

# WE CARE A LOT:



Stewardship of Land  
in the Neighborhood



Conservation



Coalition



Collaboration



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## Afterword

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This publication is a continuation of conversations that students of The Design for the Living World class had with individuals in Chicago and Detroit in September 2015 during the research travel residency *We Care a Lot: Stewardship of Land in the Neighborhood, Conservation – Coalition – Collaboration*, organized by Tricia Van Eck of 6018 North, **6018North.net** in Chicago and Kerstin Niemann of FILTER Detroit, **filter-hamburg.com**.

The Design for the Living World class, University of Fine Arts / Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) Hamburg.  
**designfortheworld.com**

## Foreword

What makes Chicago and Detroit hospitable locations for alternative practice?

From September 21 – October 1, 2015, six students from the Design for the Living World class and their professor and artist Marjetica Potrč explored each city to experience how artists, activists, and practitioners are fostering new ways of living and thinking. In both cities we arranged a series of site visits, workshops, meals, and conversations with generous neighbors, institutions, artists, activists, and makers who shared their practice and ideas.

Why Chicago and Detroit? While vastly different, both cities are former manufacturing hubs, rather than art centers. Shaped by immigrants and rich social histories, each struggles with problems of globalism exacerbated by the recent economic downturn.

In terms of the arts, Chicago's lack of a strong commercial art market but abundance of art schools means that artists support themselves through teaching. This encourages a think-tank mentality further buttressed by Chicago's affordable rent providing space to experiment and connect with other artists, free of competition. Detroit is also not a major art capital. However, recently through its long-term depopulation and economic free fall, Detroit has a large amount of unused land and empty houses. With low prices, these spaces are being reoccupied, restored or transformed by makers, artists, designers, architects and visionaries, with art and social design as primary catalysts. Some neighborhoods share resources and apply sustainable methods to live together.

Beginning the trip in Chicago, we focused on food, soil, and water asking how these resources can best be used, protected, and reinvented to form and sustain communities. Connie Spreen Director of the Experimental Station discussed how politics intersects with art, food, and community. At Emmanuel Pratt's Sweetwater Foundation aquaponic studio and community garden we discussed how community is grown and nourished. At Helen Cameron's neighborhood reception at Uncommon Ground's organic rooftop garden she and her gardeners shared how they have created the US's greenest restaurant. We also looked at large systems and ecologies by touring the Metropolitan Water Reclamation's Stickney plant – the largest wastewater treatment facility in the world – with its head engineer Reed Dring. At Rebuild Exchange's Méthode Room, French architect Xavier Wrona's exhibition posited architecture as a systemic tool through which power manifests. Over lunches with the Goethe Institut, artist Faheem Majeed, and the public within the Lurie Garden – the world's largest green roof – Director Scott Stewart explained the garden. Artist and ecological designer Frances Whitehead also presented the *606*, a former railroad recently transformed into an elevated bikepath / park with three miles of native serviceberry trees. At Hull House, artist Maria Gaspar explained her installation and *96 Acres Project*, which investigates and reframes the Cook County Jail – the US's largest jail – as a platform for transformation. On a more personal level, artist Rebecca

Beachy welcomed the group at 6018North and artist / teacher Bryan Saner shared his ideas about pedagogy and intentional community. The group presented to artist Sara Black's School of the Art Institute class and also helped Nance Klehm, who works at the root level of soil replenishment, in her phyto-remediation garden. The week ended in the Vedgewater garden with gardener Sarah Mallin and a home-cooked thank you dinner for all of the participants.

In Detroit, we avoided letting the ruin-porn infused imagery take over to look into the City's current state of mind. A workshop called "Ensemble practice" by the Hinterlands, a local multidisciplinary art group, was the starting point of a five-day conversation with the City. A breakfast Conversation with undergraduate students from the College for Creative Studies, led by its professor and head of the sculptural department Chido Johnson, made us collaboratively discuss and exchange research methodologies in the everyday artistic practice. A tour through the different project houses organized by Power House Productions director Gina Reichert pointed out that buying a cheap house is one thing, integrating a community arts house in a neighborhood with different needs, requires time to develop participation and support with neighbors as a stewardship of permanent engagement. Richard Feldman from the Boggs Center, a "home" that fosters engagement and critical thinking in communities through local, national and international networks of activists, artists and intellectuals, inspired us to take a close look at sustainable and ecological responsible projects throughout the city. At Wayne Curtis' Freedom Community Garden we were introduced to the neighborhood. A conversation with Jeri Stroupe from the economic development department of Wayne State University helped to understand approaches of building independent mobile infrastructures within a car city. Artists venues such as Popp's Packing or Underground Resistance's Cornelius Harris' take on the recent history of music in Detroit and many other makers and visionaries we engaged with, shared the possibilities and challenges of working with Detroit.

Thank you to all the participating institutions and people for your time, support, inside knowledge, love and beauty extended during these days. For their financial support we thank Kulturbehörde Hamburg and Goethe Institut in Chicago. Special thanks to the students Maria Christou, Tino Holzmann, Barbara Niklas, Anastasia Storck-Reschke, Konouz Saeed, and William Schwartz and professor Marjetica Potrč for your curiosity, insight, and critical questions.

Kerstin Niemann **FILTER Detroit**  
and Tricia Van Eck **6018North, Chicago**

## Question:

How important are institutional structures?



### XAVIER WRONA

Architect,

The Method Room residency  
at the Rebuild Foundation

[rebuild-foundation.org](http://rebuild-foundation.org)



**Answer:** Argh... I'm not sure what Institutional Structures are. I'm no philosopher but I'll try to manage with what I got to honor your invitation. To me there is an ambiguity about the nature of the term which makes it hard to answer your question. Is Donald Trump an Institutional Structure? (If not, why would he not be? how could you demonstrate that he is not?). Are we talking about private institutions or public institutions? Are the Tea Party, CNN, Democracy Now, WalMart, Wall Street or Tahrir Square Institutional Structures? I guess if I were to try circumscribe as much as possible the concept of Institutional Structure to a point were it would engulf all these possible institutions I would understand it as stabilized network of forces within reality, a node of interest with a particular intention, ideology or system of belief oriented towards a particular agenda. Institutions would then be somehow what has calcified within human practices.

Let's say that Institutional Structures are such a thing. Any judgement one would then make regarding their importance would have to be based on the fact that they include a variety of agendas that I sometimes

would be in agreement with (let's say...Tahrir square and Democracy Now) and others with which I would strongly disagree (WalMart, Tea Party...).

So the statement you are asking of me has to look beyond these agendas, it has to be about this calcification per se, it would only be talking about the fact that there are Institutional Structures, regardless of where they go or what they push for. My answer would be then: Institutional Structures is what human beings do, so how important are they? It seems they are fundamental to human beings as a way of being human beings, it seems they are part of us, as much as language is for instance.

Yet, I may be wrong, but it seems that there is an implied question within your question: as if you meant by "are they important" are they a good thing or a bad thing? This all would require more than a 24 hours to be answered but within this limited time frame, as a hunch, I would say that it goes to a criticism that Bourdieu addresses to the Marxist left in his courses on the State, at the College de France. For Bourdieu, Marxism is wrong for thinking that the structure of the State (which I would replace here by Institutional Structure) is fundamentally an oppressive structure. Bourdieu claims instead that the State is a field to be appropriated, that it can be oppressive or not, according to what happens within it. I would say, through Georges Bataille, that institutions are neither. They are not ontologically meant to be oppressive tools nor are they a free open field to invest. They would rather be something that is ideologically oriented by the

fact that they act as stabilizers, they slow down the course of things and as such they tend to organise themselves, to become structures. Unfortunately we have very few models of structures that would not be founded on top down thinking, on hierarchical relationships of domination. I believe we miss an intelligence of structures.

To conclude I will try to sum it up by an example. Anarchy is commonly associated, mainly by the Right, as chaos. And historically, the notion of order has mostly been one of the ideological values of the Right and was associated with notions of Property, Family and Religion, three majors institutions that stabilise and calcify reality through human relationships, clothing, buildings...It was actually the case during the

French revolution of 1848 for the Parti de l'Ordre, the Party of the Order, which was driven against the proletariat, understood as the partie de l'anarchie, the Party of Anarchy. But anarchy, as Elisee Reclus explained, is not chaos or the absence of rules. Anarchy is an order without hierarchy, where everyone is equal.

So, institutions I would say, again intuitively, seem to be inseparable from mankind's existence. So they are important, indeed. But to be able to make any judgment about what they actually are with in reality, whether they are a good or a bad thing, we would need to look deeper into what is the ideological order running through them, what is the system of belief that orders their own structure. I believe there is a large field of inquiry here, one for which architectural thinking could be useful.

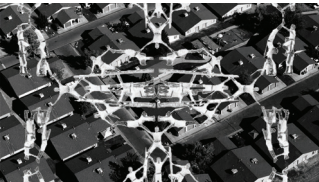
**XW, Question:**  
Are top down structures necessary to organize reality or can bottom up structures organize the totality of reality on their own?



**GINA REICHERT  
AND MITCH COPE**

Artists, Design 99,  
Co-Founders & Co-Directors,  
Power House Productions

[visitdesign99.com](http://visitdesign99.com)



**Answer:** There needs to be understanding, respect, and support from the top. An acknowledgement of the efforts and work and contribution of what is happening at other levels, grassroots if you will. After that, mostly the higher ups need to

stay out of the way. Do you think they'll ever be able to truly trust the process and let artists do their best work? Sometimes, some will. But mostly I've seen policy makers and development want to glean ideas and strategies from neighborhood based success stories and then attempt to repeat what's worked before without making room for the artist or the organizer in the rethinking or reshaping of the idea for a different context. This is a bit of a cynical answer though. In the best cases (and there are some!) there are people at higher levels that 'get it' and facilitate conversations and dialogue between various levels of working groups. And longterm, this is what needs to happen to sustain the efforts of small scale and diverse arts and cultural initiatives.

**GR + MC, Question:**

Who advocates for artists? How can institutions and biennials and curators and art spaces better host artists?



**FRANCES WHITEHEAD**

Civic practice artist,  
Principal ARTetal Studio

[franceswhitehead.com](http://franceswhitehead.com)

**Answer:** Artists can find partners, points of support, and reciprocity across society – if they are willing to step outside the art world and into larger life.



**FW, Question:**

What do artists know that can contribute to the future?



**BRYAN SANER**

Creative Practitioner,  
Social Arts Worker, Maker

[chicagoartistscoalition.org](http://chicagoartistscoalition.org)

with making their own lifestyle and communicating through difference. Maybe this is because artists use alternative languages like visual or movement or image based dialogues. I hope that collaboration nurtures this creative process. Making the things we need to survive (food, clothing, shelter and culture) in common with your neighbors or community of fellow creative practitioners teaches us to consider our relationship to otherness and realize that we are not separate from the other.



**Answer:** Artists have the ability to create their own economic structures. I imagine that creative people are more comfortable

**BS, Question:**

How can we shift the sustainable intentions of our creative practices from making money to making time?



## KERSTIN NIEMANN

Curator and founder  
of FILTER Detroit

[filter-hamburg.com](http://filter-hamburg.com)



**Answer:** Allowing ourselves to share more of our own resources and skills starts with very little gestures and acts e.g., give your car to a neighbor who needs to visit a friend far away. At first hand it may limit our radius of movement – but at the same time this type of shape shifting can increase our time account for extra activity

– such as learning how to plant tomatoes in our back yard taught by our other neighbor.

Quality time is whatever we define it to be in our life. It is a struggle at times to break behavioral patterns – yet our own willingness to be open for new approaches of creating, sharing and exchanging can save and expand time. Spending time and investing into people and ideas that do not relate to ones own can be exhausting – sometimes it is more rewarding to say no. To me there is a certain responsibility towards people in my network that I feel obligated by – that I wish to support regardless of time and money – conversely I know that I can rely on their support.

### KN, Question:

Where does a community end?



## RICHARD FELDMAN

Member of James and  
Grace Lee Boggs Center  
to Nurture Community

[boggscenter.org](http://boggscenter.org)



**Answer:** I often make the distinction between community which is place based with very different values, interests and engagements and a

network of people who have common interests and / or commitments. Each space and place in which we live has a history and it is knowing the history and acknowledging the destructive values as well as the gifts people bring to create opportunity to truly create community. Community advances individuality and dreams and interdependence and it ends with individualism, meism and narrow forms of security. A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all. The meaning of words evolve historically.

### RF, Question:

What principles and values would guide the writing of a "community constitution?"  
What does democracy look like in 2016?





## DESIGN FOR THE LIVING WORLD

Class of participatory design,  
Hochschule für Bildende  
Künste Hamburg

[designforthelivingworld.com](http://designforthelivingworld.com)



*William Schwartz on behalf of  
Design for the Living World*

**Answer:** I think some of the core principles and values that guide our class boil down to inclusivity, participation, and experimentation. Likewise, these could be argued as necessary for producing a “community constitution” that truly reflects it’s constituents. Maybe I can explain this by answering the second question.

What does democracy look like in 2016? This is the type of question that is always present, whether directly or indirectly, in our class discussions and projects. As students I think we have inherited these questions

from previous generations and have internalized them into our own practices. Of course we learn by looking at the past and current forms of democracy (and their many failures), but with this backdrop we also see ourselves as responsible to push and represent our own generation’s interpretations and results. Democracy in terms of how we vote, shop, or broadcast ourselves via social media is not what we understand to contribute to a working democracy. When you work with people, your philosophical beliefs have to translate into real actions and decision making. The democracy that we are advocating for consists of the three before mentioned principles and values.

You cannot have a working democracy without participation, but you cannot have a participatory democracy without the full inclusion of the designated populace, and you cannot have wide-reaching inclusion with a singular, centralized approach, so the ability to experiment, adapt and allow for change is critical to our understanding of a working democracy.

### **DFLW, Question:**

What can be done to prevent an end of  
a community, or to (re)vive community?



### **EMMANUEL PRATT**

Executive Director /  
Co-Founder of  
Sweet Water Foundation

[sweetwaterfoundation.com](http://sweetwaterfoundation.com)



**Answer:** A place, an urban environment, a small town village, a multi-media network or a government funded institution lacks the spirit of a community when there is no participation, self-reflection and the willingness to learn from one another. No appreciation of the individual to reach out and share with others destroys a community.

Despite decades of living and serving a beloved community,

people can be uprooted like useless weeds, then exiled to other alienated neighborhoods, perhaps even in another city. They easily become the victims of entrepreneurial or political re-zoning and gentrification schemes that significantly and adversely affect neighborhood demographics.

Whether it is a person or community in crisis, a neighborhood plagued by broken moments of history, ill-treatment, neglect and oppression, or a city attempting to overcome the adverse effects of a plantation economy, industrialization, discrimination or environmental degradation, the drive toward real transformational insight and true change starts from the single revolutionary act of sacred reconnection.

**Preventing an end of a community**  
Critical numbers of people within so-called 'blighted' or disinvested urban neighborhoods are demonstrating a powerfully creative approach to issues that adversely impact the quality of their everyday lives. The seeds for change are being quietly sown and have already sprouted wondrous roots producing far more than just good food. The Good Food {r}Evolution is being led and carried out by once alienated youth, wisdom-filled elders, the eager of school kids, working folk along with the under-employed, singles and partners, war veterans now armored with hope, the formerly incarcerated now intent upon growing a new life, paid college interns and apprentices of all ages.

It is in these spaces that they gather to share their own life stories, dreams and visions of new homes, markets that provide places to work and sell their produce and new ways to nurture their neighborhood. Abandoned buildings and warehouses, rather than representing a blight

of disintegrating wood, bricks and mortar upon the urban landscape, are re-envisioned as a restorable projects, potential financial and community investments. Working together, people envision new small businesses, better schools and vital organs of community life that can possibly emerge over time. This new narrative of promise, hope and re-connection offers the possibility to transform problems to opportunities and obstacles to assets. People are offered the possibility to create a new story of community and re-story their own lives by creating a new form of local economy centered around the premise.

**(Re)living community**  
Thinking about and participating in inner-city urban life serves as an important corrective to planning schemes. Instead, the process of creating Urban Farms initiates a direction that moves people from institutionalized victimhood to empowered personhood and offers the possibility of collective re-invention, re-imagination, regeneration, and true problem-solving that requires a dramatic recasting of a narrative of loss to one of potential and promise.

The growth in popularity of and concurrent global discourse surrounding urban agriculture offers a new menu of ecologically sensitive innovations in food production across a fusion of ancient, conventional and cutting-edge biomimetic technologies that instead focus directly on the preservation of natural, social, and human capital and the transformation of various waste streams into a dynamically re-productive and responsive feedback loop within the urban ecosystem.

At Sweet Water Foundation our mission is to democratize, globalize, and commercialize

urban agriculture practices for resilient 21st century communities via hands-on, real-life learning opportunities in urban agriculture. For SWF, urban agriculture and aquaponics have become tools offering solutions to address 1) food security and neighborhood stabilization in distressed neighborhoods chronically experiencing 'urban decay' and 'blight' and 2) sustainable production methods addressing various increasing market-level needs of 'local' or 'organic' food production.

The focus of our work (both academic and in practice) in cities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit has been to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, obstacles, and opportunities of urban agricultural practitioners, city planners, city residents, city officials, designers, and politicians alike concerning the

implications of urban agriculture on traditional approaches to city planning and development. Our methodology has and continues to include intensive participant-observation supplemented by series of open-ended interviews including our team members (self-reflectively) as active participants in the discussion.

Sweet Water Foundation utilizes an exponential growth model for maximum impact by embedding our programming within existing networks within communities. We work to catalyze and cultivate innovative spaces that emphasize the relationship between inspiration, education, action and innovation by supporting STE(A+)M education for the emerging industry of urban agriculture. Our model includes a growing network of Aquaponics Innovation Centers, Urban Agriculture STE[A+]M Hubs, and robust hyper-local partnerships locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

**EP, Question:**

If life is a stage, then what does it mean to act as a HUMAN in a (solutionary) way that sustains / replenishes / sustains the GIFT of life? (Question as inspired by my time with and the memorial for Grace Lee Boggs regarding the notion of humanity.)



**KATE DAUGHDRILL**  
Artist and Urban Farmer  
at Burnside Farm

[burnsidefarmdetroit.com](http://burnsidefarmdetroit.com)



**Answer:** For the past four years, the neighbors and artists of Burnside Farm have

worked to cultivate a healthier, more connected neighborhood through growing, cooking, and enjoying food together. Two lots of the farm are cultivated as a community garden where neighbors garden together and share in the fruits (and vegetables!) of their shared work. One lot is planted with 100' x 30' of kale and herbs for wholesale to local restaurants and corner stores as well as to supply the farm's medicinal tincture business that helps sustain our work. Three lots of the farm are used as a community gathering

*Continued after Colophon*

space where we host monthly dinners throughout the growing season on our cinder block grill as well as revolving art exhibitions and monthly musical and cultural performances by neighbors of all backgrounds.

We are committed to thinking practically about how individuals and communities can sustain ourselves in more life-giving, fulfilling ways. Many of the neighbors of Burnside heat their homes with wood. We are exploring passive solar designs in our planning for the Farm House, a multi-purpose art and gathering space that opens up to the garden. We have plans to put up a wind turbine on Burnside. We are committed to cultivating neighborhood economies by selling our fresh produce to nearby corner stores and helping the women of our community sell their handwoven baskets on the internet and their backyard vegetables to local restaurants.

The transformation of our block (and the two blocks surrounding us) happened because of the care that has grown between neighbors while weeding together and teaching each other our families' cooking secrets. It has grown while dancing together around the fire into the night and helping each other figure out how to pay our taxes. It happened while we were learning to grow our own food and to take care of ourselves and each other. Detroit philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs states that we are living during an economic and cultural paradigm shift as big as the shift from hunter-gatherers

to agriculture, agriculture to industrialism, industrialism to something else. Many in Detroit believe that this new historical paradigm will take the form of neighborhood-based economies where neighbors work together to provide for their own basic needs through place-based community production. This way of working and living gives us more time to simply be human. The work of living is cultivating life – it is nurturing and caring for ourselves and our people. It is allowing ourselves to be nurtured by nature and to be open to truly connect with and receive from others. In working with the land and collaboratively with neighbors on a neighborhood scale, we are taking care of ourselves in simple, deeply satisfying ways that bring the feelings of freedom, health, being-ness, and integration.

This way of organizing our time and our work will lead to self-sufficient neighborhoods. It will look like people growing their own food and finding creative ways to generate energy. It will look like community production of the goods and services we need on a neighborhood level. It will look like people 3D printing their own furniture (and even cars!) and greenhouses on every block. It will look like corner stores filled with fresh, neighborhood-grown food that is affordable and like owner-occupied and cooperative businesses selling things made by the people of a neighborhood to the people of a neighborhood. These ways of living connect us to the gift of life in a daily way. They teach us how to truly be present with the life all around us and how to relate to it with care.

**KD, Question:**

What values need to be cultivated to create a more care-filled, interconnected city? How do we do this?



## CONNIE SPREEN

Experimental Station,  
Executive Director

[experimentalstation.org](http://experimentalstation.org)



**Answer:** Long ago, I ceased to believe in the viability of utopias. It is a rare instance when utopian thinking does not involve misguided – and sometimes downright evil – attempts either to alter human nature or to bend and coerce the non-conforming into compliance.

While we seem to be far from the ‘care-filled, interconnected city’ in your question, I do not believe that what is absent from our city and society is interconnectedness. Our cities – and all of us who live in them – are already profoundly interconnected. Although you might live in affluence on Chicago’s north side, and tell yourself that the South Side’s problems with poverty, crime, drugs and widespread ill health are not your concern, you are nevertheless affected by them, if only through the taxes you pay.

What I see is missing from our cities and from our society generally is our ability to see how connected we are. It is when we can see that connection between ourselves and those (usually black and brown-skinned) ‘others’ that we become able

to care. Once that connection is established, compassion may be triggered for those with the capacity for compassion. And for those without that capacity, it becomes possible to make an appeal to self-interest.

Making claims to ‘justice’ and ‘rights’ is often the response to conditions of inequality. In some cases, such claims are useful and necessary. However, in the course of the work that Experimental Station has undertaken over the past nine years to enable Chicago’s low-income population to gain access to healthy food, we have avoided describing food as a ‘right’ and speaking in terms of ‘food justice.’ Stating that access to healthy food is a ‘right’ is a debatable issue. We are not seeking a debate. Rather, we are working to solve a practical problem that – as a consequence of our interconnectedness – affects us all, whether we are aware of it yet or not.

An important component of our work is therefore to make visible the invisible lines of connectedness. The health and wellbeing of black and brown lives does matter to us, whether or not we feel compassion for them, whether or not they live next door. If a significant percentage of our population is ill-fed, ill-educated, ill-equipped for employment, and simply ill, we will all suffer for it through a less robust civil society, a weaker economy, higher crime and incarceration, higher Medicaid costs, etc.

We must all be reminded that the bell does, indeed, toll for thee.

### **CS, Question:**

How do we cultivate in our society a greater sense of personal and individual responsibility for improving current conditions, whether in regard to social or climate crises?



**NANCE KLEHM**  
Steward of the Earth

[spontaneousvegetation.net](http://spontaneousvegetation.net)



**Answer:** My lifelong platforms and interests are: urbanized soils, spontaneous vegetation and disturbance ecology, urban agroecology, herbalism and community bioremediation.

My aim is to help people connect to the biology that supports them both within their bodies and their landbase. I currently teach and train people in herbal medicine, foraging skills, techniques and practices of building soil fertility to support plant function and fungal communities, as well as in methods of community bioremediation by working with bacteria, plants and fungi to heal disturbed and contaminated soils.

My work is highly localized within Chicago and with a large rural parcel just outside the city. However, I travel a fair bit internationally to do this work in my winter season.

I am the Founder and Director of Social Ecologies. Social Ecologies engages local residents in building healthy habitats and spreading holistic, systematic thinking by creating and maintaining collaborative long-term interactive neighborhood projects.  
[socialecologies.net](http://socialecologies.net)

In answer to the question posed to me:

Each of us belongs to multiple societies and it is important that each of us starts here, identifying

the communities that we relate to, that we belong to, that we participate in. The society of our geographical location such as city block, neighborhood, small town or island, the society of our work, the societies of our interests, etc. For the benefit of belonging to each of these societies, we are asked something of each of them. And to keep our membership, we perform certain responsibilities. Are all these societies we belong to truly supporting our wellbeing as citizens? As animals?

The design of cities is formulated to be specialist, not generalist. Specialization is what helped cities and the few in power expand, become states, turn into empires. Despite being social animals, I am unsure humans were designed to live in cities and am unsure if our cities support our collective wellbeing. We function better in villages, in our smaller, chosen societies and in the cultures and economies we dream and build together.

If place is an expression of a particular culture's (or society's) vision and values, why do so many places not serve as better habitats for the inhabitants? What has been taken from us and what have we willingly or unwittingly forfeited? How do we excavate and reclaim our local knowledge, our embodied economies, our practical skills, our own stories?

How can we be present, authentic and skilled? How can we build our shared experienced and scientific understanding at the same time? What culture/s do we serve? What culture/s do we create? How do we facilitate others' emergence and wellbeing? How can we be the first to listen and give back?

Humans are creative and vulnerable. Creativity

means being present to see connections, engage our questions, be authentic in our actions, experiment, fail and succeed and enjoy the learning that comes from it. Vulnerability creates a space to receive. It recognizes an interdependence. We need to relate, form connections, and form networks to survive. As we maintain,

restore and improve our communities, landscapes and ecosystems, we are benefitted individually. In other words, when we take care of others (plants, animals, fungi, etc.) we take care of ourselves.

How can we inhabit a new order now?

**NK, Question:**

How do we recast our relationships to each other, ourselves and the land and all it holds to better support our collective wellbeing?



**LIZA BIELBY**

Co-director The Hinterlands,  
experimental performance  
ensemble

[thehinterlandsensemble.org](http://thehinterlandsensemble.org)



**Answer:** Part of the struggle begins with developing daily methods and exercises to strengthen our ability to think beyond the boundaries of the individual. Practicing listening without outcome in mind; acknowledging difference (in opinion, in life experience,

etc.) and not running away from or smoothing over these differences; finding experiences in which we are lost and uncomfortable – these are all trainings that can help us put the self aside and be available to others.

In the US – and probably many other places around the world – we're bombarded with encouragement to think individually – to accomplish great things as individuals, to do it our own way, to go it alone. Working with others, working in deference to our land, and working in collective means being comfortable with occasional discomfort. We need ongoing and evolving training to push our self into a notion of ourselves.

**LB, Question:**

Is it better to work to change systems from within or to create new systems from without that can overtake or replace existing systems – why?





## TRICIA VAN ECK

6018North Director  
and Founder

[6018north.org](http://6018north.org)



**Answer:** Working to create systemic change is difficult. Systems are complex, as are people. Every inside has an outside and vice-versa; it's just a matter of perspective. To challenge and redefine systems, insiders or outsiders need to triangulate and connect with those within and without, and on the margins. These margins hold power and are key leverage points where shifts can happen. Having worked in a gallery, museum, and now a non-profit space, I know that change can be effected from many different positions. Buckminster Fuller called this trim tab – a small device on the rudder of a boat or plane that can alter the steering of its course – the power of individuals to effect change.

The second half of the question implies a quick fix – replace, overtake. If we think about contaminated soil, we can bulldoze and replace it with new soil. This provides new soil without addressing the underlying problem. If we think about regime change, we know where that goes. Quick fix solutions usually result in later problems. Instead, using a holistic systems approach, we step back and approach the problem as an ecosystem. What are the system's structure, cycles, and interactions between its parts? Who works within and without? Who benefits, how and why? What are the systems'

rules? What are its needs? Frequently, a systems' needs are also its leverage points, where we are probably connected. If we dig deep and are honest, we often support the same system we are challenging. For example, if the system is a corporation, what purchases have we made that fund that corporation? Systems work because of these interconnections within and without, and at the margins. By focusing on interconnections, change can occur. By connecting individuals, alliances, networks, organizations, and other ecosystems, we can simultaneously address different problem areas (from different vantage points) and leverage improvement throughout the wider system. Working together is not easy and clearly requires a paradigm shift from destruction to construction. This does not imply quantity and doing more, but rather quality and doing perhaps less. It calls for aligning capacities to achieve what the system in question cannot, to make something better, create value, problem solve, or simply streamline efforts. People want to be associated with success, even naysayers. Success breeds success. So the adage is true: be the change you want to see.

This brings us to the overriding but unaddressed question: what is the aspirational change? A clear vision of what is to be achieved is equally important as knowing the system, its leverage points, and the root causes of the problem. Underneath the desire for change is usually an unarticulated or unmet need. By bringing our new network of partners and alliances together, needs (and resources) can be uncovered and articulated. Lack of resources is usually not the problem, but rather distribution or misalignment of resources. Networks can then work like acupuncture. Acupuncture,



a holistic approach to change, moves stagnated energy and redistributes or realigns the body's resources. Acupuncture is not systemic overthrow, but movement within the system from without, similar to Fuller's trim tab. In acupuncture nothing is lost – which is what opponents to change fear – only stagnation. We can then reframe problems as opportunities for aligning needs with resources by removing stagnation, the probable cause of most needs are not met. This does not imply that this is easy. And it may sound unduly optimistic when faced with – police brutality, obesity, or climate change – problems built up over decades with many different causes. It's important, however, to view these not as “us vs. them” “insider vs. outsider” problems, but societal ailments that effect and connect us all. In fact, the more people feel connected to, rather than isolated from a problem, the greater chance for key decision makers to recognize the problem and look for solutions. At 6018North we try to address needs through connections since connections create opportunities. By bringing together networks and shifting from focusing on problems to creating opportunities, diverse constituents can align to meet needs, and in the process discover new possibilities for underutilized resources and untapped potential.

## Afterword

Over ten intense days, from September 21 to October 1, 2015, students from the Design for the Living World class at the University of Fine Arts / HFBK in Hamburg met with a number of inspiring people and learned about their bottom-up initiatives in Chicago and Detroit. Using local knowledge, they are reinventing their neighborhoods, one by one, to create more resilient cities. For us, it was an empowering experience to realize that we in Hamburg share a common language and similar dreams and practices with people in Chicago and Detroit.

This publication presents a chain of questions and answers by these artists, architects, designers, and activists, as well as Design for the Living World and our collaborators in the project, Tricia Van Eck of 6018North in Chicago and Kerstin Niemann of FILTER in Hamburg and Detroit. It worked like this: we posed a question to someone, who then, after answering it, asked a new question, which we passed on to the next person in the chain. In this way, a fruitful exchange was created between Chicago and Detroit (and Hamburg). We are very grateful to all the contributors for taking the time to share their ideas, practices, and questions with us.

In Chicago, we learned that the city has a strong and socially engaged art community. This is due to important local precedents and good support as well as a lack of commercially oriented art. The people we spoke with are active in small-scale socially conscious economies, urban agriculture, and community education. We realized that such initiatives are seeds that can grow into a city of resilient neighborhoods.

In Detroit, we visited the Boggs Center, which has a legacy that dates from the city's social and economic collapse after the decline of the automotive industry in the 1960s. In response to this, activists visualized a future built on politically empowered residents – Richard Feldman calls this the city's re-evolution. The residents who stayed in the inner city understood the potential of unused spaces, the urban voids that became available for the urban agricultural practices Detroit celebrates today. Gina Reichert and Mitch Cope of the Power House Productions Project took us around the neighborhood and showed us several houses, such as Play House and Squash House, which were once vacant but are now being developed with and for the community and the neighbourhood. Turning loss into opportunity is something people here have learned the hard way. Such initiatives make Detroit a laboratory for practices that inspire other cities as well – cities that see a future beyond the neoliberal social and economic agreement. And not only that, but by foregrounding community values, such practices honour the unforgotten dream of the activists of the 1960s and provide tools of engagement for today's generation to build their communities and make their city stronger.

As champions of similar initiatives in Hamburg and elsewhere, we value the awareness that we are connected to others across generations and across the world. This was a gift we celebrated in both Chicago and Detroit.

*We Care a Lot: Stewardship of Land in the Neighborhood, Conservation – Coalition – Collaboration* is a collaboration with Tricia Van Eck of 6018North in Chicago and Kerstin Niemann of FILTER in Detroit and Hamburg. Huge thanks go to Tricia and Kerstin for envisioning the project and for their leadership and commitment.

The students who participated in the project are Maria Christou, Tino Holzmann, Barbara Niklas, Anastasia Storck-Reschke, Konouz Saeed, and William Schwartz.

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# COLOPHON

## Editors

Kerstin Niemann

Marjetica Potrč

Anastasia Storck-Reschke

## Front Cover and Design

Eva Zielinski

## Collages

Lea Kirstein

## Print

Reset Grafische Medien GmbH, Hamburg

## Authors

Liza Bielby and Richard Newman, Kate Daughdrill,  
Richard Feldman, Nance Klehm, Kerstin Niemann,  
Marjetica Potrč, Emmanuel Pratt, Gina Reichert  
and Mitch Cope, Bryan Saner, William Schwartz –  
The Design for the Living World class, Connie Spreen,  
Tricia Van Eck, Frances Whitehead and Xavier Wrona.

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