) like bars and cafes, but the practitioners in these spaces are people whose place in the knowledge network is already accepted, even if the site has not previously been. The digital-visual method described in this chapter tries to take it a step closer to the grassroots. Policies often travel in pieces and not as wholly formed objects (McCann, 2004). Importantly, by looking for the (digitally mediated) material outcome of the creative city policy, as opposed to the discursive or social practice (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008; Lysgård, 2016) – in this case the fiberglass statues themselves – I'm able to include in my dataset work done by people who would not often be included in the knowledge networks of creativity that policy mobility studies create. Specifically, I'm able to collect projects done by people who are not professional artists and who may not describe themselves as artists at all, people like the community member who came across Candy Chang's "Before I Die…" board online and decided to erect one in the North Limestone neighborhood because it spoke to her. Or the people who installed the guerrilla wayfinding signs, before the Knight Foundation ultimately brought them to Lexington, because they needed official-looking signage that got people to the bike polo courts without getting immediately removed by authorities. Or the community member who took it upon himself to provide decoratively painted, recycled pallet benches as seating at city bus stops because he wanted to improve the experience of those places for commuters and neither the bus company nor the city seemed to have an intent in doing so (see Figure 2.12).

I also uncovered themes of co-option, cooperation and collaboration, and collection within the ways that cities and towns have enacted these projects. The cooperation and collaboration between cities and towns stands out as unexpected. The proliferation of intercity rankings that keep cities engaged in endless competition with each other, as well as the competitive grant funding systems for creative placemaking, would seem to preclude

cooperation and collaboration (Markusen, 2013). From these emerging themes, we can start to see how creative placemaking is used in novel and unexpected ways that fit the specific needs of the communities that engage in it.

Paying attention to the replicated creative placemaking projects that dot the landscapes of so many cities and towns presents an opportunity to gain a relational comparative view of the everyday work these projects do. Such a view has been absent from studies of creative placemaking despite general acknowledgment that creative policies overall have become highly replicative (Peck, 2014). This work is the first step towards a relational understanding of the complex work that replicated creative placemaking projects do as they move through networked space. Future work on this topic could expand this methodology to trace multiple, well-circulated creative placemaking projects to see how these projects layer up in places, like Lexington's Main Street, in order to understand what these projects do as an assemblage, similar to Sandler's (2020) work in São Paulo, Brazil . Or one might examine how the layering up of these projects expands within a city, quietly claiming increasing space for neoliberal urban (re)development goals akin to the work of Fincher et al (2016) in Melbourne, Australia.

CHAPTER 3. TO THE AMAZING PEOPLE OF LEXINGTON (AND BEYOND): VISUALIZING TRANSCALAR CONNECTIONS THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIATION

3.1 Introduction

Figure 3.1 Odeith and an assistant working on the rough sketch of the mural. (Photo by Richard Young.)

It's mid-November in Lexington, Kentucky and there is a small crowd of people milling around in the gravel parking lot outside my apartment. Some of them I recognize as neighbors, fellow residents of the collection of crumbling yellow buildings clustered at the intersection of North Limestone and York Street. Others I've seen around the neighborhood. A few more have come over from the tattoo shop that shares the parking lot, plastic wrap wound tightly over freshly inked flesh.

I stand in my kitchen doorway, half watching the crowd, half watching what they've come to see. A worn construction ladder is wedged between the train tracks and the back

wall of the thrift store on the corner. The man standing atop the ladder is sketching large shapes on the wall in black spray paint. A few people in the crowd have their mobile phones out and are taking pictures and videos of the man as he works. My landlord, who owns most of the buildings on this block and yet another dozen houses a street over, is happily moving through the crowd, chatting. He sees me and shouts, "Great things are happening in our neighborhood!" a continuation of the social media posts he's been making all day. I nod to acknowledge his greeting but wonder if the residents of adjacent Upper Street, where economic precarity is made visible on a monthly basis in the form of discarded furniture and household goods piled on the curb – the telltale indicators of yet another eviction, would agree.

This "great thing" we've all gathered to watch is the painting of a street art mural. The man atop the ladder is Odeith, a Portuguese graffiti artist, who has come to Lexington as part of the PRHBTN (pronounced "prohibition") festival. Part music festival, part graffiti art show, PRHTBN bills itself as "an annual celebration of art forms that have been criminalized, marginalized, and under-appreciated in the mainstream" (PRHBTN, n.d.). In this, its third year, the festival has expanded to include bringing international artists to paint walls in Lexington. The inaugural group of artists is Odeith (Portugal), Gaia (USA), Phlegm (UK), and Eduardo Kobra (Brazil). All of them are veterans of the international street art mural festival circuit that winds its way around the globe from city to city and in which PRHBTN aims to make Lexington a node.

A privately run festival, PRHBTN's stated goal with this expansion is to bring a sidewalk gallery of international quality street art, akin to Wynwood Walls in Miami, Florida, to Lexington. Contrary to PRHBTN's claims that street art and graffiti are "under-appreciated in the mainstream," street art mural festivals have become common form of creative placemaking, an economic (re)development policy that focuses on the role of artists and arts organizations in creating economic vitality at the neighborhood level (Markusen & Gwada, 2010). For Odeith's mural, PRHBTN has partnered with the North

Limestone Community Development Corporation (NoLi CDC), a neighborhood nonprofit organization who, in addition to trying to rebrand the neighborhood as "NoLi" (pronounced "no lie"), has been the primary vector for creative placemaking projects in the area. The assembled audience in the parking lot of my apartment building is the result of the NoLi CDC creating a Facebook event page for the painting of the mural and having taken to social media to publicize not only the creation of the mural, but how it is a symbol of the regeneration of the neighborhood itself, a sign of more positive changes to come.

In the coming weeks, Odeith's mural will start appearing more and more on blogs and on social media as the mural hunters slowly begin to arrive, drawn by the idea of collecting something exclusive and ephemeral. Soon the derelict space between the train tracks and the thrift store will become a destination for street art photographers and a stylish backdrop for fashion shoots and engagement photos. Within a year the thrift store will be gone, replaced by an art gallery, and the offices of a marketing firm that once enjoyed brief viral fame for lobbying the state government to adopt, "Kentucky Kicks Ass," as its official tourism slogan.

Creative placemaking is framed by practitioners as creating connections and impacts at the local scale (see Markusen & Gwada, 2010; Markusen, 2014), yet the work that creative placemaking does is more than local; it is translocal and transcalar. In the previous chapter I laid out a methodology for using the digital mediation of replicated creative placemaking projects as a means of visually tracing the translocation of creative placemaking. In this chapter, I explore the way in which the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects helps to make visible the transcalar connections that they create between places and constellations of places. I begin by comparing the aforementioned PRHBTN mural project with a similar mural project from nearby Cincinnati, Ohio that took place in the 1970s to demonstrate that the desire to create transcalar connections with creative placemaking is not a novel concept resulting from digital mediation, but instead a long-standing goal of creative placemaking. I then examine the efforts of VisitLex, the

Convention and Visitors Bureau in Lexington, Kentucky, to encourage the digital mediation of the PRHBTN murals on social media. By incentivizing visitors and residents to digitally mediate the PRHBTN murals and share them via social media platforms, VisitLex was making visible the connections between Lexington and the larger universe of creative places that they want to have recognized and in doing so shared a vision for the future of Lexington.

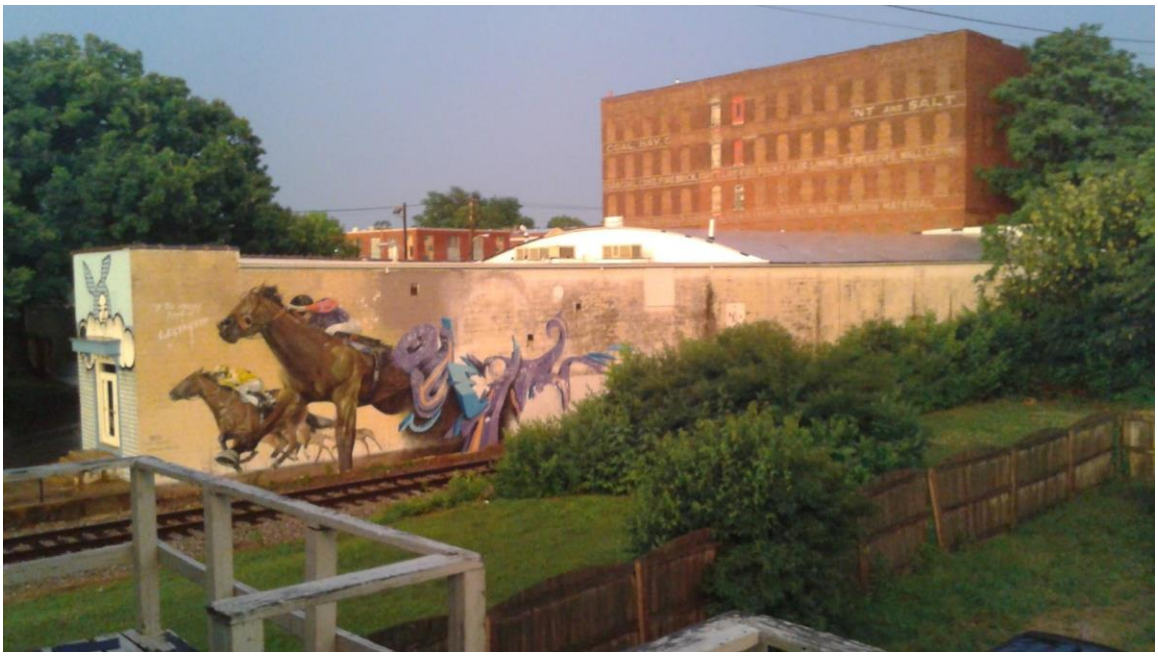

Figure 3.2 Odeith's finished mural dedicated, "To the amazing people of Lexington." (Photo by author.)

3.2 "Just Paint"

This scene, of a disinvested neighborhood watching an internationally known artist ply their trade on a forgotten wall is a scenario that Odeith likely finds himself starring in often as he travels through the circuit of mural festivals and street art celebrations that have become a creative placemaking staple in many cities, both in the US and abroad. Between 2015 and 2020 Odeith painted dozens of murals in his native Portugal as well as the USA (Lexington, KY; Charleston, SC; Jacksonville, FL), the U.K., Sweden, Switzerland,

Denmark, Greece, Mexico, Italy, Russia, Dubai, and Indonesia (Odeith.com, n.d.). Street art murals and mural festivals have become synonymous with creative placemaking to the point where organizations and practitioners find it difficult to move people past them (Gwada Nicodemus et al., 2017).

When the executive director of ArtWorks Cincinnati, an arts job organization which has created dozens of murals across Cincinnati runs out of compelling reasons to sell building owners on allowing her organization to paint a mural on their property, she falls back on the excuse of, "It's just paint" (ArtWorks Cincinnati, 2017). She admits that it's a somewhat duplicitous statement, but it is this duality of being "just paint" and while still being more than just paint that makes murals compelling projects. As they are "just paint," murals are cheap to produce. Many graffiti artists use spray paint specially formulated for use in outdoor art along with specialized spray tips to create different kinds of lines and strokes, but they aren't strictly necessary. Hardware store rattle cans or paint brushes and rollers will work and are the preferred tools of some muralists. Blank walls are a ready resource in many built environments and are often available free of charge. With proper planning there's a relatively low skill requirement to paint a mural, which makes them ideal for involving community volunteers and children. Painted murals are easily removed by simply painting over them and walls can be reused again and again. For risk averse city governments, they are a tried-and-true concept that has proven time and again to be very popular with the public. But street art murals and their accompanying festivals are also more than "just paint."

Murals have a history of being used to coalesce and stabilize collective identities and claim space in urban environments, as seen in the Chicano Arts Movement of the 1970s that made extensive use of muralism. At the same time, street art festivals are a means of reimagining urban space that has become inexorably linked to urban (re)development in the ever-increasing competition between cities for tourism, business, and the creative class. They are the material aspect of a well-traveled economic policy that is laden with ideas

about the best uses of public space, who belongs and who doesn't belong, and who spaces should be designed for. Commissioned street art murals have become a sign to investors that a neighborhood is changing and ready for reinvestment (Tsilimpounidi, 2015). These projects are so well traveled and commonplace as to be considered "common sense" to engage in; simply part of the assemblage of projects and policies that make up a modern city.

These mural projects are also potentially unjust. Creative placemaking is reliant on the work done by Jane Jacobs (1961), Kevin Lynch (1960), William "Holly" Whyte (1956; 1980), and later, Jan Gehl (1987; 2010). These authors and their work are foundational to the planning profession and to the broader concept of human centric cities and placemaking, but as Leslie Kern points out in her book Feminist City (2020) , these authors overlook "race, class, ability, and sexuality" in their work. They have no concept of difference. Kern notes, by way of example, that authors James Baldwin (1963) and Jane Jacobs were contemporaries, writing about the same places, but experiences like those Baldwin relates do not appear to exist in the neighborhood world that Jacobs describes. This lack of attention to difference continues to perpetuate a host of social inequalities (Hashimoto, 2020). In the words of Robert Bedoya, the Cultural Affairs Manager for the City of Oakland, California, and a prominent cultural policy maker, "the field of creative placemaking has not examined toughly our nation's racist legacy and its complicity with this line of thinking — especially in the actions of placemaking and the white spatial imaginary at play in policies and practices in this field." (Crane et al., 2020). The examination that Bedoya encourages is slowly starting to take place as creative placemakers, in the wake of the widespread racial and social justice protests of 2020, are recognizing their role in perpetuating social injustice and seeking to become a more diverse field of practioners (Courage, 2020).

Creative placemaking projects, particularly those closely tied to urban redevelopment goals, are often accused of lacking a connection to the communities where

they take place, resulting in the steamrolling of community interests, the subjugation of community cultural assets to the interests of developers and investors, and ultimately a preferencing of "place" over "process." So common are these types of creative placemaking ventures that practitioners have coined a name for them, "place-taking." There's also "place-masking," where placemakers perform discourse about the need for inclusiveness in the placemaking process and not engaging in place-taking only to not be inclusive and engage in place-taking anyway (Fincher et al., 2016). The similarity between these actions and the process of colonization has been noted by scholars (Oakley & Johnson, 2013). This makes these projects important sites of consideration when considering the work that creative placemaking does, but these projects have impacts beyond the local. Through their digital mediation these projects are able to impact places far beyond their initial sites.

In other words, even as creative placemaking projects seek to change localities, and are deeply tied to material and local places, literally paint applied apply to walls in the case of murals, they are also tied to larger transcalar movements. As I argue in the following section, this often results in the ironic outcome that so-called "placemaking" efforts are in fact as much tied to non-local and relational networks via digital image sharing, as they are to the specific locations in which they are physically manifest.

3.2.1 Internal and External Transcalar Connections

Creative placemaking practitioners focus on the local impacts of their work to the exclusion of the nonlocal impacts, but as Redaelli (2016) notes the structure of creative placemaking as described by the NEA is inherently and explicitly transcalar and that this is facilitated through research, grants and partnerships. The involvement of federal, state, and local governments along with financial institutions and arts and culture organizations perpetuated a transcalar governance that shaped the creative placemaking policies that in

turn shape cities and towns across the country (Redaelli, 2016). The NEA Our Town grant program, that was launched following the publication of Markusen and Gwada's (2010) whitepaper for the NEA's Mayors' Institute of City Design, set up a system requiring that funded projects be created through public-private partnerships between civic and arts and cultural organizations. While ArtPlace America, a collaboration between multiple federal agencies including the NEA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as banks and philanthropic foundations, not only funded creative placemaking projects but sought to create connection between creative placemaking practitioners through publication of research and best practices in the field (Redaelli, 2016). Even though these projects may happen at the local level, be that neighborhood, city, or region, the process that imagined them, funded them, and spread them was intentionally transcalar.

However, the transcalar relationships that Redaelli (2016) describes in her work are only part of the transcalar connections at work in creative placemaking. They represent a sort of internal transcalar reach connecting bounded places, specific neighborhoods and cities, through multiple levels of funders and policy makers in an essentially vertical hierarchy and one that is exclusively American in context. But creative placemaking, connected as it is to well-traveled creative city concepts that have circled the globe via the work of Richard Florida (2002) and others, is a global phenomenon occurring in places around the world and that has resulted in a constellation of places which are recognized for their creativity and culture. Perhaps owing to the way that creativity is formulated within creative cities thinking as being something that resides in large, urban centers and seeps out into smaller and less urban places (Landry & Bianchini, 1995), these recognized places tend to be large and global cities that have engaged in creative placemaking as part of a shift from post-industrial space towards the creative/knowledge economy. For the cities and towns not (yet) included in these constellations of creative places, enacting creative placemaking projects, particularly replicated projects, and encouraging the sharing of their digital mediation, is a means of drawing a connection between themselves and these stellar

places. They are putting themselves "into the picture" and staking an outward transcalar claim to being a part of this constellation, even if that claim is as yet only aspirational. This drive for cities to create transcalar connections to the places that they aspire to be like or compete with isn't new, it pre-exists digital mediation, digital mediation simply offers new possibilities for making these connections visible.

3.2.2 Digital Mediation

The shift from text-based social media like Twitter to image-based social media platforms like Instagram has resulted in a "visual turn" in social media. This "visual turn" has created a demand for photographable objects and events that fit the preferred way of seeing, or scopic regime, of a particular platform. By conforming to the platform vernacular of Instagram, users maximize the attention they receive from other users through likes and shares (Leszczynski, 2019). While Caliandro and Graham (2020) have noted that there is more than one platform vernacular at work on Instagram, or indeed any social media platform, we can in a general sense understand this as an attempt to be "Instagrammable." The rise in the number of street art festivals has accompanied an increase in the popularity of murals and their consumption on digital media platforms, in particular Instagram, which provides space for the consumption of murals and their creation, a need that street art festivals fulfill. As MacDowall and de Souza (2017) note, "Instagram's privileging of flows of images tied to mobile devices that are carried through the city and the real-time battles for attention and impact that this generates, it is more closely synced with the aesthetics of graffiti and street art and the needs of its producers and consumers than any other digital platforms." This symbiotic relationship with social media leads to the creation of mural projects designed to maximize the attention of the platform gaze. In other words, street art and street art festivals are particularly Instagrammable.

The work of a street art mural (or its accompanying festival) doesn't end when the paint dries. Creative placemaking is an always on-going project that continues long after the initial project installation is completed (Sweeney et al., 2018). Digital mediation provides a way of prolonging temporary creative placemaking projects and enabling their circulation beyond the site where they occurred, providing the opportunity and for engaging with new audiences (Zebracki, 2017; Zebracki & Luger, 2019). Research has demonstrated how social media users, through the assemblages of objects they choose to digitally mediate and share with their networks, claim connections to urban spaces and project, often aspirational, identities to other users (Boy & Uitermark, 2017). Similarly, cities and towns, through both their own digital mediation and through the directed digital mediation of their audiences, create transcalar connections to other places and project aspirational identities via social media platforms (see Chapter 4). Engagement with a well-traveled and heavily digitally mediated creative placemaking project like a street art mural festival provides a means of making those transcalar connections and aspirations visible as cities seek to emulate their peer cities and the cities that they desire to be seen as peers to.

3.3 PRHBTN and Urban Walls Cincinnati

In this section I will describe two mural projects that, though separated by 40 years, share many aspects including their desire to create transcalar connections to larger cities and global flows. The purpose here is to illustrate how urban mural projects like PRHBTN aren't simply the result of a modern focus on digital-visual mediation and catering to the scopic regimes of social media platforms, but in fact have a much longer history of being used to shape urban space. Then I will examine how the subsequent digital mediation of PRHBTN which was encouraged by VisitLex through their mural challenge makes these connections visible and puts them to use enacting VisitLex's vision for the future of Lexington, Kentucky.

3.3.1 PRHBTN - Lexington, Kentucky

PRHTBN started out as a combination concert and gallery show for local graffiti artists organized by the owner of a local music performance space and its entertainment manager. But after watching Banksy's "Exit Through the Gift Shop," and seeing the success of a one-off project that brought German street artists, Herkut, to Lexington to paint a pair of murals, Jessica and John Winters (the co-founders of PRHNTN) decided to incorporate bringing international street artists to Lexington into the event. The year that Odeith painted the back wall of the thrift store, 2013, was the first year these invitations were made. Subsequently, PRHBTN has brought 3-4 internationally known street artists to Lexington annually, except for 2020 when the event was canceled due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

After the inclusion of international artists in the project with the subsequent rise in travel and paint costs, the project sought funding initially through a Kickstarter campaign and then later with LexArts, the local area arts council and united arts fund. With LexArts acting as their fiduciary agent, donations to PRHBTN became tax-deductible. In 2016, the gallery exhibition was separated from the concert portion of the festival and moved to the Loudon House, the exhibition and studio space operated by the Lexington Art League, a membership organization that supports Kentucky artists. In 2022, the Winters' announced via Instagram that the PRHBTN festival would no longer be producing large scale murals and would focus instead on gallery work, citing increasing costs and administrative time (PRHBTN, 2022).

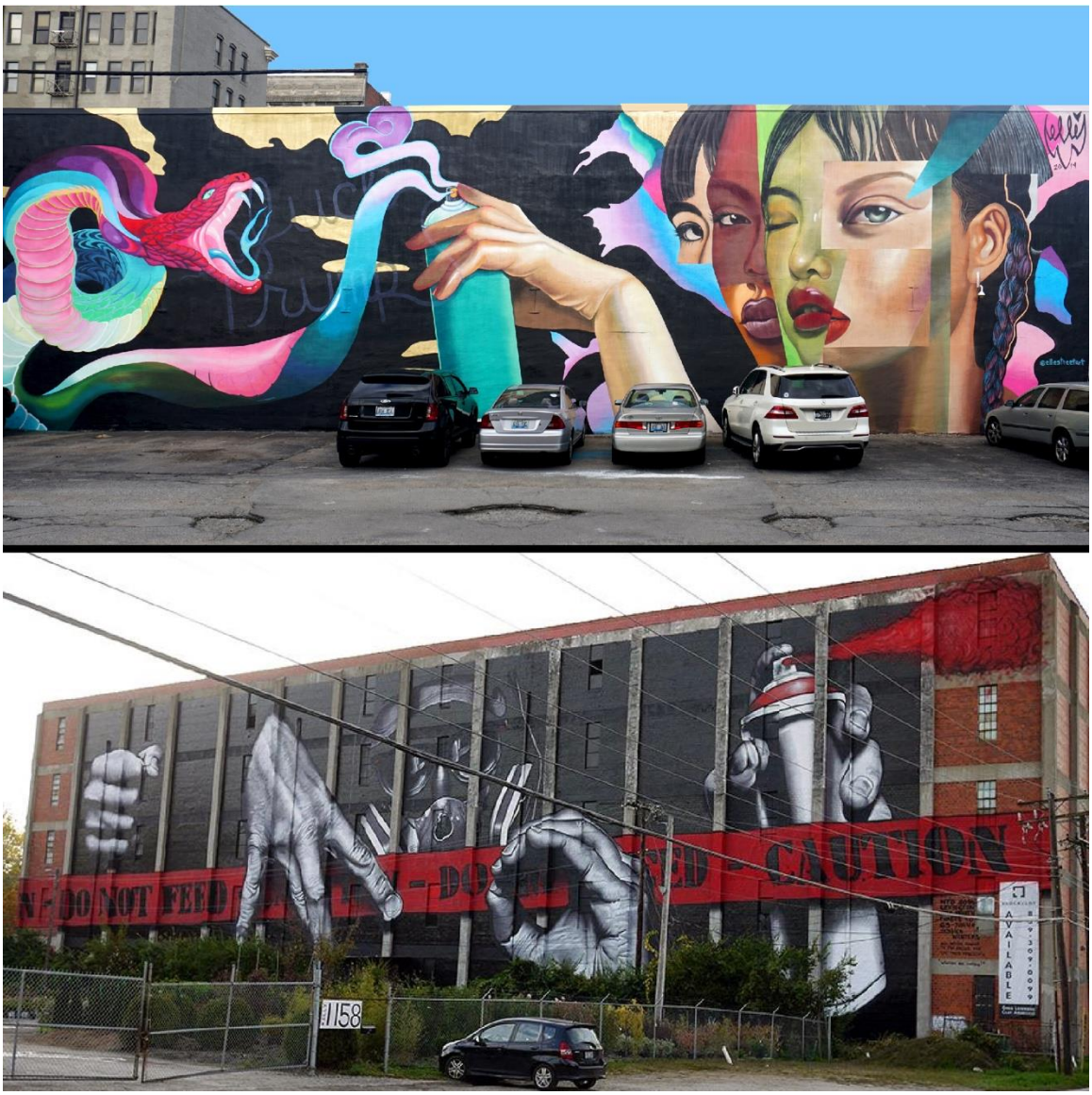

Figure 3.3 A pair of controversial murals from PRHBTN. From top: “Fuck Trump” by Elle (Elle Street Art, 2021) and “My Name is MO” by MTO (Street Art News, 2014)

The Winters’ personally selected the artists, extending around 20 invitations a year to artists whose work they enjoy, having seen their work while traveling or via the internet, with around 5 artists typically taking them up on the invitation. According to the Winters, most of the artists invited have never been to Lexington or Kentucky due to the area’s rural reputation (Corbin, n.d.). The muralists are given free rein to create a mural of their choosing, with the wall’s owners able to reject, but not alter a design. In the early days of the festival there was a requirement that building owners sign a contract agreeing to keep

the mural in place for 10 years (Brewer, 2013). There is zero community input sought regarding mural content, though suggestions for mural locations have sometimes been crowdsourced on social media. This combination has led to several well-documented controversies when the murals artists produced did not align with community mores. In 2014 MTO, a French street artist, painted a mural in which sign language gestures for his initials were misinterpreted as gang symbols, an allegation that had been leveled at his work previously (Brooklyn Street Art, 2014). In 2019 a mural by Elle, one of the few female street artists invited to the festival, titled "The Devil is in the Details" and including the phrase, "Fuck Trump" in glow-in-the-dark paint drew public scrutiny resulting the building owner hiring a second artist to paint over the text portion of the mural (Kobin, 2019). The artist responded to the alteration of her artwork by retitling the piece, "Fuck Trump" (Elle Street Art, 2021).

The disconnect in communication between artists and the community has also led to odd serendipity. In 2021 Gaia painted his "Mother of Us All" mural featuring images of legendary Lexingtonian, Sweet Evening Breeze composited on a multistory wall opposite the federal court building in downtown. The images Gaia used for the mural came from the Faulkner Morgan Archive, an archive of LGBTQ history in Kentucky, that unbeknownst to Gaia, had been planning a similar mural. Gaia's previous mural for PRHBTN, painted in 2013 and depicting a tumbling horse, had been unpopular with residents.

Figure 3.3 Gaia's 2021, "Mother of Us All" for PRHBTN. Photo by author.

3.3.2 Urban Walls - Cincinnati, Ohio

Urban Walls Cincinnati was “a non-profit community improvement project” organized through the Carl Solway Gallery in Cincinnati (Chewning, 1976). Carl Solway, a Cincinnati art dealer with offices in Cincinnati and New York City, and his assistant, Jack Boulton, Urban Walls Cincinnati[4] based the project on other urban art projects that the pair had heard of and/or seen in NYC, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Chewning, 1976). In fact, Solway’s New York City office was within walking distance to some of the murals that Smokehouse and City Walls Inc., both muralist art groups, had produced there. Murals by both of these organizations were part of the Jewish Art Museum’s 1970 exhibit “Using Walls (Outdoors)” (Jewish Museum (New York, N.Y.), 1970) and part of an earlier show

[4] This project, and those it emulated, referred to the art it created as “walls” rather than murals. It was an attempt to differentiate the work of professional artists designing large scale op art in spaces that might otherwise have been used for commercial signage from the community-oriented practice of muralism that was on the rise in the 1970s. But for the sake of clarity, I’m referring to these works as murals in this text.

at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), both in New York City. While Boulton, in his previous work as a high school art teacher had worked with students and a Cincinnati business district to design, but not implement, a community mural project (Chewning, 1976).

The Urban Walls Cincinnati project consisted of 10 murals, most of them on multistory walls in the southwest quadrant of the city. Significantly, the majority of the walls chosen as mural locations were ones that had recently been exposed by the demolition of buildings for the expansion of parking in anticipation of increased demand. Cincinnati was one of many American cities in the midst of a large federal urban renewal project. Cincinnati's central urban renewal project, which displaced a large number of African American families in what is now Fountain Square, opened up space in the downtown area for high-cost shopping, offices and apartments. There was also a large renovation that occurred closer to the river that caused large-scale demolitions for the creation of a new highway interchange and several sports stadiums.

The designs for the murals were designed by local artists, mostly graphic designers, and put in place by professional sign painters. The repurposing of the tools of marketing was an intentional aspect of the project, intending to showcase the potential for local graphic designers and commercial printers, both big businesses in Cincinnati, to contribute to the shape of the city. Of the original ten installations, two of the murals still exist. One has since been hidden by the construction of another building and the other was recently refurbished when the building it adorns was converted to luxury apartments.

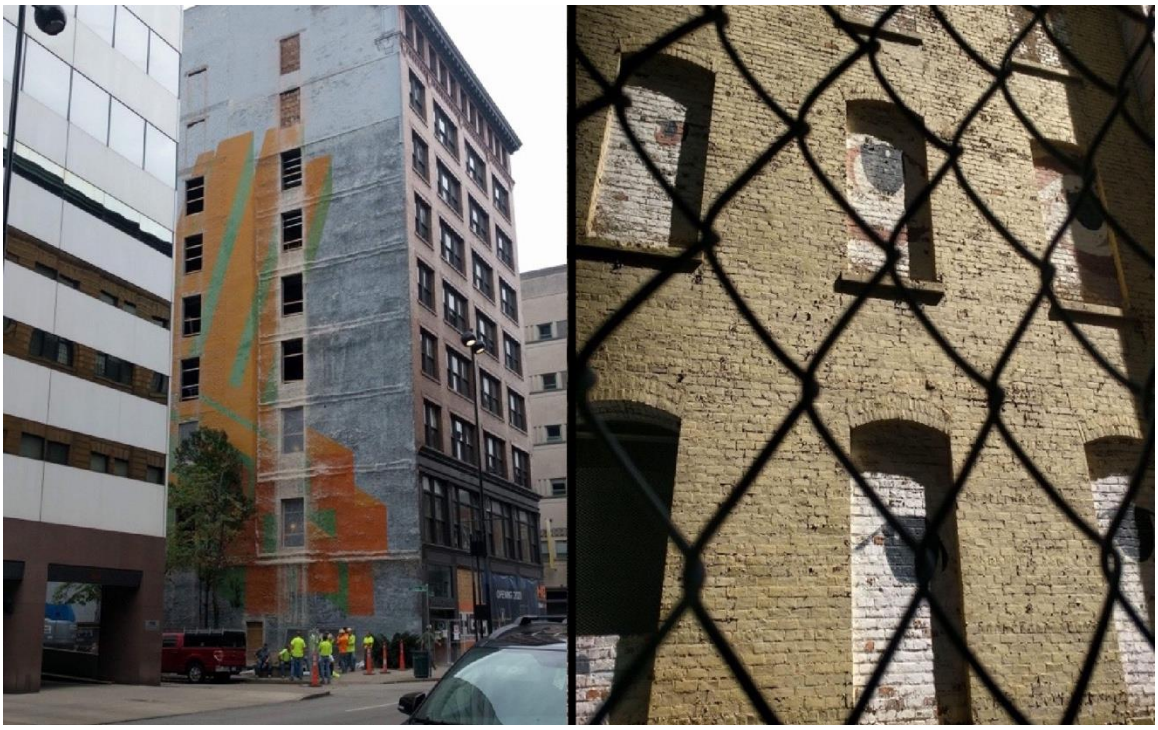

Figure 3.4 Allegro by Barron Krody at Seventh and Race (left) and Preston McClanahan's untitled work on the Commerce Garage, on Race between 3rd and 4th Streets (right). These are the last two of the original Urban Walls Cincinnati murals still in place. (Photos by author.)

These two projects, despite their difference in age, share a number of similarities. Both of these mural projects were passion projects for their organizers, and both focused on an art style that was popular at the time, street art for PRHBTN and op art (optical art) for Urban Walls. Both projects were privately organized. They raised the money, they picked the walls, and they personally convinced the building owners to let them paint murals there. They also selected the artists from professional artists whose work they knew and personally liked. And they gave the artists free reign to create their work without any input from the communities where the art would be located, demonstrating that the friction often still found between communities and the DIY urbanists who fail to involve them has deep roots.

3.3.3 Archives

As professional art dealers, Carl Solway and Jack Boulton were keenly aware of the significance that documentation has to the value of art and so the Urban Walls project was meticulously planned and documented. Solway and Boulton ensured that all aspects of the project were carefully documented including the process for selecting walls, their preparation and materials, as well as the details of the artists and the actual installation of the art. Copies of the work were sent to the Cincinnati Library, the Cincinnati Art Museum, MOMA, and the NEA Archives in Washington, DC. By submitting copies of the documentation and the silk screens of the works also produced by the project to the libraries and archives of local and nationally important arts organizations, Solway and Boulton ensured that their work would be included in the archives of modern art and into the formal knowledge networks that operated in that space at the time. Connecting themselves and their project to the broader world of public art had to take place materially as well as discursively.

The organizers of PRHBTN have made no such similar effort to preserve their work in formal archives. Instead PRHBTN is able to make use of the ad hoc archive of the internet (Cianci & Schutt, 2014) generated by the collective digital mediation of the project by its audiences. And while the internet is a fragile archive, things can and do go missing, it is also remarkably effective. A few years after my neighbors and I gathered to watch Odeith paint his mural, I walked out of my apartment one morning to see another scaffolding erected in the same spot. This time a group of workers were systematically removing the artwork with a power washer, the result of a miscommunication with the building's tenant. The workers were stopped before they were able to remove the entire mural. All that remains in situ now is the bottom quarter of the original work, but the mural survives intact and whole on the internet. Long after the mural had been partially erased,

mural hunters would still show up to photograph it believing it still existed there in the space between the train tracks and the thrift store wall.

Figure 3.5 Workers removing the Odeith mural. (Photo by author.)

3.3.4 Payment

PRHBTN includes a gallery show and sale that are supplemental to the murals and include artists who don't participate in the mural portion of the project. The inclusion of the gallery show is a nod to how the artists involved in this work earn their living, through the sale of artwork and not the painting of murals. In fact, PRHBTN has historically not paid muralists for their work, offering them instead room and board on a sort of busman's holiday, or in the parlance of street artists, a "spraycation." PRHBTN's founders have also discussed the way in which "exposure," which in the case of street art is largely gained through digital mediation on social media platforms like Instagram, is one of the ways that festival artists are "paid" for their murals (Artistic Allies, n.d.). Having their work

appearing in the images of a street art festival alongside more famous artists has value to new artists as they try to gain a foothold in the world of street art.

Urban Walls also included gallery sales in their project. They sold a limited edition of silk screen prints of the mural designs to collectors in Cincinnati and in Solway's professional networks to finance the actual painting of the murals, but this is also one of the ways in which the project differs. The artists involved in Urban Walls were paid for their work and their mural designs were finalized in advance of the painting because the artists who created the murals didn't do the painting. Solway and Boulton employed professional sign painters to paint the actual murals as they would have an advertisement. The small, self-operated, scissor lifts like those PRHBTN uses didn't exist yet and the gondolas that descend from the roof of the building that sign painters used were not considered safe or appropriate for use by non-professionals.

3.3.5 Ties to Urban Redevelopment

Urban redevelopment heavily influenced both PRHBTN and Urban Walls. When Solway and Boulton were organizing Urban Walls Cincinnati, the city was amid a massive, federally funded urban redevelopment project that had caused the removal of numerous buildings in the downtown area. The removal of these buildings created newly exposed, blank walls that changed the look and, importantly, the feel of the city. The urban art projects in New York that Urban Walls sought to emulate were the outcome of artists responding to the change in the atmosphere of the city, attempting to re-humanize the space, and change the way it felt. In 1970, the area Solway and Boulton chose to center Urban Walls Cincinnati on was full of architecturally interesting nineteenth century buildings, occupied by small galleries and wholesale businesses with related parking. They sought out space for their project there because it was adjacent to areas that were slated for dramatic urban redevelopment, anticipating that the adjacent space would become a

neighborhood of studio apartments and specialty shops (Chewning, 1976). Solway and Boulton wanted the art they were creating to contribute to the atmospheric change of the space that they envisioned following the urban renewal. This connection to urban change and development is now an accepted aspect of urban mural projects which frequently take their funding from banking and real estate development interests.

Because Lexington, Kentucky is not a post-industrial city, the urban landscape that PRHBTN's organizers were faced with didn't fit the mold for where street art gets located nearly as well as Cincinnati did. Brennan-Horley (2010) in his paper on mapping the small creative city, shows that the post-industrial spaces often associated with culture-led redevelopment in urban space are not present in many smaller cities, because like Lexington, not all of them are post-industrial. This results in a different spatial pattern of creativity than would be expected in a "creative city." In Lexington, this resulted in a number of PRHBTN's murals being painted on well used, publicly owned buildings including several murals located on a downtown parking garage as well as an historic movie theater. Not having the physical structures associated with creative cities in large and global cities, the post-industrial landscape of disused warehouses and factory buildings in need of urban renewal, also leads to different outcomes for creative city policies and not just a different geography. The focus of culture-led urban redevelopment in Lexington is not so much the material of the built environment, but its use. Ironically, in one of the few instances where PRHBTN did make use of a post-industrial area for their murals, producing several on the grounds of a disused bourbon distillery, one of the murals was removed to induce a business to occupy the space. This would appear to contradict Schacter's (2015) assertion that the fondness of the creative class and their enablers for street art to its ability to simulate an authentic urban space while maintaining the safety that middle-class white professionals require.

By leveraging the power of digital technology, creative placemaking can be used to foster a sense of connection and community among residents, as well as attract visitors

and investors. The central argument of Richard Florida's creative class theory is that being competitive in the global knowledge economy requires cities to be able to attract creative industries and their workers, the eponymous creative class (Florida, 2002). To do this, cities must create places that creative class professionals want to be, places with what Florida refers to as "street level culture" (Florida, 2002). The placement of PRHBTN murals in the downtown area and in gentrifying areas, like the North Limestone neighborhood, makes use of them as street-level spectacle. They create the kind of "buzz" Florida advocates for, bringing people to city streets, giving them something novel to do, and garnering media attention.

3.3.6 Transcalar Connections

The first chapter of the Urban Walls Cincinnati exhibit catalog is titled, "Bringing the Idea Home to Cincinnati." Solway and Boulton were very clear from the beginning of their project that they were replicating an idea that they had seen and/or heard of happening in other cities, namely Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. In fact, Boulton carried a copy of the "City Walls: New York" exhibit catalog from the Jewish Museum with him to show building owners when he met with them to pitch the project (Chewning, 1976). He wasn't just selling them on putting a mural on their building, at a time when outdoor advertising still offered an income to building owners, he was selling them a connection to New York City. The many artists the Solway and Boulton selected for the project were graphic designers because Cincinnati had a national reputation in graphic design and printing that they wanted to highlight with the project. Cincinnati firms were in competition with graphic design firms from the cities where urban mural projects had previously been staged. The press that was used to create the silk screen prints sold to fund the project was a new model only available in a few places in the US at the time, yet another way that Cincinnati had the opportunity to show off with this project. Solway and Boulton

even went so far as to bring in an artist with experience painting large scale murals in New York City to Cincinnati to consult on the project and make sure that their project was materially on par with those in New York (Chewning, 1976).

To publicize the project Solway and Boulton arranged for a multi-page spread about the painting of the murals to be printed in the Cincinnati Sunday newspaper to make sure that images of the murals were able to be dispersed around the country (Chewning, 1976). During the painting of the murals Solway and Boulton organized a gallery show of the in-progress murals along with images of mural projects from other cities to provide context for the audience (Chewning, 1976). The mediation that Urban Walls Cincinnati sought out, along with their archiving efforts, was intentionally transcalar seeking to link Cincinnati to other large, creative places that they either were, or wanted to be, in competition with. This mediation managed to travel nationally resulting in requests for assistance in staging urban wall projects in other cities.

PRHBTN has been similarly clear about the origin of their festival, the result of watching a documentary about the world street art, and their intention of creating a space in Lexington similar to Wynwood Walls. Local news media has written about PRHBTN repeatedly over the past 10 years of the festival, but street art blogs and social media posts made up the majority of the digital mediation of the festival that I was able to uncover. While the news media facilitates the transcalar connections that PRHBTN is making by emphasizing how the artists who paint at the festival are "international" and paint all over the world as well as repeating their Wynwood Wall aspirations, it is the digital-visual mediation by mural hunters and other visitors to the murals that does the bulk of the work. The image sharing of mural visitors, frequently tagged with usernames and street art and artist-specific hashtags, via social media platforms puts Lexington's murals in visual conversation with murals from all over the world. PRHBTN is not reliant on the material circulation of newspaper articles or gallery catalogs to be able to reach an audience outside of the physical vicinity of its murals. In this way, PRHBTN can extend their reach from

Lexington to creative cities around the world that have similar projects and artwork and stake a claim to being part of the larger world of street art.

3.4 VisitLex's Mural Challenge

Having now illustrated the overlap in the work done by the PRHBTN festival and the Urban Walls project, to include their shared goal of connecting their location to other cities, particularly those included in the constellation of places that have become globally known for their involvement in muralism and street art, I now move on to illustrating how digital mediation makes those connections visible in a way they were not previously. I will do this by focusing on the work done by VisitLex to encourage residents and visitors to Lexington to photograph and post to social media the murals primarily created by PRHBTN.

Several years into the PRHBTN project, VisitLex, the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau, began promoting a mural challenge. The idea, which has been used in a number of cities, is to encourage people to conduct self-led scavenger hunts in search of urban murals. In Lexington, most of the ~30 murals that VisitLex was encouraging people to find had been created as part of PRHBTN. There are a few murals included in the mural challenge that are not from PRHBTN, most of these were part of a previous LexArts-sponsored mural project, with several of the included murals being private commissions. Mural hunters are encouraged to post their images of the mural to VisitLex's standard hashtag, #sharethelex. Mural hunters are also incentivized to share their photos directly with VisitLex. The specifics of how this part of the challenge works have changed over time. The mural challenge makes use of the already existing practice of "mural hunting," where street art enthusiasts engage with liminal spaces in the city in order to find, photograph, and share the often-ephemeral artwork of artists, both sanctioned and unsanctioned. It's a callback to photographers like Martha Cooper and the lengths to which

she would go to document the work of illegal graffiti taggers in New York City in the 1970s and 80s (Cooper & Chalfant, 1984). Previously, once an individual had collected 5 murals, they were asked to email their images directly to VisitLex in return for a poster. Currently, VisitLex is using a GPS-enabled digital passport system app that allows them to track visitors on their movements through Lexington. This system includes place-based advertising tailored to the movements of the users (Harris, 2022).

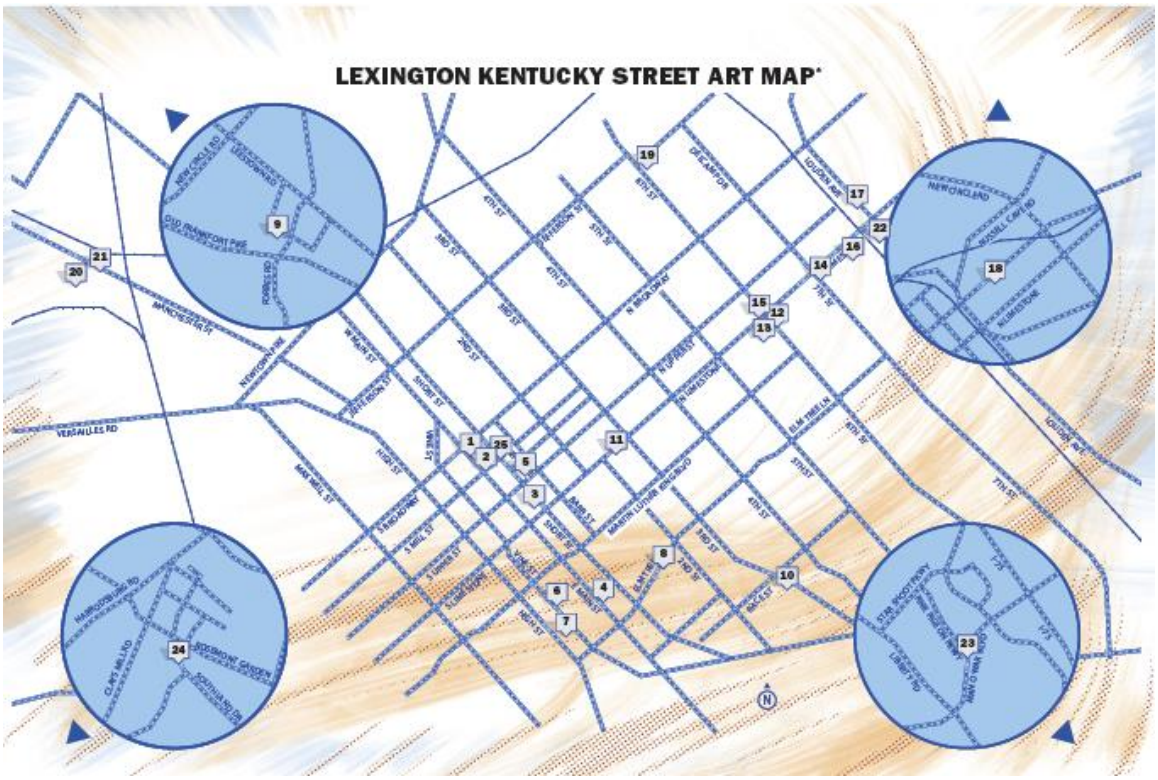

Figure 3.6 Inset map from Mural Challenge brochure distributed by VisitLex. Source: VisitLex (VisitLex, n.d.)

In addition to encouraging the use of the hashtag and app, VisitLex distributes a map of mural locations available to visitors in their downtown office or as a downloadable pdf on the VisitLex website. Prior to COVID-19, VisitLex organized walking tours of some of the closer-together murals with explicit instructions for attendees to bring cameras and post their photos on Instagram using the hashtag (Smiley Pete Publishing, 2018). VisitLex also has a guide to the most Instagram-able murals in town on their website, explicitly

encouraging visitors to collect these murals on their social media accounts (Riding, 2020). Lexington's murals have ended up in national "best mural" lists and "best places to see murals" lists, which make heavy use of images from social media (Raven, 2021). As COVID-19 restrictions were starting to lift, VisitLex explicitly proclaimed Lexington "an Instagrammer's paradise" and suggested images of the city's street art as a way to "rake in those likes" (VisitLex, 2020).

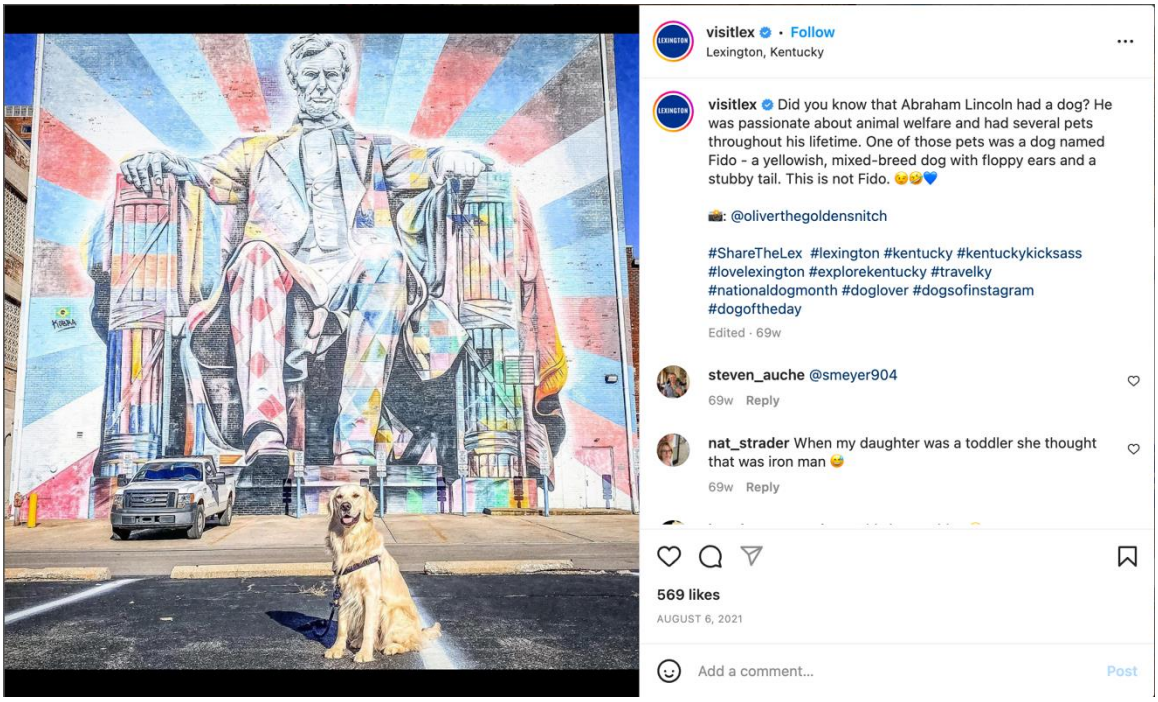

Figure 3.7 Examples of an image taken as part of the mural challenge. Source: VisitLex (VisitLex, 2021).

As Lexington's Visitor and Convention Bureau, it is VisitLex's mission to market the Bluegrass Region as a destination for tourism and business. They are deeply embedded in the intercity competition for attention and dollars that Florida's creative cities thinking encourages. Jamie Peck (2020) argues that creative city policies are well traveled not because they are particularly effective, but because they uphold the status quo, fit well into existing governmental priorities, and don't upset the pre-existing power relations. Viewed in this manner, creative placemaking projects are a form of what Hertting et al. (2021)

refer to as the "sly de-politicization" of urban entrepreneurialism, in which the reimagining of urban space by elites is framed as beneficial to all and proceeds incrementally through carefully curated partnerships thus diffusing responsibility and creating the impression that urban change is an organic rather than political process. In the case of PRHBTN, this sly de-politicization takes the form of an independent mural project partnered with a city-funded organization, VisitLex. Through this arrangement, the creation of street art murals across Lexington and their markedly uneven distribution is distanced from the political organization of the city and presented as the action of individuals engaged in the difficult to assail social good of public art. At the same time, the city and other political elites utilize the festival's murals in advertising, on tourism literature, and even state reports. They are able to encourage the digital mediation of PRHBTN's murals through advertising and gamification and use them to support a city branding strategy that promotes Lexington as a world class cultural destination all while not having to answer for the potentially negative impact on the communities where the murals are located.

3.5 Conclusion

Creative placemaking projects are more than local, they also create translocal and transcalar connections to places and constellations of places. Some of these transcalar connections are internal as cities collaborate with organizations and individuals at a range of scales (Redaelli, 2016). External transcalar connections are made visible through the digital mediation of these projects across networked space where they become archived, searchable, circulated, and acted upon by users and algorithms. For cities and towns forced to engage in never-ending intercity competition, these non-local impacts of creative placemaking projects, both translocal and transcalar, have value and are desirable. Made visible through digital mediation, these translocal and transcalar connections to place can help draw in new businesses and residents to the area in addition to attracting tourists. They

put cities and neighborhoods into the picture with those places they aspire to be on par with. For audiences engaging with social media platforms, these nonlocal connections provide an opportunity to demonstrate their mobility (Wilson, 2012) and identity (Boy & Uitermark, 2017).

The desire to create transcalar connection is not new to creative placemaking projects. As shown with the examples of PRHBTN and Urban Walls Cincinnati, two mural projects 40 years apart, it has long been part of creative placemaking as it combines arts and culture with city boosterism and interurban competition. However, digital mediation enables these transcalar connections to be made visible in a way that reliance on physical mediation did not. In bringing focus to the more than local connections made by creative placemaking projects, I am suggesting that paying through attention to the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects across networked space we can see the work that creative placemaking does that exceeds the scope of what creative placemakers tell us it does. This is important because, despite their size and duration, these projects obtain a spread and digital longevity that has far-reaching impacts on how people (near and far) understand a place.

CHAPTER 4. THE HASHTAG FUTURECITY: LEVERGING DIGITAL-VISUAL MEDIATION IN CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

4.1 Introduction

Figure 4.1 The Hanke Building is illuminated by projection mapping during the inaugural BLINK festival. Source: 360around (360around, n.d.)

It's the last night of the inaugural BLINK light art festival in Cincinnati, Ohio and a crowd has gathered at the T-shaped intersection of Main and East 12th Street. A large projection mapped artwork by Kyle Eli Ebersole has transformed the façade of The Hanke Building (1876) at the top of the intersection into a swirling kaleidoscope of colorful, expanding shapes that radiate from its arched, Italianate windows. Standing among the throng of people, I have become aware that place, which is always multiple and overlapping (Massey, 1994), has been visibly fractured here, split apart like a beam of light

through a prism. In the crowd there are the people with faces upturned, watching the lights dance on the building, who are fully within the ephemeral, projected world of the artwork and the BLINK festival, the promised Future City. There are other people in the crowd who view the same spectacle through the screens of their cellphones, recording the experience of the Future City for themselves and for people not present; theirs is a Mediated Future City, able to be shared and circulated, but static in time. The streetcar driver attempting to drive down Main Street inhabits a liminal space between the two; while the City That Is determines her path, dictates the arc that she must travel through the intersection, the Future City is bleeding into it, setting the speed at which she can move, as its occupants, seemingly unaware of her presence, block her path.

People frequently move between the overlapping cities. A police officer stands with his back to the artwork, sometimes tapping on the glass of the Future City and its mediated, not-quite twin, as he herds people back onto the sidewalks and out of the street. A cell phone is raised and then lowered as someone moves in and out of the Mediated Future City. The family that has stopped on the streetcar tracks, their attention focused completely within the Future City, is pulled into the City That Is by the honk of the streetcar and the intervention of the police officer. Under all of it, the City That Is, itself an amalgam of all the cities that led up to it, is in opposition to the Future City, working to direct it and limit it in the shape of itself. At this intersection the City That Is is weak, being actively subsumed by the BLINK festival's vision of the Future City, but a block or two away from the lights, it gets stronger again. In the city blocks that the crowd must travel between the brilliantly lit art installations of the festival, the City That Is and the Future City vie for dominion as the BLINK festival attempts to continue the Future City's hold through the deployment of maps, digital media, and mobile applications that link the spaces together and the City That Is imposes its physical hold over bodies.

4.2 The Future City Manifesto

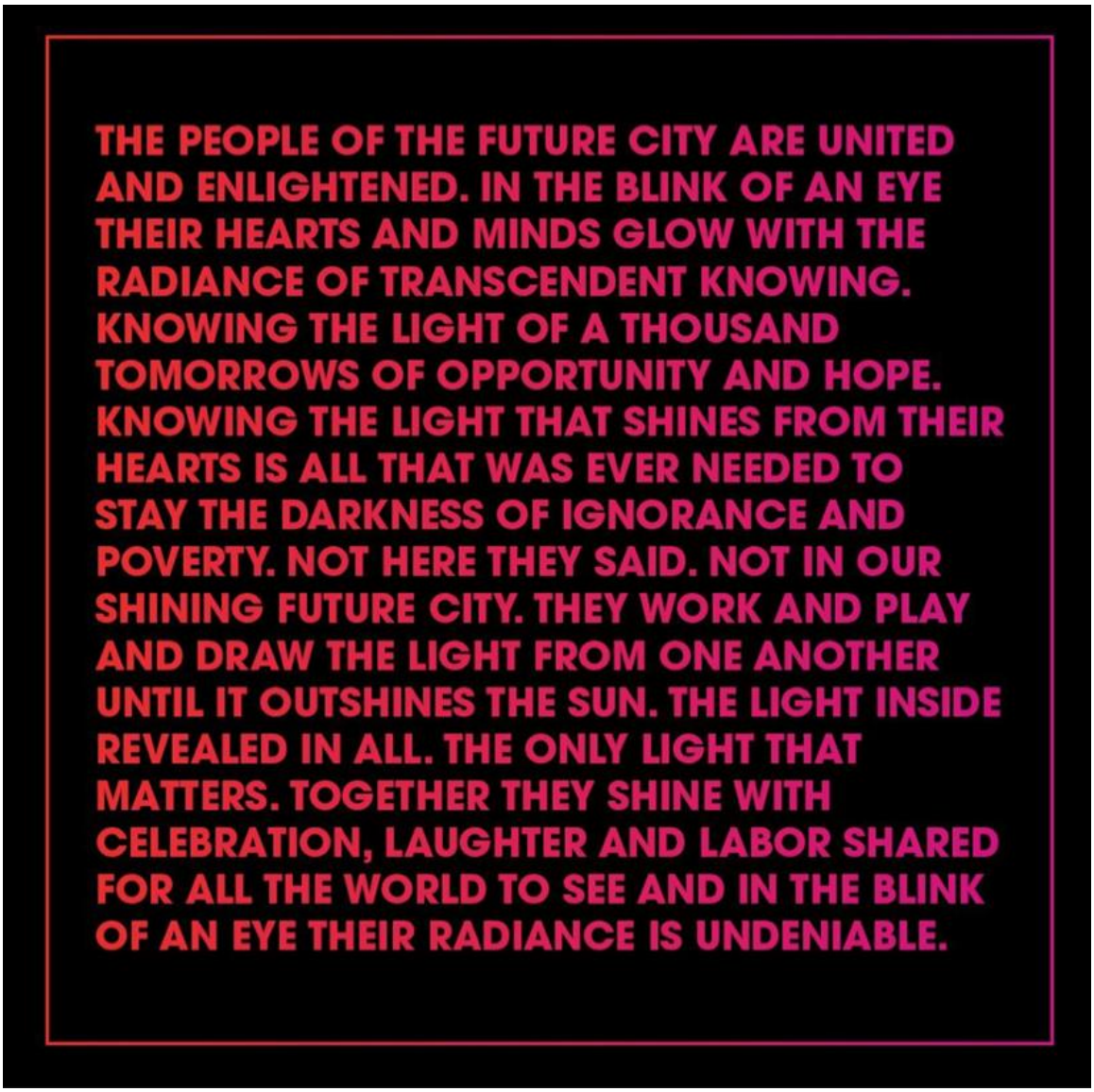

Figure 4.2 The Future City Manifesto as posted to the Blink Cincinnati Instagram account. Source: BLINK (BLINK, 2020)

The Future City Manifesto, written by festival co-founder Dan Reynolds of Brave Berlin during the initial planning stages of the inaugural 2017 festival, appears in marketing materials and on merchandise throughout the festival. It can be found on t-shirts and tote bags, banners and street signs. The #FutureCity represents organizers' visions for a Cincinnati where art and culture are central to the city's place in the world. This vision is explicitly linked to intentions of "putting Cincinnati on the map" artistically and to creating

both translocal and transcalar connections to specific global cities (BLINK,c2017; Williams, 2017).

Creative placemaking is an aspiration endeavor. It attempts to bring into being an imagined future, to show the public what is possible in a space, to give them immediate access to that imagined future, and to solidify that vision of the future by building public and political support for it (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). The BLINK organizers' invocation of an imagined Future City is temporary, lasting only as long as the generators that power the lights and projectors are still running. Once the festival lights go down, the City That Is returns leaving only the Mediated Future City to perpetuate the BLINK organizer's vision for the city of Cincinnati. Like many ephemeral creative placemaking projects the BLINK festival relies on digital mediation across networked space to disrupt time and space and to create a widely sharable, ad hoc archive of the event (Cianci & Schutt, 2014) to prolong their vision. At the same time, digital mediation has been identified as a destabilizing force on digital cultural objects that enables audiences to readily co-create and co-opt, potentially undermining the visions of project organizers (Rose, 2015). Indeed, BLINK festival attendees produced tens of thousands of images of the event on Instagram alone.

Unlike much of creative placemaking practice that devalues the work of digital mediation (Halegoua, 2020), as a digital media art festival organized by two marketing firms and an art non-profit, BLINK embraces digital mediation as a means of connection between people and places. For the organizers of BLINK, audience digital mediation and their engagement with the digital mediation of others is a key metric that they use to gauge their success to their sponsors and partners. In the Impact Report that followed the 2019 BLINK festival, a quarter of the document was devoted to reporting mediation metrics from social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) as well as print, broadcast, and web/online media (BLINK, 2019a). They also reported metrics from their website and the dedicated app that was launched especially for the 2019 festival.

In this chapter, I argue that while digital mediation does have the potential to destabilize project organizers' visions for the future via audience co-creation and co-option, these projects and their organizers are not powerless against it. I show how BLINK festival organizers used a variety of physical and digital methods to direct and redirect the audience's co-creation of the Mediated Future City, created by the digital mediation of the festival. These efforts ultimately served to prolong and stabilize organizers' vision for the #FutureCity.

4.3 The BLINK Light Art Festival

Roughly following the route of the Cincinnati Bell Connector streetcar line, the BLINK light art festival reaches from Findlay Market, in the northern end of the city, to The Banks, an aptly named park at the southern boundary of the city located on the Ohio River. First held in October 2017, the event expanded in 2019 to include a portion of Covington, Kentucky, just over the Ohio River from Cincinnati. This expansion brought the festival to approximately 30 city blocks and made it one of the largest in the United States.

The BLINK festival kicks off with the Future City Spectacular Parade, in which ~3,000 people festooned in lights including marching bands, dance troupes, arts organizations, and corporate sponsors, stroll, dance, and otherwise make their way down Vine Street, led in 2017 by Cincinnati-local Bootsie Collins. Over the next four nights, the biennial festival will transform the city of Cincinnati into the Future City with over 100 installations including light sculptures, large-scale projection mapping, and street art murals created by artists from around the city and globe.

The festival hours officially run from 7 pm to 11 pm each night, when the power to the lights and projectors that drive the festival is switched on. There are, however, a handful of daytime events that occur during the festival. One of these is THINK, a collection of

talks from artists participating in the festival and a panel considering the work of BLINK towards the creation of the #FutureCity. Many of the daytime events are focused on the creation and consumption of street art murals in the historic Findlay Market area of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. These consist of opportunities to watch muralists at work, purchase printed artwork in a pop-up gallery from artists painting at the festival, or engaging in a guided walking tour of BLINK artwork from skilled photographers, who will teach you how to take better photos of street art, co-sponsored by BLINK and B & H Camera.

4.3.1 Digital Placemaking

The BLINK light art festival is an act of digital placemaking. "Digital placemaking" is a relatively recent term in the scholarly literature (Basaraba, 2021). The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) defines digital placemaking as "the integration of social media into Placemaking practices, which are community-centered, encouraging public participation, collaboration, and transparency" (Latorre, 2011). In 2011, PPS launched a series of digital placemaking projects in several large cities that enabled community members to mark locations on a digital map of the city with their suggestions for the future of those places (Latorre, 2011). The projects were essentially web-based participatory mapping exercises where PPS, in collaboration with civic officials and planners, were able to harvest crowdsourced visions of the future. This was a digital placemaking that was making use of the internet as a communication tool and not as a particular way of making meaning itself.

Halegoua & Polson (2021) adopt a broader definition of digital placemaking as "a concept describing the use of digital media to create a sense of place for oneself and/or others. As a broad framework that encompasses a variety of practices used to create emotional attachments to place through digital media use, digital placemaking can be examined across a variety of domains. The concept acknowledges that, at its core, a drive

to create and control a sense of place is understood as primary to how social actors identify with each other and express their identities and how communities organize to build more meaningful and connected spaces." They go on further to describe it as the "embrace [of] digital media affordances in order to cultivate or maintain a sense of attachment to place." This revised definition recognizes the power of digital placemaking and its associated practices to create unique meaning and attachments to place, and not just as a substitute for face-to-face and in-person communication. This is the type of digital placemaking that BLINK aspires to and it is this change in understanding is what Marcus Foth (2017) refers to when he talks about the potential for digital placemaking to not simply be a feedback tool for local governments, as it was in the case of earlier PPS projects, but to facilitate community members as "co-creators in a collaborative form of city making."

Despite the increasing ways that the digital and the physical are entwined, hybridized, and made mundane in our daily lives (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011; Zook & Graham, 2007), much of creative placemaking practice has shied away from the inclusion of the digital mediation within their work. Halegouga (2020) in her overview of the work funded by both the NEA Our Town grants and ArtPlace America, notes that engagement with the digital is typically limited to an interest in archiving projects or marketing them and of the 600 projects she surveyed only thirty-six Our Town proposals and two ArtPlace America proposals made substantive use of digital media. She and other authors have linked this aversion to the digital and the screens and interfaces that go with it to an outdated philosophy of digital media personified in the work of Robert Putnam and his work in Bowling Alone (Halegoua, 2020). In this paradigm, screens and other digital interfaces are seen as creating barriers between people and preventing them from building the connections that Putnam and other sociologists of the time see as resulting from face-to-face interaction.

4.3.2 Digital Mediation

This viewpoint is in opposition to more recent work on the role of digital media and interfaces in creating connections to both people and place. Boy and Uitermark (2016) in their 2016 study on the use of Instagram data as a means of visualizing the sociospatial patterns of urban space point to the ways that users both declare and circulate their connections to place through inclusion in their Instagram feeds. Additionally, user's Instagram feeds are not simple visual journaling, but rather are curated visions for urban life, a desired future. Subsequent research by the same authors (Boy & Uitermark, 2017) looked again at Instagram data to find ways in which people represent the city on the platform. Their work showed that users selectively pick and choose parts of the city to represent, but in ways that made it possible to recognize subcultural groups of individuals. So not only do people use social media images of the city to create their own identity, they use them to create their communal identity as well. This ability for users to envision a future place together through the curation and circulation of digital mediation has significant implications for the stability of BLINK organizers' own vision for the Future City.

Zebracki (2017a and 2017b), has written about the work that digital mediation does for public art generally. He notes the ability of digital mediation to alter the ephemeral nature of temporary artworks and to enable their global circulation through audience co-creation and potential co-option (Zebracki, 2017). For Zebracki space/time is altered by digital mediation because public/private no longer has meaning and the ephemeral is permanently captured, while Hochman et al (2014) argue that geotagging and timestamps in social media permanently tie digital mediation to a specific place and time, equivalent to the neo-avant-garde concept of site-specificity. The images themselves act as interfaces to the Future City (Rose et al., 2014), giving audiences an opportunity to interact and influence the vision. Audience co-creation and co-option pose a potential danger to

placemakers' visions, but creative placemakers are also beholden to it. They use social media stats as proof of efficacy given the way that funding timelines and social change don't line up. The spread of a creative placemaking project is also beneficial to creative placemakers personally as it presents an opportunity to become known in a field, create relationships, and perhaps undertake consulting work. It would be more problematic to creative placemakers if no one else was taking pictures of their work and spreading it around social media.

Creative placemaking, particularly temporary creative placemaking, relies on this digital mediation as part of the life cycle of a project: it provides a means of reaching potential audience members to tell them about the project; it generates images that act as proof of concept and facilitates metrics that are needed for grants and fundraising efforts, but it also gathers support for a vision of the future and stabilizes it via transmediation as hashtags working across platforms create a critical mass of mediation. In the case of BLINK, the digital meditation created by the project was considered to be of such importance to the project that relaying the number of likes, mentions, and reposts takes up a full quarter of their Blink Impact Report (2019a) . As audience co-creation is a necessary evil, what methods do creative placemakers, like those who run BLINK, deploy to protect their vision for the Future City while still acquiring the benefits of digital mediation?

4.4 Methods

My research method is an amalgam of methods borrowed in large part from the Research Unit in Public Cultures at the University of Melbourne and their study of Melbourne's White Night festival (Papastergladis et al., 2015). I found the project particularly salient to examining Cincinnati's BLINK festival as this was one of the festivals (and possibly even the particular year) that BLINK's organizers attended in preparation for organizing BLINK. In this project, a group of nine researchers from a

diversity of disciplines employed a range of methodologies to examine Melbourne's White Night light art festival. The following are the particular pieces from the project that I based my method on.

Tom Andrews (2015) conducted participant observation and interviews to understand how "light-based media can facilitate an understanding of participatory public space." His work revealed that though the act of photography during the event was highly public with arms and cellphones visibly raised and positioned, that the people doing the photography thought of the act as private even when they intended to post the images to social media. Incidentally, his work and several others in the project revealed the disconnect, described elsewhere by Pink (2016), between the digital practices of users and their awareness of them. Digital mediation and the practices that enable them have become so embedded and so mundane as to not register with people when they do them, rendering valid questions from interviewers about those practices meaningless to them.

Thao Phan's (2015) methodology for the project combined interviews with festival attendees with his own thoughts as a participant-observer as he examined the concept of transformation within the festival. He points out that the transformation of the city is multipronged. On one hand it disrupts and transforms simply because the site is one that many of the observers are intimately familiar with on a daily basis, on another it does so because the projected artwork opens up the potential for other ways of relating to the city. Most interestingly, Phan's work points out how the light art created anti-liminal space. Thinking of darkened city streets as being liminal spaces where potentially illicit activities might occur (Creed 2005 cited in (Phan, 2015)), particularly with a large and festive crowd, Phan noted that the light brought back the established rules of conformity and public etiquette.

Caitlin Overington (2015) examined how, through the lighting design of the event, light is manipulated to enhance the built form of the city and becomes a source of control, directing the crowds and their actions. She describes this control as both internalized and

externalized. Light as an internalized control came from the desire of the audience to engage with the light projections, primarily in the forms of spectacle and photography. Under this control, audiences let the light move them through the space from one display to another and to the exclusion of the rest of the city. As Overington explains, "it was the ephemeral nature of these images that drew the audience, with a desire to capture the moment and the light being what contained them." Externalized control via lighting served to bound the festival space through the presence of various types of security. It served to both keep certain spaces and people within the festival and exclude others.

Asher Warren (2015) and Stephanie Hannon (2015) in their papers for the project both examined social media of the event with Warren's observations occurring in-situ while Hannon's occurred at a physical and temporal distance. Warren found through interviews with attendees that though digital-visual mediation of the event was frequent and ubiquitous, that it wasn't simultaneous. The vast majority of interviewees reported that they were not posting to social media during the event, rather they planned to post later after they had a chance to look at their pictures better. Those who were posting to social media during the event frequently mentioned that their postings were for the benefit of people who weren't present rather than a means of engaging with the public present at the event. Hannon's work followed the digital mediation of the event at a distance, watching it unfold through various forms of mediation. Her work highlighted the gap between how the event organizers and media promoted social media about the event, as a means of participation, and how people physically at the event used it, as an archive and means of claiming being present.

4.4.1 Data Collection

Following from the project described above, my approach to data gathering was bifurcated. Part of my approach was to conduct participant-observation of the festival

starting with my experience as a volunteer BLINK Ambassador. During the week before the event, I spent a Saturday morning with ~100 other volunteers at the Chamber of Commerce offices hearing from the BLINK organizers and their partners about the festival, their goals for it, and how we, as volunteers, would be helping to facilitate it. I then spent two volunteer shifts during the second night of the festival stationed in Washington Park working as a BLINK Ambassador. I gave directions to festival attendees, pointed them towards the festival app as I had been directed, answering questions about the festival, typically related to the location of facilities and specific installations, and chatting with my fellow volunteers about their experience of the BLINK festival. During the 4 days and nights of the 2019 festival itself, I collected field notes, images, and sound recordings as I joined in with the crowd, experienced the installations, and observed the response of the audience in place. In addition to the opening Future City Spectacular Parade and the evening events, I also attended three of BLINK's daytime events. The first was THINK, advertised as a daytime primer to BLINK, where artists gave talks about their work in the festival and a panel of organizers spoke about their goals for BLINK and the #FutureCity. I also attended the pop-up gallery and daytime mural painting sessions taking place around the Findley Market area and one of a trio of photographic walking tours organized by BLINK in partnership with B & H Camera.

Based on the Melbourne group's findings of participants not connecting with researchers' questions about participants' personal digital mediation practices, I decided to exclude participant interviews from my data collection and instead focus on assembling an extensive archive of the mediation surrounding the BLINK festival in the vein of Hannon (2015) . I collected press releases, general documents, maps, and ephemera created by BLINK itself as well as mediation created by the press and audience via articles, blogs, and videos. Additionally, because light festivals provide ample fodder for digital-visual

mediation, I collected ~10,000 Instagram[5] posts from the official hashtags, #FutureCity and #BLINKcincinnati, and from several adjacent spellings/years. My goal was to get a general overview of how the project mediated itself and how it dealt with mediation by other parties, both traditional media and the public.

4.5 Building the (Mediated) Future City

The analysis proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, I considered my experience as a festival participant/observer/volunteer in terms of Overington's (2015) writing about how light was a source of control over people and space in Melbourne , looking for the ways in which I had observed control being exerted on site. I also examined the documents I had collected with an eye towards how they worked towards controlling and directing audience mediation. Ultimately finding that the BLINK festival organizers made use of a combination of physical and digital methods to monitor, curate, and direct the digital mediation of the festival by its audiences. I will now delve into the specifics of these physical and digital methods before looking at how these things were or were not then represented in the Instagram images produced of the festival.

4.5.1 Physical methods

The BLINK festival deployed a number of physical methods that had the effect of directing and curating the digital mediation of its audience. The BLINK festival encompasses nearly 30 city blocks of Cincinnati and adjacent Covington, Kentucky. Art installations are dotted around the route in a series of 5 zones over ~2.5 miles. Prior to the event, BLINK organizers published a festival guide and related social media video called,

[5] Due to software limitations, I was unable to collect images from Facebook or YouTube, both of which were rich data sources for further digital mediation. However, using only one social media platform does eliminate methodological issues around tracking the differences in platforms that could contribute to differences in how content is created and shared.

"How to BLINK," which discouraged attendees from attempting to drive the festival route to see the lights and encouraged them to "connect and share" with each other during the event (BLINK, 2019b). This is like what Hannon (2015) found regarding the invocation of social media usage by event organizers and media in Melbourne prior to the 2015 White Night festival. There too, social media was touted before the event as a way of connecting to the event. BLINK organizers also encouraged attendees to walk the route and to visit the separate zones of the event over multiple nights to have the best experience of the spectacle.

The festival also published an official BLINK Cincinnati app for the 2019 event. The app was focused on the festival map and included 5 curated walking tours, one for each zone, in addition to information about the artists and artworks included in the festival. This again mirrored the work of festival organizers in Melbourne. The BLINK festival's location-aware app was able to notify users when they were near a festival artwork and provide them with walking directions to reach it. The app's access to user tracking data facilitated the provision of on-demand heatmaps of the event that users could use to see what artworks had the most people around them at that moment, which had the longest visits from users – a measure of popularity, and which had the most repeat visits – again a measure of popularity. Through this tactic festival organizers were able to encourage the internalized control Hannon (2015) described so that attendees were free to be drawn along through the festival by the light installations. The app was a marked improvement from 2017 when a highly stylized paper map and its static online representation made navigating the festival difficult, particularly for visitors that were not familiar with the area. The festival also made heavy use of signage featuring its distinctive blinking eye logo to direct festival visitors from zone to zone and to delineate artworks associated with the festival from other pre-existing artwork in the area.

The use of a mobile app, maps, and signage facilitated the movement of an estimated 1.5 million festival attendees through the festival's sizable and dark urban space, but they also served to physically direct attendees' digital mediation. The mobile app and

maps reinforced boundaries to the festival, indicating where interaction with the festival could occur and designating parts of the city as outside of the festival. Event signage did similar work, denoting which of the many pieces of artwork scattered throughout the city were BLINK and which were not. The creation of boundaries and exclusions directed the attention of attendees and their digital mediation to the spaces and objects selected by festival organizers to conform to their vision for the Future City. Similarly, this act of bounding the festival also designated other spaces as being outside of the festival.

The BLINK festival also employed other physical techniques to curate the digital mediation of its audience. The festival organizers partnered with B & H Photo, a camera, and electronics dealer in New York City, to sponsor a series of walking tours led by a collection of Instagram influencers. Rather than being experts about the area or the individual murals, the influencers were known for their street art photography and expertise in taking well-liked pictures of murals on Instagram. For these walks, participants were encouraged to bring their camera equipment, whether that was professional DSLR gear or just a cellphone. In the advertisements for the event was the explicit idea that the photos taken on the tour should be posted to Instagram, hopefully building the photographer's follower base. Information on the tour emphasized how to take better images for social media including how to frame shots best, important when you’re trying to combine the square aspect ratio of Instagram with the non-square walls and murals, and how to provide them with place-oriented context.

While these walking tours did draw participants' attention to specific artworks within the festival, primarily the street art murals in the Findlay Market area of Over-the-Rhine and in Covington, Kentucky, they also contributed to the physical control of audience co-creation by reinforcing the scopic regime of Instagram. The scopic regimes of digital platforms limit what users photograph and share and ultimately how the city is seen and valued (Leszczynski, 2019). The photos that get liked on Instagram are those that meet the scopic regime of the platform. To that end, receiving social feedback from Instagram

requires that images meet that particular scopic regime. There's an element of marketing to being able to do this, but there's also artistic capability. By teaching festival attendees how to take images that adhere to the scopic regime of Instagram, BLINK festival organizers were curating and improving the digital mediation of the event, and their vision for the #FutureCity, in a way that would result in more likes and shares on the platform and thus expand its influence.

4.5.2 Digital methods

The digital methods of directing audience co-creation will be familiar to users of social media and marketers alike. They are essentially tools of curation, but they also provide the ability to monitor. The use of an official account is a sort of first line of defense tactic — it identifies itself as the authoritative account for information on the event even though its own contribution to the mediation of the event is dwarfed by the mediation of the audience. For the ~10,000 images posted to the official hashtag, only a small number were created by the official account. The rest of the account's output during the festival was reposting of the audience's co-created digital mediation. The ratio of creation to curation makes a strong case that an official account is primarily a tool for (re)directing audience co-creation and not creating mediation itself.

Engagement with the official account provided individual audience members an opportunity to boost their co-creation out of the stream of mediation created by the ~1.5 million spectators. Tagging the official account in an Instagram image gave audience members access to the attention and (potential) approval of the official account's followers and gave project organizers monitoring the account instant access to the mediation of particularly keen audience members which they could then "boost" by reposting to the official account.

Hashtags did similar work. Facilitating curation by project organizers across platforms though it is more labor intensive than @ing — requiring that someone be monitoring the hashtag to find images to add to the curation of the official account's feed. Broadly, the hashtag allowed project organizers to collect co-creation easily. Attaching a hashtag to an image on Instagram makes the image searchable without it being mediated by the AI that oversees image search engines. Hashtags also have the benefit of being usable across platforms — #BLINKcincinnati works not just on Instagram, but on other social media platforms facilitating transmediation, where images and content are repeated across platforms, making them more likely to appear in search results and stabilizing them as authoritative (Oh, 2020).

But the use of a hashtag is precarious — people can be unaware of them, misspell them, get them wrong, and they can be subverted. An example of subversion or a "take over" in the parlance of social media, would be the flooding of #proudboys by gay couples posting wedding photos to drown out posting to the hashtag by a far-right hate group of the same name. There can also be accidental takeovers such as #paintthevoid which started out as a hashtag used by a project in San Francisco during the summer of 2020 that aimed to facilitate paid work for BIPOC and women artists painting the boarded-up storefronts of San Francisco businesses but was taken up and used by unaffiliated muralists who misread it as a call to action to paint cities emptied by COVID-19 and civil unrest.

4.6 Seeing the Future City

The second phase of my analysis sought to explore how the successes or failures of these physical and digital attempts to control audience digital mediation could be seen in the ~10,000 Instagram images I collected during the event. I began with distilling the outline of BLINK's vision for the Future City from the various documents that I had collected from the festival itself and from its participation with local print, online, and

television media. Because of the organizers' insistence on The Future City Manifesto being the "spirit of the event," I started with that document and read the rest of the collected documents as building on the manifesto. I similarly used the "How to BLINK" documents that the organization shared in several formats as a key document (BLINK, 2019b). From the collected documents my reading was that BLINK was envisioned as a human-scale event intended for its audience to actively participate in slowly, repeatedly, and in community. BLINK's goal was not for a passive consumption of creativity, but to spark a transformational creative joy in the audience and the city at large.

There were ~10,000 Instagram posts made to the BLINK festival's official hashtag, #BLINKcincinnati. These were collected in real time using 4Kstogram, a software designed for the management of Instagram accounts, which facilitates the downloading of posts by hashtag, user, or location. The software download generates a SQLite table containing text information about the post and a linked image file. I considered analyzing the posts based on their location, but the scant location data that was available was overly general for the scale of the festival and so I limited my use of the image metadata to the hashtag. I used a Python script to generate a random sample of the Instagram posts and loaded them into NVivo for coding. I used an iterative approach to the coding, starting with broad categories and becoming more specific as collections emerged.

In my coding I was looking for evidence of how the organizers of BLINK used the various digital and physical methods of directing and managing audience co-creation to fit their vision of the #FutureCity. I ultimately decided on examining the photos for images of community, whether the artwork or event being photographed was part of BLINK, and finally I looked for repetition in the images. From the images of community, I was hoping to find how the instructions organizers provided its audience to, "Take Pause: together," had appeared in the festival's digital mediation. Did people take group shots or photos of crowds? Or did they maintain the scopic regime of Instagram that rewards selfies and the visual impression of exclusivity (Boy & Uitermark, 2017) even though I know from my

own participant-observation that there were many people present when the photo was taken. Assessing the images for whether they contained artwork from BLINK or from some other event or artist was intended as a measure of how well BLINK organizers had controlled the boundaries of their event and delimited their project and its vision of the future from the general aesthetic and creative placemaking that can be found in downtown Cincinnati. While the repetition of images would provide evidence of successful transmediation (Oh, 2020) that might be the result of either physical control, like barriers or selfie-dots, or scopic control.

From the representative sample of the images that I reviewed I found relatively few individual selfies of the type that Instagram has been largely known for in popular culture (Abidin, 2016). Solo selfies were far outnumbered by selfies containing multiple people and non-selfie images of multiple people (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). Crowds also appeared in the images regularly, though often secondary to the image and not the subject of the image. Drone images also stood out in the dataset for the way that they were able to capture much larger portions of the city than ground-based photographers.

There were very few images in the sample that were not in some way about BLINK. I only found a handful of examples of images that were tagged with the BLINK hashtags but were advertisements or images that did not have any clear relationship with BLINK. There were some images in the sample that contained artwork that was not part of the 2019 BLINK, but interestingly many of these contained work from either the 2017 BLINK or artwork that was facilitated for another purpose by one of the BLINK organizing groups. Most commonly these were murals by ArtWorks contained in the same area as the BLINK festival. However, there was very little of the abundant graffiti tagging in the Over-the-Rhine area despite the large number of mural photos that attendees took there. I interpreted this finding as an indication that BLINK's work to bound the festival through maps, apps,

lighting, and barriers had been effective in helping to limit the audience's digital mediation of the event to those artworks and spaces within the vision of the #FutureCity.

Figure 4.3 Images that were repeated in the digital mediation of BLINK. Source: BLINK 2019g; BLINK 2019i; BLINK 2019c; BLINK 2019j

Transmediation builds meaning through the repetition of images across media, in this case digital platforms. This repetition of images across platforms helps stabilize the BLINK organizers' vision of the #FutureCity because the "transmedia mobility of place images circulates only certain place meanings concerning aesthetic qualities, veiling and erasing other issues behind figurative images (Oh, 2020)." In this way the repetition of images of BLINK's imagined #FutureCity helps to stabilize it. In the sample data set I reviewed there were multiple instances of images being repeated. The light-up see-saws that were part of the Wave-field Variation G project, Rumble which lit up the Roebling Suspension Bridge and turned it into multimedia art installation based on its nickname, "The Singing Bridge," and the Rainbow Bridge, a celebration of LBGTQ diversity originally displayed as part of Burning Man, also in the Banks were projects that turned up again and again in very similar images.

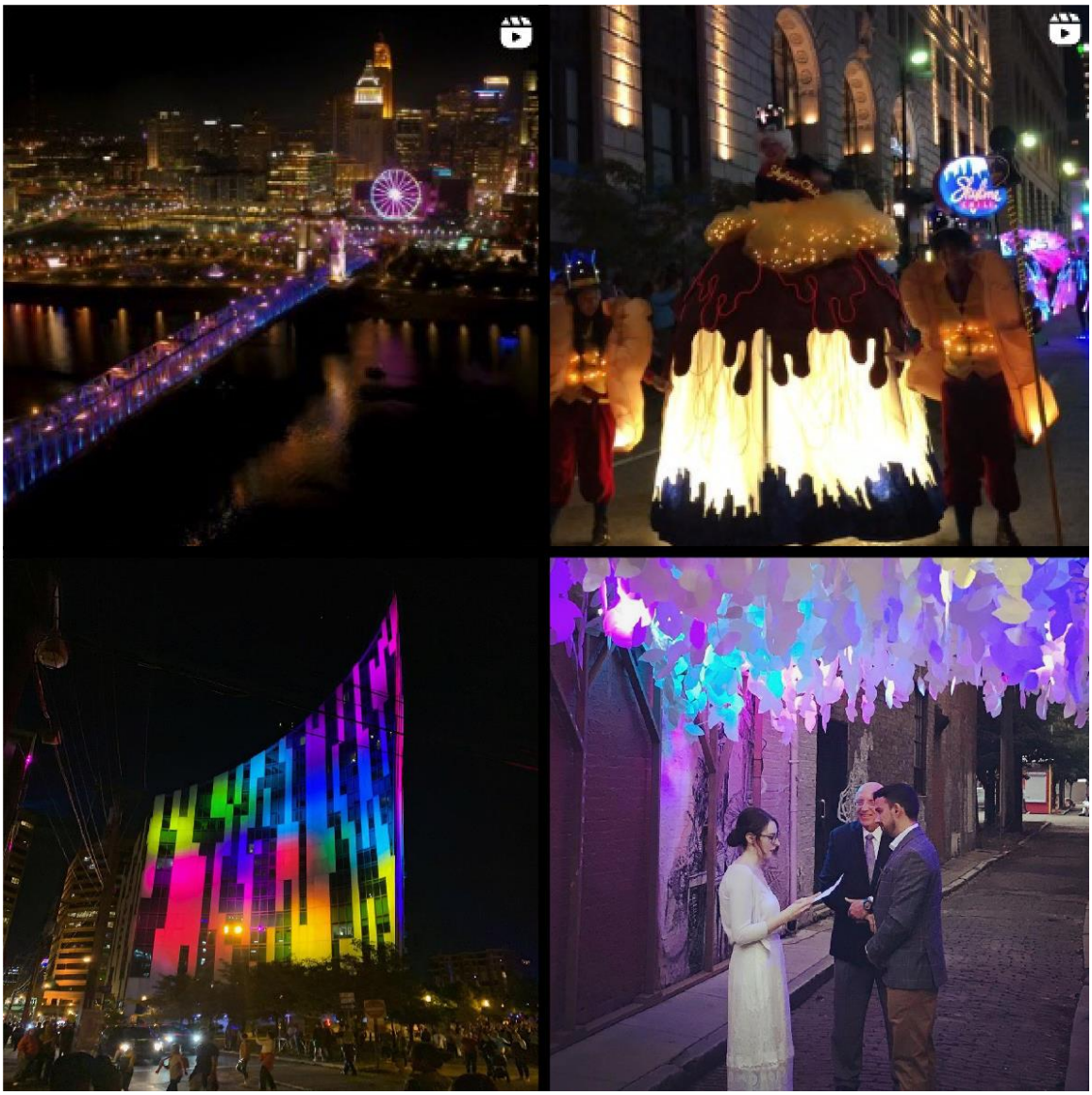

Figure 4.4 The four most liked images from the official BLINK Instagram account.
Source: BLINK 2019e; BLINK 2019d; BLINK 2019f, BLINK 2019h

Of the top Instagram posts by likes, four of the top twelve were of the Rainbow Bridge artwork, two of which were daytime images, so not during the official festival hours. Similarly, the top liked Facebook post for the festival was an image of the Rainbow Bridge, again not lit up. Despite being taken at different times of day, the images are all taken from nearly the exact same vantage point framing the recognizable skyline of Cincinnati underneath the rainbow's arc. The locating of the artwork was intentional to generate this view of the city and its suggestion of an inclusive and open future city. Its

repetition increases the number of people who interact with it and help to stabilize it as a collective goal for the city.

4.7 Conclusion

Light has affective capabilities to transform places and people (Edensor & Bille, 2019) literally transfiguring places and creating them anew. Though they have been connected to gentrification, light festivals have radical potential (Edensor & Sumartoko, 2018; Waitt, 2008; Amayo Caldwell & Foth, 2014) to change the way that people feel about a place (Lovell & Griffin, 2019). They are more than just light, they can create a "duality of perception" and if they are really good, a "parallel world" (Lovell & Griffin, 2019). It is through this duality of perception that creative placemakers and festival organizers like BLINK aim to bring to temporary reality their vision for the Future City.

The BLINK festival reconfigured the city of Cincinnati through light. Via projection mapping art and light sculpture, the BLINK festival projected a vision for the Future City of Cincinnati onto its buildings and walls. Particularly in the Findlay Market zone of the festival, which is undergoing heavy amounts of renovation and redevelopment, lighting was used to create pathways between artworks and direct attendees through liminal spaces they might otherwise not venture into. The light projections of BLINK altered audience perceptions of place and space, but this altered shift was ephemeral, part of the lights and the crowd. Digital mediation in the form of the Mediated Future City was necessary to prolong this shift, to share it to people who were not at the event, and to embed it digitally in place. The BLINK organizers' vision of the Future City needed the audience to digitally mediate it, to create the level of media saturation necessary, but this reliance on the digital mediation of the audience also opens the vision of the project up to audience co-creation and potentially, co-option. To safeguard their vision and solidify it, BLINK

festival organizers were able to make use of numerous digital and physical methods to (re)direct audience digital meditation and curate it into a form that fits their goals.

This chapter examined the digital mediation of BLINK, both by its organizers and its audiences to understand how creative placemakers can (re)direct audience co-creation and co-option to further cement their vision for the future. This is an important consideration for both creative placemakers looking to strengthen their visions for the future, but also for those who hold out digital mediation as a potentially transformative means of communication between communities and civic organizations (Foth, 2017). Through digital mediation across networked space, individuals can share ideas, access resources, and collaborate on projects that enhance the aesthetic and cultural vibrancy of their community. Additionally, paying closer attention to digital cultural objects and their ability to act as interfaces to the future city (Rose et al., 2014) answers Rose's (2015) call to geographers to consider further the participatory aspects of these objects and builds on Zebracki and Luger's work on the digital mediation of public art (Zebracki, 2017; Zebracki & Luger, 2019). Both of these are important to gaining a more complete picture of the work that digital mediation does in our cities and towns as creative placemaking, now 13 years on shows little signs of abating as a major driver behind the design of urban spaces.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

In this dissertation, I set out to interrogate how paying attention to the digital mediation of creative placemaking can help us better understand the work that creative placemaking projects do in our constantly mediated and networked world. The creative placemaking projects that I've discussed up till now tend towards the ludic and whimsical, but just because something is silly doesn't mean it doesn't do genuine and important work. It certainly doesn't mean that it is benign. Creative placemaking projects are the material outcome of very real, very well-traveled arts-led urban (re)development policies that have an agenda for what public spaces should look like, what kinds of things that should happen there, and who they should be designed for. By extension these projects also have an agenda for who and what do not belong there. They are not benign, they shape the world, and through their digital mediation they are able to shape places far beyond their origin sites.

Though the focus of creative placemaking practitioners and their assessment metrics is on the local impact, creative placemaking projects are in fact more than local; they are translocal and transcalar. The movement of these projects across places is frequently facilitated by the creation of toolkits and white papers. The policy mobilities field has managed to create methodologies for tracing these objects through formal knowledge networks (McCann, 2011; McCann & Ward, 2012) both in formal and informal spaces. However, the reach of these documents and their associated circuits of conferences and consultants has proven difficult to trace in smaller places without clear connections to those formal networks (Kong et al., 2006). In Chapter 2, I have shown how the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects, in particular replicated projects, has the potential to enable tracing the translocation of these projects through places regardless of their size or association with formal and informal knowledge networks. By being able to

trace the movement of these replicated projects we move closer to a relational view of creative placemaking across networked space, a viewpoint that has been sorely lacking in the study of creative placemaking which has tended to focus on singular projects in large and global cities (Edensor et al., 2010).

Redaelli (2016) has shown how creative placemaking projects, by requiring public-private partnerships and coordination between multiple organizations operating at numerous scales, are always transcalar, but this is an internal transcalar reach. There is also an external transcalar reach associated with creative placemaking. These projects work to create transcalar connections outside of their sites by linking themselves to the global networks of places that engage in creative placemaking. By bringing themselves into comparison with places that are known for their art and creativity, which tend to be large and global cities given the way that creativity has habitually been formulated within urban policy (Edensor et al., 2010), the sites of creative placemaking projects announce where they see themselves fitting in in this constellation of places (Richards & Duif, 2019). In Chapter 3, I've shown how digital mediation helps to make these external transcalar connections visible through the example of Lexington's participation in the #muralchallenge.

Creative placemaking projects seldom consider the work of digital mediation in their projects beyond its role in marketing (Halegoua, 2020) or as an ad hoc archive (Cianci & Schutt, 2014). In the recently published Routledge Handbook of Creative Placemaking which brings together numerous well-established scholars, there is only one chapter listed in its contents by topic list for "digital and technology" and that chapter is about Smart Cities. There are 10 uses of the phrase "social media" in the text, not including the index, and most of them are in reference to using social media to market a project. McCabe and Harris (2021) in their review of the community development literature regarding practioners perspectives on social media found precious little academic debate in the field concerning the work the medium does. Instead, they found social media use treated as

"value-free" and disconnected from larger debates within the field about neoliberalization (McCabe & Harris, 2021). Still some hold out hope of digital mediation being a transformational way for citizens to engage with their cities (Foth, 2017). Yet, as shown in Chapter 4, audience digital mediation is potentially subject to both physical and digital methods of control and (re)direction by project organizers. Audience co-creation, and potential co-option, threaten to destabilize project organizers' visions for the future giving project organizers a vested interest in limiting audience digital mediation to that which best fits with their imagined future of a place.

5.2 "This 'Mural' Ain't Doing Shit."

On the cover of the Routledge Handbook of Creative Placemaking (Calderon & Takeshita, 2020) is an aerial photograph of the Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC. The plaza and its namesake mural occupy the 800 and 900 blocks of 16th Avenue NW where it meets Lafayette Park, directly in front of the White House. The two-block stretch of road became internationally famous in June 2020 when, several days after adjacent Lafayette Park was forcibly cleared of demonstrators protesting the extrajudicial murders of black citizens at the hands of police, a very clear message appeared. Rendered in traffic yellow, reflective paint and in lettering 40 ft high: BLACK LIVES MATTER. The street mural was secretly commissioned by DC Mayor Muriel Bowser and is the work of 8 DC artists, 6 of whom have chosen to remain anonymous, assisted by employees from the DC Department of Public Works and passers-by who worked through the night to install the street mural (Wright, 2020). In the days after the DC street mural's appearance, other cities across the country and around the globe scrambled to create their own anti-racist street murals in the same mold.

In the preface to the handbook, Courage (2020) writes of the cover image:

> *"In this one image, we have an art practice that has become synonymous with placemaking, undertaken by a familiar cohort from across*

> *municipal, public, and commercial life, and since, rendered in site-specific words in further cities across the United States. We also have contested public realm and citizen-administration relations, contested politics, racial injustice, and the right to the city and to protest (and indeed, such street murals have been the site since of racist acts of removal and painting over.) This is the politics of placemaking – and it is the job of placemakers to work in the service of our communities and, for those white placemakers, to offer our allyship at all times, platforming, amplifying, and making space for our people-of-colour colleagues and communities (natch, any and all protected characteristics.) It should never be forgotten that the street mural was intended as monument to lives lost from the Black community across America, and the world. Having this image on the front cover of this book is an act of remembrance and of resistance and a reminder of who we serve as placemakers and of our duty to 'do better.'"*

The acknowledgment of a dynamic and layered political environment in which placemaking happens is a step forward for a discipline that Roberto Bedoya, the Cultural Affairs Manager for the City of Oakland and longtime creative placemaking professional, notes "has not examined toughly our nation's racist legacy and its complicity with this line of thinking — especially in the actions of placemaking and the white spatial imaginary at play in policies and practices in this field" (Crane et al., 2020). Coming as it does out of the tradition of neighborhood-level placemaking work done by Jane Jacobs (1961) and Holly Whyte (1980), creative placemaking is human-centric, but it has lacked an understanding of difference. Not all human bodies move through space in the same way for a multiplicity of reasons including race, gender, and class. The shift that the Routledge Handbook for Creative Placemaking is working to cement in the discipline, to recognize that difference is an important part of the human experience of place, that it matters who is doing the placemaking, that the work of placemaking is political, this is all a significant change in how creative placemaking situates itself in the world. It is a change that has been slowly coming, as the evidence mounts up showing how creative placemaking, despite its progressive talk, is just creative cities neoliberalism repackaged (Pratt, 2011).

Creative placemakers have become more conscious of their role in promoting urban inequality. They've come up with labels like "place-taking" and "place-masking" (Fincher et al., 2016) and devised new definitions of placemaking that attempt to exclude projects that don't adequately involve existing communities (Jackson, 2019). Yet well-intentioned placemakers routinely miss the point so succinctly made by an anonymous graffiti writer painting on the site of the DC Black Lives Matter street mural, "This 'Mural' Ain't Doing Shit" (Lewis, 2020a in Dugyala, 2020).

The problem is really that the street mural both is and is not "doing shit" and that creative placemakers ignore a good deal of both. To the graffiti writer's point, the mural is absolutely not doing anything to create systemic change. This mural is not ending racism in America. It does nothing to ameliorate the myriad forms of injustice that marginalized people suffer every day. This mural does nothing to hold police accountable for the violent murders of black men and women committed in cities across the country at their hands. This mural does not make anyone anywhere any safer. By all of these metrics, the mural is absolutely useless, and the anonymous graffiti writer was not alone in their critique. Similar messages were written on other murals in other cities and news outlets openly questioned the ability of art to make actual change (Wilson, 2020; Summers, 2020; Grantham-Phillips, 2020). Shortly after the DC street mural appeared, Black Lives Matter DC denounced the street mural via tweet as "a performative distraction from real policy changes" citing the mayor's refusal to support their actual cause, the defunding of the police (DMV Black Lives Matter, 2020). Protestors altered the mural to include other messages including, "DEFUND THE POLICE" (Lewis, 2020b in Dugyala, 2020). Amendments to the mural were well documented on social media, but subsequently removed.

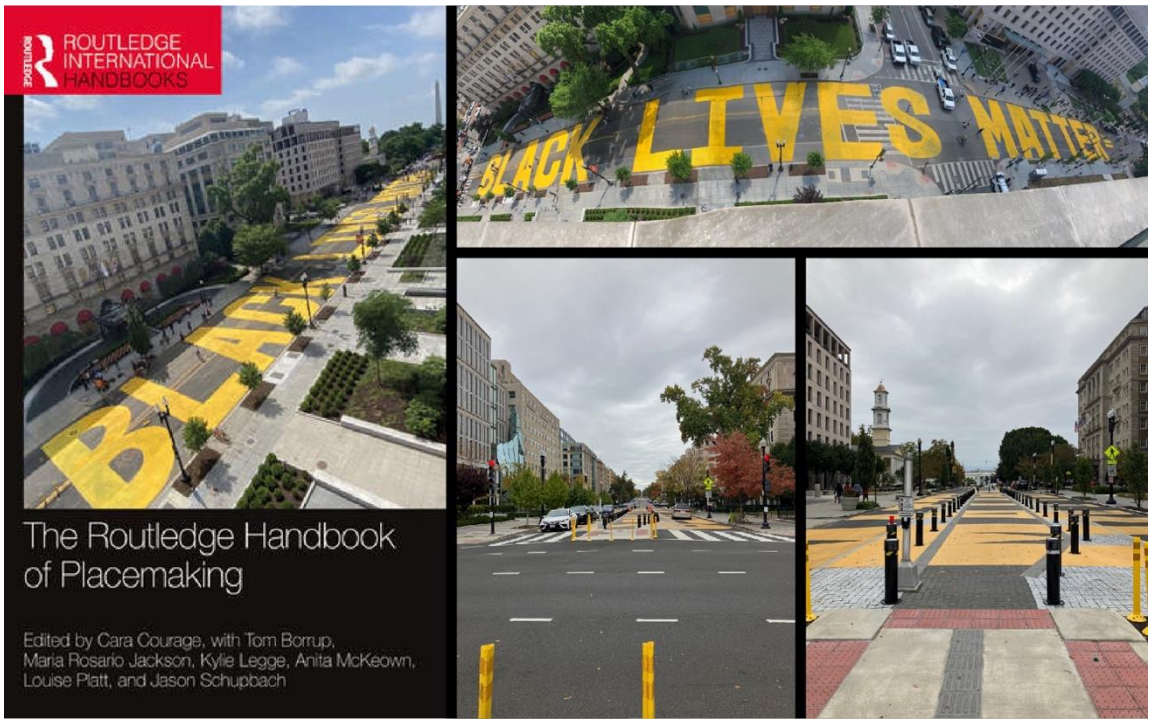

Figure 5.1 Photos of Black Lives Matter street mural in Washington, DC: Cover of Routledge Handbook of Creative Placemaking (Courage et al., 2020) (left); BLM street mural image from the MuralsDC project site (DC Department of Public Works, n.d.) (top); street mural as seen from the intersection of I Street NW and 16 Street NW at the center of the Black Lives Matter Plaza. Looking north towards Farragut North (bottom center) and looking south towards the White House (bottom right). (Photos by author.)

While the meaningful work that people clearly want to see done, is not being done by the DC street mural (and presumably its creators), it is doing quite a lot of other work, much of it related to the street mural's digital mediation. What struck me about the DC Black Lives Matter street mural when I first visited it was that though the MuralsDC Project website (DC Department of Public Works, n.d.) is quick to point out that the street mural is visible from space, from the ground the ~350-yard-long artwork on a heavily trafficked street isn't easily legible. I passed by it several times before finally having to resort to Google Maps to locate it. Instead, the street mural is designed to be digitally mediated, to be seen from space, from Harraway's god's eye view (1988), or the roof of the $500 a night Hays-Adams Hotel where the mayor posed for a photo of the newly created street mural (Dugyala, 2020). The muralists, when asked for tips for other places trying to put in place

their own Black Lives Matter street mural, emphasized the need for "as perfect an aerial shot as possible" and for videographers and photographers to be present to document the process (Hammond, 2020). No suggestions were made for how to connect the street mural to an on-site audience.

Overnight in summer 2020 the DC Black Lives Matter street mural became a social media juggernaut. The MuralsDC website describes it as "the mural heard around the world," invoking Emerson's Concord Hymn and the first battle of the American Revolutionary War (DC Department of Public Works, n.d.). Satellite images of the DC street mural circulated on news broadcasts and social media around the world enabling far more people than would ever see the street mural in person to engage with it digitally, a common occurrence for street art (MacDowall, 2016). With no time for the creation of whitepapers or toolkits, the digital mediation of the DC street mural alone facilitated its translocation. In city after city, the DC street mural was replicated from the digitally mediated images that circulated across networked space and facilitated its rapid translocation.

The scale of the mural and the choice to paint it on the street surface had particular saliency in Washington, DC where the day before the mural was painted the city and the White House had been in conflict over who the street legally belonged to (Nirappil et al., 2020). Painting the message on the street surface was itself a message and a literal claim of ownership over the street. The street mural was not designed for by passers-by or even people within the space itself, it was intended to be mediated and viewed on a digital screen[6]. The choice of scale and location limit the way that people can physically interact with the mural and how individuals are able digitally mediate it. The mural's location on a busy DC street has also made it particularly fragile. The street mural has already been removed and repainted several times, initially due to damage from vehicle exhaust and

[6] Specifically, it was meant to be seen on a screen two blocks away in the White House.

traffic, and later due to road work that necessitated tearing up the street surface. A permanent installation of the street mural in thermoplastic paint and with the addition of a bollard-protected pedestrian plaza opened in November 2021 (DC Mayor's Office, 2021).

Initially, cities copied the project directly down to the traffic yellow road paint and the choice to paint on the street surface, but the project quickly mutated to better fit the needs and resources of host locations. In Charlotte, North Carolina its street mural maintained the god's eye view design, but without the need to produce the street mural secretly or over the course of a single night, organizers chose to expand on the concept and included mini murals within each of the letters of "Black Lives Matter." As pictures of the Charlotte street mural started making the rounds on the internet other cities began using it as a model for a street mural that, though still visible from space, was more artistic in its deployment and provided expanded opportunities for community involvement at a range of skills. This same pattern of replication and response can be seen in the movement of art parades in Chapter 2.

The street murals were not received in the same way in every city. Raleigh, North Carolina painted a street mural identical in deployment, but using a different phrase: End Racism Now (Jennings, 2020). Issues of inequity and exclusion in the creative placemaking process were exposed as the street mural project spread. In Seattle, newspaper articles about its street mural documented the process that led to its creation as an act of allyship (Kamb, 2020), while in Pittsburgh a similar mural, this one painted on an underpass, was met with ire when it was discovered that no people of color had been involved in its creation (Waltz, 2020). The street mural outside of City Hall in Dallas, Texas was created with temporary, washable paints instead of thermoplastic paint severely limiting its lifespan (Grantham-Phillips, 2020). While Redwood City, California chose to remove its Black Lives Matter street mural several weeks after it was installed when the city received a request to paint a "MAGA 2020" street mural adjacent to it (Koran, 2020). In some places, the painting of the murals was an act of protest, while in others it had civic support. In

Oakland, California its street mural was painted without prior consent from the city because artists feared that the city wouldn't allow it. After police attempted to arrest the artists mid-mural, the city stepped in with approval for the work (Dafoe, 2020). This pattern also emerged in the translocation of art parades where we saw projects being undertaken by an array of different actors at various levels within a city. We saw similar responses from civic leaders in the case of art trails as well, where some rushed to collaborate with communities while others were content to leave the work to arts and culture organizations, while still benefiting from the work that creative placemaking did.

The Washington, DC Black Lives Matter street mural and its rapid and well-documented translocation via digital mediation provided us a rare opportunity to trace, in near real-time, the movement of a creative placemaking project and the work as it did as it moved across places. Via the project's digital mediation, it was possible to watch the project morph in terms of its materiality and content as local contexts shaped the project. One could see how communities altered the project to fit their individual physical and political space and how those individual physical and political spaces responded to each other as information moved through networked space. Raleigh, North Carolina's decision to not use "Black Lives Matter" in their street mural sent ripples out that influenced the way that other places enacted their replication of DC's project as did Charlotte's use of mini-murals. Similarly, the legal challenge threatened in Redwood City, California likely influenced decisions elsewhere to sanction similar street murals on public property. Through digital mediation, all these projects made visible translocal and transcalar connections to the other cities and towns that painted similar street murals and claimed space in a global conversation about race, power, and inequality.

5.3 Conclusion

Though the discourse around creative placemaking focuses on the local, creative placemaking does more than local work that is both translocal and transcalar. The digital mediation of creative placemaking projects provides a means of tracking this work through their movement (via translocation) across places and making visible the transcalar connections to other places and flows of knowledge that cities are attempting to create through creative placemaking. Additionally, though creative placemakers do have potential to direct and limit it, digital mediation offers a potentially transformative way for community and civic organizations to interact at multiple levels about the futures that they imagine for their cities (Foth, 2017). While the work of creative placemakers is heavily digitally mediated by its creators and audiences, creative placemakers have persistently overlooked the impacts of digital mediation as part of what their work does in the world and to account for and engage with its more than local effects.

Washington, DC's Black Lives Matter street mural is a creative placemaking project that was designed to be digitally mediated. It was circulated around the world via digital mediation on social media platforms and news sites, and its digital mediation spawned replicated projects worldwide, which were themselves then digitally mediated and circulated. Its subsequent augmentation by several waves of protestors was documented, circulated, and archived on social media. The DC Black Lives Matter street mural clearly engages with fundamentally important issues of racial inequality and the right to the city. This lifecycle is not unique to this project, it is reflected in the numerous projects covered throughout this dissertation.

The anti-racist protests that erupted in American cities and across the globe have altered the conversation in urban spaces around racial inequality and the right to the city. At the same time, the global COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways that we think about and organize social interaction and connections. Creative placemaking as a practice

seems poised to make significant strides forward towards incorporating more diverse voices, greater concern for social justice, and ameliorating the worst of its neoliberal outcomes. This is a paradigm shift will require creative placemaking practioners take a larger view of their practice and to incorporate a relational view of the work it does which is readily available by paying attention to the digital mediation of creative placemaking projects.

CHAPTER 6. CODA

6.1 The Law of Unintended Consequences

> *"In the economic sphere, an act, a custom, an institution, a law, produces not only an effect, but a series of effects. Of these effects the first only is immediate; it appears simultaneously with its cause, it is seen. The others are only developed successively, they are not seen; it is well if they are foreseen."* - Frédéric Bastiat, 1859

I mentioned briefly in the introduction to this dissertation that during my research I undertook an artist residency. I saw the call for artist proposals on social media and submitted a proposal, not because I have any delusions of being an artist[7], but rather because I wanted to try and tip the thoughts of the selection committee towards participatory art. Instead of having an artist come into the community and make art about the community, I wanted to suggest to the committee the idea of the artist-in-residence as a facilitator for enabling the community to make art about itself. I pitched a project where community members were provided with the tools and opportunity to tell their own stories about neighborhood change through photography and mapping. I was surprised to be invited for an interview and genuinely shocked when I was selected for the residency. It had not crossed my mind that my proposal might actually be selected.

Something that very early in the residency stood out to me was how differently my proposal was evaluated as a creative placemaking project versus the academic research environment that I'm used to. Had I been writing the residency proposal with the intention of publishing academic research I'd have described it as a community mapping project exploring the attitudes of residents towards "neighborhood change" (broadly defined) and utilizing participatory mapping and photovoice as the research instruments. I would have had to submit my proposal to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) who would

[7] Prior to this point my highest artistic achievement was at age 6 when a drawing I did was the first piece sold in a school fundraiser for survivors of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake and I was very briefly interviewed by The Stars and Stripes. (See Hladky, 1985.)

have required me to enumerate the potential consequences of this research, positive and negative, seen and unseen, as Bastiat puts it, for those individuals participating in my research. The IRB would have considered my proposal in the context of protecting the people involved in my research from harm.

If we're being honest, the potential positive consequences of my art residency proposal (e.g. participation in a fun, potentially informative activity; an opportunity to build stronger community bonds) are outnumbered by the potential negative consequences (e.g. community conflict stirred up by a well-intentioned but poorly nuanced project; being (yet again) exploited for knowledge by outside "experts" and then denied access to the benefit of that knowledge through the lack of access to the institutions those experts work for or the channels in which they distribute information). And while dirty looks in the grocery store and not being able to get a copy of a journal article might seem like minor consequences, they are the sort of death by a thousand cuts kind of damage that academics, and the circuits of power that we are part of, regularly leave in our wake. It's the kind of damage that critical and feminist scholars try to mitigate with participatory practices and reflexive position statements in an attempt to foresee the impact their research might have on the communities they work with. The IRB might have required me to redesign my proposal to mitigate potential harm to research participants.

Creative placemaking can similarly leave a trail of casual destruction, but they have no mechanism that forces them to address those consequences. So, the primarily focus remains on the immediate, positive aspects of their work and minimizes the unintended and longer-term consequences that follow it. Institutional review isn't a perfect system, and I certainly don't suggest that creative placemaking adopt it wholesale, but if I could make any one change to the creative placemaking ecosystem, it would be to have the NEA include a requirement in the Our Town grant process where grantees must provide a detailed evaluation of the potential impacts of their work, both seen and unseen, positive and negative, on the communities where they propose to work. Given the sway of the NEA

and the way that their grant processes get replicated across arts organizations and borders, adding this requirement could potentially impact grant processes globally.

By adopting the viewpoint of needing to protect the people and communities they work with from harm and making thinking through the potential harms and benefits their work might cause throughout its existence, immediately and long-term, creative placemakers could alter their project plans to avoid the more onerous outcomes. Shifting to thinking about their work having immediate and following effects, work that economists have long been doing, would mean creative placemakers having to recontextualize themselves as being part of an economic development policy. It would also mean expanding the ways they think about people interacting with their project to include direct and indirect means, including digital mediation. The actions of people will always be subject to the law of unintended consequences, we will always do accidental harm, but we can mitigate it if we take the opportunity to foresee it.

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VITA

Education

M.S., Environmental Studies, May 2011, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC

B.A., Political Science, December 2002 University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

Professional Experience

Program Director, American University (2022)

Geospatial Research Support, University Library

Instructor, Brescia University

GEO 212 – World Geography (Fall 2021)

Research Assistant, University of Kentucky

Mapshop, Department of Geography, (Fall 2015 & Spring 2016)

The Food Connection, Department of Agricultural Economics (Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Spring 2019)

Instructor, University of Kentucky

GEO 309 - Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (Spring & Fall 2014, Fall 2019)

GEO 172 - Introduction to Human Geography (Fall 2018)

Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky

GEO 109 - Digital Mapping (Fall 2013)

GEO 509 - Workshop in Geospatial Technologies (Spring 2015)

AS 500 - Getting Started with Mapmaking (Fall 2016)

Teaching Assistant, University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)

GEO 386/686 Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (Fall 2012 & Spring 2013)

Honors and Awards

FOSS4Geo Travel Award, North America 2016

University of Kentucky QIPSR Software Festival, Presentation Award 2015, 2016

North American Cartographic Information Society, Travel Award 2014, 2016

University of Kentucky Graduate School, Travel Award 2014, 2016, 2017

Humanities, Arts, Science, & Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) Scholar 2014

Barnhart-Withington, Research Award, 2014

UMBC Graduate Student Association, Travel Award 2014

Public Lab Annual Barn Raising Meeting, Presentation Award 2011 - 2014

College of Charleston, Presentation Award 2011

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