

*Testimony and Statement submitted and read at the Inquiry into the State of the Future
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Generosity and the Gift: a Social Contract worthy of investigation

What does it mean to be authentically generous? Generosity in its most authentic form is a type of reaching that requires one to go beyond one's own self to give to another in a way that will benefit him or her. It is considered a selfless act. Yet every time we are acknowledged for our generosity even if this acknowledgement is in the form of a simple thank you, generosity has shifted from a selfless act to an act that falls within a social system of reciprocity. The acknowledgement benefits the giver as much as the giving may benefit the receiver. Giving, in its everyday use, is a social contract. When one openly gives and one openly receives the gift that is being given, she or he is accepting the generosity of the giver in his or her ability to give. And in so doing the receiver is then obligated to reciprocate at some later time. This economics of exchange is clearly laid in the classic anthropological work of Marcel Mauss in *The Gift: The form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Subsequently theoreticians and philosophers have taken up the gift as a topic of inquiry, such as Martin Heidegger, George Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Helen Cixous, as well as more recently Miwon Kwon, to name a few. The economics of exchange is the generosity we are most familiar with.

Yet what does theories on gift exchange have to do with the possible misrepresentations of language by certain individuals and institutions when speaking about the character of Philadelphia? The imagined gift-the proposal for a selfless giving- is alive and well in Philadelphia. The selfless ideal of an authentic generosity, however is just that- simply an ideal. Also inherent to the gift, but unacknowledged, is the gift's potential to harm. Derrida refers to the aporia of the gift as *pharmakon*. It is no coincidence that the word *pharmakon*, hence pharmacy associated with the field of medicine, functions with the Hippocratic oath that commands physicians to do no harm. It is the imagined gift of "civic dialogue" of "community input" of "visionary planning" and "sustainability" for instance, that calls for a deeper scrutiny. It is the gift of a promise, a claim and an announcement for an "almost great" city in the future. And it is these claims that we invite you to look at more closely to see if indeed this is a gift worth accepting.

The Next Great City "InteGRITY the Branding a vice with the virtues of the ideal.

Naming- as a form of branding also falls under the realm of the imagined gift: as in the evidence put forth in the ICA notes, the naming of the imagined participatory local art practices: "Locally Localized Gravity" and the pre-formulated elevated notion of Civic Dialogue named "Great Expectations". As well as one that impacts me directly is the naming of my neighborhood by our local CDC from Kensington to New Kensington, along with the merging of the word grit with the virtuous attribute of Integrity, branded by the design firm GroupG who created the brand "InteGRITY". Grit can certainly be discussed in the realm of the gift, yet it is a very different

type of gift. It is the gift of excess, the residue that which remains and what is left after the party is over.

Georges Bataille in the *Accursed Share* describes the general economy of excess and waste as the residue of production and the expenditure of energy, *which certainly Philadelphia can be aptly named as a living memorial to the excess of our industrial productive enterprises.* This phenomena of elevating what is normally known to be a vice by splicing it with the imagined gift, in this case integrity, is one that Andrew O'Hehir points out in his essay *The Neo-Bohemia Rhapsody* quote "This "aesthetic relationship to urban vice" is a key element in neo-bohemia, as well as an obviously hypocritical one." The first stages of a design process for Kensington's Frankford Arts Corridor was not initiated by the many years of creative folks who brought their entrepreneur and innovative enterprises to an area, but rather by the institution of city government who saw hints of a possibility and a imagined vibrant art community that would save the neglected city neighborhood from its blighted existence.

Mayor street, designated Frankford Ave an arts corridor, on the possibility of its existence rather than its actuality. As far as I know, Mayor Street is no great fan of the arts- rather- his interest, like his interest to bring casinos to Philadelphia are strictly an economic one and an imaginary one at best. And therefore, it is no coincidence that it is the economic department of NKCDC that instigates and fabricates arts events for the Kensington and Fishtown communities. To decorate is to adorn and when we adorn it is usually something that we already value. But what does it mean to decorate something that does not yet exist and more strangely to decorate decay? The decorative points to the temporal. Its virtue is not integral but rather it is a temporal and fleeting celebration of the everyday that we value. But really do we value grit? Do we value homes being neglected for decades where our neighborhoods look like the bombing of Lebanon? Do we value a failed infrastructure and the affects of generations of poverty that leaves our streets strewn with debris, crime and drugs?

Behind the mirage of the imagined gift, these problems are the problems that most of us in Philadelphia face everyday when we walk out our doors. As an overly educated artist I am acutely aware that my presence in a neighborhood brings with it not the promise of equitable economic prosperity for those who have stuck it out for decades, but rather, I bring the real threat of the loss of what of we all mourn. The gift of grit is that it brings economic affordability to working class poor and yes- artists to work and live. Yet this gift- once named and recognized as an "asset"- is its death sentence. O'Hehir describes this aptly. quote: "The neighborhood "we" have (very recently) settled, and in so doing profoundly changed, is at any moment about to be invaded and presumably ruined by "them," generally meaning affluent professionals who will make the contradictions of "our" presence even more obvious than they are already. Lloyd quotes anthropologist Renato Rosaldo on what the latter calls "imperialist nostalgia," which occurs "where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed."

What we are addressing today is perhaps that we have already eliminated the possibility of greatness by prematurely naming and imagining it.

I propose that we consider other ways of improving the quality of our lives in Philadelphia; that ideas should not be predigested and handed from the top down; and that we should look at ways in which we might build participation, which empowers individuals and communities from all levels of society to build their futures together.