Building Bohemia in Detroit's Cass Corridor, 1964-2017

Jacqueline Sarah Sahagian
Charlottesville, VA

Bachelor of Arts, University of Michigan, 2013
Master of Arts, University of Mississippi, 2018
Master of Arts, University of Virginia, 2021

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Acronyms

404 = 404 Willis
AWS = Detroit Artists' Workshop
CCS = Community Concert Series
COINTELPRO = Counter Intelligence Program
DDA = Downtown Development Authority
DCEWV = Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam
DEGC = Detroit Economic Growth Corporation
DIA = Detroit Institute of Arts
DIY = do it yourself
DPD = Detroit Police Department
EF! = Earth First!
ELF = Earth Liberation Front
FE = *The Fifth Estate*
FUD = Free University of Detroit
JLSP = John and Leni Sinclair Papers
LCA = Little Caesars' Arena
LLC = limited liability company
MMR = *Maximum Rocknroll*
NCCU = North Cass Community Union
NLRB = National Labor Relations Board
RAR = Rock Against Racism
STRESS = Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets
TAZ = Temporary Autonomous Zone
WPP = White Panther Party
WSU = Wayne State University

Introduction—The Rise and Fall of Detroit's Cass Corridor

Detroit, Michigan is a city perhaps best known for two things: urban crisis and cultural efflorescence. During the late twentieth century, as the city gained notoriety for racial unrest, deindustrialization, and white flight, it also produced arts and ideas that shaped American politics and culture.[1] Some of the most influential music and art the city produced, from the MC5 to the White Stripes, from Gary Grimshaw's acid rock posters to xeroxed hardcore punk zines, emanated out of a neighborhood north of downtown that was once called the Cass Corridor. Many of Detroit's most well-known 1960s counterculture institutions including the rock magazine *Creem*, the underground newspaper the *Fifth Estate* (FE), the concert venue the Grande Ballroom, and the advocates of cultural revolution the White Panther Party (WPP) had their roots in the Corridor. Through the following decades, as the neighborhood was increasingly disinvested from by the city and state, Detroit's hardcore punk and garage rock scenes would also call it home.

This enclave, bound by Woodward Avenue in the east, the John C. Lodge freeway in the west, the Fisher Freeway (I-75) in the south, and the Edsel Ford Expressway (I-94) in the north, was home to a flourishing bohemian community throughout the late twentieth century. The *Fifth Estate*'s longtime editor Peter Werbe has said of the neighborhood, "It's always served a purpose

[1] Motown, techno, punk, heavy metal, and the early 2000s indie rock revival are all musics with roots in Detroit. For a sampling of literature on Detroit's illustrious musical history, see Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920-60* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001); Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999); Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go?: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Michaelangelo Matos, *The Underground Is Massive: How Electronic Dance Music Conquered America* (New York: Dey St. [Imprint of William Morrow Publishers], 2015); Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Dan Charnas, *Dilla Time: The Life and Afterlife of J Dilla, The Hip-Hop Producer Who Reinvented Rhythm* (New York: MCD / Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2022); Carleton S. Gholz, "'Where the Mix Is Perfect': Voices from the Post-Motown Soundscape" (Ph.D., United States -- Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh), accessed June 16, 2023, https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/888203833/abstract/A452AD4CAC894198PQ/6; M. L. Liebler, ed., *Heaven Was Detroit: From Jazz to Hip-Hop and Beyond* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2016).

where the rebellious and the weird and the radical and the misfits can get together."[2] Wayne State University (WSU), located in the Corridor's north end, brought together like-minded outsiders and gave them something to rebel against as well as resources to exploit. Institutions catering to students and professors, like cafes and newspapers, became sites of creative and political activity. Home also to a relocated slum with social service organizations, vice district enticements like the "topless shoeshine," as well as apartment buildings and motels that charged by the week, the day, or the hour, the Corridor offered affordable space for those who could navigate the conditions of the distressed inner city.[3] The meeting point of the university's resources and community with low rents resulted in an enduring bohemian enclave that produced significant art, music, and political activity throughout the final decades of the twentieth century, but is little known today as the neighborhood has been demolished, rebranded, and erased by one of Michigan's most powerful families.

[2] D. Sands, "Would The Real Midtown Please Stand Up? A Cultural History of the Cass Corridor," *Critical Moment* (blog), February 15, 2012, https://critical-moment.org/2012/02/15/would-the-real-midtown-please-stand-up/.
[3] Bruce Harkness, *Photographs from Detroit, 1975-2019* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2022), 33; Armando Delicato and Elias Khalil, *Images of America: Detroit's Cass Corridor* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 88–89.

Fig. 0.1. Map of the Cass Corridor. Source: Bryan Alexander, 11:11 Designs.

This dissertation tells the story of some of the artists and activists who lived and worked in the Cass Corridor during the late twentieth century. These figures include the counterculture revolutionary John Sinclair and his wife and comrade, Leni; the collective who published the longest-running English-language anarchist newspaper, the *Fifth Estate,* and protested the building of the world's largest trash incinerator in the city; the suburban teenagers who cultivated the city's hardcore punk scene in disused buildings like the Freezer Theatre and the Women's City Club; and anarchist activists who turned deindustrialized Detroit into a queer utopia in xerographic art and collectively-owned spaces. The dissertation emphasizes that the different

generations and scenes of this small community were interconnected and in dialogue with each other through the decades.

This project explores the life and death of a bohemian community in a Rust Belt city experiencing rapid change, and how artists and activists responded to those changes. Studying these prolific grassroots actors goes beyond the narrative of deindustrial malaise that frequently colors both popular and historical accounts of late twentieth century Detroit. Cass Corridor residents theorized and organized against the conditions that neoliberal urban governance wrought upon their neighborhood and their lives. Their work was a significant contribution to what Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson have called "remaking radicalism" in the post-1960s era.[4] In order to take Cass Corridor bohemians seriously as intellectuals, this dissertation unpacks some of their prodigious amount of self-published work, studying its ideas, art, and printmaking. The artists and activists examined here contributed to national artistic and literary movements made possible by mimeograph and xerox machines, connecting their provincial industrial city to coastal cultural meccas via print. Much of this material was accessed in the personal archives of scene participants, who were generous enough to share their time, stories, and collections.

I use the term "bohemian" to describe the artists, radicals, musicians, writers, and activists who lived in the neighborhood throughout the period under study. In his examination of Chicago's Wicker Park, Richard Lloyd defines bohemia as "the activities of artists and lifestyle eccentrics as they cohere in and around urban districts."[5] The word has been used this way since at least the 1830s but gained currency in describing modernist art movements that emerged in nineteenth century Paris. Central to the bohemian ethos is a rejection of the bourgeoisie from

[4] Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson, "Introduction: Usable Pasts and the Persistence of Radicalism," in *Remaking Radicalism: A Grassroots Documentary Reader of the United States, 1973-2001* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2020), 1–21.
[5] Richard D. Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 50.

which the bohemian often comes. Like the bohemians of Paris' Left Bank or New York's Greenwich Village, many of those in the Cass Corridor left homes that offered class stability and social respectability to live a more exciting and adventurous life in the city in part through "a spatial proximity to the urban subproletariat."[6] Throughout the late twentieth century, the Corridor was a refuge to disillusioned metro Detroit suburbanites who turned their back on the suburbs, the Protestant work ethic, and even civilization. Many Corridor bohemians attempted to build solidarity with their Black neighbors as the city's segregation and isolation from the suburbs deepened throughout the late twentieth century, but these attempts had uneven results as we will see in the following chapters. While some have critiqued them as proto-gentrifiers engaged in slumming, this project ponders what performance studies scholar Ashon Crawley calls "otherwise possibilities" created when white residents chose to reject the suburbs and mainstream narratives that the inner city was inhospitable for them.[7] In zines, music, and community spaces, these bohemians romanticized deindustrialized Detroit as a place they could be their authentic selves and created sites to explore radical possibilities for different ways of living.

In both popular narratives and scholarship, Detroit is often portrayed as a symbol of failure, with Detroiters the victims of top-down forces. My dissertation joins work by scholars and activists taking a grassroots perspective to identify how people leveraged their agency while facing the political headwinds of the late twentieth century.[8] In seeking ways to reframe

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[6] Lloyd, 55.
[7] Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.
[8] Some studies of Detroit that influenced this dissertation include Monica M. White, "Shouldering Responsibility for the Delivery of Human Rights: A Case Study of the D-Town Farmers of Detroit," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 3, no. 2 (2010): 189–211; Monica M. White, "Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (October 1, 2011), https://doi.org/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.13; Mark Jay and Philip Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2020); Stephen M. Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives*

narratives of late twentieth century Detroit, this chapter follows an intellectual path blazed by Heather Ann Thompson's argument that "when white racial conservatives eventually abandoned inner cities, they did so as losers—not victors—of the intense war for urban control."[9] When white conservatives fled the city, they left devastation but also space for other possibilities to emerge. Thompson is attentive to the ways that white radicals in the 1960s and '70s were key actors in the processes that helped achieve an urban multiracial democracy. This dissertation follows some of these white radicals in those decades through to the end of the century—FE editor Peter Werbe, for example, was a prominent activist in the movement against the Vietnam War before joining the paper. Thompson emphasizes how "real political differences among whites routinely thwarted every white attempt to unify along racial lines."[10] The bohemians of the Cass Corridor are part of this story of white radicals who refused the suburbanization, consumerism, and a fear-driven rejection of the city that characterized many suburbanites in metro Detroit and elsewhere.[11]

As of this writing, the Cass Corridor no longer exists. Much of the neighborhood has been razed to make way for the publicly funded construction of a sports stadium. While the rest of Detroit gained population for the first time in six decades, the census tracts that make up the Corridor lost residents after the stadium was built and promised mixed-use developments have

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of James and Grace Lee Boggs (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Andrew Herscher, *The Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Kimberley Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[9] Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History.," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 1, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/97.3.703; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 6.

[10] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 11.

[11] For more on white radicals in Detroit see Say Burgin, *Organizing Your Own: The White Fight for Black Power in Detroit* (New York: New York University Press, 2024).

never been constructed.[12] The new designation "Midtown" has been used to apply to the northern Corridor and surrounding areas near Wayne State.[13] Examining the erasure of this community helps unveil neoliberal strategies for managing and profiting from the urban crisis in Rust Belt cities. Corridor artists and activists fought the decisions that destroyed their neighborhood, and their story helps us see the lived experience of Detroiters as business, municipal, and state leaders remade Detroit into a postindustrial city. This dissertation advances a rise and fall narrative to illustrate how removing the urban spaces where bohemian cultures once flourished is a standard protocol of neoliberal urban governance.

Though the Cass Corridor is no more, the subjects of this dissertation who lived and worked in the neighborhood undertook a variety of artistic and political endeavors that continue to influence art and activism and are relevant to contemporary struggles for a more democratic, freer city. *Building Bohemia in Detroit's Cass Corridor* seeks to explore the life and death of bohemian community in United States cities using an overlooked case study between the coasts. Having provided a broad overview of my argument, the following sections lay more historical groundwork for the chapters to come and further elucidate my interventions in the fields of urban, cultural, and political history of the U.S.

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[12] Louis Aguilar, "Ilitch Family Revives Its First Historic Detroit Building in 30 Years," *Bridge Michigan*, September 15, 2021, https://www.bridgemi.com/urban-affairs/ilitch-family-revives-its-first-historic-detroit-building-30-years; Dana Afana, "'Detroit Is a Vibrant and Growing City Again'; Population Grows for First Time since 1957," *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2024, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2024/05/16/census-bureau-report-detroit-population-increases/73701788007/.

[13] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 100; Sands, "Would The Real Midtown Please Stand Up? A Cultural History of the Cass Corridor."

The Cass Corridor from Settlement to the Counterculture

When French explorer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac arrived in 1701 to settle the marshy land on the straits connecting Lake Huron and Lake Erie, the area had been occupied by indigenous peoples for thousands of years. The Anishinaabe peoples named the land *Waawiiyaataanong,* meaning "where the water bends." French settlers called it *détroit,* which translates to "the strait." Historians including Kyle Mays and Tiya Miles have explored the indigenous history of Detroit and how legacies of colonialism and erasure linger to the present.[14]

The French divided the settlement into parcels called "ribbon farms" that were granted to settlers in the early 1700s, named for the thin strips of land connecting to the Detroit River. During the French and Indian War, the British gained control of the settlement, but not without some disruption from the indigenous leader Pontiac, who led a siege of Fort Detroit but failed to capture it. The Cass Corridor's name comes from its time as a ribbon farm originally purchased by the Macomb family and later sold to Michigan Territory governor Lewis Cass in 1816.[15] Cass served as Michigan's governor from 1813 to 1831, Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War from 1831 to 1836, and was an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 1848. He was also a slaveowner who advocated for popular sovereignty and has been called "an architect of Indian removal" by professor of history and Native American studies Michael Witgen.[16] In recognition of Cass's role

[14] Kyle T. Mays, *City of Dispossessions: Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and the Creation of Modern Detroit*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Kyle T. Mays, "Pontiac's Ghost in the Motor City: Indigeneity and the Discursive Construction of Modern Detroit," *Middle West Review* 2, no. 2 (2016): 115–42, https://doi.org/10.1353/mwr.2016.0001; Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017); Karen L. Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels: The Power of French-Indigenous Families in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020).

[15] Gretchen Griner, "Historic and Architectural Resources of the Cass Farm Survey Area, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan" (National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, August 1995), https://catalog.archives.gov/id/25338635, National Archives.

[16] Witgen quoted in Shelby Jouppi, "CuriosiD: Lewis Cass, Michigan Governor, Architect of Indian Removal," *WDET 101.9 FM* (blog), June 27, 2017, https://wdet.org/2017/06/27/curiosid-lewis-cass-michigan-governor-architect-of-indian-removal/. This article contains a map of various sites in Michigan named after Lewis Cass.; See

harming indigenous and Black populations, some have recently pushed to remove his name and image from institutions including the U.S. Capitol, but it can still be seen around the state.[17] The lifestyles and political views of the Corridor's bohemians would likely have horrified the conservative Cass, and they had no fondness for the man their neighborhood was named after. "I think in all future references, people like ourselves should refer to it as the Corridor, and we should excise Lewis motherfucking Cass and his stupid racist name from the neighborhood," *Fifth Estate* collective member Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith said in an oral history interview.[18]

By the 1880s, Cass's farm plot had been subdivided, Victorian mansions built, and a neighborhood of "many of Detroit's illustrious citizens resided there."[19] After Henry Ford announced the Five Dollar Day in 1914, offering to pay workers five dollars for each eight-hour shift on Ford's assembly line, Detroit's population grew rapidly as foreign-born and Southern migrants arrived to labor in the city's automobile factories. Between 1900 and 1920, Detroit rose from the thirteenth most populous city in the nation to the fourth, with its Black population growing 611 percent.[20] Detroit was a major destination for Black and white Southerners during both waves of the Great Migration.[21] The economic downturn of the Great Depression followed

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also John T. Fierst, "Rationalizing Removal: Anti-Indianism in Lewis Cass's North American Review Essays," *Michigan Historical Review* 36, no. 2 (2010): 1–35, https://doi.org/10.5342/michhistrevi.36.2.0001.

[17] Melissa Nann Burke, "Michigan House OKs Replacing Cass Statue with Coleman Young at U.S. Capitol," *The Detroit News*, December 6, 2022, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/michigan/2022/12/06/michigan-house-oks-replacing-cass-statue-with-coleman-young-at-u-s-capitol/69706921007/; Paul Egan, "Lewis Cass Name Is All over Michigan: 10 Places Named for Slave Owner," *Detroit Free Press*, June 30, 2020, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/06/30/lewis-cass-building-lansing-michigan/5350447002/.

[18] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, interview by Author, January 31, 2023.

[19] Griner, "Historic and Architectural Resources of the Cass Farm Survey Area, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan," 4.

[20] Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 30–31.

[21] James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); William K. Stevens, "Appalachia's Hillbillies Trek North for Jobs," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1973, https://www.nytimes.com/1973/03/29/archives/appalachias-hillbillies-trek-north-for-jobs-4-million-migrants.html. Gregory's book focuses on the stories of two famous Detroiters with southern roots, Aretha Franklin and Lily Tomlin. Tomlin was born to Kentuckian parents, grew up in the Corridor, and graduated from Cass Technical High School.

by the population boom that resulted from the city's period as "the arsenal of democracy" during World War II saw the Cass Corridor transition into a working-class neighborhood. Many residents were Appalachian migrants who came to labor in the city's defense plants and resided in subdivided multiple dwelling units. In the 1960s the neighborhood remained so heavily populated with Appalachian migrants that workers for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee referred to it as "little Kentucky."[22]

This population growth led to competition for adequate housing across the city, as Black residents were restricted to overcrowded and unmaintained neighborhoods.[23] Detroit's leaders attempted to solve the problem with urban renewal and highway construction, resulting in the destruction of historically Black neighborhoods including Paradise Valley and Black Bottom, broken promises to rehouse displaced residents, and the acceleration of white flight.[24] The construction of I-75 separated the Cass Corridor from downtown and sped the neighborhood's decline. During the early 1960s, a skid row district on Michigan Avenue east of Tiger Stadium was razed to expand the John C. Lodge freeway.[25] In 1962, the Detroit City Council discussed what should be done with the people and businesses that would be displaced when the slum was torn down. Councilman Mel Ravitz advocated for containing the residents and businesses in one

[22] The Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, "Field Notes No.3: The Geography of the Children of Detroit" (Detroit, 1971), https://radicalantipode.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/dgei_fieldnotes-iii_b.pdf.
[23] For racial unrest related to housing pre-1967 Rebellion, see Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004); Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, *Run Home If You Don't Want to Be Killed: The Detroit Uprising of 1943* (Chapel Hill, Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, 2021); Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination* (New York: Amistad, 2017), 150–54; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33–88; For race and housing shortages in another Midwestern city in this era, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
[24] For urban renewal in Detroit see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47–51.
[25] George Hunter, "Revival of Detroit's Cass Corridor Crowds out Criminals," *The Detroit News*, July 12, 2016, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2016/07/12/detroit-evolving-cass-corridor-criminals/87010800/.

neighborhood. “Why can’t we control and designate a specific area for them, before we find the effects of a new Skid Row appearing throughout the city?” he suggested.[26] The shelters, bars, pawn shops, liquor stores, and hotels that had served this population were relocated to the Cass Corridor, which became “the city’s red-light district.” In this same period, Detroit’s Chinatown was also designated a slum and relocated from downtown to a few blocks in the Corridor.[27] The neighborhood maintained its reputation as a vice district through the late twentieth century.

By the mid-1960s, the Corridor’s location close to the downtown of a major city, proximity to a university, ethnic and class diversity, and availability of cheap housing made it ripe for the development of a bohemian community and it became home to the city’s burgeoning counterculture. Meanwhile tensions caused by police repression, housing shortages, and discriminatory hiring practices boiled over in the summer of 1967, when Detroit saw the deadliest urban uprising in an era of “long hot summers.”[28] Corridor bohemians supported the rebellion, looting businesses alongside their neighbors, raising a flag that read “burn, baby, burn” over their rooftop, and theorizing the outburst as a prefiguration of a more equitable urban future in their publications.[29] The Detroit Rebellion shaped the public image of the city for generations, but the Corridor’s creative community endured and fostered radical activity even as the neighborhood gained notoriety as a center for drugs, prostitution, and violent crime.

There is a growing but disjointed literature exploring the specific artists, works, and movements that came from the Corridor milieu. Ken and Ann Mikolowski’s art and poetry

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[26] Quoted in Hunter.
[27] “Unveil Plans for $3-Million Chinatown,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 3, 1961; For a memoir of life in Detroit's Chinatown, see Curtis Chin, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2023); For a documentary about Detroit's Chinatown, see *Last Days of Chinatown*, 2017.
[28] For an in-depth study of the 1967 Rebellion, see Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007).
[29] Steve Miller, *Detroit Rock City: The Uncensored History of Rock “n” Roll in America’s Loudest City* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2013), 56; John Sinclair, “The Coatpuller,” *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1967, Labadie Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

printing project the Alternative Press has received scholarly attention and been archived.[30] The "urban expressionist" visual artists centered around community-based studios and galleries like the Common Ground for the Arts and the Willis Gallery have been the subject of studies and exhibits.[31] Historians of urban and labor history have studied the radical student activists at WSU who took over the university's student paper, renamed it *The South End*, and founded the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.[32] The Grande Ballroom's counterculture rock scene, considered the best between the coasts during the late 1960s, was not located in the Corridor but was cultivated by Corridor artists including the MC5 and John and Leni Sinclair. This golden era of Detroit rock history has received popular and scholarly attention.[33] The hardcore punk scene of the early 1980s has been remembered in an oral history collection, a documentary, and scholarly articles, and its zines and flyers have been anthologized.[34] While individual

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[30] Rebecca Kosick, "Intermedia Poetics in and out of Detroit's Alternative Press," *Word & Image* 38, no. 2 (June 29, 2022): 88–103, https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2021.1925039; Rebecca Kosick, *Detroit's Alternative Press: Dispatches from the Avant-Garage* (Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2025); Emily Warn, "D.I.Y. Detroit: How the Alternative Press Shaped the Art of a City Left for Dead.," *Poetry Foundation* (blog), April 20, 2011, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69676/diy-detroit.

[31] Mary Jane Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams: The Emergence of a Detroit Avant-Garde," in *Kick Out the Jams: Detroit's Cass Corridor, 1963-1977* (Detroit, Mich: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1980), 17–24; Julia R. Myers, *Subverting Modernism: Cass Corridor Revisited, 1966-1980* (Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University Galleries, 2013); Sarah Rose Sharp, "The Cass Corridor Movement's Salvation Through Salvage," Hyperallergic, January 25, 2022, http://hyperallergic.com/704718/the-cass-corridor-movements-salvation-through-salvage/.

[32] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying A Study in Urban Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

[33] Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 33–83; Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 207–34; David A. Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution: The Birth of Detroit Rock "n" Roll* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Mathew J. Bartkowiak, *The MC5 and Social Change: A Study in Rock and Revolution* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mcfarland & Company, Inc., 2009); Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 3–102; Patrick Burke, *Tear Down the Walls: White Radicalism and Black Power in 1960s Rock* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 19–44; *Louder Than Love: The Grande Ballroom Story*, 2012.

[34] Michael H. Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," *Cultural History* 4, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 19–41, https://doi.org/10.3366/cult.2015.0082; Stephen Cedars, "Something We're Not: John Brannon, Negative Approach, and the Ruins of Detroit," *Music & Politics* 16, no. 1 (February 16, 2022), https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.2340; Drew Daniel, "'Why Be Something That You're Not?' Punk Performance and the Epistemology of Queer Minstrelsy," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (116) (September 1, 2013): 13–34, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152819; Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 203–32; Tony Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not: Detroit Hardcore, 1979-1985* (Huntington Beach, CA: Revelation Records, 2010); Tony Rettman, Chris Minicucci, and Richard Warwick, eds., *Better Never Than Late: Midwest Hardcore Flyers and Ephemera,*

publications with roots in the Corridor, especially *Creem* magazine, have been recognized for their influence, the neighborhood's role as an incubator of important political and cultural critique has not been deeply explored.[35] These scenes and projects are often portrayed as distinct, disjointed, and separate. One objective of this dissertation is to synthesize scattershot stories about culture and politics and argue that they are united by place.

The Urban Crisis

Histories of the late twentieth century United States often focus on the entrenchment of neoliberal economic policy and conservative politics; the end of the "new deal order;" "backlash" to movements for social justice and liberation; the political ascendency of the New Right; the increasing conservatism of suburbanites; growing wealth inequality; the decline of organized labor; and the rise of mass incarceration.[36] In these narratives, Detroit often takes on a role as the most extreme example. Detroit in the late twentieth century can be seen as one of the

1981-1984 (Brooklyn and Boston: Radio Raheem, 2021); Tesco Vee and Dave Stimson, *Touch and Go: The Complete Hardcore Punk Zine '79-'83*, ed. Steve Miller (Brooklyn, New York: Bazillion Points, 2010).

[35] Jim DeRogatis, *Let It Blurt: The Life & Times of Lester Bangs, America's Greatest Rock Critic* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000); *Creem: America's Only Rock "n" Roll Magazine* (Greenwich Entertainment, 2020); Michael J. Kramer, "'Can't Forget the Motor City': Creem Magazine, Rock Music, Detroit Identity, Mass Consumerism, and the Counterculture," *Michigan Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 42–77, https://doi.org/10.2307/20173983.

[36] Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005), https://doi.org/10.2307/3660172; Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008); Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016); Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History."

bleakest sites in U.S. history, and this story has been told by scholars, journalists, and artists.[37] During the last decades of the twentieth century, Detroit was the site of one of the country's deadliest urban rebellions, the city's metropolitan area was broken up into an ever-growing number of suburbs which, in combination with white flight, created one of the most segregated cities in America, capital flight left industrial ruins that have been compared to those in Rome and Angkor Wat, and the Detroit Police Department (DPD) perpetrated some of the deadliest policing of the era.[38] By the early 1980s, 45.1 percent of male Detroiters were out of work and the city exhibited some of the highest violent crime rates in the country.[39]

The Cass Corridor was one of Detroit's most distressed neighborhoods, and fears and myths about the inner city were fostered using its landscape and inhabitants. The city's two daily newspapers dispatched photographers to document the life of slum dwellers, trans and queer people, and sex workers.[40] The papers also ran sanctimonious, titillating articles with headlines like "Inside the Cass Corridor – Where Life Teaches Fear, Despair."[41] National newspapers, too, contributed to the neighborhood's seedy reputation.[42] Meanwhile Black Detroiters, who were the

[37] For journalistic depictions of Detroit's decline, see Ze'ev Chafets, *Devil's Night: And Other True Tales of Detroit* (New York: Random House, 1990); David Maraniss, *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013); Yves Marchand et al., *The Ruins of Detroit* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010).
[38] Josiah Rector, *Toxic Debt: An Environmental Justice History of Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 169; Marchand et al., *The Ruins of Detroit*; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 191; Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 82.
[39] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 151; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 200.
[40] For a collection of these images see Harkness, *Photographs from Detroit, 1975-2019*.
[41] For examples of this see Mary C. Knopp, "Cass Corridor: Pimps, Prostitutes, Drugs, Death," *Detroit News*, August 15, 1977, Box 1 Folder 48, Beulah Groehn Croxford Papers, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University; Bill Gray, "Inside the Cass Corridor -- Where Life Teaches Fear, Despair," *The Sunday News*, November 7, 1976, Box 3, Folder 6, Beulah Groehn Croxford Papers, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University; "Weekend of Death: How 11 Victims Died in a Strange Pattern of Sudden Violence," *Detroit Free Press*, March 7, 1971.
[42] Reginald Stuart, "DETROIT WAGES WAR ON SEX BUSINESSES," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1976, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/01/archives/detroit-wages-war-on-sex-businesses-citizens-picket-prostitutes.html; William Serrin, "Detroit: A Midsummer's Nightmare," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1976, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/25/archives/detroit-a-midsummers-nightmare.html.

majority by the mid-1970s, became poorer and more isolated while the city government turned to development megaprojects in a desperate attempt to straighten out the city's finances.[43]

A vast literature about urban decline in the U.S. has approached the crisis by studying policing and the prison industrial complex, urban renewal, and public/private partnerships, all of which were at play in Detroit and the Corridor as we will see in the following chapters.[44] One of the most influential studies of the interlocking problems that cities faced during this period uses Detroit as its case study. Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis* sought to refute narratives that blamed Black political participation for urban malaise. The book instead held responsible the white Detroiters who wielded physical violence to maintain segregated neighborhoods. Sugrue also changed the periodization of the urban crisis, pushing the timeline back into the 1950s, an era often characterized as prosperous.

However, *Origins* has been critiqued for failing to include "the people" on the ground challenging the top-down forces that affected their lives.[45] By looking at a small group of writers and activists who fought the prevailing political forces of their era and for their community's "right to the city," this dissertation is inspired by the critique of Sugrue from Wayne State University scholars Beth and Timothy Bates with longtime local activist Grace Lee Boggs.[46]

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[43] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 269; James Boggs, "Rebuilding Detroit: An Alternative to Casino Gambling," in *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 341–46; Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 149.

[44] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History."; Andrew R. Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); N.D.B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

[45] Beth Bates, Timothy Bates, and Grace Lee Boggs, "WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE? REVIEW ESSAY ON THOMAS SUGRUE'S THE ORIGINS OF THE URBAN CRISIS.," *Review of Black Political Economy* 27, no. 4 (March 1, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02717260.

[46] Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à La Ville [The Right to the City]* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).

This study seeks to balance the focus in much of the literature on the problems caused by overarching forces, whether that be the local or federal government, racism, or neoliberalism.[47] The scholarship examining those forces is crucial. Detroiters faced monumental challenges and injustices during this period. Still, we must also recover the stories of "the people," even if they seem to end in failure, to learn valuable lessons and find a sense of hope for continuing justice work in the present.

Urban historians and geographers have built a strong body of literature illustrating the causes and effects of the "neoliberal city."[48] As former manufacturing centers like Detroit lost both federal support and the tax dollars of residents who relocated either to the suburbs or a different state entirely, metropolitan leaders turned to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called "industries of last resort" to fill city coffers.[49] During the 1980s and '90s, Detroit built the world's largest trash incinerator, approved casino gambling in city limits, and used public money to fund the building of sports stadiums. Scholars have explored how constructing what Dennis R. Judd calls a "tourist bubble" in Rust Belt cities was an irresistible false promise for municipal leaders facing a bleak fiscal and political landscape in the late twentieth century.[50] These

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[47] In addition to Sugrue, for more on top-down forces that affected Detroiters see Taylor, *Race for Profit*; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Rebecca J. Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland: The Rise of Detroit as America's Postindustrial Frontier* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[48] David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (January 1, 1989), https://doi.org/10.2307/490503; Andrew Diamond and Thomas J. Sugrue, *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar Urban America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Andrew Diamond, *Chicago on the Make: Power and Inequality in a Modern City* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2017); Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Picador, 2017).

[49] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," in *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 50.

[50] Dennis R. Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble," in *The Tourist City* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 35–53; For more on tourism and the postindustrial city see, Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Aaron Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit: Tourism and Urban Revitalization in the Postwar Rustbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016); Sean Dinces, "'Nothing but Net Profit': Property Taxes, Public Dollars, and Corporate Philanthropy at Chicago's United Center," *Radical History Review*, no. 125 (May 1, 2016): 13–34,

bubbles—physically separated from the rest of the urban environment and its people, designed to mimic the suburbs themselves—were created to lure suburbanites into the city center to spend time and money on leisure activities such as watching sports. While the Cass Corridor had been an attraction for alienated suburbanites, the neighborhood would ultimately be remade into something very similar to what they had been looking to escape.

As part of this broader "neoliberal turn," scholars of urban and environmental history have shown how deregulation in industries like energy and waste disposal caused environmental catastrophe despite the hard-won environmental protections of the 1970s.[51] Recent scholarship on Detroit's long tradition of environmental activism coming from a wide variety of people, groups, and ideologies has contributed to this literature.[52] The deep roots of the urban agriculture and gardening movements in Detroit as well as the long fight for the right to clean air and water are ways that "the people" have exercised agency to build a better quality of life over the longue durée. The Corridor-based anarchists who theorized anarcho-primitivism are part of that story, for their political theory as well as their activism, which included protests against the Detroit trash incinerator, the Fermi II nuclear power plant, and the auto industry.

Detroit has been used to study much of what went wrong during the twentieth century. This work seeks to join a conversation with those who are interested in finding out what the

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https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-3451712; Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018); Chloe E. Taft, *From Steel to Slots: Casino Capitalism in the Postindustrial City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[51] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 9; Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007); Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Rector, *Toxic Debt*.

[52] Brandon M. Ward, *Living Detroit: Environmental Activism in an Age of Urban Crisis* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge, 2022); Joseph Stanhope Cialdella, *Motor City Green: A Century of Landscapes and Environmentalism in Detroit* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020); Rector, *Toxic Debt*.

people living in this "canary in the coalmine" have been doing to survive in an inhospitable climate, rather than focusing on the inhospitable climate itself.[53]

Bohemian Enclaves

Most studies of bohemia in the U.S. focus on New York City, especially the neighborhoods of Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side.[54] Bohemians in the Cass Corridor were in dialogue with and inspired by work created in New York and San Francisco, and my project aims to situate the Corridor neighborhood as a key site of the "bohemian diaspora" in the twentieth century U.S.[55] This work joins a conversation with scholars of urban and cultural history exploring bohemian communities that grew in seemingly peripheral locations and how male-dominated scenes affected the work of female and queer artists.[56] Bohemian enclaves are also an especially rich site to study the neoliberal phenomenon of gentrification, and scholars have used New York neighborhoods like Brooklyn, Harlem, and Soho to explore the relationship

[53] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 3.
[54] Caroline F. Ware, *Greenwich Village, 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935); Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000); Tim Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor, 1980-1983* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Aaron Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950-1980* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Kembrew McLeod, *The Downtown Pop Underground: New York City and the Literary Punks, Renegade Artists, DIY Filmmakers, Mad Playwrights, and Rock "n" Roll Glitter Queens Who Revolutionized Culture* (New York: Abrams Press, 2018).
[55] C. Carr, "The Bohemian Diaspora," *The Village Voice*, February 4, 1992.
[56] Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Cool Town: How Athens, Georgia, Launched Alternative Music and Changed American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Sarah Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010); Mark Braude, *Kiki Man Ray: Art, Love, and Rivalry in 1920s Paris* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).

between artists, radicals, gentrifiers, and capitalists as that city underwent rapid change.[57] This work also builds on existing studies of bohemian enclaves as sites of racial encounter.[58]

Urban historian Victoria Wolcott has observed that "cultural history's centrality in urban history has declined over time" and as a result there has been "a parallel decline" in work that combines gender and urban history. She argues that cultural approaches are often necessary to find women and gender nonconforming people in urban space, rather than ones that focus on political economy.[59] Uncovering the lives of the influential female and queer artists who lived and worked in the Cass Corridor like Leni Sinclair, Larissa Stolarchuk, and Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith allows for the exploration of women and queer peoples' experience in the city during the twentieth century and how some used bohemia to escape restrictive gender and sexual norms. Historians combining urban and cultural history have demonstrated how the fusion of these subdisciplines can help illustrate the way various groups of people came to understand the city as a place of radical possibility, where new ways of being can be imagined and enacted.[60]

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[57] Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brian D. Goldstein, *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle Over Harlem* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950-1980*.

[58] Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[59] Victoria W. Wolcott, "Remaking Urban History," *The Metropole* (blog), January 8, 2020, https://themetropole.blog/2020/01/08/remaking-urban-history/.

[60] For a sampling of literature combining these two subdisciplines that influenced this study see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Cass Corridor bohemians imagined and enacted new ways of being through their print publications as well as their collectively run spaces. During "an era marked by the rapid centralization of corporate media," this dissertation follows the efforts of bohemians to create their own free press.[61] Historian John McMillian argues that the underground press movement of the 1960s was perhaps "the New Left's greatest organizational achievement," countering biased mainstream coverage of everything from the Vietnam War to marijuana.[62] The *Fifth Estate*, which debuted in 1965, was one of the underground press's foundational newspapers and helped turn the Cass Corridor into a counterculture hub.[63] During the 1980s and '90s xeroxed zines—which historian Stephen Duncombe defines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves"—became the prevalent form of self-publishing in bohemian communities.[64] Media scholar Kate Eichhorn argues that through these publications "xerography enabled us to imagine and in some cases even realize radically different types of cities, publics, and counterpublics in the twentieth century."[65] The Cass Corridor's zines illustrate this dynamic at play.

Critically engaging Corridor bohemia also contributes to a growing interdisciplinary literature using Detroit to study DIY or "do-it-yourself" culture in arts and urbanism. Residents have been forced to "do it themselves"—repairing homes, maintaining parks and lots, creating opportunities for recreation and entertainment—as neoliberal urban policy has privatized and

[61] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Third (Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2017), 5.
[62] John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189.
[63] Peter Werbe, "History of the Fifth Estate Part I: The Early Years," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1996, #347 edition.
[64] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 9.
[65] Kate Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art, and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century* (London, England, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 88–89.

eliminated basic services.[66] The urban neglect of the Cass Corridor allowed Detroit bohemians to engage in DIY urbanism through the creation of venues and arts spaces in devalued buildings, which we will see in spaces including the Detroit Artists Workshop, the Freezer Theatre, the Women's City Club, and 404 Willis.

Bohemia is an easy thing to critique. The artists and activists who have participated in bohemian scenes around the world could often be naïve, or elitist, and appropriated the cultures of others.[67] The term "bohemian" itself comes from a nineteenth century fascination with the Roma people of the former kingdom of Bohemia, as bohemians in Paris felt the lifestyle of the persecuted people was romantic.[68] Today bohemians are often seen as a subset of the "creative class" theorized by influential urbanist Richard Florida, which cities down on their luck desperately try to attract through various amenities. Florida has written that the presence of bohemians means a neighborhood is ripe for development.[69] Lloyd's study of Wicker Park argues that in the postmodern 1990s, urban bohemians possessed the skills desired by a new economy that prioritized "adaptability," "contingency," and "vulnerability," and so found themselves desired workers in a new, unstable era, a dynamic that has only intensified in the intervening decades.[70] The story of the Cass Corridor illustrates ways in which bohemians, too, are exploited residents of the neoliberal city.

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[66] White, "Shouldering Responsibility for the Delivery of Human Rights"; Herscher, *The Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit*; Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services*; Claire W. Herbert, *A Detroit Story: Urban Decline and the Rise of Property Informality* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021).
[67] For appropriation of Black culture in the Corridor's rock scenes see Katherine E. Wadkins, "'Freakin' Out': Remaking Masculinity through Punk Rock in Detroit," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 22, no. 2–3 (July 7, 2012): 239–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2012.721083; Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 207–34; Burke, *Tear Down the Walls: White Radicalism and Black Power in 1960s Rock*, 19–44.
[68] Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*, 52.
[69] Richard Florida, "Bohemia and Economic Geography," *Journal of Economic Geography* 2 (2002): 55–71.
[70] Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*, 240.

The Corridor communities discussed in this dissertation were mostly white, especially after the 1960s. This dissertation does not tell the story of Black Detroiters, who were the majority, or concurrent, Black-led artistic and political movements in the city.[71] During the period under study, multiracial groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, James and Grace Lee Boggs's Freedom Summer project, and the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization among many others organized to fight the crack epidemic, water shut offs, and other assaults on Detroiters' rights as city services were privatized and eliminated.[72] This dissertation will show how Cass Corridor bohemians attempted to engage with their Black neighbors on activism and art, but as the city grew more segregated, so did their movements.

Post-1960s Radicalism

Thompson writes that "Detroit—arguably more than cities usually thought to epitomize the radical 1960s, such as Berkeley—witnessed militant left-wing activism in virtually every realm of civic and labor life."[73] This dissertation argues that Detroit additionally witnessed militant left-wing activism in *cultural* life, and that this activism lasted beyond the radical 1960s. To do this, my project takes seriously the intellectual work of thinkers typically dismissed as

[71] For the Black Arts Movement in Detroit see Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling With the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 200–215; Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*; Danielle Aubert, *The Detroit Printing Co-Op: The Politics of the Joy of Printing* (Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2019).
[72] For more on these multiracial movements in late twentieth century Detroit see Ahmad A. Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying A Study in Urban Revolution*; Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 172–222; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 209–19.
[73] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 7.

fringe and who have rarely been engaged with outside movement publications while relying on insights from the history of social movements.[74]

During the late twentieth century, anarchism went from an ideology drowned out by the New Left's Maoists and Marxist-Leninists to a core philosophy of a revived Left.[75] Political theorists including David Graeber and Uri Gordon have written about the "new anarchism" that informs global radical politics today.[76] This dissertation tells the story of how the Cass Corridor's little known anarchist thinkers, activists, and publishers played a key role in this transformation.

Historian of anarchism Andrew Cornell writes that "Scholarship on the history of U.S. radicalism has frequently neglected or minimized the contributions of anarchists."[77] Here, I seek to foreground those contributions. Cornell's *Unruly Equality* provides crucial detail on how anarchism developed and survived from its "classical period" (1860-1940) to the 1970s. Cornell notes that the *Fifth Estate* served as a critical bridge between the anarchist politics that had been nearly destroyed by the Red Scare and the revitalized anarchism that erupted in the 1980s.[78] However, *Unruly Equality* ends just as the anarchist and radical environmental movements that

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[74] Social movement history that influenced this study includes Kevin K. Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan*; David M. Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire: Punk Rock in the 1990s United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021); Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021); Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs*.

[75] See Spencer Beswick's dissertation on the Love and Rage Federation for more on the development of anarchism in the late twentieth century. Spencer Cole Beswick, "Love and Rage: Revolutionary Anarchism in the Late Twentieth Century," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., United States -- New York, Cornell University, 2023), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (2863628202), https://proxy1.library.virginia.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Flove-rage-revolutionary-anarchism-late-twentieth%2Fdocview%2F2863628202%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14678.

[76] David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13 (February 2002); Uri Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (February 2007): 29–48.

[77] Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the 20th Century* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2016), 281.

[78] Cornell, 292.

the FE helped to revive were blooming across the country. FE contributors and collective members Fredy Perlman and David Watson contributed to the development of an influential political theory called anarcho-primitivism that inspired new generations of radical environmentalists including Earth First! (EF!) and Earth Liberation Front (ELF).

Bohemian enclaves are the ideal site to explore this remaking of radicalism in the late twentieth century. Historians of anarchism have examined the relationship between avant-garde art and anarchist politics, which consistently overlapped and influenced each other at bohemian sites like City Lights Bookstore and the Six Gallery.[79] As the twentieth century progressed, anarchism became more entwined with bohemianism and less focused on building worker power as it had been during its classical era. Cornell explores the connections between anarchism and avant-garde artists in the bohemian communities of New York and San Francisco that influenced the Cass Corridor scenes, as well as on the White Panther Party itself.[80]

In one of the few historical monographs on radical environmentalism, Keith Mako Woodhouse writes that in the historiography, similarly to anarchists, "radical environmentalists have more often been objects of derision than subjects of serious study" due to their "extreme" philosophies and actions.[81] In this dissertation, I argue that climate crisis and the renewed activism that has resulted warrants further attention to the history of the radical environmental movement. The existing literature on radical environmentalism, including Woodhouse's book, often focuses on EF!, one of the most famous direct-action groups of the 1980s.[82] This is

[79] Cornell, 15; Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jesse Cohn, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848-2011* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014).
[80] Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 183–210, 240–80.
[81] Keith Mako Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 5.
[82] Some historical monographs on radical environmentalism include the following texts, which discuss Earth First! but not anarcho-primitivism: Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism*; Derek Wall, *Earth First! And the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements*

understandable given the group's exciting protests, engagement in eco-sabotage, and large membership. However, the Malthusian views held by EF! leaders did not help the radical environmental movement build a broad coalition or overcome stereotypes of the movement's elitism. The FE's roots and activist work in a majority-Black city brought environmental justice issues into a radical environmental movement focused on conservation. Studying the activist work from Detroit's Cass Corridor community helps reveal a broader story of radical environmentalism and the growth of anarchism in the late twentieth century.

Organization

Building Bohemia in Detroit's Cass Corridor is divided into five chapters in rough chronological order, each exploring a different group of artists and activists who worked, lived, and played in the neighborhood. It begins with the formation of the Detroit Artists' Workshop (AWS) in 1964 and ends in 2017 with the opening of the Little Caesars' Arena (LCA).

(London, New York: Routledge, 1999); Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, Studies in Modern Science, Technology, and the Environment (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics Since 1964*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Book (Seattle, Wash: University of Washington Press, 2012); Douglas Bevington, *The Rebirth of Environmentalism: Grassroots Activism From the Spotted Owl to the Polar Bear* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009); Darren Frederick Speece, *Defending Giants: The Redwood Wars and the Transformation of American Environmental Politics* (Seattle, [Washington], London, [England]: University of Washington Press, 2017). Journalistic accounts of Earth First! include Susan Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! And the Environmental Movement* (New York, NY: Viking, 1993); Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990). Scholars in political philosophy and religious studies have studied radical environmentalism in much greater depth: Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007); Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004); Brian Doherty and Marius de Geus, *Democracy and Green Political Thought: Sustainability, Rights, and Citizenship*, European Political Science (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Tim Hayward, *Ecological Thought: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, Blackwell, 1995); Adrian Parr, *Birth of a New Earth: The Radical Politics of Environmentalism*, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Martha F. (Martha Frances) Lee, *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse*, Religion and Politics Series (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Todd LeVasseur, "Decisive Ecological Warfare: Triggering Industrial Collapse via Deep Green Resistance," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.29799; Bron Raymond Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Sarah M. Pike, *For the Wild: Ritual and Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).

Chapter 1 narrates the story of the AWS, a collective of students from WSU who, dissatisfied with the culturally stifling environment of the university and city, rented a home in the Corridor to use as a community hub dedicated to bringing vibrant new art to a place that lacked access to the counterculture movements developing in New York and San Francisco. The chapter argues that the formation of the AWS marks the birth of Cass Corridor bohemia and follows the story of Leni Sinclair, who played a major role in almost every aspect of running the AWS but whose legacy is overshadowed by her charismatic husband, to see what kind of freedoms Cass Corridor bohemia had to offer female artists.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the *Fifth Estate* as it transitioned from a New Left underground newspaper to an intellectual founder of the anti-capitalist, anti-technology ideology called anarcho-primitivism. The FE collective considered the Cass Corridor their "jovial dissident community" where they produced the paper and used their office spaces as a home base to support local arts and activism.[83] The collective's political theory and activist work, especially opposing the building of the world's largest trash incinerator, forced the radical environmental movement of the 1980s to confront urban issues typically associated with the environmental justice movement.

Chapter 3 explores the world of Detroit's early 1980s hardcore punk scene, which saw disaffected suburban teenagers travel to the Cass Corridor to build an influential subculture. By narrating the story of musician, artist, zine-maker, and venue organizer Larissa Stolarchuk, the chapter looks at the hyper-masculine world of hardcore punk through a female perspective and creates space to discuss how women have been relegated to the sidelines of Detroit rock and roll history. The chapter also focuses on the venues where the hardcore scene coalesced, telling an

[83] Lorraine Perlman, *Having Little Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman's Fifty Years* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1989), 86.

alternative history of the storied Freezer Theatre, which has been romanticized in punk histories as hardcore youth creating "something out of nothing" in an abandoned neighborhood when research reveals its history as a community space run by an earlier generation of Cass Corridor bohemians.

Chapter 4 narrates the proliferation of community-based publishing and radical venues in the neighborhood from the late 1980s through the 1990s by following the story of FE contributor, zine-maker, and activist Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith. Facilitated by low property values during this period in the city's history, a new generation of Cass Corridor bohemians were able to imagine a radically different city in zines such as Smith's *Babyfish Lost Its Momma* and then create it at collectively owned spaces like the punk club 404 Willis and the anarchist house the Trumbullplex.

The final chapter unveils the vision of the Cass Corridor that became reality by the second decade of the twenty-first century. From the late 1990s to the 2010s, Little Caesars' billionaire founder Mike Ilitch and his family clandestinely purchased swaths of land in the Cass Corridor to facilitate the building of the Little Caesars' Arena. The Ilitches have admitted to using a strategy that critics dubbed "dereliction by design," in which property is purchased and purposefully neglected in order to depress the value of the surrounding area.[84] The re-branded "Midtown" of today is the result of the Ilitch family accumulating over sixty percent of the land in neighborhood.

A last word on this project's methodology. The Cass Corridor neighborhood is an ideal case study to explore the extreme changes of the inner-city Rust Belt over the late twentieth

[84] Tom Perkins, "How the Ilitches Used 'dereliction by Design' to Get Their New Detroit Arena," *Detroit Metro Times*, September 12, 2017, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/how-the-ilitches-used-dereliction-by-design-to-get-their-new-detroit-arena-5532824.

century from the grassroots. In order to demonstrate the importance of intergenerational connections within bohemian enclaves and radical activism, I chose to undertake a local study of one neighborhood over the course of several decades. Cass Corridor residents and travelers have created rich archives illustrating how they interpreted and responded to deindustrialization, environmental injustice, and neoliberal economic policy, among other issues. Focusing on print culture and community-based spaces allowed me to explore "how Detroit was—and remains—a fertile ground for ideas, political organizing, and neighborhood activism."[85] To access these archives, this study relied heavily on material in private collections, oral history interviews, and the "snowball" method in which informants connected me with others. Because the Corridor movements privileged community-building, this method served me well, though the story told here is certainly incomplete.

In 1969, John Sinclair lamented to the *Detroit Free Press* about the impending demise of the Detroit Artists' Workshop at the hands of urban renewal: "We have made this community ourselves, with our own hands, when the 'society' would do nothing but tear it down and build a football stadium."[86] This dissertation tells the story of this community's making and unmaking.

[85] Brandon M. Ward, "Wasteland or Fertile Ground? Detroit's Historiographical Moment," *JOURNAL OF URBAN HISTORY* 46, no. 2 (September 10, 2019): 444, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144219873346.
[86] John Askins, "Where Did John Sinclair Come From?," *Detroit Free Press*, December 14, 1969, Box 32, Folder, Artists and Poets-Sinclair, John 2/5, The Alternative Press Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Chapter 1—The Detroit Artists' Workshop: Building Bohemia in the Cass Corridor, 1964-1972

On November 1, 1964, an interracial group of sixteen poets, musicians, artists and disaffected Wayne State University (WSU) students, tired of the lack of artistic opportunity in their industrial Midwestern city, published a manifesto expressing their desire "to do something about Detroit."[1] Their goal was to build a community that would support young, up-and-coming artists and provide a space where Detroiters could access new, vibrant art forms springing up in New York City and San Francisco, including Beat poetry and free jazz. These young Detroiters wanted to stimulate a "Detroit renaissance," rather than see their friends, collaborators, and comrades jet off to the coasts.[2] Several had been affiliated with the short-lived Red Door Gallery, one of the first spaces to bring avant-garde art to the city. The group voted to contribute five dollars each to rent a cheap house not far from campus at 1252 W. Forest, establishing it as a community hub, practice and performance space, and gallery. On that same night, founding member John Sinclair, who in 1969 would become one of the most famous political prisoners of the decade and a hero of marijuana reform, gave his first public poetry reading.[3] The Detroit Artists' Workshop (AWS) was born.

The development of the AWS marks the beginning of the Cass Corridor as a bohemian neighborhood and epicenter of the counterculture in the Midwest. The AWS's projects would expand from a gallery and performance venue to include a free university, communal living space, a print shop and publishing house. Artists who participated in the AWS span a wide swath

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[1] John Sinclair, "The Collected Artists' Worksheet 1965" (The Artists' Workshop Press, 1967), Box 10, Folder 13, John and Leni Sinclair Papers (forthwith JLSP), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The full list of signees is: John Sinclair, Charles Moore, Larry Weiner, James Semark, Gayle Pearl, Ellen Phelan, Bill Reid, Joe Mulkey, Robin Eichele, George Tysh, Danny Spencer, Richard Tobias, Allister McKenzie, Paul Sedan, David Homicz, and Bob Marsh. This chapter was written during the student intifada of spring 2024 and is dedicated to student antiwar protestors across time and space. Free Palestine.

[2] John Sinclair and Friends of John Sinclair, "An Appeal," n.d., Box 7, Folder 11, JLSP.

[3] Sinclair, "The Collected Artists' Worksheet 1965."

of Detroit's popular and avant-garde arts from the 1960s through the twenty-first century, including John Sinclair and his photographer wife Leni, who captured some of the most well-known images of 1960s Detroit; psychedelic poster artist Gary Grimshaw; visual artists Ellen Phelan and Ann Mikolowski; free jazz musicians Charles Moore, Jim Semark, and Ron English; poets Robin Eichele, Allen Van Newkirk, Andrei Codrescu, and Ken Mikolowski; and the proto-punk band the MC5, among many others. Through participating in the collective, these artists gained the opportunity to experiment with multiple genres, engage with hard-to-find poetry and music from the vibrant art movements in New York City and San Francisco, and validation that they could create their own scene even in a provincial town like Detroit. Cass Corridor bohemia became a space where young people fell in love, got arrested, made art, organized political actions, were mentored by older generations who shared their political and artistic visions, and refused to abandon their city for a hipper place with better resources.

This was achieved in part through John's efforts tirelessly promoting the Workshop, corresponding with some of the most important figures of the New American Poetry and free jazz movements, including Allen Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, Ed Sanders, Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman, and Amiri Baraka, among others, making them aware of the group's efforts in Detroit, bringing them to the city to perform, and publishing their work alongside local writers.[4] The scene at the AWS existed alongside a flowering of Black arts and activism in Detroit that included publishing with Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, James Forman's Black Star Press, and the student takeover of WSU's newspaper that resulted in the *Daily Collegian's* transformation into the *South End;* radical labor organizing in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers; political theorists James and Grace Lee Boggs, whose 1966 article "The City Is the

[4] Box 1, JLSP.

Black Man's Land" influenced the Black Power movement and was blamed for inflaming tensions that led to the 1967 Rebellion; and cultural nationalist organizations like the Republic of New Africa. All this activity coalesced to make Detroit into a hub of 1960s political militancy and artistic counterculture, a place that bohemians flocked to, believing it was "ripe for revolution."[5]

Poet, activist, jazz critic, and rock band manager John Sinclair is a prominent figure from this turbulent period. Sinclair guided the AWS through political and aesthetic transitions that characterized the fast-changing era. Over the course of four years, the organization shifted from a focus on artistic community, free verse poetry, and free jazz to mind expansion through psychedelic drugs, acid rock, and creating propaganda for cultural revolution, changing their name from the AWS to Trans-Love Energies to the militant revolutionary organization the White Panther Party (WPP). Sinclair's art and activism earned him many enemies in Michigan's conservative establishment and even the White House, which resulted in a punitive ten-year prison sentence for giving away two marijuana joints to an undercover officer, a cause célèbre that gained him the support of activist celebrities including John Lennon, Jane Fonda, and Abbie Hoffman. Existing scholarship focuses on Sinclair's role as a leader of 1960s cultural revolution, which he theorized in various underground newspapers and his 1972 book *Guitar Army*, the

[5] Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92, Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs, "The City Is the Black Man's Land," *Monthly Review*, no. 11 (April 1966): 35–46.; For more on the Black Arts Movement and Black activism in Detroit in this period see James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 200–215; Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling With the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying A Study in Urban Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012); Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999); Danielle Aubert, *The Detroit Printing Co-Op: The Politics of the Joy of Printing* (Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2019); Ahmad A. Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Stephen M. Ward, ed., *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011); Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

manager and promoter of the Detroit proto-punk band the MC5, and a political prisoner, and often treats the AWS as a prologue to his later work.[6] This chapter narrates John's earlier efforts fostering the AWS with collaborators, especially his wife Leni, who played a major role in almost every aspect of running the organization, and their impact creating a legacy of bohemian community in their neighborhood even after they themselves were pushed out of town by police repression.

Despite his belief that Detroit was "artistically 'dead'," John sought to position the city as a place where, with a little elbow grease, artists could flourish.[7] "Detroit has one of the best if not the best art climate in America," he told the *Daily Collegian*. "I'm glad I'm in Detroit. Hopefully, we'd like to see Detroit a vital center of art life and of work. We've got to start where we are."[8] At the AWS, young Detroiters discovered the quintessentially bohemian idea that in the more disinvested, rougher parts of the inner city, one could discover a way of life focused on making art rather than meeting bourgeois social expectations. The group that gathered at the AWS was composed of "youths" who "had flocked to the city from the suburbs to find excitement, commitment, and meaning."[9] The space "succeeded in becoming a place of their own and in providing the freedom necessary to explore the vast stimuli that confronted them."[10] The Cass Corridor would remain a place that offered refuge for disaffected suburban artists through the

[6] Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 207–36; Jeff A. Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 125–56; Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*; Burke, *Tear Down the Walls: White Radicalism and Black Power in 1960s Rock*, 22–47; Miller, *Detroit Rock City*.
[7] Robin Eichele and John Sinclair, "Getting out from Under," *New University Thought*, Summer 1965, Box 7, Folder 35, JLSP.
[8] Elinor Harvin, "Artists' Policy: Phonies Stay Home," *The Daily Collegian*, March 9, 1965, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.
[9] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 22.
[10] Jacob, 22.

following decades as various scenes sprouted in the neighborhood, growing from the seeds planted by the AWS.

Centering Leni Sinclair and the earlier AWS period makes John Sinclair's role as a collaborator rather than a charismatic leader more apparent. Leni's story is remarkable in many aspects, but it is also representative of the ways women have used bohemianism and the city to exercise agency and build lives outside of traditional domestic roles. Leni and John worked day and night to keep the Workshop's constantly multiplying projects afloat. Workshop members had to take on multiple and at times contradictory roles, from contractor to fundraiser, photographer to secretary, landlord to promoter. This chapter is in conversation with historians working at the intersection of cultural, urban, and gender history who have examined the ways women interacted with bohemian communities to create lives filled with meaning and adventure beyond what domesticity had to offer.[11] For Leni, this space of freedom and possibility was the Cass Corridor.

[11] Works that influenced this analysis of Leni's life include: Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*; Braude, *Kiki Man Ray*; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*.

Fig. 1.1. John and Leni Sinclair, photograph by Robin Eichele. Date unknown. Source: Box 37, John and Leni Sinclair Papers (JLSP), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

In the program for a 1980 exhibition of the "Cass Corridor group" of visual artists at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Mary Jane Jacob writes that "the peculiar geographical, physical, and social nature of the Cass Corridor proved to be well-suited to fostering Detroit's first significant artists' community."[12] By the 1960s, neighborhood's location close to the downtown of a major city, proximity to WSU, and availability of cheap housing made it a perfect host to artists, activists, students, and drop-outs.

Earlier institutions that sowed the ground for this development in the Corridor included the "European-style" coffee house Cup of Socrates, where Leni briefly worked as a waitress, and

[12] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 17.

clubs such as the Purple Onion and Verne's Bar, where a young John attended poetry readings.[13] These spaces alongside WSU helped some like-minded misfits find each other in the grey morass of the Eisenhower-era Midwest, but it was their efforts creating the short-lived Red Door Gallery that spurred the formation of a new scene in the Cass Corridor.

Proto-Bohemia in the Cass Corridor, 1963-1964

One faltering beginning for Cass Corridor bohemia came in September 1963, when local bohemians, "predominantly white college students" who had "for the most part grown up in middle-class suburban comfort" formed the Red Door Gallery, which marked "a turning point in the emergence of an avant-garde in Detroit."[14] The Red Door was located on the corner of Second and Willis and only lasted a single season, but it demonstrated the desire of a small group of Detroiters for a kind of art and community that was not available elsewhere in the city. The gallery became "a center of avant-garde film showings, exhibitions of paintings, and general 'hanging out'" that laid a blueprint for how AWS would function, according to John and AWS cofounder Robin Eichele.[15] One of the gallery's organizers was a twenty-three-year-old Magdalene Arndt, who would later become more well known by her married nickname Leni Sinclair.

Arndt was born in 1940 in Königsberg, Germany, and her early life was marked by upheaval and disruption caused by the Third Reich, World War II, and Germany's postwar division. After the war, Arndt's family, farmers by trade, were relocated to a small village outside

[13] Delicato and Khalil, *Images of America: Detroit's Cass Corridor*, 68; Cary Loren, "Motor City Underground: Through the Lens of Leni Sinclair," in *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978* (Detroit, Mich: Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit/Foggy Notions Books, 2021), 352; Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 107.
[14] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 18–19.
[15] Eichele and Sinclair, "Getting out from Under."

East Berlin called Valhdorf, where they helped operate a ten-acre collective farm. She has fond memories of growing up in the country under the principles of collective living, an ethos she brought with her to the United States and informed her journey into the 1960s counterculture: "It was a beautiful childhood, and I was a nature girl."[16] However, Arndt's rebellious nature and curiosity did not fit well into an environment of Cold War era conformity. One connection to the world outside the Eastern Bloc came through a transistor radio that she won as a child in a potato-bug killing contest. Local governments awarded children a penny for each insect they collected: "At the end of the season I had broken all records," Arndt wrote in an essay titled "Going Home," published in a WSU student-run literary journal.[17] She used the reward money to purchase a radio, and she became a jazz and rock and roll fanatic by tuning into illicit stations that transmitted western music over the Iron Curtain.[18]

Hearing stories of a cousin's experiences in Western Europe led Arndt to decide by her late teens that she too would immigrate. Her mother supported her decision, and scraped together money to "buy something nice," which Arndt spent on her first camera.[19] In late 1959 she traveled from West Berlin to Detroit, choosing the city because she had relatives who had settled there and could sponsor her immigration.[20] After securing work in the suburbs as a maid and studying to improve her English, Arndt sought out the fledging bohemian community around Detroit's cultural center and WSU, where she enrolled to study geography. She recalls conspicuously carrying around a copy of Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry epic *Howl* in an attempt to find like-minded people around town.[21]

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[16] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 349.
[17] Magdalene Arndt, "Going Home," *The Journal*, April 1965, Box 9, Folder 12, JLSP.
[18] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 349.
[19] Loren, 350.
[20] Loren, 350.
[21] Loren, 352; Julian Weber, "Aktivistin über White Panther: „Unser Kampf hat sich gelohnt"," taz, January 6, 2014, https://taz.de/!5051427/.

At WSU, Leni worked for and was mentored by the anti-fascist scholar Otto Feinstein. He had come to Detroit in 1960 to teach at WSU's new experimental school Monteith College, which was created to "combine the advantages of a small liberal arts college with the resources of a major urban university," and became known for its radical bent.[22] Monteith cultivated a "highly nonconformist, politicized cadre of students" who grated against the "narrow, Eurocentric curriculum" being taught across the university.[23] Through working with Feinstein and hanging out in the Edwardian houses that composed Monteith, Leni met other students and artists in the area who were interested in building an art scene in Detroit, including the poet George Tysh.[24] Feinstein was a founding editor of the left-wing journal *New University Thought* and he supported the work of Leni and her new friends on the university publication the *Monteith Journal*, both of which published writings by members of the AWS.[25] Working as Feinstein's assistant gave Leni access to university office equipment, including a mimeograph machine, that was crucial to the development of the AWS until they were able to afford their own presses. Leni remembers how, "…it ended up that in the last couple issues of the *Monteith Journal*, almost all the people who wrote for it, who had poetry in it, later on appeared in [AWS publication] *Work* magazine. The incubation happened at the student center. So we utilized the mimeograph machine and published our first magazines and books by running them off late at night."[26] Mimeographs—which created cheap copies using stencils pressed against a rotating, ink-saturated cylinder—were a key tool of both social movement organizing and the creation of new

[22] Monteith College existed from 1959 to 1978, when WSU made the decision to close it due to budget cuts. "Monteith College Archives Collection Papers, 1958-1972 [Finding Aid]," n.d., Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/WSR000453.pdf; Loren, "Motor City Underground," 352.
[23] Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination*, 215.
[24] "Monteith College Archives Collection Papers, 1958-1972 [Finding Aid]"; Loren, "Motor City Underground," 354.
[25] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 352.
[26] Cary Loren, "Monteith College: Roots of the Workshop," *Detroit Artists Workshop* (blog), accessed May 19, 2024, https://www.detroitartistsworkshop.com/monteith-college-roots-of-the-workshop/.

experiments in literature during the 1960s.[27] During her freshman year at WSU, Leni also created her first piece of protest art by using a few strokes of white paint to change nuclear fallout shelter signs on campus into peace signs.[28]

WSU had a contradictory relationship with the AWS and the burgeoning bohemian community growing in the surrounding neighborhood. Several AWS members enrolled at WSU to study literature, then rebelled against conservatism in the school's English Department.[29] When interviewed about the AWS for the campus paper the *Daily Collegian*, Leni complained that WSU instructors had told her poetry written twelve years prior was "too new to be studied."[30] This infuriated students who were inspired by new movements in music and poetry, and desired to take part in what was happening in their contemporary moment. As we will see, while AWS members took advantage of WSU's resources by commandeering their mimeograph machine and using student publications to publicize their endeavors, they were also harassed by campus police and forced to move due to the university's role in urban renewal projects.

Energized by their studies at Monteith but wanting more than they could do in the university context, in September 1963 Larry Weiner, Harvey Columbus, Carl and Sheila Schurer, George Tysh and Magdalene Arndt became the founding members of The Red Door, "Detroit's first contemporary co-op gallery," named for the bright red paint on the storefront's door.[31] Located on Second Street, the space was donated by Weiner's father, who owned the adjacent auto repair shop.[32] The Red Door helped the small contingent of bohemians in Detroit discover

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[27] See McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 13–30; Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998).
[28] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 353.
[29] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 20.
[30] Peggy Cronin, "Free University of Detroit Founded by Artists To Offer Alternative or Extension," *The Daily Collegian*, January 24, 1966, Box 7, Folder 24, JLSP.
[31] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 354, 356.
[32] Loren, 356.

each other, convert other restless youths, and share avant-garde art, poetry, music and film that was hard to find between the coasts. Tysh and Schurer organized the exhibitions, which included "some of the first avant-garde events in the city," including a visit from Black Mountain poet Robert Creeley.[33] Jazz cornetist Charles Moore frequently performed, films were screened, and poetry readings were held as the gallery "became a gathering place for Detroit's 'beats.'"[34]

Fig. 1.2: Leni Sinclair's photograph of Detroit bohemians hanging out in front of the Red Door Gallery. From left to right, Robert Winter, George Tysh, Robin Eichele, Alan Stone and Martine Algire. Source: Box 37, JLSP. Also see *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978,* 22.

Leni put the camera her mother had gifted her to use documenting the early days of Detroit's bohemian community. One photo of the Red Door taken by Leni shows a group of young local bohemians including future AWS members George Tysh, Robin Eichele, and Martine Algire posing on the storefront's sidewalk in full beatnik regalia of sweaters, sunglasses,

[33] Loren, 354.
[34] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 19.

berets and fedoras (Fig. 1.2).[35] Tysh holds a painting by WSU math professor Eizo Nishura, whose work was on display in the gallery. The photo reveals the subjects' youthful enthusiasm and energy despite their pose of practiced nonchalance. Another photograph of Leni standing in front of the Red Door and smiling in a plaid raincoat shows the group's ironic humor, as they used tabloid newspapers with lurid headlines to plaster over the storefront's display windows.[36] After nine months of work and community-building, an experimental film by Weiner that involved using Beat writer William Burroughs' "cut up" technique on pornography led to the closure of the space when Weiner's father decided to have him committed to a mental institution due to the content of the film.[37] The Schurers' decision to relocate to Greece further condemned the project.[38] Weiner was able to escape from the asylum and went on to be a founding member of the AWS.[39]

During the summer of 1964, as the Red Door collapsed and Tysh wondered what to do next, he met WSU literature student and jazz fanatic John Sinclair. John, who had recently moved to Detroit from Flint, Michigan to pursue his M.A. in English and was working as the Detroit correspondent for several jazz publications including *DownBeat*, *JAZZ*, and *Coda*, shared Tysh's "interests in jazz, poetry, and pot," and was similarly energized by the idea of creating an arts scene in their city.[40] Over the summer and fall of that year, they connected their friend groups as Tysh introduced John to jazz musician Charles Moore, and brainstormed ideas to continue and expand the work that had begun at the Red Door.[41] By the fall of 1964, John and

[35] Leni Sinclair, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978* (Detroit: Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit/Foggy Notions Books, 2021), 22.
[36] Sinclair, 20.
[37] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 356.
[38] Eichele and Sinclair, "Getting out from Under."
[39] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 356.
[40] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 20; Loren, "Motor City Underground," 362.
[41] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 360.

Leni, who shared mutual friends and were neighbors, had fallen in love and started putting their seemingly limitless energy towards the creation of what would become perhaps the most influential arts organization in the history of the Cass Corridor.[42]

The Detroit Artists' Workshop, 1964-1967

In the fall of 1964 the sixteen artists, including poets Robin Eichele and George Tysh, jazz musician Charles Moore, and visual artist Ellen Phelan, rented the house at 1252 W. Forest and drafted a manifesto stating their vision and intentions for the AWS.[43] The idea for the Workshop was developed in late-night conversations between Moore, Sinclair, and Tysh at Sinclair's apartment, while Moore played along to Sinclair's impressive jazz record collection.[44] Robin Eichele and his partner, dancer and choreographer Martine Algire, lived on the top floor of the W. Forest house and covered the majority of the rent, with Workshop activities taking place on the large, open downstairs.[45]

The Detroit Artists Workshop manifesto reflects the energy and urgency felt by youth living under the paranoia of the Cold War, which they described as "a society on the verge of total annihilation." In response they declared that "what we want is a place for artists—musicians, painters, poets, writers, film-makers—who are committed to their art and to the concept of community involvement to meet and work with one another in an open, warm, loving, supportive environment (—what they don't get in the 'real' world)—a place for people to come together as equals in a community venture the success of which depends solely on those involved

[42] Loren, 358.
[43] "The Artists' Workshop Society: A 'Manifesto,'" November 1, 1964, Box 7, Folder 33, JLSP.
[44] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 361.
[45] Monika Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Robin Eichele, April 6, 2010, Wayne State University Undergraduate Library, https://elibrary.wayne.edu/record=b4399259~S47; Loren, "Motor City Underground," 362.

in it." Defining the workshop as "an essentially non-political group," the manifesto emphasizes the personal responsibility of those involved to maintain the project and to create connection and community between human beings wherever possible. Without community, "the lone artist…stumbles along, hung up in his own ego & his own work, no perspective."[46] Historian Howard Briggs has noted how using "the idea of 'community' as an answer to isolation and powerlessness" was important to the burgeoning counterculture, as student-led organizations that emerged in the early 1960s including the Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee also prioritized this in their foundational documents.[47]

The members of the AWS committed to stimulating a "Detroit renaissance," rather than fleeing for the established scenes that influenced them in New York's Lower East Side and San Francisco.[48] This was a difficult task in a city dominated by conservative institutions like WSU and the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), both so resistant to change that in the early 1960s they were only just beginning to recognize modernism, much less the profusion of genres that were growing in the contemporary moment—including New American poetry, free jazz, existentialist philosophy, experimental film.[49] Unlike WSU and the DIA, the AWS was an ambitious, dynamic, and fast-moving organization, and it was quickly successful in gaining attention and participation from others in Detroit looking for something new.

After its formation in November 1964, the collective began holding public showcases on Sundays in the W. Forest house featuring jazz concerts, poetry readings, showings of paintings and photography, and film screenings, as well as weekly workshop sessions of jazz, film, and

[46] "The Artists' Workshop Society: A 'Manifesto.'"
[47] Howard Briggs, *The Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 17.
[48] Sinclair and Friends of John Sinclair, "An Appeal."
[49] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 17–18.

poetry. Leni's photographs of the period demonstrate the interracial composition of the collective and its events, fostered by the emphasis they placed on jazz.[50] Founding Black members of the AWS included Charles Moore and poet/playwright Bill Harris. Rent and utilities on the house were paid for by donations (the AWS registered as a nonprofit and emphasized that status to potential donors) and membership dues. The organization quickly began publishing multiple journals, newsletters, and poetry chapbooks, and emphasized centering the voices of young, new artists. They also began publishing a newsletter titled *The Artists' Worksheet* to circulate and gain feedback on works-in-progress that were read at the Sunday workshops, to keep members who were unable to attend in the loop. Members felt the rewards of their efforts quickly, as the Sunday workshops became gathering points for the burgeoning Detroit counterculture. John wrote to Beat poet and City Lights publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti: "The Workshop had its first public program last week…& everything came off beautifully—more than we ever hoped. At our house—that's what we ended up w/ for the Workshop, a whole house—we had close to 100 people, an 'overflow crowd' as they say. This week looks even better."[51]

The building energy was halted abruptly when over Memorial Day weekend 1965 a cigarette tossed in a trash can caused a fire at the W. Forest house.[52] No one was injured—Eichele and Algire made a harrowing escape out the second-floor window—but instruments and artworks were destroyed, and the collective was left without a space.[53] After a six-month break, in November 1965 the AWS relocated to a $50-a-month storefront on the intersection of Warren and the John C. Lodge freeway. Some of the artists moved into a collective housing venture the

[50] Sinclair, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978*.
[51] John Sinclair, "Letter to Lawrence Ferlinghetti," November 4, 1964, Box 1, Folder 15, JLSP.
[52] Millie McFadden, "Fire Endangers Artist's Exhibit," *The Daily Collegian*, n.d., Vol. 55 No. 139 edition, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.
[53] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 362; McFadden, "Fire Endangers Artist's Exhibit."

group initiated at a nearby Gothic apartment building nicknamed "the Castle."[54] In these spaces, at a grimy corner slated to be destroyed by an urban renewal project, the collective continued expanding their work, growing to include a housing collective, the Free University of Detroit, the Detroit Artists Workshop Press, and multiple musical collaborations exploring the reaches of free jazz.

The AWS's primary artistic focuses were poetry and jazz, though they supported and encouraged cross-genre experimentation including photography, printmaking, and film. The collective created two publications to discuss, create, and disseminate poetry inspired by New American Poetry (NAP)—a movement which took its name from the influential 1960 anthology edited by Don Allen that the AWS writers considered their "Bible."[55] According to Allen, the poetry in the anthology was greatly diverse but "has shown one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse."[56] The anthology included Beat poets like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg as well as poets from the defunct experimental university Black Mountain College, which had been home to some of the most influential artists of the mid-twentieth century.[57] Black Mountain rector and poet Charles Olson's essay on "projective verse," which was included in the NAP anthology and emphasized the breath as a connection between poetry and jazz, was the AWS' "doctrine" according to Sinclair.[58]

Leni wrote in one newsletter: "The Artists' Workshop stocks a number of small literary magazines and books of poetry which are not available any other place in Detroit or in the Midwest."[59] John drew on his connections in the literary underground, developed through

[54] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 362; Magdalene Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Reopens; Brings Art Colony To Detroit," *The Daily Collegian*, November 17, 1965, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.
[55] Sinclair, "The Collected Artists' Worksheet 1965."
[56] Donald Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), xi.
[57] Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, 30.
[58] Sinclair, "The Collected Artists' Worksheet 1965."
[59] Leni Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter #3," March 9, 1966, Box 7, Folder 27, JLSP.

nonstop correspondence, to get these copies for Detroit artists and readers. In addition to reading their own work at the Sunday night workshops, AWS members instituted Friday night readings from the NAP anthology—the intention of the New American poets was for their work to be read and heard aloud—and poems from the anthology and its poets were reprinted in Artists Workshop Press publications.[60] Through this engagement with NAP and its little magazines, the AWS joined an artistic movement that would later be known as the "mimeo revolution," in which a growing counterculture utilized print (often but not always created with a mimeograph machine) to self-publish in a literary counterpart to the New Left's underground press.[61] The mimeo revolution was characterized by experimentation with both poetic verse and printmaking conventions, an emphasis on artistic innovation, a DIY spirit, and a rejection of social and artistic norms.[62]

The AWS helped expand the mimeo revolution beyond the coasts and into America's heartland. The Artists Workshop Press printed chapbooks by local writers and more well-known authors in addition to the organization's own journals. The AWS eventually grew to printing three journals, *Work*, *Change*, and *whe're*, and was the only place between the coasts that republished feminist poet Diane di Prima's counterculture touchstone *Revolutionary Letters*.[63] Other works by stars of the underground literati AWS published include Allen Ginsberg's *Prose Contribution to Cuban Revolution* and Ed Sanders' *Fugs' Songbook*.[64] The Workshop also sold small press publications including the *Evergreen Review*, *Kulchur*, *Wild Dog,* and *Wormwood*

[60] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 21.
[61] Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, 15.
[62] In a celebrated retrospective exhibit on the mimeo revolution, curators Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips noted that the AWS's penchant for using "colored 'construction' papers (of the sort favored by grade school teachers) was a particularly distinctive characteristic of this press." Clay and Phillips, 46.
[63] Diane Di Prima, "Revolutionary Letters" (Artists' Workshop Press, 1968), Box 10, Folder 11, JLSP.
[64] Allen Ginsberg, "Prose Contribution to Cuban Revolution" (Artists' Workshop Press, 1966), Box 10, Folder 9, JLSP; Ed Sanders, "The Fugs' Songbook!" (Artists' Workshop Press, 1968), Box 10, Folder 5, JLSP.

Review alongside their own work.[65] The underground literary community relied on a spirit of comradery and the development of networks of support, so writers on the coasts benefited from being exposed to audiences in the Midwest. The AWS held benefits for a variety of underground writers and their presses, publications, and organizations, and the AWS received funds from benefits held by others.[66]

Bright orange construction paper was used to print the first journal of the Artists Workshop Press, *Work*, published on July 1, 1965. The journal was intended to disseminate poetry and criticism inspired by New American Poetry, written by up-and-coming Detroit writers. The publication placed these little-known local writers in conversation with the underground stars featured in Allen's anthology and John's networking exposed the Detroit poets to heavyweights like Diane di Prima, LeRoi Jones, Allen Ginsberg, and Charles Olson. The AWS members' writing was diverse, and they were not interested in developing a "Detroit school."[67] Their poetry was typically written in free verse and featured romantic descriptions of bohemian life, satires of the middle-class suburbia they had left behind, pirated blues lyrics and lines from the I Ching, sex, drugs, and jazz. John's poetry was especially influenced by music, and he wrote poems about and dedicated to local musicians and jazz icons including John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Sun Ra among many others. Reflecting their close-knit community, the AWS poets also used their comrades as inspiration, as they frequently dedicated poems to each other and wrote poems about each other. In one poem, "Weathering," John described his and Leni's living arrangements in an apartment with no heat:

[65] "Artists' Workshop Program #15," February 14, 1965, Box 7, Folder 29, JLSP.
[66] John Sinclair, "Letter to Diane diPrima," November 13, 1964, Box 1, Folder 15, JLSP; "Artists' Workshop Program #15"; "Artists' Workshop Program #16," February 21, 1965, Box 7, Folder 29, JLSP.
[67] Sinclair, "The Collected Artists' Worksheet 1965."

"one week here it got so cold
couldn't work at the desk, we just sat
as long as we could
feet in the oven, reading"[68]

Leni and Robin Eichele's photographs of the Workshop, its inner-city environs, and its members were often featured on the journal's covers. The cover of *Work/1* featured Robin Eichele's photograph of Charles Moore clowning on a motorcycle in front of the Workshop storefront (Fig. 1.3). The writers explored their local context by writing about the city's landscape, the romanticization of work and working people, and the idea of poets and artists as workers. John wrote in the opening editorial of the first issue, which Leni co-edited: "The work, is the thing. The measure of a man. All there is, to look at, count up, judge him by. His work."[69] Clay and Phillips noted that the AWS "cultivated a sort of hard-core working-class aesthetic."[70]

[68] John Sinclair, "Weathering," *Work/3*, Winter 1965/1966, Box 9, Folder 18, JLSP.
[69] "Editorial," *Work/1*, Summer 1965, Box 9, Folder 16, JLSP.
[70] Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, 46.

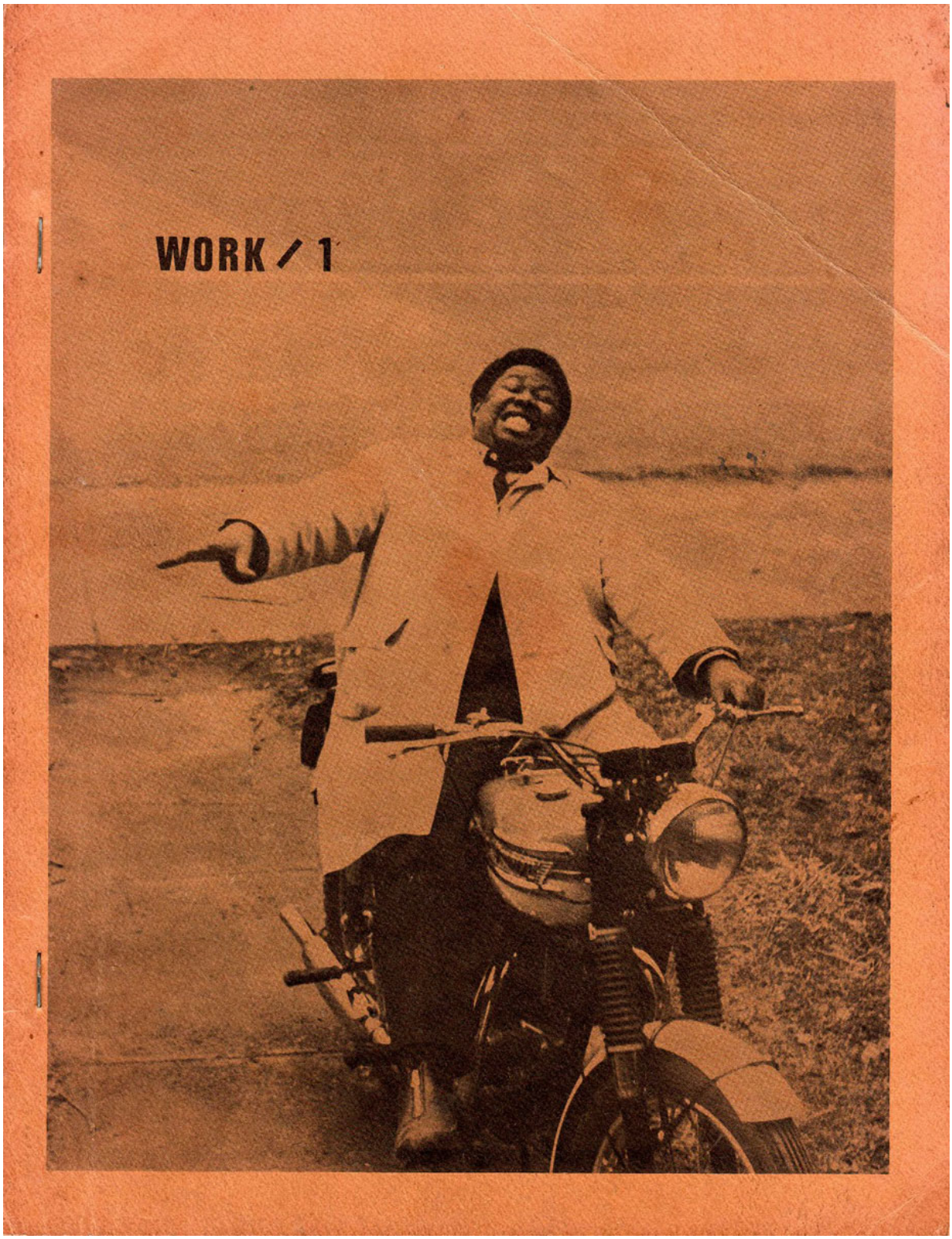

Fig 1.3: The cover of *Work/1,* July 1965. Source: Box 9, Folder 16, JLSP.

On June 12, 1965, John and Leni were married at the Workshop. Leni wore a white mini-dress and Kool-Aid was served to the guests. Their marriage was in part a response to the police harassment they were beginning to experience, as John was on probation for previous drug charges and threatened with arrest for his "illegal cohabitation" with Leni.[71] "It was a Sunday afternoon Workshop wedding," Leni recalled in an interview with Carey Loren. "John's mom made me a white mini-dress, I had flowers in my hair…It was a beatnik wedding!"[72] Later that summer, John, Leni, Robin Eichele, and Martine Algire drove to California together to share their work at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference. A landmark event in the history of postwar poetry and a "flash point of the mimeo revolution," the AWS members met many of their literary idols and friends at Berkeley including Ed Sanders, Ed Dorn, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg.[73] John read at the conference, and the group promoted the Detroit scene to the national literary counterculture.

Music was a constant companion and inspiration to poetry at the AWS, specifically groundbreaking innovations in jazz that at the time were called by many names—in AWS publications the burgeoning genre is often called "the new music"—but would later be commonly known as free jazz.[74] The NAP poets that inspired John and other AWS writers were inspired by jazz and sought to replicate the music's sounds and phrasing in their work. Workshop musicians and composers included James Semark, Charles Olson, Lyman Woodard, and Ron English. These musicians performed in a variety of ensembles, the most prominent of which was the Detroit Contemporary 4. During the 1950s, Detroit was an important site of bebop

[71] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 362.
[72] Loren, 362.
[73] Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, 27.
[74] The term "free jazz" comes from the 1960 Ornette Coleman album title. Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 2.

innovation, with artists including Miles Davis and Charlie Parker performing regularly at Black-owned clubs such as the Blue Bird Inn.[75] The new generation of jazz musicians that the AWS crowd was engaged with sought to innovate the genre beyond bebop by experimenting with "extended improvisations with few breaks" and emphasizing jazz's Black heritage, but were met with backlash from institutions like *DownBeat* and *Jazz*, where white male critics took the developments as an attack on the canon they had built to make jazz into a modernist art form based on a criteria of "color-blind universalism."[76] These critics referred to the new music as "anti-jazz."[77] The AWS was part of "an unprecedented number of collective self-help efforts" that proliferated in the 1960s to create space for "the new wave."[78]

The AWS created *Change*, a journal of free jazz thought and criticism, to counter the lack of coverage of "the new music" in mainstream jazz publications and give musicians an opportunity to develop and publish theoretical ideas behind the emerging genre, as well as promote new recordings and performances. John understood the biases of the mainstream jazz publications well, since he worked for them, and he knew that to receive fair coverage the "new music" needed its own critical apparatus. Just two issues of *Change* were published, Fall/Winter 1965 and Spring/Summer 1966, but the publication offered an important space for the discussion of the developing free jazz genre and the jazz scene in Detroit. John called upon his extensive contacts in the jazz world to develop the publication. The first issue, published in 1965 just a few months after the debut of *Work*, included a manifesto by jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, who wrote, "It is our belief that jazz musical forms must be extended to meet an entirely new set of

[75] Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*.
[76] Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 83, 75.
[77] Anderson, 2.
[78] Anderson, 123.

artistic, social, cultural, and economic circumstances."[79] The cover featured Leni's photo of Shepp and the issue included writings by members of the AWS house bands including Charles Moore, Lyman Woodard, Jim Semark, and Ron English. Leni's photographs of musicians including Shepp, Marion Brown, and Cecil Taylor among many others graced the pages of *Change* and illustrated the multiracial artistic collaboration happening at the AWS. Some AWS musicians like Semark and Moore were also poets and contributed to both *Change* and *Work*. The intense, collaborative atmosphere of the Workshop encouraged constant feedback between poets and musicians, poetry and music. In addition to photographer, Leni acted as a publicist for the AWS and its jazz musicians. She contributed articles to the *Fifth Estate* and the *Daily Collegian* about the Workshop's activities to promote upcoming performances by AWS ensembles and boasted their success performing in cities including Toronto, Newark, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Toledo.[80]

The AWS recognized that previous generations of jazz musicians in Detroit had engaged in similar collective organizing. In *Change/1*, Semark interviewed Detroit jazz musician, band leader, and educator Harold McKinney, who was a mentor to both Semark and Charles Moore among many Detroit artists.[81] Throughout his career McKinney helped organize numerous collectives for jazz musicians in Detroit, including the World Stage Collective (which began in 1951) and the New Music Society (began in 1955), both of which were influences on the AWS.[82] The interview with Semark was an effort by the AWS to learn from a veteran cultural organizer. In the conversation, McKinney discussed the development of a "Detroit sound" in jazz that was

[79] Archie Shepp, "Change/1 Back Cover," *Change/1*, Fall/Winter 1965, Box 9, Folder 10, JLSP.
[80] Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Reopens; Brings Art Colony To Detroit"; Magdalene Sinclair, "The Coatpuller," *Fifth Estate*, July 30, 1966, Labadie Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
[81] Mark Stryker, "Harold McKinney (1928-2001): Detroit's Beloved Patriarch of Jazz," *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2001.
[82] Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 118–19.

supported by musicians organizing themselves.[83] "What the musicians were trying to do then is what the Artists' Workshop is trying to now," McKinney said, praising AWS's work. "Although I think that the Artists' Workshop has developed and evolved the idea differently and better, because they have taken it out of the night club setting, a setting which has been a deterent [sic] for development of purely musical ideas without any other considerations."[84] This kind of interracial dialogue with elders in the community is something that would become less prevalent in later generations of Cass Corridor bohemia.

Further inspired by the Black Mountain experiment and looking to create the kind of learning experience they wished they could have at WSU, in the winter of 1966 the AWS initiated another ambitious project, the Free University of Detroit (FUD). "A free university here in Detroit represents for us the second major step toward the construction of a permanent community of committed artists and scholars in this area," the group wrote in the course catalogue. Students at FUD worked "without any promise or demand of degrees, credits, and other token rewards—which have come to mean, finally, only meal tickets on the great American soup line." A wide variety of courses were offered, taught by AWS members and others from the community "who are deeply committed to their work and to the work of sharing what information they may have which can help other people to a more human life possibility than they are offered elsewhere in our society."[85] John co-taught classes on the New American poetry with Robin Eichele and "contemporary jazz and jazz criticism" with Charles Moore, as well as a prose and drama course focused on contemporary writers including William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and LeRoi Jones. Leni taught photography. Other courses offered included "the

[83] Jim Semark, "You: Part II," *Change/1*, Fall/Winter 1965, Box 9, Folder 10, JLSP.
[84] Semark.
[85] "Free University of Detroit Course Catalog," Winter-Spring 1966, Box 7, Folder 24, JLSP.

surrealist stance," "media and non-rational communication," "philosophy and music," "creative mathematics," and "modern colonial revolutions," as well as skills-based classes at the printing co-op on offset printing, letterpress printing, silkscreen, and graphic design. When FUD opened, AWS hero and former rector of Black Mountain Charles Olson sent the AWS a telegram congratulating them "on founding your free university."[86] This experiment in free education operated for a just single semester, but gained attention with articles in the *Daily Collegian* and the *Detroit Free Press*.[87] The *Free Press's* coverage illustrated how those tasked with maintaining the status quo viewed this project in self-determination, expressing dismay at the Workshop's dilapidated building and blighted neighborhood as well as bemusement that any type of school would allow students to "think as you like."[88]

The AWS had quickly made itself the center of arts and culture in Detroit, but also suffered from its own ambition. The group admitted in one undated newsletter, "As the Workshop grew in size and function, unfortunately the organizational process lagged far behind."[89] Much of the work of the organization was shouldered by a few people, including Leni, and these core members fired off angry newsletters to the rest of the membership, chastising them for their lack of participation and failure to pay their monthly dues. At one point the collective became desperate enough to charge a fifty-cent admission for one of the Sunday workshop programs, but were met with such backlash that they reversed course.[90] While they sought to break free of social conventions and constraints themselves, the male members of the

[86] Charles Olson, "Telegram to John Sinclair and Robin Eichele," January 19, 1966, Box 7, Folder 24, JLSP.
[87] Cronin, "Free University of Detroit Founded by Artists To Offer Alternative or Extension"; Peggy Cronin, "Challenges Mass Education: FUD Not Connected to State," *The Daily Collegian*, January 25, 1966, Box 7, Folder 24, JLSP; George Walker, "New School's Creed: Think As You Like," *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1966, Box 7, Folder 24, JLSP.
[88] Walker, "New School's Creed: Think As You Like."
[89] "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter," undated, Box 7, Folder 34, JLSP.
[90] "Artists' Workshop Program #18," March 7, 1965, Box 7, Folder 29, JLSP.

AWS assumed that the few women involved should take on gendered labor required by the organization. As scholars have shown, this dynamic was not uncommon in 1960s New Left and counterculture organizations and was a driving factor in the development of second-wave feminism.[91]

In a 2010 oral history interview, Robin Eichele recalled, "The Artists' Workshop was very much a male-dominated enterprise… I think we were looked at as being kind of a testosterone-driven organization."[92] Evidence of this can be seen in one newsletter asking for assistance with labor at the John Lodge storefront, in which the organization wrote, "we need *women* to help prepare food for the monthly co-op dinner, people to clean up and paint the basement of the Workshop, people to be called on for secretarial work (esp. typing), people to help with mailings and distribution of publicity, people to run errands for the Press, Printing Co-op, and Workshop, etc" (emphasis added).[93] Similar gendered assumptions about labor were reflected in the work Leni did for the organization and how that work was credited. Within AWS publications, Leni was frequently the sole female contributor. Her biographical entries in *The Journal* put her roles as wife and caretaker ahead of her identity as an artist. The Winter 1966/1967 issue of *The Journal* describes her as "John's good helmate [sic] and still has time to be a photographer in her own right."[94] This issue was one of the first places where Leni published her widely-circulated photograph of her bohemian friends lounging outside the Red Door.[95] Her bio from the April 1965 issue of the same publication also emphasizes Leni's caretaking role over her artistic work,

[91] Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979).
[92] Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Robin Eichele.
[93] Robin Eichele, "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter," January 30, 1966, Box 7, Folder 33, JLSP.
[94] "The Journal" (Monteith College, Winter 1966/1967), Box 9, Folder 13, JLSP.
[95] This photograph was widely republished, including on the cover of the *Detroit Metro Times*. Lisa M. Collins, "And the Beats Go On: The Cass Corridor Revolution at 40," *Detroit Metro Times*, November 3, 2004, Andrew W. Smith personal collection.

"She now helps take care of the Artists' Workshop and John Sinclair."[96] However, publications created and edited by AWS members did give her an opportunity to share her own opinions on "sexism," which she did in an article about "cock rock" and a review of Amiri Baraka's play *Dutchman*.[97]

The group realized that relying on a few people to do most of the labor was resulting in burnout. "Unfortunately, over the past few months, avenues of contact have broken down to the point where many people feel that the Workshop is a one or two man show (that is, that a small nucleus does everything) which, unfortunately, has been the case," they wrote in one newsletter.[98] While they attempted to encourage an equitable experiment through their rhetoric, Leni and John were the driving forces behind the Workshop and John served as the charismatic figurehead. It was hard for others to keep up with the Sinclairs and the needs of the organization. Robin Eichele, who was also a core contributor, remembered their feverish pace of work years later: "John slept rarely, he was the master stencil maker for the mimeographs. Leni was equally indefatigable."[99] Leni remembered, "We were working day and night, we thought sleeping was a waste of time."[100] Leni also performed much unglamorous work for the organization. She filed the paperwork to register the organization as a nonprofit.[101] She took on a secretarial role, writing and mailing many of the newsletters asking for donations and begging members to stop falling behind on their dues. She distributed free poems on the WSU campus, printed books and

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[96] "The Journal" (Monteith College, April 1965), Box 9, Folder 12, JLSP.
[97] Leni Sinclair, "Cock Rock," *Ann Arbor Sun*, May 21, 1971, Ann Arbor District Library, https://aadl.org/node/193260; Magdalene Arndt, "DUTCHMAN/Impressions," *Work/1*, Summer 1965, Box 9, Folder 16, JLSP.
[98] Eichele, "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter."
[99] Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Robin Eichele.
[100] Monika Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Leni Sinclair, April 14, 2009, Wayne State University Undergraduate Library, https://elibrary.wayne.edu/record=b4399271~S47.
[101] Magdalene Sinclair and Michigan Department of Treasury, "Trans-Love Energies Certified Resolution of Change of Registered Office," August 14, 1968, Box 10, Folder 15, JLSP.

journals, photographed and documented events, and organized John's legal support while he was incarcerated. She translated texts by German poet Rainer Gerhardt featured prominently in *Work/3*.[102] Leni's background in a family of farmers and childhood spent engaged in communal labor were suited to the Workshop project, but not everyone shared her work ethic and she could become embittered when others shirked their duties. One newsletter Leni wrote in 1966 reflects the frustration the core members of the collective felt towards those who were less engaged:

> "There is so much happening here right now that, if you people were lifted off the face of this earth for awhile, thru something like temporary death, as [jazz musician] Joseph Jarman suggested today, & could look down on this place on John Lodge from a different perspective, you'd realize just how BIG this thing is that's happening here. & you'd get some healthy respect, maybe, for the people who do all the WORK here…And maybe, after you get back from death you'd hurry down here & HELP us, & bring us some MONEY or some food."[103]

Additionally, the AWS found that while developing communal urban living for artists was an important contribution to creating a scene, it was not easy. Members of the organization were invigorated by living in proximity to each other. Leni wrote that "the best music usually doesn't even happen at the Workshop but at our house, 4825 John Lodge, or 'the castle.'"[104] Many of the members of AWS who went on to become well-known artists—the Sinclairs, Charles Moore, Gary Grimshaw—lived together in "the Castle." But there were challenges in urban communal living, including neighbors frustrated with late-night noise and the question of how to provide housing to artists who may not always have the funds to pay rent. Raising the money to support the maintenance of multiple old, dilapidated buildings was a constant struggle. The housing cooperative forced John to occupy a contradictory role in which he demanded rent from tenants and enforced house rules while preaching a spirit of freedom and comradery. Notes were posted

[102] John Sinclair, "Work/3," *Work/3*, Winter 1965/1966, Box 9, Folder 18, JLSP.
[103] Magdalene Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter #7," May 31, 1966, Box 7, Folder 27, JLSP.
[104] Leni Sinclair and John Sinclair, "The Home Front: Detroit," *Change*, Spring/Summer 1966, Box 9, Folder 11, JLSP.

in the workshop storefront warning people not to play the instruments unless they were tenants of the building or "actual musicians" and threatening eviction for non-payment of rent and loss of kitchen privileges.[105] In an "emergency letter" addressed to AWS members, Leni blamed others involved for the difficulties faced by the housing cooperative: "It seems that there are people still living with us who do not know what a co-operative is. They have shamlessly [sic] taken advantage of this free, non-compulsive environment, putting their own petty wants & desires before that of the community, that they have forced the Workshop to act like a landlord…"[106]

Finally, as they worked to provide affordable housing, alternative education, and access to arts that were unavailable in the city and region, members of the collective imagined Detroit in ways that echoed settler colonialism, seeing the city as a blank slate and themselves as the first to bring real art to a culturally deprived civilization. John claimed credit for the organization's work and accomplishments, conceptualizing himself and the AWS as a pioneers and Detroit as a frontier. In a profile of him published by the *Detroit Free Press*, John is quoted as boasting, "I've almost single-handedly put Detroit on the map among the country's artists."[107] In another article, John wrote, "Detroit, despite all its cultural pretensions, has been artistically 'dead' for longer than most people here want to admit…the Detroit milieu is if anything anti-artistic."[108] In his writings about the AWS, John describes Detroit as both "artistically 'dead" and "virgin ground" for artists, metaphors for the city that have been cemented in popular consciousness and have only increased with the city's decline as scholars such as Rebecca Kinney have demonstrated.[109]

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[105] "Notice About AWS Instruments," n.d., Box 7, Folder 32, JLSP; "Artists' Workshop Society: Notice to Tenants," January 30, 1965, Box 7, Folder 11, JLSP.
[106] Leni Sinclair, "Emergency Meeting Letter," March 7, 1966, Box 7, Folder 18, JLSP.
[107] Askins, "Where Did John Sinclair Come From?"
[108] Eichele and Sinclair, "Getting out from Under."
[109] Eichele and Sinclair; Rebecca J. Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland: The Rise of Detroit as America's Postindustrial Frontier* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); For more on connections between deindustrialization

The AWS was influential, but like future Cass Corridor scenes, it built upon the work of local artist-organizers that came before. Charles Moore reflected that, "The Artists' Workshop was not the only game. There was the World Stage, New Music Society, and a bunch of other stuff going all the way back to the 1950s."[110] John was well aware of the work done by jazz musicians to build community-based organizations in Detroit and elsewhere, and recognized this by featuring a jazz artist and cultural organizer like Harold McKinney within the pages of *Change*. Conceptualizing Detroit as an artistic wasteland was another way that the AWS set a precedent for future Cass Corridor scenes, in which artists would continue to imagine the Corridor and Detroit in ways that erased their predecessors and contemporaries.

"Police City, Baby"

The biggest challenge that the AWS and its members faced was police harassment. Late 1960s Detroit has been described by scholars as "a virtual war zone" between a majority white and ideologically conservative police force that largely operated as a political tool in an attempt to retain conservative control over a rapidly changing city against activists fighting for civil rights, Black Power, an end to the Vietnam War, and police reform among other causes.[111] In 1964, only 144 out of 4,390 Detroit Police Department (DPD) officers were Black, and the few Black officers that were on the force reported constant discrimination and harassment on the job.[112] Entrenched racism had been endemic in the DPD for decades, at least going back to the

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and the frontier, see: Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).

[110] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 361.

[111] Matthew Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Police Violence and Black Power, 1968-1970," Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era (University of Michigan Carceral State Project), 2021, https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1968-70.

[112] Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying A Study in Urban Revolution*, 156–65; Matthew Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Limits of Police Reform," Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime

city's 1943 race riot, and attempts at police reform during the liberal mayor Jerome Cavanaugh's administration (1962-1970) fell short of their goals.[113]

While the AWS saw the arts as their major focus, their use of marijuana, interracial socializing, and general nonconformism made them a threat to the status quo, and thus a target for the DPD. "I think that it was intimidating or threatening to people who saw that as essentially a negation of the American dream that they had, which was not what we were looking for," Eichele later reflected.[114] Surveillance and harassment by the DPD's Red Squad and Narcotics Bureau would land John in prison for giving away two marijuana cigarettes, force the group and its members out of the city, and ultimately cause the AWS to collapse and be reborn as the radicalized White Panther Party.[115] John remembered in a later oral history interview, "Nothing was happening but the police…Detroit was Police City, baby, and you never forgot it—not for a minute."[116]

The AWS and their neighbors and comrades at the FE and the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam were under surveillance by the DPD's notorious Red Squad, which monitored their members, sent undercover officers to infiltrate their activities, and maintained meticulous files on those it monitored.[117] Red Squads operated in most major U.S. cities during this period. These organizations had their roots in the late nineteenth century as part of the first

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Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era (University of Michigan Carceral State Project), 2021, https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/civil-rights-pressure.

[113] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 11, 95–125; Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Limits of Police Reform."

[114] Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Robin Eichele.

[115] See Hale for more on the political radicalization of the group: Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture.'"

[116] This quote comes from Bret Eynon's oral history interviews with John Sinclair as part of the Hunter College American Social History Project in Ann Arbor in 1977. Quoted in Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 135.

[117] Matthew Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Red Squad: Political Surveillance," Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era (University of Michigan Carceral State Project), 2021, https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/red-squad.

Red Scare that was orchestrated to clamp down on Leftist and labor activism in the response to the Haymarket massacre.[118] The Squads were designed as a way for local police to collaborate with state and national law enforcement, feeding them information about local activists, many active in movements for labor and racial justice. Detroit's Red Squad operated similarly to those in cities around the country, stifling dissent and protest, and keeping detailed files on the activities of citizens deemed suspect. Activists across the city faced similar treatment by DPD and the Red Squad during this era, with Black activists receiving the most punitive actions as Red Squads increasingly targeted civil rights and Black Power groups through the 1960s and 1970s.[119] In Detroit, "Mere attendance at a rally, meeting, forum, or demonstration was frequently sufficient to trigger the data collection process."[120] Red Squads across the country used two main tactics to disrupt organizations: "covert intervention through informer infiltration" and "the raid."[121] DPD utilized both of these methods to harass, intimidate, and wear down members of the AWS. The Detroit Red Squad also facilitated DPD collaboration with state, federal, and WSU campus police, all of whom were involved in raids on the AWS.[122]

The first major police raid of the AWS took place on August 16, 1965. Both John and Leni were arrested at their home at 4825 John Lodge, along with Charles Moore and six others.[123] Lieutenant James Raley of the DPD narcotics bureau told the *Detroit News* that the

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[118] Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1990); Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Red Squad: Political Surveillance."
[119] Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 291; Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Red Squad: Political Surveillance."
[120] Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 296.
[121] Donner, 2.
[122] Donner, 293.
[123] Detroit Police Department Criminal Investigation Division Narcotic Bureau, "Information on the 'PEACE IN VIET NAM' Committee, Also Known as the DETROIT COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIET NAM (DCEWV)," August 17, 1965, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad & Police Files, MI State Police Files (1 of 2), JLSP.

cops had "interrupted a smoking session of beatniks" and that John said, "I don't see anything wrong in smoking pot."[124] The *News* reported that the raid was the result of a three-week investigation "assisted by university officials" and described the AWS as a place "frequented by musicians, artists and writers, as well as students."[125] During the raid, members of the AWS community along with their neighbors at the DCEWV "harassed" the police performing their duties, giving them enough trouble that they were forced to call for backup.[126] DPD documents record that, "The Detroit Police were hindered by the attempted intervention of DCEWV members who had been at their headquarters."[127] According to the *Free Press*, which also covered the raid, this "harassment" consisted of "committee members who asked those under arrest if their civil rights had been violated. They also challenged police to produce arrest warrants which they said were necessary to make the arrests legal."[128] At this time, possessing even a tiny amount of marijuana was a felony in Michigan.[129] John's first arrest for marijuana possession had occurred less than a month before founding the AWS, on October 7, 1964. After the August 1965 raid, he was looking at jail time and faced an automatic ten-year sentence if he received a third conviction for marijuana possession.[130]

In February of 1966, John Sinclair entered the Detroit House of Corrections to serve six months for his previous drug charges. The police were successful in their goal of disrupting

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[124] "8 Arrested in Dope Raid Near WSU," *Detroit News*, August 17, 1965, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.
[125] "8 Arrested in Dope Raid Near WSU."
[126] Robert Cotter, "Would-Be School Teacher Defends Marijuana Habit," *Detroit Free Press*, August 18, 1965, Box 7, Folder 11, JLSP; Detroit Police Department Criminal Investigation Division Narcotic Bureau, "Information on the 'PEACE IN VIET NAM' Committee, Also Known as the DETROIT COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIET NAM (DCEWV)." The DCEWV and the FE's extensive Red Squad files can be accessed in the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan's Special Collections Research Center.
[127] DPD Narcotic Bureau, "Detroit Police Department Interrogation Record," August 16, 1965, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.
[128] Cotter, "Would-Be School Teacher Defends Marijuana Habit."
[129] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 109.
[130] Carson, 113.

activity at the Workshop, as John's incarceration left the organization in shambles, financially devastated by John's legal costs, members exhausted and afraid from the repeated police harassment. Leni recalled working night and day to try and keep AWS afloat while John was in jail, and during this period she dropped out of college to keep the Workshop going.[131] At the time John was incarcerated, the AWS was in the middle of a FUD semester and was publishing multiple journals and newsletters regularly in addition to holding weekly public showcases and making the Workshop space available for artists. Meanwhile, as they and their organization faced crisis, the counterculture movement that the AWS had helped to bring to the Motor City was beginning to bloom. Leni remembered how, "John went to jail [for marijuana possession] for six months. When he got out of jail, [in] that time the world had changed, it seemed. Instead of a whole big jazz scene, what was happening was a whole big youth movement."[132]

The Sinclairs and the rest of the Workshop connected with the youth movement they had helped spark in Detroit when John was released in August 1966. While, like many beatniks, John was skeptical of rock and roll, a local group of rock musicians called the Motor City 5 (MC5 for short) would soon change his mind about the genre, and his partnership with them shaped the national counterculture. Back in 1963, at the same time that the Red Door Gallery hosted its single influential season, the members of the Motor City 5—guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred "Sonic" Smith, singer Rob Tyner, drummer Dennis Thompson, and bassist Michael Davis—formed their band in the downriver suburb of Lincoln Park.[133] After consistent gigging in the

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[131] Berenyi, Oral History Interview with Leni Sinclair.
[132] Richie Unterberger, "LENI SINCLAIR AND THE MOTOR CITY UNDERGROUND," PleaseKillMe, December 13, 2021, https://pleasekillme.com/leni-sinclair/.
[133] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 100–103; For more on the story of the MC5, see: Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 33–62; Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 207–326; Mathew J. Bartkowiak, *The MC5 and Social Change: A Study in Rock and Revolution* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mcfarland & Company, Inc., 2009); Wayne Kramer, *The Hard Stuff: Dope, Crime, The MC5 & My Life of Impossibilities* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2018); Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 24–40; Burke, *Tear Down the Walls: White Radicalism and Black Power in 1960s Rock*, 22–45.

subpar rock and roll venues available in the metro Detroit area at the time—mostly teen clubs, bars, and casinos—in late summer 1966 the group moved to the Cass Corridor, renting apartments in a building at 659 W. Canfield.[134]

Kramer remembered, "I met John the day he got out of prison."[135] A "Festival of the People" celebration was held at the Workshop in honor of John's release, and the MC5 begged for an opportunity to perform even though they were not on the bill.[136] Leni ended up pulling the plug on their set out of fear their neighbors would call the police over the loud music, but still the band members were determined to get involved with the AWS community.[137] The MC5 were aspiring beatniks, and they saw John as "a mythical figure."[138] Despite having no experience with managing a rock band, John believed the group could become a great success with some organization and guidance, and agreed to be the group's manager. He influenced them to incorporate elements of free jazz improvisation into rock and roll and to consider the political implications of popular culture. The improvised, dueling guitar solos of Wayne Kramer and Fred "Sonic" Smith made the musicians into two of the most influential guitarists of the rock genre and drew crowds to the group's shows.[139]

While the collaboration with the MC5 was just beginning, the Workshop was targeted by the DPD for a second major raid on January 24, 1967. This time, the DPD had undertaken a three-month undercover investigation into the AWS in order to arrest fifty-five people, including both John and Leni again. The raid involved the collaboration of multiple agencies, using "the

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[134] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 110.
[135] Chris Simunek, "High Times Interview: Wayne Kramer," High Times, June 26, 2015, https://hightimes.com/culture/music/high-times-interview-wayne-kramer/.
[136] Magdalene Sinclair, "Festival for People," *Fifth Estate*, July 30, 1966, Labadie Collection.
[137] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 110; Loren, "Motor City Underground," 370.
[138] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 110.
[139] Rolling Stone, "The 250 Greatest Guitarists of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, October 13, 2023, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/best-guitarists-1234814010/.

entire 22-man Detroit Narcotics Squad, seven federal narcotics agents, five customs agents, three members of the Michigan State intelligence bureau and an agent from the Food and Drug Administration."[140] The DPD busted into the Workshop while a new musical project, the Detroit Edison White Light Band, were practicing. John told the FE that when the raid began "the band kept blasting away with its rendition of 'Love Supreme.'"[141] Police described the scene to the *Free Press* as a "jam session…a party at which the participants entertain themselves with bongo music and marijuana."[142] The FE reported that, "Artist Workshop magazines, posters, and books were confiscated by the police. The agents had no warrant…"[143]

Both raids were made possible by the undercover police work performed by officer Vahan Kapagian. For the second sting, Kapagian grew a beard and was joined by officer June Mumford, who donned a miniskirt to play the role of a female beatnik. The pair attended AWS events and repeatedly asked John where they could score marijuana. John told the FE that Kapegian "even brought fried chicken to our communal dinner and his wife helped with putting together our magazine."[144] Kapegian, going by the pseudonym "Louie," was easily able to take advantage of the "openness" that John and AWS members had cultivated at the Workshop, at their own risk.[145] Once the counterculture community learned of Kapagian's work, they publicized his actions. "Louie's" photograph was put on the cover of the FE, warning others not to fall for the bearded hippie disguise and to be vigilant about infiltrators.[146] While vilified among the hippies, beatniks, students, and their sympathizers, Kapegian was awarded the *Detroit*

[140] Peter Werbe and Harvey Ovshinsky, "Narco Agents Raid Artists' Workshop," *Fifth Estate*, February 1, 1967, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.
[141] Werbe and Ovshinsky.
[142] Cotter, "Would-Be School Teacher Defends Marijuana Habit."
[143] Werbe and Ovshinsky.
[144] Werbe and Ovshinsky, "Narco Agents Raid Artists' Workshop."
[145] John Sinclair, "A Questionnaire: For a Bunch of Very Questionable People," July 19, 1966, Box 7, Folder 33, JLSP.
[146] Ben Habeebe, "The Louie Love-In," *Fifth Estate*, June 15, 1967, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.

News' "Policeman of the Month" award for his role in "breaking up a dope ring." At the event, Kapegian's wife was thanked by Police Commissioner Ray Girardin for putting up with her husband's beard. Members of the AWS and growing counterculture community organized a protest at the ceremony, while Kapegian snuck out of a back door.[147]

Police documents and press coverage of the AWS reveal the anxiety these young people who were against the war in Vietnam, partook in interracial socializing, listened to jazz, and smoked marijuana caused among Detroit's leadership. After the January 24 raid, Inspector Joseph Brown, chief of the Detroit Narcotics Squad, told the FE "that he thought those arrested were a danger to the population of Detroit."[148] Police documents show that the DPD believed John and the AWS "has harbored many teen-age runaways, mostly girls" and was "purported to be conducting immoral readings and showing pornographic films."[149] An informant told the DPD that "Sinclair sells drugs to the teenagers and permits them to engage in sexual activities on his premises."[150] These sensationalized reports demonstrate how the police used Red Squad files to justify their surveillance activities.

Detroit's two daily newspapers reinforced this, smearing the reputations of those involved in both raids and especially Sinclair. Though most of those arrested were released without charges, the media collaborated with police to create a moral panic around the group's activities. In a report on the first AWS raid, the *Detroit Free Press* published an article titled "Would-Be Schoolteacher Defends Marijuana Habit," frightening and titillating its readers with the suggestion that John, who was earning an MA in English from WSU, desired to turn their

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[147] Habeebe.
[148] Werbe and Ovshinsky, "Narco Agents Raid Artists' Workshop."
[149] DPD Gang Detail Youth Bureau, "Detroit Police Department Inter-Office Memorandum," December 19, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP; Detroit Police Department Detective Division, Narcotic Bureau, "Arrest for Violation of the State Narcotic Law, Sale and Possession of Marihuana," January 27, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.
[150] DPD Gang Detail Youth Bureau, "Detroit Police Department Inter-Office Memorandum."

children's classrooms into a "jam session."[151] In a letter to AWS supporters asking for donations to help cover legal expenses, John shared the newspaper coverage to demonstrate "what we are all up against," and denied having spoken to the press or police.[152] He accused the media and the police of fabricating the salacious details in the articles, such as his desire to become a schoolteacher (he was studying literature, not teaching).[153]

John's drug-related arrests were "masterminded" by one man, Lieutenant Warner Stringfellow of the DPD Narcotics Bureau.[154] Both Leni and MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer recall that Stringfellow had a personal vendetta against John and the AWS because his teenage daughter had decided to join the counterculture and started hanging out at the Workshop.[155] "This lieutenant had a daughter who became a hippie and started hanging out with us. That made her dad really hate us," Leni recalled.[156]

It was not only John the DPD was after, and other members of the collective were continuously harassed by Detroit police. In one incident just a few months after January 1967 raid, police dragged Gary Grimshaw out of his apartment at the Castle building to a police station after they noticed some art they found offensive inside his home while driving past the building to surveil the occupants. Police documents describing the incident detail the level of repression and surveillance that members of the AWS faced: "a Second Precinct Scout Car drove by and observed inside this location but visible through an open door a large kite, described as red white and blue bearing the inscription 'FUCK THE UNITED STATES—GO FLY A KITE.

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[151] Cotter, "Would-Be School Teacher Defends Marijuana Habit."
[152] Sinclair and Friends of John Sinclair, "An Appeal."
[153] Sinclair and Friends of John Sinclair.
[154] Werbe and Ovshinsky, "Narco Agents Raid Artists' Workshop"; Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 124.
[155] Unterberger, "LENI SINCLAIR AND THE MOTOR CITY UNDERGROUND"; Simunek, "High Times Interview."
[156] Unterberger, "LENI SINCLAIR AND THE MOTOR CITY UNDERGROUND"; Sinclair wrote a book of poetry, published by the AWS Press, dedicated to the man harassing him. John Sinclair, *The Poem for Warner Stringfellow* (Detroit: The Artists' Workshop Press, 1966).

The scout car officers confiscated the kite and conveyed the lone occupant of this location to the Second Precinct."[157] John and others stormed the police station after they realized Grimshaw had been taken, and Grimshaw was released. One of the irate AWS members promised the police "that because of this incident the police would have more trouble this summer with this group than they could handle."[158]

Just two days after the January 1967 raid, the *Detroit News* published a bizarre article in which a reporter narrates going to the AWS building during the middle of the day and, finding it "locked, silent" concludes that the organization no longer poses any threat. The reporter spends nearly equal time describing the trash piled up in the back of the building as he does some of the AWS literature seen hanging in the windows. The article ends by noting that many buildings in the area were in the process of demolition as part of an ongoing urban renewal project: "The Artists' Workshop seems to be a pretty inactive pad in an area that has been apparently condemned to make room for progress. There's no one on the street with whom to discuss it—not even an artist."[159] This article assures readers that the drug bust the paper heartily endorsed had worked; the organization was no longer operating and the threat to conservative ideology had been eliminated.

AWS members recognized how the media and police worked together to "smear and malign" the group to stop its activities, and they utilized their own media apparatus in the underground press to fight back. Media scholar John McMillian has shown how the counterculture and New Left developed the underground press in response to such inaccurate and

[157] Criminal Intelligence Bureau, "Inter-Office Memorandum Criminal Intelligence Bureau," May 22, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.
[158] Criminal Intelligence Bureau.
[159] Armand Gebert, "Raided Building Locked, Silent," *The Detroit News*, January 26, 1967, Box 7, Folder 17, JLSP.

biased coverage of their work, lifestyle, politics, and current events by the mainstream media.[160] The AWS and their colleagues at the FE were at the forefront of this effort.[161] Further illustrating the feverish pace of work that the pair maintained, Leni and John were both staff members and frequent contributors to the FE with the "Coatpuller" and "Rock and Roll Dope" columns.[162] The collective used the underground press to spread ideas developed at the AWS to a broader audience in publications including the FE, the *Warren-Forest Sun*, and the *Ann Arbor Sun*. In a press release addressing the raid, the AWS argued that the police were seeking to "bolster their crumbling image by striking out at an already misunderstood group of human beings, hoping to dissolve the growing community of artists, heads, political activists, and young sympathizers and potential members of this community into single isolated beings cowering in total fear and paranoia." Though marijuana was used as the legal excuse for targeting the AWS, it was obvious to the group "that this is not merely a legal fight over marijuana…but that ignorant fearful lacklove reactive forces are working to deny our whole way of life."[163]

While local media trumpeted the success of the January 24 raid, the thirty-eight law enforcement officials from local, state, and national agencies had only confiscated a small amount of marijuana and all but thirteen of those arrested were released without charges. The raid represented an enormous expenditure of public money and law enforcement effort to collect a negligible amount of marijuana and arrest a few people for non-violent offenses. However, it was successful in chilling the environment of community and creativity at the AWS. The fear and paranoia caused by DPD's relentless campaign against them wore on AWS members. Robin

[160] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 6.
[161] Werbe, "History of the Fifth Estate Part I: The Early Years."
[162] John published a collection of his underground newspaper columns and prison writings in 1972. John Sinclair, *Guitar Army: Rock & Revolution with MC5 and The White Panther Party* (Los Angeles: Process Media, 2007).
[163] Heads of State Defense Committee, "Detroit Artists Workshop Press Release," n.d., Box 7, Folder 18, JLSP.

Eichele said that the repeated arrests were more than the organization could handle, "John got hit and a number of other people got hit around the same time, and the pressure got too much. We just couldn't operate; every time you'd turn around there was a cop car at the door. Paranoia was wiping people out."[164]

Trans-Love Gets You There, 1967-1968

As a response to the challenges and changes of 1966, in the summer of 1967 the AWS reorganized under the name Trans-Love Energies, taken from a song by British folksinger Donovan frequently performed by Jefferson Airplane.[165] Trans-Love Energies was as ambitious and hard-working an organization as the AWS had been, had many of the same members, and continued many of the Workshop's activities, with a more psychedelic aesthetic to fit the changing times. They published an underground newspaper, *The Warren-Forest Sun*, while continuing to publish *Work* (issues 4 and 5 with art by newcomer to the collective Gary Grimshaw reflected the growing influence of psychedelia), and operated a "general store" at 4857 John Lodge where artists sold their wares to raise funds for the organization, in addition to their most lucrative job of managing the MC5 and building the growing rock scene at the new venue the Grande Ballroom.[166] The most dedicated members, including the Sinclair family, Gary Grimshaw, and Lawrence "Pun" Plamondon, lived communally in "a large apartment complex above the Sun office and the Fifth Estate."[167] They worked closely with others in the movement, especially the FE and the DCEWV, which were located within blocks of the John Lodge and Warren intersection. All these organizations were closely monitored by the Red Squad.

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[164] Askins, "Where Did John Sinclair Come From?"
[165] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 113; Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 130.
[166] Trans-Love Energies, "Trans-Love Special," undated, Box 10, Folder 15, JLSP.
[167] Trans-Love Energies.

The most well-known achievement of the Trans-Love collective was the cultivation of the psychedelic rock scene at the Grande Ballroom on the city's West Side, which opened in October of 1966 and thanks to their work collaborating with the MC5 became known as one of the best rock venues between the coasts.[168] The Grande's "hip capitalist" owner "Uncle" Russ Gibb went into rock and roll promotion because he found it was more lucrative than teaching high school and, "chasing after a buck," was inspired to create a version of San Francisco's counterculture rock club The Fillmore in Detroit.[169] He found the ideal location in the Grande, "a former big-band dancehall built in 1929 that resembled an exotic middle-eastern palace."[170] While he provided the funding, Trans-Love created the scene that made the Grande a draw for some of the most iconic artists of the 1960s—Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Who, Creem, Jimi Hendrix, and many others performed there. But it was Detroit's local bands including the Stooges, ? and the Mysterians, the Rationals, the Up, the Amboy Dukes (featuring a young Ted Nugent) and especially the MC5 that were the biggest draw and frequently outperformed the more famous headliners. Leni's photographs of these bands performing at the Grande are considered iconic images of 1960s rock culture. Leni, Workshop poet Jerry Younkin, and Gary Grimshaw collaborated as the Magic Veil Light Company to provide a psychedelic light show accompanying the music and Grimshaw advertised the Grande's happenings with his era-defining rock poster art.[171] The Grande is considered a golden age in Detroit music, and it is

[168] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 371; Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 112; *Louder Than Love: The Grande Ballroom Story*.
[169] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 133; Timothy J. Fritz, Oral History Interview with Russ Gibb, Cass Corridor Documentation Project, March 25, 2011, Wayne State University Undergraduate Library, https://elibrary.wayne.edu/record=b4293157~S47.
[170] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 371.
[171] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 155.

frequently cited by scholars and music journalists as the scene that laid the foundations of both the punk rock and heavy metal genres that would develop in the following decade.[172]

One way the transition from the AWS to Trans-Love changed the collective was a decreased participation of Black artists.[173] The AWS period from 1964 to 1967 represents the greatest amount of interracial collaboration within the Cass Corridor bohemian scenes of the late twentieth century, due in large part to the centrality of free jazz within the movement.[174] Inspired by the Beats and NAP, John and others at the AWS believed that free jazz held the promise of a liberated, utopian future. As the youth movement and counterculture grew, John shifted his focus from jazz to rock music as the genre he believed would be the voice of rebellion for the youth of America. While John continued to champion Black music and artists—for example bringing Sun Ra to perform at the Grande Ballroom—his attention was focused increasingly on psychedelic rock with his role managing the MC5. This shift reflects music scholar Iain Anderson's findings that rock and roll's growing popularity through the 1960s "exacerbated the declining opportunities" for free jazz artists.[175] With the collective's later move to Ann Arbor and the formation of the White Panther Party, the counterculture milieu of the Cass Corridor would become much more white than it was during the Artists Workshop days.[176]

The Belle Isle Love-In, held on April 30, 1967, was perhaps the most high-profile confrontation between Trans-Love/AWS members and police. Precipitating 1967's "Summer of Love," Trans-Love decided to organize a day-long counterculture festival on the city's island park, Belle Isle, which sits in the Detroit River between Detroit and Windsor, Canada. The MC5,

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[172] McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me*, 33–62; Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 207–326; *Louder Than Love: The Grande Ballroom Story*.
[173] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 142.
[174] For more on the interracial dynamics of Cass Corridor bohemia at this time and the influence of WSU on the scene see Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, 200–215.
[175] Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 52.
[176] Ann Arbor musician Hiawatha Bailey was the only Black member of the WPP. Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 304.

the Up, Seventh Seal, and Billy C. and the Sunshine were among the musical acts, and Leni designed and sewed the pink muumuu worn by John (she also created costumes for the MC5 throughout their tenure).[177] As the crowd grew to over six thousand, several motorcycle gangs joined the festivities and clashed with police as the night wore on. When police attempted to make an arrest for driving a motorcycle through the crowd, attendees began throwing fireworks, bottles, and other debris and a riot broke out. The DPD eventually called in 150 reinforcements to restore their idea of order.[178] Wayne Kramer remembered being shocked by the police brutality he witnessed, as the police responded "ridiculously out of proportion to the danger they faced…The mounted cops galloped toward the running people and clubbed them like they were playing polo."[179] Undercover officers had attended meetings organizing the Love-In and were aware of Trans-Love's plans for providing their own security forces, which they dubbed the "psychedelic rangers."[180] Police documents describing the event admit that the violence spiraled as people became increasingly angry at officers, who refused to allow the rangers to keep the peace.[181] However, mainstream press coverage describes the youth attending the event as the agitators and blames John in particular for the violence.[182] Leni was heavily pregnant at the time

[177] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 114–15; Kristine McKenna, "Leni Sinclair in Conversation with Kristine McKenna," in *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978* (Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit/Foggy Notions Books, 2021), 401.
[178] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 115; Detroit Police Department Detective Division, "REPORT OF CONFERENCE ON LOVE-IN HELD ON BELLE ISLE, Apr. 30, 1967," April 30, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad & Police Files, Detroit Police Files, primarily 1966-1970, JLSP.
[179] Quoted in Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 115–16.
[180] Detroit Police Department Detective Division Special Investigation Bureau, "Conference on LOVE-IN to Be Held on Belle Isle, April 30, 1967," April 26, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad & Police Files, Detroit Police Files, primarily 1966-1970, JLSP.
[181] Detroit Police Department Detective Division, "REPORT OF CONFERENCE ON LOVE-IN HELD ON BELLE ISLE, Apr. 30, 1967."
[182] Gary Blonston and Susan Holmes, "Thousands Battle with Police: Belle Isle Love-In Turns to Hate," *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1967, Newspapers.com.

and experienced police violence during her pregnancy for the second time since the January AWS raid. She and John were able to escape safely to a nearby friend's house.[183]

Barely three months after the Love-In and six months after the January raid on the Workshop, in the early hours of Sunday, July 23, 1967, police officers busted an illicit speakeasy in a Black neighborhood on the city's West Side.[184] Long-simmering anger over police brutality, overcrowded housing, and racist hiring practices among other grievances exploded, resulting in over a week of chaos throughout the city. Over 2,500 stores looted and/or burned, 43 deaths (30 of those killed by police), 7,231 arrests, and both the national guard and federal troops were called in to restore law and order.[185] The Detroit Rebellion would become known as "the worst civil disorder" of the twentieth century, the defining moment of this period for the city's culture and politics.[186] The amount of police interference at the AWS during the first half of 1967 is indicative of the level of police surveillance, harassment, and brutality that occurred throughout Detroit at this time, and more intensely in the city's Black communities.

Scholars have noted the interracial character of the Rebellion and the community organizing that took place to lay the groundwork for the uprising.[187] The AWS was part of this work before, during, and after. The collective hung two banners from the Workshop's roof during the Rebellion, one reading "Peace on Earth," and another painted by Gary Grimshaw that read "Burn, Baby, Burn!"[188] The collective of counterculture organizations on the John Lodge and Warren intersection were not harmed during the Rebellion, and neither was the Grande Ballroom,

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[183] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 116.
[184] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 155–91. See Fine's book for a detailed study of the Detroit rebellion.
[185] Fine, 155–91, 208, 219, 249.
[186] Fine, 291.
[187] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 101; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 129–53.
[188] Peter Werbe, "Get the Big Stuff," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1967, Labadie Collection; Sinclair, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978*, 382.

while other white-owned buildings and businesses were targeted for arson and looting.[189] Some of the AWS collective participated in looting and felt that the carnivalesque atmosphere was a prefiguration of the society they were working to build. John recalled in an interview, "It was just exhilarating. I thought, this was the greatest. We were at our Trans-Love Energies building at John Lodge and Warren. Right in the eye of the storm. We helped people loot stores. We got some bolts of cloth that the MC5 made into clothes and wore 'em for months."[190] Trans-Love also helped provide food and clothing to those affected by the damage from the fires.[191] John wrote an article about the Rebellion in the issue of FE published in the immediate aftermath: "No, baby, it's not a 'race riot' or anything simple as that. People just got tired of being hassled by police and cheated by businessmen and got out their equalizers and went to town…Oh it was Robin Hood Day in merry olde Detroit, the first annual city-wide all-free fire-sale, and the people without got their hands on the goodies."[192] Those responsible for maintaining the status quo responded with a harsh crackdown that targeted people and organizations that they felt had pushed citizens over the edge, including Trans-Love Energies.

If being surveilled and harassed by the DPD was not enough, urban renewal was the final nail in the coffin that expelled the Trans-Love comrades from Detroit. The John C. Lodge freeway, running from Detroit to West Bloomfield, was one of multiple major highway projects built during the mid-twentieth century that targeted neighborhoods deemed blighted for demolition.[193] The city bulldozed culturally rich historically Black neighborhoods such as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, home to overcrowded and subpar housing but also Black-owned

[189] Werbe, "Get the Big Stuff."
[190] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 56.
[191] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 124.
[192] Sinclair, "The Coatpuller," August 1, 1967.
[193] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47–51. See Sugrue for more on urban renewal in Detroit.

businesses, theaters, and clubs where blues and jazz greats performed.[194] Detroit mayor Albert Cobo (1950-1957) was an enthusiastic proponent of using freeway construction to eliminate what he saw as urban blight, and during his term highway building was seen as a "handy device for razing slums."[195] Detroit's massive investment in the highways that would make it easier for people to live outside the city and commute in at the expense of quality of life for residents who remained is one factor in the city's precipitous population decline in the second half of the twentieth century.[196]

Wayne State's expanding facilities were another way urban renewal affected the Cass Corridor throughout the mid to late twentieth century. The buildings on the John Lodge and Hancock intersection that the AWS inhabited were in a neighborhood deemed blighted and slated to be demolished for a WSU expansion, eventually to become Matthaei Athletic Center.[197] Leni wrote of the collective's plight in the *Daily Collegian*, "Unfortunately, this whole area, including 'our' block, is condemned to be torn down in 1967 to become part of the great 'University City,' and will be replaced by the University's new football complex."[198] After spending two years at the space on John Lodge and Warren Ave, in the fall of 1967 the group was forced to move to 499 W. Forest, at the intersection of Second and Forest. The "long-vacant former doctor's office" was the last space they would inhabit in the city of Detroit.[199] At this location, they continued the Artists Workshop Press and collaborated with others in the counterculture community to run The

[194] Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 37–59.
[195] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47.
[196] John Gallagher, *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City* (Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 73–83.
[197] "Facilities - Matthaei Center," Wayne State University Athletics, accessed June 14, 2024, https://wsuathletics.com/facilities/matthaei-center/10; Community organizing against this project continued into the early 1970s, see: Danielle Aubert, *The Detroit Printing Co-Op: The Politics of the Joy of Printing* (Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2019), 186.
[198] Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Reopens; Brings Art Colony To Detroit."
[199] "Trans-Love Relocates in Warren-Forest," *Fifth Estate*, October 1, 1967, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.

Pisces Eyes Poster Co. and the 100 Camels Bookstore. The Detroit branch of LEMAR (Movement to Legalize Marijuana) also relocated here. The MC5 and the FE's offices moved into the vacant space above the former Workshop, while an art gallery took over the storefront.

Trans-Love occupied this location for less than a year. In early 1968, the organization was denied permission to renew their lease at 499 W. Forest by the city because of WSU's expansion.[200] During this brief period, there was an attempted firebombing in February 1968, which was reported to police but went unsolved.[201] Trans-Love members had reason to worry about attacks. A group of far-right militants called Breakthrough committed vandalism and harassment against New Left and counterculture groups in Detroit throughout the 1960s and were later revealed to be taking direction from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[202] After the FE's offices were vandalized by Breakthrough, who lobbed bricks wrapped in brown paper carrying the messages "DEATH TO RED TRAITORS" and "THIS IS WAR, YOU BASTARDS" through the windows, Leni took a photograph of Peter Werbe and other staff members framed by shards of broken glass left in the window panes.[203] The windows of the AWS building on John Lodge were also broken by vandals, and Leni wrote of the incident, "We can say that someone finally caught on to what the Workshop is all about & got scared enough to commit an act of violence. (We are not foolish enough to allow ourselves to think that this was an isolated accident or some punk neighborhood kid who just likes to break windows.)"[204]

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[200] "Trans-Love Moves," *Fifth Estate*, June 4, 1968, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP.
[201] Detroit Police Department Detective Division, "Arson at 499 W. Forest," February 7, 1968, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, 1966-1970, JLSP; "Police Probe Firebombing on W. Forest," *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17, 1968, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad and Police Files, Detroit Police Files, JLSP.
[202] "FBI Disruptions of Detroit New Left Exposed," *Fifth Estate*, November 3, 1978, #295 edition.
[203] Sinclair, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs, 1963-1978*, 46; John wrote a poem about the incident in his collection *FIREMUSIC.* John Sinclair, *FIREMUSIC: A Record* (The Artists' Workshop Press, 1966). Leni also photographed Breakthrough counter-demonstrating at an anti-war protest. *Motor City Underground*, 46.
[204] Magdalene Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Society Newsletter #6," April 11, 1966, Box 7, Folder 27, JLSP.

Reflecting an increasing "siege mentality" of whites in the city, Detroit's leaders instituted a curfew in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., which occurred less than a year after the Rebellion on April 4, 1968.[205] The curfew order prevented gatherings of more than three people and shut down all activity after dark.[206] It also emboldened police with more power to stop, harass, threaten, and detain people. Trans-Love relied on money earned from MC5 performances at the Grande and elsewhere, so in addition to suffering an even more repressive atmosphere in the city, the curfew stopped their biggest source of income.[207] The combination of the infiltration of the community, the arrests and jail time, the curfew, and the urban renewal projects scheduled to destroy their home made staying in Detroit unsustainable for the Sinclairs, who had an infant daughter, and other members of the collective.

In the summer of 1968, the group decided to move to the neighboring college town of Ann Arbor. "We committed ourselves to the city of Detroit four years ago and I feel we honored that commitment as long as we possibly could. But the police-state atmosphere and the increasing dirt and ugliness of American industry in Detroit finally made us leave. We'll still be doing the same work but in a little more livable environment," John told FE.[208]

From the White Panther Party to the Rainbow People, 1968-1972

In the summer of 1968, the Trans-Love commune, including the Sinclair family and the MC5, relocated 45 miles west to two large houses near the University of Michigan campus at 1510 and 1520 Hill Street.[209] The group formed the White Panther Party (WPP) in Ann Arbor

[205] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 135; Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Police Violence and Black Power, 1968-1970."
[206] Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Police Violence and Black Power, 1968-1970."
[207] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 136.
[208] "Trans-Love Moves."
[209] "PLEASE NOTE WELL:," n.d., Box 10, Folder 15, JLSP.

that fall, on the four-year anniversary of the founding of the AWS, November 1, 1968.[210] The organization was inspired by Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton's call for white radicals to organize their own communities.[211] A comparison of the White Panther Party and AWS founding documents shows how constant police harassment, exile, and broader changes in the political and cultural climate had politicized the members of the two organizations. Where the AWS manifesto had stated a preference for "non-political" activity, the White Panther Party 10-Point Plan pledged allegiance to the Black Panthers and called for "a total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets."[212]

While living in Ann Arbor, the Sinclairs and their comrades gained their greatest notoriety and performed some of their most well-known and studied work. This dissertation is limited in scope to the Cass Corridor neighborhood, so the flurry of activity during the collective's Ann Arbor years will be summarized. On August 25, 1968, the MC5 were the only musical act to show up in Chicago for the Yippies' planned "Festival of Life" to protest the Democratic National Convention, which ended in a police riot.[213] On October 30 and 31 of that year, the MC5 recorded their debut album, *Kick Out the Jams*, live at the Grande Ballroom. With production and liner notes by John, the record is considered one of the greatest rock albums of all time and an important document of the period. Just a month before this performance, the CIA recruitment office in Ann Arbor was bombed, and the WPP became the top suspects with a manhunt that saw "Pun" Plamondon enter the FBI's top ten most wanted list.[214] John and

[210] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 383.
[211] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 142.
[212] "The Artists' Workshop Society: A 'Manifesto'"; John Sinclair, "White Panther Statement," *Fifth Estate*, November 14, 1968, Labadie Collection.
[213] Burke, *Tear Down the Walls: White Radicalism and Black Power in 1960s Rock*, 22–47.
[214] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 147; See Pun Plamondon, *Lost From the Ottawa: The Story of the Journey Back* (Cloverdale, MI: Plamondon, Inc., 2004) for a fascinating first-hand account of these events and the WPP story.

Plamondon were falsely accused of orchestrating the bombing and indicted on conspiracy charges. Amidst all these events, the WPP published an underground newspaper called the *Ann Arbor Sun*, gave free concerts in Ann Arbor parks, and ran the highly regarded Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival among other activities that had lasting impacts.[215]

The group's militant rhetoric and Leni's photos of the MC5 and other WPP members brandishing guns and guitars did not go unnoticed by the authorities. In Ann Arbor they may have been free of surveillance from the Detroit Red Squad, but the Sinclairs and other members of the WPP continued to be watched by law enforcement, this time the FBI's COINTELPRO operation that was used to destroy Leftist, Black Power, and counterculture organizations during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[216] FBI head J. Edgar Hoover wrote a letter to Michigan congressman Gerald Ford addressing the threat he believed John and the WPP posed to the national security and U.S. society: "A source has stated that, in terms of radical and violent activity to meet its goal, the White Panther Party should be rated 2nd only to the Weathermen and to the Black Panther Party."[217] FBI documents from the era demonstrate that Hoover and Nixon were both fixated on the WPP as part of their broader crackdown on Black Power and New Left militancy.[218] An agent provocateur was sent to infiltrate the group, pushing them to act on their violent posturing, but was not successful.[219] As Jeff Hale's scholarship has shown, the group's small membership and the fact that they never moved from violent rhetoric to deeds demonstrates the FBI's misguided and overzealous repression during this period.[220]

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[215] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 396.
[216] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 125.
[217] "Letter from J. Edgar Hoover to Gerald Ford," September 25, 1970, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, FOIA FBI documents, 1969-1974, JLSP.
[218] Hale, "The White Panthers' 'Total Assault on the Culture,'" 144–45.
[219] Hale, 148.
[220] Hale, 146–48.

In July 1969, John was sentenced to ten years in prison for giving away two joints to undercover officer Kapegian back in 1967. The WPP leveraged this extreme punishment from Detroit Recorder's Court Judge Robert J. Colombo, who refused to offer bond, to turn John into a celebrity political prisoner. Most of the collective's time in the next two years was spent building the movement to "free John," which reached its height and its conclusion when fifteen thousand people attended the John Sinclair Freedom Rally held at the University of Michigan's Crisler Arena on December 10, 1971. The event featured appearances by some of the biggest names in the counterculture and New Left and many in the crowd openly smoking marijuana.[221] Performances and speeches by Allen Ginsberg, Stevie Wonder, Bobby Seale, and others lasted late into the night, with John Lennon and Yoko Ono finally gracing the stage at three in the morning and performing a song about John's plight they had written that day.[222] Four days after the rally, John was released from prison, having served two and a half years of his ten-year sentence. The Michigan Supreme Court deemed the state's marijuana laws, which gave offenders 20 years to life for possession, unconstitutional.[223] Ann Arbor's lax five dollar fine for marijuana possession and yearly "Hash Bash" festival were legacies of this court decision.[224]

The following year, John's conspiracy case alongside Plamondon related to the bombing of the CIA recruitment office went to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the warrantless wiretaps the government had used to collect evidence used against the WPP were an

[221] Gus Burns, "Activist and Poet John Sinclair among First to Purchase Legal Recreational Marijuana in Michigan, 50 Years after His Historic Arrest," *Mlive*, December 1, 2019, https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2019/12/activist-and-poet-john-sinclair-among-first-to-purchase-legal-recreational-marijuana-in-michigan-50-years-after-his-historic-arrest.html.
[222] Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 266–67.
[223] Carson, 268.
[224] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 396; Burns, "Activist and Poet John Sinclair among First to Purchase Legal Recreational Marijuana in Michigan, 50 Years after His Historic Arrest."

unconstitutional violation of Fourth Amendment rights.[225] Known as "the Keith Case" after U.S. District Court Judge Damon Keith, this decision was a blow to COINTELPRO's work and led to Nixon's decision to remove the secret wiretaps he had installed at the Democratic National headquarters, which resulted in the Watergate scandal.[226] Shortly after Watergate, John became a defendant on another significant court case that helped undo the work of the police surveillance that had harmed him and the lives of many others in Michigan. The lawsuit *Benkert v. State of Michigan* would, over the course of a decade, force the DPD, the Michigan State Police, and the state of Michigan to shut down the Red Squad and take responsibility for the organization's decades of harm against Michiganders' civil liberties. The state was required to send out letters and pay for ads in Michigan newspapers notifying people that police had maintained files on their activities.[227] It was revealed through the course of the lawsuit that 1.5 million names appeared in the Red Squad's files.[228] In these two court cases, John and his comrades got some poetic justice in their battle against some of their most powerful enemies, and helped make both Michigan and the nation a more just and amenable climate for future activism.

After being released from prison, John rejoined Leni and his comrades at the Hill Street commune. The WPP had reorganized yet again, changing their name to the Rainbow People's Party (RPP) partially to clear up any confusion that the group was only open to white people.[229] Most of the core members and leadership remained the same. This rebranded organization

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[225] United States v. U.S. District Court for Eastern District of Michigan, No. 407 U.S. 297 (U.S. Supreme Court June 19, 1972).
[226] For more on connections between the Keith Case, the WPP, and Watergate, see: Jeff A. Hale, "Wiretapping and National Security: Nixon, the Mitchell Doctrine, and the White Panthers. Volume I" (Ph.D., United States -- Louisiana, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College), accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304210000/abstract/1C6DADFE011649D3PQ/1.
[227] Jim Jacobs and Richard Soble, "A Blow Against the Red Squads," *The Nation*, February 14, 1981, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad and Police Files, MI State Police Files (1 of 2), JLSP.
[228] Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Red Squad: Political Surveillance."
[229] Central Committee, Rainbow People's Party, "Statement of the Central Committee: Rainbow People's Party," *Ann Arbor Sun*, May 30, 1971, Ann Arbor District Library.

shifted its focus from building a national cultural revolution to organizing unhoused people in Ann Arbor, running radical candidates in city council elections, and promoting local rock bands. Due in part to their own successes in shifting culture and changing drug laws, the RPP was considered less threatening by law enforcement. The FBI concluded that the organization had "softened its image and appears to be working within the confines of the law."[230] The FBI determined that the Rainbow People's Party was no longer threatening enough to keep an open file on John and his associates in Ann Arbor, and ended surveillance of the group in 1974.[231]

The FBI were correct in their assessment that by the early 1970s significant fracturing had occurred among Detroit's radicals. In the 1970s, John and the Rainbow People's Party were criticized as hypocrites by some former allies, including FE. In September 1975, the FE published a biting parody of the RPP's *Sun* newspaper with the headline "Jail John Now!"[232] The FE alleged that Sinclair and the RPP were "encouraging people to join the system to liberalize it, and in general, reinforcing the passivity that makes people submit to the wasteland of capitalist daily life." Members of the RPP insisted that their goals had not changed since the AWS days.[233] Eventually, burnout, bankruptcy, and trauma from the tumultuous years they spent together combined to erode the Sinclairs' marriage and they were divorced in 1977.[234]

One of the most tangible ways the AWS impacted Michigan was through marijuana decriminalization. John lived long enough to see 56 percent of Michigan voters decide to legalize recreational cannabis sales and use in 2018, and the state that had incarcerated him benefit from

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[230] Jack Shell, "Special Investigations Unit Confidential Report," November 3, 1972, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, Red Squad & Police Files, MI State Police Files (1 of 2), JLSP.
[231] FBI, "United States Government Memorandum - John Alexander Sinclair, Jr. - ADEX Card Cancelled," May 31, 1974, Box 46, Legal and Prison Files, FOIA FBI documents, 1969-1974, JLSP.
[232] Fifth Estate Collective, "Jail John Now!," *Fifth Estate*, September 1975, #266 edition, https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28036591.
[233] Dennis Rosenblum, "Over the Rainbow," *Fifth Estate*, July 18, 1974, #216 edition.
[234] McKenna, "Leni Sinclair in Conversation with Kristine McKenna," 403; Carson, *Grit, Noise, and Revolution*, 294.

recreational marijuana becoming a thriving industry. On December 1, 2019, he made the first purchase of legal recreational marijuana in Michigan from an Ann Arbor dispensary.[235] As of early 2024, five cities in Michigan including Detroit, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Ferndale had taken steps to decriminalize plant-based psychedelics.[236] After spending time in New Orleans and Amsterdam, John returned to Detroit and was living back in the Cass Corridor when he passed away on April 2, 2024.[237] Leni also returned to Detroit, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit held a retrospective exhibit of her photography in 2021.[238]

Through the decades after the AWS left the Corridor, local artists influenced by their work continued building community-based arts organizations in the neighborhood. The "Cass Corridor group" of artists, including AWS member Ellen Phelan, created the "urban expressionism" movement and ran Corridor-based arts initiatives like the Common Ground for the Arts.[239] Ken and Ann Mikolowski used a letterpress purchased from the AWS to start the Alternative Press, an experiment in printing and poetry that furthered the relationships between the New American poets and Detroit area writers the AWS had begun.[240] Local presses including Broadside Press, Detroit River Press, and Ridgeway Press, among others, published Detroit

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[235] Burns, "Activist and Poet John Sinclair among First to Purchase Legal Recreational Marijuana in Michigan, 50 Years after His Historic Arrest."
[236] Kyle Jaeger, "Fifth Michigan City Approves Local Psychedelics Decriminalization Resolution," *Marijuana Moment* (blog), January 11, 2024, https://www.marijuanamoment.net/fifth-michigan-city-approves-local-psychedelics-decriminalization-resolution/; Emma Stein, "Detroit Decriminalizes Psychedelic Mushrooms: What It Means," *Detroit Free Press*, November 6, 2021, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2021/11/06/detroit-psychedelic-mushrooms-proposal-e-entheogenic-plants/6303402001/.
[237] Melody Baetens, "Marijuana Activist and 'Detroit's Resident Radical' John Sinclair Has Died at 82," *The Detroit News*, April 2, 2024, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/people/2024/04/02/obit-john-sinclair-marijuana-activist-detroit-radical/73178795007/.
[238] Nolan Kelly, "Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs 1963–1978," The Brooklyn Rail, September 1, 2021, https://brooklynrail.org/2021/09/art_books/Motor-City-Underground-Leni-Sinclair-Photographs-1963-1978.
[239] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams," 23–24.
[240] Warn, "D.I.Y. Detroit: How the Alternative Press Shaped the Art of a City Left for Dead."

writers through the late twentieth century.[241] Detroit and the Cass Corridor's reputation for a thriving rock scene can be traced to community-building and artistic innovations at the Artist Workshop. Local artist and founding member of the art collective/noise rock band Destroy All Monsters Carey Loren writes that "The Artists' Workshop was the root branch of Detroit's Avant-garde for over 50 years."[242]

One of the AWS's contemporaries and comrades that outlasted them is the *Fifth Estate* newspaper. Founded just a year after the AWS in fall of 1965 by a teenage Harvey Ovshinsky, the paper had deep relationships and shared physical space and collective members with the AWS and Trans-Love Energies. However, as the 1970s brought increasing challenges to radical activists, the FE responded to these headwinds in different ways than the members of the AWS. First, the paper did not leave its home base in the Cass Corridor. Second, rather than turn to working within the system, FE adopted an increasingly militant, anarchist-influenced political perspective that informed the paper's decision to stop taking advertising, operate as a volunteer collective, and develop influential new lines of radical thought and action, informed by their local context of deindustrializing Detroit.

[241] M. L. Liebler, "Introduction," in *Abandon Automobile: Detroit City Poetry 2001* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 23–31.
[242] Loren, "Motor City Underground," 396.

Chapter 2—Against the Megamachine, In the Motor City: Anarcho-Primitivism in Detroit's *Fifth Estate* Newspaper, 1975-1995

During the early 1980s, a group of anarchist writers and activists at the underground newspaper the *Fifth Estate* (FE) concluded that technology and civilization itself must be destroyed in order to save humanity and the planet. The FE's writers thought drastic times called for drastic measures: "We'd like to see a moratorium on industrialization starting right now—a mass strike for the abolition of industrial civilization."[1] Situated in Detroit's Cass Corridor neighborhood—which they described as "home to students, drop-outs, rebels, poets, artists, weirdos, and the urban poor"—through the 1970s and '80s the newspaper developed an anti-capitalist, anti-technology, anti-civilization ideology that came to be known as anarcho-primitivism and contributed to the late century revival of anarchist ideology on the Left.[2]

The FE got its start in the same Cass Corridor community as the Detroit Artists' Workshop. Founded in 1965 by the nineteen-year-old Harvey Ovshinsky, it was one of the country's foundational underground newspapers, alongside similar publications including the *Berkeley Barb*, the *East Village Other*, and East Lansing, Michigan's *The Paper*.[3] Through the late 1960s, mimeographed papers cheaply produced by amateurs and espousing radical politics popped up like "weeds" or "mushrooms," resulting in "several hundred newspapers…with a combined readership that stretched into the millions."[4] According to historian John McMillian, "underground newspapers educated, politicized, and built communities among disaffected youths in every region of the country" while countering the biased coverage of youth culture and politics seen in the mainstream press.[5] The FE is a unique member of this movement because it

[1] P. Solis, "Bhopal and the Prospects for Anarchy," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1985, #320 edition.
[2] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1986, #324 edition.
[3] Werbe, "History of the Fifth Estate Part I: The Early Years"; McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 6, 31.
[4] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 31, 4.
[5] McMillian, 6.

has continued publishing to the present day and has done so without taking the more typical trajectory of evolving into a toned-down "alternative" newspaper.[6] Archivists eventually identified it as the longest running English-language anarchist newspaper in North America.[7] The FE's unexpected success can be attributed in part to the forward (or perhaps backward) thinking anarchists who commandeered it.

Like many of its peers in the underground press movement, the FE was on its last legs, struggling financially and politically, when a group of rebel pranksters who called themselves the Eat the Rich Gang took the paper over in 1975 and announced its "last issue" as a "capitalist enterprise."[8] From then on, the paper refused ad dollars, was operated by a collective, and adopted militant antiauthoritarian politics that set it apart from the Marxists and Maoists of the declining New Left. In addition to publishing the newspaper, the FE collective practiced political activism that blended art, theater, and protest, supported radical projects across Detroit, and fought for a more environmentally and socially just city. Historian of anarchism Andrew Cornell writes that "[t]he *Fifth Estate* was likely the most widely distributed and consistently published anarchist periodical during the 1970s," keeping the movement active and helping spur the revitalization of anarchism that occurred in the following decade.[9]

The "new anarchism" that blossomed in the 1980s was interconnected with an increasingly radical environmentalism seen in publications like FE.[10] As the radical environmental movement grew in the 1980s, the FE was a key site for the development of anarcho-primitivism, publishing local thinkers as well as influential primitivists from around the

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[6] McMillian, 173.
[7] "Fifth Estate Records 1967-2016," University of Michigan Library Special Collections Research Center Finding Aids, accessed March 14, 2023, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/s/sclead/umich-scl-fifthestate?byte=10087204;focusrgn=bioghist;subview=standard;view=reslist.
[8] "Last Issue: FE As Capitalist Enterprise," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1975, #265 edition.
[9] Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 292.
[10] Cornell, 15; Graeber, "The New Anarchists"; Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded."

country. In contrast to many Detroiters in this period, the FE collective wanted deindustrialization, just not how it was playing out around them. They envisioned a truly deindustrialized future, one in which industrial civilization would be eradicated not just from the Midwest, not just from the Global North, but from the planet and the collective psyche of humanity. From the late 1970s to late 1990s, the FE collective theorized technology as a system of domination entwined with capitalism and the state that writer David Watson called the "megamachine."[11]

Studying a radical project that survived the disintegration of the New Left, harassment from law enforcement, and neoliberal austerity offers many lessons for today's social movements. Its theoretical turn towards anarcho-primitivism and dialogue with the radical environmental movement have been little studied outside movement spaces.[12] This chapter builds on articles by Stephen Millet, Chamsy el-Ojeili, and Dylan Taylor that analyze the newspaper's critiques of civilization and technology, but do not bring local history into their examinations of FE's politics.[13] Detroiters and FE collective members David Watson and Fredy Perlman are almost absent in academic literature, though both men's writing influenced the environmental movement and Leftist politics of this period.[14] The current challenges in our political and environmental landscape warrant attention to a radical project that weathered

[11] Watson borrowed the term from philosopher Lewis Mumford. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967).
[12] The majority of anarcho-primitivist writing, critique, and analysis has occurred in movement publications like *Fifth Estate, Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, and *Green Anarchy*, among others. Due to the anti-copyright ethic of many anarchists, much of this work is freely available online via sites such as The Anarchist Library. *The Fifth Estate* has an extensive archive of articles on their website. JSTOR's open-access Independent Voices collection is also a valuable resource, and what I used to read FE's archives for this project.
[13] Stephen Millett, "Technology Is Capital: Fifth Estate's Critique of the Megamachine," in *Changing Anarchism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 73–98; Chamsy el-Ojeili and Dylan Taylor, "'The Future in the Past': Anarcho-Primitivism and the Critique of Civilization Today," *Rethinking Marxism* 32, no. 2 (2020): 168–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2020.1727256.
[14] Uri Gordon, "Leviathan's Body: Recovering Fredy Perlman's Anarchist Social Theory.," *Anarchist Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 2023), https://doi.org/10.3898/AS.31.1.04.

conservative assault and political change while developing a potent environmental critique. Through their anarcho-primitivist theory, support of radical spaces, and creation of a long-standing newspaper, the writers and activists at the FE were an integral part of the story of "remaking radicalism" in the late twentieth century.[15]

In Detroit, the FE collective influenced and were influenced by the Cass Corridor neighborhood they called home. They built a "jovial dissident community" in Detroit that was known for publishing the newspaper, political pranks, and protests infused with theater and direct action.[16] The collective supported and created radical spaces in the Corridor, which helped the area retain its heritage as bohemian neighborhood through the "counterrevolutionary age" of the late twentieth century.[17] The collective's activism around environmental issues that affected their majority Black city, including their opposition to the Detroit trash incinerator and a local nuclear power plant, forced the radical environmental movement to confront urban environmental issues typically associated with the environmental justice movement. This work also influenced FE's critique of technology and industrialism. To counter what they saw as misanthropic ideologies within the radical environmental movement, the writers at FE theorized a "humanistic deep ecology" that united concerns of the environmental justice movement with those of the radical environmental movement.[18] In the process they made the environmental justice movement more radical and the radical environmental movement more just. The paper additionally offered Detroiters a locally based vision of a truly free press amidst consolidation and crisis in the newspaper industry.

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[15] Berger and Hobson, "Introduction: Usable Pasts and the Persistence of Radicalism."
[16] Perlman, *Having Little Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman's Fifty Years*, 86.
[17] Spencer Beswick, "From the Ashes of the Old: Anarchism Reborn in a Counterrevolutionary Age (1970s-1990s).," *Anarchist Studies* 30, no. 2 (July 1, 2022), https://doi.org/10.3898/AS.30.2.02.
[18] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023; Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, interview by Author, February 14, 2023.

Along with el-Ojeili and Taylor, I would like to suggest that anarcho-primitivism's extreme position has useful elements for our contemporary moment, while recognizing its limits.[19] As humanity faces climate crisis and its attendant calamities, even mainstream scientists have begun to recommend "radical and immediate de-growth strategies" and have suggested that "resistance" movements "outside the dominant culture" might be the planet's only hope for remaining a viable home to human beings.[20] The FE collective's work offers contemporary activists and anyone concerned about humanity's future a not-so-distant "usable past" of ecological radicals battling the megamachine and reimagining their city amidst a challenging political and social landscape.[21]

"Detroit's Jovial Dissident Community": Anarchist Community in the Corridor

The FE wrote in 1982 that the Cass Corridor "makes up our little world here in the city."[22] In the wake of the 1967 Rebellion, some of FE's counterculture comrades such as Trans-Love Energies and *Creem* magazine left the city, but the newspaper stayed and remained based there through the end of the century. As elder radicals mentored the FE collective, their writing, activism, and support of autonomous spaces helped continue the legacy of radical political activity in the Corridor.

Like their comrades at the AWS, the FE collective was targeted by the DPD's Red Squad and the FBI's COINTELPRO during the late 1960s. Longtime editor Peter Werbe's Red Squad

[19] el-Ojeili and Taylor, "'The Future in the Past': Anarcho-Primitivism and the Critique of Civilization Today."
[20] Naomi Klein, "How Science Is Telling Us All to Revolt," *The New Statesman*, October 29, 2013, http://www.newstateman.com/2013/10/science-says-revolt.
[21] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past"; Dan Berger and Emily K. Hobson, eds., *Remaking Radicalism: A Grassroots Documentary Reader of the United States, 1973-2001* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020), 2.
[22] E.B. Maple and George Bradford, "FE & the Anti-Nuke War Movement: Where We've Been," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1982, #309 edition.

file includes an anecdote about an interaction with an undercover officer at an antiwar protest in which Werbe said:

> "that the best thing the United States Government could do for him would be to send him to the Army and teach him how to use automatic weapons and hand grenades so that he could use them against the government. WERBE said 'As a matter of fact, if they do teach me how to use an M 16 or a machine gun, I'd come back here and shoot you with it.' After having said this WERBE walked away and continued hawking his newspaper."

Once FE was able to obtain its FBI files through the Freedom of Information Act, the newspaper never stopped bragging that the agency had described them as "supporting the cause of revolution everywhere."[23] Perhaps in part because it did not attain the same celebrity as John Sinclair, the newspaper was able to withstand this law enforcement harassment without leaving the city. By the early 1970s, the collective members were frustrated with Leftist politics, burned out, and searching for something new.

[23] "20 Years of the Fifth Estate," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1986, #322 edition; Matthew Lassiter and The Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, "Red Squad: Political Surveillance," Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era, 2021, https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/red-squad; "Peter Werbe Red Squad File," July 9, 1969, Box 28, Folder F.E.-Topical-Red Squad-Peter Werbe, Fifth Estate Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan.

Fig. 2.1. Peter Werbe (standing) and David Watson (sitting) at the Fifth Estate office on Second Ave. Date unknown. Source: Box 33, Fifth Estate Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan.

According to Werbe, "the biggest influence" on the development of FE's new political direction was understudied political theorist, novelist, and cellist Fredy Perlman, whose 1983 book *Against His-story! Against Leviathan!* is one of the canonical texts of anarcho-primitivist thought.[24] During the late 1960s, Detroit's status as an industrial and cultural center with a large urban Black population made it an attractive location for political radicals who believed the city was "ripe for revolution."[25] Fredy and his wife Lorraine were among those who decided to make Detroit their adopted home. Upon return to the United States after participating in the May 1968 uprisings in France, Perlman quit his job at Western Michigan University, left his career in academia, and settled in Detroit. There, the couple connected with local activists, opened a print

[24] Peter Werbe, interview by Author, December 21, 2022.
[25] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 92.

shop that would become a crucial space for radical political culture in Detroit during the 1970s, and established the publishing collective Black & Red Press, which Lorraine continues to operate today.[26] Fredy was a pioneer in graphic design, and the couple's work at the Detroit Printing Co-op supported radical projects in Detroit and across the country.[27] At the Printing Co-op, the Perlmans learned to operate a large Harris offset press they acquired second-hand. They printed Fredy's own works as well as the Students for a Democratic Society journal *Radical America*, texts from the French Situationist movement that had inspired the uprisings there in May 1968, and Cass-Trumbull Community Calendars that the organization People Concerned About Urban Renewal used to fundraise their fight against Wayne State's building of Matthaei Athletic Center, among other projects. They also collaborated with comrades from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' Black Star Press, who helped them learn to use the Harris press.[28] Perlman lived in Detroit from 1968 until his death in 1985, leaving behind a prodigious bibliography of articles (many of which were published in FE), political theory, novels, and translations, most famously the first English translation of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which introduced the text to English-language readers.[29]

Perlman was one of FE's most important supporters. In addition to being an intellectual influence and publishing some of his most well-known articles in the paper—including "Progress and Nuclear Power" (1979), "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom" (1982), and "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism" (1985)—he also did typing and lay-out work as part of the

[26] Lorraine Perlman, interview by Author, December 21, 2022.
[27] Aubert, *The Detroit Printing Co-Op: The Politics of the Joy of Printing*. Aubert's book explores the Perlmans' work at the Printing Co-op in depth, analyzing Fredy's evolution as a graphic designer and reproducing primary sources that were printed there.
[28] Aubert, 149.
[29] Perlman also chose the 1952 photograph of a film audience wearing 3D glasses for the cover of the translation, an image which is now widely associated with the text. Gordon, "Leviathan's Body: Recovering Fredy Perlman's Anarchist Social Theory."

collective.[30] Perlman's works published from Detroit in FE and Black & Red Press were critical to late twentieth century radical politics, and especially radical environmentalism. "Perlman was easily the most influential anarchist writer of his generation," according to political theorist Uri Gordon.[31] FE wrote in Perlman's obituary that his "voice played such a large role in reviving libertarian traditions and articulating the critical primitivism that has so profoundly transformed antiauthoritarian ideas."[32] Still, his writing has been little studied, perhaps in part because of Perlman's rejection of academia and use of nontraditional genres.[33] Perlman's anarcho-primitivist texts, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* (1983) and *The Strait* (published posthumously in 1988) were widely read by radical environmentalists and influenced the anti-civilization politics of the movement. In *Against His-story*, Perlman rewrites the story of humanity as a struggle of the people against the state and technology using a Hobbesian metaphor to detail the history of the rise of systems of domination he calls the "Leviathan," beginning in ancient Sumer. FE printed a long excerpt of *Against His-story* and sent copies of the book to subscribers.[34] Perlman's novel *The Strait* argues for the superiority of indigenous epistemologies over Western ones as an Ojibwe character named Obenabi relates the stories of his ancestors from before and after their encounter with European colonizers in the Great Lakes woodlands. Both texts use storytelling, language, and affect to convince the reader of the anarcho-primitivist perspective.[35]

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[30] "Fredy Perlman: An Appreciation," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1985, #321 edition.
[31] Gordon, "Leviathan's Body: Recovering Fredy Perlman's Anarchist Social Theory.," 59.
[32] George Bradford, "An Exemplary Life: A Memoir of Fredy Perlman," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1990, #334 edition.
[33] Gordon, "Leviathan's Body: Recovering Fredy Perlman's Anarchist Social Theory.," 59.
[34] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1983, #313 edition.
[35] These works warrant further attention by scholars, especially the unfinished epic *The Strait*, which Perlman was working on when he died. Lorraine has spent decades using Fredy's numerous binders full of meticulous hand-written notes, maps, and lineages he created imagining the novel's complex universe in her work to complete the text.

Perlman's wife and work partner Lorraine called the group of radicals that cohered around the FE and the Detroit Printing Co-op "Detroit's jovial dissident community."[36] Members of this community remembered the importance of the spirited political conversations held during dinners the Perlmans hosted at their home (Fredy was an avid cook). FE collective member David Watson's tribute recollects how "our intense discussions and arguments—often around the kitchen table at Fredy and Lorraine's house on Detroit's southwest side—led us to a deeper conception of politics: a critique of civilization itself."[37] In a history of the publication written for FE's thirtieth anniversary, Werbe cites the influence of "exciting discussions hosted by Fredy and Lorraine Perlman at their home where we furiously debated and discussed ideas contained in the books and pamphlets published at a rapid pace by the Black & Red."[38]

The "jovial dissident community" was dedicated to their city. Many of its members, including Peter Werbe, David Watson, and Lorraine Perlman, still live in metro Detroit today, as they enter their eighth and ninth decades.[39] Werbe and Watson were also born in the city.[40] For these writers, Detroit's history, politics, and state of crisis during the late twentieth century was continuously radicalizing. FE covered local news throughout the publication's existence, analyzing the problems facing their city through a radical lens and often using Detroit issues as examples demonstrating various arguments. In each issue, FE printed a "Detroit Seen" column that recapped recent events at the paper as well as local news. "Detroit Seen" featured stories about the local effects of neoliberal austerity, landlord abuse of tenants, and Wayne State

[36] Perlman, *Having Little Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman's Fifty Years*, 86.
[37] Bradford, "An Exemplary Life: A Memoir of Fredy Perlman."
[38] Werbe, "History of the Fifth Estate Part I: The Early Years."
[39] Werbe, interview; Perlman, interview.
[40] Werbe, interview; David Watson, "Thoughts on the Disappearance of History," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1994, #344 edition, sec. Daily Barbarian No. 8 Spring 1994 insert.

University's role as oppressor towards Cass Corridor residents.[41] FE was consistently critical of the way the city turned to technology and megaprojects as false solutions. For example, the paper lambasted both the Renaissance Center, a skyscraper business complex, and the People Mover, a public transit effort seen by many locals as a failure.[42] FE used these local concerns to show how the problems Detroiters confronted during this period fit the anarcho-primitivist argument that industrial civilization had produced terrible outcomes for humanity.

"Back to the Stone Age": The *Fifth Estate* and Anarcho-Primitivism

In the 1960s and '70s it seemed like the one thing that radicals and their capitalist enemies could agree on was that technology was going to save humanity, remaking the world into a worker's or a consumer's paradise. Anarchists like Murray Bookchin argued for the development of a "liberatory technology," and some Marxist thinkers like Detroiter James Boggs argued that due to automation there would be "no longer a social and economic need…to work."[43] The FE's writers grew increasingly disillusioned with these perspectives on technology and with the Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist politics of their peers in the New Left, systems that they believed had proven to be nothing more than authoritarian failures. During the late 1970s, in contrast to many of the leftist activists of the period, the writers at FE produced an efflorescence of intellectual activity and activist work as they eagerly engaged new ideas inspired by

[41] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, October 1, 1976, #277 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, August 21, 1978, #293/294 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1977, #288 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1987, #325 edition.
[42] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, February 1, 1977, #280 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, April 19, 1977, #282 edition; Mary Wildwood, "The Train to Nowhere: Detroit's People Mover," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1985, #320 edition.
[43] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 2nd ed. (Montreal, Quebec: Black Rose Press, 1986), 105–62; James Boggs, "The Challenge of Automation," in *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 100–106, essay first published in *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers' Notebook* (1963).

Situationism, anti-authoritarianism, and critiques of technology and civilization from the Frankfurt school and French ultra-left theory.[44]

During these years, the FE collective developed a philosophy that theorized technology as a system of domination and envisioned how people could live in harmony with nature, which they believed was the ultimate path to freedom. They concluded that in order to get free, humanity must rid itself of technology, destroy industrial-based civilization, and rebuild a way of life inspired by the preagricultural societies of 10,000 BCE and before. FE's sweeping indictment of technology broadly conceived developed along a few key arguments: technology does not conform to people, people conform to technology; technology homogenizes the Earth and human experience; technology becomes increasingly complicated, demanding a stratified, hierarchical division of labor to maintain it; it is impossible to maintain industrial capitalism without pollution and disasters caused by technology; and that technology cannot be reformed, it can only be destroyed. They believed the solution was to undo mass industrial civilization.

FE's shift to anarcho-primitivism was preceded by the paper's turn to a broader anarchist orientation in 1975. In August of that year, the newspaper was taken over by the Eat the Rich Gang, a group that turned FE into an anti-profit project with a coherent political vision. This action was declared in the August 1975 issue, which is described as the "the last issue of a failing capitalist enterprise."[45] The new FE was owned and operated by an editorial collective, refused to take advertising, and published articles either without an author name or under pseudonyms.[46]

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[44] Werbe, "History of the Fifth Estate Part I: The Early Years"; Millett, "Technology Is Capital: Fifth Estate's Critique of the Megamachine."
[45] "Last Issue: FE As Capitalist Enterprise."
[46] Werbe says that the collective chose to use pseudonyms because, "we didn't want anyone to be stars," and that crediting the authors "neglected so many other hands" that worked on the publication. I confirmed the identities behind many of the pseudonyms used in the newspaper via email correspondence with Werbe and in this chapter I refer to the writers by their real names. The writer's pseudonym is cited in the footnote, as that is what appears in the newspaper. Werbe, interview; Peter Werbe, "Email Message to Author," April 8, 2023.

By the mid-1970s, the underground press movement of the 1960s was collapsing as quickly as it had risen, but the FE was reborn.[47]

The anarcho-primitivist school of thought took shape in the pages of the FE during the late 1970s, influenced by Beat poet Gary Snyder, archeological anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, and French ultra-Left theory from Jacques Ellul and Jacques Camatte.[48] In this period, the paper published articles on anti-work philosophy and the historical roots of revolt, and critiqued the way Leftist movements had failed to create joy or dignity for the masses. During this time, the FE began a line of inquiry that would come to define the paper through the work of Oregon-based John Zerzan alongside locals Perlman, Werbe, and Watson. These writers, unsatisfied with simply blaming capitalism for what they saw as humanity's decline, searched further and further backward in time for "the moment of dissolution of the original unity between humanity and nature."[49] FE's writers were influenced by Marx, but also highly critical of Marxism, which they saw as an obvious failure as illustrated by the "police states" it had produced in places like the Soviet Union and Cuba.[50] They also thought that when it came to destroying the environment, Marxism and capitalism went hand in hand, enshrining the Enlightenment narrative of industrialization and progress that had led to environmental disaster.

An important article from this early period was Werbe's review of Snyder's book *The Politics of Ethnopoetics*. In the article titled "Back to the Stone Age?" he pointed out that most Marxist and anarchist thinkers linked revolution with "the continuing development of our productive capacity and view any reversal of the process as reactionary." Werbe explains,

[47] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 32.
[48] Millett, "Technology Is Capital: Fifth Estate's Critique of the Megamachine."
[49] John Zerzan, "Language: Origin and Meaning," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1984, #314 edition.
[50] "The Myth of National Liberation: Nationalism Against the Working Class," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1975, #265 edition.

"Snyder calls into question the basic assumptions of modern society and very directly indicts the whole edifice of civilization as the culprit in the predicament humans have gotten themselves into…What is being directly confronted is the concept of progress itself."[51] In this review, FE embraces Snyder's idea that the rise of agriculture during the Neolithic era was the moment when humanity began to lose its freedom, a view that became a strong theme in the paper. Seven months later, Werbe wrote that "the innovation of agriculture…led to a complete re-definition of the human experience and altered people from a condition of wildness to one of domestication."[52] By late 1980, John Zerzan, who became a figurehead of the primitivist movement, began his "Origins" series with the article "The Refusal of Technology."[53] In this series of articles, Zerzan located the roots of human alienation in agriculture, time, language, math, and art.[54] He believed that from these forms of abstraction arose "the wrenching and demoralizing character of the crisis we find ourselves in."[55]

FE number 306, published in July 1981, "represents the emergence of a fully-formed primitivist perspective."[56] This issue contains David Watson's essay "Against the Megamachine," an early work elaborating the anarcho-primitivist argument that technology is intertwined with both capitalism and the state to form the "megamachine," a system of domination in which humans are subjugated to the technologies they have created. Watson

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[51] Peter Werbe, "Gary Snyder Asks: Poetry or Machines? Back to the Stone Age," *Fifth Estate*, September 1977, #286 edition.
[52] Peter Werbe, "Technology & the State: An Introduction," *Fifth Estate*, March 2, 1978, #290 edition.
[53] John Zerzan, "The Refusal of Technology," *Fifth Estate*, October 20, 1980, #303 edition; Roc Morin, "The Anarcho-Primitivist Who Wants Us All to Give Up Technology," *Vice*, June 25, 2014, https://www.vice.com/en/article/dpwx3m/john-zerzan-wants-us-to-give-up-all-of-our-technology.
[54] John Zerzan, "Agriculture: Essence of Civilization," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1988, #329 edition; John Zerzan, "Beginning of Time, End of Time," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1983, #313 edition; Zerzan, "Language: Origin and Meaning"; John Zerzan, "Number: Its Origin & Evolution," *Fifth Estate*, October 1, 1985, #321 edition; John Zerzan, "The Case Against Art," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1986, #324 edition.
[55] Zerzan, "Number: Its Origin & Evolution."
[56] David Watson, "Introduction to Fifth Estate #306," *Fifth Estate*, July 1981, #306 edition.

concludes the essay with the call to "begin to envision the radical deconstruction of mass society."[57] This article established Watson as one of the leading voices of the radical environmental movement. His writing in FE, including political theory, personal essay, and poetry written under various pseudonyms, became influential to radical environmentalists but is little known outside movement spaces. Issue 306 also contains articles on the more leisurely, communitarian lifestyles of "primitive societies" and the way that leftist romanticization of the factory works to maintain hierarchy and even the state itself through dependence on industrial technology.[58]

Anarcho-primitivists used anthropological scholarship to prove that their utopic vision had been successfully implemented in the past.[59] Archeological anthropologist Marshall Sahlins dubbed the preagricultural world "the original affluent society" as his research found that prior to the Neolithic era, people worked no more than four hours a day, yet had everything they needed.[60] This thesis was later critiqued by other anthropologists, and continues to be debated, but it represented a paradigm shift in the field during the twentieth century.[61]

FE writer Bob Brubaker wrote in a critique of the mainstream anti-nuclear movement, "[w]hat the world lacks is a visionary conception of a desirable life, and people willing to act on such a vision."[62] The FE's writers used archaeological anthropology to illustrate a "desirable

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[57] David Watson, "Against the Megamachine," *Fifth Estate*, July 1, 1981, #306 edition.
[58] Bob Brubaker, "Community, Primitive Society and the State," *Fifth Estate*, July 1981, Volume 15, Issue 5 (306) edition, Radical Archives; George Bradford, "Marxism, Anarchism, and the Roots of the New Totalitarianism," *Fifth Estate*, July 1981, Volume 15, Issue 5 (306) edition.
[59] For more on the relationship between anthropology and anarchism see Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, "Beyond the State: Anthropology and 'actually-Existing-Anarchism'.," *Critique of Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X12438779.
[60] Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society: How We Used to Live Before the Rise of the State, Technology, and the Government," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1979, #298 edition.
[61] David Kaplan, "The Darker Side of the 'Original Affluent Society,'" *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56, no. 3 (October 1, 2000), https://www.jstor.org/stable/3631086.
[62] Bob Brubaker, "Anti-Anti-Nuke," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1982, #309 edition.

life" by showing that a preagricultural lifestyle was characterized by an absence of hierarchy, less work, and the presence of a vigorous spirituality and egalitarian principles.[63] "They cultivated nothing except themselves," Fredy Perlman wrote of these societies in *Against His-story, Against Leviathan*.[64] According to anarcho-primitivism, technology developed when an entity or individual gained the power to coerce the labor necessary to hoard a surplus of goods. For anarcho-primitivists the development of surplus, which was used by individuals to gain power over others, led to a decline in quality of life for most humans. In archeological anthropology scholarship like Sahlins', FE's writers found evidence of a world where people spent their time in ecstatic, joyful rituals and play, and they traced the ways that the civilizing project had to destroy art, joy, sexuality, and spirituality to impose a life where the majority of waking hours would be spent working.[65]

The development of anarcho-primitivism was equally influenced by events on the ground in Detroit and around the world as it was by the study of political theory, anthropology, and radical history. The FE's critique sharpened as the writers considered the long history of environmental degradation caused by industry in southeast Michigan. Every issue of the paper covered news and events with importance to Detroiters and the broader radical community, and FE used current events to prove their critique that technology dominated humans. For each new oil spill, nuclear meltdown, or town evacuated due to chemical explosion, FE analyzed how modern humanity's dependence on industrial technology made life subordinate to the megamachine. Industrial accidents were given particular attention, with an entire issue dedicated

[63] Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society: How We Used to Live Before the Rise of the State, Technology, and the Government."
[64] Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!: An Essay* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), 8.
[65] Fredy Perlman, "Against Leviathan: Community vs. The State," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1982, #311 edition; Pat (the Rat) Halley, "Revenge of the Clowns: Origins of April Fools' Day," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1976, #271 edition; Richard Drinnon, "The Metaphysics of Dancing Tribes," *Fifth Estate*, Summer 1987, #326 edition.

to the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown and multiple articles analyzing accidents at Seveso, Italy; Bhopal, India; and chemical contamination in Michigan's dairy, meat, and egg supply.[66] FE saw these events as interlinked—"For us, the disasters are moments within the same process"—and an unavoidable part of life with technology run amuck.[67] The paper ridiculed suggestions that technology could be utilized to prevent and clean up after these industrial accidents, pointing out the unending cycle of how technology is offered up to solve problems caused by technology.[68]

One of the major critiques that "Detroit's primitives" received about their critique of technology was that they had imagined a utopia that was impossible to implement.[69] While at times the writers would argue that they saw their role as being to elucidate the problem, rather than present a solution, FE did over time build a toolbox of principles and actions for how to adopt anarcho-primitivism in everyday life, including the following overlapping techniques: rejection of work, engaging in "epistemological Luddism," and pursuing a "desirable life" by any means necessary.[70]

Anti-work theory and praxis became deeply embedded in the paper's identity and was important to FE's analysis of hunter-gatherer societies. The FE used Sahlins' argument to bolster their conclusion that the majority of human beings wasted their lives working to create profit for the elite while decimating the earth. Anti-work ideology infused the paper, from news stories

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[66] R.F., "Italian Chemical Disaster: Possible Here?," *Fifth Estate*, October 1, 1976, #277 edition; "Seveso Update," *Fifth Estate*, July 1, 1977, #284 edition; Solis, "Bhopal and the Prospects for Anarchy"; "We All Live in Bhopal," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1985, #319 edition; S. Tufts, "PBB: Case Study of an Industrial Plague," *Fifth Estate*, May 1, 1976, #272 edition; "PBB Found in Mother's Milk," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1976, #276 edition.
[67] P. Solis, "Mexican Oil Spill Disaster: Industrial Plague Widens," *Fifth Estate*, October 22, 1979, #299 edition.
[68] George Bradford, "Stopping the Industrial Hydra: Revolution Against the Megamachine," *Fifth Estate*, Winter 1990, #333 edition.
[69] Harry Schnurr, "Not the Pope," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1984, #318 edition; Ron Hayley and Bob Brubaker, "Dubious History," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1983, #313 edition.
[70] George Bradford, "Media: Capital's Global Village," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1984, #318 edition; Brubaker, "Anti-Anti-Nuke."

about sabotage and absenteeism in the modern workplace, to Zerzan's series of articles arguing that labor unions have throughout history coopted worker militancy and operated as "auxiliary organs of Capital," to historical explorations of anti-work movements like the Luddites, to utopian imaginings of a future without work through poetry and art.[71] The following excerpt from one of those imaginings does as good a job of defining the paper's position on work as any of its political theory:

> "Work distorts one's perceptions. It causes us to view the elaborate sexual rites of spiders involved in the spinning of webs as unmotivated mechanical labor…Immediately after the advent of paradise work will be placed on a dark shelf in the basement of the Smithsonian Institute. Children under twelve will be admitted only if accompanied by a lazy adult."[72]

[71] John Zerzan, "Do Unions Raise Wages? A Note on 'Labor Economics,'" *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1976, #273 edition; John Zerzan, "Unionism & the Nazi Labor Front," *Fifth Estate*, October 1, 1976, #277 edition; John Zerzan, "Unionism and Taylorism: Labor Cooperation with the 'Modernization of Production,'" *Fifth Estate*, November 1, 1976, #278 edition; John Zerzan, "Anti-Work and the Struggle for Control," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1982, #309 edition; John Zerzan, "Unionization in America," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1976, #275 edition; John Zerzan and Paula Zerzan, "New York, New York," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1977, #285 edition; John Zerzan and Paula Zerzan, "Who Killed Ned Ludd?: A History of Machine Breaking at the Dawn of Capitalism," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1976, #271 edition; Charles Reeve, "The 'Revolt Against Work' or Fight For The Right To Be Lazy?," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1976, #279 edition; Peter Rachleff, "Anything New In The 'Revolt Against Work'?," *Fifth Estate*, February 1, 1977, #280 edition.

[72] Blue Jesus, "Salamanders for Allah: Tales on the Nature of Work," *Fifth Estate*, October 20, 1980, #303 edition.

Fig. 2.2. The *Fifth Estate's* anti-work propaganda. Back cover of FE #325, Spring 1987. Source: JSTOR Independent Voices.

FE also saw the ways people opted out of participation in political systems such as voting, the census, and the draft as heroic acts of refusal. The newspaper gave extensive coverage to draft resistance, took a firm position against electoral politics and praised low voter turnouts ("The voter is a man who comes where he is summoned one day like a flunkey."), recommended not cooperating with the census ("Take This Census & Shove It!"), and the paper also covered local acts of resistance, such as Detroiters repeatedly tearing down the wooden gate

of a pay parking lot built by Wayne State or bus riders protesting a fare hike by paying with dollar bills that had been ripped in half.[73] For FE, these incidents revealed that more people aligned with an anarchist ideology than was typically recognized. "We always jokingly say everybody is born an anarchist, and then we're just taught to obey," says Werbe.[74]

Lastly, the magazine theorized their own laziness, which resulted in an erratic publishing schedule, as a radical praxis in line with their anti-work ethic. In the "Detroit Seen" column, the collective often explained why they had failed to produce the issue on time. Publishing slowed over the decades. However, this did not stop the paper from gaining subscribers. Between 1980 and 1990, FE's distribution grew from 1,772 to 4,786, which the publication attributed to "increased interest in anti-authoritarian ideas rather than visions of success for our paper."[75] Another "Detroit Seen" column illustrates FE's rejection of ambition:

> "Usually when a publication such as ours disappears for several months it is due to money problems, political differences among the staff or a combination of the two. However, we can happily report that neither of these maladies caused our hiatus, but rather a combination of sloth and self-indulgence. The days and then the months just slipped away as we traveled, tended our gardens, took leisurely bike rides, worked our dumb jobs and generally laid about as much as we could."[76]

Despite the fun and games of anti-work philosophy, anarcho-primitivist critique was an extreme position that could lead to a feeling of hopelessness for those sympathetic to the cause—it was hard to imagine how society could quit technology cold turkey. While at times the FE's writers said they were "not the 'primitivist party'; we have no program," they did work out an

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[73] "Draft Law at Standstill: Millions Refuse Registration," *Fifth Estate*, January 19, 1982, #308 edition; "The Absurdity of Politics: An American Institution," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1976, #271 edition; "The 1988 Election: Nobody Won!," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1988, #330 edition; "Take This Census & Shove It!," *Fifth Estate*, February 26, 2023, #301 edition; "Detroit Seen," December 1, 1977; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1982, #311 edition.
[74] Werbe, interview.
[75] "Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation," *Fifth Estate*, December 1980, #304 edition; "Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation," *Fifth Estate*, Winter 1990, #335 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, Summer 1987, #326 edition.
[76] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, October 22, 1979, #299 edition.

idea for a gradual reduction in dependence on technology, a method they called "epistemological Luddism."[77] Through this framework, Watson suggested "that a possible beginning to stopping this decaying juggernaut would be to begin dismantling the problematic technical structures and to refuse to repair those systems that are breaking down. This would also imply refusing to accept newly devised technological systems meant to fix or replace the old."[78]

Epistemological luddism could be practiced on an individual level—an anarcho-primitivist could refuse to engage with a particular technology such as cars or television, while still using a refrigerator or electricity. FE recognized that as a newspaper the collective had to use certain technologies in order to continue their project, and did not believe this made their critique of technology hypocritical. One way they enacted epistemological Luddism was their insistence on using an antique typesetter to layout and print the newspaper, refusing to convert to a computer until 1993 ("The Fifth Estate Enters the 20th Century. We Get a Computer and Hate It!").[79] The FE collective's use of old technologies aligns with broader anarchist culture. Kathy Ferguson notes in her study of anarchist printers from the movement's classical period that "[a]narchists and other radicals predictably had less money to spend on new technology, and thus were more likely to stick with older machines, even after the new became available."[80]

For FE, the rejection of both work and technology was intertwined with the radical pursuit of joy in everyday life. The writers believed that only by removing or reducing both work and the use of technology could people make room for this experience. This was part of the paper's praxis, as the collective insisted that "we want to make this a project of joy and

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[77] David Watson borrowed this concept from the political theorist Langdon Winner. Bradford, "Media: Capital's Global Village."
[78] Bradford.
[79] E.B. Maple, "The Fifth Estate Enters the 20th Century. We Get A Computer and Hate It!," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 2023, #342 edition.
[80] Kathy E. Ferguson, "Anarchist Printers and Presses: Material Circuits of Politics," *Political Theory* 42, no. 4 (August 2014): 396, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591714531420.

celebration as much as one of struggle and reflection."[81] The paper's inclusion of art, fiction, and poetry in its pages was a part of this effort "to create a publication that not only critiques modern society, but also expresses the dreams and desires of a new life."[82] FE's anarcho-primitivism attempted to show people "a desirable life" in the modern era, but was inspired by what the writers believed was the last time humanity lived free from domination.[83] Steps on the way to that desirable life could look like getting rid of your television, growing your own food, living off of unemployment for as long as possible, or it could look like simply not paying your bus fare, filling out the census form, or voting in the primary.

A desirable life could also be modeled through direct action. In 1997, FE described their planned actions at an upcoming protest as "creative, joyful, militant, and with a heavy dose of radical culture as theater and in the streets."[84] The demand for a desirable everyday life infused the collective's activism, which often featured political theater and puppetry. FE was a proponent of two interlinking praxes that were important to the revived anarchism of the late twentieth century broadly— direct action and prefiguration, often described through the Industrial Workers of the World slogan "building the new world in the shell of the old."[85] Uri Gordon defines these strategies for social change as "a dual strategy of confrontation to delegitimize the system and grassroots alternative-building from below."[86]

The 1980s were an era of fervent creativity in direct action protests from groups including the radical environmentalists in Earth First! and the queer liberationists in ACT UP.

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[81] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1993, #343 edition.
[82] "Why What Who Barbarians," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1984, #319 edition, sec. Daily Barbarian No. 2 insert, https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28036640.
[83] Brubaker, "Anti-Anti-Nuke."
[84] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, Summer 1997, #349 edition.
[85] Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded," 39; "Preamble to the IWW Constitution," Industrial Workers of the World, accessed March 23, 2023, https://www.iww.org/preamble/.
[86] Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded," 40.

Some members of the FE collective had been involved in protests since the Vietnam War era and in the following decade they continued the use of direct action with the formation of the satirical political theater group the Eat the Rich Gang. In one stunt, the collective printed a joke cover of Detroit's conservative daily *The Detroit News* for Easter Sunday with the headline "Easter cancelled, Christ's body found!"[87] This outraged some local Christians to the point of driving a car and firing a gun into *Detroit News* newspaper boxes.[88] Another action involved the group staging a theatrical soup kitchen outside a dinner for Detroit's civic leaders, with participants "dressed as bums and wastrels" distributing free gruel to themselves and handing out a pamphlet titled "To Serve the Rich" that included recipes for "Hearst Patties" and "Split Priest Soup."[89] FE took special glee in sacrificing Detroit's "greatest idol," and anti-car writing and protests spanned two decades.[90] The paper encouraged readers to participate in theatrical, subversive actions in large and small ways, inviting people to organized protests and also encouraging them to do things like bring Ronald Reagan urine samples for drug testing or charge their long-distance phone calls to the CIA's Detroit office (Fig. 2.3).[91] Through these actions, the collective engaged

[87] "Easter Cancelled Christ's Body Found," *Fifth Estate*, March 27, 1975, Vol. 10, No. 18 edition.
[88] David Watson, "Notes toward a History of the Fifth Estate," *Fifth Estate*, Spring-Summer 2005, #368-369 edition, https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/368-369-spring-summer-2005/notes-toward-history-fifth-estate/.
[89] Perlman, *Having Little Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman's Fifty Years*, 87.
[90] Eddie Sabot, "Death of the Car," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1990, #334 edition; Lynne Clive, "Introduction to Aberration: The Automobile," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1987, #325 edition.
[91] A. Shady Character, "How to Cheat Ma Bell: Telephone Credit Card Codes," *Fifth Estate*, February 1, 1976, #269 edition; A. Shady Character, "Call Long-Distance on Ma Bell," *Fifth Estate*, February 1, 1977, #280 edition.

in protest, created alternative institutions, and built a world filled with art, irreverence, and spontaneity.

Fig. 2.3. Peter Werbe (holding the jugs of "urine") and others protesting Ronald Reagan's campaign stop at Cobo Hall in Detroit, September 24, 1986. A flyer was circulated asking people to "bring a sample of your urine to present to [Reagan]…to show you are drug free." Source: Box 33, Fifth Estate Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan.

The Detroit Trash Incinerator

For a group of anarchists that wanted to end industrial society, there could be a positive reading of their city's urban crisis, which in some ways represented the collapse of industrial civilization they were advocating for. In the 1983 cover story "Detroit—High Tech and the Widening Gyre," Kathleen Rashid writes, "For us, here in inner-city Detroit, the crumbling of a

'progress' oriented society is very real and present. Its effects are tangible here."[92] FE recognized that while in some respects Detroit was returning to nature, growing an urban prairie amidst crumbling buildings, in others the atrocities of mass society were only getting worse.[93] "We were ambivalent about the entropy," Watson wrote in a reflection on this period. "People were suffering."[94] FE reported on gentrification in the Corridor from the 1970s, illustrating that the deindustrialized city had not really been as abandoned by capital as it might have seemed.[95] As Detroit built both a nuclear power plant and the world's largest trash incinerator in the 1970s and '80s, the FE collective participated in vigorous battles against megaprojects that posed existential threats to the well-being of themselves, their neighbors, and the environment. FE's reporting on environmental problems in their city and the activism the collective participated in with the coalition the Evergreen Alliance connected the radical environmental movement with issues typically associated with the environmental justice movement.

After the paper's anarcho-primitivist shift in the mid-1970s, one area of focus of the collective's activist work was the anti-nuclear movement. Nuclear power was a special anxiety among environmentally conscious Detroiters. In November 1955, the Fermi I nuclear power plant just south of the city in Monroe, Michigan suffered a partial meltdown, an incident that could have killed over one hundred thousand people in the metro Detroit region and was kept secret until the 1975 publication of John G. Fuller's book *We Almost Lost Detroit*.[96] Fermi I was decommissioned, but utility operator Detroit Edison was given permission to build a second

[92] Mary Wildwood, "Detroit-High Tech and the Widening Gyre," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1983, #313 edition.
[93] "Detroit Seen," April 1, 1987.
[94] Watson, "Notes toward a History of the Fifth Estate."
[95] "Lording in the Corridor," *Fifth Estate*, October 31, 1975, #267 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1976, #273 edition; "Detroit Seen," April 19, 1977; "Detroit Seen," December 1, 1977; "Detroit Seen," April 1, 1987.
[96] H. Genghis Kahn, "Anti-Nuke Demo Planned Against Edison," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1977, #286 edition. Gil Scott Heron named a song on his 1977 album *Bridges* after the book's title.

plant, Fermi II, in Monroe, which remains in operation.[97] The FE published articles about nuclear energy and the collective participated in local coalitions seeking to end the use of nuclear power, though it also criticized these groups for being focused on reforms rather than radical changes.[98]

In the late 1970s, as the collective was focused on protesting Fermi II, a deal even more sinister to southeastern Michigan's environment was making its way through city government. As scholars of urban and environmental history such as Josiah Rector and Julie Sze have elucidated, during the 1970s and '80s many indebted and shrinking cities experiencing deindustrialization turned to trash incineration as way to earn money at the expense of their citizens' health. As part of the rise of neoliberal economics, "intensifying trends of privatization and deregulation in the solid waste and energy sectors" led to an increase in the number of trash incinerators and other "noxious" waste and energy facilities in formerly industrial areas near low-income communities of color.[99] For Detroit's first Black mayor Coleman Young, a trash incinerator was an easy fix to attempt to buttress the city's failing budget, as other municipalities would pay the city to burn their waste in the incinerator. "Reagan-era fiscal and regulatory policies" had overburdened many deindustrialized cities and especially Detroit with "toxic debt," which would be paid with the health of Detroit's poorest citizens.[100]

The FE collective came out in fury against the incinerator, which was located only half a mile from the Cass Corridor, and linked up with other activists and concerned citizens from the neighborhood to form an anti-incinerator coalition called the Evergreen Alliance. The coalition

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[97] Kahn; "Fermi 2 Power Plant," DTE Energy, accessed March 18, 2023, https://www.dteenergy.com/us/en/business/about-dte/fermi-2-power-plant/fermi-2-power-plant.html.
[98] George Bradford, "The Nuclear Freeze: Why We Didn't Sign Your Petition," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1982, #309 edition; Maple and Bradford, "FE & the Anti-Nuke War Movement: Where We've Been."
[99] Josiah Rector, *Toxic Debt: An Environmental Justice History of Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 151; Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), 3; also see Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
[100] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 150, 170–71.

was active from 1986 to 1991 and performed a wide variety of activities, from speaking out against the incinerator at city council meetings to marching with puppets that represented protestors' dreams of a better world.[101] In the pages of FE, members debated whether the movement should take a strong anti-industrial, anti-civilization perspective.[102] FE pointed out the hypocrisy within the mainstream news coverage of the incinerator and the protests against it (protesters were referred to as "environmental terrorists" by the *Detroit News* when Greenpeace came to Detroit to support the movement).[103] The coalition was able to build enough community support that the "Evergreen 19" who were arrested at a demonstration and charged with disorderly conduct were found not guilty by a jury even though the judge had called for the maximum penalty.[104] The Evergreen Alliance were even successful in temporarily shutting the incinerator down by fighting it in court on the grounds that it violated laws against air pollution (Kathleen Rashid writes of this victory in FE: "What had we done? Validated the system by using it to effect social change? Yikes!").[105]

Recent scholarship on the Evergreen Alliance has critiqued the movement for its inability to build a collective with their Black neighbors in the Corridor and across the city, blaming this for the movement's failure to stop the incinerator. By the 1980s Detroit was one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. and because actions against the incinerator consisted mostly of white protestors the coalition could not overcome stereotypes about the environmental movement's whiteness.[106] Coleman Young was able to paint the protestors as "outside agitators"—i.e., white

[101] Rector, 170.
[102] E.B. Maple, "Stopping the Incinerator Starting the Movement," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1988, #329 edition.
[103] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1986, #323 edition.
[104] Bill Blank and George Bradford, "Evergreen 19 Beat Rap as Incinerator Fires Up," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1988, #330 edition.
[105] Mary Wildwood, "Yikes! We Shut It Down! Detroit Burner Closes Temporarily," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1990, #334 edition.
[106] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 170.

suburbanites—even though they lived in Detroit.[107] Josiah Rector identifies Young's powerful image as a civil rights champion in addition to his "use of patronage politics to blunt opposition to controversial projects" as contributing factors to why Black Detroiters may have been reluctant to participate in the movement against the incinerator.[108] Rector also writes that the Evergreen Alliance's "anarchist philosophy, avant-garde aesthetic, and use of puppets and parade floats made its protests lively, but also may have limited their appeal beyond the Cass Corridor music and art scene."[109] Movement participant Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith agrees that some might have viewed the protests as "silly."[110]

Black Detroiters, and especially Black women, had long been organizing against environmental injustice in the city—from Mildred Smith staring down bulldozers coming to demolish her home on Hobart Street in 1966 to Charity Hicks' 2014 arrests for civil disobedience while speaking out against water shutoffs that emergency managers mandated during Detroit's bankruptcy.[111] The narrative that Black Detroiters were apathetic in the face of the incinerator is suspect. It is beyond the scope of this project to pursue the story of how Black Detroiters responded to the building of the Detroit trash incinerator, but I wish to linger momentarily on Robin Kelley's assertion that working-class and low-income Black communities have always challenged oppression and those in power "despite the appearance of consent" through covert and everyday forms of resistance that have often been left out of scholarship.[112] In the decades following the building of the incinerator, women of color such as Grace Lee Boggs, Marian

[107] Rector, 161.
[108] Rector, 160.
[109] Rector, 160.
[110] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[111] Brandon M. Ward, "The Greening of Detroit History," *The Metropole* (blog), January 25, 2022, https://themetropole.blog/2022/01/25/the-greening-of-detroit-history/.
[112] Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75–112.

Kramer, Maureen Taylor, and Charity Hicks would lead some of the groups and institutions—including the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, and the Boggs Center—continuing the fight for environmental justice in Detroit.[113]

FE's environmental activism was harmed by a lack of racial and gender diversity, and the paper reflected on this openly, as it often did with critiques of its work. Werbe recollects that there was "next to no Black participation on the *Fifth Estate*, ever."[114] Both Smith and Werbe remember only one Black writer ever participating in the collective, a man named Lucius Amerson, who was present in FE's work for just a brief period.[115] Members of the FE collective wrote about their relationship with their Black neighbors and why they thought it was difficult to build coalitions with them as activists. They expressed a sense of grief and alienation at living in a city that was characterized by Black-white antagonism.[116] Reflecting on the environmental activists' failure to reach their Black neighbors, Mary Wildwood wrote that, "the legacy of deep-seated racism here, and its generations of abuse and exploitation, compounded by urban blight, its poverty, addiction, and alienation, has spawned a profound and unprecedented level of rage and disempowerment (for lack of a better word) that is truly terrifying."[117] She continued that "efforts to expose the incinerator as an instance of environmental racism" were ineffective because "to most blacks here in this 80% black city, our white faces still speak through the mask of oppression."[118] The collective was never able to overcome this dynamic.

There was more gender diversity than there was racial diversity in the FE collective, but even so writer Kathleen Rashid remembered years later that "the *Fifth Estate* was kind of

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[113] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 173–98, 216–22.
[114] Werbe, interview.
[115] Werbe; Smith, interview, January 31, 2023; Werbe, "Email Message to Author," April 8, 2023.
[116] Lynne Clive, "Detroit: Demolished by Design: Violence, Racism and Collapse of Community," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1990, #335 edition.
[117] Mary Wildwood, "1. 'No Clear Dividing Line...,'" *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1990, #335 edition.
[118] Wildwood.

dominated by a lot of male consciousness."[119] The spouses and partners of FE's male writers including Marilyn Werbe, Marilynn Rashid (partner to David Watson, sister of Kathleen), and Lorraine Perlman held important roles as writers, editors, typists, and artists in the collective. These women were involved with the intellectual labor of developing arguments and debating ideas, the menial labor of typesetting, layout, and mailing (often referred to as "grunt work"), and the artistic contributions including graphic design, poetry, and art pieces featured in the paper.[120] Rashid, writing under the pseudonym Lynn Clive, critiqued sexist practices within the FE collective, which the paper published. In a response to Werbe's criticism that the Evergreen Alliance and the broader anti-incinerator movement was reformist, Marilynn Rashid lambasted the "unequal relationships on the paper."[121] FE was often willing to publish critiques of its arguments and practices, and the paper sometimes ran issues that were almost entirely composed of letters to the editor and responses from the collective.[122] Rashid wrote that the Evergreen Alliance allowed some women "who had previously been passive or intimidated" to become "truly empowered, energized, and surprisingly articulate in ways these other projects (especially the FE) had not allowed them to be."[123] Some of the women in the Evergreen Alliance formed the ecofeminist collective Womyn Empowered Against Violence to the Environment (WEAVE), which at one action "weaved" themselves to the incinerator's chain-link fence (Fig. 2.4).[124]

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[119] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 156.
[120] Werbe, interview; Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[121] Lynne Clive, "A Response: Stopping the Incinerator Starting the Movement," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1988, #330 edition.
[122] "More Debate on Pornography, Sexism & Fascism," *Fifth Estate*, April 30, 1978, #291 edition; "FE Criticized & Our Response," *Fifth Estate*, April 30, 1978, #291 edition.
[123] Clive, "A Response: Stopping the Incinerator Starting the Movement."
[124] Ruby Lips, "Women WEAVE a Web of Resistance," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1989, #332 edition; Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 156.

Fig. 2.4. The eco-feminist collective WEAVE (Womyn Empowered Against Violence to the Environment) weave themselves to the gate of the Detroit Trash Incinerator, 1989. Source: Box 33, Fifth Estate Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan.

In a reflection on a weekend of anti-incinerator actions, FE wrote that the Mobilization to Save the Great Lakes "helped foster a radical, anti-industrial perspective among a growing community of resistance in Detroit's Cass Corridor District."[125] While the movement to stop the Detroit trash incinerator was in many ways a failure—it was never able to bring out more than a few hundred people into the streets, could not build an adequate coalition with Black Detroiters, and did not stop the incinerator from burning trash for thirty years—the Evergreen Alliance's activism saw a feisty group of Cass Corridorites engaging in direct action and it ensured that the incinerator was not built without opposition. Though they were not able to stop the incinerator project, the relationship between the Evergreen Alliance and their community reinforced the

[125] Maple, "Stopping the Incinerator Starting the Movement."

bohemian neighborhood's connection to radicalism and their coverage of the Detroit trash incinerator in the newspaper drew attention to the common causes of the radical environmental movement and the environmental justice movement. This last point was particularly important given the increasing conservatism among certain quarters of radical environmentalists.

A Deeper Deep Ecology: The *Fifth Estate* and Earth First!

Most historical accounts of the radical environmental movement focus heavily on the militant activists of Earth First! (EF!), and with good reason.[126] EF! created some of the most exciting protests of the twentieth century, and the group grew rapidly during the 1980s, attaining over five thousand members spread across the country by the end of the decade. However, centering EF! as the figurehead of the radical environmental movement can lead to a simplistic narrative that poses the radical environmental movement in distinction to the environmental justice movement, the needs of people of color living in inner cities versus the wants of privileged white people obsessed with wilderness conservation. FE was never as widely known as EF!, but the paper's work developing anarcho-primitivism in the late 1970s influenced the thinking of EF! rank and file.[127] FE's critique of the most problematic ideologies embraced by EF! from within the radical environmental movement makes the publication an important perspective to include in histories of radical environmentalism and radical social movements of the 1980s broadly. Throughout the late 1980s and into the '90s, especially in two issues dedicated to the topic, FE writer David Watson theorized a "humanistic deep ecology" in contrast

[126] Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists*. See the introduction to this dissertation for an overview of the literature on radical environmentalism.
[127] During the 1980s, FE's circulation grew slowly but steadily to between four and five thousand by the end of the decade, but EF!'s direct action tactics gained the group much more media attention and notoriety than FE would ever attain. "Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation," *Fifth Estate*, Winter 1988-1989, # 330 edition.

to the biocentric, Malthusian politics of EF! leader David Foreman as well as the pro-technology ideas of Murray Bookchin's social ecology.[128] While Watson's work is the least known of these three political theorists, his writings merit wider study than they have received and are useful to anyone seeking a richer understanding of the radical environmental movement during this period.[129]

EF! was founded in 1981 by disillusioned environmentalists David Foreman, Mike Roselle, and Howie Wolke, the same year that FE published issue 306.[130] EF! had a journal, but was most focused on direct action, especially a form of sabotage that was dubbed "monkeywrenching" after movement figurehead Edward Abbey's 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.[131] The conservation of wild spaces, especially in the western United States, was EF!'s immediate goal.[132] The FE collective also believed in this cause, but there were important differences between the two organizations. FE was focused more on theory than action—the newspaper was their primary project—and the FE collective was more concerned with environmental issues that affected life in the deindustrialized city. Both FE and EF! embraced anti-civilization philosophy, but the FE collective's location in Detroit and engagement with their local community caused it to diverge philosophically from the rural-based EF!

The founders of EF! were proponents of a philosophy called deep ecology, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess' idea that the health of the biosphere should be prioritized over the needs

[128] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023; George Bradford, "How Deep Is Deep Ecology?: A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism," *Fifth Estate*, October 31, 1987, #327 edition; George Bradford, "Return of the Son of Deep Ecology: The Ethics of Permanent Crisis and the Permanent Crisis in Ethics," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1989, #331 edition.
[129] Some of Watson's writing for FE has been collected in two books published by Autonomedia. David Watson, *Against the Megamachine: Essays on Empire & Its Enemies* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1997); David Watson, *Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1996).
[130] Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*, 132–33.
[131] Zakin, 7.
[132] Zakin, 144.

of humans.[133] The white men behind EF! really meant Earth should come first, and they adopted outlaw cowboy personae as they fought to protect their beloved Southwest wilderness from being destroyed by mines, suburbs, and dams. David Foreman and Edward Abbey were charismatic leaders and talented orators, but their politics were deeply misanthropic. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of EF! was their belief that the human population should be reduced to restore balance to the Earth's ecology. The group embraced the thinking of the seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Robert Malthus, who thought that the human population needed to be kept in check to prevent resource depletion and thus was responsible for ideas used to justify eugenics.[134] EF! even sold bumper stickers with the phrase "Malthus was right."[135] FE was highly critical of these ideas in EF!'s work, which FE attributed to "the inability of deep ecology to come to grips with the question of the capitalist political economy."[136] The paper concluded that "EF is developing not only an ecological agenda, but also a right-wing social and political ideology with a style to match."[137]

FE was relentless in their critique of Abbey and Foreman's bigoted statements and the hypocrisy they saw in the movement's embrace of biocentrism. FE's political vision centered a desirable life and human joy, and a philosophy fetishizing a planet devoid of humanity was incompatible with their utopian ideal. The paper excoriated Abbey for his comments that the U.S.-Mexico border should be closed and patrolled by the military, as he believed the influx of migrants from Latin America was spoiling the land and American culture.[138] Foreman made

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[133] Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *Inquiry* 16, no. 1–4 (January 1, 1973): 95–100, https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682.
[134] Michael Shermer, "Why Malthus Is Still Wrong," *Scientific American*, May 1, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0516-72.
[135] Bradford, "How Deep Is Deep Ecology?: A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism."
[136] Bradford.
[137] E.B. Maple, "Ideology as Material Force: Earth First! And the Problem of Language," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1988, #328 edition.
[138] E.B. Maple, "Edward Abbey: We Rest Our Case," *Fifth Estate*, August 1, 1988, #329 edition.

heinous remarks that he was happy about both the AIDS epidemic and famine in Ethiopia reducing the human population, leading Watson to call him a "cheerleader for the plague."[139]

Watson was the driving force behind the critique of deep ecology, as he had been in developing FE's primitivist perspective. His writing composed the majority of the two special issues dedicated to critiquing deep ecology, EF!, and Murray Bookchin during the late 1980s, which staked out FE's position in the radical environmental movement. In the 1987 essay "How Deep Is Deep Ecology: A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism," Watson, writing under the penname George Bradford, argued that the EF! vision of deep ecology "goes astray and is frequently vapid" as a result of having "no social critique."[140] Watson assaulted the faulty logic he saw infesting in a movement that was otherwise fighting for a worthy cause, pointing out the way Malthus reduced humans to commodities "subject to the laws of supply and demand," the group's "conservative reaction to imperial decline" and inability to see "the connection between empire and habitat devastation," as well as the way Foreman's comments on famine reveal a "refusal to understand that food has become a commodity." Watson rejected the individualism of EF!'s cowboys for community: "Deep ecologists tend to forget that particularly in the long run preservation of wilderness and defense of natural integrity and diversity is essential to human survival also, that there is no isolated 'intrinsic worth' but an interrelated dependency that includes us all."[141] Rather than an Earth free from humans, a humanistic deep ecology imagines people living in harmony with nature, which Watson believed was the key to liberation.

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[139] George Bradford, "Cheerleaders for the Plague," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1989, #331 edition.
[140] Bradford, "How Deep Is Deep Ecology?: A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism."
[141] Bradford; Kropotkin's 1892 text *Conquest of Bread* argues for a decentralized economic system based on mutual aid (a concept Kropotkin also theorized) and cooperation, which he wrote is more natural to humanity than competition. Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (United Kingdom: Vanguard Press, 1926).

The remainder of this special issue was dedicated to a newsletter written by a group of former Earth First!ers based in Olympia, Washington.[142] This document sketches out the beginnings of the break between the first and second generation of EF!, which FE saw as necessary for the movement to continue. The newsletter describes the groups' experience attending the EF! annual meeting and experiencing racism and chauvinism within EF! rank and file. "How Deep is Deep Ecology?" generated the strongest reader response of any FE article thus far, and debate from readers, many of them members of the radical environmental movement, comprised much of the following issue.[143]

FE's work as well as the growing anarchist movement of the 1980s influenced the second generation of EF!, which was more socially conscious.[144] By winter of 1988, members of this new generation published an article in FE stating that Foreman and the EF! journal were not representative of them, that they should be judged by their actions protesting by day and monkeywrenching by night rather than the controversial statements from Foreman.[145] The authors wrote that the young organization had gone through many changes, and thus it was no longer the same Earth First! profiled in Watson's article the previous year. Many of the young militants were learning revolutionary theory and some had chosen to abandon the *Earth First! Journal*, which at that time was still controlled by Foreman, to form their own publication, *Live Wild or Die!*. This new perspective within the organization became more concrete with the leadership of environmentalist and labor organizer Judi Bari, who worked to form a coalition between EF! and loggers to stop the deforestation of redwoods in northern California. Her work

[142] Alien-Nation, "Alien-Nation: A Glimpse of the July 4th Earth First! Gathering," *Fifth Estate*, October 31, 1987, #327 edition.
[143] The FE Staff, "Introduction: Delving Deeper into Deep Ecology," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1988, #328 edition.
[144] Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*, 39.
[145] Mikal Jakubal, "'Live Wild or Die' - The Other EF!," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1988, #330 edition.

organizing Redwood Summer, a three-month long occupation of old-growth forest in northern California to prevent new logging and draw attention to the harm caused by the logging industry, resulted in accusations from EF!'s old guard that the new activists had diluted their biocentric vision.[146]

In the spring of 1989, another issue of FE was dedicated to Watson's critique of deep ecology. The essay "Return of the Son of Deep Ecology: The Ethic of Permanent Crisis and the Permanent Crisis in Ethics" takes the form of a response to Earth First!er Christopher Manes, who wrote angry letters to FE defending EF! and deep ecology under the pen name Miss Ann Thropy. In the article, Watson refined his argument that EF!'s misanthropic position is in alignment with capitalism and industrialism, rather than a rebellion against those logics. "Starting from a legitimate revulsion against the destructiveness of civilization, DE [deep ecology] takes for granted an economistic, 'zero-sum' picture of the world and natural history, in which humanity can only thrive by making nature lose. This is essentially the world view of bourgeois civilization," he wrote.[147] Watson argued that deep ecologists' advocacy for a mass die-off through praising Malthus "buys into the logic of industrialism (we need industrialization to survive)" and ignores the fact that nature would be devastated if such a collapse were to occur, something demonstrated by the famines in Africa that Foreman had praised.[148] Watson also wrote that deep ecology has the same blind spots as the conservation movements that preceded and influenced it, especially the enshrining of the National Parks system in the late nineteenth

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[146] Estelle Fennell, "The Split in Earth First!," *Fifth Estate*, December 1, 1990, #335 edition; Bari's activism resulted in an attempt on her life, as well as the life of fellow activist Darryl Cherney, by car bombing in the spring of 1990. The FBI and Oakland police claimed that Bari and Cherney planted the bomb themselves, while Bari and Cherney accused the police of framing them. In 2002, a jury found that the Oakland police and the FBI had violated the pair's civil rights. Evelyn Nieves, "Truth Is Still Elusive In 1990 Pipe Bombing," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2002, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/16/us/truth-is-still-elusive-in-1990-pipe-bombing.html.
[147] Bradford, "Return of the Son of Deep Ecology: The Ethics of Permanent Crisis and the Permanent Crisis in Ethics."
[148] Bradford.

century which occurred at the same time that the U.S. government committed genocide against Native American tribes. Watson's "humanistic deep ecology" is posed in contrast to biocentrism and emphasizes an ecological politics based in solidarity with other human beings and fellow creatures:

> "Biocentrism cannot therefore replace a social critique of social solidarity. Our recognition of our kinship and community with nature goes hand in paw with our understanding of the global "planetariat" that we have become since the original rupture in primitive society and the origins of the state megamachines. To turn away from the long, rich traditions of communal revolt and from solidarity with other human communities in their ongoing struggle for freedom would be as violent an error as to deny the biosocial roots of our connections to the land."[149]

By 1997, Watson began to distance himself from the anarcho-primitivist orientation with the article "Swamp Fever, Primitivism, & the Ideological Vortex: Farewell to All That." The piece surveyed recent texts from the primitivist and Green Anarchist movements, which left Watson dismayed by their embrace of violence. Continuing to emphasize the necessity of a humanistic radical environmentalism, Watson rejected the nihilism he saw in new anarcho-primitivist groups that glorified figures like the "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski, who murdered three people and injured twenty-three others in a mail-bombing campaign against those he believed contributed to advancing industrial civilization (Kaczynski's manifesto *Industrial Society and Its Future* remains influential among radical environmentalists). Watson countered those who embraced ideas like Kaczynski's, writing, "Civilizations, most people know, destroy themselves. Radical greens, anarchist or otherwise, need to develop a constructive politics of solidarity, justice, and renewal that moves beyond one-dimensional opposition to an unintelligible confrontation with mass society."[150]

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[149] Bradford.
[150] David Watson, "Swamp Fever, Primitivism & the Ideological Vortex: Farewell to All That," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1997, #350 edition.

In "Swamp Fever," Watson addresses the idea that Detroit, the Corridor neighborhood, or deindustrialization influenced his or the FE's politics. In response to recently published works from within European Leftist circles that explored the FE's history and suggested Detroit provided a context for the publication's development of anarcho-primitivism, Watson writes that the argument "that deindustrialization and the eclipse of auto production in Detroit 'fostered [the FE] critique of technology'…must have some truth to it, relying as it does on the inescapable fact of our living here" but it "reduc[es] us to sociologically determined puppets."[151] He also insisted that there was no anarcho-primitivist scene or milieu in Detroit.[152] Watson felt that tying primitivism to Detroit and deindustrialization was reductive and argued that it was not "just living in a deteriorating rust belt city like Detroit that brought about our views" but rather "living in the late twentieth century under advanced capitalism's holocaust against nature and the human spirit."[153]

The FE's writers may not have come to the anarcho-primitivist critique simply because of living in Detroit, but living in Detroit shaped their anarcho-primitivist philosophy via their lived experience, their activist work, and their coverage of local events. Comparing the philosophies that Watson developed in the pages of FE with EF!'s deep ecology illustrates how an emphasis

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[151] Watson. The works Watson was responding to are: John Moore, "City Primeval: Fredy Perlman, Primitivism, and Detroit" and Luther Blissett, "From *Socialisme ou Barbarie* to Communism or Civilization" in *Transgressions: A Journal of Urban Exploration,* Volume 2, Issue 3 (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Geography Department, University of Newcastle); and Steve Booth, *Into the 1990's With Green Anarchist* (London: Green Anarchist Books, 1996).

[152] In the article, Watson also distances the paper from the local anarchist spaces 404 Willis and the Trumbullplex, though there were figures such as Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith who worked for both collectives and the newspaper, as will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 4. FE regularly covered the formation of both spaces and the events they hosted, sponsored events at 404 Willis, and Watson even performed poetry at 404 Willis's Anti-Columbus day protest. While it was a younger generation that created the spaces, the majority of issues of FE published during the 1990s promote activities at either 404 Willis or the Trumbullplex. "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1991, #337 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1992, #340 edition; "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1993, #341 edition; "The Wreck of Columbus Day 1992," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1993, #341 edition; "Come to Detroit June 20-21," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1997, #349 edition; "Detroit Seen," September 1, 1993.

[153] Watson, "Swamp Fever, Primitivism & the Ideological Vortex: Farewell to All That."

on human solidarity and environmental justice emerged in the urban-based radical environmental group and not in the rural movement focused on conservation. While EF! is more well-known and its influence on today's environmental movements is recognized, Watson's "humanistic deep ecology" deserves similar study and recognition.[154]

Detroit's Real Free Press

"What are you guys doing here? You hate unions!" a strike supporter called out upon seeing Peter Werbe and other members of the FE collective approach the picket line "that balmy September night" in 1995.[155] The anarchists had not reevaluated their stance on labor unions, but nonetheless they had come to the suburban printing plant to lend their support to Teamsters and reporters from Detroit's two daily papers, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*, during the long, bitter Detroit newspaper strike of the late 1990s. Scholars have suggested that the Detroit newspaper strike, one of the largest and longest strikes of the era, represents the denouement to "postwar industrial labor relations" in the United States.[156] The FE collective was known for their hostility to both organized labor and the local dailies, but when it came time to support workers in a battle against capital, they showed up to the struggle. The strike ended in a brutal defeat for workers and for Detroiters' access to that cornerstone of democracy, a free press. At the same time, the FE's shift to an "anti-profit" orientation in the mid-1970s had positioned it to weather the ways neoliberal economics would erode the newspaper industry, and the FE's story has lessons to offer about what it takes to make and maintain freedom of the press.

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[154] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[155] E.B. Maple, "I'm Sticking With The Union? The Battle of Detroit," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1996, #347 edition.
[156] Chris Rhomberg, *The Broken Table: The Detroit Newspaper Strike and the State of American Labor* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012), 264.

The Detroit newspaper strike lasted for five years between 1995-2000. During the final decades of the twentieth century, Detroit's major daily newspapers, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News,* were purchased by the two largest newspaper chains of the era, Gannet and Knight-Ridder, and saw their newsrooms' staff and budgets slashed.[157] While Detroit had the biggest strike of the era, in part because of the city's history as a union town, it was not alone in facing a time of crisis in its newsrooms. As in the worlds of waste and energy, neoliberal government policies encouraged mergers and acquisitions in the newspaper industry, and so papers' focus became increasing profits rather than investing in journalism.[158]

The Detroit newspaper strike involved 2,500 employees from six local unions across diverse occupations.[159] Knight-Ridder and Gannet spent unprecedented sums on security, police, and court fees to appeal the decisions of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and judges that ruled the striking workers be reinstated and given back pay.[160] This lasted until July 2000, when a federal Appeals Court overturned the NLRB decision and the unions were forced to accept contracts on management's terms. Strike historian Chris Rhomberg writes, "In Detroit the strike permanently altered the newspapers' relationship to the local community. Circulation fell at eight times the rate for the industry as a whole between 1995 and 1999, and dozens of veteran journalists left the papers and the city, taking with them years of local knowledge and public memory."[161] FE understood that though the *Free Press* and the *Detroit News* were far from perfect, and neither were the tactics of the six trade unions involved in the strike, what the papers' parent companies were doing was worse. Werbe wrote of the strike, "The current round

[157] Rhomberg, 31, 35.
[158] Rhomberg, 33.
[159] Rhomberg, 9.
[160] Rhomberg, 4–5.
[161] Rhomberg, 6.

of attacks on unions is part of a world-wide effort by capital to enforce austerity measures which began with workers and the poor, but has now extended to the middle class as well."[162]

The FE collective was not exactly a friend to their city's largest dailies. The publication consistently critiqued both the *Free Press* and the *News* from its formation in the 1960s. For decades, FE pointed out the biased reporting in the dailies' articles on police brutality, the city's healthcare system, and the trash incinerator among other topics.[163] Along with local and federal government, and authoritarian leftists, the local dailies were two of the biggest targets of FE's ire. Following the publication of op-eds from both newspapers that called for the death penalty to be considered in instances of gang violence, the FE wrote that it was the op-ed writers deserved to be given the death penalty for publicly airing such sentiments.[164] FE also skewered the liberal *Free Press* for covering right-wing terrorist organizations in Michigan in a sympathetic light; for publishing a light human interest story on a police officer who murdered five people while part of the notorious STRESS unit of the DPD; and for the contrasting coverage of the 1967 urban uprising and the damage caused to the city by white suburbanites who rioted in the wake of the Detroit Tigers' 1984 World Series win.[165]

The conservative *Detroit News* was a target of the collective's political pranks, including the fake Easter edition.[166] In another action ridiculing the conservative paper's religiosity, a shadowy group that called itself the "Marquis de Sade Brigade" dropped off a box containing a

[162] Maple, "I'm Sticking With The Union? The Battle of Detroit."
[163] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, December 31, 1980, #304 edition; "Racist Slayings Hit South End: Free Press Distorts Dearborn Attacks," *Fifth Estate*, July 1, 1976, #274 edition; Alan Franklin, "Your Money and Your Life," *Fifth Estate*, May 1, 1976, #272 edition; "Detroit Seen," June 1, 1986, #323 edition.
[164] The Fifth Estate Staff, "Death Penalty for Newspaper Columnists: Open Letter to Judd Arnett & Lou Gordon," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1976, #276 edition.
[165] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1985, #321 edition; "Detroit Seen," October 1, 1976; A true Tiger fan, "The Spectacle Explodes," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1984, #318 edition.
[166] "Easter Cancelled Christ's Body Found."

pig's foot at the *Detroit News* offices.[167] A note inside read that the group had "kidnapped God" and "included His severed limb as proof," demanding that the newspaper cut all ties with religious organizations.[168] While FE didn't claim responsibility for this act, they did publish the Marquis de Sade Brigade's demands, saying "we can only hope they have more such pranks in store for the future."[169] FE's relentless critique of both newspapers emphasized that a press in the pocket of politicians, priests, and businessmen resulted in harmful media coverage. Instead, the FE used a radically different model for producing a newspaper that was not beholden to these interests.

Scholars have identified the erosion of a free press in the United States as one of the major reasons this country's democratic ideals are under threat.[170] The end of the Detroit newspaper strike marked the decision by those in power that newspapers would function primarily to create shareholder value rather than convey information to readers. In this context, FE demonstrates the importance of anti-profit self-publishing. The paper continues to practice many of the principles it adopted in 1975 when it announced its "last issue" as a "capitalist enterprise," including accepting no advertising money, publishing articles under pseudonyms, and operating as a collective.[171] The underground press, which was born in the 1960s as consolidation swept the newspaper industry, offers many useful lessons for our contemporary moment that mainstream journalism supported by ad dollars and nonprofits is failing the

[167] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1978, #292 edition.
[168] "Detroit Seen."
[169] Marquis De Sade Brigade/PSF Cell, "We Demand," *Fifth Estate*, June 19, 1978, #292 edition; "Detroit Seen," June 19, 1978.
[170] Howard Rosenberg and Charles S. Feldman, *No Time to Think: The Menace of Media Speed and the 24-Hour News Cycle* (New York: Continuum, 2008); Denis Muller, *Journalism and the Future of Democracy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Victor W. Pickard, *Democracy Without Journalism?: Confronting the Misinformation Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[171] "Last Issue: FE As Capitalist Enterprise."

majority.[172] FE's antiauthoritarian politics have allowed it to operate on its own terms for sixty years.

Conclusion

In January 1979, in observance of the paper's fourteenth anniversary, the FE collective published an article reflecting on why the paper had outlasted most of its peers in the underground press. "The *Fifth Estate*'s survival in the wake of the almost total disintegration of the underground press movement seems to us to be in good part due to the geographical accident of being published in Detroit. Why this city should be able to nurture a radical newspaper when no others seemed to be able to, escapes us."[173] Peter Werbe says that he likely wrote the above article, but he now has some conclusions as to why FE has endured. He believes that the paper's willingness to break with the Marxism-Leninism and Maoism that had defined 1960s and '70s radicalism and to explore new ideas enlivened the publication at a moment when its peers were puttering out.[174] "Everyone else was going down and we were suddenly getting so excited," Werbe said. "So, we came on board just filled with ideas…I don't think anyone was listening to us hardly at all. But that often doesn't matter for radicals. You have something to say and you say it enthusiastically."[175] In this way the FE is part of a long anarchist tradition. Kathy Ferguson's study of anarchist printers during the movement's pre-WWI era concludes that more than anything else they "did it because they themselves wanted/needed to make (and be made by) a journal."[176]

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[172] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 8.
[173] "Fifth Estate Slips Quietly Into 14th Year," *Fifth Estate*, January 29, 1979, #296 edition.
[174] Werbe, interview.
[175] Werbe.
[176] Ferguson, "Anarchist Printers and Presses: Material Circuits of Politics," 406.

While they might not have succeeded in turning the Cass Corridor into an autonomous zone or stopping the building of the Detroit trash incinerator, they did have some smaller, more tangible wins. Rector writes that the negative attention on the Detroit trash incinerator helped prevent three other, smaller trash incinerators from being built in the city.[177] The FE and to a smaller extent Black & Red press are long-lasting anarchist institutions based in Detroit that have developed strategies to survive in an inhospitable political climate. They planted the seeds for a new generation of anarchists in the city and nation-wide, which will be explored in Chapter 4.

The broader radical environmental movement of the 1980s and '90s was greatly weakened by the law enforcement crackdown known as the Green Scare.[178] As of the 1990s, the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front were "perhaps the only left-wing clandestine groups operating in the United States" and they "caused millions of dollars in damage through sabotage without causing human injury."[179] This was brought to an end by state repression, with Michigan as a major battleground between environmentalists and the government. Detroiter, FE contributor, and Earth Liberation Front member Marius Mason (who went by the name Marie prior to their transition) was targeted by the FBI, charged with domestic terrorism, and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison for setting a building on fire on Michigan State University's campus to protest research into genetically modified crops, an action that resulted in $1 million in damage but injured no one.[180] Assistant U.S. Attorney Hagen Frank called it "the most onerous sentence imposed on a case of this sort."[181] Despite this suppression, this period in the radical environmental movement is a key influence on contemporary anarchist and environmental

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[177] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 166.
[178] Jennifer D. Grubbs, *Ecoliberation: Reimagining Resistance and the Green Scare* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 4.
[179] Berger and Hobson, "Introduction: Usable Pasts and the Persistence of Radicalism," 15.
[180] "Activist Gets Nearly 22 Years in Prison for Michigan State University Arson," Fox News (Fox News, March 25, 2015), https://www.foxnews.com/story/activist-gets-nearly-22-years-in-prison-for-michigan-state-university-arson.
[181] "Activist Gets Nearly 22 Years in Prison for Michigan State University Arson."

activism, including the battle to defend the Weelaunee forest in Atlanta and stop the building of the police training facility activists have deemed "Cop City," as well as the fight against the Mountain Valley Pipeline in Appalachia. Monkeywrenching and tree-sitting, legacies of the radical environmental movement of the 1980s, are common tactics among activists in both campaigns.[182]

The anarcho-primitivist critique is little known or acknowledged outside movement circles, but still present in contemporary thinking and scholarship. Anarchist scholar David Graeber's 2021 best-selling book *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* forwarded an anarcho-primitivist argument to the masses.[183] Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott's *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* makes a similar argument, focusing on how the first states developed as the result of coercion.[184] El-Ojeili and Taylor demonstrate how a wide swath of contemporary leftist philosophers including Vandana Shiva, Sherry Turkle, Timothy Morton, and Derrick Jensen all engage primitivist, anti-technology, and anti-civilization philosophies.[185]

The Detroit anarcho-primitivists' radical, extreme critiques of technology also foreshadowed the urgency of the climate movement as humanity faces the existential threat of climate change and a system of domination unwilling to change even when faced with human extinction. Naomi Klein has covered the increasingly dire warnings coming from mainstream climate science, in which some scientists have pointed to "resistance" movements including

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[182] David Peisner, "The Forest for the Trees," *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, December 13, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/feature/2022/the-forest-for-the-trees-atlanta-prison-farm; Matt Dhillon, "Last Tree-Sitters Removed from Path of Mountain Valley Pipeline," April 16, 2021, https://appvoices.org/2021/04/16/tree-sitters-removed-mvp/.
[183] David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).
[184] James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
[185] el-Ojeili and Taylor, "'The Future in the Past': Anarcho-Primitivism and the Critique of Civilization Today."

"environmental direct action, resistance taken from outside the dominant culture, as in protests, blockades and sabotage by indigenous peoples, workers, anarchists, and other activist groups" as the only forces that offer "some hope" in slowing global warming.[186]

The anarcho-primitivists of FE imagined, argued, and fought for a postindustrial planet, and in doing so created a utopic vision in which humanity would be free from industrial capitalism. David Watson wrote in 1990: "If the anti-industrial perspective now seems too radical, too visionary, too impractical, future generations, if there are any, will wonder why it took so much time and anguish to recognize it and make it a practical reality."[187]

[186] Klein, "How Science Is Telling Us All to Revolt."
[187] Bradford, "Stopping the Industrial Hydra: Revolution Against the Megamachine," 32.

Chapter 3—Beyond the Fridge: The Cass Corridor and Detroit Hardcore, 1979-1984

During the early 1980s the Cass Corridor was an appealing place for another, younger group of budding bohemians.[1] At the same time that the *Fifth Estate*'s writers penned the canonical texts of anarcho-primitivism, teenagers from Detroit's suburbs traveled to the city's most notorious neighborhood to attend hardcore punk shows at a community-based venue called the Freezer Theatre. With bands including Negative Approach, the Necros, Bored Youth, and the Meatmen, as well as the fanzine and record label Touch and Go, the scene these teens created became a major center of early hardcore punk. The Freezer's history of hosting unconventional performances and location in a disinvested neighborhood made it a perfect location for the do-it-yourself experiments of a new subculture. Hardcore musicians and fans embraced Detroit's deindustrialized space, recognizing what performance studies scholar Ashon Crawley calls "otherwise possibilities"—or "infinite alternatives to what is"—in a place rendered abject by the media, the state, and the white middle-class they were part of.[2] For these youth, hardcore was, as one participant put it, "the soul music of the suburbs that had to be played in the inner city," as Detroit offered spaces free from surveillance where punks could hold raucous, all-ages shows.[3] In Detroit hardcore, the inner city became the place where you didn't have to be "something that you're not."[4]

Musicians, scene organizers, zine-makers, and sometimes couple John Brannon, frontman of Negative Approach, and Larissa Stolarchuk, frontwoman of L-Seven, got a chance to explain

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[1] Special thanks to Kevin Knapp for providing access to his personal collection of rare hardcore punk zines and ephemera related to the Detroit scene, without which I could not have completed this chapter. Also, thank you to Otto Buj and Dr. Michael Carriere for additional research assistance and support.
[2] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, 2.
[3] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 94.
[4] "Why Be Something That You're Not?" by Negative Approach (1982) is one of the most well-known songs to emerge from the Detroit hardcore scene.

hardcore to the broader public of their city when a reporter from the *Detroit News* approached them after a 1983 Negative Approach show. While Brannon said the hardcore kids made this music because, "[w]e've got to stamp out boredom. I can't really explain why I do this. I just know I have to," Stolarchuk expressed a more overtly political perspective.[5] "The attitude is anti-ignorance, pro-creative, anti-prejudice," she told the reporter. "It's a way of looking at things. It's exciting. It's aggressive. It's not blasé."[6]

Stolarchuk was a pivotal figure in the Detroit hardcore scene, which she nurtured through booking shows, creating venues, zine-making, drawing flyers, fronting the postpunk band L-Seven, and mentoring fellow musicians. Both Stolarchuk and Brannon grew up in the suburbs of metro Detroit—he in Grosse Pointe, she in Southfield—a perspective that characterized the hardcore genre. Stolarchuk's artistic talent landed her a scholarship to the prestigious Parsons School of Design, where she soaked up the energy of the various art and music scenes of early 1980s New York City, though she left after a semester and moved back home.[7] A key protagonist in the story of Detroit rock history, Stolarchuk was part of what *Village Voice* critic C. Carr dubbed "the bohemian diaspora"—someone who took the latest in underground music and art from a cultural center like New York and brought her knowledge elsewhere, in the process inspiring the creation of a whole new bohemian scene.[8] Stolarchuk's bandmate Dave Rice recalls, "Larissa had just come back from New York and was this amazing person with an amazing depth of music, art, and cultural knowledge. She had this great 'fuck off' spirit, not to

[5] Lowell Cauffiel, "The Punk Revolt," *Michigan: The Magazine of the Detroit News*, July 10, 1983.
[6] Cauffiel, "The Punk Revolt."
[7] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 23.
[8] Carr, "The Bohemian Diaspora"; Hale, *Cool Town: How Athens, Georgia, Launched Alternative Music and Changed American Culture*, 8, 12.

mention the coolest punk rock look we had ever seen. Just a real charismatic alpha chick. People were drawn to her."[9]

While hardcore punk in Detroit and across the country was male-dominated, in Detroit, a female artist was "instrumental in getting the Freezer off the ground" and cultivating the scene's community.[10] Stolarchuk influenced seemingly everyone she encountered through her unique sense of style, her fierce conviction, her dedication to a bohemian lifestyle, her disregard of traditional gender presentation and roles, and her knowledge of underground art and music. She was a working musician for most of her life and refused middle class stability by squatting, sleeping in a van, and sharing communal homes with other artists. She also lived dangerously, whether by experimenting with drugs—which ultimately led to a life-ending addiction—or standing up to members of organized crime who wanted to kick her out of her home. Stolarchuk's story illuminates the freedoms and dangers Cass Corridor bohemia continued to offer female artists almost two decades after Leni and John Sinclair founded the AWS.

Scholarship and popular histories on Detroit hardcore typically focus on the Freezer Theatre, Negative Approach, and the zine and later record label Touch and Go. By centering Stolarchuk in this story, we can probe what participating in hardcore meant for young women and how a prominent hardcore scene that was organized and inspired by a female artist complicates the narrative that hardcore was male-centered to begin to flesh out a history of Detroit music that takes female musicians and fans out of the footnotes. Stolarchuk's influence is even more notable since she made her artistic home in hardcore, perhaps the most hypermasculine subgenre in rock and roll. "Hardcore was made by a bunch of bellowing, crew-cut, shirtless young men playing loud, fast, aggressive music," notes one popular music

[9] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 24.
[10] Rettman, 85.

historian.[11] However, in Detroit, Stolarchuk shaped the scene in various ways, as the hardcore boys around her read her zine, performed at venues she helped run, listened to her record collection, and played shows with her band.

Detroit's rock music history is brimming with female artists across eras and genres—including Suzi Quatro, Niagara Detroit (Destroy All Monsters), Nikki Corvette (Nikki and the Corvettes), Peggy O'Neill (The Gories), Rachel Nagy (The Detroit Cobras), Margaret Doll Rod (Demolition Doll Rods), and Meg White (The White Stripes), to name a few—many of whom lived and worked in the Cass Corridor. In recent years, feminist punk scholars and scene participants have written a revisionist history of punk rock, with Patti Smith, Alice Bag, Carrie Brownstein, Viv Albertine, and Kim Gordon among others writing acclaimed memoirs, and academic journals including *Social Text* and *Women & Performance* publishing themed issues on punk, but this literature has not yet highlighted the important contributions of Detroit's female artists and fans.[12] Detroit has a storied place in the history of rock and roll, known for being a home to some of the most innovative and influential work in the genre, as well as a candidate for the birthplace of punk. The city was home to influential 1960s proto-punk bands including the MC5, the Stooges, and ? and the Mysterians, and rock journalists including Dave Marsh and Lester Bangs theorized the genre in *Creem* magazine. Marsh is credited with being one of the

[11] Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes From the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 150.

[12] Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Ecco, 2010); Alice Bag, *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage, A Chicana Punk Story* (Port Townsend, Washington: Feral House, 2011); Carrie Brownstein, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl: A Memoir* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015); Viv Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes: Music, Music, Music : Boys, Boys, Boys : A Memoir* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Dunne Books, 2014); Kim Gordon, *Girl in a Band* (New York: Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow Publishers, 2015); Vivien Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Music History From Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); Jayna Brown, Patrick Deer, and Tavia Nyong'o, "Punk and Its Afterlives Introduction," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (116) (September 1, 2013): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152900; Mimi Nguyen includes Quatro's first band Suzi and the Pleasure Seekers in her list of proto-feminist punk. Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Making Waves: Other Punk Feminisms.," *Women & Performance* 22, no. 2/3 (July 1, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2012.720895.

first to use the term "punk" to describe this music in a 1971 article about ? and the Mysterians.[13] Popular music historiography is in need of a history of "rock city" that will not relegate women to a side story.[14]

At the same moment that the FE's anarchists rebelled against the political milieu of the splintered New Left, a new generation of punks rebelled against what they saw as stagnation and commodification within punk rock—the FE's landmark issue establishing anarcho-primitivism was published in 1981, the same year the first Detroit hardcore show was held at the Freezer. The hardcore subgenre originated in the suburbs of Southern California and Washington, D.C. with bands like Bad Brains, Minor Threat, and Black Flag making loud, fast, stripped-down songs that often clocked in under 30 seconds. The genre came with an equally severe visual aesthetic featuring work boots, leather jackets, and shaved heads, and social rituals like slam dancing and stage diving that could shock even other punks. Stolarchuk described it like this in her zine, "If you think it's the same thing you might have heard in '76, you're wrong. It's much faster and its american, and slam dancing is a lot worse than the pogo."[15] The youth who created this new subculture were disgusted and enraged by the way the music industry had quickly coopted punk sounds and aesthetics, creating the benign and radio-friendly "new wave" genre out of the social and artistic movement, and they wanted to take punk back.[16]

Though they weren't in dialogue with each other, both the anarcho-primitivists and the hardcore kids benefited from and contributed to the history of bohemian community in the Cass

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[13] Dave Marsh, "Looney Tunes," *Creem*, May 1971.
[14] KISS, "Detroit Rock City," *Destroyer*, Casablanca, 1976.
[15] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 3, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p., Kevin Knapp personal collection.
[16] For more on the history of hardcore punk see Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*; Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk, 1978-1984* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*, Second Edition (Port Townsend, Washington: Feral House, 2010); Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit"; David A. Ensminger, *The Politics of Punk: Protest and Revolt from the Streets* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Shayna L. Maskell, *Politics as Sound: The Washington, DC, Hardcore Scene, 1978-1983* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

Corridor, which had fostered an environment hospitable to rebellious artists and activists. As Heather Ann Thompson argues in her exploration of labor organizing and Black Power during this era, there was never white consensus in metro Detroit during the tumultuous late twentieth century.[17] The FE and the hardcore scene are both part of the population of white radicals in the region who rejected the metro Detroit suburban project. Though the hardcore youth in Detroit did not take an activist stance like some of their counterparts on the coasts, their strident critique of suburbia was a strong political statement within their local context, where the elites and middle class had fled to the suburbs so they would not have to share space, power, or resources with Detroit's Black population. Between 1970 and 1980 over 310,000 white residents moved to the suburbs and Detroit became a majority Black city. Thompson notes that "by 1980, whites largely had abandoned the inner city of Detroit."[18] At this moment, the hardcore kids undertook a "reverse white flight" into one of the city's most blighted neighborhoods and repeatedly expressed that they found it safer in the Cass Corridor than in the suburbs where they were raised.[19] The reason they felt that way, the reason they came into the Corridor and discovered spaces where they could host their unconventional performances, was both because of deindustrialization and the longstanding artistic community that existed there.

Soul Music of the Suburbs

In her interview with the *Detroit News*, Stolarchuck explained that hardcore came from places with large suburban populations where youth had become disaffected by the status quo of postwar suburbia: "the suburb is a ghetto…" she told the reporter. "It's hard to escape. Like

[17] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 5–6.
[18] Heather Ann Thompson, "Prologue to the 2017 Printing," in *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017), xv.
[19] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 21.

every house is alike. There's no individuality. The kids are really middle class, but not really wealthy. They're just sort of nowhere. You're expected to go to college, get married, get a job, and get a place in the suburbs. Your whole life seemed already planned out."[20]

The Detroit hardcore kids ironically referred to their sound as "the soul music of the suburbs," referencing their city's well-known history of soul music made by Black artists (Motown, most famously).[21] Detroit hardcore made a searing critique of suburban life, in songs, in zines, and by creating their scene in the maligned inner city. While previous iterations of punk had developed in deindustrialized urban contexts, hardcore was made by teenagers living in the suburbs surrounding those cities. Detroit hardcore was influenced by bands from outside Los Angeles (Black Flag) and Washington, D.C. (Minor Threat, Bad Brains) because the musicians "weren't in New York on smack and they're not in London on the dole; they were suburban kids like we were."[22] Instead of trying to hide where they were from or waiting until they were older to form bands and create art, hardcore kids rallied around (the rejection of) their suburban identity.

Detroit's hardcore kids were the generation of white flight. Historian Thomas Sugrue points out that, in Detroit "segregation actually worsened during the 1970s and 1980s."[23] Many of the hardcore youth were raised by parents who had grown increasingly conservative, part of a group famously described as "Reagan Democrats" that was first identified in metro Detroit's Macomb County.[24] Sugrue describes how many whites in Detroit throughout the twentieth

[20] Cauffiel, "The Punk Revolt."
[21] Cauffiel. The earliest use of this phrase that I found is John Brannon saying it in this article, and others discussing Detroit hardcore have continued to use it.
[22] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 20.
[23] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 269.
[24] Stanley B. Greenberg, *Middle Class Dreams: The Politics and Power of the New American Majority* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

century rallied against the integration of neighborhoods and schools.[25] Many white adults in metro Detroit in the late 1970s and early 1980s blamed Detroit's Black population, and Black mayor Coleman Young in particular, for the region's economic crisis and urban decay.[26] Scholars have shown how the urban crisis was a systemic one with a variety of contributing factors including tax and capital flight, racial discrimination in housing and employment, and retrenchment of federal funding.[27] For some white metro Detroiters, building and fiercely guarding segregated suburbs felt like a solution to being entangled in this crisis.[28]

Detroit hardcore was a voice of dissent from within these communities, from youth who found the suburban experience stifling rather than safe. In a documentary about the scene, Bored Youth's Rob Michaels says, "the mainstream culture, particularly white suburban culture, was just oppressively bland." Andy Wendler of the Necros explains, "Middle America USA, you're gonna go to high school, play football, marry the cheerleader, sign up for a job…We had no interest in that…And if you weren't subscribing to that theory of life, you were an outsider simply for that reason."[29] Hardcore musicians and fans discuss experiencing more violence in their suburban communities than in the Cass Corridor, as they were harassed by their peers and police due their unconventional appearance and participation in the subculture. The Necros' Barry Henssler remembers, "If you had a leather jacket and a crew-cut people would throw

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[25] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 265–66. During these decades, metro Detroit parents fought hard for segregated schools and in 1974 they were victors in the Supreme Court case *Milliken v. Bradley*, as the court ruled that the city's segregated school system was constitutional.
[26] Sugrue, 266–68.
[27] In addition to Sugrue see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*; Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History."; Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis*; Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida*; Taylor, *Race for Profit*.
[28] Sugrue writes that, "By 1980, metropolitan Detroit had eighty-six municipalities, forty-five townships, and eighty-nine school districts…Window breakings, arson, and threats largely prevented blacks from joining the ranks of working-class suburbanites." Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 266.
[29] Wendler and Michaels quoted in *Dope, Hookers and Pavement: The Real and Imagined History of Detroit Hardcore*, 2021.

bottles at you from their cars."[30] The Necros describe their Ohio suburb of Maumee as a place to find "Police Brutality" and a "Race Riot," things that are often instead associated with the inner city: "police brutality / cops harassing me / police brutality / get it in Maumee."[31]

Stolarchuk grew up in the Oakland County suburb of Southfield, which abuts the northern edge of Detroit's 8 Mile border between suburb and city. Southfield was considered one of the more "tolerant" metro Detroit suburbs where "upwardly mobile blacks" were able to relocate to escape the worst of Detroit's decline, along with sizeable Iraqi-Chaldean and Jewish-American populations.[32] According to the 1980 census, the city's Black residents made up just under ten percent of the population (meanwhile, over in Brannon's home of Grosse Pointe, the Black population was 0.1 percent).[33] White Detroiters had been fleeing to the suburbs even before Detroit's transition to a majority Black city with Black leadership during the mid-1970s, building their identities around homeownership and whiteness against the foil of Detroit and its Black residents.[34] Stolarchuk's Ukrainian family may have been drawn to Southfield for its professed tolerance and ethnic and cultural diversity.[35] However, Southfield's liberal values and a multicultural upbringing did not make Stolarchuk any less ruthless in her appraisal of suburbia.

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[30] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 35.
[31] The Necros, "Police Brutality," *I.Q. 32*, Touch & Go, 1981.
[32] Thomas J. Sugrue, "Preface to the 2005 Edition," in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014); Anna Clark, "The Inclusive Suburb: Southfield's Long History of Intentional Integration," *Metromode* (blog), February 19, 2015, https://www.secondwavemedia.com/metromode/features/inclusivesouthfield021915.aspx.
[33] Social Explorer Tables (SE), Census 1980, U.S. Census Bureau and Social Explorer.
[34] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 209–58.
[35] I was unable to connect with any of Stolarchuk's family members while researching this project—she is survived by siblings Anna Varney and Michale and husband Alexander—so I could not learn about the role Ukrainian culture played in her upbringing and life. However, the fact that her obituary describes her as a member of St. Andrew's Ukrainian Church (an affiliation which could have been more important to her family than to the typically antiauthoritarian Stolarchuk) and that she was buried in St. Andrew's Ukrainian Cemetery under a headstone written in Ukrainian suggests that this heritage was at least present in her upbringing if not an important aspect of her family life. "Larissa Stolarchuk Obituary," *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, November 7, 2006; "Larissa Stolarchuk (1960-2006)," Find a Grave, accessed November 21, 2023, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/199160153/larissa-stolarchuk.

Detroit's hardcore artists used song lyrics to express the alienation that they felt living in communities that stifled difference and dissent. Songs by the Necros like "Peer Pressure," "I Hate My School," and "Public High School" ridiculed the homogeneity of suburbia. In "Peer Pressure," the peers are "a group whose only purpose is to make the same of you and me."[36] "Public High School," describes "Thousands of kids and they're all the same / Might as well have the same last name."[37] Bored Youth explored similar themes throughout their record *November 1981*. Songs like "Misfit," "Bored Youth," and "Outcast" feature a narrator who feels like "a question with no answer…a dog without a bone," but ultimately embraces his outsider status.[38] Queer theorist Drew Daniels argues in his reading of the Meatmen's oeuvre that the group's tongue-in-cheek sexism and homophobia in songs such as "Tooling for Anus" and "I'm Glad I'm Not a Girl" can be read as lampooning the desperate reification of patriarchy that was at the heart of both the New Right and suburbanization.[39] Youth Patrol's song "Society Sucks" puts it simply: "can't take it no longer / place really sucks / livin' in the suburbs / makes me go nuts."[40]

These songs' narrators are often confused and full of rage over the obvious lies and hypocrisy that uphold their communities—"why be something that you're not?" John Brannon howls in the Negative Approach classic—but they vow to be their authentic selves regardless of the consequences.[41] "It's so fucking easy to just be one of them / It isn't hard to please me I know

[36] The Necros, "Peer Pressure," *I.Q. 32*, Touch and Go, 1981.
[37] The Necros, "Public High School," *Ambionic Sound*, 1979, reissued by Alona's Dream Records, 2012.
[38] Bored Youth, "Misfit," *November 1981*, Touch and Go, 1981.
[39] Drew Daniel, "'Why Be Something That You're Not?' Punk Performance and the Epistemology of Queer Minstrelsy," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (116) (September 1, 2013): 13–34, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152819.
[40] Rettman, Minicucci, and Warwick, *Better Never Than Late: Midwest Hardcore Flyers and Ephemera, 1981-1984*, 48. From lyric sheet.
[41] Negative Approach, "Why Be Something That You're Not?," *Negative Approach*, Touch and Go, 1982.

just who I am," concludes the final verse of Bored Youth's "To Label is To Limit."[42] To find these authentic selves, the hardcore kids had to leave the suburbs and come into the city.

Participants in the scene recall how transgressive it was for white suburban teenagers to spend time in a neighborhood like the Cass Corridor. Brannon describes going to the Corridor as being akin to "a dare" for suburban teenagers who had been warned against it their entire lives.[43] Another scenester remembers, "A lot of us were from the suburbs, and we all wanted to be downtown where it was tough."[44] Some of the hardcore kids, including Stolarchuk and Brannon, left the suburbs to live in the Corridor, while others traveled there every weekend to attend shows at the Freezer.[45] The hardcore scene in Detroit, as in cities across the country, needed the postindustrial city because the abandoned buildings and unsurveilled space allowed for the rowdy, all-ages shows that the scene required.[46] Members of the scene associated spaces in the Corridor with the freedom to be themselves, to look and sound how they wanted, and to innovate new music that broke from previous traditions. However, as scholars such as Rebecca Kinney and Neil Smith have pointed out, the tendency for suburban artists to arrive in deindustrialized cities and claim them as empty space to be used for their benefit without an attempt to understand existing communities and previous history reproduces the settler-colonial dynamics.[47] The Detroit hardcore scene did not avoid this pitfall.

One of the few Black participants in the Detroit scene, Lacy Shelton, describes it like this: "So they came into the shitty lousy city, which had excitement at least, where the suburbs

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[42] Bored Youth, "To Label Is to Limit."
[43] *Dope, Hookers, and Pavement*.
[44] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 208.
[45] Brannon and Larissa Stolarchuk did this at both the Clubhouse and the Women's City Club buildings.
[46] Michael Carriere and David Schalliol, "Hardcore Urban Renewal: The Punk Origins of the City Creative," *The Metropole* (blog), February 17, 2022, https://themetropole.blog/2022/02/17/hardcore-urban-renewal-the-punk-origins-of-the-city-creative/.
[47] Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland*; Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*.

were just shitty lousy boredom, this is shitty lousy excitement, so they could live more. Yeah, coming into the city so you could just, live."[48] While the blighted city granted these white, middle-class artists the space to "live" and create, their identities gave them the opportunity to view Detroit as a place they could escape to, without engaging more deeply with the city's history or present. They benefited from and became part of the longer history of artistic community in the Cass Corridor, but they did not acknowledge that history in the moment and those links have been muted in retrospective accounts of the scene.

Although the participants railed against the stifling homogeneity of the suburban project, the "soul music of the suburbs" reproduced that homogeneity in race, gender, and class. Hardcore scenes including the one in Detroit were majority white, though the genre was arguably invented by the Black D.C. punk band Bad Brains.[49] As much as these white men claimed to be using the urban environment to create space for their authentic individuality and artistic freedom, they marginalized anyone who was not like them. Black musicians and participants in the Detroit scene, like Son of Sam's Lacy Shelton, fan and scenester Hillary Waddles, and The Fix guitarist Craig Calvert, were in the minority. And so were queer, gender-nonconforming, and female participants, like Stolarchuk.

Girls in "the Brotherhood of Cass Corridor Hardcore"

For the women in Detroit hardcore scene looking to escape "the postwar domestication of women" achieved via "privatized suburbs," the suburb was a "ghetto" in ways it was not for men.[50] While hardcore punk is known for being a nearly all-male space, it has in common with

[48] *Dope, Hookers, and Pavement*.
[49] Maskell, *Politics as Sound*.
[50] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 255.

second-wave feminism a critique of postwar suburbia. Girls' participation in Detroit's hardcore punk scene gave them an opportunity to reject the gendered oppression of the suburbs, exercise autonomy, and access public platforms to air their grievances, even if they did so in a scene that did not embrace them unless they were an exceptional figure such as Stolarchuk.

While previous iterations of punk were characterized by an increased participation of women musicians, something that had been rare in rock and roll, hardcore "continued the long history of rock's male-centric tradition."[51] This was true in Detroit's scene, which has been referred to as "the brotherhood of Cass Corridor hardcore" and where participants remember "an audience of largely teenage boys."[52] Additionally, "straight edge" ideology—the belief that indulging in drugs, alcohol, and sex were immoral excesses that could destroy the scene—led to further rejection of women from hardcore as they were viewed as potential contaminants to male sexual purity.[53] Detroit hardcore scenester Hillary Waddles remembers, "Those kids that got into the straight-edge nonsense really didn't like girls."[54] The development of the riot grrrl subgenre a decade after the Detroit hardcore scene documented here was in part a reaction to and rejection of the sexism and exclusion experienced by women in hardcore.[55]

Girls and women who participated in the Detroit hardcore scene have conflicting views about their experiences. Some female participants describe a milieu that was violent and inhospitable to women's participation. Waddles says, "There were girls, but we were all people's girlfriends. It just wasn't the time for that yet—girls didn't get in bands; you didn't get the sense that you could be anything but a groupie or a girlfriend." Branzei confirms this view, "At that

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[51] Maskell, *Politics as Sound*, 78; Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, 151.
[52] Cedars, "Something We're Not," 20; Roberta Mock, "'This Ain't No Love-in, This Ain't No Happenin': Misfits, Detroit Hardcore and the Performance of Zombie Scenarios," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 34, no. 3 (September 2, 2014): 205, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2014.961363.
[53] Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*, 29.
[54] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 207.
[55] Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, 49.

time girls and punk rock did not go together at all." This view was informed by the escalating violence associated with hardcore shows. Participants describe how hardcore rituals like slam dancing and stage diving seemed violent to outsiders, but in practice were meant to be a cathartic bonding ritual. As the scene grew, people who were not initiated into or interested in the community began coming to the shows to act out aggression. Many women felt excluded by these rituals from the beginning and especially by this escalation. Scenester and musician Sherrie Feight remembers, "Going to shows in Detroit meant you were gonna get hit." Some would just participate in it; Branzei says, "It was a really violent scene. I would kick someone's ass for the hell of it."[56] However, scene participant Roberta Mock remembers things differently, writing that "I believe the girls on the scene generally felt safe there…I remember no sexism…although I found myself surrounded by fighting boys on many occasions, I was never hit myself, nor did I ever hit anybody."[57]

Some women in the scene were able to evade physical harm and almost all stayed on the sidelines, at least for the period of hardcore's zenith. Stolarchuk was one of the only female artists on bills from this scene. But she used her influence to build community with other women, inspiring them to become hardcore punk fans and explore the world of Cass Corridor bohemia. According to her bandmate Frank Callis, Stolarchuk went everywhere with an "entourage" of fellow punks and misfits that included a group of "young girls" from Southfield.[58] Creating an opportunity for girls to explore punk identity and the inner city (they would follow Stolarchuk to L-Seven band practices, according to Callis) could be a lifeline to escape from the suburbs and

[56] Waddles, Branzei, and Feight quoted in Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 207.
[57] Roberta Mock, "'This Ain't No Love-in, This Ain't No Happenin': Misfits, Detroit Hardcore and the Performance of Zombie Scenarios," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 34, no. 3 (September 2, 2014): 210, footnote 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2014.961363.
[58] Rob. St. Mary, "L-Seven," Digital Archive, Detroit Punk Archive, August 21, 2018, http://detroitpunkarchive.com/bands/l-seven/.

into a realm that was still male-dominated but offered some freedoms that could not be found back home.[59] Stolarchuk's visionary artistic talent also infused her personal style, which inspired women in the scene. Her mop of wild bleached blonde hair and pale skin contrasted against her large, dark eyes made her appear almost otherworldly. She used her unique taste to play off her striking physical features—in one example photographs of Stolarchuk performing with L-Seven at the Clubhouse show her in pants emblazoned with the Coca-Cola logo paired with motorcycle boots and an oversized sweater (Fig 3.1). Feight remembers the impression Stolarchuk's style made:

> "You'd go to Detroit for a show, you never knew what to wear. So you'd kind of wear what the guys were wearing. The first time I saw Larissa, I was like, 'Oh my God.' She was in a slip and combat boots, her hair bleached out, with this milky white skin and those eyes. I wanted to be like her, but there was no way. I was this rich kid and she was from down on Cass; we were from different worlds."[60]

One hardcore zine noted Stolarchuk's local influence as other punks copied her spiky haircut: "Larissa's iconoclastic appearance is being imitated by a number of young fans—Bookie's doorpeople have dubbed them 'hedge-hogs.'"[61] Feight went on to perform as the vocalist in the band Strange Fruit with Steve Shelley, later of Sonic Youth.

[59] St. Mary.
[60] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 205.
[61] Kevin Knapp, *Trashland Adventures*, 3, 1981, Ypsilanti, MI, n.p., Kevin Knapp personal collection.

Fig. 3.1. Stolarchuk and bassist Frank Callis performing with L-Seven. Source: Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 23. Photograph by Marc Barie.

Rejecting the conformity and confinement of the suburbs to join a bohemian, punk community offered freedom, but also had costs for women and girls in Detroit hardcore. Cultural historian Grace Hale has argued that participating in outsider scenes "proved extremely costly for women who tried to live as rebels."[62] One Detroit hardcore scenester has said, "That scene had girls, but they all died. It's weird when you look at it, like these chicks that were hanging around all seemed to pass away over the years."[63] Scene participant and performance studies scholar Roberta Mock responded to this quote in her own article, rejecting the doom and gloom portrayal of the scene: "as my continued existence and that of my girlfriends…will attest, this is something of an overstatement."[64]

While Mock's experience shows not all girls in hardcore had a bad time, Stolarchuk's story is not as optimistic. As tough as Stolarchuk may have been, her experience aligns with Hale's conclusion that "[s]elf-destructiveness and suicide haunted female rebels."[65] Many from the Detroit hardcore scene remember her as being one of the first people they knew to use drugs intravenously, to take heroin, and for introducing others to hard drug use.[66] Her bandmates describe being shocked by the amount and frequency of drugs she consumed at a young age and attribute her drug use as one of the reasons for the band's demise.[67] Her struggles with addiction were long-lasting and would prematurely end her life.[68]

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[62] Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 47.
[63] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 206.
[64] Mock, "'This Ain't No Love-in, This Ain't No Happenin,'" 210, footnote 8.
[65] Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 47.
[66] Marc Barie, zine maker and host of the Detroit public access TV show documenting the hardcore scene "Why Be Something That You're Not?", said that "Larissa turned me on to shooting dope." Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 204.
[67] St. Mary, "L-Seven."
[68] Johnny Loftus, "Queen of the Nighttime World," *Detroit Metro Times*, November 15, 2006, https://www.metrotimes.com/music/queen-of-the-nighttime-world-2185964.

Writing the Scene

Hardcore fanzines or "zines"—small circulation publications created with punk's DIY ethos, photocopied, and traded in the mail—cultivated the scene's community and allowed for communication amongst punks across the Midwest and the country. Easy access to xerox technology—at print shops, schools, and places of employment—helped zines explode in popularity during the 1980s, with punks comprising one of the biggest communities of zine-makers.[69] Stolarchuk's zine *Anonymous*, published in five issues between 1980 and 1982, documents the Detroit hardcore scene and illustrates the period from her perspective as she wrote about the city, art, music, and politics and built relationships with future collaborators via zine networks.

Before the hardcore kids around Detroit commandeered the Freezer Theatre, they wrote in their zines about the sorry state of the punk scene in the area and the dire need for an all-ages space that would not kick them out or shut down their shows. The most influential zine from the Midwest hardcore scene was the Lansing, Michigan-based *Touch and Go*. First published in 1979, *Touch and Go* was the brainchild of Dave Stimson and Robert Vermeulen, who went by the penname Tesco Vee and also performed as the front man of the Meatmen. *Touch and Go's* style was characterized by "locker room humor," porn collages, and political incorrectness, in part influenced by their major rock journalism models and fellow Cass Corridor travelers *Creem* magazine.[70] The zine was one of the first places between coasts to champion the new hardcore genre coming out of Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.[71]

[69] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 132.
[70] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 13.
[71] Rettman, 17.

While the three were comrades and compatriots in the Detroit hardcore scene, the political vision that Stimson and Vermeulen articulated in *Touch and Go* differs in crucial ways from what Stolarchuk expressed in *Anonymous*. *Touch and Go's* ideas became the most prominent expression of Midwest hardcore, as the zine and later record label gained a following around the country, but Stolarchuk's vision etched out in *Anonymous* shows that Detroit hardcore was not as uniformly apolitical as it has been remembered. *Touch and Go* was the antithesis of contemporary zines that sought to wed punk rock with a growing anarchist movement, such as Oakland, California's *Maximum Rocknroll* (MMR) or Minneapolis' *Profane Existence*. Stolarchuk's *Anonymous* leaned more towards MMR or *Profane Existence* than *Touch and Go*. Her ideas about punk, politics, and community differed from the boys in her scene, though they aligned on the necessity of a DIY all-ages venue and the banality of the local new-wave bands.

In *Anonymous*, Stolarchuk articulates the punk community as a political project that offered an alternative to the apathy she saw everywhere else, whether that be in the mainstream or the inauthentic people in the punk scene she referred to as "trendies."[72] The editorial that opens the first issue is a manifesto calling for Detroit's youth to reinvigorate their music scene. "Why is everyone in Detroit so self-satisfied with the way things are? No one seems to know the fact that with a little effort we can all change things for the better. The nite-club scene in Detroit is dead… The whole scene has steadily been driving down a dead end street and no one has the fucking guts to turn it around. Anonymous magazine will be trying to help pull things together."[73] Stolarchuk called on her readers to contribute by sending in their ideas about how to fix the problem, but only if these ideas were "original"—"so think again!" she wrote.[74]

[72] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 1, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[73] Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 1, n.p.
[74] Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 1, n.p.

In her interview with the *Detroit News*, Stolarchuk described the punk "attitude" as "anti-ignorance, pro-creative, anti-prejudice."[75] In *Anonymous,* Stolarchuk created and curated writing and art that complemented her vision.[76] While *Touch and Go's* critiques of Midwest banality were focused on aesthetic concerns (especially a hatred for Lansing's local rock radio station WILS-FM, the contrived new wave genre, and the most famous new wave band from Detroit, the New Romantics), Stolarchuk was interested in going beyond aesthetics to contemplate the way political power functioned in her community and how that affected the way people lived their lives.[77] *Anonymous* included articles, manifestos, and poetry arguing for an anti-capitalist, anti-war, and anti-work perspective. The zine is relentless in its critique of suburban life, the rat race, and the emptiness of consumer culture. Music-focused content, including performance reviews, record reviews, and interviews, was included alongside articles, manifestos, creative writing, and art that opposed television and advertising, the Reagan administration's foreign aggression, war, the police, and work. In her interviews with bands, Stolarchuk asked questions like, "What do you think about politics?", "Did you vote this year?", "Would you like to see a revolution in this country?"[78] In *Anonymous*, Stolarchuk articulates the punk scene as a political alternative to the individualism found in suburbia.

[75] Cauffiel, "The Punk Revolt."
[76] Giving proper attribution for the art and writing in *Anonymous* is difficult, given that "all contributors, writers, and photographers are anonymous." Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous,* 3, n.p. Writing under pseudonyms or contributing anonymously was a common practice for zinemakers. If an article or art piece in *Anonymous* was attributed to a pseudonym, I assumed it might not have been Stolarchuk who created it. However, I read the overall zine as a curatorial project by Stolarchuk that reflected her artistic and political ideas.
[77] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 28.
[78] Interview with The Blind. Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 2, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.

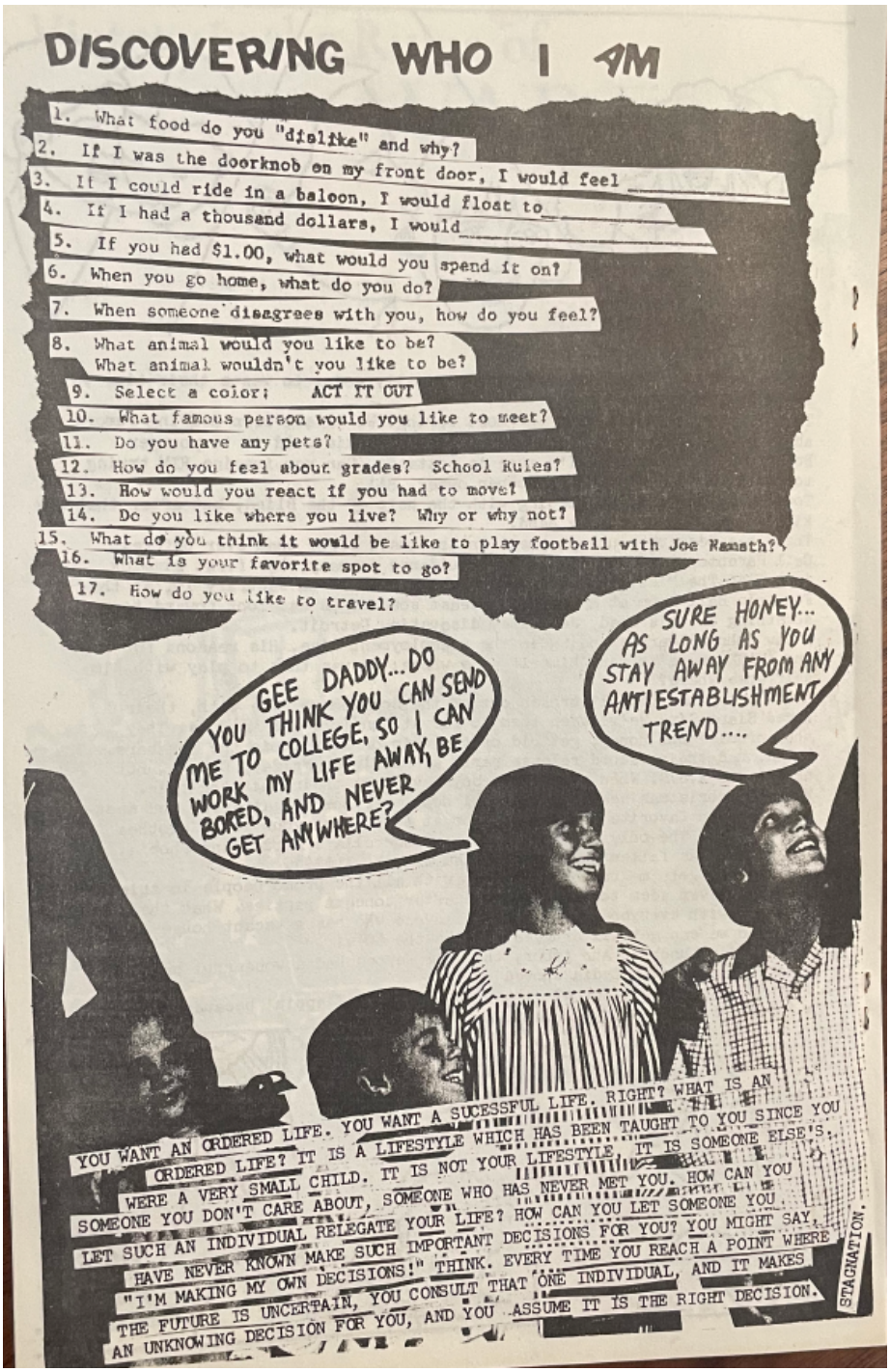

Fig. 3.2. The back cover of *Anonymous* #2. Source: Kevin Knapp personal collection.

As in hardcore lyrics, in *Anonymous* suburban life is a twisted dystopia, essentially a reversal of the way that the Corridor was presented in mainstream media sources consumed by

suburbanites.[79] An example of this is seen on back cover of *Anonymous #2* in a collage titled "Discovering Who I Am" (Fig. 3.2). A group of siblings is cut out of an image of an idealized nuclear family, taken perhaps from a catalogue or advertisement. A young girl is smiling and laughing with her siblings, looking up towards her father, who is cut off the right side of the page. A hand-drawn word-bubble is inserted into the scene, and the girl speaks: "Gee Daddy, Do you think you can send me to college, so I can work my life away, be bored, and never get anywhere?"[80] The father responds from off-scene, his invisible presence ominous: "Sure honey…As long as you stay away from any anti-establishment trend…" Below this image is a screed: "You want an ordered life. You want a successful life. Right? What is an ordered life? It is a lifestyle which has been taught to you since you were a small child. It is not your lifestyle, it is someone else's." The following issue featured another art piece with a similar message. In the short story of "career boy xerox boy," the main character goes to his office and does what he is supposed to for his boss every day, living his life inside a "can" with a lid that he spends his time screwing on tighter and tighter.[81] Stolarchuk portrayed the xerox machine, a tool of the trade many zinemakers romanticize, as a metaphor for the monotony of life under postwar consumer capitalism.

Over the five issues of *Anonymous*, Stolarchuk grew more excited about the music scene she was helping create. In the second issue, Stolarchuk began communicating with the Necros' Barry Henssler, who created his own hardcore zine called *Smegma Journal*. Though the bands' members lived forty-five minutes south in Maumee, Ohio, the Necros were a foundational part of

[79] Local newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s presented exaggerated, dehumanizing accounts of Cass Corridor life. A particularly egregious serious of articles by Bill Gray was run by the *Detroit News'* Sunday magazine, *The Sunday News*, the same publication that ran the interview with Stolarchuk and Brannon quoted earlier. Gray, "Inside the Cass Corridor -- Where Life Teaches Fear, Despair."
[80] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 2, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[81] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 3, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.

Detroit hardcore, helping turn the Freezer Theatre into a hardcore venue and becoming one of the Touch and Go label's first artists (after Lansing's The Fix). Henssler's correspondence with Stolarchuk in the pages of her zine is a pivotal moment in the building of Detroit's hardcore scene. In his letter to *Anonymous*, Henssler discussed the need for an all-ages hardcore venue and complemented Stolarchuk's vision: "You've got a good attitude about Detroit the place is overloaded with old people old ideas, etc… I'm willing to bet that the best Detroit bands lurk in basements and garages and have 15-16-17 year old members."[82] Stolarchuk became close friends with the members of the Necros and she championed their music in *Anonymous*.[83] In issue three, she wrote that the March 1981 Black Flag show with the Necros and the Fix at Club Doobee's in Lansing was "the best gig I ever saw," noted that *Touch and Go* had started a label, and other zines were popping up in Detroit.[84]

However, the scene still needed a space. The short-lived venue Todd's had stopped booking bands and "Once again the locals have no where to go."[85] The need for autonomous, all-ages venues was a constant topic in hardcore zines and a problem in hardcore scenes around the country as the "roadblocks to securing traditional venues seemed unending."[86] Before the Freezer Theatre was adopted by the scene, hardcore punk zines from the Midwest discussed the dearth of venues in the region. An all-ages space would allow the underage kids who built the scene to stop using fake IDs, prevent them from being at the mercy of greedy club owners, and let them exercise autonomy within their own community.

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[82] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 2, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[83] There is a full article about the band in *Anonymous #3*. Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 3, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[84] Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 3, n.p.; Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 162; Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, 14. Azerrad discusses how Black Flag's multiple tours across the U.S. were a catalyst for hardcore scenes around the country.
[85] Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 3, n.p.
[86] Maskell, *Politics as Sound*, 105.

The gay bars Bookie's and Nunzio's were the primary places that hardcore bands in Detroit played prior to the Freezer, but the Detroit hardcore kids despised these venues. Gay bars and punk scenes have had a long relationship within postindustrial space in Detroit and elsewhere in the U.S.[87] Though these were some of the few places that allowed them to perform, the hardcore punks rebelled against the styles and sounds that the audience and bands at Bookie's and Nunzio's preferred, and the older crowd did not embrace the hardcore sound or attitude. While earlier iterations of punk were influenced by and had an affinity with certain aspects of queer culture, especially drag performers and sex workers, adopting a reactionary, homophobic attitude was a way to rebel for some hardcore punks.[88] Dave Rice remembers, "The hardcore thing was just deliberately nihilistic. And homophobic as fuck. Which, I mean—rightfully so—rubbed people [at Bookie's] the wrong way."[89] Bookie's and Nunzio's are skewered in The Meatmen's song "Tooling for Anus," which satirizes the gay men in the audience.[90] One infamous incident in the history of the scene is the "Destruction of Nunzio's" show in November of 1981, which featured many of the scene's bands playing together and taking out their

[87] Bookie's, Nunzio's, and the Gold Dollar are just three of the most famous Detroit rock clubs with roots as gay bars. Rob St Mary, "Free Press Flashback: How the 'Godfather of Gay Detroit' Helped Launch the Modern Music Scene," *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 2022, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2022/12/18/bookies-punk-music-detroit-godfather-of-gay-detroit/69715764007/; Kembrew McLeod and Tim Lawrence explore in detail the influence of queer spaces on the punk scene in New York City. Kembrew McLeod, *The Downtown Pop Underground: New York City and the Literary Punks, Renegade Artists, DIY Filmmakers, Mad Playwrights, and Rock "n" Roll Glitter Queens Who Revolutionized Culture* (New York: Abrams Press, 2018); Tim Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor, 1980-1983* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); José Esteban Muñoz discusses how this dynamic between punks and queers played out in another Midwestern "blue-collar oppressive city." José Esteban Muñoz, "IMPOSSIBLE SPACES.," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 11, no. 3 (July 1, 2005).

[88] Tavia Nyong'o, "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," *Radical History Review*, no. 100 (Winter 2008): 102–19, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-024; Jack Halberstam, "Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos, and the Wild," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (116) (September 1, 2013): 123–34, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2152873; Negative Approach bassist Pete Zelewski: "I didn't agree with all the attitudes that surrounded the Midwest Scene--which were quite sexist and very homophobic at times." Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 157.

[89] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 199.

[90] The Meatmen, "Tooling for Anus," *Blood Sausage*, Touch and Go, 1982.

frustration about previously canceled gigs and underage audience members being kicked out of the bar by wrecking the place during the Necros' set.[91]

In the first issue of *Anonymous*, Stolarchuk writes about attending an October 1980 Psychedelic Furs show at Bookie's and being outraged when she is charged seventy-five cents for a glass of water—"getting thirsty I made my way back upstairs only to find that water was no longer free (!) in Detroit. What? Another Bookie's rip-off."[92] She begins her review: "Bookie's Club 870 is not one of my favorite places to see a band or just to hang about. Expensive to get in (for no reason other than to squeeze money out of some musically interested youths) and always a backward crowd."[93] Both *Touch and Go* and *Anonymous* frequently published rants about their hatred of Bookie's. However, unlike *Touch and Go*, Stolarchuk's articles did not use homophobic slurs when describing her distaste for the club and its audience.[94]

Touch and Go's irreverence, spontaneity, early recognition of hardcore's relevance, and tenacious drive to build a scene in a place as devoid of alternative culture as Lansing, Michigan, make the zine an important document from this period. The publication is part of Michigan's heritage of great rock journalism that includes *Creem, Orbit*, and the *Detroit Metro Times* and critics such as David Marsh and Lester Bangs. However, the use of politically incorrect humor to denigrate the queer people and spaces that made room for punk in Detroit during the late 1970s and early 1980s is part of the dynamic of historical erasure in this scene that would, with time, see hardcore punks themselves getting pushed out of the Corridor. In *Anonymous*, Stolarchuk articulates a vision of hardcore that could wage a cultural rebellion while remaining "anti-ignorance." In the zine's final "message from the editor" Stolarchuk wrote, "How can I stress the

[91] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 192–93.
[92] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 1, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[93] Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 1, n.p.
[94] Vee and Stimson, *Touch and Go: The Complete Hardcore Punk Zine '79-'83*, 177, 314.

actuality and importance of a real scene that has shown itself of late? Away from all the past Detroit bands…that were laughable because of thier [sic] non talent, there is a new small crop of undeniably exciting bands… They are the only Detroit bands that matter."[95] One of these "undeniably exciting bands" was her own.

L-Seven

Stolarchuk's band L-Seven formed in the summer of 1980, as guitarist Dave Rice and drummer Michael Smith left their previous group and began rehearsing for a new project in an office supply warehouse in southwest Detroit owned by Smith's father. They recall first meeting Stolarchuk at Rice's downtown apartment at the same time as the Republican National Convention, during which Ronald Reagan received his party's nomination for president, was happening down the street at the Joe Louis Arena. "One of my first memories of her is of us heckling the 1980 GOP conventioneers from the window of my flat on Jefferson Avenue," Rice told the *Metro Times*.[96] The group eventually added Charles McEvoy on saxophone and keyboards and Frank Callis on bass. Stolarchuk's wide ranging musical tastes, which included R&B and rap in addition to punk and hardcore, influenced the band's sound though she did not play an instrument or compose music at the time. She suggested the name L-Seven from the 1979 Rick James record *Bustin' Out of L Seven*. "She was probably the first person I knew who knew about this new 'rap' thing. So the idea became to somehow combine R&B and the post punk stuff were all into," says Rice.[97] Their music pulled from all over the map of post-punk

[95] Larissa Stolarchuk, *Anonymous*, 4, no date, Southfield, MI, n.p.
[96] Doug Coombe, "L-Seven Is the Detroit Post-Punk Band That Time Forgot — but Third Man Records Is Looking to Change That with a Deluxe Reissue," *Detroit Metro Times*, August 19, 2020, https://www.metrotimes.com/music/l-seven-is-the-detroit-post-punk-band-that-time-forgot-but-third-man-records-is-looking-to-change-that-with-a-deluxe-reissue-25157958.
[97] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 25.

influences, including the melding of rap and punk with "Rapping Tune," early ska with "Brixton Shuffle," and no wave with "Lost in Paradise." The group opened for the Detroit stops of some of the biggest punk and post-punk bands of the era including Iggy Pop, Bauhaus, the Gun Club, the Birthday Party, and U2 during their three-year run.[98] Her bandmates attribute the group's success to Stolarchuk and describe her as a "genius."[99]

While their music did not fall under the strict parameters of hardcore, L-Seven and Stolarchuk were pivotal to the musicians in the hardcore scene. Rob Michaels of Bored Youth recalls: "I was this upper middle class Jewish kid and she was a mind blowing thing to me. She lived in this weird place downtown without running water. She was weirdly androgynous but also weirdly lovely. We met the rest of the guys that were in her band L-Seven and they were total bohemians."[100] Pete Zelewski of Negative Approach remembers, "L-Seven were a huge breath of fresh air for us, and the only Detroit band we could take seriously at the time. Their sound was not hardcore, but it was very uncompromising in its approach."[101] Both Shelley and Michaels say that L-Seven were the "greatest thing" happening in Michigan musically at the time.[102]

In February 1982, the band recorded a three-song self-titled EP which was released by Touch and Go under the subsidiary Special Forces, created to differentiate the L-Seven record from the hardcore the label was known for. Stolarchuk designed the striking cover of the EP, which features a black-and-white close-up shot of her face underwater with her eyes rolled backwards as if in a state of ecstasy or possession. Stolarchuk's connections, taste, and style

[98] Coombe, "L-Seven Is the Detroit Post-Punk Band That Time Forgot."
[99] St. Mary, "L-Seven."
[100] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 25.
[101] Rettman, 25.
[102] Rettman, 25.

helped L-Seven grow into one of the most popular local bands in Detroit at the time. The musicians Stolarchuk encountered and worked with in the scene say that she had a relentless creativity that was infectious. “Larissa was a scene leader,” says Shelley.[103] “She was instantly our punk rock den mother!” remembers Necros drummer Todd Swalla.[104]

One of the most important figures Stolarchuk inspired was her romantic and creative partner John Brannon. In the fall of 1981, an eighteen-year-old Brannon moved in with Stolarchuk in the Corridor after being kicked out of his parents’ Grosse Pointe home because he had allowed a canceled hardcore show to relocate to his family basement. When his mother unexpectedly came home early to find her house full of hardcore kids, she threw her son out and unwittingly set into motion one of the most influential creative partnerships of late 1980s-early 1990s rock and roll.[105] Stolarchuk and Brannon would be on-and-off romantic partners for many years, but their primary relationship was a creative one, cultivating the hardcore punk scene and later performing in the Laughing Hyenas. “There was nobody like her, nobody that dressed like her, or looked like her. She just had a badass attitude and didn’t take any shit from anybody. I was just in awe of her,” Brannon said.[106] In the Cass Corridor, they dedicated themselves to a bohemian lifestyle of art, music, poverty, and drug use. During 1981 and 1982, much of their combined energy went into solving the venue problem by helping their friends make the Freezer Theatre the center for all-ages hardcore shows in the Midwest.

[103] Coombe, “L-Seven Is the Detroit Post-Punk Band That Time Forgot.”
[104] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You’re Not*, 24.
[105] Rettman, 80.
[106] Doug Coombe, “An Oral History of the Laughing Hyenas, One of the Great Unsung Detroit Rock Bands,” *Detroit Metro Times*, December 12, 2018, https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/an-oral-history-of-the-laughing-hyenas-one-of-the-great-unsung-detroit-rock-bands/Content?oid=18664679.

Beyond the Fridge

The groundwork and community building laid through zine networks came to fruition with the Freezer Theatre. Throughout 1981, the Necros' Barry Henssler and Corey Rusk were determined to find a venue in Detroit to hold all-ages hardcore shows for the growing scene, as underage audience and band members were repeatedly kicked out of Bookie's and Nunzio's. The Freezer Theatre and the Corridor represented the perfect solution, offering a space where hardcore youth could build a high platform for stagediving, play as loud and fast as they wanted, and pack in fans under eighteen. There, they were finally able to hold regular, all-ages performances without fear of harassment by venue owners or police. Touring bands like Black Flag, the Misfits, and Minor Threat played the Freezer, but it was most important as a space for local acts to develop their sound and for the fledging Touch and Go to grow as a record label. "Support Midwest hardcore," a slogan Touch and Go printed on the "Process of Elimination" compilation, became the "call to arms" of the scene.[107] The first hardcore show was held at there on December 12, 1981.[108] A release party for the "Process of Elimination" compilation, which Touch and Go curated to demonstrate the vibrancy of the Midwest hardcore scene, included Negative Approach, the Necros, Bored Youth, the Meatmen, Youth Patrol, Suburban Anger, and Violent Apathy. The Freezer has since attained a mythical status in the history of Detroit rock and roll.

The participants in Detroit's hardcore punk scene as well as journalists reconstructing the milieu in books and documentaries describe the Freezer Theatre as a decaying building in an abandoned neighborhood. "It was a great, shitty little room on Cass Avenue. It was more or less an abandoned neighborhood where the cops never came around. We could have fired a cannon

[107] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 92.
[108] Rettman, 186.

off in the middle of the street and no one would've cared," remembers Necros bassist Brian Hyland. His bandmate Barry Henssler recalls, "I had never been to the Cass Corridor before then; it was the land that time forgot." According to Todd Swalla, "We just needed a dump that was indestructible and it was perfect."[109] Scene chronicler Tony Rettman writes, "in the early eighties, the area was left for dead by the local government. In the middle of this war zone stood the Freezer Theatre, a gutted concrete storefront suffering a slow death—until the hyperactive hardcore youth from the suburbs took it over."[110] Tesco Vee called the Freezer "a beautiful shit hole."[111]

In these descriptions, we see the history of the Freezer Theatre filtered through a punk ethos that seeks to erase history and destroy precedents in the name of artistic innovation. However, the Freezer Theatre had a longer history as a radical arts space located in a bohemian neighborhood that was home to artists both famous and unknown, who influenced the Detroit hardcore kids in big and small ways. This story about artistic community is obscured in the histories of this scene, which instead tell a narrative about youth disgruntled with the suburbs discovering an abandoned neighborhood in the deindustrialized city and using it to create something new.

As was seen in the previous chapter, during the early 1980s there were artists and activists who had been living and working in the Cass Corridor for decades, including those associated with the FE. According to Detroit hardcore documentarian Otto Buj, the Freezer Theatre was first established around 1975 by "a group of altruistic ex-hippies" as a space for

[109] Rettman, 85.
[110] Rettman, 83.
[111] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 206.

experimental, political theatre.[112] Local cultural and racial justice activist, radio DJ, and co-founder of the Detroit branch of the anti-racist punk organization Rock Against Racism (RAR) Ismael Ahmed remembers that this original Freezer Theatre was located on Fourth Street in a building that had once been a butcher shop; the venue got its name from the "freezer door tacked to the front."[113]

Some members of the FE collective were involved with the Freezer's radical performances, called "Beyond the Fridge" plays, and the venue's happenings were reported on in FE. The FE collective used street theater in their protest tactics, and so believed it was important to support local spaces where radical theater was performed. The jolly, surrealistic version of the Freezer Theatre seen in FE is much different from the apocalyptic wasteland that comes out of the hardcore punks' descriptions. Ahmed remembers that FE collective member and "nuts playwright" Pat "the Rat" Halley "was really the founder, if there was one, of the Freezer Theatre."[114] Ahmed recalls how Halley would use the Freezer as a space for "everything from plays to these really strange wrestling matches. So, you know, The Nun versus the Landlord."[115] One FE article written by Halley (under the penname Ratticus) on "the People's Theatre movement" describes the Freezer Theatre as "a Detroit version of the Alternative Theatre experience."[116] Included is a photo of "two players from Detroit's Freezer Theater" acting out a scene featuring a bewigged doctor listening to a robot's heartbeat with a stethoscope (Fig. 3.3).

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[112] Otto Buj, "Detroit Hardcore Movie," Instagram, January 17, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CKJogfHjCNR/?img_index=1.
[113] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author, Farmington Hills, MI, January 9, 2024. Ahmed has had a long and illustrious career that includes co-founding Detroit's free jazz and world music summer concert series Concert of Colors and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS).
[114] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[115] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author. Pat Halley's papers are archived in the University of Michigan Special Collections Research Center.
[116] Ratticus, "Culture as Cannibalism: On 'People's Theatre,'" *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1983, #314 edition.

Fig. 3.3. A Beyond the Fridge Play at the Freezer Theatre in the *Fifth Estate*. Source: JSTOR Independent Voices.

In February 1980, FE reported that the previous month the Freezer caught fire and was "totally gutted," forcing the performers to move to another radical space, the Grinning Duck Club, and venues on the Wayne State University campus.[117] By June of that year, FE reported that the Freezer had reopened in a new location, where the venue would become known for its association with hardcore: "all you ardent Freezer fans will be glad to know that they've opened up shop on Cass, between Selden & Alexandrine in the Cass Corridor."[118] The paper let its readers know that the Freezer's players were "back to performing the 'beyond the fridge' plays that only they can do, and have started poetry readings on Sundays. It's well worth checking out…"[119]

[117] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, February 26, 1980, #301 edition.
[118] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1980, #302 edition.
[119] "Detroit Seen."

The Necros' Barry Henssler described encountering one of these poetry readings when he first went to the Freezer with his bandmate: "The first time I went down there with Corey [Rusk] to check the place out, they were having a poetry reading and the only people in the audience were a bunch of homeless guys with forty ounces sitting in folding chairs."[120] This story of discovering the Freezer among the rubble obscures the fact that some of the musicians who would become members of Detroit hardcore's foundational bands had played shows at the Freezer (which also briefly went by the name the Crooked Beat) in the year leading up to the venue's transition to hardcore, as RAR used the Freezer to host performances. Negative Approach's Pete Zelewski describes playing "at the Freezer a year before the hardcore gigs started… We used to cover—very poorly—Junior Murvin's 'Police and Thieves' and also the Slickers' "Johnny Too Bad" and that was enough to get us several more gigs at the Freezer with the RAR crowd." Zelewski also helped Negative Approach frontman John Brannon's first band, the glam rock act Static, get a gig at the Freezer in this earlier period: "the politically correct audience didn't take to John rolling around the stage on broken beer bottles and smothering himself in toothpaste."[121]

Ahmed remembers the Corridor of this era and the Freezer Theatre itself as being home to flourishing arts scenes that were largely ignored by the hardcore youth. Already a seasoned Detroit activist, Ahmed arrived in the neighborhood in 1978 and "found it to be a thriving community of alternative activity." Ahmed was one of the people involved with nurturing the Freezer as a community space before the hardcore youth arrived. He recalls that after the fire and the venue's move to Cass Avenue, "It stayed what it was basically—it was a place that anybody could use that didn't have a place." Ahmed describes the hardcore musicians and fans as "an

[120] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 85.
[121] Rettman, 84.

invading army" who came to the Corridor for shows but did not participate in the arts and activism that were occurring around them. He remembers seeing "Larissa [Stolarchuk] from L-Seven, who would skate up and down the Corridor." However, the members of the hardcore scene "were kind of seen as these white kids from the suburbs who had no respect for the Corridor and the people in the Corridor," Ahmed says. He remembers that "the relationship between the people who ran the Freezer, and the other bands, and the hardcore bands wasn't particularly good. It wasn't bad. It just wasn't good." The political ethos baked into the neighborhood's alternative institutions prioritized hospitality for all. "But the ethic of the Freezer was, this is a place for everybody. And so they were welcomed, but they were never part of the other stuff that went on," says Ahmed.[122]

While the youth that comprised the hardcore punk scene did not acknowledge or engage with the older bohemian community, they relied on the elders' institutions to create their scene. RAR helped organize the space that the hardcore scene adopted, and the group also introduced hardcore itself to the Motor City by bringing bands like the seminal Vancouver-based D.O.A. to Detroit for their benefits.[123] D.O.A. not only played RAR's event protesting the 1980 Republican National Convention, but the band also performed at the Cass Corridor Chinese restaurant-turned-community theatre the Grinning Duck Club run by the FE collective.[124] These performances brought together the older activist crowd and the hardcore youth. "You know, the one thing that we all had in common is we all loved D.O.A.," Ahmed remembers.[125]

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[122] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[123] Otto Buj, "Detroit Hardcore Movie," Instagram, December 29, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CJY0sD3j4bK/, Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author. Bad Brains is on the flyer for this July 13, 1980 show, but according to Buj and Ahmed, the band never showed up for the gig.
[124] "Detroit Seen," February 26, 1980.
[125] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.

One of the most influential legacies of hardcore is its "do-it-yourself" or "DIY" ethic, a call to undertake all processes involved in making music oneself on a local, underground level rather than appealing to existing commercial apparatuses.[126] Using the Freezer Theatre as an all-ages hardcore venue in a city that had no such spaces is a prime example of DIY, but it also shows how the "yourself" in the equation can erase community and legacy.[127] The way hardcore participants and historians tell the story of the Freezer in books and documentaries about the scene obscures that it was already a functioning community arts space and music venue that even booked punk shows before the hardcore scene arrived. Hardcore scenesters and musicians describe the Freezer as their autonomous project when the venue was operated by a community-based collective that made the space available "for everybody."[128] Ahmed describes how he was part of the collective in which "all of us could rent out the Freezer, or make it available to people. We needed to raise a little money to pay for the heat—I wouldn't call it heat because it was never hot—but, you know, to pay for the lights and electricity and the rent." He continues, "The way the Freezer was set up, there were half a dozen people we kind of really watched out and took care of the Freezer. Nobody owned the Freezer."[129] While the space is now romanticized as a time of "kids doing shit on their own," the kids were not on their own but rather using a community space that was being operated by longtime Cass Corridor artists and activists for exactly that purpose.[130]

The Freezer's association with hardcore lasted less than a year, with the scene holding its last show there on June 18, 1982 (the Misfits headlining, support from Negative Approach and

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[126] Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, 6.
[127] Barry Shank additionally critiques DIY as being "wholly in line with neoliberal assumptions." Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014), 176.
[128] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[129] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[130] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 84.

Minor Threat).[131] After the show, a fight broke out between rival factions of new and old scenesters, a preview of the tensions that would lead to the collapse of the scene in the following year. Frontman of D.C. hardcore pioneers Minor Threat Ian MacKaye recalls, "I remember going outside to see something that resembled a battle from the middle ages."[132] Brannon's response to the chaos was: "Welcome to Detroit!"[133] Histories of the scene identify the venue's proprietor as a man named Fred—who, according to Ahmed, was one member of the collective that helped operate the venue, although "not a key player"—and accuse him of using the brawl as a distraction to run away with the door money owed to the bands.[134] That incident was the end of the Detroit hardcore scene's association with the Freezer Theatre. According to Ahmed, the venue continued to operate as a community space after the hardcore bands stopped playing there: "The Freezer was around for maybe seven years" but "eventually just dissipated from lack of energy."[135]

Stolarchuk continued to be a leading force in the hardcore community after the scene stopped using the Freezer. In the summer of 1982, she opened her home and practice space at 406 W. Willis to the scene, calling it The Clubhouse.[136] Brannon describes how "we just gutted the place and built a stage and were like, 'O.K., this is the new Freezer.' That's how the Clubhouse got started. We had to keep the music going."[137] Both Negative Approach and L-Seven rehearsed in the space. Living and working as a musician in the Corridor in this era was not without risks, and scenesters remember that the shows at the Clubhouse were often benefits for the artists who lived and practiced there, since "they were always getting their equipment

[131] Rettman, 186.
[132] Rettman, 114.
[133] Rettman, 116.
[134] Rettman, 114; Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[135] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author.
[136] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 163.
[137] Rettman, 116.

stolen from there."[138] The Clubhouse was another brief center for Detroit's hardcore scene, lasting about a year, until the opening of Clutch Cargo's at the historic Women's City Club.

The Women's City Club

Stolarchuk was again at the center of the next important hardcore venue in Detroit. Between 1981 and 1983, musician turned promoter Vince Bannon took his success booking punk and new wave acts at Bookie's to the abandoned Women's City Club, calling the new venture Clutch Cargo's. This ornate downtown skyscraper looked much different from the Freezer and the Clubhouse's gritty storefronts but was available to the hardcore scene due to similar patterns of neglect and abandonment that affected the city broadly. At the Women's City Club, Negative Approach practiced in one of several ballrooms while Brannon and Stolarchuk lived in an apartment above, regularly sneaking into shows at Clutch Cargo's with their friends—if L-Seven or Negative Approach were not booked to open for a touring band.[139]

As with the Freezer Theatre, the hardcore kids did not remark upon the Women's City Club's longer history as a site of political activity. The Women's City Club of Detroit was founded in 1919 and grew rapidly along with the rising fortunes of the industrial city. The city's upper-class feminists who benefited from and were invigorated by women's suffrage wanted their own space for living, leisure, and organizing, and they secured the architect Chase Stratton to construct a stunning building with "highly distinctive architectural character," especially noted for its locally made, iridescent Pewabic tiles.[140] The building at 2110 Park Ave. was completed in

[138] Rettman, 116.
[139] Rettman, 110.
[140] Miriam Leland Woodbridge and Leslie J. Vollmert, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form -- Women's City Club," October 3, 1979, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/25341090, National Archives.

1924. By the 1930s the club had eight thousand members and was considered the largest women's club in the U.S. The building was a home to feminist organizing through the early to mid-twentieth century, featuring lectures, concerts, and exhibitions, as well as offering space to women from a variety of organizations including the League of Women Voters, the Detroit Women Writers Association, the United Foundation, and many others. The Women's City Club vacated the building in 1975 due to the city's decline and the growing inclusion of women in previously men-only organizations. Another women's organization, the Feminist Women's Club, then took over the building, using it for living space, cultural projects, and a short-lived women-only credit union.[141]

By 1981, 2110 Park Ave. was more or less abandoned, when Vince Bannon, guitarist of Coldcock and the Sillies and booking agent at Bookie's, began to eye the space for his next venture.[142] The City Club's amphitheater allowed for bigger shows than at a small club, offering the potential for increased ticket sales. While the building is just south of the Fisher Freeway, which demarcates the border between the Cass Corridor and downtown, it was a "shortish walk" from the Freezer.[143] One scenester describes it as "this amazing building with mosaic tiles, swimming pools, and this grand dining room and it was all vacant."[144] Negative Approach drummer Chris Moore remembers Brannon and Stolarchuk's living arrangements in the building: "in the City Club they had this cool apartment. The windows were always open and this city noise was coming in, and they had all these records and artwork. I loved hanging out there and them showing me this great art and different music. I got a great education from both John and

[141] Woodbridge and Vollmert.
[142] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 2010.
[143] Otto Buj, "Detroit Hardcore Movie," Instagram, January 30, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CKq_MHtDrv6/?img_index=3. Buj's Instagram page is an invaluable resource brimming with rare primary source material related to the Detroit hardcore scene.
[144] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 109.

Larissa."[145] Photographs of Brannon and Stolarchuk's time living in the building reveal teenage punks dressed in ragged t-shirts hanging out of the windows and skateboarding down deserted streets (Fig. 3.4).[146] Brannon recalls how the hardcore kids would use their knowledge of the building's interior to sneak into shows at Clutch Cargo's and scam both the club and less savvy concert attendees.[147]

Fig. 3.4. Hardcore kids at the Women's City Club, summer 1982. Brannon is on the far right and Stolarchuk is third from right. Todd Swalla and Barry Henssler of the Necros are on the far left and second from left. Photograph by Greg Lewis. Source: Otto Buj on Instagram @detroithardcoremovie.

[145] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 204.
[146] Otto Buj, "Detroit Hardcore Movie," Instagram, January 30, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CKq_MHtDrv6/?img_index=3.
[147] John Brannon remembers, "I would charge these New Wave chicks twenty bucks to bring them up in the dumbwaiter and down the fire escape into the club…That was my scam for a little while." Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not,* 111.

During this period, the Women's City Club was also home to an early techno venue called the Park Avenue Club, an important site for the development of the new genre. Although this dissertation is limited in scope to the artistic and political activity that developed in the Cass Corridor during the late twentieth century, another major musical innovation was bubbling up in the metro Detroit suburbs during the early 1980s, created by Black and Latinx teens who leveraged similar feelings of ennui over their bland surroundings and seemingly bleak futures to inspire the creation of new sounds. The musical and spatial history of Detroit techno parallels that of the hardcore scene and the two genres would share space at the Women's City Club. As scholarship on techno has explored, the young artists who innovated the genre created music that acted as a metaphor for Detroit by incorporating the sounds of machinery, highways, and factories. The innovators and fans of techno also embraced a DIY ethic and used deindustrialized inner-city spaces to cultivate their scene and sound, but because their scene took place mostly outside of the Cass Corridor neighborhood it is only briefly mentioned here.[148]

The genre hybridity melding the worlds of dance music and punk rock that Stolarchuk sought to achieve in her music with L-Seven was reflected in the milieu of the Women's City Club. Scholarship at the nexus of urban and cultural history has explored how this dynamic was present in musical cultures in New York City during the early 1980s, with venues like the Mudd Club and the Roxy being sites where disco DJ's, rappers, and punks would rub shoulders.[149] The history of the Women's City Club shows that even in Rust Belt backwaters young artists were experimenting in similar ways, creating spaces and music where these genres intermingled.

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[148] For more on Detroit techno see George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 238–61; Sicko, *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk*; Matos, *The Underground Is Massive: How Electronic Dance Music Conquered America*; C. Vecchiola, "Submerge in Detroit: Techno's Creative Response to Urban Crisis," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 1 (February 2011): 95–111, https://doi.org/10.2307/23016761.

[149] Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor*; Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*.

Fittingly, L-Seven bookended the Women City Club's brief tenure as a punk rock haven. Bandmate Frank Callis remembers, "We opened the Women's City Club and we closed the Women's City Club. I don't know how we managed that, but we were the first show there and the last show there."[150]

Violence and the Decline of Detroit Hardcore

During the era that the building was a home to thriving musical subcultures, the Women's City Club was owned by Michael Higgins, "a notorious Detroit slumlord" according to one hardcore scenester, who was arrested in 1981 for income tax evasion and building code violations on properties he owned.[151] Brannon describes how during his time living with Stolarchuk in the Women's City Club, the building was neglected and "kind of turned into an abandoned building in the middle of Detroit where the crack industry started." Brannon and Stolarchuk decided to squat, reluctant to give up their prime location, but were eventually forced out by the criminal organizations that took over the building.[152]

The first wave of Detroit hardcore imploded by 1983 as shows became increasingly violent, in part due to white nationalist ideology seeping into the scene, as was the case in hardcore scenes across the country at this time.[153] 1983 was also the year that L-Seven called it

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[150] St. Mary, "L-Seven."
[151] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 109; Woodbridge and Vollmert, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form -- Women's City Club"; Carol T., "He's Taxed with Towering Tenant Woes," *Detroit Free Press*, December 20, 1982; "Boy Real Estate Wonder Now Free on $380 Bond," *Detroit Free Press*, April 6, 1981; Higgins also owned a downtown apartment building called the Leland and ran a music venue there called the Leland City Club that was known for holding goth and electronic music nights. Local media rehabilitated his reputation with a glowing obituary at the time of his death in 2023. J. C. Reindl, "Longtime Detroit Landlord and Business Owner, Michael Higgins, Dies at 74," *Detroit Free Press*, September 6, 2023,. https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2023/09/06/detroit-landlord-developer-michael-higgins-dead/70779874007/.
[152] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 203.
[153] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 138–43; For more on white nationalist ideology in hardcore punk see Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2018), 169; Stanislav Vysotsky, *American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and*

quits, as tensions within the group developed over Stolarchuk's drug use, and Vince Bannon pulled out of the Women's City Club, moving his successful concert enterprise to St. Andrew's Hall.[154] In 1984 the Women's City Club was purchased by developer Charles Forbes. He leased the building to the Detroit Police Department, which occupied it in some capacity until 1996.[155] 2110 Park Ave. was thereafter left vacant. Many who had been part of the Detroit hardcore scene left the Corridor during the mid-to-late 1980s, including Stolarchuk, Brannon, and Touch and Go.[156]

Following a similar path as the Sinclairs and the MC5 had sixteen years prior, in 1984 Brannon and Stolarchuk moved from Detroit to Ann Arbor to pursue a new artistic vision, divorced from the constraints of hardcore and inspired by their heroes the Birthday Party and the Stooges.[157] This move precipitated the founding of the blues-punk band the Laughing Hyenas, which also signed to Touch and Go. Through the Laughing Hyenas, Stolarchuk (who used the penname Larissa Strickland during her work with the band) continued her role as trailblazer, enhanced by the creative partnership with her (sometimes literal) partner-in-crime, John Brannon. The Laughing Hyenas are credited with influencing the subgenre and cultural phenomenon of grunge, especially through their work with future Nirvana producer Butch Vig and Stolarchuk's guitar playing.[158] Her sound was characterized by the manipulation of feedback

Practice of Militant Antifascism (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 7–8; Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire*, 38–39.

[154] St. Mary, "L-Seven," The band's members would go on to form other groups, including Figures on a Beach; Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 224.

[155] Historic Designation Advisory Board, "Proposed Park Avenue Local Historic District," accessed November 21, 2023, https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2018-08/Park%20Avenue%20Local%20HD%20Final%20Report.pdf.

[156] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 37.

[157] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 221–24, 228.

[158] Coombe, "An Oral History of the Laughing Hyenas."

driven through her notoriously loud Fender Twin amp. The band released an EP and four albums between 1987 and 1994, but burned out due to the members' struggles with drug addiction.

Conclusion

The Detroit hardcore scene was transient. Most of the bands that participated only released a handful of songs, an EP or two. Many zines were as brief as *Anonymous'* five issues, with *Touch and Go* being an outlier for having lasted five years. But the influence of Touch and Go Records, and of the music that Stolarchuk created, nurtured, and influenced, was "anything but ephemeral" as the Laughing Hyenas and other bands on the label would "set the groundwork for the rise of the 'alternative' music genre that would sweep airwaves by the early 1990s," according to historian Michael Carriere.[159] Scholars have described the proliferation of punk-inspired sounds in the early 1980s as a "golden age" of popular music.[160] Detroit was an important site for multiple genres developed during this period, including techno and hardcore. In this era, the hardcore scene shared space with techno innovators in an abandoned architectural marvel and with radical theatre and anarchist poets in a "shitty" storefront, and a woman was one of the pivotal influences in a hypermasculine genre as a bandleader, zinemaker, venue organizer, and tastemaker. Stolarchuk died of an alleged overdose on October 9, 2006.[161] She did not survive to see the recent resurgence of interest in Detroit hardcore or the reissues and retrospectives of L-Seven and Laughing Hyenas that focused attention on her pioneering art.[162]

[159] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 37–38.
[160] Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, 11.
[161] Loftus, "Queen of the Nighttime World."
[162] Fellow Cass Corridor rock musician Jack White's Third Man Records reissued the Laughing Hyenas catalogue in 2018 and L-Seven's extant recordings including their Touch and Go EP along with B-sides and live recordings in 2020.

In 2013, the same year that Detroit gained infamy as the largest U.S. city ever to file for bankruptcy, the building at 3958 Cass that had formerly housed the Freezer Theatre was demolished.[163] The intersection of Cass and Alexandrine where the Freezer once stood is now home to a surface parking lot. Despite the woes of the municipality and the majority of Detroiters, development of the downtown core was the priority of the city's elite, as will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5. Local billionaires the Ilitch family purchased the Women's City Club building in 2017 and two years later announced plans to restore the property and lease it to the Swiss company IWG for a co-working venture that will occupy most of the building's the 46,000 square feet.[164] These plans have yet to come to fruition as of this writing. Currently, the building is unoccupied and under slow renovation.

Some have argued that the hardcore kids' contribution to history was serving as "the shock troops of gentrification."[165] There is a large body of literature in urban history and sociology exploring the relationship between artists and gentrification, much of it concluding that artists "at best inadvertently and at worst knowingly championed the shift from industrial to postindustrial capitalism."[166] Cultural and urban historian Tim Lawrence's study of downtown New York in this period argues against this view, finding that the blame for gentrification should not be placed on artists, who were least equipped to fight the changes in New York City's real

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[163] Realreldnew, "Pizza Don't Go Bad: R.I.P. Freezer Theater: Footnote in Detroit Hardcore History Erased," *Pizza Don't Go Bad* (blog), October 18, 2013, https://pizzadontgobad.blogspot.com/2013/10/rip-freezer-theater-footnote-in-detroit.html.

[164] J. C. Reindl, "Ilitches Plan $25M Renovation of Historic Detroit Building — with Big Tenant Coming," *Detroit Free Press*, December 5, 2019, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2019/12/05/ilitch-detroit-womens-city-club/2620579001/.

[165] David Tomere, "Shock Troops of Gentrification," The Load, October 15, 1986, p. 5, cited in Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 59. The Freezer Theater's mysterious owner "Fred" uses this phrase to describe the Detroit hardcore scene in Buj's film. Buj, "Dope, Hookers, and Pavement."

[166] Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor*, 474; Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*; Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*; Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002); Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*.

estate landscape and, for the most part, ended up becoming its victims.[167] In Detroit, the hardcore scene's ethos to destroy what came before made the scene more artistically innovative but also diminished its opportunities for building community. The hardcore scenesters' portrayal of the Cass Corridor as abandoned and empty was a falsehood based in mythologies common to the stories we tell about postindustrial cities in general and Detroit especially, as scholars such as Rebecca Kinney have shown.[168] Carriere writes that the Detroit hardcore scene "highlights the sort of collective unawareness that allows not only for the birth of new cultures but also the forgetting of previous ones. An understanding of such a mindset seems integral to grasping how gentrification has worked in the United States."[169] Ironically, the ignorance of the people and projects that came before them and were occurring around them within Cass Corridor bohemia contributed to the hardcore scene and musicians themselves being erased from the neighborhood in later decades.

Still, in a time and place characterized by Black-white animosity so intense it has been referred to as a "war," this group of metro Detroit youth rejected their isolated, segregated suburbs.[170] They saw "otherwise possibilities" in a place that many people believed was "the pits of hell," value in spaces the market, the state, and white Detroiters had abandoned, and reimagined the deindustrialized city as a place that could be utopic rather than abject.[171] Though their scene reproduced some of the homogenous dynamics they tried to escape, the hardcore kids' journey to the Corridor to pursue a bohemian dream helped extend the neighborhood's heritage as an incubator for artistic visions and great rock and roll.

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[167] Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor*, 474.
[168] Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland*.
[169] Carriere, "Touch and Go Records and the Rise of Hardcore Punk in Late Twentieth-Century Detroit," 37.
[170] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 6.
[171] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, 2; *Dope, Hookers and Pavement*.

While many involved with the hardcore scene left the Corridor, the presence of punk rock in the neighborhood did not dissipate after hardcore's zenith. "It didn't end when John Brannon stopped coming to hardcore shows, you know?" recalls one scenester.[172] A decade after Stolarchuk's move to Ann Arbor, two new venues that combined the aesthetics and sounds of hardcore with the anarchist politics of the FE appeared in the neighborhood. Though she was busy with her career in the Laughing Hyenas, Stolarchuk occasionally supported these endeavors through booking assistance and flyer making, a champion of Cass Corridor punk to the end.[173]

[172] Rettman, *Why Be Something That You're Not*, 156.
[173] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Interview by Author, August 2, 2023, Cookeville, TN.

Chapter 4—Detroit's Autonomous Zone: Community-Based Publishing and Performance in the Cass Corridor, 1986-1994

"xerox your family into anarchy" - Carey Loren, *The Secrets of Photography*, 1980[1]

In the spring of 1986, the *Detroit Free Press* highlighted the work and political views of a local high school student who saw things a bit differently than many of his fellow suburban metro Detroiters. "Teen sees need in '80s for '60s-style activism," the headline declared. Andrew Smith, the 18-year-old Southfield High senior in question told the paper, "When you love people you don't kill them…[so] I won't register for the draft." The short article highlighted Smith's many extracurricular activities, including co-editing and contributing a music column to the student newspaper, organizing an antiwar group among his peers, and hosting a "punk and progressive" radio show called "United Underground" on the school's student-run radio station. The United Underground was cancelled after two years on the air, just before the article went to print, because of Smith's "comments against President Reagan."[2]

Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith has continued a similar array of pursuits for most of his life—activism, broadcasting, writing, music fandom—and was involved with several Cass Corridor institutions that combined art with radical politics during an often-overlooked period in the neighborhood's history.[3] As a writer (and later editor) for the *Fifth Estate*, zine-maker, community-based arts organizer, co-founder of anarchist collectives and punk venues 404 Willis and The Trumbullplex, and activist for causes ranging from anti-nuclear to queer rights, Smith fostered important spaces and projects that sustained the Corridor's bohemian community during

[1] Loren quoted in Drew Sawyer, "Social Media: Photography and Zines in the Age of Xerography," in *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (London New York: Phaidon, 2023), 130.
[2] Maryanne George, "Teen Sees Need in '80s for '60s-Style Activism," *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1986.
[3] Special thanks to Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Christopher Becker, William R. Boyle and Susan Sunshine for providing access to their personal collections of zines, flyers, and ephemera, without which I could not have completed this chapter.

the late 1980s and ‘90s. This activity nourished the radical spirit and community of the Corridor through the end of the twentieth century, an era often characterized as a time Western neoliberalism triumphed on the global stage and eradicated alternatives.

In reflecting on his years helping run the Freezer Theater and working as a cultural organizer in the surrounding scene, community activist Ismael Ahmed bemoans that the space is so often associated with the hardcore genre. “The scene was much broader and much wider,” he remembers.[4] Smith’s story—that of a writer and activist with an insatiable appetite for art-making and community-building that continues into his sixth decade—illustrates this broader scene and follows some of the organizations that bloomed in the Corridor during the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, a period often considered an urban and cultural nadir for the city. Detroit’s decades of urban crisis, felt acutely in the Cass Corridor neighborhood, created the space for a utopian dreamer like Smith to imagine a different kind of city, one where buildings and properties are cooperatively owned and used in service of community needs and art-making, one where cars and televisions are smashed but xerox machines are commandeered, one where more time is spent engaged in activism than working a job. This was possible due to the inexpensive rents and abandoned buildings available in the Corridor neighborhood and across the city during these years, which Smith took advantage of with particular verve.

Andrew Smith was raised in the Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights, a community that had intentionally racially integrated in the 1950s, by “left-wing Christian” parents who had been active in the civil rights movement.[5] When Smith began high school, the family relocated to Southfield, Michigan, the same suburb where Larissa Stolarchuk was raised. Smith has fond memories of Southfield: “The time I was there, it was richly diverse. Jewish, Chaldean, African

[4] Ismael Ahmed, Interview by Author, Farmington Hills, MI, January 9, 2024.
[5] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023.

American, Caucasian. And it was a beautiful melting pot. It was my idea of the beloved community."[6] Southfield High School incubated a teenage Smith's artistic and political sensibilities. In addition to contributing a music column to the high school newspaper *The Southfield Jay* and hosting his radio show, Smith created his first zine during these years with his friend Karen Widman, a local music fanzine called *Disoriented Rain Dance*.[7] He soon began traveling to downtown Detroit to thrift shop and see live music.

In the fall of 1987, after completing less than a semester at the experimental liberal arts school Antioch College, Smith dropped out and moved to Detroit to pursue a full-time education in underground culture and radical activism. In a period of six months, he developed connections with previous generations of Cass Corridor bohemians that would take him "from being basically like a hippie Christian kind of college drop-out in fall of '87, to being this black flag waving anarcho-hippie-punk by the summer of '88."[8] During this period, Smith wrote the poetry for a self-published chapbook called *Automotive Earth*, explored "the abandoned skeletons of Detroit neighborhoods with a passionate vigor for discovery" riding his bicycle while experimenting with hallucinogens, inserted himself into the *Fifth Estate* collective, and published the first issue of his zine of urban queer utopia *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*.[9]

Historians often characterize radical politics of the 1990s as fragmenting into increasingly niche groups focused on identity politics and fighting culture wars rather than building a coalition capable of taking on challenges like growing wealth inequality or achieving

[6] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[7] Smith. *Disoriented Rain Dance*, 3, 1985, Southfield, MI, Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.
[8] Smith, interview by Author.
[9] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Babyfish Lost Its Momma, 6, 1994, Detroit, MI, 7, Box 2, Folder 1, Babyfish papers, University of Michigan Special Collections Research Center. Hereafter, "Babyfish papers."

racial justice.[10] Meanwhile, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 seemed to cement the triumph of neoliberal capitalism both domestically and on the global stage.[11]

The Corridor's residents were left out of Western capitalism's victory. A Recession from 1990 to 1991 raised unemployment to its highest level in a decade.[12] On October 1, 1991, Michigan's governor John Engler ended General Assistance welfare for single adults without children, which resulted in 83,000 Michiganders losing their only source of income (40,000 of which were Detroiters) in one of the most severe cuts to welfare programs in the country during this period.[13] To further reduce costs and fulfill his promise to balance Michigan's budget, Engler "moved aggressively to privatize the mental-health system" and closed state-run mental-health facilities, which flooded the Corridor with more people in need of help but with nowhere to go.[14] The money the state saved went to building twenty-three new prisons between 1985 and 1992.[15]

Democratic President Bill Clinton's election in 1992 did not improve living conditions. "The affluent look and act like nothing has changed since the wealthy's halcyon days of the Reagan era," Peter Werbe and David Watson wrote in FE. "In the Cass Corridor, things are different. This decaying area has long been a center of the city's underclass. But now the scythe of capitalist austerity…is accelerating with a vengeance."[16] People living in deindustrialized inner-city neighborhoods like the Corridor faced the loss of unionized manufacturing jobs to the

[10] Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 149; Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), 220–25.
[11] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 146.
[12] Gerstle, 150.
[13] George Bradford and E.B. Maple, "Plentitude and Penury in Detroit: The War on the Poor," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1992, #338 edition; Sandra K. Danziger and Sherrie A. Kossoudji, "When a Welfare Program Is Terminated: A Study of Michigan's General Assistance Recipients," *African American Research Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (1995): 62–69.
[14] Julie Mack, "Families Struggle as Psych Beds Disappear from Hospitals," mlive, September 24, 2019, https://www.mlive.com/mental-health/.
[15] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 210–11.
[16] Bradford and Maple, "Plentitude and Penury in Detroit: The War on the Poor."

North American Free Trade Agreement, the continuation of the War on Drugs and increase in mass incarceration after the 1994 Crime Bill, the AIDS crisis, and welfare cuts as Clinton vowed to "eliminate welfare as we know it."[17] Coleman Young's twenty-year reign as Detroit's first Black mayor ended in 1994 when he left office due to ill health. His successor Dennis Archer maintained the status quo by attempting to redevelop downtown with tax-funded megaprojects.[18] By 1996, Detroiters approved casino gambling within city limits and the use of public funds to build sports stadiums, turning to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has dubbed "industries of last resort" as the city's population and tax base continued to fall.[19] The late 1980s and early 1990s represented both the "triumph" of the "neoliberal order" and a "counterrevolutionary age."[20]

Despite the common notion that radical politics were ineffectual in this period, historian of anarchism Andrew Cornell writes that "anarchism was cacophonous in the 1980s."[21] This era was "marked by a spread of anarchist politics throughout the radical left," according to historian Spencer Beswick, as radicals sought to adapt to neoliberalism, the New Right, and the failures of state socialism.[22] Institutions like the *Fifth Estate* and the Love and Rage Federation fostered anarchism nationally and across North America through publications and gatherings.[23] Punk music, zines, and venues like those explored in this chapter were places where young people often first encountered anarchist politics and the logic of the "triumphant empire" was

[17] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 141–88; Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire*, 3, 31.
[18] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 214.
[19] Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," 50; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 214.
[20] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 146; Beswick, "From the Ashes of the Old: Anarchism Reborn in a Counterrevolutionary Age (1970s-1990s)."
[21] Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 296.
[22] Beswick, "From the Ashes of the Old: Anarchism Reborn in a Counterrevolutionary Age (1970s-1990s).," 32.
[23] For more on the understudied Love and Rage Federation see Beswick, "Love and Rage: Revolutionary Anarchism in the Late Twentieth Century."

challenged from within.[24] By the late 1980s, leftist punks across the country had organized against the presence of neo-Nazis in the punk scene through organizations like Anti-Racist Action and the most influential punk zines of the era, like *Maximum Rocknroll* and *Profane Existence*, disseminated anarchist perspectives.[25] Underground music, zines, and venues were able to attract "a small but significant number of American youth determined to resist US empire both in their daily lives and through involvement in protests and political organizations" while much of the traditional Left had collapsed.[26]

Detroit historians Mark Jay and Phillip Conklin note that locally, the late 1980s and '90s "witnessed a flourishing of community groups in the city."[27] In the Cass Corridor, these organizations drew on a neighborhood legacy that had been challenging the logic of the American dream for decades. This period saw many of the same neighborhood activists that had found against the Detroit trash incinerator (including Smith) protest the Gulf War.[28] Projects like *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 404 Willis, and the Trumbullplex combined the Detroit Artists Workshop's core tenet that art was a gateway to personal and political revolution with the DIY ethos and aesthetics of the hardcore scene in a new era. These intersecting projects show Cass Corridor bohemians in the 1990s attempting to craft a more expansive vision of justice, community, and the city than their forebears as they linked up the punk scene with the existing anarchist community in the Corridor as well as national movements for queer liberation and radical environmentalism. Smith's queer and non-monogamous sexuality infused his art and

[24] Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire*.
[25] As was seen in chapter 3, white power ideology was a significant factor in disrupting Detroit's hardcore scene. Pearson, 38–39; Vysotsky, *American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and Practice of Militant Antifascism*, 7–8; Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 297; Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, 169.
[26] Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire*, 2; Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 6–7.
[27] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 211.
[28] Jim Schaefer, "Detroit Police Break up Antiwar Protest," *Detroit Free Press*, January 15, 1991.

writing, making *Babyfish* part of a continental movement of queer zines in this period and an important document of Detroit queer life. The spaces and publications explored in this chapter demonstrate how the identity-based liberation movements of the late 1980s and '90s, rather than being segmented, fractured, and ineffectual, frequently intersected to create subcultures where young people rejected American empire and the American dream, and created a new anarchist-infused radical politics that has influenced events from 1999's Battle for Seattle to the summer 2020 uprisings in response to the police murder of George Floyd.[29] The Cass Corridor publications and spaces explored in this chapter are a few local sites where a new generation participated in "remaking radicalism" during the Bush and Clinton years.[30]

Smith's enthusiasm for Detroit's radical potential was infectious (as is his enthusiasm generally). "I was convinced that we were already in late '80s, early '90s Detroit, living in this post apocalypse and that it was going to be requisite to, the old Wobblie saying is 'build the new world in the shell of the old,'" Smith recalls, referring to the nickname for members of the Industrial Workers of the World, an anti-capitalist union that reached its largest membership in the early twentieth century but has been a touchpoint for radicals ever since.[31] "And we literally saw the shell of the old world crumbling around us!"[32] This chapter analyzes the efforts of Smith and his peers to cultivate radical community and build a new world in a shell that was not quite as abandoned by capital as it may have felt.

[29] For more on the influence of anarchism on contemporary social movements see Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded"; Graeber, "The New Anarchists"; Beswick, "From the Ashes of the Old: Anarchism Reborn in a Counterrevolutionary Age (1970s-1990s)."
[30] Berger and Hobson, "Introduction: Usable Pasts and the Persistence of Radicalism."
[31] See Cornell for more on the influence of the IWW on anarchism in the U.S. Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 21–52.
[32] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.

Community Concert Series

One of the venues where Smith first encountered Cass Corridor bohemia was the Community Concert Series (CCS), a regular open-mic style benefit concert that offered a "community-based, censorship-free forum for all kinds of performing arts" with free vegetarian food that Smith first began attending when he was still in high school.[33] The shows ran into the early hours of the morning in order to draw performers and audience members after their time at bars, though the event itself emphasized its offering of vegetarian food rather than alcohol. The Community Concert Series fostered intergenerational ties between bohemian communities in the Corridor, bringing together garage rock musicians, anarcho-primitivists, aging hippies and counterculture legends as it provided a platform for live music outside of night clubs and for-profit spaces, which had been a goal of the AWS and was written about in the *Fifth Estate*.[34] FE collective members including Peter Werbe, Alan Franklin, and Marius Mason and counterculture icons like John Sinclair and Rob Tyner performed at the CCS alongside local bands that impacted the Corridor scene but never gained prominence outside Detroit, like the Layabouts, the Blanks, and Cathouse.[35]

Every CCS show was a benefit of some kind, and the series raised money for causes including homelessness, domestic violence prevention and harm reduction, local and national environmental activism (like the movement to stop the building of the Detroit trash incinerator), and local arts and culture, including *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*. The event also raised money to support protests against the Gulf War, to send activists including Smith to Nevada to protest

[33] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Babyfish papers, Box 1, Folder 2.
[34] Bob Nirkind, "Community Music in Cass Corridor," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1976, #268 edition.
[35] For the best sense of what this scene sounded like, Andrew Smith's Tennessee Tech-based radio show Teacher on the Radio and Soundcloud account offer a treasure trove of rare Cass Corridor music from his personal archive. https://soundcloud.com/teacherontheradio.

underground nuclear testing, and to benefit the Redwood Summer fight against destructive logging practices in northern California. The series rotated between a variety of venues in the Corridor and downtown, including the Paradigm Center for the Arts (1437 Randolph in Harmonie Park), the Mansion (60 E. Ferry in the museum district), the Arts Center Music School, and St. Andrew's Church on Wayne State's campus.[36]

The CCS helped build connections between different generations and groups of Cass Corridor bohemians, and it offered space and an audience for unusual sounds and ideas. For example, the CCS provided a venue for garage rock pioneers the Gories to play their first show. Gories and Demolition Doll Rods guitarist Danny Kroha describes himself as being politically unaware at the time of the Gories' debut, but the CCS was a space where a young musician would brush elbows with veteran activists while helping raise money for some of the most important radical causes of the period.[37] The MC5's former vocalist Rob Tyner and his wife Becky were key CCS organizers in the early days of the series, with Tyner often hosting and performing on various folk instruments and Becky contributing food through her catering business. Kroha remembers he and his bandmates encountering Tyner when they came to the CCS to sign up for their first performance in July 1986, and being less than impressed: "He was like some washed-up overweight hippie to us, singing like really corny, nostalgic songs with this autoharp."[38] At the time, the Gories didn't know who Tyner or the MC5 were.[39] Kroha and others in the scene now remember Tyner as being supportive of new bands and active in his efforts to continue the Cass Corridor's musical legacy. "Looking back, I'm really, really grateful for Rob

[36] Community Concert Series flyers, n.d., Susan Sunshine personal collection.
[37] Danny Kroha, Interview by Author, phone, January 8, 2024.
[38] Kroha.
[39] Chris Handyside, "The Power and the Gory," *Detroit Metro Times*, June 24, 2009, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/the-power-and-the-gory-2195183.

Tyner for giving us that chance to do that, you know, he was not judgmental about us at all," Kroha says. Scene participant, drummer and songwriter for the Blanks, and FE collective member William R. Boyer lived at CCS venue the Arts Center Music School from 1985 to 1996 and remembers that Tyner was "really interested in trying to cultivate the next generation" of rock and roll musicians through the series.[40] The Gories became a pivotal influence on the Cass Corridor's garage rock scene, which emerged around venues like the Gold Dollar after the band broke up in 1993.

The CSS featured poetry readings, lectures, and political "skits" as well as live music. In addition to performing with his rock band the Blanks, Boyer describes performing "silent theater" in a project called Bill and Leah's Soapbox Derby: "The Gulf War was a war for oil. And so our skit would be, I had this old Mustang, metal car, and I would drive in on it as a businessman. And we would just be pretending to drink oil for breakfast."[41] Kroha remembers, "That scene was very avant-garde. Like we're the only rock band I can remember playing those Art Center Music School shows, you know, it was mostly pretty experimental kind of stuff."[42] Gories drummer Peggy O'Neill concurs that the CCS, "was this place that was really supportive of local bands, and they let bands play there who couldn't get a show anywhere else—like us."[43] Smith remembers giving one of his first poetry readings during a CCS benefit where the Gories also performed.[44] The CCS continued through the mid-1990s, eventually relocating to a Unitarian Church in the suburb of Birmingham.[45]

[40] William R. Boyer, Interview by Author, Detroit, MI, January 20, 2024.
[41] Boyer.
[42] Kroha, Interview by Author.
[43] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 238.
[44] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[45] Community Concert Series flyer, n.d., Susan Sunshine personal collection.

Other important community-run performance events and spaces in the Corridor that existed during these years included the annual street festivals the Fourth Street Fair and the Dally in the Alley, which emerged from grassroots efforts to stop the city from tearing down housing and historic buildings in the area for Wayne State expansions. In 1974, after blocks in the north Corridor were slated for demolition to make way for a WSU parking lot, Cass Corridor residents organized the North Cass Community Union (NCCU) to save their apartment buildings. The outdoor festival that grew into the Dally in the Alley began as their fundraiser for this advocacy work, named after a medieval love song and the alleyway between Second and Third Avenues where the celebration is still held today.[46] The NCCU were successful in saving their homes, as well as gaining historic status for the Dodge-Horace Carriage house where Horace Dodge built his first automobile prototype.[47] The Dally proved so popular that it has outlasted its necessity and continued as a yearly event since 1977.[48] Smith, who performed spoken word at multiple Dally celebrations, wrote of the street fair in *Babyfish*, "there aint no other woodstock coz underneath it all we go the alley the dally and in it none of our love can be taken away."[49] Community-run performance initiatives like the CCS and the Dally in the Alley offered a space for artists and activists to connect, find their voices, and support each other's endeavors, and also laid a blueprint for future projects that Smith would spearhead in the Corridor.

[46] Allen Schaerges, "Did You Know?," 1987, Box 1, Folder-Dally in the Alley, 1987, North Cass Community Union Records, Walter Reuther Library.
[47] Bette Huster and Allen Schaerges, "Dally Program 1989, A Brief History of the Alley," 1989, Box 1, Folder-Dally in the Alley, 1989, North Cass Community Union Records, Walter Reuther Library.
[48] For more on Dally in the Alley, see *Dally On!*, n.d., https://dallyinthealley.com/doc/; Melody Baetens, "Things May Change, but the Dally in the Alley Stays the Same Beloved Street Festival," *The Detroit News*, September 7, 2022, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/2022/09/08/things-may-change-but-dally-alley-stays-same-beloved-street-festival/7958883001/. The North Cass Community Union's papers are held at Wayne State University's Walter Reuther Library.
[49] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.

Fifth Estate's New Generation

Smith also first encountered the FE when he was a student at Southfield High. While listening to a local radio station, he heard about "a protest for music fans" that was to be held at a venue called the Uncooperative, which was both a music venue and the office of the FE at the time. The collective's scathing satirical humor immediately caught Smith's attention. "I remember seeing 'John Hinckley for President' posters in the *Fifth Estate* office, you know 'Hinckley for President: He Took a Shot at the Man, Now Give Him a Shot at the Job,'" he recalled (Hinckley attempted to assassinate President Reagan in 1981).[50] This experience, as well as writing the *Disoriented Rain Dance* fanzine, spurred Smith's initial explorations of downtown Detroit.

Smith moved to Detroit in the fall of 1987 after dropping out of the experimental liberal arts college Antioch, located in Yellow Springs, Ohio. The school had a radical bent but was a three-and-a-half-hour drive south of Southfield and led to intense homesickness for the young Smith. In the Corridor, Smith got a full-time radical education closer to home by inserting himself into the FE collective. "I just sort of started coming around and refused to leave," Smith remembers. "Within weeks I had become completely immersed in their whole scene."[51] Smith's head-first dive into the FE collective connected his previous involvement in the peace, environmental, and anti-nuclear movements with underground aesthetics and a more militant radicalism than the "Christian hippie" spaces he had previously participated in. During this period, Smith would go to the paper's basement office on Second Avenue, grab a stack of old issues from the archives, and "just stay up all night reading the *Fifth Estate*." This was during the

[50] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023.
[51] Smith.

era of FE's prominence developing theory and critique that shaped the radical environmental movement, as explored in Chapter 2. Smith remembers of this time, "I think I was probably reading FEs in the wee hours all winter long. And around that time was when Earth First was really happening. And David Watson was really positioning himself as the voice."[52] Smith also participated in the Evergreen Alliance's movement to stop the Detroit trash incinerator, becoming a member the "Evergreen 19" who were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for their civil disobedience actions.[53]

There was a clear "generation gap" between Smith and the other members of the FE collective, but his willingness to engage in the collective's rigorous editorial process and consensus-based decision-making earned him a place in the group. "I was a baby. They met me when I was in high school," Smith remembers. "And a lot of those articles I wrote in my early twenties."[54] Smith's first articles appeared in FE in early 1988: "I remember, when I first got my first articles published that year in '88, I pretty much was like, 'This is what I'm going to do.' And I did it for twenty-one years. For twenty-one years I was on the FE editorial collective."[55] His perspective from a younger generation and enthusiasm for the cause of anarchist publishing infused the paper with the new ideas and perspectives needed to keep the publication active and relevant into the 1990s and 2000s. While at the magazine, Smith wrote widely-shared articles including a piece on his desire for a pornography that could express "our deepest erotic secrets and desires" outside the bounds of capital and patriarchy, a critique of the radical embrace of email and "the anarchic aspects of the net," and sharing his experience building local anarchist

[52] Smith.
[53] Blank and Bradford, "Evergreen 19 Beat Rap as Incinerator Fires Up."
[54] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023.
[55] Smith.

spaces with Cass Corridor comrades.[56] His writing pushed FE in a more radical direction in terms of gender and sexuality, however his vision of Cass Corridor bohemia was fully realized not in FE, but in the zine of urban anarchist utopia *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*.

Babyfish Lost Its Momma: Xerox Your Family into Anarchy

The first issue of Smith's zine *Babyfish Lost Its Momma,* published in the spring of 1988, promises to be "a city kiss…with asphalt lips" offering a "taste of liberation for all you people locked inside your cars."[57] Published over six issues between 1988 and 1994, *Babyfish* is a feral urban exploration of Cass Corridor bohemia during these years, brimming with Smith's intoxicated love and enthusiasm for the city and its people. Media scholar Kate Eichhorn argues that "xerography helped to change both the look and experience of cities" during the late 1980s and early '90s.[58] *Babyfish's* depiction of Detroit's urban spaces, romanticizing them and insisting on their value, portrayed the city as both bleak and beautiful, and showed Smith and other contributors reimagining their environment through xerox art. *Babyfish* xeroxed the Cass Corridor into an urban queer world where, amidst concrete ruins and grey skies, sex was uninhibited, people could embody any gender they might imagine, and war, patriarchy, domination, and technology could be fought with the tools at hand—perhaps a xerox machine, some mud, or a colorful costume.

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[56] Sunfrog, "Treatise on Electronic Anarchy & the Net: Arguments for Elimination of the Information Age," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1995, #345 edition; Sunfrog, "Pornography & Pleasure: Beyond Capital, Beyond Patriarchy," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1992, #340 edition.
[57] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 1, 1988, Lathrup Village, MI, n.p., Christopher Becker personal collection.
[58] Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 83.

Babyfish was part of a "proliferation" of queer zines across North America during the late 1980s and early 1990s.[59] Smith identified as "non-monogamous & queer" and "polysexual," and much of *Babyfish's* provocative art challenged sexual conventions.[60] Scholarship has noted that many zines of this era were engaged in the utopian project theorist José Esteban Muñoz has called "queer world-making."[61] Zine scholar Stephen Duncombe writes that zinemakers were often "experimenting with new identities, political vocabularies, and emotions that are not readily accepted in the dominant society."[62] Eichhorn examines how the xerox was a critical technology for 1980s and '90s queer activists in organizations like ACT UP, as they used the machine to create zines, flyers, educational literature, and art to bring attention to the AIDS crisis.[63] *Babyfish* was in dialogue with this activity as Smith read and corresponded with other queer zines, including *homocore* and *RFD: A Country Journal for Gay Men Everywhere*, and attended networking events with national organizations for queer liberation such as the Radical Faeries, who blended queer separatism and neopagan spirituality.[64]

Babyfish Lost Its Momma was named after a drawing by a child of friends and inspired by Smith's late-night wanderings around the city. Smith has hazy recollection about the origins of his nickname and pseudonym "Sunfrog," but it has stuck with him throughout his life (he has both a "sunfrog" tattoo and license plate). Smith remembers, "it was very low quality and very, I

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[59] Brandon W. Joseph, "Zines by Artists: Post-Pop Punk Art," in *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2023), 65.
[60] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Babyfish Found Its Momma (Or, Random Notes on Birth, Death, Anarchy, Community, & the Possibilities of Polysexual Post-Parenting for the 21st Century)," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 6, 1994, Detroit, MI, 4, Box 2, Folder 1, Babyfish Papers.
[61] Sawyer, "Social Media: Photography and Zines in the Age of Xerography"; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 40.
[62] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 193.
[63] Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 114–45.
[64] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Babyfish Found Its Momma (Or, Random Notes on Birth, Death, Anarchy, Community, & the Possibilities of Polysexual Post-Parenting for the 21st Century)," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 6, 1994, Detroit, MI, 4, Box 2, Folder 1, Babyfish Papers; see also Mark, "Who Are the Radical Faeries?," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 3, Winter 1989, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 2, Babyfish Papers.

mean very, gritty in its aesthetic," fusing hippie, punk, and goth subcultures.[65] Each issue of *Babyfish* emphasized that the zine was "originating in detroit's cass corridor" and featured a mix of music and performance reviews of local bands, poetry, xerox collage, photography, musings about life in the city, and essays about local and national political issues including the growing anarchist movement, the Detroit trash incinerator, queer and women's rights, and homelessness.[66] Where the FE featured articles thousands of words long with footnotes, *Babyfish* was focused on bursts of emotional and aesthetic expression.

[65] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[66] Cover, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers; Flyer, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 3, 1989, Detroit, MI, Box 1, Folder 2, Babyfish papers.

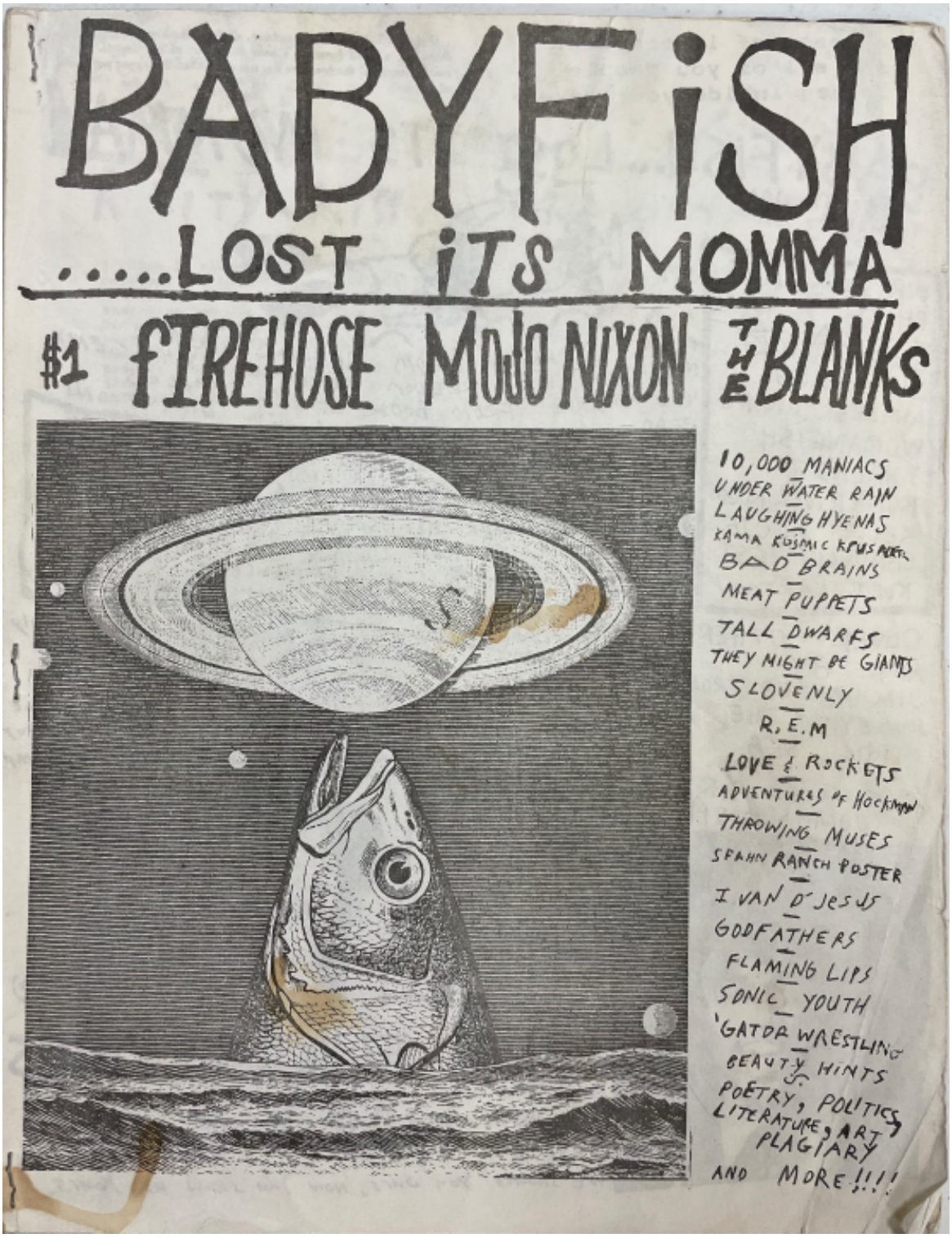

Fig. 4.1. Cover of *Babyfish Lost Its Momma* #1. Source: Christopher Becker personal collection.

Babyfish number one (Fig. 4.1) opens with an anecdote about the inspiration behind the zine project. After an evening of intoxicated rambling, dancing to street performers, and volunteering at a soup kitchen, Smith and his friend Joe were caught by police engaging in urban ruin exploration in the United Artists Theatre—a former movie palace and one of Detroit's most famous abandoned buildings—and were thrown in jail for the night. "Well, we were let out without being charged, we sucked up the city air with pure joy, we had gone very far in our own brotherhood and with a deeper connection to our screaming city. The night in a big way created the energy which is incarnate in this 'zine," Smith wrote in the opening editorial. "These are truly STREET writings, for we had wandered the streets for hours, given away all our money and come home full of it all."[67] The two went home and began creating the writings and art that would comprise *Babyfish* number one. The issue also includes a review of a Laughing Hyenas performance and a reflection on the March to Stop the Incinerator which had taken place that spring.

The Cass Corridor in this era continued to offer a place where suburbanites like Smith could turn away from a life of homogeneity and consumerism. *Babyfish* documents this journey, Smith's "reckless pilgrimage to discover Detroit." He wrote in the first issue: "I had lived in the suburbs for five years and finally found spiritual and cultural liberation in the city. I met the men of the street. And the concrete spirit began to poison and save my veins."[68] *Babyfish* is more successful than the projects of the Detroit Artists Workshop or the hardcore scene in critically engaging and displaying empathy towards less advantaged neighbors in the Corridor. In *Babyfish,* the Corridor is a place of beauty and wonder, but also "where I daily see hungry hands,

[67] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 1, Spring 1988, Lathrup Village, MI, n.p., Christopher Becker personal collection.
[68] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Underwater Rain," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 1, Spring 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p. Christopher Becker personal collection.

mutilated hopes, and desperate screams, the sadness of Detroit streets is not mythological statistics but actual flesh and bone tortured, screaming out, the first casualties of the new world order."[69] While the AWS and the hardcore scene focused on cultivating artistic communities and new genres, *Babyfish* looks outward. The zine regularly discussed local issues like the trash incinerator, Engler's welfare cuts, and homelessness, expressing grief and rage at the way Detroiters suffered because of the increasing greed of those in power.

Smith describes *Babyfish* as coalescing around three major themes, "Radical Sexuality," "Earth vs. The Machine," and "poetry, interviews, and reviews."[70] While "Sunfrog" was the main editor and contributor, he wrote that "the primary function of Babyfish is to be an open forum for the free flow of ideas coming from the grassroots of the underground community" and that "the opinions expressed inside of this zine come from a diverse group of people in our community, the cass corridor, and from around the land."[71] Smith wrote an appeal calling for poetry from the community in *Babyfish* number two, "We the visionary urban rats, call forth the words of all you post-industrial poetscum."[72] Poetry contributors who answered the call included FE members Ralph Franklin, William "Bill Blank" Boyer, Marius Mason, David Watson, and Marilynn Rashid, and famed Corridor poets including Jim Gustafson; Ken Mikolowski, founder of the Cass Corridor-born poetry and art project The Alternative Press; and Chris Tysh, feminist poet and wife of AWS co-founder George Tysh.

Cass Corridorites filled the zine with collage, photography, poetry, reviews and interviews that capture a rarely documented period in the neighborhood's creative history. Smith,

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[69] *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 4, Winter 1990, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 3, Babyfish papers.
[70] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 6, 1994, Detroit, MI, 7, Box 2, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.
[71] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "ed it ORiAL," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 4, September 1990, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 2, Folder 1, Babyfish papers; Smith, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.
[72] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Words for the summer of 1988," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.

who got his start writing music fanzines and maintains that practice to this day, published interviews, lyrics, and photography of little-known Detroit musicians, including world-beat anarchist band the Layabouts, the punk rockers the Blanks, psychedelic pop band Orange Roughies, and political hardcore group Forced Anger, among many others, documenting an underappreciated era in Detroit music. "No one's telling the story between the mid-'80s and the mid-'90s, because no one was quote 'making it.' You know, after the MC5 and the Romantics and Madonna, there was nothing coming out of Detroit, allegedly," remembers Boyer. "There was nothing famous, maybe. But, dynamic, exciting, inspiring."[73] Similarly to the AWS journals *Work* and *Change*, *Babyfish's* priorities were to provide a forum for new ideas from the local bohemian community and showing the link between the arts and political revolution.

The zine's use of the xerox's chaotic black-and-white effect signified its politics—Eichhorn writes "[t]he gritty photocopied aesthetic is anarchic and punk, radical and queer"—and was also ideal for conveying Detroit's landscape.[74] The zine's collages, some by Smith and others by collaborators, leveraged the xerox's blurry, grey-scale effect—which was intensified by an inexperienced or rushed user—to provide a vivid portrait of Rust Belt life. Detroit's industrial, concrete spaces and cloudy skies are richly conveyed in xerox collages featuring grainy images of crumbling concrete and collapsed steel. Smith also used xerox collage to create art out of a citation he received for trespassing at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station during an anti-war protest and a letter from the government admonishing him for refusing to register for the draft.[75] Many collages in the zine combine apocalyptic and pornographic imagery, for example George

[73] William R. Boyer, Interview by Author, Detroit, MI, January 20, 2024.
[74] Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 162.
[75] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Blood Hounds Resist Selective Service System," "NOT TO ENTER OR REENTER MILITARY RESERVATION," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 2, Babyfish papers.

H.W. Bush's head pasted onto an image from a porn magazine of a couple having sex, with the woman's groin covered by panties cut out of a dollar bill, or images of people in face masks, gas masks, hazmat suits, and police in riot gear collaged together to form a mass of humanity in need of protection from each other and the looming nuclear explosion in the background.[76] The zine is also filled with art photography featuring Cass Corridor bohemians posing nude for each other's photos. The message conveyed is that the pursuit of joy, through sex and music, is a radical act in a failing world.

Xerography and zines were a crucial aspect of building "anarchist resistance culture," connecting and feeding the growing anarchist movement during this era, to the extent that the xerox aesthetic has become a visual shorthand for anarchism itself.[77] In the zine, Smith reflected on his participation in the anarchist movement spreading across the country at this time. He attended and wrote about events like protests against the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta and nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site, and the anarchist gathering in Toronto, Ontario, all in 1988. In the spirit of DIY, the zine invites readers to get involved in community actions and protests, reject participating in oppressive systems wherever possible, and either create their own zines or contribute to *Babyfish*. Making zines and xerox art could inculcate radical politics in part because xeroxing often means commandeering access to a machine, whether in a Kinko's managed by a friend, at work, or perhaps in the workplace of a friend,

[76] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Collage, *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 3, Winter 1989, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 2, Babyfish papers.
[77] Cohn, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848-2011*, 39; Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 162.

family member, or comrade.[78] Smith at times relied on his father's employer's machine to print *Babyfish*.[79]

The world of *Babyfish* was full of rich multigenerational political and artistic lineages. In contrast to the hardcore scene that coalesced around the Freezer Theatre just a few years prior, Smith emphasized connections between different counterculture generations and was inspired by his elders. While hardcore punk sought to erase history and disavow the present in order to create something new, Smith looked for connections to the past in order to build a continuum of resistance politics and culture. The 1990s were an era of 1960s nostalgia in popular culture (1994's Woodstock II music festival and marketing campaigns of Apple and Nike that used music by the Beatles and Gil-Scott Heron being notable examples of this nostalgia), with the aesthetics from the earlier era often being shorn from the political and cultural revolutions they were once tied to.[80] In a decade where "selling-out" was top of mind for participants in underground culture, Smith's "hippie-punk" style in dress, collage, poetry, and musical taste demonstrated this nostalgia did not have to represent an apolitical "hip capitalism," it could be informed by a desire for the continuation of the 1960s' unfinished revolutions.[81] Smith says of the zine's "hippie-punk" aesthetics, "we fused the two freely and without any—it wasn't ironic or anything like that. It was just like a full-on fusion of those subcultures."[82] Smith sought to build bridges between the 1960s' revolutionary movements in politics and culture and his

[78] Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 143–44; Duncombe discusses how zinesters not only performed acts of sabotage and time theft at work in order to create their zines, they also wrote about it in their zines, see Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 86–102. Artists and activists have hijacked tools from the workplace prior to the centrality of the xerox in movement printing as well— chapter 1 discussed how Leni Sinclair and other members of the Artists Workshop used mimeograph machines owned by WSU to print newsletters and literary publications.
[79] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Letter to M.L. Liebler," September 7, 1990, Box 2, Folder 2, Babyfish papers.
[80] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 4–9.
[81] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 16; Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 26–33.
[82] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.

present. In a reflection written after seeing the Grateful Dead perform live, Smith wrote that he wanted his generation to "celebrate the influence of the late 60's on the revolution in culture and life we want to move into the 90's. We can do this in all the glorious tye-dye we can find, but let us do this as children with an identity all our own and not just one of the sixties nostalgia. We are not throwbacks but a love that will not fade away."[83]

Smith explored this theme throughout *Babyfish #2*, publishing an interview with David Whittaker, who he met while protesting nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site. Whittaker regaled Smith with stories from his life enmeshed in various counterculture scenes, including being mentored by the Beats in San Francisco and Paris in the late 1950s, introducing a young Bob Dylan to Woody Guthrie, moving to Haight-Asberry in the 1960s and hosting a political radio show on San Francisco's KPOO, and reading spoken word poetry during punk and hardcore shows at Bay Area underground clubs. Whittaker refers to beatniks, hippies, and punks as "the three generation rainbow," and Smith argues that through Whittaker's life one can see "an entire revolutionary movement which expresses itself through poetry and music," spanning across the mid to late twentieth century.[84]

Babyfish also demonstrated the connections between 1960s and 1990s movements locally in the Cass Corridor. The zine was a clear descendent of the Artists Workshop's literary magazines *Change* and *Work*, with its rough-hewn self-printing, local color, urban imagery, radical politics, and Beat-esque prose style. Smith saw John Sinclair as a pivotal influence, recalling his experience reading Sinclair's collected writings in the 1972 book *Guitar Army*

[83] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Not Fade Away," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.
[84] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Dave Whittaker and the 3 Generation Rainbow," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 2, Autumn 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 1, Babyfish papers.

during his first months living in Detroit as crucial to his political development.[85] In *Babyfish* number one, Smith wrote that John Sinclair and the MC5 were "our Detroit mentors" pointing out that "Sinclair said so well that rock music needs to be integrated with the community it comes from and is played for."[86] Sinclair relocated to New Orleans in 1991, but Smith was able to meet him before his move.[87] Smith describes the connections between the 1960s and the 1980s-1990s Cass Corridor as "such a rich lineage."[88]

In the third issue of *Babyfish*, a caption beneath a political cartoon: " 'I'm sorry that people don't question authority like they used to in the '60s' the man says on the radio invading my half sleep / I am sorry that the man speaking is so out of touch with 1989 that he does not realize that people DO question authority and resist it each and every day."[89] Zines like *Babyfish* were part of building and sustaining that antiauthoritarian ethos and community through the 1980s and '90s. Scholarship on zine-making has noted that these publications "have often created the communities they wish to speak to and for."[90] This was true for *Babyfish*, and the Cass Corridor as portrayed in the zine came to life in community spaces Smith co-created with his peers. The zine and these community endeavors took spaces that had been deemed worthless and invested them with beauty, value, and the "prefigurative politics" that were at the beating heart of the growing anarchist movement.

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[85] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[86] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, "Underwater Rain," *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 1, Spring 1988, Detroit, MI, n.p. Christopher Becker personal collection.
[87] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Interview By Author, August 2, 2023, Cookeville, TN; Joseph Irrera, "John Sinclair (1941-2024)," OffBeat Magazine, April 3, 2024, https://www.offbeat.com/news/john-sinclair-1941-2024/.
[88] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023.
[89] *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 3, Winter 1989, Detroit, MI, n.p., Box 1, Folder 2, Babyfish papers.
[90] Brandon W. Joseph and Drew Sawyer, "Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines," in *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2023), 13.

Detroit's Autonomous Zones: 404 Willis and The Trumbullplex

According to Smith, the conditions of deindustrialization along with the texts *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* by Peter Lamborn Wilson (under the pseudonym Hakim Bey) and *bolo'bolo* by Hans Widmer (under the pseudonym P.M.) were the impetus for the creation of the anarchist space and punk venue 404 Willis, which opened in spring 1991.[91] "We read the book, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*," Smith remembers. "A bunch of us read it and said, 'Okay, we're gonna start an autonomous zone.'"[92] Central to anarchist thought and practice in this era was the concept of "prefigurative politics," which Uri Gordon defines as "grassroots alternative-building from below" with the goal to "define and realize anarchist social relations within the existing society" rather than waiting for revolution to come first.[93] Both *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* and *bolo'bolo* theorized prefigurative politics as they discussed the establishment of spaces that function independently of and outside capitalist hegemony. The temporary autonomous zone (TAZ) concept was especially influential in the revitalized anarchist spheres and underground culture of the 1980s and 1990s, and the concept remains important today, with radicals creating "autonomous zones" across the U.S. during the uprisings of summer 2020 in response to George Floyd's murder.[94]

Lamborn Wilson defined the temporary autonomous zone as "an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, or imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush

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[91] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023; Sunfrog, "Anarchy in Action: 404 Willis: Detroit's Autonomous Zone," *Fifth Estate*, April 1, 1992, #339 edition; Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991); P.M., *Bolo'bolo*, 30th Anniversary (New York: Autonomedia, 2011).
[92] Smith, interview, February 14, 2023.
[93] Gordon, "Anarchism Reloaded," 40.
[94] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 185; Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 297–98; Ezra Marcus, "In the Autonomous Zones," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2020, sec. Style, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/style/autonomous-zone-anarchist-community.html.

it."[95] Music-making and festivals are important aspects of the autonomous zone, which structures itself around joy and celebration in contrast to "revolution," which Lamborn Wilson portrays as a dour Sisyphean chore. He argues that temporary autonomous zones have existed throughout history, but are difficult to recognize because the TAZ's "greatest strength lies in its invisibility…As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated) it must vanish, it will vanish."[96] Historical examples Wilson explores in the book include pirate ships, the Paris commune, and maroon communities of the formerly enslaved.

404 Willis resulted from Smith and his comrades putting TAZ theory into practice, and the space reintroduced radical politics to Detroit's punk scene, which since the days of the MC5 had avoided directly engaging with the political realities of their city. An announcement about the new space in FE read, "The venue will cater punk, folk, film, poetry, and performance as well as a center for political events…Racist, sexist, or homophobic bands will not be booked and similar attitudes on the part of the people attending events are not welcome…"[97] In one FE article, Smith called 404 Willis "Detroit's autonomous zone."[98] In its three-year tenure, 404 Willis joined a network of autonomous spaces opening across the country.[99] Through this network, the venue helped connect Detroit with the new generation of the revitalized anarchist movement by bringing groups like Anti-Racist Action into the Cass Corridor.[100] "There really became a youth anarchist scene in Detroit during the early nineties that was independent of the *Fifth Estate*," Smith remembers.[101]

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[95] Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 80.
[96] Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*.
[97] "Detroit Seen," June 1, 1991.
[98] Sunfrog, "Anarchy in Action: 404 Willis: Detroit's Autonomous Zone."
[99] Rob Los Ricos, "Anarchist Spaces Open Across the Country," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1993, #343 edition.
[100] Los Ricos.
[101] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.

Fig. 4.2. 404 Willis in 1992. Source: Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.

The space was located in a black-painted storefront on W. Willis Ave. between the Cass Corridor Food Co-op, a long-running institution where Smith frequently worked, and the Willis Gallery, an artist-run venue known for fostering the Corridor's visual artists (Fig. 4.2).[102] "The acoustics were probably terrible," Smith remembers of the 404. "The entire interior of 404 Willis was cement. It was just like a little cement cave."[103] Many concert attendees chose to urinate in the alley outside because, "You had to walk through the band to get to the bathroom."[104] In addition to local acts, some of the most well-known political punk bands of the era including Chumbawumba, Los Crudos, and MDC played 404 Willis. The venue was listed in *Maximum Rocknroll*'s *Book Your Own Fucking Life*, a zine that guided a generation of punk bands through

[102] Jacob, "Kick Out the Jams."
[103] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[104] Smith.

the process of booking tours around the U.S. by publishing the contact information for DIY venues.[105] However, the collective did much more than just host punk shows during the 404's three-year run. They hosted performances by musicians in the "anti-folk" movement (which was also characterized by DIY methods and used satirical lyrics to mock the commercialization of the mainstream folk scene), provided a platform for spoken word poetry, and were a home base for radical organizing and protest.

As was seen with *Babyfish*, 404 Willis continued many of the practices, theories, and goals of the Artists Workshop, with different aesthetics in a new era. One priority shared by the two projects was a desire to sever live music from bars and the selling of alcohol. In a statement of purpose, the collective wrote that the 404 would be "an underground music venue for bands and people who dislike 'bar scene' attitudes and trends. It is a place where respect for all is appreciated and racist, sexist, and homophobic bullshit confronted. It is run by a diverse group of people who are not waiting for society to change by itself, but are trying to do it themselves."[106] Like the AWS, the 404 collective also combined live music, visual art, and poetry, encouraging anyone with an idea to express themselves. During these years Smith developed his poetry practice both live and on the page, self-publishing and performing locally and around the country. Alongside his then-partner Lisa "Lust" Klieger the couple earned comparisons to Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin for their "gender-bending, provocative prose."[107] "Words on Willis," a regular showcase of "subversive urban verse," led the *Detroit Metro Times* to dub 404 Willis the best poetry venue in the city.[108] "To see 20 year olds race onto the stage (such as it is) emoting

[105] Pearson, *Rebel Music in the Triumphant Empire*, 40.
[106] "404 Willis Flyer," n.d., Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.
[107] Lisa Cramton-Wexton, "Aural Sex," *Detroit Metro Times*, December 7, 1994, Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.
[108] Dennis Shea, "Best Poetry Reading (Venue)," *Detroit Metro Times*, 1992, Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.

their poems kinda wildly, recalls the energy and idealism that fought Vietnam-era masters of war and culture," the publication wrote. The venue also served as a gallery for visual artists, and one benefit to support *Babyfish* featured a "xerox art show."[109]

The 404 collective additionally published their own zine, which Smith found time to contribute to while creating *Babyfish*, writing for FE, and running the venue. *Mutiny*, which the 404's rabblerousers were bold enough to say was surreptitiously printed at Comprehensive Accounting Services Corporation, offered "articles, artwork, critique on American society" from the Corridor-based collective.[110] The zine features writing in which the collective develops their anarchist politics ("Community? Autonomy? Or Community for Autonomy?") and their roots in their local environment, covering how Engler's cuts to welfare, Medicaid, and energy assistance and closing of state-funded mental health facilities affected life in the neighborhood. "Hanging out at 404 Willis in the Cass Corridor," a collective member writing under the penname Wenita Revolution writes, "the results of [Engler's] plan were quickly apparent. The Corridor area is the center of welfare hotels, soup kitchens, liquor stores, blood banks next to the Jeffries projects. It is overrun with garbage, rotting abandoned buildings, homeless and the unemployed. It's a vortex of hopelessness suddenly flooded with solidarity men."[111] To help their neighbors who were affected by these policy decisions, lack of basic city services, and other brutal realities of the late twentieth century deindustrialized city, the collective opened the space to the Corridor community on Sundays for "free clothes, food, and coffee" as "a direct response to the war on

[109] "404 Willis Flyer."
[110] *Mutiny*, 1992, Detroit, MI, Babyfish papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
[111] Wenita Revolution, "Detroit Off Welfare; Capitalizing on the Homeless," *Mutiny,* 1992, Detroit, MI, n.p., Babyfish papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

the poor," offered a free box outside the venue, and maintained a pay-what-you-can policy for shows.[112]

Following in the footsteps of the FE's Eat the Rich Gang, the 404 collective continued a Corridor tradition of political theater with lively protest actions and festivals—TAZ theory named festivals as one manifestation of the autonomous zone. One of their first events was the Detroit Festival Against Wealth & Waste in June 1991, an action which involved protestors taking off most of their clothes, covering themselves in mud, leaves, and sticks, and adopting the primitive personae of "mud people" to accost businessmen holding a conference at the Detroit Athletic Club, a space used by Detroit elites to make backroom deals.[113] "We were all covered in mud, and we were like barking at these rich people. It was one of the most exuberant days of my life," Smith remembers (Fig. 4.3).[114] The festival also involved musical performances and the sacrifice of a television on Wayne State's campus. Other notable gatherings and events hosted by 404 Willis included a festival celebrating bisexual art, identity, and activism; a "Kill the Car"

[112] "Detroit Seen," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1992, #338 edition.
[113] Mike, "Detroit Festival Against Wealth & Waste Says: Eat the Rich!," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1991, #337 edition.
[114] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.

protest in front of General Motors headquarters; and an "Anti-Columbus Day" program to counter the celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' landing.[115]

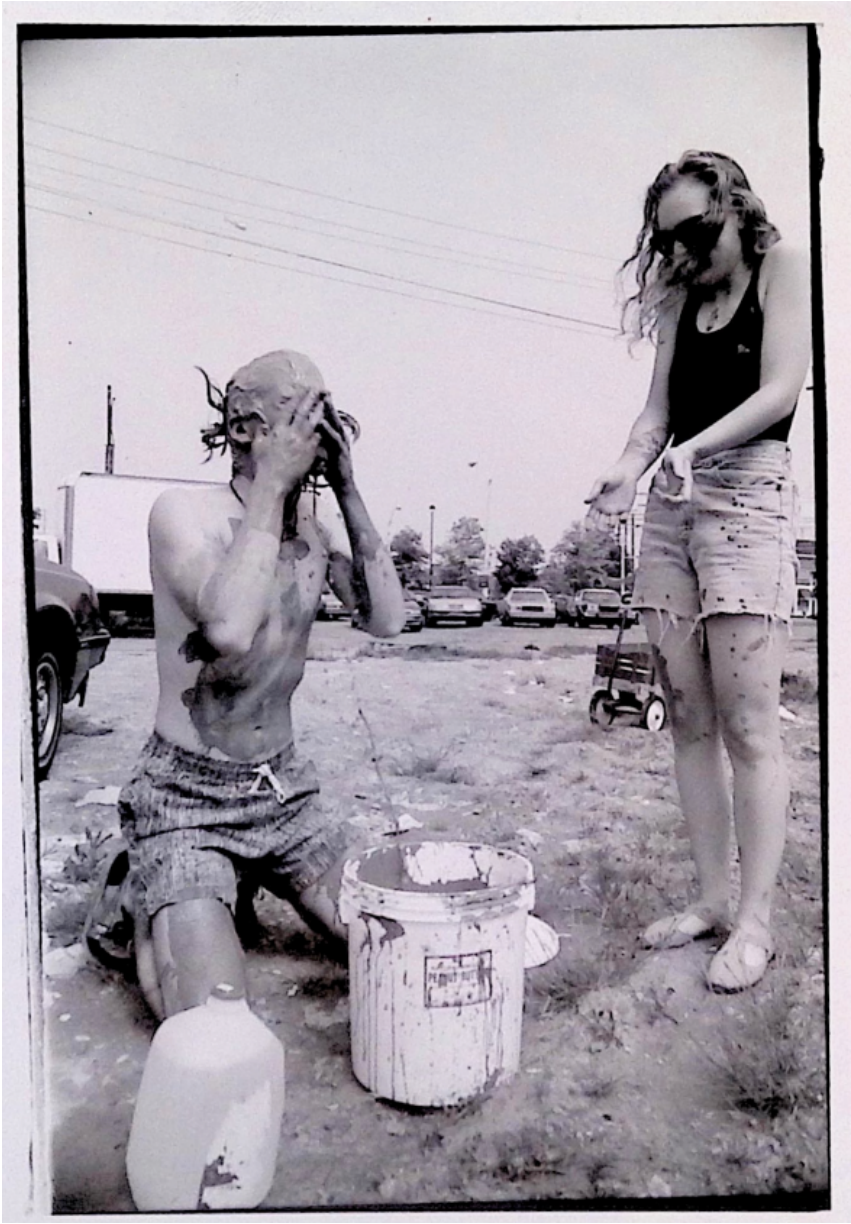

Fig. 4.3. Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith and then-partner Lisa "Lust" Klieger becoming "mud people." Date unknown ("mud people" attended multiple rallies in this period). Source: Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.

[115] "Detroit Seen," September 1, 1992; "100th Anniversary of the Automobile: Kill the Car-No More Roads!," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1996, #348 edition; "Detroit Seen," April 1, 1993; "The Wreck of Columbus Day 1992."

Smith and his comrades at 404 Willis were also a key force in moving the anarchist scene in Detroit towards a more liberated vision of gender and sexuality, similar to the world seen in *Babyfish*. While the anarcho-primitivist utopia as envisioned by FE and Fredy Perlman was anti-patriarchal and believed in uninhibited sexuality, the paper did not do in-depth coverage of queer life and politics until the 1990s. Smith contributed articles and poetry to FE from a queer perspective and covered local and national activism for queer rights. His work on a special issue about Dope, Queer Sex, & Anarchy "generated more controversy and negative responses than any one [issue] since our Special Women's issue published in 1970," revealing that perhaps the arguments about the role of patriarchy in the establishment of the state and technocracy were not deeply penetrating some members FE's readership.[116]

There was praxis in addition to theory in this area as well. FE and 404 Willis collaborated on the festival celebrating bisexuality and members of both collectives held a lively protest against a local Cracker Barrel restaurant, as the national chain refused to hire queer people under the guise of health concerns in the midst of the AIDS crisis.[117] In a scene straight out of a *Babyfish* collage, mixed genders of anarchist protestors passionately kissed in front of police and Christian counter-demonstrators at the suburban Cracker Barrel. Smith remembers a similar incident happening at 404 Willis, "the night Chumbawumba played, some Bible thumper came and had one of those giant sandwich board-type signs saying that we're all gonna go to hell. And all these women were coming out on the street and taking their tops off and making out in front of this guy and like flirting with the Bible thumper! It was just insane."[118]

[116] "Detroit Seen," September 1, 1993.
[117] "Detroit Seen," September 1, 1992; Doug Graves, "Crackers at the Barrel," *Fifth Estate*, Winter 1992, #338 edition.
[118] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.

By the spring of 1994, the 404 collective was suffering from high rates of turnover and burnout, and "many of the poets, punks, pissed off wimmin and anarchists who made up the 404" shifted their focus to "the 'elsewhere/elsewhen' project of the cooperatively owned Trumbull Theater."[119] The Trumbullplex housing collective, which was referred to as the Trumbull Theater in its early days, was formally incorporated in 1993, though the property had been a home to radicals since the 1970s.[120] The Trumbullplex is located in the Woodbridge neighborhood just a few blocks west of the 404 down W. Willis Ave., across the John C. Lodge freeway boundary demarcating the Cass Corridor neighborhood. In the 1990s, Woodbridge was full of dilapidated Victorian mansions like those on the Trumbullplex property.

Smith remembers the transition as "an extension of what was happening at 404" involving "a pretty tight Venn Diagram of people" from the two spaces.[121] When the three-year lease at 404 W. Willis was up, it made sense to move to a bigger space, where there were two large houses, a theater, and gardens. "It had a room twice the size," Smith remembers. "And did we really need two punk rock venues?"[122] This project was an even more ambitious experiment in changing the terms of daily life and attempting to live outside the bounds of capitalism, as the activists had purchased the building from their former landlord and could live on site. The additional space and ownership of the property helped ease the exhaustion from running the 404, but the collective still kept themselves busy. Some of the Trumbullplex's early activities included hosting the meetings of the Detroit Women's Action Collective, and national organizations

[119] Sunfrog, "404 Is Dead! Long Live 404!," *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1994, #344 edition.
[120] Jhon Clark, "Trumbullplex: DIY Anarchist Living in the Heart of Detroit," *Fifth Estate*, Spring 2011, #384 edition, Fifth Estate Archive, https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/384-spring-2011/trumbullplex/.
[121] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[122] Smith.

including Anti-Racist Action, which used militant direct action to thwart white power organizing, and Anarchist Black Cross, a prisoner support network.[123]

Fig. 4.4. Trumbull Theater (later known as The Trumbullplex) mural advertising a benefit to support *Babyfish Lost Its Momma*, 1994. Source: Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.

Through the 1990s, Lamborn Wilson continued to write about the TAZ and developed a complementary theory he called the Permanent Autonomous Zone. "Certain cracks in the Babylonian Monolith appear so vacant that whole groups can move into them and settle down,"

[123] "D.W.A.C.!! Detroit Women's Action Collective," *The Rumble*, Summer 1997, Issue 1 edition, sec. Insert in Fifth Estate #349; "Anti-Racist Action: Challenging the Right," *The Rumble*, Summer 1997, Issue 1 edition, sec. Insert in Fifth Estate #349; "Detroit Anarchist Black Cross Formed," *The Rumble*, Summer 1997, Issue 1 edition, sec. Insert in Fifth Estate #349.

he wrote in an article FE published.[124] Deindustrialization created these "cracks" in cities across the Rust Belt during this period, leaving abandoned buildings and cheap rent so that experiments with alternative living that might previously have existed only for the length of a party, a protest, or a festival could become longer lasting. The Trumbullplex collective members continued to use Lamborn Wilson's work to theorize their activity, referring to their home as "Detroit's Permanent Autonomous Zone."[125]

Former Trumbullplex resident Jhon Clark, who resided at the space from 2000 to 2003 remembers that, like the 404 collective, "We didn't want it to just be like a punk space, and it wasn't! We did so many things" including "weddings and funerals and fashion shows and hip-hop shows from our friends at the Food Co-op."[126] Like the 404 collective, members of the Trumbullplex created their own zine, *(Dis)connection*, "a networking journal for anarchist collectives and counterinstitutions" which built connections between Detroit anarchists and others working on their own autonomous zones around the country. The zine featured writing from other anarchist collectives, articles about organizing efforts to create a national Network of Anarchist Collectives, a guide on how to start a "rural land collective," and a reflection on how the Trumbullplex collective overcame challenges in the wake of a 1995 fire that partially destroyed one of the houses on the property ("We questioned if as a collective we could really unite under the pressure. But, strangely enough we did. OUR ANARCHY WORKED.").[127]

In an FE article reflecting on the end of the 404 Willis, Smith wrote that through working on the space "we actually felt the potential of anarchy infect the fabric of our lives."[128] Using the

[124] Hakim Bey, "P.A.Z. Permanent Autonomous Zones," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1995, #345 edition.
[125] "Save Detroit's Permanent Autonomous Zone (PAZ)," *Fifth Estate*, January 1, 1995, #345 edition.
[126] Jhon Clark, Interview by the Author, phone, October 6, 2023.
[127] *(Dis)connection*, 4, no date, Detroit, MI, n.p., Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith personal collection.
[128] Sunfrog, "404 Is Dead! Long Live 404!"

conditions of deindustrialization in 1990s Detroit to their advantage, the participants in 404 Willis and the Trumbullplex put anarchist theory into practice. “It was a nonstop kind of anarcho-pageant,” Smith remembers of these years. “I really could, in my mind, visualize the Woodbridge neighborhood and the Corridor neighborhood as this kind of template for an anarchist society inside of late capitalism as it was dying all around us.”[129]

The Trumbullplex’s continued existence warrants its reputation as Detroit’s Permanent Autonomous Zone, as not many autonomous spaces make it past their thirtieth birthday. The Trumbullplex today is occupied by a majority Black youth arts collective, which came to live in the houses in the wake of intentional efforts to diversify the space. Clark, who is white, says that “the fact that it was primarily a white collective membership in a predominantly Black city was always a topic of conversation.” Known as “the freaky white kids” of the neighborhood, Clark remembers, “we never figured out how to be more inclusive.” A “mass exodus” of older members from the houses during the Covid-19 pandemic allowed for a younger, more diverse generation to take ownership of the space, an evolution that warrants further scholarly attention.[130]

Conclusion

On January 1, 1995, Smith, his then-partner Lisa Klieger, and their young daughter Ruby Jazz left Detroit for an extended road trip, eventually settling in rural middle Tennessee to join a growing group of queer anarchist communes in the area—the most famous of these being the Radical Faerie Sanctuary at Short Mountain in Liberty, Tennessee.[131] Smith has resided in middle

[129] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[130] Clark, Interview by the Author.
[131] Alex Halberstadt, “Out of the Woods,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2015, sec. Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/magazine/out-of-the-woods.html.

Tennessee ever since. The Trumbullplex was his final home in Detroit.[132] From 2002 to 2010, the FE was published at Pumpkin Hollow, the "anarcho-pansexual collective farm" in Tennessee where Smith lived for thirteen years.[133] While members of the publication remained based in southeast Michigan, the FE's workers and contributors grew increasingly geographically decentralized in part due to Smith's influence recruiting people from the southeastern U.S.[134]

Scene participant William Boyer remembers these years in the Cass Corridor as "an incredibly vibrant time where you really believed you could change the world."[135] However, Boyer says that in the wake of Clinton's election, the political and artistic movements in the neighborhood weakened as participants realized they had lost the fight against the incinerator, found that the deindustrialized inner city was not where they wanted to raise young children, and failed to muster the same enthusiasm railing against a seemingly color-blind liberal administration that they could against a Republican leader. While Boyer never left the city, many of his comrades did.

Another, much more well-known, music scene based in the Corridor neighborhood soon followed the one described here. In the late 1990s a collection of bands that were also inspired by the 1960s, in sound rather than in politics, cohered around the Gold Dollar Bar, a former drag revue on Cass Avenue between Peterboro and Temple. Inspired by reissue compilations of little-known 1960s garage bands like Crypt Records' *Back from the Grave* series and the Lenny Kaye-curated *Nuggets*, bands including the White Stripes, the Detroit Cobras, the Von Bondies, and the Dirtbombs took a style pioneered by the Gories to national fame, with music industry leaders

[132] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[133] Smith.
[134] Sunfrog, "Still from Detroit: Cass Corridor to Pumpkin Hollow," *Fifth Estate*, Spring/Summer 2005, No. 368-369 edition.
[135] Boyer, Interview by Author, Detroit, MI.

believing Detroit would become "the next Seattle."[136] These bands for the most part did not participate in the same kind of political projects to help their neighbors or neighborhood as the generation of Detroit punk bands, zines, and venues described in this chapter. The Gold Dollar's second life as a rock club lasted from 1996 to 2001, after which the building was left vacant, and burned down in 2019.[137] The following chapter will explore why this was a common ending for the Cass Corridor's bohemian spaces.

Cultural studies scholar Tavia Nyong'o writes that "zines have played a critical role in sustaining revolutionary counter-moods in today's reactionary times."[138] The legacy of the zines and autonomous spaces of the 1980s and '90s is palpable in contemporary radical politics, as zine fests flourish in cities large and small, xerox aesthetics are recreated using digital technologies, contemporary movements like Occupy Wall Street use blurry photocopies to signify their affinity with previous social movements, and autonomous zones are created to agitate for change.[139] Zines like *Babyfish* offer us a "queer counter-archive as a set of tools and techniques for anti-fascist living."[140] With the current authoritarian drift of the most widely used social media platforms, a tangible medium that is more difficult to censor is likely to become increasingly relevant, a revolutionary counter-mood more needed than ever.

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[136] Miller, *Detroit Rock City*, 297; For more on Detroit's 1990s garage rock scene, see: Miller, 257–88; *It Came From Detroit* (Plus One Productions, 2009), https://itcamefromdetroit.vhx.tv.
[137] Louis Aguilar, "Gold Dollar Bar Destroyed by Fire Is 1 of 34 Empty Ilitch-Linked Buildings," *The Detroit News*, July 23, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/07/23/fire-ex-gold-dollar-bar-suspicious-fire-chief-says/1804484001/.
[138] Tavia Nyong'o, "In Love and Rage: The Revolutionary Counter-Mood of Zine Culture," in *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2023), 348.
[139] Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin*, 161–62; Marcus, "In the Autonomous Zones"; Jenna Wortham, "Why the Internet Didn't Kill Zines," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2017, sec. Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/28/magazine/why-the-internet-didnt-kill-zines.html.
[140] Nyong'o, "In Love and Rage: The Revolutionary Counter-Mood of Zine Culture," 343.

Today the storefront at 404 W. Willis is home to a Black-owned business, a women's clothing store called Flo Boutique.[141] While the temporary autonomous zones of 404 and *Babyfish* and even the Cass Corridor itself have long since vanished, the permanent autonomous zone lives on. Amidst a gentrifying neighborhood of refurbished Victorians, the Trumbullplex retains its derelict character and offers a home for Black youth arts and artists. In 2016, the city of Detroit even sided with the Trumbullplex against a real estate developer in a legal battle to purchase several adjacent lots.[142] The collective was already using the property for fruit trees, a fire pit, and parking for their school bus, and had attempted to purchase the land but were frustrated by the city's byzantine land bank auctions. This was a notable victory in a city where land is increasingly concentrated into the hands of several billionaire owners, as will be explored in the following chapter.

In his letter from editor in the final issue of *Babyfish*, Smith wrote of his beloved Corridor community: "it is clear there is still an enormous amount of unpublished work which the community deserves a chance to see…this is our final entry in a prolific Cass Corridor journey."[143] Unfortunately, much of this unpublished work remained unseen. After Smith left the city, the Cass Corridor's bohemians faced increasing challenges to their art, activism, and existence, as one of Michigan's most powerful families set into motion their own radical reimagining of the neighborhood.

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[141] Kate Roff, "Surviving Detroit's Highs and Lows: Flo Boutique Owner on Navigating a Crisis," Model D, February 2, 2021, https://www.modeldmedia.com/features/FloBoutique.aspx.
[142] J. C. Reindl, "Detroit Sides with Anarchists over Developer in Land Bid," *Detroit Free Press*, June 9, 2016, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2016/06/09/detroit-sides-anarchists-over-developer-land-bid/85562778/.
[143] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, Babyfish Lost Its Momma, 6, 1994, Detroit, MI, 7, Babyfish papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

Chapter 5—Dereliction by Design: The Rise of Ilitchville and the Death of the Cass Corridor, 1987-2019

If you were a young, rebellious metro Detroiter seeking to escape suburban conformity and you decided to visit the Cass Corridor today, you would find that the neighborhood no longer exists.[1] On most maps, the area just north of downtown Detroit and south of Wayne State University, bound by the freeways I-94 and I-75 on the north and south, Woodward Avenue to the east and the John C. Lodge freeway to the west, is now labeled "Midtown." While the occasional business in the area uses the Cass Corridor name to signal credibility and authenticity, the neighborhood described in the proceeding chapters is receding into memory.[2] Local writers have noted that, "One way to discern between old and new residents is whether they call the district the Cass Corridor or 'Midtown.'"[3]

It is not just the neighborhood's name that has been removed. The next thing you would notice on your visit is an almost endless sea of surface parking lots. You would be unable to plan for the cost of parking in one of these lots, since the rate varies wildly and may cost up to sixty dollars. If your visit were during the summer, you might feel blistering heat emanating from the concrete, or, if it had recently rained, you may slosh through water rushing to overwhelm the sewer system and carry pollution into Great Lakes waterways. These negative environmental effects are supposed to be mitigated by landscaping, according to city codes, but in these lots the required landscaping elements are absent.[4] Dotted between the parking lots you would see historic buildings—homes, apartment complexes, and former businesses—that seem blighted

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[1] Special thanks to the anonymous folks behind the Terrible Ilitches social media accounts, which inspired and informed this chapter.
[2] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 103.
[3] Kurashige, 100; Sands, "Would The Real Midtown Please Stand Up? A Cultural History of the Cass Corridor."
[4] Joe Guillen, "Ilitches Can Maximize Parking Money Thanks to Favorable City Ruling on LCA Lot Designs," *Detroit Free Press*, January 11, 2018, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2018/01/11/ilitch-parking-lca/948374001/.

beyond repair. They may have broken windows or doors, brick or stone that is painted over with garish colors, holes in the walls or roof, and yards strewn with trash. You might assume these properties are owned by the beleaguered city government, which cannot seem to keep up with Detroit's highly publicized "comeback," rather than the billionaires who receive credit for the business activity and development projects that this narrative hinges upon.[5] You would be unlikely to see neon blight tickets tacked on these properties that are frequently given out to city residents and Black-owned community spaces, such as Olayami Dabls' African Bead Museum.[6] Moving through the space on foot, you may feel unsafe due to the lack of other pedestrians, businesses, and life. However, if there is an event at the nearby Little Caesars' Arena (LCA), safety concerns increase with the crowds as people from surrounding areas swarm into the city to blow off steam, misbehave, and drive drunk.[7] Research has shown that crime increases when a major sports stadium is built in a neighborhood, especially on game days.[8] While a few Cass Corridor establishments remain, like the Old Miami bar and the Trumbullplex housing collective, the LCA dominates and determines the character of the neighborhood today. This transformation from a place where "the rebellious and the weird and the radical and the misfits can get together" to a vacant stadium parking lot was accomplished by a billionaire family, using taxpayer money from a bankrupt city.[9]

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[5] Rebecca J. Kinney, "'America's Great Comeback Story': The White Possessive in Detroit Tourism," *AMERICAN QUARTERLY* 70, no. 4 (December 1, 2018).
[6] Allie Gross, "Blighted Ilitch Buildings near New Arena Go Unticketed," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 2018, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2018/05/23/blight-tickets-ilitch-cass-avenue-detroit/623246002/; Micah Walker, "Building on Detroit African Bead Museum Site to Be Razed," BridgeDetroit, June 28, 2024, http://www.bridgedetroit.com/building-on-detroit-african-bead-museum-site-set-for-emergency-demolition/.
[7] Steve Neavling, "Aftermath of Tigers Opening Day: Red Cups, Blood, Rotting Food, Vomit, Broken Windows & Beer Bottles," *Motor City Muckraker* (blog), April 6, 2013, https://motorcitymuckraker.com/2013/04/06/aftermath-of-tigers-opening-day-red-cups-blood-rotting-food-vomit-broken-windows-beer-bottles/.
[8] John Charles Bradbury, Dennis Coates, and Brad R. Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey.," *Journal of Economic Surveys* 37, no. 4 (September 1, 2023): 1410–11, https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12533.
[9] Sands, "Would The Real Midtown Please Stand Up? A Cultural History of the Cass Corridor."

From the late 1990s to 2017, an enormous swath of the Cass Corridor was purchased by the Ilitch family, the owners of the Little Caesars' Pizza franchise, as part of a publicly financed deal to build the LCA and an adjacent fifty-square-block mixed-use development they dubbed the District Detroit.[10] The family accumulated what would amount to approximately seventy properties using anonymous limited liability companies (LLCs), in addition to thirty-four parcels sold to them for a total of one dollar during Detroit's 2013 bankruptcy. These properties were abandoned and left open to the elements, sometimes for years, violating city codes, with the goal of driving down land value in the surrounding neighborhood, a process critics have dubbed "dereliction by design."[11] Chris Ilitch admitted to the practice in an interview with the *Detroit News*. "It took us fifteen years to accumulate the property so we can achieve this transformative project," he said of the LCA. "It's been painful to not be able to develop some of that property because every time we made a move, the price for other property would shoot way up. But we had to wait, and that hurt."[12]

While the LCA opened in 2017, the other promised initiatives were never completed, despite receiving multiple rounds of public investment. As nearby areas of downtown Detroit have developed new housing and businesses, much of the Corridor is occupied by Ilitch-owned parking lots that sit vacant except on event days. The Cass Corridor today looks like someone wiped out the buildings, homes, and life that used to exist there, leaving only concrete. This is essentially what happened, and it did not occur during the age of the urban crisis, but during the Great Recession and Detroit's bankruptcy. This project of erasure was funded by Detroit's city

[10] Louis Aguilar, "District Detroit: Inside the Ilitches' Land of Unfulfilled Promises," *The Detroit News*, May 22, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/05/22/ilitch-companies-control-district-detroit-area-land-larger-than-downtown/2636965002/.
[11] Perkins, "How the Ilitches Used 'dereliction by Design' to Get Their New Detroit Arena."
[12] Louis Aguilar, "LCA's to-Do List Gets Smaller and Smaller," *The Detroit News*, September 1, 2017, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2017/09/01/little-caesars-arena-todolist/105205002/.

government and the state of Michigan. The Ilitches have been given $1.8 billion in tax incentives over the decades for the LCA and adjacent developments, an amount said to be one of the largest incentive packages ever awarded.[13]

Fig. 5.1. Aerial view of what was once the Cass Corridor in 2019. Source: Kirk Pinho/Crain's Detroit Business.

Many of Cass Corridor bohemia's most important and well-known spaces, including the Women's City Club, the Gold Dollar Bar, and the Freezer Theater, were either purchased by the Ilitch family or torn down to make way for the LCA. As was discussed in Chapter 3, The Women's City Club was purchased by the Ilitch family in 2017 and is currently being renovated at a painstaking pace to someday become a co-working space.[14] The Gold Dollar, purchased by the Ilitches in 2015, was left open to the elements, occupied by squatters, and burned in a

[13] Tom Perkins, "District Detroit Is Getting More Incentives than You Think," BridgeDetroit, April 10, 2023, http://www.bridgedetroit.com/district-detroit-is-getting-more-incentives-than-you-think/.
[14] Reindl, "Ilitches Plan $25M Renovation of Historic Detroit Building — with Big Tenant Coming."

"suspicious fire" in 2019.[15] The Freezer Theater building was bulldozed in 2013 to make way for a surface lot.[16]

The bohemian character of the Corridor neighborhood has been greatly muted. Many of the artists and activists discussed in this dissertation had left the Corridor and the city by the turn of the century. Some went to metro Detroit suburbs; Peter and Marilyn Werbe moved to Oak Park, Lorraine Perlman to Ferndale.[17] Larissa Stolarchuk was living in North Port, Florida when she died in 2006.[18] Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith made rural middle Tennessee his permanent home after the mid-1990s. John Sinclair moved first to New Orleans in 1991, then to Amsterdam a decade later, though he did return to the Corridor for several years prior his death in 2024.[19] Working-class and poor residents across the neighborhood have been pushed out as the Ilitches purchased low-income housing complexes, evicted the tenants, and left the buildings to rot.[20] Other historic spaces in the neighborhood that the Ilitches own include a Chinese theater and merchant's association that was once the heart of Cass Corridor's Chinatown, demolished in 2023 amidst community outcry, and the first office of Detroit's African American newspaper *The Michigan Chronicle*, which currently sits vacant with no plans for redevelopment.[21]

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[15] Aguilar, "Gold Dollar Bar Destroyed by Fire Is 1 of 34 Empty Ilitch-Linked Buildings."
[16] Paul Beshouri, "Cass Storefront and Former Freezer Theater Now Erased," Curbed Detroit, October 18, 2013, https://detroit.curbed.com/2013/10/18/10185684/cass-storefront-and-former-freezer-theater-now-erased.
[17] Werbe, interview; Perlman, interview.
[18] "Larissa Stolarchuk Obituary."
[19] Irrera, "John Sinclair (1941-2024)"; Baetens, "Marijuana Activist and 'Detroit's Resident Radical' John Sinclair Has Died at 82."
[20] Louis Aguilar, "Ilitch-Owned Apartments near LCA Pile up Blight Tickets," *The Detroit News*, August 23, 2018, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/08/24/ilitch-apartments-little-caesars-arena/872177002/.
[21] Louis Aguilar, "Building in Detroit's Ex-Chinatown Razed; Controversy Mounts over Why It Wasn't Saved," *The Detroit News*, July 30, 2023, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2023/07/30/razing-building-detroits-ex-chinatown-controversy/70493621007/; Louis Aguilar, "Ilitches Buy Another Cass Corridor Building near Arena," *The Detroit News*, July 24, 2015, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/2015/07/24/ilitch-cass-corridor-michigan-chronicle/30641967/.

Still, many in Detroit and the metro area have a favorable opinion of the Ilitch family. Mike and Marion Ilitch, founders of Little Caesar's, gained a long-lasting reputation as saviors of Detroit for their work purchasing and restoring the movie palace the Fox Theatre in the late 1980s and relocating their workforce from the suburbs during the peak of white flight.[22] Mike, a child of Macedonian immigrants, graduate of Detroit's Cooley High School, and former baseball player, built a business empire in food, entertainment, and real estate during the late twentieth century, a period characterized by corporate flight from his home city.[23] Credited as a "key figure in the revival of downtown Detroit" by local and national media "his life seemed to imitate the plot of a Horatio Alger tale."[24] The first Little Caesar's restaurant, named after "Marian Ilitch's admiring nickname for her husband," opened in the metro Detroit suburb of Garden City in 1959 and the company grew to become the world's largest pizza franchise on the popularity of its inexpensive "hot 'n' ready" pizzas.[25] Ilitch was also media savvy. After civil rights veteran Rosa Parks was robbed and beaten in her home in 1994, he wrote a check to assist with her rent payments at the apartment complex where she relocated.[26] The "Mike Ilitch quietly paid Rosa Parks' rent" story was an exaggeration. Parks faced eviction in 2002, which would not have

[22] Joann Muller, "Billionaire Mike Ilitch, Founder Of Little Caesars Pizza Chain, Dies At Age 87," *Forbes*, February 10, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/joannmuller/2017/02/10/billionaire-mike-ilitch-founder-of-little-caesars-pizza-chain-dies-at-age-87/.
[23] Bill McGraw and John Gallagher, "Tigers, Red Wings Owner and Pizza Titan Mike Ilitch Dead at 87," *Detroit Free Press*, February 10, 2017, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/columnists/2017/02/10/ilitch-detroit-pizza-red-wings-tigers-hockey-forbes/91475642/.
[24] McGraw and Gallagher.
[25] Bill Shea, "Ilitch's Legacy Spanned Pizza, Sports, Redevelopment, Philanthropy," Crain's Detroit Business, February 10, 2017, https://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20170210/news/170219978/ilitchs-legacy-spanned-pizza-sports-redevelopment-philanthropy.
[26] Christopher Botta, "Ilitch Aids Civil Rights Pioneer Rosa Parks, Others," *Sports Business Journal*, February 24, 2014, https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Journal/Issues/2014/02/24/Champions/Ilitch-Rosa-Parks.aspx.

occurred if Ilitch had kept up with those rent payments. She was allowed to live at the complex rent-free until her death in 2005, but the narrative bought the family years of good publicity.[27]

Ilitch used his success in the restaurant business to purchase Detroit's major league hockey team the Red Wings in 1982 and baseball team the Detroit Tigers in 1992, influence local politics, buy land and property at rock bottom prices, and pursue a dream of turning downtown Detroit into a destination for wealthy suburbanites to engage in leisure and consumption. The couple's seven children have been granted key positions in family-owned companies including Olympia Development and Olympia Entertainment, and their son Christopher became CEO of Ilitch Holdings upon Mike's death in 2017.[28] Though he was beloved as his ownership of the Red Wings and the Tigers brought Stanley Cups and World Series games, Mike Ilitch rarely granted interviews despite an adoring local press and "he could bristle when asked about internal matters, such as his financial relationship with the City of Detroit, which benefited greatly from his presence and lured him with public funds."[29]

Through his ownership of two of the city's major league sports teams, Ilitch orchestrated three massive stadium projects that reshaped Detroit's landscape during the late 1990s and early 2000s—the demolition of Tiger Stadium and the building of Comerica Park, the demolition of the Pontiac Silverdome and the building of Ford Field to entice professional football team the Detroit Lions to return downtown, and the demolition of Joe Louis Arena and the building of the

[27] Brian Manzullo, "When Rosa Parks Was Robbed, Little Caesars's Founder Stepped Up," *Detroit Free Press*, February 16, 2017, https://www.freep.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/02/16/little-caesars-founder-mike-ilitch-rosa-parks-rent/97989230/.
[28] J. C. Reindl and Brent Snavely, "Ilitches Make It Official: Chris in Line to Lead Family Business Empire," *Detroit Free Press*, May 5, 2016, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2016/05/05/christopher-ilitch-ilitch-holdings-mike-marian-little-caesars/83992742/; Bill McGraw, "Ilitch's Anguish," *Detroit Free Press*, May 2, 1994.
[29] McGraw and Gallagher, "Tigers, Red Wings Owner and Pizza Titan Mike Ilitch Dead at 87."

Little Caesar's Arena.[30] Due to his efforts "Detroit's sports district became the most compact in urban America," with the LCA six blocks from Comerica Park and Ford Field, surrounded by a sea of parking lots that charge the highest fees in the nation to park on game days.[31] The Ilitch family has repeatedly sold Detroit taxpayers a vision of the mixed-use developments that would appear surrounding the sports stadiums, so long as the Ilitches were given enough public money to construct them. Through the decades, the family has used the same strategies to gain public money for the same development projects; years later, Detroiters are left with broken promises, parking lots, and blighted buildings.

This dissertation has explored alternatives imagined and enacted by Cass Corridor artists and activists at different periods in the late twentieth century. This chapter narrates the alternative vision of the Corridor that took shape by the early years of the twenty-first century. Using historian Kyle Mays' work combining indigenous and urban history, I frame the Ilitch family as "settler capitalists" who use "neoliberal settler narratives" to legitimize and manufacture consent for their projects and the use of public funds to build them.[32] Mays notes that into the present day "elite whites place contemporary Detroit within nineteenth century narratives of colonization and expansion."[33] Scholars including Mays, Rebecca Kinney, and Tiya Miles have observed that dispossession and extraction are not new in the city of the straits.[34] The Ilitches' "dereliction by design" manufactured the vacant land needed to build these frontier narratives, which legitimizes

[30] Roger Biles and Mark Rose, "'Gilbertville,' 'Ilitchville,' and the Redevelopment of Detroit.," *Journal of Planning History* 20, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 9, https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513219866139.
[31] Biles and Rose, 10; Douglas A. McIntyre, "This Is the Most Expensive American Stadium to Park Your Car," 24/7 Wall St., April 12, 2022, https://247wallst.com/services/2022/04/12/the-most-expensive-american-stadium-to-park-at/.
[32] Kyle T. Mays, "Narratives of Dispossession and Anticolonial Art in Urban Spaces.," *Southern Cultures* 28, no. 3 (September 1, 2022): 135, https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2022.0032.
[33] Mays, 136.
[34] Mays, *City of Dispossessions*; Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland*; Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits*.

their relentless appetite for the city's tax dollars. Detroit's mayors from Coleman Young to Mike Duggan have supported the Ilitch family's projects and opened the city's coffers for the billionaires, even when the city itself was bankrupt.

However, after decades of blanket approval from the media, in recent years journalists and activist groups have focused on the Ilitches as figureheads for the damages caused by corporate welfare in Detroit. As seen throughout the history of the Cass Corridor bohemia, Detroiters were not passive victims of the top-down forces constructing the neoliberal city around them. Scholars have noted the organizing and activism that has grown in the years during and since Detroit's bankruptcy as Detroiters organize to fight neoliberal austerity practices with groups including Detroit Eviction Defense, Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, among many others, demonstrating that Detroiters will continue to refuse the logics that dispossess them.[35] These organizers are influenced by and grow out of Detroit's legacy of militant organizing in the realms of labor and racial justice, from the Cass Corridor and elsewhere across the city. As this chapter will reveal, activists' clever campaigns against the Ilitches have helped begin to change decades of positive public opinion on the family.

The story of the Cass Corridor's demise contributes to a growing literature on the recent history of Detroit, exploring how the city's bankruptcy, water crisis, and subprime mortgage crisis have shaped the urban environment, as well as broader discussions on how neoliberal politics and economics has impacted urban development.[36] While blight manufacture and the creation of the "tourist bubble" have been common practices in the neoliberal city worldwide,

[35] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 172–222; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 114–39; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 209–19.
[36] Rector, *Toxic Debt*; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*; Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services*; Herscher, *The Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit*.

Detroit and the Cass Corridor offer an exceptional case study due to the concentration of power, property, and influence into the hands of so few actors. Ilitch organizations own the majority of the Cass Corridor area, while Quicken Loans owner Dan Gilbert has amassed a large concentration of properties in downtown Detroit. The result has been "arguably the largest private urban revival effort in the nation's history."[37]

Postindustrialism in Detroit

The Ilitches' power and influence in Detroit has been compared to that of auto industry titans Henry Ford and William C. Durant, men who had famously contemptuous relationships with the city and moved their factories to the suburbs to avoid paying taxes or following regulations.[38] The Ilitches gained similar power by taking advantage of and benefitting from trends in municipal governance that were ascendant across the country and globe with the rise of neoliberalism, an economic theory and "political order" that proposes "human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" according to historian Gary Gerstle.[39] This logic has allowed corporate leaders to leverage the twin crises of the Great Recession and Detroit's bankruptcy to regain control of the inner city from its majority Black citizens and leaders, to the extent that they now act as "Detroit's de facto city planners" and use public funding for development projects that profit their private companies.[40] Naomi Klein calls this "disaster capitalism."[41]

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[37] Biles and Rose, "'Gilbertville,' 'Ilitchville,' and the Redevelopment of Detroit.," 6.
[38] Biles and Rose, 19.
[39] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*; David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (March 1, 2007): 22, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716206296780.
[40] Biles and Rose, "'Gilbertville,' 'Ilitchville,' and the Redevelopment of Detroit.," 18.
[41] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 6.

Scholars in history, geography, and sociology have theorized a "neoliberal city" that emerged in the mid-twentieth century as urbanism was a central preoccupation of this economic doctrine.[42] The neoliberal city is characterized by a withdrawal of government support from the public sphere—slashing of funding for welfare, schools, libraries, public transportation, and the like—and transitioning those services to businesses through public-private partnerships. Geographer David Harvey's description of the change from a managerial city, mostly concerned with the dispersal of services to local populations, to an entrepreneurial city, in which municipal governments focus on fostering development and innovation, is an influential conception of this shift.[43] Cities were crucial to the development of neoliberalism, as these were the sites where this new economic model was first practiced. The emblematic example of this is University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman's students the "Chicago Boys" who were given free rein to re-structure the economy of Santiago, Chile after the U.S.-backed coup there in 1973.[44] In the United States, former manufacturing centers struggling with the simultaneous flight of people and capital were logical places to continue this experimentation—they would not put up much of a fight against austerity measures and were desperate for investment. The austerity regime that politicians and business leaders forced on New York during the 1970s after Gerald Ford's decision not to bail it out of bankruptcy is a representative example from the era.[45] In the Rust Belt this became "postindustrialism"—a model for the renewal of former manufacturing centers through public-private partnerships and "a pervasive ideology that privileged white-collar jobs

[42] Diamond and Sugrue, *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar Urban America*; Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*.
[43] Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism."
[44] Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," 26; Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 94–103.
[45] Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics*, 7.

and middle-class resident."[46] This idea was implemented in the Cass Corridor, as Scott Kurashige notes that the "rebranding of 'Midtown' first emanated from a non-profit-driven 'arts, eds, and meds' strategy that positioned museums, hospitals, and university campuses as anchors of the postindustrial economy."[47] In this process "local officials abandoned social democratic goals in favor of corporate welfare programs, fostering and increasing economic inequality among their residents in the process."[48]

Shifting public subsidies from social programs to the hospitality industry was part of the an embrace of neoliberal economics by the New Right.[49] Urban historian Aaron Cowan demonstrates that tourism did not gain traction in U.S. cities until the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the same time there was widespread resentment against a liberal consensus that had funded social programs for the urban poor.[50] Richard Nixon's administration was pioneering in its embrace of a federal urban policy that supported public-private partnerships.[51] Ronald Reagan's administration continued this backlash against Great Society urbanism, emphasizing that cities should "concentrate on increasing their attractiveness to potential investors, residents, and visitors."[52]

The hospitality industry had spent years advocating for public subsidy to support their business, and was ready to take advantage of the moment, as it "sensed opportunity in the desperation of political leaders" facing increasingly bleak economic headwinds.[53] Tourism projects offered "tangible physical developments" and "provided seemingly instant results" to

[46] Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 3.
[47] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 101.
[48] Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 3.
[49] Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble," 35.
[50] Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 7.
[51] Cowan, 31; Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 16–19.
[52] Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble," 35.
[53] Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 6.

the beleaguered mayors of Rust Belt cities and "tourism development came to serve, in many cases, as proof that the city as whole was vital, successful, worthy of visitors, capital investment, and media attention."[54] This is why Detroit's mayors, despite their political differences, have all been Ilitch supporters. Rather than invest in making cities more livable for residents, municipal governments subsidized the hospitality industry's project to remake the inner city into a landscape of leisure for suburbanites and other visitors, a "tourist bubble" that envelops the traveler during sports-viewing, shopping, professional conferences, dining, gambling, or museum visits.[55] Judd's analysis found that between 1976 and 1986, ten billion dollars was spent on 250 tourism development projects in U.S. downtowns, and compared the efforts' effects on the built environment and economy to the urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s.[56]

Professional sports and the stadiums where people gather to watch them are a central aspect of the tourist bubble, and "aggressive team owners" like Mike Ilitch convinced economically struggling municipalities to grant them fantastic public subsidies in the post-1960s era.[57] As in Detroit, "many of these recent stadiums were built in cities with declining populations and shrinking fiscal resources."[58] Building publicly funded sports stadiums over inner-city communities is part of a postwar endeavor Eric Avila calls "suburbanizing the city center" in his study of Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium, which opened in 1962 on the site of the razed Chicano neighborhood of Chavez Ravine.[59] Cowan writes that even though "cookie-cutter stadiums were in the heart of the city, they were designed around the needs of suburbanites: closely linked with interstate highways, surrounded by thousands of parking spaces, and in an era

[54] Cowan, 7.
[55] Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble," 36.
[56] Judd, 36.
[57] Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 105.
[58] Cowan, 112.
[59] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 145.

of urban decline and unrest, designed to give suburban fans a sense of protection and separation from the downtown as a whole."[60] Geographer Neil Smith describes this process as the creation of a "revanchist city," a violent re-taking of urban space by the white middle-class.[61]

How do these team owners and urban mayors convince local populations to agree to use their tax dollars to fund projects helmed by billionaires? Local growth coalitions, "an institutional alliance between the local corporate community and the local government," are the power players of the neoliberal city and the driving force behind garnering public money for projects like stadiums.[62] The Ilitch family's partnership with the mayor's office and employees in city organizations like the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) illustrates the local growth coalition at work in Detroit. When seeking to create consent for the building of a new stadium, members of the local growth coalition often turn to propagandistic narratives that "equate new stadiums with economic growth or heightened community self-esteem."[63] They claim that the construction of the facilities and operation of the stadiums will bring much-needed jobs and community members will feel proud of being a "big-league city."[64] Despite decades of economic research confirming that sports stadiums offer little to no economic benefits to their surrounding communities, local growth coalitions successfully gain public funding for sports stadiums based on the duel promise of jobs and "civic pride."[65] Sociologists Delaney and Eckstein's study of publicly-funded sports

[60] Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 118.
[61] Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, 42.
[62] Kevin J. Delaney and Rick Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3.
[63] Delaney and Eckstein, 186.
[64] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey.," 1421.
[65] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey."; Delaney and Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums*, 187.

stadiums found that local growth coalitions tend to be more powerful in struggling cities where "much is riding on policies that will supposedly generate growth or at least slow down economic decline."[66] Local media, often owned by the powerful corporations and wealthy individuals in the local growth coalition, functions "as editorial sycophants for proponents of new publicly subsidized stadiums," uncritically repeating these narratives and printing press releases with little analysis.[67] As this chapter will discuss, this dynamic is reflected in the media coverage of the Ilitches and their empire in Detroit.

The Cass Corridor/Midtown and the LCA have been at the center of Detroit's tourism development strategy.[68] However, the LCA and the surrounding, still incomplete District Detroit project are not the first or even second time the Ilitch family has gained public funding for a sports stadium and adjacent, never-completed development in downtown Detroit.

Foxtown

The Ilitch family began using public funds to turn downtown Detroit into a tourist bubble with their 1987 purchase of the dilapidated movie palace the Fox Theatre. First opened in 1928, the Art Deco masterpiece was designed by architect C. Howard Crane and features a medley of pan-Asian and Middle Eastern motifs characteristic of the period, described by the *Free Press* as "a one-of-a-kind gallery of gargoyles and gods whose décor is as arresting as many of the prominent acts that have played there."[69] It remains one of the largest surviving movie palaces of

[66] Delaney and Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums*, 15.
[67] Delaney and Eckstein, 18.
[68] Kinney, "'America's Great Comeback Story': The White Possessive in Detroit Tourism."
[69] Bernie Shellum, "Out-Foxed: Theater Is Sold, but Developer Still Has Big Plans," *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1987; Michael H. Hodges, "Fox Theatre's Rebirth Ushered in City's Renewal," *Detroit News*, September 18, 2003, https://archive.ph/20121205184440/http://info.detnews.com/redesign/history/story/historytemplate.cfm?id=215.

the 1920s and the 1988 restoration continues to be hailed as a "rebirth" that "ushered in [the] city's renewal."[70]

The Ilitch family's investments in downtown Detroit beginning in the 1980s reflect the shifts in municipal governance happening in deindustrialized cities around the country, as enterprising capitalists convinced cash-strapped local governments to assume the financial risk while they invested in blighted downtowns. Before buying the Fox, Ilitch had already gained much goodwill with Detroiters after he purchased the Detroit Red Wings in 1982, smuggled hockey players out of Eastern Bloc countries, and obtained Stanley Cup wins for the team and positive publicity for the city.[71] Professional sports were an area where many Detroiters found pride during this difficult era, with the Tigers also bringing the city a World Series win in 1984, and so Ilitch was able to earn public trust through his sports successes.

Ilitch used similar scheming and corruption to buy up property in the Grand Circus Park neighborhood where the Fox was located as he would later in the Cass Corridor. Before he could get the theater from then-owner Charles Forbes Sr., he purchased other downtown theaters including the United Artists Theater and the Adams Theater through "third party companies to conceal his identity" in order to "keep prices down."[72] His purchase of the Fox from Forbes was subsidized by the city, as then-mayor Coleman Young and then-director of Detroit's Community and Economic Development Department Emmett Moten Jr. saw the opportunity to draw Little Caesars downtown as a victory against white flight. Young's administration put in place policies that would benefit Ilitch for decades, especially the 1975 creation of the semi-public DDA, which provides subsidies, can acquire and sell land, and broadly acts on the city's behalf in

[70] Hodges, "Fox Theatre's Rebirth Ushered in City's Renewal."
[71] McGraw and Gallagher, "Tigers, Red Wings Owner and Pizza Titan Mike Ilitch Dead at 87."
[72] Jack A. Seamonds, "Inside Information," *Detroit Free Press*, January 30, 1989.

business deals with the goal of spurring economic development in downtown.[73] The DDA, the DEGC, and the Community and Economic Development Department were all entities created to drive investment in downtown through real estate development and public-private partnerships (Moten worked at the latter two). Moten, who would leave his post with the city to work for Ilitch and helped the family gain favorable real estate deals for decades, was even at this early stage being referred to in the *Free Press* as Ilitch's "lieutenant."[74]

Forbes identified the theater district as ripe for investment as early as the late 1970s and, in contrast to the Ilitches, invested his own money buying properties in Grand Circus Park, including the Fox, the State Theater, and Women's City Club. However, because he funded these projects himself and banks were reluctant to make loans on these properties, Forbes was slow to renovate the buildings (he did successfully renovate and open the State Theater). Young and Moten were desperate for the good publicity that would result from Little Caesars' relocation from the suburbs. They pressured Forbes to sell and agreed to a deal in which the city would purchase the Fox, parking spaces, and some adjacent property for $5.5 million and transfer it to the Ilitches along with a related package of $12.2 million in loans and grants "intended to finance renovation of the Fox building and help Ilitch move Little Caesars' headquarters from Farmington Hills." In return, the Ilitches would invest $15 million in renovating the theater. City officials strong-armed Forbes by threatening to condemn the vacant buildings he owned if he refused to sell. "Given a choice, I probably wouldn't have sold the Fox. But you can't fight City Hall," Forbes told the *Free Press*, acknowledging that the Fox renovation would happen faster

[73] David Whitaker, "Detroit Downtown Development Authority Report" (City of Detroit City Council, Legislative Policy Division, March 25, 2024), https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2024-03/DDA%20Report%20ms.pdf.
[74] Seamonds, "Inside Information."

with Ilitch as the owner. “The city decided it was important to have Mike Ilitch come downtown.”[75]

“It was a coup for Mayor Young,” the *Free Press* wrote.[76] While the Ilitches were lavished with praise for renovating the Fox and leaving the suburbs during a time Detroit was nicknamed Murder City and auto industry crisis spread despair across the region, their move and the theater’s renovation were subsidized by tax dollars. Forbes took greater risk when he purchased the building without these incentives, and was repeatedly punished for getting in the way of the Ilitches’ plans. In 1993, Forbes filed a lawsuit against the city and the DDA claiming that “the city promised to give him several pieces of property” if he sold the Fox to Ilitch. The city eventually gave Forbes the Wolverine Hotel to settle his lawsuit against the Ilitches, but Forbes claimed that “city officials—particularly Moten—and Ilitch tried to block the transfer because they knew the Wolverine stood in the path of the originally proposed site for a new Tigers stadium.” The *Free Press* noted that taxpayers would be left “buying other Forbes holdings in which the city has committed $3.5 million in development loans and aid to help Forbes restore a faded theater district, also as part of the settlement.”[77]

The Ilitches never collaborated with Forbes to restore the theater district. Despite the good publicity the family continues to wring out of the Fox restoration, they are no historic preservationists and have razed a number of significant buildings that advocates say should have been saved. The United Artists’ Theater, also designed by Crane and sold to the Ilitches by the city in 1997, could have been restored but was instead left to deteriorate and was razed for a

[75] Shellum, “Out-Foxed: Theater Is Sold, but Developer Still Has Big Plans.”
[76] Shellum.
[77] Tina Lam, David Migoya, and Jeff Taylor, “Developer’s Boon in Stadium Path,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 29, 1996.

surface parking lot in 2022 amidst outcry.[78] The Adams Theatre suffered a similar fate.[79] After the Fox, the Ilitches did not successfully restore another building for over thirty years, despite owning many of Detroit's historic and architectural treasures, until they opened the Eddystone apartment complex in 2021.[80]

While media often acts as a key part of the local growth coalition, and this has certainly been the case in Detroit, reporters have investigated the land speculation and corruption of Detroit's business and political elites. In 1986, the *Detroit Free Press* sued the Young administration for its refusal to provide the paper with city land records that the law required be made publicly available.[81] This lawsuit resulted in the ever-loyal Emmett Moten being briefly jailed for contempt of court, as Young refused to give up the documentation on the amount, location, and value of the city's land holdings.[82] While Moten threatened that the *Free Press'* lawsuit and investigation would derail negotiations for Chrysler's Jefferson Avenue East plant and cost the city auto industry jobs, the newspaper did not back down.[83] The project ended up going forward and some even credit Moten with keeping the auto industry in Motor City during the 1980s.[84] The Jefferson East plant, now called Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex, and

[78] Amy Elliott Bragg, "Bragg: Peer into the Past of Detroit's United Artists Theatre before It's Gone," *The Detroit News*, October 6, 2022, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2022/10/07/bragg-peer-into-the-past-of-detroits-united-artists-theatre-before-its-gone/69544712007/; Candice Williams, "HUD: Demolition Not Required of United Artists Theater," *The Detroit News*, October 28, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/10/28/hud-demolition-not-required-united-artists-theater/2484604001/.
[79] Dan Austin, "Adams Theatre," *Historic Detroit* (blog), accessed September 18, 2024, https://www.historicdetroit.org/buildings/adams-theatre. Austin's *Historic Detroit* blog is an invaluable resource on history of Detroit's buildings.
[80] Aguilar, "Ilitch Family Revives Its First Historic Detroit Building in 30 Years."
[81] Patricia Edmonds, "Moten Jailed for Withholding Files," *Detroit Free Press*, September 11, 1986.
[82] Dave Lawrence, "No Pleasure in Sending Him to Jail," *Detroit Free Press*, September 14, 1986.
[83] Edmonds, "Moten Jailed for Withholding Files"; Lawrence, "No Pleasure in Sending Him to Jail."
[84] Candice Williams, "Emmett Moten, a Detroit Development Pioneer, Is Still Leading Projects after Four Decades," *The Detroit News*, June 7, 2024, https://www.detroitnews.com/in-depth/news/michigan/michiganians-of-year/2024/06/06/emmett-moten-detroit-news-michiganian/73473759007/.

General Motors' (GM) Detroit/Hamtramck Assembly plant are the only two automobile plants still operating within Detroit city limits, and Moten negotiated the land deals for both.

The controversial deal for the GM plant saw Moten and the city exchange a promise of six thousand auto industry jobs for razing the vibrant working-class Poletown neighborhood, which displaced 4,200 people and 1,500 homes in one of the most notorious uses of eminent domain in U.S. history, holding the ignominious record of the most people ever moved in the shortest time in the United States.[85] This pushed more people out of the city at a time Detroit's population loss was at crisis levels, and GM only delivered half of the promised jobs. Moten feels no regrets about the reviled Poletown decision, and in a 2024 interview with the *Detroit News*, Moten said that his "proudest accomplishment" was "working out the deal that assembled land" for the Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant.[86] Moten's political savvy, willingness to sacrifice ordinary people on the altar of the deal, and steadfast loyalty to Young made him an ideal candidate for the Ilitch organization. After helping the Ilitches gain the Fox and other theatre district properties, he was hired as vice president of development for Olympia Development, a position he held from 1988 to 1995.[87]

A decade after acquiring the Red Wings, in 1992 Mike Ilitch purchased his second professional sports team, the Detroit Tigers, for $85 million.[88] A former player in the Tigers' farm system, Ilitch had a strong emotional connection to the team. However, that connection did

[85] Jeanie Wylie, *Poletown: Community Betrayed* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); "Poletown Neighborhood Council v Detroit: Private Property and Public Use 410 Mich 616 (1981)," *Michigan Bar Journal* 88, no. 3 (March 2009): 18–23.
[86] Williams, "Emmett Moten, a Detroit Development Pioneer, Is Still Leading Projects after Four Decades."
[87] Robert Ankeny, "A Hotel for 'can-Do' Moten: Pick-Fort Shelby Is Longtime Developer's Latest Achievement," Crain's Detroit Business, August 5, 2008, https://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20080805/EMAIL01/584331739/a-hotel-for-can-do-moten-pick-fort-shelby-is-longtime-developers.
[88] Aguilar, "District Detroit"; Ilitch would later attempt to purchase Detroit's professional basketball team as well. Mike Ozanian, "Why Michael Ilitch Did Not Buy The Detroit Pistons," Forbes, December 15, 2010, https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2010/12/15/why-michael-ilitch-did-not-buy-the-detroit-pistons/.

not extend to the beloved Tiger Stadium, located on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull in the Corktown neighborhood where the Tigers had played since 1896.[89] Ownership of the team mandated that Ilitch rent Tiger Stadium from the city and enact a 90-cent ticket surcharge to fund renovations of the historic structure. Ilitch decided after purchasing the team that the Tigers needed a new stadium, and the city was going to pay for it, as it had for his previous development projects. Once Tiger Stadium was gone, Ilitch was able to concentrate his real estate ventures in downtown and ensure that the city and its residents would be paying him, not the other way around. Standing in the way was a city ordinance that banned the use of local government funds for sports stadiums.

As soon as he purchased the team, Ilitch began a relentless campaign to overturn the city ordinance banning the use of public funds for stadium construction and to additionally gain funding from the state. He also decided to simply not honor his contract with the city, and used the ticket surcharge that was supposed to fund upkeep of the city-owned building to pay a Little Caesar's subsidiary for "food counters, menu signs, pizza pans, dough trays, ladles, cheese scoops and oven mitts, among other items."[90] During Olympia's time at Tiger Stadium, the company refused to make city-ordered repairs to the building or to turn over its annual financial reports, both of which were required in its contract with the city.[91] A scrappy grassroots group of baseball fans and preservationists called the Tiger Stadium Fan Club tried to fight the overturning of the ordinance against using public funds for stadiums, which they knew would be the death knell for Tiger Stadium, but city leadership, local media, and the Tigers out-organized

[89] Andy Jacoby, "Demolition by Neglect in Detroit and the Battle to Save Historic Tiger Stadium: Lessons for Baseball Park Preservationists," *Denver Sports & Entertainment Law Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 48.
[90] Michael Betzold and Ethan Casey, *Queen of Diamonds: The Tiger Stadium Story* (San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2000), 336.
[91] Bill McGraw, Robert Ourlian, and Paige St. John, "Ilitch Collects, City Trusts," *The Detroit Sunday Journal*, November 26, 1995, Vol. 1 No. 2 edition, Wayne State University Library Digital Collections.

and out-spent them.[92] As was seen in in Chapter 2 with the anarchist environmental activists who fought the construction of the Detroit trash incinerator, the Tiger Stadium preservationists were caricatured by Coleman Young as white suburbanites fighting investment and progress that the city desperately needed.[93]

In November 1993, Detroit had its first change in mayoral administrations in twenty years with the election of Dennis Archer. While Coleman Young was a fierce critic of Archer, and had been running against Archer until he was forced to drop out of the race due to health problems, the two men were similar in their support of giving the city's tax dollars to the Ilitch family's development projects.[94] Like the mayors before and after him, Archer wanted megaprojects to redevelop downtown, and a new baseball stadium was the centerpiece of his administration's efforts. Detroit was not unique in building a new baseball stadium in the mid-1990s. The completion of the celebrated Camden Yards in Baltimore in 1992, which marked a shift away from the unpopular multiuse stadiums of midcentury, triggered a wave of baseball stadium construction around the country.[95] The Ilitches and Detroit city officials visited Camden Yards during the campaign for a new baseball stadium.[96] By the following year, Ilitch announced that a new baseball stadium would be built downtown, conveniently across the street from the Fox Theatre.

While the Ilitches were stumping for city and state funds to build the new stadium, Mike Ilitch introduced the public to his "best idea yet," a mixed-use development called "Foxtown" that would accompany the stadium, providing shopping and leisure experiences while

[92] Rebecca M. Long, "Detroit's Field of Dreams: The Grassroots Preservation of Tiger Stadium" (Clemson University, 2012), 72, 87, https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/1371.
[93] Long, 88–89.
[94] Lekan Oguntoyinbo, "Stadium Vote a Boost for Archer," *Detroit Free Press*, March 20, 1996.
[95] Frank Andre Guridy, *The Stadium: An American History of Politics, Protest, and Play* (New York: Basic Books, 2024), 252–58; Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 115–16.
[96] Aguilar, "District Detroit."

redeveloping a desolate downtown.[97] "From homes to museums, he sees lots more than stadium," trumpeted the *Free Press*, while printing full-color renderings Olympia provided.[98] These renderings show an early version of the "40-block sport-shopping entertainment complex with arched wrought-iron signs spanning street entrances" that would appear in different forms over the years each time Olympia wanted public funding for a new project. The "concept" for Foxtown was shared with the public to manufacture consent for the stadium funding referendum, though that money could only be used to build the baseball stadium, not Foxtown. Already setting the stage to ask for more public money, Olympia spun a fantasy of "future phases" of the project with "150 new homes in the Brush Park neighborhood and a light rail line." The *Free Press* noted that while Governor John Engler supported the use of over $200 million in state funds for the project, legislators from outside the metro Detroit area and 67 percent of Michigan voters did not.[99] While the renderings the newspaper printed showed a branch of the Motown Museum, Nike, and Crate & Barrel, when reached out for comment, Motown said they were "surprised" to be included and the retailers denied they would be willing to come to downtown Detroit.

Ilitch wanted $230 million in state funds to create Foxtown, but found getting money from the state was harder than asking for it from city officials, even with the governor on his side.[100] The Foxtown development languished in part because it was unpopular at the state level to spend money on Detroit.[101] Rather than go to Lansing to campaign for the money himself, Ilitch sent Archer to do it on his behalf. The *Free Press'* editorial staff criticized Ilitch's vague

[97] McGraw, "Ilitch's Anguish."
[98] Tina Lam and Jeanne May, "The Ilitch Vision," *Detroit Free Press*, March 24, 1994.
[99] Lam and May.
[100] Free Press Editors, "Foxtown: It Needs Caution in Lansing and Candor from Ilitch," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 1994.
[101] McGraw, "Ilitch's Anguish."

plans for the development, writing in multiple opinion pieces that the state should not fund it unless Mike Ilitch got personally involved and created plans with "real details about what the state will be buying in this deal."[102] Though the family had sent lobbyists to the state legislature, in June 1994, the legislature adjourned without giving money to Foxtown and Ilitch threw a temper tantrum.[103] While meeting with the press at a Red Wings game, "With eyes glaring, neck bulging, and fist shaking, Ilitch assailed politicians and members of the media and public who have questioned the Foxtown plan."[104]

As the 1996 referendum vote inched closer, the Ilitches continued to present renderings and wring propaganda out of sympathetic Detroit media as they advocated for state funding for Foxtown and city funding for a new baseball stadium. Mike Ilitch even granted a rare interview to the *Detroit News*, spinning the reporter his Foxtown fantasy: "We're certainly not going to be parking there."[105]

In the spring of 1996, Detroiters voted in favor of the stadium funding proposal. Eighty-one percent of voters rejected Proposal A, which would have blocked the city from using $40 million in bonds to help build the new stadium.[106] The pro-stadium growth coalition, comprised of the city's biggest power players, spent heavily on radio and television ads in which Archer appeared as the "chief pitchman," and the mayor campaigned against the referendum in churches throughout the city.[107] The coalition additionally ensured the wording of the referendum was confusing, voters had to vote yes to mean they were against using public funding for stadium

[102] Free Press Editors, "Foxtown: It Needs Caution in Lansing and Candor from Ilitch."
[103] Free Press Editors, "Tiger Stadium: Firmer Plans, More Details Needed for next Pitch," *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1994; McGraw, "Ilitch's Anguish."
[104] McGraw, "Ilitch's Anguish."
[105] Jon Pepper, "We All Know Ilitch Believes in Dreams, Now the Question Is, Does Detroit?," *The Detroit News*, March 17, 1996, sec. C.
[106] Tina Lam, "A New Baseball Stadium? Detroit Voters Say... Build It," *Detroit Free Press*, March 20, 1996.
[107] Oguntoyinbo, "Stadium Vote a Boost for Archer."

construction and no to mean they were for it. Just four years prior, 63 percent of voters had approved a ban on using city money for a new stadium.[108] However, that vote was before Mike Ilitch owned the Tigers, and local media attributed Ilitch's ownership and popularity as the reason that voters were now willing to hand over the funds.[109] The proposal included vague wording about "stadium construction" rather than specifically mentioning baseball or the Tigers, which left the door open to the use of city funds to build stadiums for the city's other professional sports teams.

Meanwhile, at the state level, Governor Engler worked to get around the legislature's reluctance to use tax dollars for the project by redirecting funds received from payments made by Native American tribes on their revenue earned through casino gambling in the state.[110] These payments were directed to a special fund set up as a public corporation managed solely by the executive branch, so that Engler could disperse the funds to local governments as he saw fit. The Michigan legislature, which had rejected using tax dollars to build the stadium or Foxtown, approved this use of funds received from casino gambling. The Tiger Stadium Fan Club sued to block the governor's ability to appropriate the funds without approval from the legislature, but the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled that the tribal funds were not subject to appropriations. Engler got the Ilitches the money they wanted for the new stadium.

In 1997, construction began on the 25-acre site for Comerica Park, named for a bank that had been part of corporate flight from Detroit in the 1980s.[111] While the Detroit-Wayne County Stadium authority owns Comerica Park, Olympia pays no rent and collects one hundred percent

[108] Lam, "A New Baseball Stadium? Detroit Voters Say... Build It."
[109] Lam.
[110] Jacoby, "Demolition by Neglect in Detroit and the Battle to Save Historic Tiger Stadium," 68–69.
[111] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 214; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 98.

of the profits from games and events.[112] Detroit's City Council voted to demolish Tiger Stadium in 2007, and the job was completed two years later.[113] The cost of Comerica Park ballooned to an estimated $361 million, over $100 million over the amount voters were told when they agreed to invest public funds in it four years prior, as Ilitch spent lavishly on tiger statues flanking the gates and a half-million-dollar carousel among other touches.[114] Buildings including the YMCA, which provided a "rare integrated space" in the city according to the FE, and the Wolverine Hotel were razed for surrounding surface lots that charge exorbitant fees on game days.[115] A loyal group of baseball fans still tends the grounds of the historic Tiger Stadium ballpark at Michigan and Trumbull.[116]

While Comerica Park was built, with the first game held at the stadium in 2000, Foxtown never materialized. *Detroit News* reporter Louis Aguilar writes that "Foxtown never moved past the concept stage" but the "Ilitches never let go of the Foxtown idea."[117] One of the worst economic crises in Michigan's history would open the door for the family to repeat the Foxtown/Comerica Park strategy, taking over an entire neighborhood and getting a bankrupt city and its struggling citizens to pay for it.

Ilitchville

Naomi Klein has argued that it takes a crisis or "shock" to unleash neoliberal doctrine's "true vision," because these moments of "major collective trauma" allow for democratic

[112] Tina Lam, "Tigers' Park Exceeds Cost by $100 Million," *Detroit Free Press*, June 6, 2000.
[113] Jacoby, "Demolition by Neglect in Detroit and the Battle to Save Historic Tiger Stadium," 72; Long, "Detroit's Field of Dreams: The Grassroots Preservation of Tiger Stadium," 103–4.
[114] Lam, "Tigers' Park Exceeds Cost by $100 Million."
[115] Lam, Migoya, and Taylor, "Developer's Boon in Stadium Path"; "Detroit Seen," Summer 1997.
[116] Long, "Detroit's Field of Dreams: The Grassroots Preservation of Tiger Stadium," 106–7.
[117] Aguilar, "District Detroit."

processes to be suspended or interrupted.[118] Detroit was a site of ongoing crises during the twentieth century, but the city reached a nadir in the wake of the Great Recession. Nationwide, the Recession caused housing prices to fall by a third.[119] Between 2007 and 2010, "the median household lost half of its wealth."[120] Detroit and the state of Michigan struggled economically for decades before the Recession hit and experienced some of its most extreme impacts. The Recession led to the auto industry's near collapse, averted by an $80 billion bailout from the federal government for Chrysler and General Motors, and the subprime mortgage crisis, which ravaged the housing market. Thirty-six percent of Detroit's properties underwent foreclosure proceedings between 2005 and 2014, spurring further population loss.[121] Property values statewide fell 23 percent.[122] During the Recession, Michigan had the highest unemployment rate in the nation, reaching 15.3 percent.[123] Detroit's Recession-era unemployment peaked at 24.9 percent in 2009.[124]

While communities around the country began to recover from the Recession after 2010, Michigan and Detroit did not rebound as quickly. Concessions made during the auto industry bailouts inhibited the United Auto Workers and resulted in one million auto industry jobs lost. The fallout from the Recession led to Detroit making the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in history in July 2013. Just 53 percent of working-age adults in Detroit reported being employed that year.[125] The city and its residents were not deemed worthy of a federal bailout. In 2008, as

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[118] Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 13.
[119] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 221.
[120] Gerstle, 221.
[121] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 47.
[122] Eric Lupher, "The Slow Recovery of Property Values in Counties Hit Hardest by the Great Recession," *Citizens Research Council of Michigan* (blog), June 7, 2024, https://crcmich.org/the-slow-recovery-of-property-values.
[123] "Michigan at a Crossroads: A Changing Economy," *Michigan at a Crossroads Policy Guide* (blog), accessed October 21, 2024, https://www.canr.msu.edu/michiganpolicyguide/a-changing-economy.
[124] Thomas J. Sugrue, "Preface to the Princeton Classics Edition," in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), xv.
[125] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 53.

the Recession began, then-mayor Kwame Kilpatrick had presented Mike Ilitch with a key to the city.[126] As most Detroiters and Michiganders struggled, the Ilitches opened the bankrupt city's coffers, plundering the municipality for land and taxes to finance developments that were never built.

Michigan's Republican governor Rick Snyder and the state's conservative legislature used emergency management, which involved invoking the state's authority to temporarily replace a city's elected leadership with economic "experts" chosen by the state, as a tool to discipline and control Michigan cities in fiscal crisis during this period. Geographer David Harvey has called this process "a coup d'état by financial institutions."[127] These experts proposed privatizing city services, implementing public-private partnerships, and raising costs for the provision of basic necessities such as water. In late 2012, Michigan lawmakers passed a new emergency manager law, Michigan Public Act 436, "the Local Financial Stability and Choice Act," which "authorized the state to seize control of all matters of city governance."[128] The law allowed the emergency manager to break contracts with unions, but not with banks, and included fine print to stop it from being revoked via citizen referendum.

Snyder had already placed Detroit's northern neighbor Flint under emergency management in 2011. The decision of Flint's emergency managers to change the city's water supply to the toxic Flint River as a cost-cutting measure led to the infamous water crisis that poisoned hundreds of thousands of residents and caused at least twelve deaths as the city's drinking water was contaminated with lead and *Legionella* bacteria for 18 months between 2013

[126] David Ashenfelter, "Honoring Horton's Humanity," *Detroit Free Press*, February 15, 2008.
[127] Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," 30.
[128] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 51–52.

and 2014.[129] In July 2013, Governor Snyder rendered the democratically elected leaders of Detroit impotent and placed the city under the control of emergency manager Kevyn Orr. When Detroit was taken over by emergency managers, it was one of six cities under state control, and roughly half of Michigan's Black population was living under the authority of emergency managers rather than the leaders they had elected.[130]

Scholars have shown how neoliberalism thrives best in authoritarian contexts, as it uses "mechanisms of coercion" to "impose market discipline on a society."[131] Detroit's bankruptcy and takeover by emergency managers, who were tasked with bringing the city to fiscal solvency no matter the costs, provided the excuse to remove the authority of the mayor and city council and force the interests of actors like the Ilitches and the city's creditors to be placed above the needs of residents. The city's elected leaders were scapegoated for a financial collapse that had more to do with the actions of banks and Wall Street speculators than the city government.[132] The costs were pensions of retired city employees, water access for residents who could not afford aggressive rate increases, funding to public schools and libraries. Three thousand Detroiters had their water turned off each week beginning in March 2014 for unpaid bills as low as $150, leading to a public health crisis, meanwhile commercial accounts including the Red Wings kept their water on despite owing back bills.[133] Funding for Detroit Public Schools was gutted and the city became a playground for charter school experimentation, which has not demonstrated improvement in academic achievement a decade later.[134] Scholars including Scott Kurashige,

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[129] Kurashige, 59; Kayla Ruble et al., "Flint Water Crisis Deaths Likely Surpass Official Toll," *FRONTLINE*, July 24, 2018, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/flint-water-crisis-deaths-likely-surpass-official-toll/.
[130] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 59.
[131] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 7.
[132] For an example of this kind of analysis, see: Amy Padnani, "Anatomy of Detroit's Decline," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/17/us/detroit-decline.html.
[133] Rector, *Toxic Debt*, 173–98; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 70; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 31.
[134] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 89–90.

Josiah Rector, and Mark Jay and Philip Conklin have explored in further depth the wide-reaching and ongoing consequences of the city's bankruptcy.[135]

Orr, a corporate lawyer with two degrees from the University of Michigan who had helped with Chrysler's restructuring, privatized city services and left the city with a budget that placed highest priority on blight removal and policing.[136] He was chosen by the state government because his self-presentation fit stereotypical ideas about Black masculinity, which the state's leaders felt would help Detroit residents accept their fate, and for his dedication to neoliberal doctrine.[137] Orr repeatedly emphasized that he had taken a pay cut to do the job and that he felt what he was doing was an act of public service for the city.[138] Orr's initial proposal was to give residents who were owed a pension from the city just ten cents to the dollar, while the banks would get between 75-82 cents.[139] He said of this plan, "I can cut somebody's throat and leave them to bleed out in the gutter with the best of them."[140] This statement was not intended for the city's creditors, but the low-income retirees whose budgets he was decimating. Orr was scolded in court twice for being too soft on the city's creditors in negotiations, and the banks ultimately settled for thirty cents on the dollar.[141] The pensioners ended up receiving much smaller cuts due to what became known as "the Grand Bargain," when Orr threatened to auction off the holdings at the city's revered Detroit Institute of Arts.[142] This brought nationwide attention, and pledges from foundations, wealthy donors, and funding from the state poured in to protect the treasured institution. It was not lost on many community members that the plight of Detroit's pensioners

[135] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*; Rector, *Toxic Debt*; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*.
[136] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 72; Nathan Bomey, John Gallagher, and Mark Stryker, "How Detroit Was Reborn: The Inside Story of Detroit's Historic Bankruptcy Case," *Detroit Free Press*, November 9, 2014.
[137] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 78–79.
[138] Bomey, Gallagher, and Stryker, "How Detroit Was Reborn."
[139] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 66.
[140] Kurashige, 65.
[141] Kurashige, 67.
[142] Bomey, Gallagher, and Stryker, "How Detroit Was Reborn."

was ignored until the wealthy thought they may lose a fine art museum. Meanwhile the city's creditors asked to settle for the least were given land that now has exponentially risen in value.[143]

In November 2013, while the city was controlled by emergency managers and in the midst of settling its bankruptcy, residents elected Mike Duggan, the city's first white mayor since Roman Gribbs, who had served from 1970 to 1974 when Detroit still had a majority white population.[144] Orr campaigned on Duggan's behalf, emphasizing that a vote for Duggan was an endorsement of the pro-business practices forced on the city through the emergency management process.[145] In his time as mayor, Duggan has continued that business-friendly orientation instated during the restructuring and maintained a controversial and aggressive blight removal program, demolishing large numbers of properties across the city and providing public funding to tear down historically significant properties owned by the Ilitch family.[146] Duggan's political career began as deputy County Executive under Edward H. McNamara from 1987 to 2001, during which time he served as the chairman of the Wayne County Stadium Authority.[147] In that role, he helped negotiate favorable terms for Comerica Park and Ford Field, bringing two of the city's professional sports teams back downtown with the enticement of public funds.[148] His neoliberal credentials were boosted further when he became CEO of the Detroit Medical Center and sold the former nonprofit to venture capitalists in a deal that used public subsidies.[149] Duggan's

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[143] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit*, 69; See map of "City Land Given up in Bankruptcy" in Bomey, Gallagher, and Stryker, "How Detroit Was Reborn."
[144] Eliott C. McLaughlin, "Detroit Elects First White Mayor in More than 4 Decades," CNN, November 6, 2013, https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/06/politics/detroit-elects-white-mayor/index.html.
[145] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 84–85.
[146] Steve Neavling, "Old Chinatown Building in Detroit Must Be Demolished 'Immediately,' Duggan's Team Says," *Detroit Metro Times*, July 26, 2023, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/old-chinatown-building-in-detroit-must-be-demolished-immediately-duggans-team-says-33717468.
[147] Norm Sinclair, "Duggan Fills Quarterback Slot on McNamara's Team," *The Detroit News*, May 24, 1998; Daniel G. Fricker, "Ilitch Nails down Loan for Ballpark," *Detroit Free Press*, March 18, 1998.
[148] Sinclair, "Duggan Fills Quarterback Slot on McNamara's Team"; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 98.
[149] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 85.

demolition program took federal funds that were meant to help struggling homeowners facing foreclosure to stay in their homes and used it to raze structures deemed "blighted" instead.[150] Rather than prioritizing the needs of the city's current residents, Duggan's administration saw the opportunity the Recession presented to rid the city of the poor and working class, clearing the way for new residents and investments.

In the bankruptcy and restructuring, the Ilitches saw their opportunity to push forward with a plan they had been slowly and secretly working on for years. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, as many Detroiters struggled with job loss and affording necessities, the Ilitches were fixated on their desire for a new hockey arena. The family wanted to get the Red Wings out of the city-owned Joe Louis Arena, as they had Tiger Stadium, for similar reasons—in their current contract they were obligated to give the city twenty-five percent of local television revenue.[151] The Ilitches repeated what they had done with the Tigers, they insisted that the team needed a new stadium, which would release them from their obligations to share revenue. Mike Ilitch wanted a new stadium closer to Comerica Park, which would help with the creation of his long dreamed of pro-sports district. The Cass Corridor, with its poor reputation, seemed the perfect area to raze and rebrand for a stadium and retail complex designed to draw suburbanites into the city.

The Ilitches knew that if their plan was publicized, it would cause a bidding war, so they used LLCs to slowly buy up parcels, working their way towards accumulating a total of fifty square blocks in the lower Corridor. Names of these LLCs included the Corporation Co., Sorin Enterprise, ODM Management, Nexus Properties, and Cass Revival LLC, among others, titles

[150] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 33–34.
[151] David Muller, "Detroit City Council Narrowly Agrees to New Lease for Joe Louis Arena, Paves Way for New Detroit Red Wings Development," mlive, March 31, 2014, https://www.mlive.com/business/detroit/2014/03/detroit_city_council_narrowly.html.

used to obscure their connection to the family.[152] *Detroit News* reporter Louis Aguilar reported that the Ilitches spent $50 million over the course of fifteen years "secretly buying 56 properties from dozens of private owners in the Cass Corridor neighborhood," using over fifty different LLCs.[153] Sellers often negotiated prices high above market value and signed confidentiality agreements.[154]

Fellow real estate investors have described the Ilitch family's investment technique as "patient money."[155] Aguilar wrote of Olympia Development: "The group has rarely, if ever, sold a property once it gains control. In some cases, the family has held onto vacant property for decades."[156] Their waiting game paid off with the city's bankruptcy filing. The city's takeover by Orr allowed the Ilitches to obtain ownership of the city-owned properties in the LCA footprint and get out of the unfavorable Joe Louis Arena lease in one fell swoop during the final months of bankruptcy proceedings. In early 2014, though the city had elected a new mayor, it remained under Orr's control. In February, Detroit City Council approved a deal negotiated by Orr to transfer thirty-nine parcels of publicly owned land in the Cass Corridor to the DDA for the price of one dollar.[157] The DDA would then lease the land, which had an assessed value of $2.9 million, to Olympia Development for the District Detroit. The *Free Press* called it "one of the largest land transfers in the city's history" and cheerfully boasted that it would "transform what was once a blighted, crime-ridden strip near downtown."[158] Three city councilors voted against the land transfer because Olympia refused to commit to a robust community benefits agreement

[152] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[153] Louis Aguilar, "Ilitches Bet Big on Land near MotorCity Casino Hotel," *The Detroit News*, August 25, 2015, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/2015/08/25/ilitches-motorcity-casino-land/32375355/.
[154] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[155] Aguilar, "Ilitches Bet Big on Land near MotorCity Casino Hotel."
[156] Aguilar, "Ilitch Family Revives Its First Historic Detroit Building in 30 Years."
[157] Joe Guillen, "Arena Deal to Transform City," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 2014.
[158] Guillen.

ensuring permanent jobs for Detroiters.[159] If the city council had rejected the deal, Orr would have simply asked the state's emergency loan board to execute it.[160]

The Ilitches continued to profiteer from the city's bankruptcy through Joe Louis Arena. In the final days of bankruptcy negotiations, the city still owed $1 billion to Financial Guaranty Insurance Co. (FGIC), described by the *Free Press* as "the last big holdout creditor."[161] City-owned Joe Louis Arena was the "surprise asset" that allowed Orr to strike the final deal needed to end bankruptcy proceedings. FGIC agreed to accept a settlement of thirteen cents on the dollar in addition to the right to develop the waterfront around the Joe Louis Arena into a hotel. "You always keep something under your sleeve," Orr told the *Free Press*. "I said, 'Well, you know, we ain't got a lot, but we got something."[162]

In March 2014, Olympia Entertainment reached a new lease agreement with the Detroit City Council for the remainder of the Red Wings' time at the Joe Louis Arena, which Orr also helped negotiate.[163] This new agreement meant the Ilitches could finally move forward with their new hockey arena. It forced the city to pay for the demolition of Joe Louis Arena and its parking garage, allowed the Ilitches to pay only $5.2 million out of between $50-80 million in unpaid revenue it owed the city, and included a non-compete clause that forbid the city from using Joe Louis Arena for any ticketed events once the LCA was opened.[164] Joe Louis Arena, named after one of Detroit's most revered Black heroes, which the city had paid for, owned, and maintained, was eventually demolished in 2019.[165] The public ended up contributing $324 million to building

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[159] Guillen.
[160] Joe Guillen and JC Reindl, "Council Votes Today on Arena Land Deal," *Detroit Free Press*, February 4, 2014.
[161] Bomey, Gallagher, and Stryker, "How Detroit Was Reborn."
[162] Bomey, Gallagher, and Stryker.
[163] Muller, "Detroit City Council Narrowly Agrees to New Lease for Joe Louis Arena, Paves Way for New Detroit Red Wings Development."
[164] Muller.
[165] J. C. Reindl, "Demolition Countdown Begins for Detroit's Joe Louis Arena," *Detroit Free Press*, February 3, 2018, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2018/02/03/demolition-detroit-joe-louis-arena/1088694001/.

the $863 million LCA, however *Bridge Detroit* valued the overall incentives, including the elimination of revenue the city had previously received from Red Wings' games, at $857 million.[166] At the time Detroit entered bankruptcy, the Ilitch family was worth $2.7 billion.[167]

A few months later, on July 20, 2014, Mike Ilitch's eighty-fifth birthday, the Ilitches announced their plans for the "District Detroit" as Orr continued to steer the city through bankruptcy. The "sweeping transformation" of "dozens of underutilized blocks between downtown and midtown" was reported with feverish excitement by local media, which parroted Olympia Development's press releases and shared the renderings, excited to promote a positive story after suffering humiliation on the national stage.[168] The Ilitches promised that the District Detroit, which would comprise five walkable neighborhoods with "European-style" design spanning dozens of blocks along the city's main thoroughfare of Woodward Avenue, would be built at the same time as the arena.[169] "Our vision is to build out a sports and entertainment district that is world-class and rivals anything in the country, perhaps the world," Chris Ilitch told the *Free Press*. "We're not just building a hockey arena. It's really about the district."[170]

Chris Ilitch told the press that it would "all come out of the ground at once in 2017."[171] Olympia said groundbreaking on the project would begin in the fall. The project's announcement touted planned investments in public infrastructure including lighting, sidewalks, green spaces,

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[166] John Gallagher, Frank Witsil, and JC Reindl, "Little Caesars Arena to Breathe Life into Dead Zone of Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, August 31, 2017, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2017/08/31/detroit-district-arena/617001001/; Perkins, "District Detroit Is Getting More Incentives than You Think."
[167] Erin Carlyle, "Full List: U.S. Billionaires Of 2013," Forbes, March 6, 2013, https://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2013/03/06/full-list-u-s-billionaires-of-2013/.
[168] "Ilitch Organization Releases Plans for New Red Wings Arena District," Click on Detroit, July 21, 2014, https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/2014/07/21/ilitch-organization-releases-plans-for-new-red-wings-arena-district/.
[169] John Gallagher, "Ilitches Unveil 'bold Vision' for Arena District," USA TODAY, July 20, 2014, https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nhl/wings/2014/07/20/detroit-red-wings-arena-district/12909267/.
[170] John Gallagher, "Behind the Scenes, 30 Years of Hard Work Led to Opening of Little Caesars Arena," *Detroit Free Press*, September 4, 2017, https://www.freep.com/story/money/2017/09/04/timeline-little-caesars-arena-ilitch-hockey-detroit/597623001/.
[171] Aguilar, "District Detroit."

and streets that would happen as the District was developed.[172] Olympia claimed that the District's construction would create 8,300 construction and construction-related jobs, plus 1,100 permanent jobs in Detroit, and $1.8 billion in economic impact for the city. Media outlets uncritically reported these claims.[173] The *Free Press* added insult to injury by referring to the area the District Detroit would occupy as a "dead zone."[174]

Fig. 5.2. Conceptual rendering of Columbia Park neighborhood, Olympia Development, 2014. Source: Louis Aguilar, "District Detroit: Inside the Ilitches' Land of Unfulfilled Promises," *Detroit News,* May 22, 2019.

In the District Detroit's fifty-plus blocks, the Ilitches envisioned not one, but "five new neighborhoods" to replace the Cass Corridor, with names like "Wildcat Corner," "Columbia Park," and "Cass Park Village," featuring a curated blend of shopping, upscale residences, and

[172] "Ilitch Organization Releases Plans for New Red Wings Arena District."
[173] "Ilitch Organization Releases Plans for New Red Wings Arena District."
[174] Gallagher, Witsil, and Reindl, "Little Caesars Arena to Breathe Life into Dead Zone of Detroit."

retail where residents would live, work, spend, and attend events at the nearby stadium.[175] They released rendering after rendering, disseminated through local media, illustrating diverse families walking on cobblestone streets and sidewalks, surrounded by lush greenery and advertising for the Tigers and Red Wings (Fig. 5.2).[176] These renderings demonstrate what Avila calls "an illusion of community."[177] While Cass Corridor organizations like the AWS, the FE, and the hardcore punk scene had theorized and created community through the messy and difficult work of organizing and consensus building, the Ilitches instead presented community as an easily purchased commodity. The architecture was devoid of local character, indicating that local landmarks and historic buildings would be replaced with glass-paned high rises, window displays of merchandise, new row houses and apartment buildings, and faceless crowds.

Aesthetic inspiration for the District came when members of the Ilitch family visited San Jose, California's outdoor mall Santana Row while in town for a 2002 Red Wings game. The development comprises forty-two acres of low-rise buildings featuring shopping, restaurants, spas, salons, a boutique luxury hotel, and apartments, all in a "faux-Mediterranean" style.[178] The Ilitches were so impressed they hired Santana Row designer Richard Heapes to work on the District's "European-style" design.[179] This emphasis on European aesthetics is revealing of the family's role as "settler capitalists" claiming space in a majority-Black city and making it more comfortable for suburbanites.[180] Additionally, studies have found that most people consider the parking hassles, traffic, crowds, litter, and rowdy behavior that come with stadium events undesirable, and even those who want them in their cities have a "not in my backyard"

[175] Aguilar, "Ilitch Family Revives Its First Historic Detroit Building in 30 Years"; Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[176] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[177] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 145.
[178] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[179] Aguilar.
[180] Mays, "Narratives of Dispossession and Anticolonial Art in Urban Spaces.," 135.

perspective, leaving one to wonder whether the desired demographic would choose to live in these five new neighborhoods.[181]

While leading up to the city's bankruptcy Detroit was conceptualized by the state government as ungovernable and hostile, in the wake of Orr's economic discipline, the city's space became open for investment, as long as lavish incentives were provided to keep costs low. A thin veneer of community cooperation was placed on the District Detroit project as Olympia claimed they would establish a "Community Connect" program that would partner with Cass Technical High School, lend "urban planning and related expertise" to support the redevelopment of "various Detroit neighborhoods," and offer "dedicated support of minority entrepreneurship."[182] However, the Ilitches had refused to accept a robust community benefits agreement and the District project forced the closure of minority-owned businesses like Birdtown Petshop and Comet Bar, which had weathered decades of economic decline and neighborhood changes only to have the Ilitches deliver the coup de grâce.[183] The Ilitches' and the state's vision for the city was a whiter, more affluent one.

One of the economic benefits of stadiums touted by local growth coalitions is job creation, which they claim happens both during the building of the arenas and when staff are hired to maintain and run the massive facilities. Detroiters who lacked the ability to simply relocate in search of work were in desperate need of jobs in the wake of the Great Recession. However, Olympia's contractors failed to follow requirements that construction on the arena be performed by a workforce of at least 51 percent Detroit residents, with one worker claiming that

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[181] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey.," 1391, 1408.
[182] "Ilitch Organization Releases Plans for New Red Wings Arena District."
[183] Brenna Houck, "Cass Corridor's Comet Bar Closes," Eater Detroit, October 17, 2014, https://detroit.eater.com/2014/10/17/6991743/cass-cooridors-comet-bar-closes-detroit-red-wings; The story of Birdtown Pet Shop and other Cass Corridorites affected by the LCA is told in the documentary *Last Days of Chinatown*, 2017.

he encountered "Mississippi style racism" on the job and witnessed suburban workers using fake Detroit addresses to help meet the requirements.[184] Decades of economic research on stadium building has demonstrated that these projects almost never provide the number of jobs promised by the growth coalitions.[185] As with other mega-projects that Detroiters have seen come and go, pledging to be economic saviors of a struggling city, only a tiny fraction of promises made ended up being fulfilled.

Those who could count on jobs were the city employees who helped negotiate favorable terms for the Ilitches. The city's two lead negotiators on the LCA deal, George Jackson and Brian Holdwick, worked for the quasi-public DEGC and were supposed to be negotiating with the Ilitches in favor of Detroit and its residents. However, they quit their jobs for the city and began contracting work with the Ilitches a year after the controversial deal, which granted the Ilitches one hundred percent of revenue, was completed.[186] While serving as president of the DEGC, Jackson once openly stated that his goal for Detroit was "gentrification."[187] Jackson and Holdwick represented the next generation's Emmett Motens, people who were willing to take advantage of their public positions for personal benefit and faced no barriers in doing so. The careers of these men indicate a decades-long pattern of city employees being able to expect rewards in the form of employment and contracts in return for negotiating favorable deals for Ilitch-owned organizations.

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[184] Louis Aguilar, "Detroiter Sues Arena Contractor, Alleges Racism," *The Detroit News*, February 15, 2018, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/2018/02/15/arena-contractor-sued-construction-worker-alleged-civil-rights-violation/110472294/.
[185] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey.," 1418–19.
[186] Joe Guillen and JC Reindl, "Former City Arena Negotiators Working for Ilitches," *Detroit Free Press*, February 12, 2016, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2016/02/12/former-city-arena-negotiators-working-ilitches/79062186/.
[187] Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 102.

Though Chris Ilitch had insisted "it's really all about the District," the District failed to materialize when the LCA opened in 2017.[188] *Detroit News* reporter Louis Aguilar was one of the few vocal critics of the Ilitches in Detroit's media landscape, though he would be joined by more voices the longer the District sat empty. He reported that while the Ilitches had promised to "transform a forgotten area of Detroit by 2017" the fifty blocks composing the District were, two years later, "more vacant than when the plan was launched in 2014." Aguilar's reporting uncovered that "the Ilitches control at least sixty-four percent of developable land" in the lower Corridor. While Olympia had promised seven hundred new units of housing in six buildings, no new housing was built. In 2014, as they went back to the trough for more public funding, the Ilitch family gave documents to Detroit City Council stating that 184 residential units would be ready when the arena opened in September 2017. In January 2016, Olympia Development said that a new hotel with between three and four hundred rooms and one hundred and fifty residential units would be open within two years. These never appeared either. By 2019, amidst increasing criticism of the slow pace of development, the "five new neighborhoods" had disappeared from the District Detroit website.[189]

Instead of building the promised housing and businesses around the stadium, the Ilitches spent 2016 building, expanding, and renovating eighteen parking lots.[190] The city chose not to enforce a landscaping requirement on lots controlled by the Ilitches, allowing them to pack in more vehicles, cut costs, and bring increased environmental and safety risks to residents.[191] Olympia Development operated 7,800 parking spots as of 2019.[192] Studies have found that

[188] Gallagher, "Behind the Scenes, 30 Years of Hard Work Led to Opening of Little Caesars Arena."
[189] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[190] Aguilar.
[191] Guillen, "Ilitches Can Maximize Parking Money Thanks to Favorable City Ruling on LCA Lot Designs."
[192] Aguilar, "District Detroit."

Detroit has more parking than other U.S. metro areas, with close to a third of the downtown dedicated to parking lots and garages, and that the LCA offers the most expensive stadium parking in the country.[193] All of the parking is a symbol that the developments are not meant for locals, but people who have to drive to get there. "Where's everybody supposed to park?" Chris Ilitch responded testily in one of his few interviews addressing discontent over the District Detroit's progress.[194]

Cass Corridor properties acquired by the Ilitch family followed a pattern. After being purchased by an LLC, they would sit vacant, sometimes for years, windows and doors were left unsecured to accelerate damage, and eventually they were demolished and turned into expensive surface lots. Some grew suspicious of a tendency for Olympia-owned properties, or buildings owned by others in the way of the arena's plans, to be lost in fires.[195] Many of the Cass Corridor's historic and cultural gems were destroyed in this pattern. Aguilar's reporting found 147 vacant properties across the city owned by the Ilitches that had "been idle for years, if not decades."[196]

The Ilitches used both soft pressure and overt coercion to change the residential makeup of the Cass Corridor neighborhood. Cost-of-living increases resulted as housing grew more scarce with each apartment building that became a parking lot or a blighted eyesore. The Ilitch

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[193] Annalise Frank, "Study: Nearly a Third of Downtown Detroit Is Parking," Axios, April 12, 2023, https://www.axios.com/local/detroit/2023/04/12/study-third-downtown-detroit-parking-cars; McIntyre, "This Is the Most Expensive American Stadium to Park Your Car."
[194] John Gallagher, "Christopher Ilitch Acknowledges Delays, Defends Parking Lots near Arena," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 2019, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/john-gallagher/2019/05/23/christopher-ilitch-district-detroit-parking-lots/3766528002/.
[195] Randiah Camille Green, "Blighted Holdout House near Little Caesars Arena Mysteriously Burns Down," *Detroit Metro Times*, August 8, 2022, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/blighted-holdout-house-near-little-caesars-arena-mysteriously-burns-down-30760877.
[196] Louis Aguilar, "A Rare Look at All the Empty Detroit Properties Linked to Ilitch Group," *The Detroit News*, October 10, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/10/11/ilitch-group-linked-to-147-empty-detroit-properties/3932609002/.

family has also purchased occupied residential buildings and pressured residents to leave. Aguilar's reporting uncovered that after the Cass Park Apartments and three apartment buildings on the 400 block of Henry Street were purchased by companies linked to the family, residents immediately experienced a decline in their housing management as vacated apartments were left empty and basic maintenance stopped being performed on the buildings.[197] The Henry Street buildings, some of the last in the area accessible to low-income renters, "piled up blight tickets" as residents suffered unsanitary and unsafe conditions in the wake of Ilitch ownership.[198] The Cass Park and Henry Street apartment buildings were both part of historic districts and considered architecturally significant. The Ilitches have pushed low-income and middle-class residents out of their homes, contributed to population decline in the city, and destroyed viable housing stock.

By the fall of 2014, Detroit had settled its debts, and Orr transferred authority of the city to Duggan and the Detroit City Council. The Ilitches were high on the positive press the District Detroit had received. However, Detroiters continued to struggle as they watched their city being remade around them. The Great Recession increased economic inequality and suffering across the country as the Obama administration hired the same Wall Street bankers who had caused the crisis to fix the problem, handed out billions to banks and the auto industry, and "did almost nothing to aid the estimated 9 million households facing foreclosure or distressed sales of their homes."[199] The Recession and Detroit's bankruptcy not only helped the Ilitch family get out of their deal with the city-owned Joe Louis Arena and obtain land for building the LCA from the

[197] Louis Aguilar, "Residents of Cass Apartments Owned by Ilitch Firm Feel Squeeze," *The Detroit News*, February 13, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/2019/02/14/residents-cass-corridor-apartments-owned-by-ilitch-firm-feel-squeeze/2780476002/; Aguilar, "Ilitch-Owned Apartments near LCA Pile up Blight Tickets."
[198] Aguilar, "Ilitch-Owned Apartments near LCA Pile up Blight Tickets."
[199] Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 226.

city for free, but also placed their ally Mike Duggan in the mayor's office and made the political climate more amenable to increased public subsidies for private development of the city. This dark period for most Detroit residents was a high-water mark for the Ilitches.

Terrible Ilitches

The corporate welfare and broken promises of the "District Detroit" did not go unnoticed by the people of Detroit. Amidst the fanfare of the District Detroit announcement, a social media account named "Terrible Ilitches" appeared on Facebook and Instagram. With in-depth research into city records, newspaper archives, old websites and press releases from the Ilitches' companies, and analysis of Google Maps alongside a savvy use of memes, the account quickly gained praise, notoriety, and followers for documenting exactly how the Ilitches destroyed the Cass Corridor neighborhood and landmarks, building by building.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, in the wake of the Detroit newspaper strike, which ended in a defeat for workers and a free press after a federal appeals court forced unions to accept contracts on management's terms, the kind of reporting and advocacy done by the *Free Press* in the 1980s became more difficult.[200] The resources necessary for journalists and papers to file lawsuits challenging the most powerful political and business elites in the city disappeared, and the *Free Press* and *Detroit News* were purchased by conglomerates owned by those elites. In part due to these changes in local journalism, reporters often parroted Olympia Development press releases without giving a fuller context for the proposed project or the public monies involved.[201]

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[200] For an in-depth study of the Detroit newspaper strike see Rhomberg, *The Broken Table: The Detroit Newspaper Strike and the State of American Labor*.

[201] The following articles are just a handful of examples of this type of reporting from local media outlets: Gallagher, Witsil, and Reindl, "Little Caesars Arena to Breathe Life into Dead Zone of Detroit"; Gallagher, "Ilitches Unveil 'bold Vision' for Arena District"; J. C. Reindl, "Rehab Underway of Ilitch-Owned United Artists Theater Building in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, March 31, 2022, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2022/03/31/rehab-underway-united-artists-building-detroit/7228983001/.

Activists and advocates in Detroit have turned to social media as one venue to communicate information that traditional media sources are less likely to share. The Terrible Ilitches social media accounts combine research and humor to build skepticism and outrage towards the corporate welfare the city has given the Ilitch family over the decades. Some posts share images from archival newspaper accounts of promised developments that never materialized, some use Google Earth to show how properties deteriorate over time after coming under Ilitch ownership, and others document the stories of residents whose lives have been upended by the building of the "Pizzarena." Some posts illustrate the way local media has "rubber stamped Ilitch press releases and passed it off as news" without providing deeper context (by listing previous public monies a project has received, or properties in the area the family owns, for example). The account has even called out local journalists, including the *Free Press'* J.C. Reindl and John Gallagher, for uncritical reporting.[202] Terrible Ilitches have also mapped the Ilitch-owned parcels across Detroit, categorizing by properties that have been neglected, demolished, turned into surface lots, or were part of the one-dollar land transfer during the bankruptcy.[203]

[202] Terrible Ilitches, Interview via email with the author, September 18, 2024.
[203] The map can be accessed here: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=14j7aXj1U9GxOkzOAD2UWyos4EZA&ll=42.33990916492976%2C-83.05959105&z=16

Fig. 5.3. Post from The Terrible Ilitches Facebook account, August 25, 2024. Source: facebook.com/TERRIBLEILITCHES

The activist behind the Terrible Ilitches prefers to remain anonymous. They are adamant that their crusade is a single-issue one, to discredit and shame the Ilitch family and their enablers in local politics and media. This approach keeps their storytelling sharp and effective. Terrible Ilitches said that the announcement of District Detroit inspired the creation of the account, as it "sounded very familiar" to the vision the family had sold to the public in the 1990s when they were trying to get funding for Comerica Park.[204] The advocate behind the account was infuriated that the Ilitches "had the nerve to ask for public monies to revitalize an area that they helped

[204] Terrible Ilitches, Interview via email with the author.

destroy."[205] The account gained enough attention that the author was interviewed by local media outlet *Deadline Detroit*, saying that "watching the media fail to do their job over and over again is what ultimately prompted me to start the site."[206] They said that the goal of the account was to provide the missing facts: "I just try to post historical context and information so that the reader can draw their own conclusion, and it's most likely that the Ilitches are terrible."[207]

More grassroots advocates focused on drawing attention to the Ilitches' ownership of blighted properties and appetite for public funds sprung up on social media as the District Detroit promises became increasingly stale.[208] Don't Eat the Krazy Bread, named after a menu item at Little Caesar's, put up colorful handwritten signs in front of vacant, blighted properties owned by Ilitch-linked entities, with phrases like "The Ilitches hoard abandoned buildings like this one and 40+ others" or "Ilitch owns 45 abandoned buildings, they have let this house rot since 1980."[209] While the posters were often quickly removed, the photographs were effective at conveying that a family often lauded with revitalizing Detroit were in fact the owners of the blighted properties sitting on land in a prime location for redevelopment.[210] The Instagram account The Pizza Pauper added to the anti-Ilitch bandwagon.[211] While Don't Eat the Krazy Bread and Pizza Pauper are no longer active, Terrible Ilitches still posts regularly to a Facebook page with over eight thousand

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[205] Terrible Ilitches.
[206] Nancy Derringer, "Amid Mass Media Flattery, a Sharp-Edge Ilitch Critic Emerges on Facebook," *Deadline Detroit* (blog), November 7, 2018, https://www.deadlinedetroit.com/articles/20968/amid_mass_media_flattery_a_sharp-edge_ilitch_critic_emerges_on_facebook.
[207] Derringer.
[208] "Ilitch Organization Has Another Grassroots Social-Media Critic in Detroit," *Deadline Detroit* (blog), August 10, 2020, https://www.deadlinedetroit.com/articles/25945/ilitch_organization_has_another_grassroots_social-media_critic_in_detroit.
[209] Don't Eat the Krazy Bread (@donteatthekrazybread), August 11, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CDwUQSxjB5g/; Don't Eat the Krazy Bread (@donteatthekrazybread), August 9, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CDq-zE-jQFn/.
[210] Don't Eat the Krazy Bread (@donteatthekrazybread), August 10, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CDtyJHGjOwm/.
[211] The Pizza Pauper (@pizzapauper), https://www.instagram.com/pizzapauper/.

followers as of this writing. Terrible Ilitches believes that they and other critics have had success beginning to turn public opinion on the Ilitches as they "continue to remind the public what the Ilitches have promised in the past and what they have delivered instead."[212]

Other groups focused on local inequality have also been active raising awareness about the Ilitches' detrimental effects on the city, and scholars have noted the activism that grew in the years during and since emergency management as Detroiters organized to fight neoliberal austerity practices.[213] Detroit has one of the highest concentrations of parking of any metro area in the U.S., a legacy of urban renewal, white flight, and the auto industry's political dominance that resulted in a city designed to be navigated by car, but difficult to traverse for the many residents who lack access to a vehicle. Detroiters for Parking Reform was founded in 2019 and joined a national movement demanding that city spaces be designed for people, not vehicles. The group has held annual actions drawing attention to the parking glut in downtown.[214] In 2023 they co-led a "parking tour" with Terrible Ilitches focused on the Cass Corridor and Ilitch-owned surface lots. Detroiters for Tax Justice focuses on critiquing the way the local growth coalition—which in Detroit is comprised of the DDA and the DEGC, the mayor's office, the city council, and corporate partners like Olympia—has plundered resources meant for public schools and libraries and given the funding to developers using "tax incremental financing" or "tax captures." The group claims that this practice has sky-rocketed under Duggan's leadership, coining the term "Dugganomics" for the excessive use of tax capture.[215] They also argue that since downtown Detroit has been redeveloped, the DDA and the DEGC have served their purpose and should be

[212] Terrible Ilitches, Interview via email with the author.
[213] Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*, 48, 73; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 114–39.
[214] Omar Abdel-Baqui, "Detroiters for Parking Reform Protest Downtown Surface Parking Lots," *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 2019, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2019/09/20/detroit-parking-reform-surface-lots-protest/2383483001/.
[215] Detroiters for Tax Justice, "Tax Abatements," Detroiters For Tax Justice, 2024, https://detroitersfortaxjustice.com/tax-abatements.

dissolved so that Detroiters' tax dollars can be used for other investments. The group has calculated that over a billion dollars has been diverted from public millages through tax captures and tax abatements.[216]

By 2019, a multiplicity of grassroots voices had spurred increasing interest in the Ilitches' "land of unfulfilled promises."[217] Even the *Detroit News'* conservative opinion columnist Noah Finley criticized the Ilitches' practice of leaving land around their megadevelopments vacant.[218] *Detroit News* reporter Louis Aguilar contributed years of in-depth reporting on the Ilitches' development practices and the alternative newspaper the *Detroit Metro Times* published investigative reports and opinion pieces. The vacant District made national news when HBO's "Real Sports" ran a critical report in which local advocates and U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, in whose district the LCA was located, were interviewed on the Ilitches' failure to develop land surrounding the arena.[219] The District Detroit debacle eventually received enough backlash that Duggan was forced to respond, telling the *Detroit News* that the deal was negotiated by Orr and there was nothing he could do about it. "They stood up and made a bunch of promises with a lot of pictures, none of which were included in the contract," he said.[220] The Ilitch organization had long been tight-lipped, refusing to offer comment or grant interviews even to media outlets that offered mostly praise in return. However, the family was finally forced to respond to the

[216] Steve Neavling, "Corporate Welfare Took $1 Billion from Detroit's Schools, City Services over Past Decade," *Detroit Metro Times*, August 15, 2024, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/corporate-welfare-took-1-billion-from-detroits-schools-city-services-over-past-decade-37072808.
[217] Aguilar, "District Detroit."
[218] Nolan Finley, "Finley: Land Hoarding Keeps Bucks in Ilitch Pockets," *The Detroit News*, November 2, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/columnists/nolan-finley/2019/11/03/finley-theres-plan-behind-ilitch-land-hoarding/4098317002/.
[219] John Gallagher, "HBO 'Real Sports' Report on District Detroit: Ilitch Family Slams Show," *Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 2019, https://www.freep.com/story/money/2019/04/24/district-detroit-hbo-real-sports-ilitch-family/3562524002/.
[220] Nolan Finley, "Finley: Holding Ilitches to Promises 'not a Priority,' Duggan Says," *The Detroit News*, May 30, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2019/05/31/finley-holding-ilitches-promises-not-priority-duggan-says/1286853001/.

criticism after the HBO segment aired, with Chris Ilitch reluctantly agreeing to a brief sit-down with the *Free Press*, during which he refused to respond to questions and stuck with prepared remarks.[221]

The Ilitches' long history of demolishing historically and architecturally significant buildings also brought them under fire from the city's preservationists.[222] By 2019 when Olympia was negotiating a deal to redevelop the Eddystone apartment complex, even the pro-business DDA was showing frustration. Preservation Detroit's president Eric Kehoe spoke at the DDA meeting, saying "[t]here are a lot of concerns regarding this developer's track record" and urging scrutiny. An agreement was only reached under the conditions that if Olympia failed to meet specific deadlines, the DDA would seize the project's funding so that the city could complete the renovation.[223]

When, in 2023, the family returned to ask for more public money for the District Detroit, the ground had been sowed for discontent. At the public hearing for the Detroit Brownfield Redevelopment Authority addressing the $616 million in tax incentives that Olympia claimed were necessary for the next round of development, "nearly two dozen people" commented. "Nearly all public comments Monday were negative and opposed to the brownfield incentives," the *Free Press* reported.[224] Those who spoke mentioned the Ilitch family's previous promises of development that had been left unfulfilled. Still, the city council approved the funding package. While three members of the city council had voted against the one-dollar land transfer back in 2014, almost a decade later, Council President Mary Sheffield was the single vote against giving

[221] Gallagher, "Christopher Ilitch Acknowledges Delays, Defends Parking Lots near Arena."
[222] Williams, "HUD."
[223] Gallagher, "Christopher Ilitch Acknowledges Delays, Defends Parking Lots near Arena."
[224] J. C. Reindl, "$1.5B District Detroit Buildout Faces Heavy Criticism at Public Hearing over Incentives," *Detroit Free Press*, February 6, 2023, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2023/02/07/new-district-detroit-buildout-criticism-public-hearing/69876470007/.

Olympia Development $616 million in further tax subsidies for District Detroit.[225] Meanwhile Detroit Public Schools faced $300 million in further cuts to school funding for 2023-2024 year.[226] After the additional incentives were approved in 2023, reporting from *Bridge Detroit* found that the District Detroit had received one of the largest public funding incentive packages in history, totaling $1.8 billion since it was announced in 2014, in which taxpayer dollars comprise 64 percent of the investment.[227]

Public perception may be turning against the Ilitches, but it's turning slowly. The city government and power players remain firmly in their corner, and local media continues to uncritically cover their development projects. The *Detroit News* named Emmett Moten a 2024 "Michiganian of the Year" and gave a selective overview of his career highlights, leaving out the destruction of the Poletown neighborhood and corruption on behalf of Mayor Young's administration.[228] Wayne State named its new business school after Mike Ilitch upon a $40 million donation from the family and placed the building a mile and a half south of WSU's main campus, next to the LCA. The school was opened in 2018 and features prominent advertising for the nonexistent District Detroit.[229]

In spring 2024, groundbreaking on the District Detroit was delayed yet again. The *Free Press* reported that "the high-profile $1.5 billion District Detroit development that was originally expected to break ground last summer, but so far has not" was further delayed, without

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[225] JC Reindl and Dana Afana, "City Council OKs Incentives for $1.5B District Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, March 28, 2023, https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2023/03/28/ilitch-ross-tax-breaks-1-5b-district-detroit-plan/70055414007/.
[226] Ethan Bakuli and Micah Walker, "Detroit School Board Approves 2023-24 District Budget with $300 Million in Cuts," *Chalkbeat* (blog), June 13, 2023, https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2023/6/13/23760306/detroit-public-schools-budget-cuts-covid-job/.
[227] Perkins, "District Detroit Is Getting More Incentives than You Think."
[228] Williams, "Emmett Moten, a Detroit Development Pioneer, Is Still Leading Projects after Four Decades."
[229] Robin Runyan, "Photos: Inside the Mike Ilitch School of Business," Curbed Detroit, August 21, 2018, https://detroit.curbed.com/2018/8/21/17763614/mike-ilitch-school-of-business-photos-tour.

mentioning that the project had been originally proposed to break ground ten years ago at a fraction of the cost.[230] The latest version of the District no longer mentioned Europe or walkable neighborhoods, but was instead focused on the construction of two hotels, four apartment buildings, three office buildings and a "business incubator" that would be part of the forthcoming University of Michigan Center for Innovation campus. Rather than reimagine the office spaces for an alternate use, Olympia Development blamed the Covid-19 pandemic for the inability to obtain necessary loans to complete the office buildings, which were increasingly vacant in downtown areas around the country as companies offered more flexible work options for their employees. At least one of the ten planned buildings must begin construction by March 2025 for the developers to receive the tax incentives they had been granted by the city. While Reindl reported "the developers say they intend to make that deadline," the history of the Ilitch family's relationship to Detroit demonstrates that there is no incentive for them to be held to any deadline, or complete the project at all.[231] The District Detroit is a billion-dollar fantasy that slowly destroyed a neighborhood and diverted the city's money from necessities into the pockets of the "terrible Ilitches."

Conclusion

Since the 1960s, sports stadiums have been used as urban renewal projects in the Cass Corridor, displacing the neighborhood's community-based arts and culture organizations and dispossessing residents. As was explored in Chapter 1, in 1967 the city and WSU forced the Detroit Artists' Workshop out of their storefront and housing co-op on the John C. Lodge and

[230] J. C. Reindl, "New Timeline, Construction Plan for $1.5B District Detroit Development," *Detroit Free Press*, March 14, 2024, https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2024/03/14/district-detroit-development-new-timeline/72949461007/.
[231] Reindl.

Hancock intersection, a space that for two years had fostered the development of literary, musical, and political countercultures in Detroit, as the university made way for the building of Matthaei Athletic Center.[232] Making the Artists' Workshop relocate repeatedly was just one tactic used to disrupt their activities and eventually push them out of the city.

Today a former bohemian enclave that offered space for community-based organizing projects throughout the late twentieth century is now an "entertainment and sports ghetto" that is largely deserted except during events.[233] The 2020 Census showed that the fifty blocks that comprise the District Detroit lost both population and housing after the LCA opened.[234] Meanwhile, the city as a whole has gained population for the first time since the 1950s, relayed with fanfare in reporting that simultaneously praised the Ilitches.[235] As property values in surrounding downtown neighborhoods including Brush Park and Corktown have skyrocketed, values have not risen in the District Detroit. Kyle Mays notes that amidst these developments the white population of Detroit has increased, but the African American population continues to fall.[236] The city is increasingly inhospitable for those who are low-income as it seeks to attract new residents with greater wealth rather than support locals.

The use of public funding to finance stadium building demonstrates how cities grew less democratic as their leaders "worked with a set of limited and imperfect choices for improving cities" in the aftermath of deindustrialization.[237] The Cass Corridor's story is an extreme

[232] Sinclair, "Artists' Workshop Reopens; Brings Art Colony To Detroit"; "Trans-Love Relocates in Warren-Forest."
[233] Joe Lapointe, "Lapointe: In Ilitch Village, Greed Is Good," *Detroit Metro Times*, March 6, 2023, https://www.metrotimes.com/news/in-ilitch-village-greed-is-good-32542565.
[234] Aguilar, "Ilitch Family Revives Its First Historic Detroit Building in 30 Years."
[235] Afana, "'Detroit Is a Vibrant and Growing City Again'; Population Grows for First Time since 1957."
[236] Mays, "Narratives of Dispossession and Anticolonial Art in Urban Spaces.," 135.
[237] Delaney and Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums*, 183–204; Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 7.

example, but not unique.[238] Economic research has found that between 1970 and 2020, state and local governments spent $33 billion in public money to build sports stadiums in the U.S. and Canada, with an average public contribution of 73 percent of the cost.[239] While the local growth coalition pumps out propaganda to convince taxpayers otherwise, there is "near-universal consensus that sports venues do not generate large positive effects on local communities."[240] Usually, as in the case with the LCA and the District Detroit, the effect on the local community is a net negative.[241] Despite the seeming failure of the District Detroit, planning scholars have looked to the city's nearly wholesale takeover by the Ilitch family and Dan Gilbert to question if "planning departments still have an important role, or any role, to play in urban development" or whether Detroit represents "a decisive victory of private over public action in the battle to save postindustrial cities."[242]

While the Ilitches' vision has become reality, historian Frank Guridy writes that like cities themselves, stadiums have long been contested spaces.[243] This has been true of the LCA. When Olympia Entertainment booked avowed bigot Kid Rock to celebrate the 2017 opening of the venue, hundreds of locals gathered outside the stadium to protest.[244] They used the moment to air their grievances against the Ilitches, then-President Donald Trump, and the city's austerity practices holding signs with slogans like "Education, not gentrification" and "No justice, no

[238] Cowan describes a very similar dynamic in Pittsburgh with the Three Rivers Stadium, as promised development surrounding the stadium failed to materialize and it was left "surrounded by practically empty land throughout its history." Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, 120.
[239] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey.," 1390.
[240] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, 1390.
[241] Bradbury, Coates, and Humphreys, 1411–12.
[242] Biles and Rose, "'Gilbertville,' 'Ilitchville,' and the Redevelopment of Detroit.," 21.
[243] Guridy, *The Stadium: An American History of Politics, Protest, and Play*, 4.
[244] John Wisely, Jim Schaefer, and Allie Gross, "Protesters March Outside Kid Rock Show at Little Caesars Arena," *Detroit Free Press*, September 12, 2017, https://www.freep.com/story/news/2017/09/12/protesters-kid-rock-little-caesars-arena/659135001/.

pizza." Some said that they believed choosing Kid Rock as the opening act was a premeditated "slap in the face of the community." Guridy notes that despite being shining beacons of advertising and consumption, often named after brands and corporations, the majority of stadiums in U.S. cities are publicly owned.[245] Thus megadevelopments like the LCA, owned and paid for by the public, create an arena for the public to reassert their right to the city.

[245] Guridy, *The Stadium: An American History of Politics, Protest, and Play*, 4.

Epilogue—The Art of Failure

One song ends
arise and unbuild it again

-Ursula K. Le Guin, "Notes from the Inner City"[1]

By many measures, the movements described in the proceeding chapters were failures. What was once the Cass Corridor neighborhood is over half owned by one of the wealthiest families in the country, dominated by a sports arena, renamed, and fading into memory. John and Leni Sinclair, Peter Werbe, Larissa Stolarchuk, and Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith all left the city for significant periods, if not permanently. The Detroit Artists' Workshop's spaces, the Freezer Theatre, and the Gold Dollar have been razed, the Women's City Club building has been purchased and left vacant, and 404 Willis is now a clothing boutique. The Detroit trash incinerator burned garbage and polluted the surrounding environment for thirty years. Some of the institutions from Cass Corridor bohemia that still exist today, like the Trumbullplex, the *Fifth Estate*, the Perlmans' Black and Red Press, and Touch and Go records, moved outside the city limits or operate on a smaller scale. In the spring of 2023, Detroit's city council approved more funding for the Ilitches' District Detroit despite public outcry and worse than usual coverage in the local press as their years of broken promises had gained attention thanks to critics like the Terrible Ilitches. The Cass Corridor's bohemian movements influenced the mimeo revolution, the 1960s counterculture, the underground press, punk and alternative rock, and the rebirth of anarchism, but were not able to stop their neighborhood's erasure.

[1] Ursula K. Le Guin, "Notes from the Inner City," *Fifth Estate*, Fall 2006, #373 edition. Speculative fiction writer Ursula Le Guin was a friend to FE and others in the anarchist movement. Some of the utopic societies in her work are inspired by anarchist thought.

While the Corridor's outcome loomed over our conversations, the participants I interviewed did not see their movements as failures. "I have no desire or need to sort of look mathematically or quantitatively at the moral movements of which I've been a part that have resulted in either success or failure," Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith said. "We live in tragic times, and our movement is tragic. And no matter how paltry, or small, or partial, these movements are, they can't—none of them can rival the failure of hetero patriarch[al] capitalist industrial domination."[2] For Cass Corridor's bohemians, success was a free and happy (and sometimes lazy) life, not a career or financial gain or a particular achievement. Said another way, the Cass Corridor bohemians embodied Jack Halberstam's "queer art of failure" in which hegemonic norms of winning, success, and "reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" are rejected (some of them did have children, though).[3] This outlook was informed by the bohemians' emphasis on prefigurative politics, which privileges action in and for itself. The outcome is not as consequential as what happens in the process of doing.

The activists and artists of Detroit's Cass Corridor created, lived, and fought for what urban theorist Henri LeFebvre called "the right to the city" during years when and in a place where that right was particularly contested.[4] The Sinclairs and their comrades saw Detroit's urban rebellion as a prefiguration of a more just urban future, in which the dispossessed were in power and basic necessities were free. Utopian dreamers like Smith and Fredy Perlman imagined ways deindustrialization could lead to a life outside the clutches of industrial capitalism. Punk kids like Stolarchuk and members of the 404 collective took advantage of property deemed

[2] Smith, interview, January 31, 2023.
[3] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2; see also José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 169–83.
[4] Lefebvre, *Le Droit à La Ville [The Right to the City]*.

worthless to enact new art forms and ways of relating, often first imagined in xeroxed publications exchanged by mail. For all of these actors, the bohemian enclave was "our little world here in the city."[5] It was the space that allowed them to create their visions and something that they believed was worth fighting for, whether through protesting the Detroit trash incinerator, creating an autonomous zone, squatting in storefronts, or marching with puppets that represented their dreams of a different world.[6] This history has much to offer as the battle for the right to the city continues.[7]

This dissertation demonstrates how the lived experience of grassroots actors can provide a fresh perspective on much-studied topics such as deindustrialization and the urban crisis. The publications, art, and activism produced by the Cass Corridor neighborhood's bohemians reveal that the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s—which are often thought of as Detroit's nadir—brought many challenges but were also culturally vibrant and teeming with political resistance to the top-down forces that affected the lives of everyday people. The Cass Corridor's bohemians created institutions including community-run spaces and self-published newspapers and zines that deftly responded to the crises neoliberal austerity measures created in their neighborhood. The art and activism of Cass Corridorites was influential on a local and national scale, contributing to the spread of the "bohemian diaspora" across the U.S., marijuana decriminalization, the increasing centrality of anarchist thought in leftist organizing, and the rise of alternative music and culture in the 1990s. It was not until the Great Recession and Detroit's 2013 bankruptcy that this activity, and the bohemian enclave that fostered it, were both put to an end. The neoliberal austerity measures instated by the state of Michigan during the bankruptcy

[5] Maple and Bradford, "FE & the Anti-Nuke War Movement: Where We've Been."
[6] Dogbane Campion and Mary Wildwood, "Puppets Against Pollution: Earth Council Condemns Incinerator," *Fifth Estate*, September 1, 1992, #340 edition.
[7] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London New York: Verso, 2012).

paved the way for the Ilitch family's takeover of the neighborhood. This dissertation contributes to literature demonstrating that Detroit's much-hailed revival of recent years is really yet another urban crisis for many of the city's residents, destroying valuable spaces, histories, and cultures.[8]

The contributions of the Cass Corridor's bohemians continue to influence the artists and activists who gather in Detroit. Many of the people interviewed for this project remain practicing artists and activists in the city, and they cited enclaves like Hamtramck as places that foster thriving art scenes today.[9] Historian Kyle Mays points out that "contemporary art and activism in Detroit are attempts to address the current symbols of dispossession."[10] Organizations like the Terrible Ilitches, the Trumbullplex, and the FE continue the legacy of Cass Corridor activism into a new century.

As David Watson wrote in the summer of 2019 upon the announcement that the city was shutting down the Detroit trash incinerator, the "eco-apocalypse continues."[11] As the effects of the climate crisis snowball, Rust Belt cities have been branded "climate havens" for their mild temperatures, access to the Great Lakes' fresh water supply, and lack of hurricanes or fires, and some predict a return migration on par with the Great Migration of a century prior.[12] This growth will again bring immense changes to the urban and political environment of these cities. *Building*

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[8] Rebecca J. Kinney, "Detroit Is Closer than You Think.," *Radical History Review* 2017, no. 129 (October 1, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-3920739; Kinney, "'America's Great Comeback Story': The White Possessive in Detroit Tourism"; Kinney, *Beautiful Wasteland*; Jay and Conklin, *A People's History of Detroit*; Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*; Mays, "Narratives of Dispossession and Anticolonial Art in Urban Spaces."
[9] Kroha, Interview by Author.
[10] Mays, "Narratives of Dispossession and Anticolonial Art in Urban Spaces."
[11] David Watson, "Detroit Trash Incinerator Closing - Eco-Apocalypse Continues," *Fifth Estate*, Summer 2019, #404 edition, https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/404-summer-2019/detroit-trash-incinerator-closing/.
[12] Debra Kamin, "Out-of-Towners Head to 'Climate-Proof Duluth,'" *The New York Times*, March 10, 2023, sec. Real Estate, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/10/realestate/duluth-minnesota-climate-change.html; Abrahm Lustgarten, "America's Climate Boomtowns Are Waiting," *The Atlantic* (blog), March 23, 2024, https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2024/03/climate-migration-rust-belt-economy/677856/; Mike De Socio, "US Cities Are Advertising Themselves as 'Climate Havens'. But Can They Actually Protect Residents from Extreme Weather?," BBC, July 1, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240628-us-climate-havens-cities-claim-extreme-weather-protection.

Bohemia in Detroit's Cass Corridor demonstrates that those who make Detroit home are nothing if not adaptable and their stories offer the tools to, as speculative fiction author Ursula K. LeGuin wrote for the *Fifth Estate,* "arise and unbuild it again."

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Zines and Self-published Works

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Babyfish Lost Its Momma (Babyfish papers, Christopher Becker collection, Andrew "Sunfrog Smith collection)
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Mutiny (Babyfish papers)
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Touch and Go (*Touch and Go: The Complete Hardcore Punk Zine '79-'83*, ed. Steve Miller)
Work (JLSP)

Oral Histories and Personal Collections

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Christopher Becker, shared personal collection with the author in Ann Arbor, MI, July 19, 2022.
William R. Boyer, interviewed by and shared personal collection with the author in Detroit, MI, January 20, 2024.
Jhon Clark, interviewed by the author by phone, October 6, 2023.
Kevin Knapp, interviewed by and shared personal collection with the author in Clarkston, MI, January 8, 2022.
Danny Kroha, interviewed by the author by phone, January 8, 2024.
Lorraine Perlman, interviewed by and shared personal collection with the author in Ferndale, MI, December 21, 2022.
Andrew "Sunfrog" Smith, interviewed by the author via video chat January 31 and February 14, 2023; personal collection shared with author in Cookeville, TN, August 1-3, 2023.
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