Common Law
Confronting crime with the Guardian Angels

(Lydia Gorham)
Grottesque Alphabet

by Tobi Haslett

SOME SPECIES OF BIRD FEED THEIR CHICKS BY regurgitation: food is first ingested by the mother before climbing back up her esophagus. The mother's young stop their chipping just long enough to take in the slipped meal.

Text-based art after, say, 1975 often calls to mind all that chipping and hacking. At first glance, one might think that William Pope-John’s “Forlesen,” currently up at the Renaissance Society, is something like a mother’s post-digested mouthful, a show that has been chewed up and spit out by a critical environment that owes much to Derrida. “Forlesen,” titled after a short story by sci-fi and fantasy writer Gene Wolfe and whose most striking piece is a quarter-section of a giant wooden penis, seemed upon first visit to be a kind of postmodern exercise, a rehearsal of the same hokey tropes. The penis—rather, the “phalloide”—has been cut up—nay, “deconstructed”—just as the text of Wolfe’s story has been sliced into bits, as only four, discontinuous pages of its story are framed and hanging in the gallery.

Pope-John’s drawings, fixed to two free-standing walls (also penis-shaped), are sketches of the spaces between lines of text, so parts of letters—the top of an “e,” the bottom of an “a”—get into the composition like sets of crooked teeth. The point, you see, is not the text, but the holes within text, the yawning canyons that give the lie to our assumptions about logos and truth. More lecturing, I thought, as I imagined my head craned upward like a hatchling being fed so much pre-chewed meaning.

“Forderen” does not invite, but rather preempts such a tidy reading. My second visit to the gallery proved that what I had taken to be Pope-John’s peddling critique was, in fact, my own. The opening had been crowded, noisy—the din of conversation had, among other things, discouraged the kind of patience required of a show like this, patience not only to gawk at a drawing or the black helium balloons that dot the sound coming from a wooden sculpture titled “DuBois Machine.”

A pair of trousered legs stretches upward, a dab of red paint marking the seat of the pants. A girl’s voice (Eden Strong) reads a script about Pope-John’s curious experiment with something flitched from Martin Luther King Jr.’s personal papers. The story is of the artist’s doomed attempt to implant MLK’s DNA into a fruit and other projects, such as an attempt to package his legacy into an aerosol can and a website called distributimgarten.com. All of this is stitched to the story of his sister’s death, chance encounters, and the demands of the academic bureaucracy that both enables and frustrates the artist.

So history is revved, maybe even rewritten, when we throw together our own art facts, our own MLKs and DuBoises. The legacies of these men—men who, as Pope-John reminds us, were subject to temptation of the flesh—must share in the fate of flesh dry on the gallery floor like ceramic shards from some long-buried civilization.

When the Hyde Park Garden Fair, I wasn’t expecting anything that I’d think about much, except maybe something about the ongoing destruction by the impatiens. Some of the most popular flowers at the garden fair are under attack by impatiens downy mildew, a type of fungus that causes plants to drop their flowers and leaves. Its spores can hang out in the soil for almost a decade. But that wasn’t all there was to the garden fair. Its roots are deep, and I was really just barely visiting.

The audience was active throughout the discussion. One enthusiastic lady in the front row passionately acclaimed local figure Margaret Burroughs for her service to the community. Another challenged Arceauex’s casual use of “we” when he spoke of “assisting the community”—which points to the trickiness of balancing stakeholders in the issue of society and art. Both the name and the content of the event suggest that there are conversations yet to come. (Brian Ng)
A Nice Vue If You Can Get It

Proposed high rise looms over 53rd street

by Ari Feldman

LAST THURSDAY, THE CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION APPROVED MESA Development’s proposal for Vue53, a Hyde Park commercial and residential development that would replace a Mobil gas station and adjoining car wash on 53rd Street, just north of Nichols Park. After several years of discussion with the community, the City Council’s Committee on Zoning is scheduled to vote on it, and if that vote passes—which, given the political support the development has received from 4th Ward Alderman Will Burns, it almost certainly will—construction will commence soon after. It is expected to be finished by early fall of 2015.

In 2009 the University of Chicago purchased the land, known to locals as the McMobil site since it is home to a Mobil gas station and once held a McDonald’s. It is essentially the midpoint between the ongoing Harper Court developments and Kimball Plaza. If the bet made by the UofC and Mesa pays off, Vue53 will fill 53rd Street’s “gap in the smile,” as residents have also called the site.

The development and its design have, however, been a source of controversy among residents in Hyde Park and Kenwood. In an attempt to reach out to the community, Mesa has held a series of “visioning workshops” since 2007, when the Chicago-based firm first became interested in a combined residential and commercial development in Hyde Park. Vue53 is funded entirely by private donors, and Mesa expects 53rd Street’s TIF to receive $1 million annually from its property taxes.

When Mesa’s proposal was presented at the May 7 TIF Advisory Board meeting, a crowd of several hundred people came to pass judgment on the development’s final iteration, aspects of which had been changed to reflect concerns brought up at the January TIF Advisory meeting.

Jim Hanson, principal at Mesa Development, emphasized that Mesa had doubled the number of rooms in the development set aside as affordable housing, to twenty percent of Vue53’s 267 total units. At the Chicago Plan Commission meeting, Alderman Burns said that the affordable housing offered with this proposal—three-fourths of Vue53’s lot would be high due to the low rate of car ownership among Vue53’s target demographic: people aged sixteen to thirty-four, whom they expect to fill eighty-five percent of the units. Mesa also hopes to limit the number of cars in its lot by offering apartment and parking space leases separately. The number of parking spaces, for both cars and bicycles, is over the zoning requirement for the area, and two parking spaces will be reserved for a car-sharing service.

Regardless of the amount of parking, Chuck Thurow, a former urban planner who led both the January and May TIF Advisory meetings regarding the Vue53 proposal, believes that most residents want density because it is better for the urban environment. “I don’t think any of the people who were against [the development] had heard about global warming yet,” he said. Thurow did wish that, during the community meetings, there had been more discussion on architecture and the building’s façade instead of obstinate partisanship and disrespectful comments about Mesa’s design. (“It looks like a bunch of tubes,” said one resident.) He called the May meeting “some kind of tribal ritual,” bemoaning the fact that most people left holding the same opinions they had brought.

Still, if the Plan Commission hearing was any indication, the tide of public opinion seems to be turning: fifteen people—including representatives from the South East Chicago Commission and the Hyde Park Chamber of Commerce—spoke in favor of the plan, while eight spoke against it. One resident, speaking on the development’s behalf, noted that Hyde Park has long been home to modernist architecture, and that the design continues the tradition. He cited the Robie House and the Del Prado apartment building, both of which were considered modern at their times of construction. Alderman Burns agreed, saying in a letter to Commissioner Mooney that he thought it was “good to have modern and distinct architecture” in Hyde Park, both for residents as well as for attracting tourism and commerce from around the city.

Despite the issues involved in determining what kind of building should occupy the McMobil site, some are just happy to see the land developed. Earlier this month, Chuck Thurow was, as he put it, “dragged” into Nichols Park by one particularly concerned resident. She sat him down on a bench and told him, “It’s gonna destroy our park!” Thurow was unfazed. “I’d much rather look at a building than a gas station and car wash,” he said.
Common Law

Confronting crime with the Guardian Angels

by Josh Kovensky
LATE ONE NIGHT, THE GUARDIAN ANGELS WERE PATROLLING THE EL. A group of young and middle-aged men, they were out to help the injured, trail suspects, and make citizens' arrests when they deemed it necessary.

A young man ran into the opposite end of the car from where Chicago chapter head Miguel “3rdRail” Fuentes was standing. He was lanky, with tattoos strewn across his body. He carried a new smartphone, but seemed more interested in scrutinizing his surroundings, glancing at the security cameras and simultaneously trying to hide the phone while greedily staring at it.

After a few minutes, Fuentes moved near the kid, who unabashedly asked him, “Are you with the police?” Fuentes shook his head and said “No.” Neither pacified nor convinced, yet unwilling to move, the kid sat there, stop after stop, suspiciously glancing over at Fuentes and the other passengers. Eventually, shifty eyes gave way to clarity, and he said, “Oh! You stop people from getting robbed on the trains and shit?” Fuentes gave a brief nod. The kid still fingered the phone and nervously checked the security cameras, but was visibly relieved by the presence of Angels and the absence of cops.

The Guardian Angels got off at Roosevelt, while the kid stayed on. I asked Fuentes if he thought that the kid was suspicious. “No,” he explained. “He was [suspicious]...but then he started asking questions.” The crime was likely behind him, and so was the suspicion.

The Guardian Angels thrive on such false starts. As Fuentes will tell you over and over again, the group's main purpose is “to deter,” and not to be heroes. Fuentes maintains that the group’s distinctive garb itself stops crime. Each Guardian Angel wears a blood-red beret. Depending on weather, they either wear a white hoodie or T-shirt with the Guardian Angels logo on it, along with black pants, black shoes, and black gloves. “The uniform gives us authority,” he says. “It acts as a deterrent.” Weapons are forbidden—members are mandated to search one another at the start of each patrol—and Angels carry handcuffs on their belts. When I loudly mentioned this to Fuentes on a late-night Green Line run, he muttered “Yes,” and quickly covered them with his hoodie.

In spite of his off-the-cuff skittishness, Fuentes stands at a buff five-foot-four. He speaks with a slight Spanish accent, a byproduct of his Little Village upbringing. The Angels first came to him through a chance encounter in 1988. “I saw a group of Guardian Angels, and [founder Curtis Sliwa] just happened to get on the train car with me. I asked him how to join...one thing led to another—I became a member, then a patrol leader, and so forth.”

For twenty-five years since, Fuentes has patrolled Chicago's streets and train lines, helping citizens and deterring crime along the way. He rose to become the head of the city chapter, and is now the organization’s national director. By day, he works as an electrician; at night, he turns into 3rdRail, his Guardian Angel call sign and DJ moniker. The nickname comes from an incident early in his tenure as an Angel. His characteristic beret, for which the Angels are often ribbed, fell onto the tracks on the Green Line. He spoke to a station agent, who let him swoop down onto the tracks to retrieve it.

There are currently fifty Guardian Angels in the Chicago chapter. Many come from the South and West Sides and have working-class backgrounds, although one Angel, nicknamed Yoda, works as a TV reporter in Iowa, periodically travelling to Chicago to patrol with the local chapter. Background plays an important role in joining the Angels: regardless of spirit, no convicted felon can join. In addition, members must be sixteen years of age, clean of drug or alcohol dependency, and must also submit to a background check involving character references and an interview.

Although there are currently no gender restrictions, not a single woman numbers among Chicago's angelic ranks. Some might attribute this to relatively high rates of sexual assault, or even to the underlying macho culture on which the Angels are based. Fuentes seems to think that women just aren't cut out to be Angels. He said with a grin, “Women try, but they don't last...it's hard, you know, they get scared.”

Fear however, is universal. The training process aims to fight it. Recruits undergo six months of training before becoming full members. This includes training in the martial arts, in techniques on how to deal with verbal abuse, legal protocols for making citizen's arrests, and general behavioral testing to weed out “who's trying to be a hero,” in Fuentes’ words. Upon acceptance, members must patrol at least twice a week to remain Angels.

As Fuentes will readily tell you, being a Guardian Angel is tough. “It takes a lot...You have to deal with verbal abuse, peer pressure, people telling you you're wasting your time, risking your life for people you don't even know.” What doesn't make it onto the application, but does make Fuentes the impressive crime-fighter that he is, is the ability to think like a criminal. Not in the cartoonish sense of sniffing after a
onto their arms. As the train rolled to a halt, they heaved her onto the platform.

Fuentes and the friendly stranger lifted the woman to trail along the floor. Fuentes quickly assessed the situation, enlisting Richard to support these claims are currently available.

Regarding what the Angels can do to stop crime, Fuentes told me, “we don’t have any special powers.” Not do they have protection under the law, with the exception of no special powers.” Nor do they have protection under the law, with the exception of

"We can’t enforce city ordinances. In Chicago, graffiti is banned by ordinance, and not by law. Fuentes, as DJ 3rdRail, had frequently supported tagging during his radio shows. Some one that he went so far as to claim that tagging illegally was the only way to be a “real” graffiti artist, though no records tagging illegally was the only way to be “real” graffiti artist, though no records

Fuentes and I were in the first car. The Guardian Angels are deeply methodical about train patrols. Through a combination of strategies, a complement of three Angels can secure an entire eight-car train. At each stop, the Angels will stick their heads out, looking down the train for signals. “If nothing happens, we give a hand signal, but if we don’t see someone come out we go to that car as fast as we can.” As the train moves between stations, the angels will “float” in between cars, moving back and forth along the emergency walkway.

However, in emergencies, Angels will run down the cars to Fuentes. Richard, a lanky newbie, sprinted over from the next car while the train sped at full tilt. He was

O ne night on patrol, a woman mangled her foot on the escalator at the Bronzeville-IIT Green Line stop while running for the train. Still caught in a passion for punc
tuality, she kept running, only to get her foot caught in the gap between platform and train. Her ankle snapped and, bloody and all, she stumbled into a seat in the train’s last car.

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In their training classes, the Angels have specific segments targeted at coping with open-air ridicule. Just as saving the injured and detaining the suspected constitute the ends of their training, so does enduring the ridicule of the masses. Fuentes and the Guardian Angels are clearly devoted to their cause of helping people, despite missteps along the way. On patrol one night, a young boy, maybe around nine, walked up to Fuentes and asked, hesitantly, “Are you on a sexuuscurity operation?” Fuentes muttered “Yes,” and the kid walked away. A few minutes later, a man walked up to offer his appreci

As the Scout man said with a slurred Chicago accent: “They really do help you out, you know!”
MUSIC

Rajje Halim

Saxophonist Rajje Halim can be counted as one among the many newer artists who are adding richness and aesthetics with straight-ahead jazz. Halim himself claims to have been inspired by Coltrane as his main raison d’être. In the past, he has released his first album, “The Weekender,” which is a collection of his works which he plans to release in the near future. Halim is known for his unique style of playing, as he is able to blend different genres of music to create his own unique sound. His music is often characterized by its rhythmic complexity and its ability to convey a wide range of emotions. Halim is also known for his improvisational skills, as he is able to create spontaneous musical ideas on the spot.

Off Balance-Balance

The dictionary offers a range of definitions for “balance,” a word that can mean equilibrium, equal distribution, or the state of being in harmony. For many artists, balance is a crucial element of their work, whether it be in visual art, music, or performance. In the off-balance world of contemporary art, balance is often a subjective concept, and artists use it to create work that challenges traditional ideas of what is considered “normal” or “acceptable.”

Guitar & Dispatcher

Sudter and Dispatcher have been friends for many years, and are often seen sitting together at local coffee shops or in parks around the city. Sudter is known for his guitar playing, while Dispatcher is a talented young poet. The two met while working together at a local music store, and have since become close friends. They often collaborate on music projects, and their music is often characterized by its emotional depth and its ability to convey a wide range of emotions.

NEIGHBORHOOD HIGHLIGHTS

VISUAL ARTS

Final Form

On May 8, five big names in the contemporary art world will descend on the Chicago Project for a Symposium of projects that have been selected for their exceptional quality and potential impact. The projects will be presented in a series of events throughout the city, each focusing on a different aspect of the contemporary art world. The Symposium is being organized by a group of artists and art historians who have been working together to promote the development of new forms of art and to support emerging artists. The Symposium will feature presentations by artists, curators, and critics, as well as workshops and discussions.

Stage & Screen

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