At This Juncture

In Bronzeville, an organizer and a developer plot a course for 51st Street

Mitchell in the middle
Olfactory factory
Playing with fire
March of the children

Looking at Brian Hieggelke:
all night at Production
Dancing about Newcity
Jan rocks the disco

(Lydia Golam)
The Santa Ana Winds Are Powerful Air Streams That Blow Down From The Great Basin, Across The California Coast, And Off Into The Pacific Ocean. Far From Bその他に、これらの風は火災を誘発する可能性を持ち、乾燥した木の葉や枝など、民家や物資が火災を大規模なものにすることを恐れています。一方で、これらの風は水分を含む雨をもたらし、地域の乾燥を緩和することもあるのです。したがって、これらの風は地域の生活に大きな影響を与え、また緩和的にも重要な役割を果たしています。
ZORAYDA ORTIZ—PERFUMER, OWNER OF PILSEN BIKE TOURS, COMMUNITY GARDENER, and former medical researcher—stands in front of a mural by Alejandro Medina on the corner of South Blue Island and Cullerton. She hoists her bicycle in the air, laughing as I try to snap a picture of her. “I love this mural,” she says. It’s a portrait of Mexican history through the generations.

Her perfume company is Ajna Oils. She has many types of products, sold in different locations depending on their focus. Some are meant to heal the body and mind holistically while others pay tribute to communities or favorite foods, such as the Tamal Fresa from her collection “La Dieciocho,” named after the main street in Pilsen, which has garnered the most media attention. Coquito and Lechón Asado are homages to classic Puerto Rican dishes (eggnog and roasted suckling pig, respectively). She also makes custom blends by request. “I’ve been getting a lot of press about Tamal, but I do honestly feel deep down in my heart that that is just the tip of the iceberg,” she says.

Her interest in essential oils began after a nasty scrape on her right elbow while skateboarding. Her mother put apricot oil on it. She shows me the scar, a circular patch of crisscrossing white lines. It’s completely smooth. “I just thought it was amazing,” she says. She began to make perfume on her own, experimenting and doing research on the properties of essential oils in her free time outside of the lab and making gifts for friends and family.

Ortiz is originally from Humboldt Park, but after more than a decade living and working in Pilsen, it’s safe to say she’s a local. She originally started coming to Pilsen as a high school student in the AmeriCorps apprenticeship program and fell in love with it, moving there soon after graduating from college. Her sisters occasionally make fun of her for that—”Like, what about Humboldt Park?”, they ask her jokingly. But she’s biker, me loving the community so much, me loving the people so much and also because perfumery is my art,” she tells me. For example, the “Día de los Muertos” series includes a pan de muerto perfume. It has a strong whiff of star anise with the light sweetness of pastry. Another, La Catrina, takes its name from the iconic female skeleton, with flowers adorning her stately hat, who roams the night looking for men to dance with and lure back to the grave. It brings to mind the smell of a man’s shirt.

Most of the perfumes are unisex. She would like them to be free from the gendered definitions commonly used to market perfumes. “I feel that a lot of male perfumes can be floral, but perfumers don’t admit it. You can have a hint of rose, a hint of jasmine. Jasmine’s actually an arousing scent for men,” she says. For example, the “Día de los Muertos” series includes a pan de muerto perfume. It has a strong whiff of star anise with the light sweetness of pastry. Another, La Catrina, takes its name from the iconic female skeleton, with flowers adorning her stately hat, who roams the night looking for men to dance with and lure back to the grave. It brings to mind the smell of a man’s shirt.

Ortiz says she wasn’t afraid to switch careers, although sometimes she misses the fast pace and discipline of the hospital laboratory environment. The transition has been gradual rather than abrupt. Many of the interests she’s exploring now through her bike and perfume businesses have been simmering for more than a decade.

“Pilsen is number one in the whole entire nation for murals per square block radius,” she says. “They’re one of Pilsen’s most distinctive features, and a sign of the thriving artistic community she first noticed as a teenager. Although she also gives walking tours, she prefers to lead tours on bike, to cover more ground. She is also planning on starting a historical landmarks tour soon.

Her intention with the collection “La Dieciocho” was to capture the atmosphere of Pilsen’s Mexican culture and community through the specific smells and cultural icons that perfume companies often overlook. “I feel that it came out of me being a biker, me loving the community so much, me loving the people so much and also because perfumery is my art,” she tells me. For example, the “Día de los Muertos” series includes a pan de muerto perfume. It has a strong whiff of star anise with the light sweetness of pastry. Another, La Catrina, takes its name from the iconic female skeleton, with flowers adorning her stately hat, who roams the night looking for men to dance with and lure back to the grave. It brings to mind the smell of a man’s shirt.

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Ortiz has a bike tour to lead at 3 o’clock, and our impromptu photo shoot is over. She climbs on her bike at rides off. One block away I hear someone calling my name. It’s Ortiz. “Bye!” she shouts. She waves as she heads into traffic.
RIGHT AFTER A GREEN LINE TRAIN RUMBLES INTO THE 51ST STREET STATION, a siren sounds in the air. Bernard Loyd glances at the street, momentarily distracted. "This is why sound stages were invented," says the cameraman filming him. Loyd gives a quick chuckle. We are standing on the roof of what will soon be Bronzeville Cookin', a multipurpose development that Loyd is bringing to the northeast corner of 51st and Prairie Avenue. I walk over to the edge just in time to see an unmarked police car race east.

The project interviewing Loyd is from the Metropolitan Planning Council, a nonprofit urban policy organization that is trying to ensure that Bronzeville Cookin' gets the exposure it needs to be a success. They believe the development will be a major boon to the surrounding area. As Abby Crisostomo, an associate at the MPC, puts it, the project is "everything that everyone is trying to get together, all in one place." When it is finished, Bronzeville Cookin' will include a rooftop farm, a fresh produce grocery, a vegetarian restaurant, a jerk shack, a breakfast place, and a more upscale restaurant, offerings to be determined. Construction is just beginning, and Loyd expects three of the restaurants to be operational by the end of 2013.

The project's developer, Loyd has been a Bronzeville resident for over twenty years, and lives a little more than a mile from where we're standing. Loyd says that ten years ago he decided to quit his job at McKinsey & Company, where he worked on agricultural development across the globe, "to try to do [economic development] in my own backyard." He started his own firm, Urban Juncture, and in 2005 purchased the two-story terra-cotta building that will soon house Bronzeville Cookin', the firm's largest project to date. The building—which once included a liquor store—was already organized into six twenty-foot-by-sixty-foot spaces when Loyd bought it, giving him the idea to divide it into multiple venues. There are different management teams for the restaurants, but Loyd is a co-owner of each.

Loyd was able to get several prominent financial partners involved after the purchase, including JP Morgan Chase and the now-defunct Covenant Bank, though the financial crisis stymied building efforts. "Most of our major financial partners disappeared," he says, and in the past few years he has had to find a new group of backers. That process came to an end last September, by which time Loyd and Urban Juncture had assembled a team that includes the Chicago Community Loan Fund, the Community Reinvestment Fund, and the Illinois EPA. Together, the group has raised the $8.4 million necessary to cover Phase 1 of the project, which includes the restaurants slated for completion this year, the rooftop farm, and the produce store. Phase 2, projected to cost at least $2.6 million, will involve building another, more upscale restaurant in the space on the corner of 51st and Prairie, in addition to instituting some transportation and landscaping improvements. A "multi-motor parking facility" will include chargers for electric vehicles, and Urban Juncture has gotten a commitment from I-50 to install a car share station when the lot gets built. If he is able to procure the funding, Loyd plans on landscaping the lot east of the restaurants to include bioswales for directing runoff water, in addition to building a bike repair station with the help of Blackstone Bicycle Works.

There is currently no timeline for Phase 2, and no guarantee that the funding is available. But Loyd is convinced that a demand for healthy food is very much present. As he says, "It's easy to find an apple if you want," but that's really about it. "There hasn't been a produce store in this community for about two generations," he tells me. Red Apple Food & Liquor, across the street from Bronzeville Cookin', advertises deals on its facade for white bread, white potatoes, and white onions, as well as soft drinks and eighty-nine cent chicken legs. It's a sharp contrast to what Loyd's venture will offer—"the full food chain," as he puts it. The rooftop farm will grow vegetables and herbs for the restaurants as well as for the produce store, which will compost their waste for use in the farm. The Urban Juncture Foundation, the sister organization to Urban Juncture, is the direct source of funding for the farm, though the finances are essentially all integrated between the two organizations. The foundation also funds the Bronzeville Community Garden, located a block east from Bronzeville Cookin'.

Taquila, a woman I talked to in Hyde Park Food & Liquor, told me she would welcome any venture that brought healthier food to the community. She says she is a healthy eater—she rarely eats fried foods, and is a vegetarian—and wishes there were healthier restaurant and food options like those in Hyde Park, where she often goes to buy her groceries. A Chipotle, she thinks, would be perfect.

Other residents expressed a different wish. "I'd like to see a McDonald's or something," said one man I talked to who frequents 51st Street. Ghazi Al-Adwan, owner of Hyde Park Food & Liquor, suggested bringing in a McDonald's, Burger King, or Dunkin' Donuts to attract people to the area.

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By Ari Feldman

Lydia Gorham
were trying to bring in new businesses, going west from the lake, but they only got
He remembers that there had been a large development project on 47th Street. They
will soon be the produce market and asks me where I live. I tell him I live in Hyde
Park.
It turns out that Russell Rahn lived there for several years when he was younger.
He remembers that there had been a large development project on 47th Street. They
were trying to bring in new businesses, going west from the lake, but they only got
to around Drexel Avenue and weren’t able to rehab the entire street.

"It never really got there," he says.

One evening last December, just a few days before Christmas, Sandra Bivens was
at the door of the Great Elks Lodge, on Prairie Avenue just south of the
Bronzeville Cookin’ site. As the executive director of the 51st Street Business
Association, Bivens was greeting friends and members of the community who were
there for "A Taste of 51st Street," the association’s annual fundraiser. The room was
just beginning to fill up when Bivens was approached by two police officers she rec-
nognized, cops who worked the 51st Street beat. They informed her that someone had
broken into her office.
The culprit turned out to be an employee of the association, a nineteen-year-old
boy from the community who had only been working there for a few months. Bivens
told me she guessed right away who it had been. She contacted the parents and a
social worker, and together with the police they worked out a deal with the state’s
attorney that included only a few weeks’ jail time (“We wanted to give him that
scared-straight experience," said Bivens) and a yearlong probationary period. The
whole thing was sorted out in less than a month, and the deal included a provision
that would allow the misdemeanor to be taken off the boy’s record if he went twelve
months without another arrest.
The theft was the first the first time the association had been the victim of a
crime, although the organization was started in 2009 in response to a series of rob-
beries along 51st Street. Some stores that didn’t have roll-down shutters over their
entrances were burglarized several times, and other business owners felt they might
be next. Bivens—who consulted forming firm Alimos Bivens Ltd. used to have its offices on
51st Street-along with the owners of Hyde Park Food & Liquor, Baba’s Famous Philly
Steak and Lemonade, and a few others, met with 3rd Ward Alderman Pat Dowell out of
concern that their voices were not being considered. Dowell—who declined to comment
for this piece—told them that if they banded together they were more likely to be
noticed by the city, the police, and local residents. Led by Bivens, the Business
Association officially incorporated in 2010. In 2011 they moved into their current
offices.
Bivens thinks the fate of the boy who robbed her office might have been very dif-
ferent if he had robbed a business without the association in place as a mediator. She’s
probably right: were the association not there to communicate between the state, the
police, and the parents, the nineteen-year-old might have been penalized much more
harshly. In Chicago, property theft can mean up to a year in jail and a permanent stain
on your record. “Punishment should fit the crime, as they say, and a $2,500 crime,” she
told me, “should not dictate the life of a child.”
The boy who stole from the Business Association is the result of a
new type of urban community, one that is in the process of overtaking an old
paradigm. The response Bivens made represents the kind of effort she is engaged in:
trying to “totally rehab 51st Street” from the inside out. Like much of Bronzeville,
51st Street is at a kind of crossroads. Many neighbors perceive things as having vague-
ly gotten better, but exactly what is going into the gradual changes of “the strip”—
as Bivens refers to the street—is not obvious. What is clear is that 51st Street is
changing, and may soon bear little resemblance to its current form.

Sandra Bivens is a real presence, full of hospitality. She is almost always in a cheer-
ful mood, but her face darkens dramatically when she discusses the challenges of
reimagining a community. Her experience has been garnered over a twenty-five-
year career as an activist and development specialist, which has included consulting
work with public housing. For her career efforts, she was the recipient of an Unsung
Hero Award in 2012 from the South East Chicago Commission. She is casual when she
rattles off all the projects the Business Association is involved in, but her passion
comes across in full display when she is asked to talk about the progress the organi-
zation has made.

Including Bernard Loyd’s firm, there are about thirty businesses in the 51st Street
Business Association, most of which fall between Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and the
Dan Ryan Expressway. The association is a non-profit, with support coming from annu-
al dues of $550 that each member business is required to pay. According to Bivens,
those dues go toward keeping the lights on and the computers running; most of the
association’s funding for local events, which have included a summer music festival
and a school-supplies giveaway, comes in the form of a Community Development Block
Grant, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Bivens works
with three part-time volunteers who come from a couple different senior aide programs
run by area charities, which compensate the volunteers with government funding. “We
work on a very sparse budget,” she says, “but we know how to stretch a dollar to make it
happen.”

Though not technically employed by the association, Bivens is there day in, day
out to meet with various community members and business owners. She hears
requests, complaints, and questions; has led job training for local cleanup efforts; has
taught classes on how to start and run a successful business; and has helped business
owners write grants to request funding from the city. “Whatever this community
needs,” she promises, “we’re going to make sure it happens.”

Since the 51st Street Business Association’s formation, one of the community’s
most pressing needs has been crime prevention—after all, that was the reason the
group was organized in the first place. Bivens says that crime around 51st Street has
decreased in the last several years, largely because of the association’s advocacy. “I
think that it has made a serious difference,” she says, recalling a much greater preva-
lence of theft four years ago. “Sometimes people stopped you on the street trying to
sell you a pair of shoes, and you knew exactly where those shoes came from. And I
would get on their case about it, too. Why would you steal from a sister who’s just
trying to make it?”

Any crime that does happen around 51st Street, she thinks, is most likely coming
from outside the community. She says that as the community becomes more and more
developed, and as residents react more quickly to crime, it becomes obvious for the
robbers that they don’t “fit in the mix.” Drugs are a sensitive topic for Bivens, and she
sees the kids who deal them as victims of their economic situation. “They don’t par-
ticularly want to sell drugs, like people think, but that’s the easiest thing that’s out
here for making money,” she says. And while the area around 51st Street still has prob-
lems with gangs every so often, Bivens says it’s become less and less of an issue. A
large part of her job is convincing people that positive change is occurring along 51st
Street. “It’s not as bad as it used to be. It really has gotten better,” she says.

Ghazi Al-Adwan, at Hyde Park Food & Liquor, doesn’t buy it. Al-Adwan is one of
the founding members of the Business Association, though when Bivens he doesn’t
think there has been much improvement in the neighborhood. He goes to the monthly
association meetings occasionally, and though he has respect for Bivens and the
organization (“The lady is okay! They’re nice people.”) he is hard-pressed to think of
any way in which the association has had a positive effect on the strip. “It’s not going
gnowhere,” he says.

Likening the association to a manager and Alderman Dowell refused to comment
to a boss, Al-Adwan explains that he wants to feel represented, but does not. “If they
were representing us they would fight for us,” he says. That fight would include push-
ing for business-friendly regulations—per city ordinance, Al-Adwan’s store is not
allowed to sell malt liquor, beer that is less than $2 per bottle, or beer that is over
six percent alcohol—and, perhaps more important, pushing back against the constant
presence of drug dealers in the neighborhood. Al-Adwan is convinced that many of the
people on the street are dealers that come from further south and hang around 51st
Street all day selling various drugs. “All the drug dealers,” he tells me, “gotta go outta
here.”

“I don’t think it’s improved crimes or robberies, to be honest with you,” said
Mohammed Nofal, who has been the owner of Baba’s Famous Philly Steak and
Lemonade for five years. Like Al-Adwan, Nofal was a founding member of the Business
Association. “There is a ton of drug action on the corners. Whether people want to

Many neighbors perceive things as hav-
ing vaguely gotten better, but exactly
what is going into the gradual changes of “the strip” is not obvious.
one in three adults got their first job at a restaurant, and projected that the restaurant—the National Restaurant Association reports that require much education. Bronzeville Cookin’ will be key to this.

The community. She hopes they can soon return to a boom in professions that don’t people that are on the street, she says, the more that are working and contributing to the community. She is so impressed with the efforts that are being made in Bronzeville that she is willing to make personal sacrifices in order to support the cause.

Homes—has changed all that. While Grand Boulevard had a population of 80,000 in 1960, by 2010 its population had shrunk to about 22,000 residents. About thirty percent of the neighborhood lives below the poverty line—double the national average. The decline in the sevenies and has largely disappeared from the South Side. Bivens attributes that the closing of the public housing high rises coincides with an economic decline in the surrounding areas. Bivens thinks that the number of people hanging around on the street is lower now, and that this is due in part to Bivens helping many people get jobs. However, it is unclear how many people have benefitted directly from the association in finding employment.

Jobs are essential to Bivens’ goal of “bringing businesses back online.” The fewer than it used to be, and that this is due in part to Bivens helping many people get jobs. However, it is unclear how many people have benefitted directly from the Association in finding employment.

Bivens thinks that a lot of the men who loiter on 51st Street used to have jobs in the steel industry, which began its long decline in the seventies and has largely disappeared from the South Side. Bivens attests that the closing of the public housing high rises coincides with an economic decline in the surrounding areas. Bivens says that the number of people hanging around on the street is lower now, and that this is due in part to Bivens helping many people get jobs. However, it is unclear how many people have benefitted directly from the Business Association in finding employment.

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Crime statistics from the Chicago Police Department list Grand Boulevard—the community area bounded by 39th, 51st, the Dan Ryan and Cottage Grove—as twenty-fourth of seventy-seven Chicago neighborhoods in number of reported property crimes over the past 365 days. Reported property crimes are down thirty percent from last year, and of those burglaries make up a small portion—the vast majority are thefts that occur outside of homes or businesses. (The Washington Park community area, directly south of 51st Street, has seen a forty percent decrease in property crimes since a year ago.) Since about 2002, all types of crime have been decreasing. Property crimes have also lessened more in the last three years than in the nine years before. However, drug-related crimes in the street are still a constant source of arrest, and these numbers only include reported crimes, leaving out all the unregistered complaints of drug dealing made by people like Mohammed Nofal. For bringing in customers, reported crime statistics are perhaps less important than public perception—and around the 51st Street area, more often than not that perception is negative.

On a Friday evening at the Bronzeville Community Garden, just east of the 51st Street Green Line stop, I’m told that many of the people socializing are not from around 51st Street. Many come from further south, past 85th Street. One woman said she came north to the garden to see her friends, because “I gotta be where my associates are.” She is weary of people who say there is a decrease in crime on 51st Street. “If there’s a decrease in crime here, she says, “it ain’t happening when I’m here.”

Still, Bivens is steadfast in asserting that the crime that used to happen along 51st Street has tapered off, and that the neighborhood is trending away from robberies and drug dealing. She says the people who hang out and down 51st Street all day, the sort of people that attract the notice of Ghazi Al-Adwan and Mohammed Nofal, are not ill-intentioned. “They ain’t hanging around just cause they’re hanging around,” she says. “They’re hanging around because they want jobs.”

Many different community members brought up the issue of loiterers on 51st Street. Randy McCollum, owner of the eight-year-old Randy’s General Merchandise, which is located right across the street from the Business Association’s offices, said he wants to get rid of “undesirables” on the street.

McCollum joined the association about three years ago because he was impressed by Bivens’ presentation to the business owners on the strip. “It seemed like the right thing to do,” he says, both for his business and for the other businesses around him. McCollum thinks that the number of people hanging around on the street is lower now than it used to be, and that this is due in part to Bivens helping many people get jobs. However, it is unclear how many people have benefitted directly from the Business Association in finding employment.

Bivens thinks that a lot of the men who loiter on 51st Street used to have jobs in the stockyards, which closed in 1971, and the steel industry, which began its long decline in the seventies and has largely disappeared from the South Side. Bivens attests that the closing of the public housing high rises coincides with an economic decline in the surrounding areas.

As many residents told me, the neighborhood around 51st Street used to be a happening place. “In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, it was hot,” said Bivens. The blues could be heard coming out of venues up and down 47th Street, and 51st Street was home to a number of jazz clubs. A steep population decrease—caused by a lack of blue-collar jobs and, more recently, the closure of projects like the Robert Taylor Homes—has changed all that. While Grand Boulevard had a population of 80,000 in 1960, by 2010 its population had shrunk to about 22,000 residents. About thirty percent of the neighborhood lives below the poverty line—double the national average.

Jobs are essential to Bivens’ goal of “bringing businesses back online.” The fewer people that are on the street, she says, the more that are working and contributing to the community. She hopes they can soon return to a boom in professions that don’t require much education. Bronzeville Cookin’ will be key to this.

As Bernard Loyd pointed out, the restaurant industry may be the United States’ largest provider of first jobs—the National Restaurant Association reports that one in three adults get their first job at a restaurant, and projected that the restaur
rant industry will employ ten percent of the American workforce in 2013. It has also added jobs at a higher rate than the U.S. economy for the past thirteen years. Restaurants are, says Loyd, a "vital rung in the ladder to have in developing communities."

Unfortunately, Mohammed Nofal tells me, many of the local restaurants have seen a dive in businesses in the past few years. "Restaurants took a big, big hit" on the heels of the recession, says Nofal. As he sees it, people now have fewer funds for food that isn't for groceries, and are more likely to allocate their money for mortgage, rent, or car payments than for dining out.

But residents I talked with at the Bronzeville Community Garden said they would welcome a new restaurant and a new space for socializing in the community. 51st Street is already considered a major social hub for Bronzeville, and Loyd hopes that his project will direct more residents and visitors off the sidewalks and into businesses. He has particularly high hopes for the Bronzeville Cookin' restaurant slated to be closest to the Green Line stop, a Southern-style breakfast joint that will have seating for seventy-five. This venue will be crucial, Loyd says, for establishing the clientele base necessary to proceed with Phase 2 of the Bronzeville Cookin' business plan.

"It's kind of hard to take you serious when you're the only one around," he said, "one hand doesn't clap." Nofal is skeptical that superficial changes are even what the strip needs, but he would like to see more focus on bringing in the kind of businesses necessary for families and residents, like a laundromat, dry cleaners, or a large grocery store. "Right now," he asks, "what's on 51st Street? They got a couple of liquor stores, a couple of gas stations, a couple of restaurants. It's missing everyday large grocery store. "

Bernard Loyd has a strong vote of confidence in the association. "We are big fans of Sandra," he said. "It's been very helpful to have that level of energy and commitment basically next door." Though his venture is a very concrete step toward a more interesting business, he believes that improvements should come at least as much from the businesses already on the strip as from outside sources of funding. "As you talk with the businesses," she says, "you have to get them to understand that it takes more than just having more police protection. It takes your getting involved with making a change in the community."

But Bivens believes that improvements should come at least as much from the businesses already on the strip as from outside sources of funding. "As you talk with the businesses," she says, "you have to get them to understand that it takes more than just having more police protection. It takes your getting involved with making a change in the community."

Often, the proof of that change can be faint. The strip of East 51st between King Drive and the Dan Ryan Expressway looks similar to how it did four years ago, when the Business Association first came on the scene, but positive changes are certainly there: Swagger—a new restaurant just north of Prairie and 51st that has been open for about a year—turned a vacant lot into a gorgeous patio area, and there are two more businesses on that block than there were two years ago, replacing what used to be boarded up storefronts. The business community on the strip has become much more cohesive; when major issues come up, says Mohammed Nofal, "I feel like we have one voice," which cannot be ignored by the alderman or police commander. As Bivens puts it, "It's different when you have a whole group of people raising Cain than just one or two people.

Bernard Loyd was often quoted as saying that "For the neighborhood project. Sometimes it's hard to see around the long corners, and rarely in the world of community development do people know what to expect. But the mere fact that Bronzeville Cookin' is under development signals an important shift away from the economic stagnation that has for so long defined this neighborhood.

"I want to let this be a model," Bivens told me, for what people can do in a distressed area. "It's impossible to predict the future state of the strip, but Bivens believes that the stakes are high enough and the community strong enough to create a successful, self-sustaining community on East 51st Street."

"One thing I think every businessman knows, no matter what ethnic group you're in, is that when you put twenty, thirty years investment in a community that helped raise your kids, or whatever else, you're not just going to walk away from that. You're going to do what it takes to maintain your business."
THERE WERE MOMENTS WHEN LAURA CHIARAMONTE’S MAD LOGIC SEEMED SANE.

This retrospective clarity occurred when an accidental elbow bump or foot shuffle from an adjacent chair released me from the dancing’s tenuous, fragile trance. These were the times when the visual rhetoric of “Corporeal”—Chiaramonte’s latest contemporary dance piece—suddenly began to make sense. For a few seconds, my imagination could sit back, cross its arms, and self-evidently declare that these variably violent and tender, erratic and studied, gross and fluidly fine movements cohered.

Like when the eight dancers reduced their motions to meltingly measured suggestions, gazing outwards with glossy-eyed insecurity, all united in such a compelling and seamless gradualness of action that you felt obliged to carefully re-cross your legs or slowly shift your weight with instinctive but not irreverent mimicry.

Or when seven dancers arranged themselves into staggered rows, dropped themselves onto all fours, bent into acute angles at their waists. They pulled themselves up into menacingly triangular shapes braced by their hands and feet, letting their noses drag against the floor as they followed the scent of the remaining upright soloist, her agony increasing all the while. Advancing in time, evoking a dragon’s maw or a row of human tank traps, they forced her to flee haltingly to stage-left, before bending beneath the assault of their collective advance.

And also: When the only male performer stunned us with his positively magnetic groundwork, his body concavely cupped upwards, pinched off at some impossible vertex in his spine; his six-foot frame captured in an invisible field and involuntarily tugged along the floor, toes and fingers wildly trembling with barely perceptible polarities.

These were fleeting moments from a series of distinct routines where the performance came together and we could accept this shamelessly modern yet terrifically peculiar art. “Corporeal”’s clarity, however, was largely dependent upon the success of its original, electronic score. Musicians Jason Araujo and Barmey Ung triumphed when it came to inhabiting the performance space with creaks, groans, and animistic wind-whistles. They would bait the audience with plausible sounds, before switching into the artificial motifs that characterized and eventually comprised the coming music. The effect collapsed reality down to the immediate action on stage and elevated the synth’s coos and guitar’s hesitant plucks to an intelligible otherworldliness.

But dance sequences dissolved into disjointed confusion when Araujo and Ung attempted to translate this otherworldliness into a vigorous techno—when the synth squealed, popped, chirped, buzzed, and even let out a few thinly-veiled blaster noises. What I saw was elegant, smooth, streaming and beautiful: lolling heads, pivoting hips, current-tugged arms caught up in unseen forces. But what I heard was speedy, spunky. It evoked the science fictional, whereas the dance demanded something more primal.

A chemically electric score—burbling, warbling, stuttering—was appropriate given the corrosive visual art exhibited at the Department. Chiaramonte’s mother, Janet, had installed a series of prints produced from the remnants of distressed and oxidized copper sheet metal. She had etched and disrupted the surfaces of the plates, plunged them individually into thin puddles of dilute solutions, pressed them to canvasses several days later, and styled the raw products into finished art. Laura played her dancers off these prints, dressing them in bright teals, setting them against the collection’s burnished orange and the room’s naturally warm lighting. That the green film of the collective dancers formed a borderline between the world above and the metal’s uninterrupted gleam below, and so the dancers became imperfect intermediaries between the audience and the choreographer’s untarnished creative vision.

These dancers tried to access something wondrously essential—to evoke the unimaginable forces that bound matter together. But the score’s more electronic notes conjured up the wrong referents: green-glowing smokestacks, bubbling vats, the waste of mud. What we saw spoke to something mysterious. It required a different, more subdued expressive mode—spiritual, not radioactive. Overall, the music was at its finest when it was sighing, gasping, whistling, and lonesomely—tribally—singing. When they could wrap us in a synthetic somnolence, the musicians completed “Corporeal”’s illusion, gently elevating the stage artists and slightly blurring reality.

“Corporeal” was a collective creation, each element supporting and sustaining the rest. Shut out the score and tear down the hangings, and the dance—though technically rigorous—would have been unmoving. Turn the music one notch past the bizarre and into the unknown, and it would implode the absorbing human mirage on stage. Yet when motion, sound, and sight all came together, we could give ourselves over to their energy, briefly observing something transcendent with unfamiliar but understanding eyes.
**Small Talk and Sandwiches**

By Osita Nwanevu

ABOUT TEN MINUTES BEFORE STATE
Representative Christian Mitchell's first open house last Saturday, a tall man walks in with a large tray of sandwiches.

"I just thought y'all could use some food," he says warmly. "Looks like you already have some."

Indeed they did. The meeting was reminiscent of a Sunday church brunch—quietly familiar, a central table, well-laden with cookies, brownies, and chilled drinks acts as a pit stop in between conversations for a few of the more adrift guests, while friendly low-level chatter abounds. Most of the twenty or so in attendance load up plates and settle down at a roundtable and chairs lined up near the office's windows with friends and neighbors.

Two elderly women, sporting large hats and what might have been their Sunday finest were it actually Sunday, remain seated for the duration, too ensconced in small talk for food.

Given the quickly rising political star in attendance that day, this low-key reception seems a little surprising. Still twenty-six, and only a few years removed from an undergraduate stint at the University of Chicago, he's already gained the favor of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, and looks destined for bigger and better things. Those bigger ambitions look very distant today, however, as politics is displayed at its most local.

The open house, designed to introduce Mitchell to constituents in his newly configured district, took place at 35th and King Drive in Bronzeville at the behest of 4th Ward Alderman Will Burns. He was previously Mitchell's employer, but at the open house Burns lends critical support to the candidate in a district he himself formerly occupied. Nothing obviously political caught my ear in any of the initial conversations, and for a while, the most impassioned discussions of the afternoon are not about bills in the House, but about the Bulls' playoff chances.

Finally, Mitchell, casually dressed, walks in and surveys the scene. "Looks like a party," he says with a smile. He immediately sets about making the rounds—a handshake and an open ear for everyone in the room. He talks gamely about boxing—his favorite sport—and high school football with one seated group.

While, the most impassioned discussions of the afternoon are not about bills in the Illinois State General Assembly. He's introduced, among other bills, legislation bolstering regulations on private handgun purchases to prevent straw purchasing. "He pauses. "It went down 50-59."

"I hate mixing politics and policy," he says of the divide. "But the bottom line is you don't set policy without politics."

About halfway through his glad-handing around the room, it's my turn to talk with Mitchell. I ask what the others have said to him. "So far it's been mostly: 'How you doing? Keep doing a good job,'" he says. "But there's been a lot of talk about guns."

The issue does seem to follow Mitchell around the room, bookending conversations about otherwise unrelated topics like disability benefits and the responsiveness of Alderman Burns' office. However, a recent statistic saying that over one million people have been killed by gun violence since the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. galvanized the group towards gun control.

"They just got so stubborn," said one man bitterly of gun rights advocates. "And no one understands this straw issue."

Mitchell, standing with the man before about five guests, notices the puzzled looks and explains.

"Straw purchasing. Only fifteen percent of guns used in crime are actually stolen. Most are legally purchased and then re-sold or given to criminals without any records."

Mitchell, one of fifteen freshman lawmakers on Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon's "Firearms Working Group," has quickly become one of the leading advocates for gun control in the Illinois State General Assembly. He's introduced, among other bills, legislation bolstering regulations on private handgun purchases to prevent straw purchasing. "This law would have just said, 'I, the seller have to keep a record. The buyer keeps a record. Within ten days, we forward those records to the Illinois State Police.'"

"He pauses. "It went down 50-59."

With a weariness that hangs heavily on his young voice, he describes the apologies offered after the vote.

"People came up to me afterwards and said, 'Hey, that's a really good argument. Makes a lot of sense. Can't do it. NRA. Sorry.'"

Mitchell faults closer ties between the National Rifle Association and the firearms industry for the lobby's heightened obstinacy.

"Sturm, Ruger [& Company] and Smith & Wesson have a profit motive. And that profit motive gets disrupted anytime you do anything that makes it harder for someone to get a gun. So they've drawn a line in the sand. That's what happens in Springfield."

But, however intractable and unwieldy "politics" might be in Springfield, on this particular afternoon, in this particular office, "politics" hardly seems like a necessary evil. The open house continues to feel, through the end, more like a church social than a gathering for local politicos. Mitchell doesn't seem to mind.

"I don't know if I'm comfortable yet," he tells a constituent asking about adjusting to his new office. "But I'm having fun learning the process."

On harder days for Mitchell, "learning the process" means coming to terms with vexing political realities. Today, it means small talk and sandwiches.
black Radical imagination

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What's fast, furious, and entirely female? That's right: a pro-

part in a discussion afterward. Logan Center for the Arts, 915

neighborhood happenings

calamity

In Kaoru Arima’s series of diaristic drawings, mythological

And Then

Daisey, Psalm One, The Whoevers

MUSIC

11

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Chicago Home Theater Festival

Mallorie Festival

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And the book’s animal heroes are a far cry from the idealistic

 starts with Inches, a performance piece that was

one-person shows will be on the bill of the night’s offerings. In

The Dillinger Escape Plan has distinguished itself from the begin-

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Helen Marshall, has a beautifully clear pitch well-suited to the

performing message of community and acceptance to audiences since

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And Then

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guards and the personal intermin-

Ground is in design, and the pop and the personal intermin-

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Modernists

The words of Sophie Calle are among the most pondered

women’s issues. By expanding his reach and softening his

Sophie Calle

While both artists have gone on to build successful folk

At the turn of “People’s Art” if Prince weren’t enough of a

with an edge and a diversity of sound that dis-

on canvas. The focus of his paintings is to

Daisey, Psalm One, The Whoevers

Another Modernist

The book’s animal heroes are a far cry from the idealistic

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