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THE RADICAL POTENTIAL OF CREATING COMMUNITIES OF CARE THROUGH ART

*Rhoda Rosen and Amanda Leigh Davis**

The links between food insecurity and homelessness are systemic and deadly and attempts to ameliorate them can seem like a struggle to those they impact.¹ Multiple research projects have pointed to the connection between food and housing insecurity.² Feeding the hungry and housing the unhoused, noble though these ameliorations may seem, treat symptoms, and miss root causes. One way that food and housing are connected is by the waste that occurs all along the supply chain, with the real waste being the humans caught in the trap of food and housing waste. In this issue, Mariana Chilton, PhD, MPH argues that this systemic insecurity requires no less than “in full throttle societal transformation” which can only be achieved by “significantly altering the structure of the nation state” and addressing life insecurity at its roots.³ The premise of this foreword is that the intractability of food and housing insecurity is rooted in the profitability of waste, which incentivizes perpetuating the problem and makes it seem inevitable and natural; we therefore explore ways that contemporary art can conceptualize a way out of the cycle of waste by proposing circular economies that reconnect and cultivate food, housing, and people in relationship to one another. Though contemporary art practice might strike some as disconnected from nation-state structures, we explore practices with infrastructural interventions. First though, we explore where the waste is and how it operates, framing the thread that ties each of the articles in this issue together, which is the history of food and housing insecurity as not a

* The authors are indebted to Miranda Guedes, J.D. Candidate at the University of Miami School of Law and Katherine Murray, J.D. Candidate University of Miami School of Law for sharing their research.

¹ TREVA B. LINDSEY, AMERICA, GODDAM: VIOLENCE, BLACK WOMEN, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE 181-205 (2022).

² Kevin M. Fitzpatrick & Don E. Willis, *Homeless and Hungry: Food Insecurity in the Land of Plenty*, 13 FOOD SEC. 3 (2021).

³ Mariana Chilton, *Sacred Nutrition: Asserting Indigenous Sovereignty and Rights of Women and Nature to Ensure the Right to Food in the United States*, 31 U. MIA INT'L & COMP. L. REV. 49 (2024).

bug but a feature of the global socio-political and economic systems we currently inhabit.

Vacancy rates mean that over 16 million housing units sit empty in the United States.⁴ Likewise, thirty to forty percent of the United States food supply is wasted, with food comprising the single largest material in landfills, despite the fact that tens of millions of people do not fulfill their basic nutritional needs.⁵ Yet the very soup kitchens and food banks set up to connect people to food become wasteful barriers between people and nourishment: from the time it takes to ship, process, quality check, and stock the food, to limited hours, long lines and byzantine selection processes, to the social stigma associated with getting help from these institutions, waste happens.⁶ Even when pantries, banks, and kitchens do manage to connect people with food, recent studies on food pantry users conclude that pantries provide nutrient-dense foods in insufficient amounts and ultimately do not fulfill the nutrient requirements of those they serve.⁷ Just as tens of millions struggle on a daily basis to meet basic nutrition needs, at

⁴ Dan Weil, *Housing Nightmare Continues, as Rent Soars and Home Prices Rise*, THE STREET (May 19, 2022, 1:17 PM), <https://www.thestreet.com/personal-finance/housing-market-news-prices-rising>.

⁵ See generally *Food Loss and Waste*, U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMIN., <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste> (Feb. 14, 2023); See generally Rachel Loopstra, *Interventions to Address Household Food Insecurity in High-Income Countries*, 77 PROC. OF THE NUTR. SOC'Y 270 (2018); See generally Heather A. Eicher-Miller, *A Review of the Food Security, Diet and Health Outcomes of Food Pantry Clients and the Potential for Their Improvement Through Food Pantry Interventions in the United States*, 220 PHYSIOLOGY BEHAV. 1 (2020).

⁶ See Alexandra I. Evans & Robin M. Nagele, *A Lot to Digest: Advancing Food Waste Policy in the United States*, 58 NAT. RES. J. 179 (2018) (examining waste at all stages of the supply chain and arguing that food insecurity and hunger exist in the United States not because of lack of supply, but because of “systemic inefficiencies.”); see also Rachel Loopstra, *Interventions to address household food insecurity in high-income countries*, 77 PROC. NUTRITION SOC'Y 270, 275 (2018) (that social stigma prevents people from seeking nutrition from food banks is examined in an article that also reviews evidence showing the “limited impacts” of food banks, and reviews international research showing that food banks “inaccessible due to few operating hours and entry requirements.”).

⁷ See Anna Simmet et al., *The Dietary Quality of Food Pantry Users: A Systematic Review of Existing Literature*, 117 J. OF THE ACAD. OF NUTR. & DIETICS 563, 572-73 (2017).

minimum hundreds of thousands across the country do not have adequate housing.⁸

The human rights crisis in the United States is even worse when viewed through the lens of international law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) links “the right to adequate food” with “the inherent dignity of the human person.”⁹ This dignity itself, the UN has stated, is a prerequisite for meeting other human rights recognized by the International Bill of Human Rights.¹⁰ International human rights law states that food must meet four criteria: adequacy, availability, accessibility, and sustainability.¹¹ The right to food thus must not merely meet minimums, but must also be culturally acceptable, free from harm, consistently accessible locally, and must not force individuals to choose between food and other basic needs like shelter or healthcare.¹² The Special Rapporteur for the right to food affirms the right to adequate food as foundational for human lives to be lived in dignity and free of fear.¹³ Furthermore, data supports the conclusion that not having adequate food stunts growth in children and leads to behavioral problems.¹⁴ These behavioral problems then, ironically, are often used to justify cutting people – Black women in particular – off

⁸ U.S. Dep’t of Hous. & Urb. Dev., *Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count*, HUD EXCHANGE, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/>.

⁹ International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights art. 11.2, Dec. 16, 1966, 993 U.N.T.S. 3 [hereinafter ICESCR] (while we quote the U.N. and international law here (and while we agree with the sentiment) we, as authors and as part of the community of Red Line Service, do not ourselves use the term dignity, which refers to a state of being worthy. We choose instead to use the term “humanity,” which does not imply that some people either are or are not worthy).

¹⁰ U.N. ESCOR, 12th Sess., at 2, U.N. Doc. E/C/12 (May 12, 1999).

¹¹ *Id.* at ¶ 10, 13.

¹² *Id.* ¶ 8, 11, 39.

¹³ Michael Fakrhi (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food), *Conflict and the Right to Food*, ¶ 1, 33, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/52/40 (Dec. 29, 2022) (we add here that while we agree with the spirit of the Special Rapporteur, we do not ourselves endorse the use of the term ‘dignity,’ a term etymologically suggestive of those who have the status of being worthy, as if there are those who are not worthy).

¹⁴ Compromises and coping strategies, FEEDING AM., <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>.

from food and housing assistance.¹⁵ The right to adequate housing, first recognized in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and then codified into treaty law by the ICESCR, affirms a state's duty to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to adequate housing as a component of an adequate standard of living.¹⁶ The U.S. signed ICESCR on October 5, 1977, but has not yet ratified it.¹⁷ While it has no obligation to implement the treaty's provisions, it may not undermine the treaty's "object and the purpose."¹⁸ Even under this minimal standard of noninterference, the U.S. is failing to meet its obligations by criminalizing homelessness and undermining rights to health and housing. Further, international standards do not accept bare minimums as adequate: just as food is understood expansively, the right to adequate housing is defined as not merely four walls and a roof, rather, as "a home in which to live in security, peace, and dignity."¹⁹

As detailed above, the United States fails to meet food and housing standards for its citizens; with systems mired in waste, individuals become burdened with the responsibility of making up for systemic deficits.²⁰ It is rent generated by low-income students that housing developers use to pay back loans and financing.²¹ For housing to be considered affordable, rent must not exceed thirty percent of a

¹⁵ See Laura Meyer et al., *Ending Behavioral Requirements and Reproductive Control Measures Would Move TANF in an Antiracist Direction*, CTR. ON BUDGET & POL'Y PRIORITIES (Feb. 23, 2022), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/ending-behavioral-requirements-and-reproductive-control-measures-would>.

¹⁶ G.A. Res. 217 (III), art. 25.1 (Dec. 10, 1948); ICESCR, *supra* note 9, art. 11.1.

¹⁷ ICESCR, *supra* note 9, ch. 1.

¹⁸ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties art. 18(a), *opened for signature* March 23, 1969, 1155 U.N.T.S. 331; *see also* RESTATEMENT (FOURTH) OF THE FOREIGN REL. L. OF THE U.S. § 304 cmt. e (AM. L. INST. 2018) (requiring the government to "avoid actions which could render impossible the entry into force and implementation [of a treaty], or defeat its basic purpose and value").

¹⁹ Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing*, ¶ 83(b), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/43/43 (Dec. 26, 2019).

²⁰ *See generally* Callun Keith Purchase et al., *Circular Economy of Construction and Demolition Waste: A Literature Review on Lessons, Challenges, and Benefits*, 15 MATERIALS 1, 1, 6, 12 (2022).

²¹ *See generally* Michael D. Eriksen, *The Market Price of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits*, 66 J. OF URB. ECON., 141, 143 (2009).

tenant's income.²² Because assistance has not kept pace with rising rent, more than 38 million households are forced to cover the gap by spending more than thirty percent of their income on housing, meaning that income, which could have gone to food and other stabilizing supplies, is wasted.²³ Constructing affordable housing wastes capital within current systems of financing; ninety percent of affordable housing in the United States has been constructed through the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program (LIHTC) since its creation in 1986.²⁴ The program allows private investors to compete for federal tax credits, which they then sell to private developers.²⁵ Although this system is supposed to increase the flow of cash available to developers to subsidize low-income rents and stimulate construction, LIHTC projects have been consistently unable to keep pace with both dramatically rising construction costs and steadily increasing demand for affordable housing units, despite strong investor interest.²⁶ Yet market demand has been trending toward larger new homes, which are more expensive to build, require larger land lots, and are less efficient to heat and cool than smaller houses would be.²⁷ This present situation is also the product of historical accounting that is traumatically embodied in its impacts. The

²² Kristian Hernández, *Rising Construction Costs Stall Affordable Housing Projects*, STATELINE (Apr. 25, 2022, 12:00 AM), <https://stateline.org/2022/04/25/rising-construction-costs-stall-affordable-housing-projects/>.

²³ *Affordable Housing*, NAT'L ALL. TO END HOMELESSNESS, <https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/policy/affordable-housing>.

²⁴ Kimberly C. Moore, *Congress Establishes the 4% Floor to Support Affordable Housing*, GRAVEL 2 GAVEL (Jan. 21, 2021), <https://www.gravel2gavel.com/congress-four-percent-floor-affordable-housing/>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ See Yonah Freemark & Corianne Payton Scally, *LIHTC Provides Much-Needed Affordable Housing, But Not Enough to Address Today's Market Demands*, URB. INST. (July 11, 2023), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/lihtc-provides-much-needed-affordable-housing-not-enough-address-todays-market-demands>; see Tanya Zahalak, *Investors Show Strong Interest in LIHTC Assets*, FANNIE MAE (June 16, 2022), <https://multifamily.fanniemae.com/news-insights/multifamily-market-commentary/investors-show-strong-interest-lihtc-assets> (data on increasing construction costs and historic declines in vacancy rates making securing housing increasingly difficult for both renters and homeowners).

²⁷ See Savannah Maher, *The Pandemic Has Been Driving Demand for Bigger New Homes*, MARKETPLACE (Apr. 19, 2022), <https://www.marketplace.org/2022/04/19/the-pandemic-has-been-driving-demand-for-bigger-new-homes>.

accounting of the enclosure movement – which displaced countless – of early mortgages and insurance on newly hoarded property – wherein land was gifted to some and withheld from “others,” – and of racist covenants, redlining and foreclosures – wherein families were systemically disinvested of their equity – consequently blocked them from the very solution they were initially sold.²⁸ This history transformed housing into a commodity, which, in turn, became the primary way in which intergenerational wealth was created in the US, with the children of homeowners significantly more likely than children of renters to become homeowners themselves.²⁹ Market-based solutions have thus wasted subsidies, materials, and labor in pursuit of market trends that have been riddled with discrimination, and have demonstrably failed to make constructing new affordable housing viable for developers.³⁰ With rental and homeowner vacancy rates both dropping to historic lows at the time of this publication, the market can only keep driving prices higher and increasing the scarcity of new affordable housing.³¹

These basic prerequisites for humanity and freedom, then, are not naturally occurring phenomena, but are caused and perpetuated by systemic factors that also concentrate fundamental insecurity in areas populated by marginalized communities.³² This unequal failure is documented at length in “Food, Housing, and Racial Justice Symposium” by Denise Córdova Montes, Tamar Ezer, Photini Kamvisseli Suarez, Katherine Murray, Julian Seethal, Mackenzie

²⁸ See generally KARL MARX, CAPITAL 508-19 (FREDERICK ENGELS ED., SAMUEL MOORE & EDWARD AVELING TRANS., 2015) (1867) (giving context to historical accounting of enclosure).

²⁹ JUNG HYUN CHOI ET AL., INTERGENERATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL HOMEOWNERSHIP AND WEALTH ON YOUNG ADULTS’ TENURE CHOICES 7-9, 11 (2018).

³⁰ Hernández, *supra* note 22.

³¹ Jonathan Spader, *Homeowner and Rental Vacancy Rates Declined During COVID-19 Pandemic*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (May 12, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/housing-vacancy-rates-near-historic-lows.html>.

³² U.N., Int’l Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Comm. on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on the Combined Seventh to Ninth Periodic Reports of the United States of America, Aug. 26, 2014, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/USA/CO/7-9 (Sept. 25, 2014) (The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has recognized the “discriminatory mortgage-lending practices and the foreclosure crisis which disproportionately affected, and continues to affect, racial and ethnic minorities.”).

Steele, and Sarah Walters.³³ Not only are Black families more likely to rent than white families, which puts them at greater risk of forced eviction, those evictions bear greater consequences for Black families, who face pronounced discrimination on the rental market.³⁴ Black renters are made aware of and shown less than half of the apartments shown to equally qualified white renters, greatly reducing their likelihood of finding and securing suitable rental housing.³⁵ The discrimination codified into real estate concentrates families from marginalized races into areas that then face food apartheid, which involves “a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who have been denied that access due to systematic injustice.”³⁶ Rather than using the more commonly accepted term “food desert,” the term “food apartheid” highlights the racially discriminatory political structures that impact food access and control.³⁷ Relatedly, supermarket redlining is a phenomenon where larger grocery stores either refuse to move into lower-income areas, shut existing outlets, or relocate to wealthier

³³ Denisse Córdova Montes et al., *Food, Housing, And Racial Justice Symposium*, 31 U. MIA. INT’L & COMP. L. REV. 77 (2024).

³⁴ MICHAEL NEAL ET AL., URB. INST., BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, HOMEOWNERS OF COLOR FACED STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO THE BENEFITS OF HOMEOWNERSHIP 2 (2020); see also Erik Gartland, *Families with Children Increased Risk of Eviction, With Renters of Color Facing Greatest Hardship*, CTR. ON BUDGET & POL’Y PRIORITIES (Nov. 2, 2021, 5:00 AM), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/families-with-children-at-increased-risk-of-eviction-with-renters-of-color-facing-greatest>.

³⁵ *Id.*; See Joe Burns, *Black Households Have Most to Gain From Inclusion of Rent Payment Data: Report*, HOUSINGWIRE (Oct. 18, 2022, 10:50 AM), <https://www.housingwire.com/articles/black-households-have-most-to-gain-from-inclusion-of-rent-payment-data-report/>; Gartland, *supra* note 34; see also JAMIE LANGOWSKI ET AL., BOS. FOUND., QUALIFIED RENTERS NEED NOT APPLY: RACE AND VOUCHER DISCRIMINATION IN THE METRO BOSTON RENTAL HOUSING MARKET (2020), <https://www.tbf.org/-/media/tbf/reports-and-covers/2020/housing-voucher-report-20200701.pdf>.

³⁶ *Food Apartheid*, REGENERATION, <https://regeneration.org/nexus/food-apartheid> (last visited Aug. 27, 2023, 11:45 AM).

³⁷ See Nina Lakhani, *The Food System is Racist: An Activist Used a Garden to Tackle Inequities*, GUARDIAN (May 25, 2021, 06:00 AM), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/25/karen-washington-garden-of-happiness-us-food-system> (interviewing Karen Washington, who coined the term “food apartheid,” on issues with the food system).

suburbs.³⁸ Food apartheid leads to Black and Hispanic neighborhoods having rare access to the healthy, whole-grain foods that large supermarkets supply.³⁹ Thus, in not only failing to meet basic standards for food and housing, but also concentrating that failure in areas where families from marginalized races are systemically pressured to live, the United States also fails the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the principal international treaty for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, and other forms of intolerance, which the United States both signed and ratified in 1994.⁴⁰

Solving these failures has overwhelmingly been tasked to individuals in the United States, where acquiring food and housing is imagined to be a moral problem. As detailed above, renters are the basis for affordable housing developers promising to pay back construction loans, and the condition for being awarded projects⁴¹. And proposed solutions to food apartheid have included sugar and soda taxes, for example, as though individuals living in poverty should solve a supply chain problem and as though taxing the poor will compensate for the tax incentives offered to the wealthy private developers and distributors of food.⁴² For the poor, assistance can only be obtained by traveling and waiting in lines, by proving “need,” and by “behaving” according to standards laid down by those whose daily needs have already been met.⁴³ Local food pantries are provisioned by a central warehouse, where donations are first received and then

³⁸ Julian Agyeman, *The Ugly Truth About How Food Deserts Came to be*, MIC (Mar. 9, 2021), <https://www.mic.com/life/racism-created-the-food-deserts-that-still-plague-too-many-cities-65411672>.

³⁹ *Food Apartheid*, *supra* note 36.

⁴⁰ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination art. 2(1)(c), Jan. 4, 1969, 660 U.N.T.S. 195.

⁴¹ *See* Moore, *supra* note 24.

⁴² E. Melanie Du Puis, *Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America*, 7 *GASTRONOMICA: J. FOOD & CULTURE* 34, 34-44 (2007); *see* Pierre Dubois et. al., *How Well Targeted Are Soda Taxes?*, 110 *PROCEEDINGS* 1, 1-7 (2017) (analyzing how soda taxes have failed to produce the regressive results on obesity they promise).

⁴³ *How Does the Food Bank Know Who Needs the Most?*, SECOND HARVEST OF THE GREATER VALLEY (Oct. 12, 2021), <https://localfoodbank.org/how-does-the-food-bank-know-who-needs-most/>.

allotted.⁴⁴ *Foodbank.org* invites volunteers to support this system with the following statement:

In the middle of this global emergency, we can be as blessed as those who have the means. We can also be as unfortunate as those who have nothing. But through working together, we can share our blessings with the unfortunate ones. And through sharing our life challenges, we can get help from those who are blessed⁴⁵

On all sides of this statement, those who have access to monetary funds are “blessed,” in stark contrast to the “unfortunate ones” who need “help.” In other words, United States policy has operated on the logic that, for select people concentrated in certain areas, human rights are privileges to be earned and preciously bought. This ideological orientation renders unthinkable, questioning the process of extracting surplus value from life itself that is the core of capitalism. Interrogating this fundamental commodification of human needs is one that stretches the imagination.

The seeming scarcity of food and housing, hopelessly pointed to by federal, state, county, and city representatives as justification for inaction – and even for cutting assistance programs – as well as being a refrain heard from not-for-profits thinking about amelioration, is neither natural nor inevitable. This foreword makes the simple suggestion that housing and food are in fact not scarce, as the data about vacant units and the amount of food waste in landfills has already demonstrated. Rather, food and housing exist in abundance in the United States, but profit lies in the waste that is a condition of capitalism itself. Given this systemic condition, in which the root cause of artificially created scarcity is the privatization and commodification of food and housing, feeding the hungry and housing the unhoused will remain no more than marginal ameliorations of escalating problems.

The logic of scarcity is one of plantation logic – its foundation lies in thinking about the diet of the enslaved and how to maximize calories while protecting both a costly investment as well as the bottom

⁴⁴ *See id.*

⁴⁵ *See id.*

line.⁴⁶ This calculation provides a through line into our present, via the industrial period in which the diet of the worker is described in the same vein as the mechanistic efficiency of the factory itself, with humans understood as machines requiring fuel to output work.⁴⁷ In post-antebellum America, the new disciplines (and discipline) of public health as well as the home economics of the modern domestic sphere, entrenched and promoted the dietary regulations of plantation preservation logic, making health the problem of the individual, rather than systemic inequality created and enforced by capitalism through the commodification of life.⁴⁸ Not eating enough or nutritionally became a moral problem, as opposed to a body's reality of traumas inflicted by distribution systems.⁴⁹ What all these seemingly conflicting rhetorical uses of food have in common is transforming a basic necessity into a signifier of moral divisions that justify the hoarding of resources.

The subjection of a basic human need to profit margin computation rather than to the world of legal protection and human rights, is evident also, perhaps ironically, in contemporary not-for-profit poverty amelioration. The same sums — how many people can we feed with these (allegedly) limited resources — are at the very heart of that work. At stake is a philosophy of scarcity, the rationale of capital to maximize surplus value from human labor, which turns food into a commodity. This historical past that haunts our present normalizes this arithmetic, so much so that counting calories is commonplace.⁵⁰ Likewise, the use of incentives to weaponize food at many soup kitchens — such as requiring the needy to qualify by attending mandatory bible study — is a practice hearkening back to late eighteenth-century notions of the deserving and the undeserving poor.⁵¹ Empty vessels open to be filled by God and grain — once that

⁴⁶ See Fred Moten, Visiting Artist Talk, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Apr. 12, 2022 (discussing the earliest computers, a term applied to the humans, some of whom had the job of calculating the value of the enslaved and to maximize profits from their labor).

⁴⁷ See Du Puis, *supra* note 42, at 39.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 39.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 38.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 39.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 37.

grain has been centralized in private ownership, processed, packaged, and graciously re-presented by those who are blessed.⁵²

When it comes to stretching the imagination, art projects that deal with housing and food insecurity can both challenge plantation logic – a challenge that is necessary to clear the way for new forms of thinking – and form new solutions to entrenched problems. This foreword now explores a few social practice art projects that use gardening, feeding, and/or housing to create communities of care and interdependence, in which food is the medium and the connections forged between and among people, are the final artwork. The importance of creating interdependent communities of mutual care cannot be underestimated, because in the final analysis, what the calculation of plantation logic does is to separate people (individuals from family networks; families from cultural groups; cultural groups from tradition).

Using food and housing to re-establish community fabric *is* the art of the projects we discuss. We suggest that the solution to the food and housing crises requires form and that only a circular economy, with waste cycling back into production, which is distributed equitably, will avert the ongoing and cyclical crisis of food insecurity and lack of housing. Art is part of the solution when it takes as its form abundance rather than scarcity and, in so doing, makes otherwise invisible forms (like interconnectivity) tangible. What this genre of art offers is to forego math, to forgo the hierarchization that puts watery soup made with the fewest possible calories ahead of soup for the mind and heart. The projects we explore understand that both are needed to see through abjection to the human. Both are needed to break the plantation logic of scarcity. Plantation logic otherwise remains the unconscious foundation for public policies and collective dreams.

For people who are accustomed to more traditional genres, such as painting and sculpture, the genre of social practice needs some explanation because it challenges the narrow view of art as a commodity. By comparison to market-driven art, social practice is a contemporary genre that manifests as acts of architecting

⁵² *Id.* at 44; SCOTT REYNOLDS NELSON, OCEANS OF GRAIN: HOW AMERICAN WHEAT REMADE THE WORLD 368 (2022).

infrastructures for social Commons.⁵³ Capital reifies subject positions, limiting them to singular roles – either consumer, producer, or authority (such as art historian or critic) – but architecting the Commons requires that we demolish rigid cultural structures, which are as much structures as brick and mortar.⁵⁴ Social practice requires we honor fluidity, interconnectedness, and allow *any* interiority to occupy the Commons.

Two points about social practice: First, it leaves the studio and enters real life, and as such it blurs the distinction between creative labor (demarcated by studio space and posited as an individual pursuit) and the activity of living.⁵⁵ When social practice is located in the real world of the Commons, it isn't displayed in galleries or museums, but instead frames reality itself.⁵⁶ Second, social practice can be anti-representational, dispersed, and collective in authorship, foregoing mimeticism for common experience.⁵⁷ In many instances, social practice brings into the frame people in community together, often across class or identity formations.⁵⁸ For social practice that is relational, the labor can be long-term, durational, and is endlessly renewed in the deepening of community bonds, of belonging to one another.⁵⁹ Social practice challenges the art world to shift focus away from objects, and toward what has come to be termed world building.⁶⁰ World building means not only sensing and describing

⁵³ Lauren Berlant, *The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times*, 35 ENV'T & PLAN. D: SOC'Y & SPACE 393, 400 (2016) (social commons is where people can go “not to possess but to be possessed, to submit to being dispossessed of property in the self by the immediacy of a nature that dissolves the attachment to sovereignty and instrumentality”).

⁵⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The Historical a priori and the Archive*, in *THE ARCHEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE* 126-33 (A. M. Sheridan Smith trans., 1972) (writing that cultural knowledge is structured and given meaning by gatekeepers called “archons”, who essentially build the structures that contain cultural understanding).

⁵⁵ NATO THOMPSON, *LIVING AS FORM: SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART FROM 1991 – 2011*, at 22 (2012).

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 31.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 68.

⁵⁹ See generally CLAIRE DOHERTY AND PAUL O'NEILL, *LOCATING THE PRODUCERS: DURATIONAL APPROACHES TO PUBLIC ART* (2009).

⁶⁰ See Lauren Berlant, *Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event*, 20 AM. LITERARY HIST. 845, 845-60 (2008) (world building is a term for aesthetic modes that build out visceral senses of what the present can be and feel like).

human worlds, but enacting change within them, *re-forming* them. A very few examples:

Mary Mattingly's project *Swale* (2016 - ongoing), addresses waste by taking as its basic framework the fact that food in NYC is brought from elsewhere, relying on a distribution chain that leaves many people hungry while 30,000 city-owned parks with edible foods are untouchable because of laws against foraging.⁶¹ *Swale* utilizes marine common law (which doesn't prevent growing food on water) to circumvent local public land laws so that people can board *Swale* and pick medicinal and edible foods. The vessel is built from repurposed shipping containers; it is solar powered; it collects and cleans river water and stores rainwater. The artistic strategy here is to redirect law to point to the inequities while also modeling an alternative to legal barriers.

Emanuel Pratt is an architect, urban designer, and McArthur fellow, who founded and runs an art practice called Sweet Water Foundation, the tagline for which is "there grows the neighborhood."⁶² Pratt identified a term, blight, an agricultural term for decay that sets into crops with insufficient resources, which is often used to speak of neighborhoods that have experienced neglect, as if blight was caused by the moral character or lack thereof of the people living there.⁶³ What he found is that the term blight comes from botany and refers to a fungus or a pest that affects a plant, such that it can no longer sustain life.⁶⁴ By extension, as in botany, the urban areas in which he wanted to site his project (the predominantly Black southside of Chicago) had been impacted in the postwar period by racially discriminatory covenants, lending practices, and environmental hazards, such that seventy-nine percent of the parcels of land were vacant.⁶⁵ The neighborhood couldn't sustain life. It had been blighted from outside,

⁶¹ Michael McCanne, *Movable Feast: Mary Mattingly's Floating Garden*, ART IN AM. (Aug. 11, 2016, 3:45 PM), <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/feature/s/movable-feast-mary-mattinglys-floating-garden-57647>.

⁶² SWEET WATER FOUNDATION, <https://www.sweetwaterfoundation.com/>.

⁶³ *Emmanuel Pratt on Regenerating Urban Ecology*, RESITE, <https://www.resite.org/stories/emmanuel-pratt-on-regenerating-urban-ecology>.

⁶⁴ SEPAKE ANGIAMA & EMMANUEL PRATT, NOURISHING THE ROOT: TRANSFORMING THE URBAN ECOLOGIES OF CHICAGO, IN CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE BIENNIAL, . . . AND OTHER SUCH STORIES 145 (Yesomi Emolu et al. eds., 2019).

⁶⁵ *More than a mission, it's our practice...*, SWEET WATER FOUND., <https://www.sweetwaterfoundation.com/our-practice>.

from this fungus of discriminatory housing practices. Sweet Water now uses urban agriculture to transform vacant spaces and abandoned buildings into economically and ecologically productive and sustainable community assets.⁶⁶ They do this through a number of projects that point to a reimagining of land as something other than property. In terms of circular strategies, the two-acre farm stops the extraction of people from the neighborhood by employing them, by feeding 400 residents weekly, and by offering a co-living space.⁶⁷

Finally, Red Line Service Institute (of which these authors are a part) consists of artists who are unhoused or have experienced homelessness. In their contribution to the Terrain Biennial, 2023, they are initiating a long-term project to transform — in partnership with local activists at Stone Temple Baptist Church and other neighborhood residents — a vacant lot in a historically divested area of Chicago into a garden of indigenous plants, thriving pollinators, and a welcoming place of rest for all people, including those who experience homelessness. This space is therefore designed with welcoming and comfortable furniture rather than hostile benches designed to deter people experiencing homelessness. The garden is a staging area for intergenerational community art activities as well as for shared weekly meals. All food waste is composted and put back into the garden.

What ties all these art practices together is the reimagining of the basic necessities for sustaining life not as commodities but as media that tie all life together. By reusing capitalism's food and housing waste, circular economies create communities of care in which people can feel sufficiently safe to heal themselves. These projects are not themselves models for scaled policymaking but are forms that can show policymakers the lived impacts of daring to question the unquestionable and shift the ideological frameworks that surround and shape human lives.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Sweet Water Foundation 2022 Annual Summary*, SWEET WATER FOUND. (Jan. 11, 2023), <https://www.sweetwaterfoundation.com/2022-annual-summary>.