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The New State: Self-Governance & Self-Expression Through the Exploration of Youth Social Spaces in Today's Mediated Society

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THE NEW STATE:
SELF-GOVERNANCE & SELF-EXPRESSION
THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF YOUTH SOCIAL SPACES IN TODAY'S MEDIATED
SOCIETY

by

Alexia Samira Brunson

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ABSTRACT

*THE NEW STATE:
SELF-GOVERNANCE & SELF-EXPRESSION
THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF YOUTH SOCIAL SPACES IN TODAY'S MEDIATED
SOCIETY*

by

Alexia Samira Brunson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Professor David Allen

“Self-governance” and “self-expression” are tenets that one would hope to find in the standard of any progressive constitution. However, these terms are not presented here as parliamentary rhetoric, but as components of the mission to develop a “city block, creating public space, cultural infrastructure, and economic opportunity, while empowering our youth” in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That project is called *The New State*. By looking at The New State as a conceptual template for youth culture development in the digital age, this study attempts to expand understandings of youth citizenship and how it might affect development of society beyond its physicality. This ethnographic study examines the role of self-governance and self-expression in the creation of youth agency and cultural hubs in both digital and physical space. It further opens up the conversation about how critically intertwined physical and virtual third-spaces can be to the wellbeing of present society and its future practices.

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To
Valia East Kahlo Brunson-Hill
For Her I Will

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Chapter	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	History of <i>The New State</i>	2
II.	Literature Review, Research Questions, and Methodology	4
	Media Space	5
	Third Place	7
	Youth Culture as a Subculture.....	9
	Youth Culture & Space	11
	Youth Culture & Interstitial Boundaries.....	14
	Self-Governance & Agency in Self-Expression	18
	Research Questions.....	22
	Research Method	23
III.	FINDINGS	27
	Defining <i>The New State</i>	27
	Question 1.....	33
	Question 2.....	37
	Question 3.....	42
	Question 4.....	52
IV.	CONCLUSION	62
	REFERENCES	67

Chapter I

Introduction

“Self-governance” and “self-expression” are tenets that one would hope to find in the standard of any progressive constitution. However, these terms are not presented here as parliamentary rhetoric, but as components of the mission to the development of a “city block, creating public space, cultural infrastructure, and economic opportunity, while empowering our youth” . . . they call it: *The New State* (Newstatemke.org). For decades researchers have been analyzing the existence of youth culture as subcultures within mainstream society, while addressing their collective existence as “scenes” (Glass, 697). Where these scenes have been defined, revamped, and interpreted over time and space globally, the development of cultural hubs in today's society is layered with the advancements of media, redefining where, and thus how, we exist socially. *The New State* 's locality invites opportunity for youth culture to exist in a physical environment, but also where that opportunity is supported by digital space (website, blog, social media, music apps, etc.) that uses media resources to connect, develop, and influence participation in the creative culture scene in Milwaukee, WI, and the surrounding community. By looking to *The New State* as a conceptual template for youth culture development in the digital age, I believe that we may expand our understanding of youth citizenship and how it might change the development of society beyond its physicality. It also may speak to more critical connections between physical and digital space, redefining boundaries, creating “New States” of agency and existence.

History of *The New State*

The New State is a hybrid social and physical redevelopment project that has emerged from the collaborative efforts of various groups. These include the founders of a monthly pop-up youth event called FREESPACE, Milwaukee youth, other local creatives, developers and local community members. FREESPACE's purpose is to expose "youth to Milwaukee-based art and to provide them with the opportunity to appreciate that art with community members (artist, educators, peers, etc.) in a space safe for free-thinking and dialogue" (freespacemke.wordpress.com). Since 2015, FREESPACE has been housed in the Jazz Gallery, a small storefront venue it uses for its monthly showcase. With its positive influence on Milwaukee's music scene, cultivating a younger generation of artists, and a growing number of participants, a need for its own permanent space led to the development of *The New State*.

As the physical manifestation of FREESPACE, *The New State* team and its community partner West Side Arts Unlimited, purchased the old State theater (which was also once the Palms Night Club) on Milwaukee's near west side in December 2018 (Newstatemke.org). *The New State* is currently in the process of redeveloping that space into a cultural hub that includes: an all-ages music venue, sound engineering studios, storefront, and space for classes and workshops focused on youth musical arts (Newstatemke.org). Beyond its physicality, *The New State* attempts to provide youth agency in its developmental programming by way of a Youth Engagement Advisory Committee (Vogt, 2019). This allows for *The New State* not only to be a youth venue, but also a youth-cultivated experience. Considering their mission statement includes

“empowering our youth through self-governance and self-expression,” *The New State* is attempting to become a youth-governed and adult-advocated social organization, space, and community (Newstatemke.org).

The New State as a developing organization makes several claims on how they plan to help change the narrative of creative communal hubs in the city of Milwaukee. Through the thesis research presented here, I will explore the makings of The New State, and how it serves its mission as a “cultural infrastructure . . . while empowering our youth through self-governance and self-expression” (Newstatemke.org). This ethnographic study will reveal the implications of self-governance and self-expression as they involve youth agency. It will also reveal why cultural hubs, like the New State, are needed in Milwaukee in both digital and physical space. It will further open up the conversation of how critically intertwined physical and virtual third-spaces can be to the wellbeing of present society and its future practices.

Chapter II

Literature Review, Research Questions, and Methodology

In order to better understand how *The New State* uses media in its pursuit of community, I will review literature that discusses how media spaces and physical spaces have previously been used to define youth activity and youth cultural scenes. By selecting research that has ethnographic applications and historical contextual analysis — through several fields of study including Media Studies, Sociology, and Cultural Studies — a thorough array of perspectives that impact the holistic concept of youth culture, media, space, and citizenship may be applied. This review will begin with the generalization of Media Space as a social theory that helps us interpret existence in today's digital world. Following this, a discussion of Third Place & Third Space will be presented to provide a frame for understanding communal (both digital and physical) spaces and the practices that define such spaces. To exert a critical understanding of Youth Culture I will call on several ethnographic studies that help define this phenomenon as a subculture to dominant American society. I will then move on to methods of research that I will be employing to answer my research questions about *The New State's* use of media, the pursuit of community and youth culture in a digitized society. I will also address thoughts on governmentality and the agency of its power as practices of Self-Governance & Self-Expression are crucial to the mission of this organization.

Media Space

Contemporary social life is marked by complexities. A part of this complex nature is due to the reshaping of the social world through media technologies. In *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, the editors note that as electronic media starts to saturate our “everyday space” it becomes “difficult to tell a story of social space without also telling a story of media, and vice versa” (Couldry & McCarthy, p. 1). They suggest that the crossover between spaces of communication and physical space help shape our understanding of society as we know it. Couldry and McCarthy interpret this as media objects working between spaces to create cultural visions of physical space that transcend technology and communication (Couldry & McCarthy, p. 2). Where media help dictate our understanding, technology and infrastructure, in its physicality and ideology, morph our social reality (Couldry & McCarthy, p. 2). This redefines community and one’s agency within it, forcing us to look at the social implications of media use by analyzing inequality, dominance, and also the hidden knowledge and practices that have not existed before (Couldry & McCarthy, p. 4).

Clive Barnett questions the political significance of media as its characterization through cultural and social experiences. Barnett suggests that through media, grassroots methods of mobilization, organization, and self-regulation have started to reshape societies. Here he notes that the access to information through media allows for oppositional views of politics and civic engagement (Barnett, p. 71). These views redefine citizenship and policies as it is applied to communities. It can be noted that

there is a commonality between the mission of *The New State* and the way Barnett describes self-regulation.

Diving further into spatial theory of media, there has also been research that argues that media space helps surpass an independent existence and thus has been absorbed into the very nature and complexity of modern society. Because of this it is important that we define what media space is. For the purposes of this research, we will define "media space" as non-physical spaces that exist through the works of digitization, where there is an electronic medium between human communication, interaction and or practices. This may come as virtual space, social media platforms, mobile and internet apps, and all other networks of communications and socializations that walk the lines of modern technology. Media space differs from physical space in that the electronic medium acts as a conduit of information that can be stopped, started, replayed, and interacted with that allows the people to come and go, receiving it the same no matter when and where they are (Mackay, p. 570).

Nick Couldry and Andrea Hepp define media as the space where people now "enact the social" (Couldry & Hepp, p. 2). As media become a part of the building blocks of social interaction (*e.g.*, social media, internet forums, and video and image capturing applications for content dissemination) the authors note that the social doubles in its character, through its meaning-making and built environment (Couldry & Hepp, p. 3). Couldry and Hepp argue that as media becomes more a part of daily lives reality has become ever more mediated, which suggests that the social world changes when it is interwoven with media (Couldry & Hepp, p. 15). The "social world

perspective” consists of various bounded social worlds, and media become a part of that binding (Couldry & Hepp, p. 17). We may think of this as communities of specific themes and interactions, but Couldry and Hepp warn us not to generalize these communities but to use them to understand sense-making practices that define how we interpret society and our position in its reality (Couldry & Hepp, p. 18).

This analysis of media space, or mediated space, is meant to assert what they later say will become a natural interaction for new generations and media. Couldry and Hepp believe that cultural norms will exist and be applied in practice, as society proceeds to create a generation of “digital natives” who have no recollection of a time before everyday media interaction for social means (Couldry & Hepp, p. 152). This is reflected in the heavy use of social media from the onset of Web 2.0 to today’s smartphone, app-heavy, social interaction media use. This may be indicative of *The New State’s* use of digital media as supplemental to the physical space in which they are forming.

Third Place

The concepts of Third Place and Third Space are important to understanding the realities of contemporary citizenship. Though I argue that both terms in today’s society refer to the same concepts, their origins differ. Where Third Place disregards digital space, Third Space acknowledges its existence but pushes factors of connectivity. Ray Oldenburg defines Third Place as the space outside the home or workplace where community is made and social interaction exists; that is, “a core setting of informal public life” (Oldenburg, p. 16). He suggests that these types of spaces are “central to

the political processes of a democracy” which strengthen citizenship through community engagement (Oldenburg, p. 67). However, some researchers, like Scott Wright (2012), are critical of Oldenburg, not for his definition of Third Place but for his suggestion that media aids the deterioration of citizenship that exists in the physical world. Wright suggests that new media might actually be the solution to boosting citizenship and social interaction in today's society (Wright, p. 9). Wright explores how, in contrast to Oldenburg's critique, social networking through the technological means of “Web 2.0 has encouraged people to take their offline identity into the virtual world” (Wright, p. 7). But can these identities co-exist?

Wright builds on theories from other researchers that suggest three ways online communities are different from physical third places, listing them as having characteristics of emphasizing localized community, social levelers, and accessibility (Wright, p. 10). Within this concept it is noted that it may be more accurate to use the term “virtual third place”, since virtuality can transcend space, time and alter identity of symbolism and simulation (Wright, p. 10). In reference to the localization of community it is suggested that in these places, physically or virtually, we hold discussion that links us to proper discourse of place. It may be the interest of a city, a type of institution or type of platform. The discourse used localizes its participants as being there. Similarly, social class is emphasized by the use and comfort one has within a place and, simultaneously, one's access to that space. Wright suggests that physical third places and digital/virtual third places are not as “dramatically different” as they have been made out to be (Wright, p. 10). Furthermore, he does not note whether Third Place,

and online spaces, as alternative social forums, can create the same sense of citizenship that has been marked as crucial to the democratization society, both today and in the future.

Here we may draw on research that suggests the concept of Third Space as being significant to connectivity in today's society. Edirisinghe, *et al.*, (2011) state that "online social networking . . . is public connected through a telecommunication network, interacting on one arena, which could be personalized but with universally defining similar functions, ambiguous yet with one clear intention — connectivity (Edirisinghe, *et al.*, p. 623). They further connect theories from Lefebvre, Bhabha, and Soja as the originators of Third Space theory, applying their claims to social media as a "digital" space that is neither physical nor imaginative, thus a Third Space. Edirisinghe, *et al.*, assert how these spaces exist beyond physicality or an imaginative state, claiming digital space becomes tangible through the visibility of an interface but also "intangibility is the connection that provides the access to interact with others" (Edirisinghe, *et al.*, p. 623). This is why suggesting an analysis of *The New State's* dual practice may qualify new interpretations of how Third Places may be shaped.

Youth Culture as a Subculture

Youth Culture is a concept that has been discussed by many researchers. Throughout the literature on youth culture reviewed here, studies by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) have heavily influenced the understanding of youth subculture and identities. Dick Hebdige has defined a subculture as a form of expression that presents a "fundamental tension between those in power and those

condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives" (Hebdige, p. 132). This "form of resistance," he notes, is often presented in forms of style (Hebdige, p. 133). In alignment with Hebdige's observations, William Graebner vocalizes that youth culture is not the history of a single culture but the construction of many factors, stating that "youth culture was as much a social myth as a social reality, a representation of a culture of affluence and consensus that existed primarily in the collective imagination of the dominant culture" (Graebner, p. 6). Though Graebner's research studies Youth Culture as a Subculture of the 1940s and early 1950s in Buffalo, New York, he argues that the relevance of its existence as a form of self-expression is futile without the constraints or authorization by adults. He claims that "'pure' expressions of youth culture occur infrequently" which means that they are either "learning the skills of responsible citizenship, coming under appropriate supervision, or threatening the foundations of the social order" (Graebner, p. 8). As *The New State* mission statement suggests, it hopes to promote unconventional practices of youth agency, linking the organization to ideas about subculture movements.

Where we may define subculture broadly with its alternativeness to dominant culture, youth culture is identified with overlapping and unique traits. To group youth culture as one specific thing suggests a very limiting perspective like saying "typical teenager". . . it implies that there was one unified culture in which all youth participated and through which all youth expressed similar values" (Graebner, p. 11). This argument suggests we must look beyond ideas of dominant culture as the general public and consensus of normal habit to even smaller circles, starting with age (for our purposes

here), and moving even further into social class, ethnicity, gender and so on. These demographics define divergence in youth culture and the practices that develop within them but also point to the commonalities regardless of these same categories (Graebner, p. 26). As *The New State* is a byproduct of one of the most segregated cities in the United States, its reflection of youth culture and its needs may be a response to the statistical circumstances it inherits.

Youth Culture & Space

As much as Youth Culture is defined by social positioning it is also defined by spaces. Research on youth culture never fails to state where these acts of rebellion, self-expression, creativity, coming of age, and the like, occur. In his research on musical spaces in post-industrial Philadelphia, David Grazian suggests that “[!]ocal music scenes are spatial and temporal sites of music performance and consumption where participants create shared cultural meanings through sociable face-to-face interaction” (Grazian, p. 128). Where this only defines space within its physicality, he stresses that in the digital age, the ability to learn skills of music making and “find like-minded musicians through social media channels” online has never been easier (Grazian, p. 130). As he analyzes Philadelphia as a music hub in a technologically advanced time that allows for music-making, sharing and promoting to happen digitally, he notes that this technology has entered society at the same time that urban spaces have become less public, more expensive, and heavily surveillanced (Grazian, p. 130). This observation seems in line with a growing presence of Milwaukee’s music scene that *The New State’s* formation seeks to address. But why is this type of *scene* so crucial?

Pepper G. Glass asserts that there is not much literature about everyday interactions of collective peoples producing the “scenes” we say exist as subcultures (Glass, p. 696). Glass’s critique is quite appealing in the discussion of district youth culture and space, as she points out the flaw in contemporary analysis. She notes that generally “subculture research tends to minimize the importance of settings where participants come together and interact, collectively constructing these social worlds” (Glass, p. 697). Her ethnographic research on a specific location (The Pirate House) of Punk culture, shows how cultivation of community in spaces at the micro level shape and thus become identities of cultural and specific social experiences. Glass shows that conducting informal interviews gave context and history behind the formation of the space where these “punk” activities transpired (Glass, p. 701). This advocates for proximity and agency to be driven by the natural existence of such places as a study of the practices of its cultural members. Glass also notes that when places are enlisted to promote youth-culture formation they are usually done so as a solution to the lack of resources that members of these youth cultures have (Glass, p. 702). This could be due to many reasons, including a lack of access to venues, a lack of agency in their surroundings, a lack of support, or a blockade by mainstream society. To create their own places, these groups “transform intended function [of spaces] to one that fits their purposes” (Glass, p. 702). The researcher further exemplifies how media are used by groups to define these places. For example, in the case of the Pirate House, the members announced the activities that they planned to have in the space through postings on websites, distributing flyers or by directly communicating with people

through face-to-face conversations, by telephone or by email (Glass, p. 705). Glass postulates that youth culture comes into existence through the use of space being activated by specific programming. This is useful in analyzing *The New State's* creative collaborative programming. This programming is meant to invest in youth culture by way of creating a cultural hub that includes an all-ages music venue, sound engineering studios, storefront, and space for classes and workshops focused on youth musical arts (Newstatemke.org).

The case above shows that ethnography can be quite useful when researching youth culture. This idea is further demonstrated in Brian Wilson's research. Wilson provides "methodological reflections from [his] experiences conducting an ethnographic study of online and offline cultural life in a youth subculture" (Wilson, p. 309). Wilson addresses the CCCS, but where he may be most useful in his reflection is not in the 1970s approach of "critical interactionism" but in his notation of the "critical-realist stance" which he interprets as a Marxist-related concept of hegemony and ideology (Wilson, p. 312). Wilson suggests that, regardless of the spatial positioning of these defined subcultures, they are always a challenge to the hegemony of the society in which they exist. This makes them *sub*-situated in the context of society at large (Wilson, p. 312). This moves groups to spaces in which this challenging act may occur. Wilson claims that "the subcultural lives of many Internet-using young people should not be understood as virtual or real because the online and offline experiences of youth are oftentimes continuous and interconnected" (Wilson, p. 316). This suggests that the mediated reality of today's digital society cannot be separated by the physical location

of where these actions occur, but rather those realities supplement each other, reproducing the roles of space in relation to the social world (Wilson, p. 319). Wilson examined Rave culture as a subculture, and through that analysis found that there is a circuit in which information about culture flows. By establishing interactions of research through both digital space and physical sites of Rave activity, Wilson observed how online-offline social action is created, solidifying a community of not just rebellious party culture but activism (Wilson, p. 320). This may suggest that understanding the development of youth citizenship, outside the scope of traditional practices, may be a breeding ground for a new type of social order.

Youth Culture & Interstitial Boundaries

Youth culture has already been broached throughout this review as a concept of study that has been interpreted in several ways. This is because there are several fields to which the concept applies. Carles Feixa and Jordi Nofre (2012) claim that youth culture has been investigated through almost all forms of social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, communications, geography, and history (Feixa & Nofre, p. 1). By defining youth culture as a way "young people's social experiences are expressed collectively through the construction of differentiating lifestyles, mainly in their leisure time, or in interstitial spaces in the institutional life," the authors identify a new target to conceptualize as we analyze youth society (Feixa & Nofre, p. 1). This "interstitial" quality lives in several forms. It dwells between the concept of "youth micro-societies" (existing outside of the institutions of the adult mainstream) and spaces that are much harder to regulate (for example, the digital realm) (Feixa & Nofre, p. 1). Feixa and

Nofre argue that several research traditions look at youth culture as a way to open up new conversations of its contemporary existence. They identify three theoretical approaches to understanding youth culture: The Chicago School, The Gramscian Italian School, and the development of cybercultures. The Chicago School approach discusses how youth gangs appear through interstitial urban areas and thus become models of urban ecology (Feixa & Nofre, p. 3). This gives an alternative lens to youth cultures that have developed through African-American, Hispanic, and even Italian communities as the contrast to the predominant institutions of white youth in these same spaces (Feixa & Nofre, p. 3). The example from the Gramscian Italian School expresses hegemony, where ideologies are taught to the new generations which becomes the reproduction of those hegemonic practices (Feixa & Nofre, P.4). What we see here is youth rebellion as an act to institute innovation and not just to contrast tradition, which Gramsci cites as the possibility and need to form new cultural practices (Feixa & Nofre, P.4). The third theoretical approach, the development of cybercultures, reflects a rejection of hierarchy that exists in the confines of mainstream society (Feixa & Nofre, P.5). They note that these forms of culture activity (raving and hacking) are a "model of a new type of moral" emerging in the digital society, making new positions for "hybridization of contemporary youth cultures" (Feixa & Nofre, P.5). These lenses carry us into the discussion of what possibilities youth culture and its various interpretations may lend to the future of society like carrying certain practices into adult life and applying them to adult citizenship.

To communicate a tangible interpretation of these interstitial boundaries applied to youth culture we will call upon Robert Holland's (2002) question of how we "might begin to re-conceptualize the relationship between contemporary youth cultural activity and transitional pathways" into adulthood (Holland, p. 154). Where he applies this question by looking at the social and spatial inequality in urban nightlife, he also leaves room to interpret these spaces as the "cleavages of population" that separate the young from the adults and the mainstream ways from the subculture ways that exist in society (Holland, p. 154). Where his argument is most useful is in its question of youth agency. As the author notes, there has been a disregard with the cultural side of factors like economics, and how they are experienced and affected by human agency (Holland, p. 159). As youth are expected to transition into society, factors of reality constitute their civic identity and community belonging. Holland identifies nightlife as one way in which young people try to find their placement in the mainstream adult world (Holland, p. 164). The author notes that as youth culture disperses into consumption, it is "being with like-minded people" which can be characterized by the combined consumption of "arts, culture and performance" that blur social lines (Holland, p. 167).

Another example of interstitiality can be found in Joshua Clark Davis' research on African-American youth music consumers and record stores in the southern United States circa 1960s and 1970s. Davis describes a time where cultural consumption and distribution of music served not only as a means of entertainment but also "enriched their communities and stimulated local black economies" (Davis, p. 76). In describing the activities that took place in Black-owned record stores, he suggests these Black

record dealers were giving young Black consumers “safe, structured spaces where they could partake in a black-oriented, commercial public life” (Davis, p. 77). The spaces created by the record stores were characterized by adult supervision, youth interest, consumerism, socialization and a safe space for African-American youth. We must remember that programatically a record store is meant to be a capitalist outlet that sells recorded music. So how does it become a pivotal part of youth culture? Davis draws on Oldenburg’s theory of *Third Place*, claiming that “Black-owned record stores epitomized” the typification of “informal and often commercial gathering places where patrons could shop, interact, and take part in a communal process . . . described as social consumption” (Davis, p. 76). This social consumption not only promoted youth-to-youth activities, but also served as “role model” relationship building between youth and store owners that “seemed hipper than other adults who held leadership roles within their communities” (Davis, p. 80). This common interest in music made these spaces appropriate grounds for socialization (and by default consumption) for both parties. This concept gives *The New State’s* claim for a much needed “all-ages, sober music venue” credence (Newstatemke.org). As Davis’ study looks at a *niche* population during a period of massive social and systemic racial inequality, I gravitate to his reflection of societal issues that these commercial public spaces helped assuage. He concludes that African-American youth during that time “envisioned themselves not as culturally opposed to entrepreneurs, but as members of a common community who could forge close relationships around music and business” (Davis, p. 87). I question if these record stores and other spaces that once served as *Third Spaces*, cultural consumption,

mentorship, self-idealization and self-reflection are what we are now missing in today's digital age. Here it might be suggested that the mission of *The New State* is a precursor to youth entering into mainstream culture, with civic identities already instilled in each individual member, dictating the shape of societal consumption, communication of knowledge, and other forms of cultural creation we have not previously seen.

Self-Governance & Agency in Self-Expression

While *The New State* development project is a building renovation and programmatic cultural hub, its mission also includes empowering youth by means of self-governance and self-expression (Newstatemke.org). In order to understand this mission, we must first understand what these terms reflect. Philosopher Michel Foucault's work on *Governmentality* gives historical context on "[h]ow to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor," including identifying different types of governance (Foucault, p. 87). He points to the "typology" of the art of government which includes self-governance. He states, "[T]he art of self-government, [is] connected with morality" (Foucault, p. 91). Here he does not describe what qualifies as morality, or how one develops a moral compass, but he does assert that other forms of governing may exist simultaneously. Nevertheless, his ideas about the interest and aspirations of individuals who make up a population are useful for this project. Foucault claims that these interests and aspirations set "the new target and the fundamental instrument of the government of population [which is thus] the birth of a new art, or at

any rate of a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques” (Foucault, p. 100). Where adult governance over youth is the common practice in today's society, self-governance is indeed a *new tactic and technique* being presented by *The New State*. What this presents is a cultural differentiation and power struggle with dominant society, hence pushing forward the subculture narrative.

However, Foucault's ideas do not stop at governance. In another writing he expands upon power dynamics and insists there are different rationalities that create the expectations of different societies and cultures (Foucault, p. 780). It is where individuals (and groups) resist these powers that Foucault states we must focus our attention and discover why there is a need for dissent (Foucault, p. 780). Or in the case of *The New State*, why there is a need for an alternative form of governance. To understand the need for self-governance, we must look at power and the struggle against that power. One struggle we should take note of is the plight of the *state*. If we look at human civilization the idea of the *state* as a newer political ideal which Foucault claims is usually “envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interest of the totality or . . . of a class group among the citizens” (Foucault, p. 782). If this is true, then the power that controls society and the subcultures that exist in society may not represent the wants of those members, hence the resistance. Foucault is very clear that “power is not a function of consent” and that “the relationship of power can be the result of prior or permanent consent, but it is not by nature a manifestation of consensus” (Foucault, p. 788). So how do youth exercise power to self-govern? By this theory a manifestation of consensus by youth participants

and adult advocates may urge this form of resistance to be put in place. As studies on power relations within society is urged by Foucault, I see my research here as significant and properly aligned with his assertion that “[p]ower relations are rooted in the system of social networks”, which *The New State* also claims to be (Foucault, p. 793).

Sociologist Sam Binkley, building on Foucault, sees governmentality as looking at the everyday lifestyle choices of individuals as pieces of “larger projects of self-development, implemented by therapeutic discourses of risk management, self-realization, and enhanced personal well-being” (Binkley, p. 111). Where Binkley’s logic becomes powerful for this project is in his understanding of *lifestyle* as a means of self-expression, individuality, and stylistic self-consciousness (Binkley, p. 112). As *The New State’s* mission also pledges to support self-expression, it suggests that this is something that is not a given in the power structure of dominant society. Binkley clarifies that “lifestyle bring[s] together two important aspects of social behavior: the subjective dimensions of human agency, and the objective structures that compel people to behave in the way they do” (Binkley, p. 112). Though *The New State* as an organization is being developed in a democratic society, the agency members enjoy is linked to one’s social hierarchy. Where this hierarchy is easily seen in racial and economic division in Milwaukee, the commitments of *The New State* also suggest hierarchy within age and professional or social identities like creatives versus those who are more conventional. Binkley suggests that it is important “to find the ‘fit’ between structure and agency in one’s style of life” since lifestyles “describe both the subjective

outlooks and the creativity of individuals, while accounting for the structural constraints that come to bear on these outlooks" (Binkley, p. 114). From this we may assume that the need for a creative social hub like *The New State* comes with a rise of creatives in society, that may have been produced by a need to mitigate the constraints of dominant culture.

Similarly, Tania Murray Li, defines governmentality as "conduct of conduct, government is the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means" (Li, p. 275). This definition suggests that any attempt to structure human behavior or habit is a form of governance. What is interesting about Li's analysis is her discussion of heterogeneous assemblage, where she asserts the idea that programmatic intervention is built upon several factors including: modes of perception, types of authority, architectural forms, human capacities, and non-human objects (Li, p. 276). Her ideas respond to the multi-faceted developmental project that organizations like *The New State* take on in response to the pros and cons in the society in which they exist. Li also suggests that since governmental power is not homogenous it should be analyzed ethnographically, leaving opportunity for social order to be addressed culturally (Li, p. 276). She identifies three subjects that one should note when conducting this form of study: programs, practices and effects. As these subjects identify the reason for the governmental intervention, what it produces and what it does not solve, Li writes, "The relevant ensemble of population must be bounded, linked to a defined problem, and that problem linked again to an account of the mechanisms through which the problem can be addressed, the design for measures for evaluation and so on" (Li, p. 279). Just like Binkley, Li relies on Foucault to stress the importance of programming as a method of governance

and dissent from other practices (Li, p.279). This assures me that compounding several lenses that are relevant to *The New State* practices, including the use of governmental analysis, are best captured through intensive ethnographic research, which is used in this study.

Research Questions

The New State presents a unique opportunity to study many of the ideas examined in this literature review. Youth and adults who use *The New State* create media space, a kind of third space, that combines both real and virtual space. But more importantly, *The New State* attempts to promote and encourage youth culture through the use of different types of space by operating on the boundaries between those spaces. *The New State* operates in both real space (the physical building and its spaces), and virtual space (where youths and adults share stories and activities). But *The New State* also tries to walk the line between being run by adults and run by the youth who use the facilities and resources. Its goal is to empower youth both through its self-governance system and its focus on freedom of expression in both physical and virtual space.

This thesis, then, attempts to answer the following research questions:

1) How do the youth who are part of *The New State* use media to create virtual spaces for self-expression and construction of a subculture?

2) How do the youth who are part of *The New State* use media to create spaces to increase self-governance?

3) What role do the adults who are part of *The New State* play in the realization of space for self-expression and a system of self-governance?

4) How do the practices of *The New State* define the needs of Third Place in both virtual and physical space?

Research Method

To develop an understanding of *The New State*, I conducted participatory ethnographic research, temporarily immersing myself in the organization's developmental planning meetings, sub-committees, media production activities and networking through observation. Through this process, I conducted eight semi-formal, in-person and virtual interviews with both youth representatives and adult advocates of *The New State*. By focusing on both uses of physical space and digital space (via the organization's social media platforms, *The New State's* website, online group schedulers and other digital services such as podcast streaming applications used) I gathered information to better understand how participants in *The New State* engage with real and virtual space for self-governance, self-expression, and the creation of agency. By looking at previous research on media spaces, Third Place & Third Space, spaces of youth culture, interstitial boundaries and governmentality as they apply to youth culture, I have collected several interpretations of conducting ethnography as a method of youth studies research, and have cited several fields of study that have noted the implications of youth culture, and have extensively noted several frames in which the activities of contemporary youth culture and agency may apply.

All research participation in this study was voluntary. With initial approval from West Side Arts Unlimited (WSAU) Board of Directors, who serve as the adult-advocate representatives for the organization, I observed board meetings, youth leadership committees and subcommittee meetings from January 2020 to mid-April 2020. All interviews were recruited through these boards, reassuring the general participation of the interviewees as active members of *The New State*. However, I must note that during the research period the 2020 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic occurred which not only changed society drastically but also impacted this study and *The New State's* organizational practice. Activities such as social distancing, quarantining and non-essential business shutdowns prompted an increase in the use of digital spaces and limited gatherings in physical spaces. Though a large portion of this study's observational data was collected before the pandemic occurred, it did shift the narrative of future organizational event planning and mixed methods of collecting interviews which include both face-to-face, virtual, and phone conversations. Though my research has succumbed to a series of unfortunate and unprecedented events, I do believe that my observations and interviews echo the perspective of real-world issues of socialization, physical localization and virtuality in real time.

After several months of examination of *The New State* organization through observation and interviews, I transcribed the data and then analyzed it noting the patterns, programmatic elements, practices, and effects that explain how the organization functions. With this information I have collected findings, drawing connections to theories of physical space, virtual space, agency and youth culture

examined in my literature review. Though each participant was treated as an individual during the field research, I do not use the names of individuals in order to protect their privacy. Where appropriate and necessary, I note the difference between youth participants and adult-advocate participants. Since *The New State* advocates for a respect for youth agency, I feel it is my duty to be extremely mindful in noting unique organizational cultural practices in my analysis.

Throughout this study there are terms that are defined by the practices and understandings of *The New State* and its organizational culture. In this thesis *youth* refers to people under the age of twenty one. However, at times youth who are active in *The New State* are adults, entitled by the state of Wisconsin to vote, drive, purchase automobiles, etc. In this thesis, however, youth will be italicized to emphasize those circumstances when youth are eligible for some activities but not eligible for others, such as drinking, entering venues that serve alcoholic beverages, or performing at these venues.

As a scholar and researcher I believe that transparency is crucial to creating and maintaining credible data that expands upon the progress of society. With that being said, I try to note my biases and social positioning that may have influenced my research. As an active member of the creative community in Milwaukee and owner/editor-in-chief of a local publication, my presence in the room for some participants was hard to ignore. I was often asked my perspective on things and some participants were also reluctant to divulge certain content in fear that the untimely release of pertinent information may affect funding opportunities. In respect to this I

have attempted to omit comments that were directed at my input and any budgetary references where participants requested that the information be off the record. Though I will not shy away any negative commentary that was presented during observation or interviews, I do believe that organizations like *The New State* are vital to providing opportunities for Milwaukee youth and creatives. This thesis, then, is guided not by questions about whether these types of organizations ought to exist, but rather by questions that try to understand how they function and what, if anything, might increase their reach.

Chapter III

Findings

Defining *The New State*

“If nobody can give us a real good plan then we have just got to get rid of it.”

(AA1, 2020)

The story of *The New State* can be viewed through several lenses. Where it is publicly known as “a historical redevelopment project that will transform the old State Theater into a community music hub for all ages” (Newstatemke.org), the members who make up the organization (both adult advocates and *youth* participants) have varying origin stories of *The New State*, what it actually is and what it plans on being in the years to come. Entering into this research my understanding of *The New State* had been defined by the rhetoric found on the organization’s official website (Newstatemke.org). This definition, as mentioned above, includes plans to create a “415-capacity all-ages, sober music venue” and programmatic functions that will meet its mission of “empowering our *youth* through self-governance and self-expression” (Newstatemke.org). As the website explicitly states, it will “become a hotbed for *youth* arts and will house a combination of non- and for-profit businesses, sharing and collaborating in the space”(Newstatemke.org). However, it does not capture how these efforts will be achieved and how those who have committed to this “*New State*” define it, qualify its importance in Milwaukee’s community, or see it manifesting.

During the time of observation for this study, it was made clear that the programmatic functions of *The New State* had not yet started and its building

redevelopment, though in process, had several steps to overcome before it could reach completion. Because of this, *The New State* I was immersing myself into had a very different aura than described on the website, and thus defining it became an important part of my research.

One adult advocate offered a compelling definition during a *youth* subcommittee meeting:

The way I look at it is very simple. Current state of Milwaukee; racism, segregation, poverty. New State; harmony, employment opportunities for all, professional development, that's *The New State*. Literally this is gold right here (AA2, 2020).

This “gold” definition spoke to the mission and the narrative that I read in the many press releases and news articles I found online about the organization. Yet during the interviews some members recounted a nostalgic connection between FREESPACE and *The New State*, describing it as a physical manifestation of the community in which FREESPACE had been cultivated. Another adult advocate discussed how her involvement had a direct link to FREESPACE and how becoming a part of the quest to save the old State Theater had naturally fit into the plans for FREESPACE’s growth:

Well for FREESPACE there had been a long-term goal for us. Kind of like this pipe dream of opening up our own space and I had already started working on a business plan in the summer of 2017. So I had actually already written a partial business plan for a small venue and I had already been looking at buildings that the city of Milwaukee was selling because I had already felt this sense of

urgency. I just felt like FREESPACE had gotten to a point, and the city had gotten to a point where really I just thought there was not enough programming and all these spaces were closing. They are cracking down on house shows and somebody needs to make that move. Somebody needs to take that jump and obviously things have changed over the last three years, which is amazing. Now we have the all ages ordinance in Milwaukee, but at that point in time it felt really urgent and I was really frustrated. So *The New State* reaching out was just like perfect timing. I think there was a different group from the neighborhood, that wanted to open the State Theater as a theater. Because in 2017 I think the city's Business Improvement District the Near West Side Partners had mentioned that this is kinda the last chance or we're going to tear it down. Like if nobody can give us a real good plan then we have just got to get rid of it (AA1, 2020). Bringing in the non-profit components of FREESPACE, along with the for-profit sound engineering studio, seemed to be a good enough plan to save the theater for some.

While FREESPACE had a need for expansion, it had already been doing the work of supporting *youth* self-expression. One *youth* participant described his time at FREESPACE as being life changing which is why he was in full support of *The New State* becoming real:

I met [name withheld] at a Playboi Carti concert 'cause [my friend] was opening up. . . . Everybody at school just hyped FREESPACE up a lot. When I met [name withheld], at the time I was just doing music as a hobby. Um, [name

withheld] kept telling me to come out to FREESPACE, which is at the jazz gallery. I didn't go for like a year. I kept in contact on social media, then I came out and it was like really relieving. I don't know. Yeah, it's, I was going through a lot. What they talked about, it's just like positive energy. It's like a big family. You know? The

next time I went, I didn't bring my phone, I just went. It's kinda just like the cleanse. That's how I kind of take it. I even got like the thing tatted on me. (He pointed to his tattoo). They all have like a F and a S tatted for FREESPACE. I got it

after one of the shows. It really changed me. I mean like I said, it went from a hobby to actually going there and interacting with more artists. Just having like a creative hub, then two years down the road *New State* happened or it's you know, it's in the work. So it's like finally putting it to life (YP1, 2019).

His commitment to *The New State* transferred over from the feeling of community he had experienced with the FREESPACE, forever etched in his flesh with ink. As a *New State* hopeful, his experience exerts an expectation that *The New State* will be defined by those who share the same communal values.

However, other participants described *The New State* as a building-development project that included *youth* creative culture as simply a programming feature. The second Tuesday of each month the WSAU/New State Board holds meetings. Each meeting has a written agenda where the building development and its status is always included. In one meeting a board member described *The New State* as people in the

community wanting to save a building that had such an amazing musical history and the “music people” figured out what to do with it to save the building (OS1, 2020). A part of this salvation and another bullet point on the agenda was another piece of the project called Yellow Rose. *The New State* development includes a hefty amount of land. That land includes not only the theater that is to be converted into an all-ages venue, but a pocket park/outdoor venue space to the side of the building and a storefront space next to an existing bar that they plan to turn into a cafe. This Yellow Rose Cafe has become the priority of the development, assuming that its opening will begin to activate the space and allow for the creation of income. While the details of this part of the project have not been made public, there has been talk of possibly starting *youth* programming in this space until the theater is completed.

Where *The New State* is a manifestation of FREESPACE and a building development, it also seems to be envisioned as a way of coordinating events to build community and fundraise. On many occasions I was invited to subcommittee meetings. One of those subcommittees was *The New State* Gala and Event Planning Committee. During these meetings adult advocates were invited to discuss future events that were to take place in spring and summer of 2020. As subcommittee members discussed logistics, members grappled with coordinating dates with resources and the status of *The New State's* physical building, noting the importance of inviting large corporations and community partners that are known to be generous donors. For their Throwback event they debated whether acts from the 1980s that played at the Palms and old State Theater would bring in large crowds and whether spectators would pay a reasonable

amount for tickets. They also discussed whether any *youth* acts could be invited to complement those acts. During this debate one board member suggested that *The New State* could also become a place to book young artists. This included the possibility of creating a database, a thought I had not yet read about or seen on their website.

As most adult advocates interviewed described *The New State* along the lines of “a music hub primarily for *youth* of Milwaukee where they will get guidance, learn, perform, and study the musical arts areas” (AA3, 2020), there still lacked a consensus about *The New State’s* current status. However, one advocate noted the existence of *The New State* lives in a more transient state, with a possibility of constant flux to fit the needs of the community and generations to come:

I see it as the vision it's moving to become. Which is everything that we continue to say, week end and week out and present to people. It's hard to tell, because even though we see it a certain way now. It's not going to be exactly like that when it's done. Partially because it's just not one person's vision. To me I think it's going to be what we are telling people it's going to be. Which is this *youth* music hub that's going to be self-sustainable and able to help the community in a lot of ways. I know everyone now is saying it's a sober venue but as it evolves some things will naturally occur and decisions will be based on the situation, the need, the business model, the plan. I think the mission is key. I think we did it right when we kind of started it with the marketing and really thinking about the organization and the non-profit aspect. Which isn't even *The New State*. It's West Side Arts Unlimited (WSAU). I think that core was really important to the

kind of plant that seeds first. It's cool that we did. It's kind of the northern star. It helps us navigate. When things come up that we don't agree on, or questions that we have, we look back on that and say does this match or is this what we want to be doing. It just becomes easier to make decisions (AA4, 2020).

Though not all members agreed on what *The New State* is or will become, one thing that sounded clear throughout the study was the reason why *The New State* is needed.

The lack of spaces in Milwaukee for creatives seemed to be key. When asked why *The New State* is needed in Milwaukee, one participant said, "Opportunity. There is a lack of similar programs in our city. There is a strong desire to improve our music community. There is so much raw talent here" (AA3, 2020). Another vocalized a similar sentiment by stating, "Kids ages five through twenty-one severely lack spaces in Milwaukee where they can go to and create, freely make mistakes, learn, perform and socialize" (AA3, 2020). In the age of social media, the need for a space still seemed to be a priority for this group. A space for creatives. A space for *youth*. A space that does not yet exist. A place that could be defined as *The New State*.

1. How do the youth who are part of *The New State* use media to create virtual spaces for self-expression and construction of a subculture?

Creative people are byproducts of self-expression. There are various methods of making, communicating, imagining, envisioning, projecting and practicing self-expression. In *The New State*, these habits by *youth* are often discussed as they are

integral to the promotion and awareness of the organization. As *The New State* was planning “classes and workshops focusing on *youth*, modern music (hip hop/rap, electronic), performance skills and professional development as musicians” these habits became consequential to their success (www.newstatemke.org). In fact, during my research period self-expression was the only thing I actually witnessed *youth* participants doing. Through virtual media platforms the *youth* participants showed exactly how they interact with Milwaukee’s creative community and create content to help shape the narrative.

The current youth members of the organization belong to the *Youth* Engagement Committee. At this point it should be noted that by *The New State* standards *youth* are considered anyone that is twenty-one years of age and under. This logic stems from the age of legal entrance into performing venues in Milwaukee. Most performance and entertainment venues in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, hold a Class “B” liquor license which means that they sell and can allow the consumption of alcoholic beverages on their premises to people twenty-one or over (State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue, 2016). Under this same restriction, anyone under the age of twenty-one is usually not allowed to enter these venues. However, there are a few provisions. Publication 302 WI Alcohol Beverage and Tobacco Laws for Retailers does state that if “[t]he underage person is at least 18 years old, and is working under a contract with a licensee, permittee, or corporate agent to provide entertainment for customers on the premises” they may enter, but this is at discretion of the venue owner/operator (State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue, 2016). The *youth* who serve on the *Youth*

Engagement Committee are young adults, who can legally vote, serve in the armed forces, and get married, but can't perform or see a show at most local venues. They see themselves as an important piece of the puzzle; the unheard voice between children and adults with full agency, similar to interstitial boundary Holland (2002) noted in his study. Their role at *The New State* is to be the voice of the *youth*, representing their needs, their ideas, and to recruit more young people to be a part of the organization.

During one *youth* engagement meeting the group met in a small office in an old church in downtown Milwaukee. *The New State* rented the space for their use since the development had still not been completed. With the help of one adult advocate from the board, they set up the room with a large colorful backdrop with *The New State's* logo in the middle, prepared a tripod with camera and set out microphones and sound mixer to record their first podcast. This podcast was called *The Kee*, a part of the *youth* initiative *The State Sessions* where the *Youth* Leadership Committee shares their stories, talks about resources, and recruits local creative *youth*. On their first Instagram post, they promote "The State Sessions: freeform programming and events for all creatives and young skill seekers in Milwaukee" (@thestatesessions). After setting up they engaged in casual conversations about music, life, and future events they planned to attend. The adult advocate also invited them to order pizza, suggesting they all eat before they recorded since it was around dinner time. These interactions seemed to naturally stream into more official *New State* business, where the *youth* participants began to draft a list of local artists and bands that they could reach out to in the future.

They also brainstormed ideas about potential sponsored trips to different music festivals. As conversation continued, I noticed a constant interjection of things involving social media, streaming platforms, and websites.

“What should the Twitter handle be?”, the adult advocate asked from across the room. The *youth* participants responded with several options, weighing the pros and cons of using them. “Do we even need a Twitter?” one participant asked, breaking down *The State Sessions* goals, and noting observations of the current Twitter trends. During this discussion they named several social media platforms, how those platforms could be used for their benefits and how their use could also confuse or distract the demographic they hoped to reach. This showed an almost savant-like exchange between the *youth* participants as they factored in all types of scenarios that involve the cultural habits, creative *youth* culture, and social media culture of Milwaukee’s *youth*. Beyond this, they were very methodical about the kind of content they would be sharing with the community. If we go back to the beginning of this anecdote, the group was setting up for a podcast. I noted that this setup included both a mixer for sound recording and a backdrop and camera for visuals. They discussed how recording the podcast on the camera creates visual content that they could place on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, which are commonly used by today’s *youth*, whereas the podcast recording can be placed on several streaming services which meets an older audience and also a demographic more focused on audio and music.

I also noticed this same practice in WSAU/*New State* Board meetings when they discussed a promotional video that they planned to use as a visual for fundraising and

recruitment. As these visuals all include *youth* participants interacting and performing, they constructed a curated interpretation of *The New State's* mission to establish self-expression by having *youth* creatives serve as the faces and talent of *The New State*. The *youth* who are part of *The New State* use the media to create virtual spaces for self-expression and the construction of a subculture by inviting others to do what they are doing. They show these practices through their creation of media content and then disseminating that content through several platforms so that it reaches the audiences that they want to serve. "I personally use social media to push music, to find inspiration, and to stay updated. That's what most young people are doing, so that's where we find them." (YP2, 2020).

2. How do the youth who are part of *The New State* use media to create spaces to increase self-governance?

Programmatically the *youth* are a vital part of *The New State's* narrative. The idea of being a "hot bed for *youth* arts" that will empower *youth* through self-governance is what makes this organization both exciting and quite controversial. The idea of *youth* having agency over what they do and how they do it is not a conventional practice in today's society. The structures that are set in place for today's *youth* often come from hierarchical, systemic pressure and adult rule of traditional practices passed down with origins that are not always questioned. This means that though the *youth* might have to follow these rules and might be impacted by these structures they have no agency in making those regulations.

My intention at the beginning of this research was to capture *youth* perspectives of self-governance, while unraveling the adult advocate's reasoning for helping push the mission. However, that *youth* voice was limited. Those *youth* who I did see had very similar ideas behind what self-governance means to them and how they use it. As one *youth* advocate stated, self-governance is "[h]aving the freedom to speak, move and be a part of the things we want to represent" (YP2, 2020). Where most of the *youths* have creativity in common (most *youth* interviewed identified as musical artists), they also shared the idea of guidance and structure reflecting their own core values and as being useful to their personal growth. For example, one *youth* participant stated:

I envision artists of all ages just coming in and soaking [up] game. You know, just learning. But it's not going to be like schools. That's how I kind of envision it. It's kind of like a bunch of friends . . . Like it's a family. So, it's like going to hang out at your uncle's house where all the cousins get different instruments and they're all going to show you how to play one. You know what I mean?
(YP1, 2019)

This *youth* interpretation of self-governance asks for a family structure where learning and sharing knowledge is welcome.

This concept is quite divergent from the critiques that many members of *The New State* have heard since the organization's plans went public. During several board meetings the adult advocates discussed how community members have been vocalizing the concerns about young people gathering in spaces that allow them to have agency. Some of those concerns included questions about how *youth* participants should be

regulated, or who will be in charge. Others had concerns about drug use and violence. These concerns only further reflect the negative stigma and lack of normalcy *youth* self-governance reflects in an adult-dominated culture. But what is often ignored is that *youth* are actually claiming to be looking for structure, guidance and a place where they can become their best selves. This idea is something that was founded in *The New State's* predecessor, FREESPACE, where a part of their working mission was

to empower the attendees with knowledge about themselves, their community, and the space they occupy in the world, which will be accomplished by providing everyone present with the opportunity to use the art showcased as the foundation of a dialogue to explore complicated and abstract ideas therein and any other pressing questions, comments, or concerns about the human condition (freespacemke.wordpress.com).

By engaging with these principles, some *youth* have noticed a change in themselves and are eager to reshape these practices and pass them on. One *youth* participant stated:

It's just like an energy you catch when you go there. I know, for me it was like I went there and I learned. It went from, like I said a hobby to like going there and people are putting their passion and their life into it. It kind of helped me find myself in some ways, you know? Just having people to talk to, discuss things like every artist goes through, but you don't have someone to talk to (YP1, 2019).

Though social media is quite prevalent in today's society and it gives *youth* the ability to socialize, statements like these make having a space to socialize seem more pressing. But the larger question is whether the use of media to create new spaces works to increase self-governance among *New State youth*?

In a community that is dominated by media usage, socializing on demand through virtual means and access to content that in the past would be deemed only for adults, these *youth* seem to be self-governing online. All the *youth* participants of *The New State* I interviewed claimed to have an online presence, through some sort of social media platform, where they are a part of a digital community. They used these platforms for sharing their craft, learning skills, collaborating, socializing and looking for guidance. One *youth* participant identified his social media presence as part of his identity as a creative and noted that using social media gives him the liberty to promote/brand himself as an artist:

[I]n my first FREESPACE show, [name withheld] introduced me as the "Meme Lord." My Instagram actually got taken down. But I used to post stupid stuff, you know, like 6ix9ine. I used to do all that. So yeah, I use Instagram as like my main platform and kind of cultivate I guess off of it. I also look at it, too, like [FREESPACE] gave me a shot. When they started giving me shows and stuff, I was like they must really believe in me. So, I want to do that same thing. I want us to have kids that we actually see are coming to the events. And help them do a show [too] (YP2, 2019).

The way in which the *youth* participants help *youth* attend the events they have put on in the past with FREESPACE or in the future with *The New State* is through social platforms, which is the job of the *Youth* Engagement Committee and its State Sessions.

The *Youth* Engagement Committee is the physical body of *youth* self-governance in the organization. They use their young faces to connect to their peers and tap into their online communities by way of Instagram posts, podcasts and YouTube videos. They also take on bigger tasks, such as aiding board members with artist bookings for future showcases and discussing target audiences for recruitment (*e.g.*, local neighborhood community centers or schools in the Near West Side area). But outside this small committee, during my research study there were no other *youth* to be found. As these larger tasks fell into the hands of the *youth* participants on the committee, tasks did not engage volunteers. During *The New State* Board meeting and sub-committee meetings these tasks were assigned to the *Youth* Engagement Committee, without a *youth* member being present. At this point I noticed, there are no *youth* members on *The New State* Board. If there are no *youth* members on the board which governs the leadership, programmatic, developmental, and fiscal responsibilities of the organization, then is the organization truly empowering the self-governance of *youth*?

Through observation and interviews it was revealed that at this stage *youth* participation is not the primary concern. The Board was more concerned about funding and securing the safety of the development. As the Board members pointed out in several meetings, the timeline on the physical development of *The New State* has taken longer than expected. Without having a physical space to house *youth* programming,

tapping into *youth* participation has been limited. I further noticed that those *youth* members who were active during my research period had mentioned being a part of FREESPACE and therefore had already been exposed to self-government practices and using their media presence to cultivate community. As certain board members vocalized the lack of *youth* input in board meetings as an issue, it sparked a small discussion on engaging with more *youth* before the space is ready. But some board members mentioned this advancement as being “good for fundraising”. This is where the adult advocates have some explaining to do.

3. What role do the adults who are part of *The New State* play in the realization of space for self-expression and a system of self-governance?

In order for an adult advocate to actively and voluntarily support an organization like *The New State*, they have to have a reason. There has to be something that draws them in enough to make them volunteer their time and resources for the cause. These advocates, at this point, hold unpaid positions. Most of them have found their seat -- a seat that grants them a voice in the blossoming organization -- through community networking. Having that seat makes them a representative of a different type of governance, but also one that will hopefully impact Milwaukee creatives. Most adult advocates told me stories about how they joined *The New State* and how their role fits into the prospective *New State* culture.

For example, one adult advocate shared how his connection began several years earlier:

My connection to *The New State* is kind of in connection with [name withheld] early on. It was just a concept for something that he wanted as far as saving a building, with the community advocate [name withheld] who was president of the non-profit. Our connection [came] twelve years ago with me looking for an office space for [title withheld] at that time. So, it was kind of a reunion ten years later, so two years ago, with the introduction of what was the old State Theater and the Palms. It was a concept that brought other people on like [name withheld] and [name withheld]. And also, early on, [name withheld] stepped in immediately because he was running and operating a studio that was really popular. The concept was really easy to come up with, with the people around us. So [name withheld] really liked it. The City really liked it and the building was saved. . . . Now I am doing a lot of operational stuff just because I feel like I don't know who else is going to. I want to make sure it is moving forward. Even though it is inching there is still progress (AA4, 2020).

Some adult advocates claimed to work in the music industry, have a business or organization in the community or have the ability to provide some type of professional resource that would help in either the development, fundraising or programmatic elements of *The New State*.

Joining the ranks of *The New State* also means being a part of its mission. When asked what self-governance and self-expression means, some adult advocates had simple responses. One said, "It means planning and executing ideas freely without censorship or rules from anyone else but yourself" (AA5, 2020). Another said, "Self-

governance means participants will help design the programming. Self-expression means that *The New State* will be providing a platform where people of all ages can reflect their feelings" (AA3, 2020). Others had more detailed responses which painted very vivid ideas about what roles they imagine *youth* playing in the organization:

For me, especially in a music community and we did this at FREESPACE, that's always meant that those who are active members of our community should have the power and authority to decide what happens within that community and the things that community does. And so, for me it is imperative that *The New State* sets itself up for self-governance by the *youth* and the rest of the arts and music community that occupy that space. For me in particular [I think] the opportunity for our *youth* to actually exercise their power and to actually act on what they believe is right and good for their own community is super crucial. I think we don't give the *youth* enough space to exercise their voices. *The New State* was really hoping to be a space where our *youth* can be the professionals they want to be and be in a space where they can be the independent authorities that they so desperately want to be. You know we might not be able to let a kid fly a plane, but you can absolutely let a seventeen-year old run a show. I think all that real-life experience of being able to independently run their own activities is really powerful and it's something that we should be working towards in all aspects of life (AA1, 2020).

Not a plane but a show. This challenges what critics think *youth* are actually capable of doing. With many of *youth* already claiming to have learned many production and professional skills online, this does not seem far-fetched.

Where these comments express a need for strong *youth* voices and decision making now, other comments from adult advocate express an organizational structure that often follows systemic rules before *youth* can have a major say in what occurs:

I feel like when the community does finally get it as far as the project being handed over to the community and the Board of Directors kind of operating everything, that Board of Directors is going to be very in tune with or even driven by young people and the things that they ask for or talk about. So, for self-governance I think we are going to have a hand on the pulse of community and *youth*. From that what happens moving forward will be decided. So even though there is going to be some structure because there has to be and a system of operating. Even though it's a nonprofit it still has to be looked at as a business. But I think it can be designed that it is self-governing in the fact that it won't go where the people and the *youth* that are using that space don't want it to go. . . . I think that is what we are always going to promote self-expression because that leads to discovery and that just sounds like exploration. The freedom to express, that is really important, too. I mean a lot of times young people get, not told, but they feel like they are not always heard. And for adults it's hard with that generational gap (AA4, 2020).

The non-profit running like a business seems to be where adult advocates positioning in *The New State* seems to get a bit foggy. Where some adult advocates during board meetings seem to be highly concerned with the bottom line, others were more concerned about community impact. And, yet again, no *youth* had a voice since they did not attend those meetings.

Another crucial component of *The New State* is its continuing development. When it comes to developing all-ages venues and creative learning spaces in Milwaukee, opinions were split. However, the adults on *The New State* board vocalized why they stand. “[W]e are limiting the potential for *youth* in Milwaukee to have real opportunities to get noticed with their art, [a] reason why the younger population tends to leave Milwaukee when it's time for college or post college” (AA5, 2020). This idea is something that many adult advocates and *youth* participants mentioned as Milwaukee is a city with an untapped market of creatives but limited access to resources. Another advocate urged that, “We have to create safe and positive spaces for our *youth*. Sports and other hobbies seem to be better provided for than the arts” (AA3, 2020). This claim should express great concern, considering:

[a]rts and culture organizations contribute significantly to our quality of life and economic development in Milwaukee County. The arts create jobs and generate revenue for local government . . . The economic impact of Milwaukee's arts organizations is identified as more than \$122 million. Through performances, outreach and educational activities, artists and arts organizations serve all

segments of the population” (Cultural Artistic & Musical Programming Advisory Council).

But none of this matters unless the work is done to make the mission happen. During this study I noticed something I will call *casual hierarchy*. That is, a sense of control that just seemed to occur *naturally*, without questioning. Where some board members dominated the conversation and direction of the meetings, others never said a word. With no *youth* in the room, this structure fell upon adult advocates who were all volunteers, something that seems to be a big concern. At the start of *The New State*, there were paid positions. One member was so committed to *The New State’s* growth that the member’s full-time profession was to be the point of contact for *New State* business and grant writing. However, as the developmental project progressed, funding became more difficult to secure, forcing the group to rely more on a full-volunteer board. Because of this, all meetings are run by volunteers. When I asked adult advocates their thoughts on how meetings are conducted, it was like I hit a nerve -- a nerve that I believe explains a lot. Most adult advocates were wary to discuss the issue, asking me to keep their quotes off the record. Others simply glazed over the question. However, the comments I present here, given by others, support the idea that this is a major spot for organizational improvement.

One adult advocate said, “They've become more refined as time goes on and now we have a more concise and fluid process to get through everything in a timely manner” (AA5, 2020). Others expressed more concerns. One advocate said:

It's a volunteer group. There are major concerns that there is not a significant paid staff running the program at this point. You kind of get what you pay for. Paying positions take priority, so the pace in which *The New State* progresses relies on that (AA3, 2020).

If adult participants are forced to prioritize their paid positions then that logically leaves the organization on the back burner, something that other board members can't allow to happen. Some adult advocates noted that there is a difficulty in being productive because of the way in which meetings are structured. Referencing how repetitive each meeting seems to be and how the bylaws mandating they perform them in a very formal way seems quite casual. Another adult advocate noted how the global pandemic might have a major effect on meetings and productivity as well.

This is a little bit tough because A) I am thinking about the current state of what's going on in the world today and how those meetings are going to be affected. Where we are probably going to be forced to be more online. Will everybody jump that ship, especially people who are used to doing more physical meetings? Will it make it more challenging not connecting on a personal level? How they are ran now is a little bit challenging too because I think a lot of them are organized, led or prepared and presented to everybody by me. It would be nice if other people could take some of that. Because I think you need input from everybody. Some of the people who hold certain positions should have certain obligations. Like different subcommittees the chairs of these committees should be running those meetings, organizing those meetings, and scheduling those

meetings. Right now there is really no one taking charge or has stepped up to that. People have a hard time with lives, jobs and things that matter in your life that you just sometimes can't commit. So, there is not as much input as from everybody on the workload (AA4, 2020).

This *casual hierarchy*, that allows for some members to have more input into what is going on in the organization and take on leadership responsibilities, thus seems needed to have any type of productivity. It also helps move forward to *The New States* real cause.

The repetitiveness of meetings was observed at several meetings. The need to vote on past meeting minutes, having a quorum, and motioning to move to the next agenda item, come from a place (*The New State's* bylaws) unfamiliar to some board members. When asked about the bylaws the adult advocates interviewed did not know exactly what they said but knew that they were something put in place to incorporate the organization:

I'm not as familiar with the bylaws as I should be. When we all sat down to put them together it was a lot of framework from resources that are available online. Very basic because we knew we could always change them as this thing grew. There is definitely a need to review and kind of readjust because we're more familiar with our operation. My opinion is I think they are fine and I'm glad we have them. It's like a formal document that I look at less now because I'm focused on *The New State* and what's happening on the ground with the organization rather than what's on paper. I think [between] what's on paper and

what's on the ground, we are following what we need to, but I think it's going to keep evolving. We will probably have to change our bylaws frequently anyway (AA4, 2020).

Changing the bylaws was identified by one adult advocate as a way to increase *youth* involvement:

They were generic bylaws. We did a lot of research because we really wanted to incorporate as quickly as possible last year. This is something we are hoping to address as the organization grows. So, it was like a generic template that we edited to suit our needs. That would be amazing to have *youth* taking part in recreating those bylaws. I'm all about that. Last year I really wanted our *youth* engagement committee up and running because I wanted them to be our second board essentially. So, the goal of the *youth* committee is to be in the second board. I think any nonprofit, especially for fundraising, you have to have a board of quote on quote, adults, and influential people, but I firmly believe that the *youth* should have their own board and collaborate and coordinate with the regular board. I want the *youth* to have an active say so when we revise our bylaws, and we have been talking about that, now that the organization is growing and we have a clear plan on when things might open, we really should start working on those bylaws and our articles of incorporation and we should get the *youth* involved. It's their future, too (AA1, 2020).

But getting the youth involved means having a connection to that population in which they want to contribute and aid in self-governing. So where are all the *youth*?

When asked how much contact adult advocates had with *youth*, most advocates seemed unsatisfied by their own responses. Most noted that the connections with *youth* streamed from FREESPACE, “which is the model that is at the epicenter of *The New State*” (AA5, 2020). However, one advocate noted that his connection to *youth* was one of the most exciting parts of his role:

That's probably become one of my most tended to subcommittees as far as personal interaction, which is cool. They are really excited about being a part of it. They are taking charge of the tasks that are at hand. Then the resources that are available to them, they are really excited about those. And planning together certain challenges and helping organize stuff and then giving it to them and letting them run with it is also fun for me. Helping them step into this role, which I think is going to be a really important role within the next year to two years. And it's cool to watch them develop in their own sense and what they are passionate about and the things they are getting into within their young 20's (AA4, 2020)

The connection to the *youth*, though limited at this moment, seems to hold the organization together. Though *youth* as a resource is currently sparse, it is the collaboration with adult advocates, *youth*, community members and professionals that construct the *New State* idea and something for which to strive. As one advocate said, “The type of community I want to be a part of is an inclusive, diverse and creative one” (AA5, 2020).

In order to have an inclusive diverse and creative community, collaboration is key. *The New State* from its origins to its current make up has been a production of collaboration. Though the adults are currently taking the lead many of the advocates have experiences that are worth sharing with the *youth*, with the community and with anyone who wants to see a change. As one adult advocate said:

You cannot call yourself a creator if you don't collaborate. You can't be creative in a bubble. Even if you are a solo artist and you can play and write, you have to collaborate with your audience. If you're not sharing yourself there is no art . . . It just helps you go further. I was doing my thing as a hip hop artist but then joining [name withheld] records, who would have known from that we wound up on MTV, Rolling Stone, all these other things I could not have done if I had just stayed in my box. Anybody you see on TV that's killing it, they have a whole team. Even if you only see said artist by themselves, there is a whole team behind them (AA2, 2020).

Likewise, it will take a whole team to make sure *The New State* impacts Milwaukee's creative community and culture. And that means having adults speaking up for *youth* in a society that does not always consider their opinions. It's no easy task but this seems to be the start.

4. How do the practices of *The New State* define the needs of Third Place in both virtual and physical space?

"If you're in insurance that's good and all but that's not why you move to a city. People move to cities like New York and LA not because they do that, but because of

the creativity that's going on there. They want to be in a space that has a thriving culture.” (Gala & Event Committee member)

The New State in its ideology is a creative hub that is served and is self-governed by members of all ages. As it is still forming its permanent physical space, its physicality has been transient. Even though its tangibility in the physical realm is uncertain, its presence in virtual places is more secure. In this study *Third Place* is defined as the space outside the home or workplace where community is made and social interaction exists. Through the development and cultivation of community through mediated platforms, both tangible and virtual forms of Third Space are needed in order for the organization to exist.

The *youth* participants and adult advocates all come from different walks of life and communities. These communities from the suburbs and the inner city. They are composed of immigrant parents, people with strong religious upbringings, people who have had spiritual awakenings, people who come from neglectful households, people who come from tight-knit families, and everything in between. Even with their differences they all share a need to be a part of something bigger than themselves where creativity, community, and collaboration come together. *The New State* is an attempt to serve that purpose.

When asked what type of community they wanted to be a part of, adult advocates often mentioned things such as, “An inclusive, diverse and creative one” (AA5, 2020). But comments from *youth* participants were more descriptive:

When I was coming up I was always on the northside. I was trying to figure out life. See what it was. But recently, doing music and really being able to express that and be in those spaces I been a lot on the East side and Downtown. I feel like there are a lot more opportunities on the east/downtown because these are the spaces that allow us to rent out [venues]. These are the places that are saying we can allow a hip-hop event here. On the north side, again there is a lot of superstition because of what we go through every day. I want to be a part of a community where I can express myself (YP2, 2020).

This definition of territory and the things that are available on certain sides of town is heavily influenced by the segregation in the city of Milwaukee. Venues on the East Side and downtown are more likely to allow showcases of any genre because of a more multi-racial and diverse socio-economic community that dwells on these sides of town.

Another *youth* participant suggested that changing that narrative is something *The New State* can help with.

Sometimes people like to live in fear based on what they see in the news, which is legitimate and there are serious issues. But it also causes people to shut off and keep themselves away from people. I think we need to show that, not that there is nothing to be afraid of, but you can get out and experience good things and you can collaborate with people and find new experiences. (YP3, 2020).

Though social media exists and *youth* participants claim to use it for personal and promotional use, such as promoting their music, they still discuss physical space as a positive resource in creative community cultivation and socialization that is scarce.

Even though the development of the State Theater is under way, scarcity of space without the completion of *The New State's* physical hub was quite apparent throughout my research. Board meetings were held at the development office, in a building separate from the old State Theater. One sub-committee meeting was at the office of an architectural firm. The *Youth* Engagement Committee met in the little room in the downtown church. Having a physical space seemed to be at the root of many of the organization's problems. And that was a problem that they revealed to be quite costly.

At each board meeting I attended there was always an agenda item about the progress of the building development, funds needed to finish the project and what was needed to increase programming. The Yellow Rose Cafe was often seen as a viable answer for the problems. As one board member said, "We could probably get that funded and completed first. The board member further explained how the cafe could generate revenue and temporarily house the *youth* programming and small music sets.

Occupancy of the State Theater also came up several times in the Gala and Event Sub-committee meetings. The adult advocates on the committee agreed that using the theater for their throwback event slated for later in the year would be ideal. "Can we get a one-day occupancy permit?" a committee member asked as they collectively mulled over the status of an asbestos-abatement project that made the

theater illegal to inhabit. Finding a usable space to be, or obtaining permission to use space, was the subject of most planning-event meetings. Outdoor or indoor, city permits, noise ordinances and security concerns were noted. These meetings thus were constructed with a lot of planning, but nothing concrete was achieved until locations could be solidified. If *The New State* only existed online, many of these concerns would be eliminated.

So why put in so much effort to have a physical space when media platforms allow for sharing content, communicating with niche communities and teaching creative skills? All members of *The New State* I talked to agreed that there are several differences between digital/screen space and physical space. As one adult advocate said:

So let's say with physical space you go to some temple to see a new person, you're going to get a feeling. You see a picture of that same temple on Instagram of that same temple it will be a wow, but it won't be that same experience. What's happening now with virtual reality and VR glasses, potentially you in the future will be able to be somewhere and be in awe and have the emotional feeling of being there, maybe (AA4, 2020).

The potential for that "feeling" seems to lie in how far technology will be able to get us, but a full-body experience is not quite available yet. Another adult advocate suggested that because of the accessibility technology as provided us, in-person interactions are more treasured.

Social media has made in person interaction more valuable. It's quicker to communicate but it makes you value hearing someone's voice on the phone and face to face interaction more significant. Live music can't be replaced with seeing or hearing it online so it makes it more desirable (AA3, 2020).

Live music and face-to-face interaction with *youth* and creatives in the community is exactly what the organization's programming has promised to provide, feeding that desire for something that is now uncommon.

Even with that being said, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted participants to think about these issues in ways that no one in the organization had to consider before. One adult advocate pondered this new reality that was unfolding:

Well as of right now, I actually feel like during this Coronavirus pandemic this is an interesting test to see. I think we have all grown very comfortable and accustomed to digital spaces. . . . I really feel like [the difference] is going to change this year. Just because I think people will have to get more comfortable communicating using the internet and I actually think that the internet will become less of the hostile information-scape I was talking about before. It might actually become more of a community, but this is just my speculation. People are being forced to stay at home and with all social spaces being closed. . . . In my mind for music and creative arts I always think that it's just something magical about being able to be in person. The physical space is just reality and I think that digital spaces will never live up to that. They will never be able to simulate

real physical exchanges and interactions between people. But now we will see in the next couple of months what type of substitute they really are. (AA1, 2020)

This speculation has merit, considering the high volume of online video platform use during the pandemic. Platforms such as Zoom had a 535% increase in daily traffic in the first month of the crisis (Paul, 2020).

However, moving the community was not always seen as being the answer. In a more pessimistic tone during a sub-committee meeting right before the pandemic struck, one adult advocate made a comment that reflected why physical collaboration and interaction for creatives is something to be valued:

Having a real community is important. Isolation as creative leads to that mental health issue of the creative. If they shut the grid down, they are going to be talking about zombies. Creatives need to have that outlet to be okay (OS2, 2020).

Even in light of a global social change, there is still a reason why people are feening to be together. To share spaces, to talk face-to-face, to go somewhere that is not their own homes. This is why we still must ask why physical space matters so much to the stakeholders of *The New State* and people with common interests. Though my observations were critical to my findings, participants had to be asked directly about the impact of physical and virtual spaces. One *youth* participants said:

We are a *youth* engagement committee. With that being said, we want this *youth* engagement committee to be for the creatives run by the creatives . . . we want to be able to create a safe environment for people like us. We want to have

a space where everyone can get up, meet and talk about what we can do as a collective, as a city, as Milwaukee. To improve our community and make it better for the creatives and all the up and coming *youth* that will come from here. So, with that being said, yes, it is definitely a need for a physical realm or a physical space. Anything physical for the *New State/* State sessions (YP2, 2020).

Another *youth* participant said:

Physical space is definitely needed. We are in a very digital age, almost to the point where like even [I] already got my phone glued to my side at all times. I'm always trying to check in. Now that we have the state sessions Instagram and I have my own Instagram, I'm switching back and forth. But there is a point where you have to set it down and go out into the world. There is a point where you have to step back because it's the balance of playing how the world is leaning toward technology and also staying real and staying honest with the natural surroundings. Like going out to venues, starting venues and being a part of collaborations and things of that nature. You have to make that physical connection I think before you should make that digital connection (YP3, 2020).

An adult advocated said:

Everybody doesn't want to play sports. Where can these young adults go? There is no space. That is why *The New State* exists. There is no safe space for creatives right now. There just isn't. They are probably too old for the boys and girls club. You don't want to go hoop. You're not gonna take lessons from somebody who can't relate to your music. So, it's so needed. In addition to that,

it's humanity. Milwaukee needs this. How long has Milwaukee been the most segregated city? *The New State* breaks those barriers. It's people from all walks of life that we are hoping to engage because our commonality is art of some sort. Having that physical space brings humanity. It brings humility. It brings just iron sharpens iron. This is what we will be able to do with that physical space (AA2, 2020).

Breaking those barriers has already started. Since FREESPACE started in 2015, it has already served a *youth* population who are now young adults -- young adults who understand ideas of self-governance and self-expression. The ideas that they plan to carry on in *The New State* have made a positive impact that those who have experienced want to share. As a *youth* participant noted:

So, it's like I look at it as something that I wanted when I was that age. I just turned eighteen. I started making music when I was fourteen, like in my room. And then I built my own studio. But like if I could have somewhere to go, you know what I mean? I always think about like where I would be [now]. So, I want to give an outlet to kids. It's all artists of all kinds really. That's one thing with FREESPACE I always tell people, it's all ages. So, it's like people always ask if they can bring their kids. It's like, yeah bring them. I didn't really do all that stuff when I was little, so it's cool. It's music [and] art. You can't really get better than that (YP1, 2019).

Changing the narrative for the *youth* of the future seems to be on everybody's mind. But noting technology and the uncertainty of our immediate future, it is quite

easy to tell the difference between the types of spaces that are being used. As one adult advocate said:

I don't know what it's going to be like 100 years from now, because maybe it will get to the point where you can have all your senses in an alternative reality that's digitized or created, but right now it's not there. But as of right now the physical space is so important because you get that full-body experience being there. The interaction that comes with it can be digitized and that's why social media was kind of created, it happens there, too. But I think there are just certain things that the physical presence and physical interactions with somebody brings that when you disconnect it and just put it on a digital media doesn't translate the same (AA4, 2020).

Digital space stretches our limits. It increases our speed. It provides many of us with more access to resources, knowledge and power than ever before. But we still exist offline and when we step away from the screen and become conscious of digital media as a tool, it can enhance who we are as people, community, and inhabitants of the physical world. *The New State* participants reassure us that physical space is vital to creatives now and in the future.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

When I decided to conduct research on *The New State*, the idea of it becoming a creative hub in Milwaukee was still in its infancy. Through social media hashtags, whispers at local music shows, and casual conversations through a network of my “creative” peers, my antenna perked up at the thought of this place, this community, this network, becoming a reality. As I noted, media outlets in Milwaukee glazed over the development plans with short quotes from board members, and 3D renderings of the anticipated building façade. The young creative inside me screamed to know more. How will it work in this age of digital socialization and YouTube learners? How will it be maintained with the clear economic, racial and social barriers that haunt Milwaukee’s history and culture? Will the *youth* be ready to take on this power? Will society be open to the change?

They were questions similar to the ones that would often come up behind closed doors in my community. Reminiscent of the talks about paying creatives with exposure instead of money, challenges faced by creatives of color, finding galleries that would show our work without belittling our imagery, wondering why we never see developments of urban spaces by urban people or venue spaces that would let our friends play. To find the answer I decided to conduct this ethnographic study integrating the theories I had learned in my undergraduate education about communal urban spaces, and the logics of media space and cultural productions from my graduate studies.

I initially saw the relevance of my research as a conceptual template for *youth* culture development in our digitized society, and anticipated how critical connections between physical and digital space could help define boundaries of agency and our future existence. However, I never expected the world to be turned on its head by a pandemic that would make physical social distancing the new normal. As digital spaces have become the safer way to socialize, my research and the context in which it exists shifted overnight. Now the idea of having a physical space is not just a conversation for *youth* and creatives, but for all of society, as we have found a new appreciation for being in physical spaces that are at this point off limits. As virtual space has become the lifeline for many people during this time, there is more to explore here. I urge scholars to join the conversation about the intricacy of physical and mediated spaces, how they affect the growth of society, and how the agency of certain communities over others align with the access to physical space and some media space.

My findings show that these conversations about spaces, mediated and the like, are vital to building community, sharing ideas, and developing into responsible members of society. Through detailed quotes, bouncing back and forth between *youth* participants' perspectives (or the lack thereof) and those of adult advocates, I threaded the needle of commonality, untold truths, hardships, and future hope. As the *state* of things seems to be concrete in some ways, like building plans, it is still unclear if true *youth* agency in the form of self-governance and self-expression will survive in the programming of *The New State*. Where I discussed hierarchical pressures of dominant culture on subcultures and *youth* culture in my literature review, my findings also show

similar trends in *The New State* though there are strong voices of dissent still grasping on to their mission.

At the end of an interview one respondent reflected on what progress had been made since the collaboration of community members, developers, creatives, and all other individuals. This was a reflection many respondents seem to be tip toeing around during my study and no one really vocalized it during board meetings. Where were all the *youth*? Many adults had voices. The ideas of the adults were clearly articulated in their agendas, their roles and their thoughts on what the *New State* could be physically. They all had insight on how it could be promoted digitally, and how it could be funded by big corporate donors, city grants and generous “friends” of *The New State* that would support the mission. But there were no *youth* in these moments. The self-governance for them had yet to appear. As one individual told me:

We don't have to go through any extreme shit. We are founding our own organization. We make the rules. That's what drives me nuts. People are mentally allowing themselves to fall into the regular societal, let's get the kids out of it, they don't know what they are doing [mindset]. That's my same concern. The board needs to be reminded of that. . . . I know that everyone's really desperate to raise money but raising the money cannot put the kids on the back burner.

To protect the anonymity of my participants, which I have been trying to create throughout this research, I will not reference who told me this or whether it was from an adult advocate or *youth* participant. More importantly, I will suggest that if the true

mission of *The New State* is to “uplift a city block, creating public space, cultural infrastructure, and economic opportunity, while empowering our *youth* through self-governance and self-expression” (newstatemke.org), then this is something that no matter how unorthodox it may be to mass society, it needs to be discussed among all people in the organization.

Even though the mission of *The New State* was the salvation of the State theater, the reason FREESPACE joined the cause, and many *youth* want to be a part of that cause, was the ability to have a say in the direction of the organization. The normalcy of adult-guided governing structures in organizations that cater to *youth* is hard to shake. With no precedent set for *youth* agency in the same capacity as the WSAU board has now, it makes it easy for the adult advocates to ignore other structures that will empower *youth*. The bylaws, the way in which meetings are held, and even the election of board leadership like president, vice president, secretary and treasurer that lack *youth* input, all shows this to be true. It may be fear of dissent that has a strong hold on their habits or even the lack of accountability their volunteer status allows. But clearly these common practices have an effect on the narrative they all note as important to communal growth. The cultural infrastructure in which *The New State* exists, does not fit their organizational needs. I would suggest a deeper look into social shifts and the ways in which traditions are made. The same way digital spaces not too long ago were only figments of our imaginations, we might have only scratched the surface of true *youth* agency practices.

Though its physicality has yet to reach its planned form, we know *The New State* today may not be *The New State* of tomorrow. It is clear that this tangible space plays a major part in the success of the organization. The research revealed that without it, and because of it, there is a struggle to start programming, improve access to *youth*, fulfill its mission and establish a different type of governing body that pushes the shared values of a community. By using it as an example of the micro-scene of the creative community that exists in Milwaukee, it has revealed that there is a need for more community building and mentorship between *youth* and adults that have the same field of interest. There also is very much a need for spaces for creatives to learn, share, practice, and cultivate skills, both digitally and physically. *The New State* in its ideology, current practices, and prospective programming shows that urban culture, creative culture and *youth* culture is multifaceted. The portrait of future society may not be clear, but it without doubt should not be made without the voices of *all* its stakeholders. *The New State* has the potential to be something that all of us creatives, advocates for all-age venues, and urban community members could thrive from.

I am The New State. You are The New State. We are The New State.

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