Brian Trapp

My City in Two Dog Parks

> With respect to every urban space we should ask ourselves how it functions: for whom, by whom and for what purpose. Are we merely impressed by its sound proportions or does it perhaps also serve to stimulate improved relations between people.
>
> *Herman Hertzberger, "The Public Realm"*

I live in a neighborhood called Over-the-Rhine, in Cincinnati, Ohio. When I walk my dog, Betts, she mashes her nose into the ground, excavating smells—communicating with the space in a way I cannot. I don't know what information she receives, how far back she can read. Can she smell the dog that walked by an hour ago? The gnawed-on chicken wings dropped

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the night before? The box of moldy clothes that sat there last week? Or can she go back further? Whatever she smells, it must be interesting, because she often tries to rip my arm off for one more whiff.

However, she is a dog, and her knowledge is limited. She certainly can't smell that this used to be a German neighborhood, supported 45,000 people, almost seven times its current population. She is likely unaware of the 300-plus empty buildings, but she's certainly fascinated by the trash strewn across 700 vacant lots. She doesn't know that the buildings she trots under are ancient, the largest collection of nineteenth-century Italianate architecture in the United States, or that they are endangered. She can't smell the ash and blood from the 2001 race riots, which have washed away long ago. Does the odd juxtaposition of businesses mean anything to her? Does she pause to see the strange mix of check cashing centers and yoga studios, corner stores and organic groceries, fried fish establishments and overpriced urban eateries, art galleries and homeless shelters, all in the same few blocks? Unfortunately, she mostly pays attention to food and pee.

For all she doesn't know, she is the medium through which I know my neighborhood. Although I take her for walks, she also walks me, through neighborhood streets, spaces, and people. As much as she's my beloved pet, my dog is also a furry and badly behaved ontological instrument. As I walk my dog through my neighborhood, I see the battle being fought for its future. Will it be a gentrified enclave, a dark ghetto, or a diverse urban village? I don't know, but my dog really has to take a piss.

Northern Row Park

Northern Row Park is not an official dog park, but that's mostly what it's used for. When we approach its cast-iron gate, Betts wheezes against her choker collar to see if another dog is inside. When there is, every muscle in her forty-pound stocky build strains to get closer. She yaps like a psychotic

squeeze toy, and on her back forms a stripe of raised, brown fur. She forces her head under the gate, snarling and flashing fangs, and the other owner, someone I haven't met before, looks nervous. He asks, "Is he friendly?" which really means: "Don't let *that* in here" and "Your dog looks like a boy." He winces as I open the gate, and just as my monster is about to rip into the soft of his dog's throat, she stops, sniffs its privates, and wags her tail—a white flag. The owner squints: "What kind of dog is that?"

That is how I meet most of my neighbors. My dog is a slobbering conversation piece. She looks hilarious, a breeding experiment gone wrong. She has the head of a pit bull and the legs of a wiener dog, with a muscled jaw and body atop four stubby legs. I adopted her from the SPCA last year, and to date, she's dug five holes in the carpet, eaten three remote controls, chewed five pairs of shoes, and munched half a string of Christmas lights. The dog she most closely resembles is whatever kind you find in junkyards. "I don't know," I say. "Maybe basset hound and pit bull? Something that shouldn't have mated."

We watch our dogs wrestle around the park's cobbled court and run through the grass and dirt perimeter. I turn to the owner and ask: "You live around here?" It's a dumb question. They always do.

They live on Main and Sycamore, Orchard and Fourteenth Street, in the old tenements that are now rehabbed apartments and condos. They are lawyers and actors, janitors and store owners, PR men and bartenders, students and salespeople. They have lived here fifteen years, five years, six months, a week. They work downtown or in the adjacent neighborhoods, and they mostly have mutts, though there is the occasional purebred.

When their dogs have to take a shit, they come here, one of the only green spaces in the area, if you discount vacant lots.

This is not a public park, not anymore, but they have a right to be here. The park was made not by city planners but by the residents, reclaimed for

the community from asphalt-cracked urban decay.

Northern Row Park has existed for as long as anyone can remember. It's named for the northern row of houses on the edge of the city, which used to be at the end of the block on Liberty Street. With the Miami and Erie Canals (now Central Avenue) delineating the neighborhood's southern and western boundaries, and with its substantial German population, the neighborhood was nicknamed: "Over-the-Rhine."

Most of its buildings were constructed between 1865 and the end of World War I, when German-Americans dominated the area. OTR was one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the country, second only to Manhattan, and in 1900 was home to more than 45,000 people. The neighborhood was bustling and vibrant, but certainly not idyllic, reeking with thick smog from the various industries and stench from the packed-in humanity. With the advent of the automobile, much of the middle class migrated out to the expanding suburbs, leaving OTR's tenements to the working class and poor. In the 1960s, African Americans migrated from the south and from surrounding neighborhoods razed for a new highway. The latter half of the twentieth century follows the tragic plot of every Rust Belt city: investment in the surrounding suburbs and disinvestment in the urban core, leaving the buildings to decay and blight, and the people to fight for city services and quality education from a dwindling tax base. Most of the white residents left, and OTR became predominantly black and poor, with high crime. The population has shrunk to 7,000 in 2010 (36 percent white, 62 percent black, mostly low income).

When John Spencer discovered Northern Row Park in 1990, it mirrored the state of the neighborhood. It had an island of green space in the middle, surrounded by a sea of cracked blacktop, and a rusting swing set from the 1950s that no sane kid would sit on, a teetering death trap. A pair of shoes hung from the telephone wires above, marking the territory for

drug dealers. Homeless people used the park as a bathroom. Spencer, a local architect and developer, had just moved into an adjacent building, and with his business and life partner, Ken Cunningham, he aimed to rehabilitate OTR's architecture. He reported the dangerous equipment to the city, but they merely took the swing set away, leaving the space empty. "We decided it could be something," he said. "We could take it over and make it into a park worthy of a new neighborhood."

But nothing gets done quickly in Cincinnati. After seven years in negotiation with the park board, in 2004 they were allowed a ninety-nine-year lease for a pittance. They had just converted their building into condos and the new residents were excited about rehabbing the park as a neighborhood project. Over the course of a year, about forty neighbors worked to transform the park. They wrote grants and raised $100,000, convinced the city to donate old granite pavers from the downtown bus terminal, and did the grunt work. They freed the existing hawthorn and elm trees from asphalt encasements. They dug up drug paraphernalia and railroad irons, and in their place left a natural dirt area on one side and grass and a rose bed on the other. They installed street lamps and flood lights hanging down from the trees, and wrapped the space with a cast-iron fence, punctuated on a diagonal by two gates.

Spencer said he wanted the space to be a "passive area of recreation," as a "nice green space that people could enjoy." People have used the park for neighborhood parties, concerts, movie nights, weddings, chiminea camp fires, picnics and lunches. But to Spencer's mild regret, the space has mostly gone to the dogs: "There is such a need for dog space, it's overrun." The dogs have dug up flowers and trampled the grass into sad clumps. When they're in the park, they dissuade most people from passing through or loitering and they've left land mines of crap all over the green.

However, as Spencer noted, the dogs signify a strong pulse for the neigh-

borhood, a sign of health. "As you get more people with dogs, it indicates two things: more people with disposable income, and more people meeting each other," he said. "It's a great mixer. That's what is important about living in an urban area: the opportunity to meet and find out about other people."

A dog park is a space to fight against the anonymity of the city, where neighbors are forced to interact in a common space. We have no other tasks to complete. We have nowhere else to go. We must loiter long enough for our dogs to do their business, and even if you're socially awkward like me, you'll eventually interact with the other human being across from you. We get to know each other.

But this knowledge is often limited by and filtered through the dogs. For instance, I know my neighbors value fairness. My dog often plays with a beagle terrier mix named Spence (no relation to John Spencer). His owner, a professional woman of about forty-five, cheers for him as if he's a child playing soccer: "Get her, Spence, get her!" She spends her time clapping. It's hard to have a conversation. But when my dog bites Spence's collar and throws him around, she objects: "Hey, Betsy. Play fair." She separates them like a referee.

"Fair?" I say. "Look where we live. These are street rules." She disagrees.

They also seem to think their dogs' private space should be respected. Several people have bitchy ankle-biters that are not at all friendly. The pugs in particular strike me as hissing, furry lizards, as Betts' attempts at play are met with hard nips from their little fist mouths. One small and black French thing with an actual French name, "Miniot," also snaps at my dog. His owner excuses its aggression: "Say, 'I'm too delicate to play.'" There are dogs too delicate to play.

In addition, I know most of my neighbors don't have kids, because they treat their pets like children. Besides the cheering, they confess to buying soy products at gourmet pet food stores. They have taken their dogs to expensive obedience classes. They often greet the dogs first and the people second. One yuppie couple even named their dogs 'Sophie' and 'Addison,' which are not at all dog names, as if they wanted to practice the names on other living things before they moved to the suburbs and bequeathed them to their children. They cheer, correct and scold. As our dogs tear up the park and slam into one another, they look at me with exasperation, as if to say, "These kids . . . " I too am guilty of this anthropomorphic infantilization. I live alone, and in my weaker moments of existential loneliness, I might vocalize what my dog would be thinking if she had the intelligence of a spunky, eight-year-old child. But let me be clear: Betts eats regular dog food, is hopelessly misbehaved, and though her name is not 'Fido' or 'Ace,' it's still one syllable and not as yuppie-child as 'Sophie' or 'Addison.'

Lastly, I know that we don't necessarily trust one another. People hang plastic grocery bags on the iron fence. This is understandable, as the park can only function if everyone does their part, and if the system of personal responsibility breaks down, things could get pretty crappy. If others aren't playing fair, why should you, and then everyone has poop on their shoes. So the bags are tied around the fence in case you need them, but are also devices of shame, as if your neighbors expected you to not plan ahead, to forget your bag, and are such good people that they make sure you're good too. *Bastards.* You remember your bag next time.

But as much as dog park culture sometimes annoys me, it has also opened my neighborhood. Sometimes, while we watch our dogs fight over sticks, we have genuine conversations. We learn where people used to live and what brought them to the neighborhood. We share intel on favorite restaurants and bars. We learn that the owner of the German shepherd also bikes to work every day, and share stories of car aggression. We learn that the wine salesman is taking a business trip to Argentina, and when he comes back, we ask him how it went. The actors tell us about upcoming

productions. We learn that someone's sister is having brain surgery. And, if there's a horrific act of violence in the neighborhood, we have a place to worry and vent. Some of us are even close friends. Some of us kiss when we see each other.

Even if most of these interactions are trivial, they draw us out of private life and make us feel included in the fabric of the neighborhood. It's akin to how urban critic Jane Jacobs characterizes interactions on city sidewalks in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*:

> *Most of [the contact] is ostensibly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at the local level [...] is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need.*

While not a city street, the dog park is similarly vital to my public identity. While exercising my dog, I form lasting, if mostly superficial, relationships with the people around me. But those interactions add up into a public identity. I am Betsy's owner. I live on Main Street and ride my bike to work. I am an English teacher and writer. My politics are fairly liberal. I patronize local bars and like good beer. I am thankful that John Spencer and other residents have given me a place to be this public self, have built a space for me and my dog.

But this dog park is also a limited space. As Spencer said, having a dog in the city allows you to "find out about other people," but what kind of other people? Almost all of the dog park attendees are middle class or upper middle class, have no children, and are white, like me. Where is everyone else? If this is Spencer's "new neighborhood," where is the old one?

Data Pit/Pit Data

If you aint from here, don't come round here.

– Spray-painted on an OTR building, Thirteenth and Main, September 2010

When I first moved to the neighborhood, I discovered one of the great OTR dog-walking benefits: you don't need to bring a bag. When your dog pops a squat, the streets are so filthy that, almost without fail, you will have a variety of trash to choose from. Do you luck into a shriveled plastic bag under the curb, or is there a spare White Castle bag overflowing from a trash can? Like the local organic grocery store suggests, I like to reuse and recycle.

But once, when Betts squatted on Fourteenth Street, I couldn't find a piece of trash right away. I panicked. How far could I walk before people think I'm just leaving? Apparently, I passed the boundary. An old lady called down from a third-story window: "Hey! Don't be leaving that shit right on the street! We gotta live here! We *gotta...live...here*!" How could I explain the great dog-walking benefit?

So I shouted back: "I gotta live here too!" I eventually found an appropriate piece of trash and made a great show of cleaning up. But this incident underscores the hostility towards middle-class white people coming in to OTR. For a long time, as Spencer notes, Main Street was primarily an entertainment district for people like me. Young suburbanites and university students would drive in for night life, and the young white people who did rent had more interest in partying than investing in the neighborhood. When this lady saw me and my shitty little dog, she probably assumed that we were invaders who didn't care about the community, about the people who actually "gotta live here."

But this is not the typical reaction I get when I'm walking Betts on the street. At least once on any given walk, I am asked a version of the same

question: "What kind of dog is that?" And if they're local black or white working-class residents, they usually have a hunch. Sometimes they just say it: "Dat'a pit." They see the pit bull in the ball of muscle on each side of her head, in her large mouth and Egyptian eyes, in her chest thrown forward and stocky build. But what is up with those legs? "It looks crossed with a wiener dog," they often say, and might be right.

The conversations don't go much farther than that, but sometimes they do. Mostly, they make comments about her physique and praise her leash-pulling power: "She's built. Look at that, long and strong." They might offer advice: "You should mate her with a tiger pit." When she sees another dog walking across the street, lunges against her leash, and squeak-barks, I hear: "Get 'em, killer."

Consequently, sometimes they get the wrong idea about why I have her. Once, when Betts jumped up on a homeless guy and I apologized for her bad behavior, he offered me training advice: "Don't let anyone pet her. You want a guard dog, right?"

"No," I said. "I want a companion dog."

"Okay. Let them pet her, but never as much as you."

In a 1990 study of an unidentified gentrifying urban neighborhood, sociologist Elijah Anderson points out that "within the black community, dogs are used mainly as a means of protection, whereas the middle class whites and blacks in the Village generally see them as pets as well." In other words, if lower-class black and white people have dogs, they often don't see them as fur children. In a poor area with high crime, you need a dog that is aggressive and intimidating, that will convince criminals to move on to the next guy. This is not the kind of dog you want fighting over a stick with a labradoodle.

I'm not saying all lower-class people view their dogs this way. And I'm not saying all of my conversations on the street take on this tenor. Sometimes

the conversation will start with my dog's pit-bull strength, but then move on to other topics. One black man I see regularly praised Betts' muscle, but has since taken a liking to her as a pet. He hangs out on a stoop near my building and insists that Betts calls him "Uncle James" while he calls her "princess" and "queen of the block." Sometimes after initial exchanges about my dog, one of us will ask: How you doing? His mother is visiting or his grandkids stopped by. He's been sick all week or he's feeling young and how about this weather? Sometimes we talk about women. Sometimes we talk about changes in the neighborhood. "It's changing much too fast," he said. "I don't like it. A lot of people have moved away." He recently told me that he used to work in demolition and I told him I was a teacher. But what we did for a living didn't seem to matter much. He's the guy who sits on the stoop and I'm the guy who walks his dog. We don't talk about much beyond my dog, but we often say "hi."

Still others on the street act like my dog is public property. I've had all races and classes kneel to my dog without asking and whisper sweet nothings in her ear: "Hi. You're pretty and sweet." Recently, a Hispanic man asked if my dog spoke Spanish, and then proceeded to whisper Latinate as he scratched her ear. I've had a wealthy-looking white man at the farmer's market publicly humiliate himself as he knelt and made out with my dog's head. My canine has a democratizing effect. She is a public object of affection for all.

These interactions on the street are perhaps even more trivial than in Northern Row Park. We are on the move with less time to loiter for sustained conversation. But for feeling part of the neighborhood, the old one not cut off by a cast-iron fence, this contact is much more important. Over-the-Rhine has a terrible reputation. Mention you live here to some Cincinnati suburbanites, and it's as if you've confessed an elaborate plan for suicide. I would be lying if I said OTR's bad reputation doesn't sometimes loom in

my mind, especially when it seems confirmed by crime reports and pops of gunfire. I spent my teenage years in a homogenized, upper-middle-class suburb outside Cleveland, with five black people in a high school of 520. With my upbringing, it would be easy to feel threatened.

But Betts provides a reason to interact with anyone on the street. When I'm with her, she forms my public identity. I am not some dorky white guy invading the neighborhood. Foremost, I am the owner of a funny-looking dog. I cannot control who she sniffs or jumps up on, and I cannot control who talks to her. For all her ferociousness with other dogs, she loves people, and is as amiable with the black homeless man who compliments her strength as she is with the white soccer mom who babbles baby talk in her ear (though I hope she likes the homeless man better). A dog can break down the defenses we build to protect us from each other.

But I know she can provide a false sense of security. If threatened, she could take a good chunk out of a perp's leg. She might persuade a criminal hunting for a victim to keep looking. But you're still playing with probability. You think: *if I bring my dog, I will be safe. If I don't sell or buy drugs, I won't get shot. If I don't go on Race Street at night, I won't get robbed.* But the terrifying thing about violence, especially in a poor, urban neighborhood, is its randomness. On my street a few months ago, a pregnant woman was shot during a robbery by a fourteen-year-old kid. Months before that, two innocent women were shot with stray bullets in a failed drug hit inside Tuckers, a diner known for its vegan burgers. My dog, long and strong, will not protect me from desperate kids or stray bullets. But she will have to pee. She will get me into the street and talking pit bulls with people I might otherwise fear. She facilitates the trivial interactions that build trust, that make you less afraid, that give you a place to start a conversation: "What kind of dog is that?"

When my dog pulls me down the street, people often ask: "Who's

walking who?" It's a better question than they know.

The Renovation of Washington Park

When planning dog parks, it's tempting to give every interest group exactly what it wants—big dog sections, little dog sections, puppy-only areas, agility courses, natural hiking areas. But, any single dog park cannot be all things to all pooches.

Roxanne Hawn, "Canine Design"

By the time this essay is published, starting in July, when Betts wants to take a piss and fight other dogs, we can walk down Fourteenth Street and keep going, past the boarded-up buildings and rehabbed apartments, past the faded, empty storefronts and sleek, new eateries, and onto a narrow street that leads to a most glorious dog park.

This park will make Northern Row look like a vacant lot. Located inside OTR's Washington Park, this official city dog park will consist of two sections covering a total of 10,000 square feet. Planners have toured dog parks in Chicago and New York, learning from greater metropolises' mistakes and successes, to create a dog park worthy of my city. Unlike Northern Row, there is no risk of an escaped dog every time you open the gate. This park will have a double-gated system with two levels of fence: one buffer area with another layer to enter the play area. Inside the park, we will not tread on shriveled clumps of grass and secondhand pavers, or have to worry about killing the perennials. This park will have specially designed synthetic dog turf that looks like real grass but isn't, with a built-in irrigation system to spray off poop. Unlike Northern Row, where the dogs drink rank rain water

from a stone slab, this park will have continually moving water from an artificial creek, where the dogs can drink and play, and if their thirst is not sated, they can wander over to the dual-use people/dog drinking fountain with a built-in bowl at the bottom. There will be large rocks and boulders on which canines can climb and benches on which their owners can sit. Surrounding trees will shade the park from the hot summer sun.

This dog park will be awesome. Betts and I will go here all the time. So why are some people so angry about it? Why would the NAACP lobby city council to deny it taxpayer money? Why would people hold protests to lament its construction? Who are these stone-hearted dog-haters? Do they not like to see puppies frolic?

To understand that, you must understand who lives around Washington Park, and who is moving in. Music Hall lies to the park's west end, housing the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Cincinnati Opera. It's an imposing, cathedral-like Gothic theater, made of nearly four million red bricks formed in garrets and turrets, with an ornate circular glass window in the center that overlooks the park like an all-seeing eye. In its shadow is the greatest concentration of social services in the city, including the Drop Inn Center, a 250-bed shelter that serves the area's large homeless population. There is also a sizable amount of low-income housing as well as twenty-five vacant properties in the park's immediate vicinity. The area's existing residents are predominantly low-income and black.

However, the area is rapidly transforming. Cincinnati's Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), a private, non-profit firm charged by the city with rehabilitating the urban core, has put more than $162 million into the park and OTR buildings since 2004. Along with my glorious dog park, they will build an interactive water splash ground with more than 400 water jets, a state-of-the-art playground with built-in musical instruments, an artificial stream that pays tribute to OTR's canal history, performance

stages with extensive programming, and a "civic lawn" the size of a football field. And in April, directly adjacent to the park, the city broke ground on a streetcar system. With all these improvements to their blighted neighborhood, why would existing residents object to a dog park?

First, it's not a space for them. As I've mentioned, low-income people tend to have dogs for protection rather than as companions, and the city's dog park rules explicitly try to keep those dogs out: "Aggressive dogs are not permitted." But most low-income residents don't own dogs in the first place. As John Spencer mentioned, dog ownership is a sign of disposable income. When you make the neighborhood yearly median income of around $10,000, you will not want to shell out an average of $600 per year for a slobbering freeloader, no matter how cute. What's more, many of the area's landlords forbid pet ownership, because it makes turning over apartments cost-prohibitive. If you're living from paycheck to paycheck, at risk of getting evicted for the slightest financial problem, owning a dog would limit your housing options.

The dog park, as low-income advocates argue, is for the (implicitly white) middle-and upper-middle-class people moving into nearby rehabbed condos and market-price apartments. But what's wrong with that? Shouldn't they have a place for their dogs to run around? Aren't there enough valuable amenities in the park-at-large for lower-income people to enjoy? *Can you say "splash ground"?*

The problem starts when you consider what the dog park will replace. Before 3CDC started renovating, the space reserved for the dog park was formerly a deep-water pool and a basketball court. To the NAACP, this erasure has class and race implications: the basketball and swimming pool are amenities that "poor African American children use" while the dog park is not. According to Josh Spring, executive director of the Cincinnati Homeless Coalition, the residents made it clear that they wanted the pool and courts

to stay. In public planning meetings, 3CDC showed pictures from parks around the world and residents were to put a sticker on the one that they liked best. All of the pictures were missing one thing: a pool. He said that someone wrote 'pool' on one of the pictures and at the end of the night, it had "lots of stickers beside it." In addition, students from a local university redrafted the park plans, putting in the pool and courts in place of one of the dog park sections, but this alternative plan was ignored.

I can have some sympathy for the city and 3CDC. As much as the alternative design sounds like a nice compromise for everyone, the minimum space required for a dog park is 8,000 square feet. Crowding can make dogs aggressive, and what if they can't fit in the climbing boulders or artificial creek? In addition, other forces seem to be working against the pool, including low attendance, high cost and neighborhood pool density. And besides, if people want to cool off in the park, they have a ground that splashes, for Christ's sake.

But I find 3CDC to be conveniently ignorant of the class and racial implications of their spaces. Project Manager Chad Munitz denies that that the dog park has a racial or class component: "I can't imagine owning pets and enjoying animals has anything to do with a racial and class system. That's not how we envision the park and not how it will be operated." But owning a pet, especially one that will play nice, is very much dependent on both race and class. Meanwhile, the lack of a basketball court seems particularly pernicious. If you have a "civic lawn" the size of a football field, you could at least put a court in one end zone. If we view Washington Park as the focal point for the neighborhood, then the spaces and how they display the residents are of the utmost importance. As cultural critic Sharon Zukin said, "To ask 'Whose city?' suggests more than a politics of occupation; it also asks who has a right to inhabit the dominant image of the city." 3CDC and the city have decided the dominant image of OTR will not be a poor

black man executing a pick-and-roll, but rather a middle-class white guy cheering on his pooch.

Why can't it be both?

There are other issues with the dog park and the park at-large, many of which were hysterically voiced at a protest last year next to the fenced-in construction site. The activists claimed that there was no effort to employ OTR residents in the park's construction. In addition, their local grade school, which was demolished with the promise to build a new one, was replaced with a regional magnet school for performing arts that does not necessarily educate OTR children. Not only were neighborhood people missing out on good paychecks, but their families were moving away to be closer to schools. They also claimed 3CDC is attempting to move the Drop Inn Center, having already convinced another homeless shelter to relocate. Lastly, the 450-car garage being constructed under the park will not serve the residents, but rather outsiders, who will drive in for the school and park, as well as for the area's burgeoning shopping district, which will cater to young professionals. These people will need somewhere safe to put their Kias and Volvos.

The protesters' main concern, and perhaps at the heart of what the dog park portends, is that dirty five-syllable word: gentrification. As sociologist Ruth Glass originally defined the term in 1959, gentrification is the process by which a working-class neighborhood is "invaded by the middle classes—upper and lower," who rehabilitate its buildings and raise its property value, until "all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed." Although this definition has been complicated since, it contains the two main elements: physical and cultural displacement. The protesters claim that some displacement has already occurred, as low-income landlords have kicked out residents and sold to 3CDC for condo conversion. But most displacement happens indi-

rectly: as the neighborhood "improves," current residents are priced out of their apartments and homes. As activist Ricardo Taylor said, "They're trying to make it an exclusive neighborhood. People not having the goods aren't going to be able to afford it and will have to move. And they're changing the park to fit someone else's ideals." In this line of thinking, the dog park is perfectly suited for Washington Park, because when the property value goes up, only people who can afford fur children will be able to live there.

I can understand the protesters' ire. While supposedly a neighborhood park, it is mostly designed for people who don't live there yet, and visitors driving in from around the region. And whether it was intentional or not, there are some clear racial and class implications about 3CDC's design and programming choices.

And yet I am freaking excited about this park. I'm looking forward to taking my dog there to scrap with other dogs, and talking to fellow dog owners about new restaurants and bars. I want to put my face in a splash ground water jet, and go to a jazz trio on the "civic lawn." And as much as I hate to say it, I might breathe a little easier when the Drop Inn Center has moved and there's not a loud group of homeless men yelling at one another and taking up all the benches. My enthusiasm makes me wonder: Am I part of the problem? Am I unwittingly paving the way to displace people from their homes?

I fit the profile. As a graduate student and teacher, I am a professional or at least a professional-in-training. I am in my late twenties and have no kids. My apartment, for which I pay the market rate of $700 a month, used to be owned by Tom Denhart, the biggest low-income landlord in the city. At one time, he owned more than one thousand low-income units, but sold out to market-rate developers in the early 2000s, including Urban Sites, my landlord. I am unwittingly guilty of poor-person displacement (Cue foreboding music).

And though I don't make nearly enough money for the typical gentrifier, I do have another kind of worth. As Zukin sees it, gentrification is based on "consumption of cultural capital" and is dependent on "cultural mediators" that "help transform the qualities of a specific place in the built environment into a market for a wide variety of consumer goods." I hold literary readings in OTR bars and invite my friends to eat and drink at its "unique" restaurants. I brag to friends who pay higher rents in other neighborhoods and talk up my "authentic" and "diverse" neighborhood. I walk my dog at midnight, giving the impression that the neighborhood is safe. I spread the word to other middle-class white people that you should come on down, because the water is fine. As a cultural mediator, I am guilty.

Suddenly, Northern Row Park seems much more sinister. The dog park is not a gathering space for community, but rather a gentrification headquarters where we can surround ourselves with people like us, display cultural capital by knowing the hippest restaurants and bars, best beer and newest music. We display our disposable income in the form of our pampered pets, who in some cases are even "too delicate to play." We plot about what "unique" new businesses to support, welcoming the incoming white middle-class hordes, and look forward to the day OTR becomes one giant dog park.

And John Spencer, the benevolent developer who reclaimed my park from urban decay, is really a gentrifier and displacer. His aim may be to rehab OTR's buildings into their authentic and historical character, but, in Zukin's terms, he is also using "authenticity" as a "tool" that "along with economic and political power" is used to "control not just the look but the use of real urban spaces." By converting the unique and historical character of the neighborhood into market commodities for condo owners, Spencer is destroying someone else's city: what makes the neighborhood unique and historical for lower-income African Americans. He said he came to

OTR to "create a neighborhood that was still mixed, that was still 10 to 15 percent low-income." To create this kind of mixed neighborhood, where people can learn from one another, "sounds kind of utopian," he said. But for low-income people, 10 to 15 percent will sound kind of like hell. Their city and the people they know and love would be gone.

When viewed this way, Northern Row Park becomes one more ploy to increase property value, and belongs to a private developer to boot. Every time I take my dog there, I help them. I blaze another path through OTR for middle-and upper-class white people. And who knows how much property value will go up? Is it only a matter of time before I'll be priced out of the neighborhood as well? I can only work so many extra hours at the student writing center. Is John Spencer trying to displace me? I'm a cultural mediator, for Christ's sake. He can't do this to me.

I think I'm freaking out a little. In portraying all development as "rich versus poor," I can highlight important inequalities, but it also bludgeons the city's complexity, making for reductive arguments flavored with paranoia. And John Spencer is a nice guy. He was a mentor to several low-income children before it was popular, helping them with homework and attending after-school activities. For all his development talk, he cares about the old neighborhood and the people in it.

As for my white guilt, it's a little too soon. This neighborhood could use more middle-class white people, and just more people in general. According to census data, the population has dropped to 7,000, an 8 percent decline in the last ten years. The neighborhood's long-term goal is to reach a population of 15,000, and now it's farther away than ever. In addition, people in OTR have been crying gentrification for nearly forty years. As historians note, starting in the 1970s, the city attempted to make Over-the-Rhine "a chic neighborhood with a racially and socioeconically mixed population" with a focus on historical preservation, and just like now, residents were

concerned about gentrification. Due to the city's focus on affordable housing, this did not happen, but the neighborhood stayed segregated. In 1992, OTR was criticized by the advocacy group Housing Opportunities Made Equal, saying that the neighborhood was a "permanent low-income, one-race ghetto—a stagnant, decaying 'reservation' for the poor at the doorstep of downtown." The demographics remained roughly the same until race riots erupted in 2001. To keep OTR poor and black might preserve some people's city, but it will be sparse and racially segregated, with high crime, low employment, and instability.

Gentrification can just be a derogatory word for social and economic integration. The goal of most housing policy is to create economically and racially diverse neighborhoods, yet there are few places where this diversity actually exists. With its 300 vacant buildings, OTR could be such a place. There is room for more middle-class white people without displacing current residents. In 2002, the city made plans for a balance of 50 percent market-rate housing with 50 percent affordable housing to be reached in the next five years, and that balance is still far away. Low-income residents could even benefit. As urban critic Lance Freeman said, "gentrification is often accompanied by new retail outlets, the refurbishing of housing and overall improvements in amenities and services." 3CDC also believes in this trickle-down effect, claiming the park will "stimulate additional private economic development, which will further improve the quality of life for the neighborhood and its residents." In OTR, improved amenities can be a larger park green and a splash ground, for instance, or a 50 percent drop in serious crime since 2001. Many homeless people I talked to were excited that the park would be more beautiful and roomier, though they were worried about being harassed.

So gentrification is not inherently bad; however, like the dog park, when it starts to replace things of value that are already in a neighborhood, you

get into trouble. The pool is gone and so are the courts. Residents seemed resigned to the fact that a city can't change without losing something in the process. But what they ultimately want is mutual benefit. They want more homes and businesses for people like them. Their ultimate goal is more affordable housing built alongside the market-rate rehab. As Ricardo Taylor said, "Let us be a part of it too. Establish us as well. If you can't stop a locomotive, get on board. We accept that you renovate. But renovate us as well." The problem is that the state has stopped giving tax incentives to build affordable housing, and Section 8 reforms provide housing vouchers that allow stable low-income residents to live outside the city. Many affordable-housing developers have switched to market-rate development, which accelerates gentrification. While 3CDC does have a few units of affordable housing, housing advocates say there are not nearly enough units to meet demand. There's no counting system in place to make sure the neighborhood doesn't tip one way or the other.

I guess that's what I want. I don't want this neighborhood to tip. I want OTR to balance between "ghetto" and "dog park." How do you achieve that? How many percentages of the various income levels and racial demographics should we have? I don't know. I'm not an urban planner. But it seems that the obvious solution would be some formal mechanism of mutual benefit, such as using the tax revenue increases from market-rate development to build affordable housing, so that low-income residents have places to stay. All I know is that I want to have my OTR. I want to have spaces that are for me. I want to walk my dog to a state-of-the-art dog park and talk to people who bike to work and like the local Vietnamese restaurant, who enjoy good books and movies, and who bitch about drinks being too expensive at The Lackman on Vine Street. I want to celebrate this neighborhood's German history and admire its ancient buildings.

But I want others to have their OTR too. I want them to have their pools

and basketball courts, their corner stores and barber shops, their community centers, schools and shelters. I want them to have their history too. And when I walk down the street, if I don't see Uncle James, if the homeless are gone, if my dog doesn't speak Spanish, if a black man doesn't call my dog "long and strong," and say it just like that, then I don't want to live here.

Not long after I wrote the first draft of this essay, I walked Betts to Northern Row while talking to my father on my cell phone. Inside stood a white hipster woman and a large, pit bull lab mix. I had never seen them before. Betts strained against the gate, but this time, I hesitated. "It's OK," the woman said. "He's friendly." I opened the gate and Betts sniffed the dog. After they both wagged their tails, I let her off the leash and they began to run around the courtyard. About a minute later, my father heard the phone drop, the woman screaming, "Oh my God! No! No! No!" and then the sound of sirens.

When the EMTs arrived, my right pointer finger wasn't where it was supposed to be. It's difficult to piece together what happened, but after the dog locked its jaw behind Betts' shoulder, after it shook and tore, after its jaws started to move lower and lower and I imagined Betts' entrails spilling out of her body, I lost it. I punched the dog's head, gouged its eye with my thumb, twisted its paws, and eventually found my hands near its jaws, trying to tear Betts' skin from its teeth. When they finally separated, I thought my dog was dead. Meanwhile, the top of my finger took a sharp right turn, just hanging there, torn open a few inches above the nail, my tendon poking out like a tiny gray feather. I didn't feel a thing.

After a dicey surgery and three days in the hospital, I was released a whole man. And somehow Betts was okay. She only had two deep puncture wounds in her side. When I got her home, her wound was stapled shut, but then became necrotic and opened back up. The vet told me I had to just "let it heal on its own." To prevent her from licking it, I dressed her in

a T-shirt, but the wound leaked through the cloth, so she looked like she'd been shot. My hands were bandaged and my finger ached. Our safe space wasn't so safe anymore. I had stupidly trusted a complete stranger, let my dog play with a pit bull, and put my hands inside its jaws. And now we both looked ridiculous. I wanted to just hide in my apartment. But Betts was whining. She had to take a piss.

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