

The City is a Circle



By Rachel Parish

In Defense of Eavesdropping

I had just moved back to Atlanta from California when I got a call from Miranda Kyle, inviting me to be an artist in residence with the BeltLine. In particular, she was inviting me to work as the scholar in residence, an amazing opportunity she has crafted that allows artists with research-based practices to turn their attention to a deep consideration of any aspect of the the BeltLine that seems particularly poignant to them.

After getting my mind around this amazing opportunity, I did what a lot of artists do in one way or another. I started to eavesdrop. Everywhere I went in Atlanta, my ears, on radar alert, would pick up conversations that had to do, in some way or another, with the Beltline. What people say in grocery stores and coffee shops, in school volunteer days and at the CVS can offer great springboards for thought and creation.

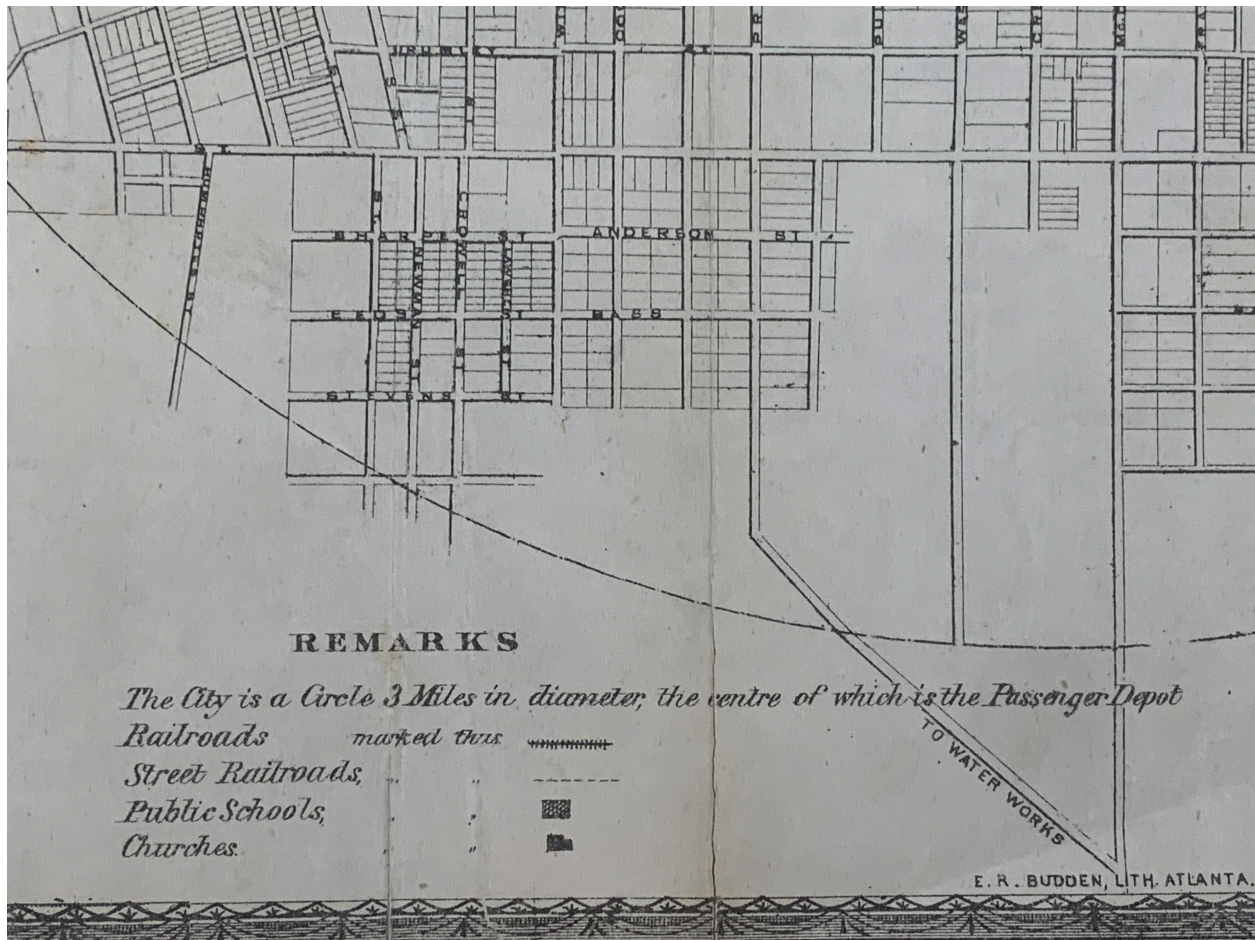
I also began to walk. I wanted to eavesdrop not just to what people were saying with words about the BeltLine, but also, to what I could “hear” by moving my body through this complex urban space in the midst of transformation. I approach this kind of experience as someone listening, not just with their ears, but with their feet, intuition, breath, peripheral vision, thirst and time, and I consider it a deep learning process. I walked the entirety of the BeltLine in this way, both the built and unbuilt portions, in long durations and in short spurts. As I navigated my body through these spaces and these communities, I attuned myself to listening to what the landscape had to say.

I also wanted to listen to people directly, so I began conversations with people with direct connection to either the BeltLine project or with an understanding of the ecosystems this infrastructure is built upon. I spoke with arborists, urban planners, employees of the Beltline, an indigenous scholar, artists, spiritual leaders, herbalists, historians and more. I also had conversations and informal interviews with community members along the whole corridor. In these conversations, I could frame the things I began thinking about to shape the content of the discussion, and this offered rich and concrete reflections. But, even when having formal conversations, there is also the opportunity to listen, perhaps to eavesdrop, beyond the words that are shared. By creating space in conversation and attuning yourself to the way that your interlocutor steers what is shared, you can also begin to hear a kind of shape to their thoughts.

And finally, I went to the archival references. To the books and papers published on the Beltline that were recommended to me as well as to the Keenan Research Archives at the Atlanta History Center. Now, each reference I was given, was given with a context—a suggestion of what the purpose of the author might be, according to the recommender. And at the Keenan

Research Center, I had the pleasure of navigating the ideas of several different archivists on what kinds of research might be appropriate to my work. By having conversations with them, and pressing the matters gently, in obscure directions, I found my way to reflections on Atlanta that have offered a shape to this project.

Many maps of Atlanta from the late 19th to early 20th centuries contain a statement: The City is a Circle. This statement, *The City is a Circle*, is sometimes joined by a statement of what the diameter is—sometimes one and three quarter miles from the train depot as the center, and other times identifying sets of concentric rings at 1 mile, 2 miles, 3 and then 4. Other times the statement is made purely through the language of shape. This statement caught my mind as a kind of implicit logic of the city as one built on the creation of infrastructure.



What does a circle offer us? Boundaries for one. It can be seen as a statement of definition, of assumed ownership, of such an arbitrary act of claiming space that natural boundaries are deemed insignificant. The city is claimed as a circle, radiating outward from the origination point of the train depot.

And that can be true, while also being an incomplete picture. Because a circle is also a statement of wholeness. It offers a unity and an embrace. A circle is an equalizer in group dynamics, with everyone able to hold an equal place as a part of a system. And it can bring us back to ourselves, even when we feel most lost.



Following lines of research also can bring you along routes that circle you back to yourself. As I listened to stories told, intuited and overheard, I began to envisage inviting people to journey along a series of paths. These paths would be both circuitous and tangential, and invite us to learn what the shape of this city has to offer us, even as it evolves.

Learning to Speak in Wilding Ways

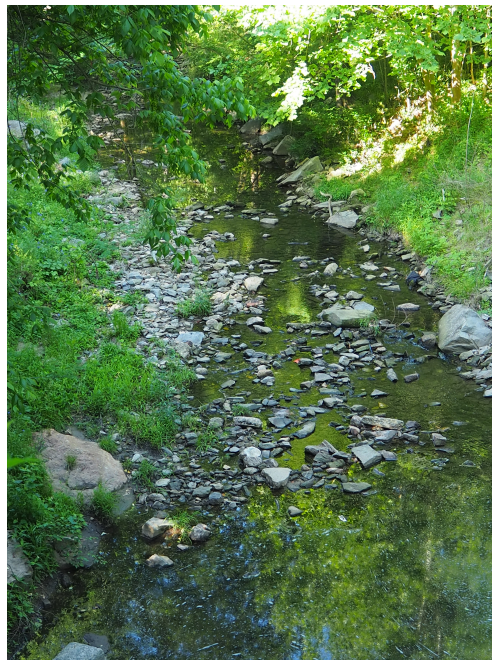
Infrastructure is a grammar.



It dictates how we construct the language of our lives.

The rules it puts in place tell us how we are to live together, how we gather, connect and flow.

There is a natural infrastructure within the land our cities are built upon.



It speaks in ridges and water sources, bedrock and rainfall.

The Atlanta experiment, from its inception, has sought to dominate the land's natural grammar and to usurp it, for the benefit of commerce. The living constituents of this city are forcibly confined to live in accordance with an imposed logic that contradicts the foundations we are built upon.

6 *Some Railroad History* — THE CONSTITUTION: ATLANTA, GA., FRIDAY, JANUARY 13 1899

WEST POINT'S BELT SKIRTS THE CITY

First Official Map of the Route Ever Published.

WILL COST FULLY \$300,000

The Company Files Its Answer in the Injunction Proceedings.

PRESIDENT SMITH PLANNED THE ROAD

Reasons Given Why It Should Be Built Now—The Injunction Hearing

Map of
Railroads in the Vicinity of Atlanta

PERKINS' EVIDENCE IS SECURED

Continued from Fifth Page.

Early in the fall of last year Mr. Hurt secured an option from this committee representing the majority of stockholders that looked like a sale, but it was abruptly broken up, Mr. Hurt refusing to consummate the transaction.

"I then went before this committee and told them I thought I had some friends in Baltimore that might be induced to purchase their holdings. I went to Baltimore and succeeded in interesting these parties."

"Dog in the Manger."

In answer to questions relative to the formation of the Atlanta City Street Railway Company, Mr. Spaulding said:

"We never had any idea of forming any new company until we became satisfied that Hurt, or some one in his interest, was trying to work the dog in the manger act on us. Mr. Briggs, who represented the Hoehling stock at our last annual meeting, stated the Consolidated was trying to buy that interest, and he ceased then out good and hard."

Regarding the price paid Mr. Perkins for his stock and bonds, Mr. Spaulding said:

"We got Mr. Perkins' holdings at \$9. We bought a good deal of other stock at this same price. We never sold it for anything. I never heard of any one being disgruntled until Perkins filed his suit."

This concluded the evidence. Mr. Hopkins had summoned Mr. Jake Haas, vice president of the Atlanta railway, but he did not put his witness up.

Mr. Hopkins has entered a formal objection to all the testimony taken yesterday, on the ground that it is not proper to take evidence at this stage of the litigation. This objection will be considered by Judge Chandler next Saturday when the injunction case comes up for trial.

Seek Home for Little Boy.

The ladies of the Home for the Friendless wish to find a home for a little baby boy just three weeks old. Mrs. Nelson said yesterday that the little fellow was a bright child and a home for it was badly wanted.

Mr. W. G. Whiddy has been very sick at his home, 13 Johnson avenue, for about three weeks. He is still confined to his bed. He was some better yesterday and it is hoped he will begin to improve rapidly.

Dr. Bull's Cough Syrup banishes once all forms of throat diseases, and a ways effects a permanent cure. This wondrous remedy has cured thousands of sufferers from bronchitis, hoarseness and other bronchial troubles.

The New Dixie Cook Book Revised and Enlarged Edition.

Carefully compiled from the treasure family collections of many generations, noted housekeepers. Largely supplemented by tested recipes of the more noted southern dishes, contributed by well-known ladies of the south.

"The best is none too good." 25.75 per paid. For sale by John M. Miller Co., 29 Marietta st., Atlanta, Ga.

DOTTED LINE SHOWS ROUTE OF PROPOSED BELT ROAD.

patronage from the Georgia railroad and the Louisville and Nashville than it has given to them, while it has always given the Central of Georgia more through business than it has rendered.

When the West Point road was originally planned, the route of the proposed belt road was not considered.

be ready to proceed this afternoon, but no one can tell until the case is called what direction it will take.

IMPORTANT CONFERENCE HELD.

Presidents of Trunk Lines Meet Members of Interstate Commission.

When the West Point road was originally planned, the route of the proposed belt road was not considered.

liquor dispensary for Cumberland county, which is at Fayetteville. With this was a petition with 700 signatures. It is asserted that most of the business men of Fayetteville signed it. This is one of the seven dispensaries established by the fusion legislature and the fight for the bill will be a hot one.

The house yesterday adopted a resolution allowing the erection of a monument in

I came across this article from January of 1899 about a battle to construct the Southeastern BeltLine Railway segment. The headline balks at the cost of constructing this segment, which was exorbitant at the time because it was opposed to the topography it was being built upon. The point of the project was to connect the company lines of Atlanta and West Point Railway to another of its lines, so that it would not be obliged to use the services of a rival company's infrastructure, the Central of Georgia Railway Company. The article also points out, with an

ominous slant, that for over half of the distance, this railway would be within a quarter of a mile of the city limits.

In 2023, this same segment is the one closest to my house. It had been opened as a 'temporary path' for several years now, but has just recently been closed to public use as it is under construction to be paved. One of the first things I overheard people saying as I started to research the BeltLine for this project were sentiments like, "I used to love the Eastside, but now I won't go there. It's too busy." and "My favorite part of the BeltLine is the Southside, but it will be ruined when they pave it." This sentiment came from people living alongside the Eastside and on the South, but also from people working on or in close connection with the BeltLine, as well as people who live outside of the city's limits.



I was sitting outside tonight in my backyard. I live on a busy road and can nearly always hear traffic and see street lights at night. But tonight the wind picked up in the leaves of the old White Oaks and Pecan trees that offer an almost complete canopy, and it overtook the sound of the cars. Not to mention the crickets and the frogs, singing their stories in a language of their own.

People are animals, too. Of course we know that but we often forget it. And being separated from the wild natural world is written deeply in the linguistic rules of the city, so this forgetfulness is reinforced and encoded. While our species has created and lives under the dominance of the grammar of this particular city, we retain so many other living and wild language systems alive and at work within us. They are just too often dismissed and undervalued.

Let's think about language for a second. Language is a means of communication. It is also a framework for what kinds of thoughts are possible to have. In English, for example, a cat can have stripes, but a stripe does not have the possibility of having a cat. Language sets out rules for where your thoughts are allowed to go. And it does that as a social act. We communicate according to the rules of the grammar, and we reinforce for each other what those relational attributes are in our world. The same things happen with infrastructure. A poured concrete path tells a body where it belongs; long driveways leading the eye to a large house in the distance says you can look, but don't touch.

Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939) was a Lakota leader and polymath whose writings introduced many newer Americans to the thoughts, systems and traditions of Native Americans. One of his most well known quotes is as follows:

“Wherever forests have not been mowed down, wherever the animal is recessed in their quiet protection, wherever the earth is not bereft of four-footed life - that to the white man is an 'unbroken wilderness.'

But for us there was no wilderness, nature was not dangerous but hospitable, not forbidding but friendly. Our faith sought the harmony of man with his surroundings; the other sought the dominance of surroundings.

For us, the world was full of beauty; for the other, it was a place to be endured until he went to another world.

But we were wise. We knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard.”

— **Chief Luther Standing Bear**

Let's consider the linguistic proposition of “the wild” in this context. A google search offers multiple definitions of wild that boil down to “a being in its natural environment.” To be free from control and free from dominance. To be uncivilized.

This tension to me speaks volumes. This concept of “the wild” tells us that the civilization we have built is unnatural. We cannot deny that we are part of something fundamentally more true than the world we have constructed.

This brings back to mind the tension that emerges when diverse people repeatedly profess a preference for the incomplete parts of the BeltLine over the completed ones. We know there is something satisfying about the realization of completed cultivation. We know it's prosperous and makes an economic case for increased revenue and mobility. We know that without the promise of the economic return on investment that the Eastside BeltLine offers, that none of the rest of it would be created. But we feel the loss inherent in it as well. A loss of possibility, a loss perhaps of the non-cultivated languages that live inside and around us.

But the BeltLine isn't a pristine forest or an untouched savannah. It's a visionary repurposing for the contemporary ATLien's use of a largely overgrown and disused urban railway line, already built and already abandoned. And my backyard is flanked by traffic. Yet the practice of hearing the voice of the wind and the chorus of crickets amongst the motors taps into a truth that simultaneously settles and invigorates. It's the excitement of going home. In this telling, I'm already at my house of course, but by home, I mean something more primal. We have built our infrastructure, largely in defiance and to the detriment of the language of our natural world. But we are still of it, and from it. No matter how much our Cartesian or Capitalist grammars tell us not to use our native tongues, we are most at home with the sounds that nurtured us in the womb of our Mother Earth.



So what do we do? Some people might take extreme measures and go off grid in an attempt to get back to nature. And that choice will perfectly suit some people. But it's not necessary at all. Just because our infrastructure confines us doesn't mean that we need to reject it. We, humans, have built it. We created it and that product of our collective imaginations and innovations should rightly be celebrated. This is our language too.

And that's a great thing about language. If you want to stretch the rules of grammar in a verbal language, to explore how your thoughts can be disassembled and reassembled, you're in luck. That's poetry. Just as we've constructed grammars that confine us, we also have the creative tools to move beyond those self imposed boundaries.

And often, these boundaries aren't what we perceive them to be. Take the small ropes that delineate the boundaries on the BeltLine between on path and off. These are there not to dissuade people from walking on one side or the other, but rather to help as a communication tool between Trees Atlanta and the city's Parks department. The ropes are there to tell one group of people where they need to work, and where that job is being overseen by another

team. There is no way for the average BeltLine user to know that, and instead, it's easily 'heard' as a sign that tells people where they should go and where they shouldn't.

The aim of this project is to offer ways of turning ourselves toward being in our city that invite us to reconnect us to ourselves, fellow human beings, and our more-than-human community members. The idea of wildness is something that doesn't exist everywhere. It's a concept that was created in a particular historical context that asserts humans as separate from the world. In some ways this can make us feel superior. But in others, it tells us that we are always under threat from something alien to us. This wildness is something to reclaim, to integrate into ourselves



and to let ourselves be subsumed by. But in order to be able to do that, we have to practice. To stretch our skills and strengthen our muscles that allow us access to these ways of being. Allow yourself to be guided by instinct, by trust and curiosity. Let yourself be a part of the world, and the world, a part of you. That is a process called rewilding. Saying, yes, we are all connected.

And here is an opportunity to practice! The series of walks, talks, adventures and activities that emerged from my process of listening and playful consideration, exist here as written offerings in this book and also serve as the foundation for an ongoing series of free public events that will begin in November of 2023, inviting us to explore the different ways our city offers us opportunities to collectively shape and reshape our lives, together.

Drift Journeys and Mental Maps

In the 1950s in France, a group of artists and thinkers called the Situationists noticed that most people's mental maps of a city were not like the maps you'd see displayed on a wall or table top, where everything was to scale. Rather, the maps we have in our minds are ones that give outsized importance to the places we frequent, often our home, our work and a small selection of third spaces.

While the spaces we are familiar with take up a large area in our mental maps, the places in between shrink and often disappear altogether. With cities such as Atlanta, in which the majority of our lives are dominated by cars, this is even more heavily weighted. Without walking as a daily necessity, we become overly familiar with a small set of interiors, perhaps some carefully circumscribed outdoor space, the interior of our cars, as well as the virtual spaces we sink into throughout our days and nights.

The BeltLine, in its best dress, can be seen as an invitation to ATLiens to make new mental maps of ourselves in our own city. It says, get outside and see what happens when you move around. It says, we're all more connected than you think! It offers opportunities for chance encounters with others in our community and for us to move and witness new places while walking or biking as limited but still viable means of transportation.

The Situationists made up a kind of exercise regime of their own called the *Derive*, sometimes translated as the *Drift*. These exercises unfolded as a series of intentional yet whimsical walks that individuals or small groups of people would take together through the streets of Paris. They would gather at a particular but varied set of times and places, and, with a series of instructions, explore their city anew. By experiencing their city through new rules, or with different grammars if you will, than the ones that are implicitly offered, the Situationists intention was to build up deeper and wider engagements with the world of which they were a part. Taking inspiration from this process, I offer below a series of Drift Journeys for you to take through Atlanta. Think of these as opportunities to radically re-map your internal image of both the BeltLine corridor and your experience navigating and knowing the shared public space of this city.

How to take a Drift Journey

- First, have fun. Let your spirit of curiosity and adventure take the lead. You have permission to turn the volume as far down as you can on your rational mind!
- Begin each one at a randomly chosen place on the BeltLine.
- Know that you might remain on the BeltLine, or you may leave it immediately, and journey out through adjacent neighborhoods.
- Each Drift Journey should take between 15 minutes and one full day to complete.
- A Drift Journey can be taken as a solo walk. You can equally take a Drift Journey with anywhere between one to seven other people. To take a Drift Journey with a group, invite a collection of people to meet you at a specific location. Share the Drift Journey sequence with them when they arrive. Know that it is possible that the group will remain together for the duration of the walk. It is also possible that your paths may diverge. Enjoy this part of the adventure.
- Try not to use any phones or tech along the way. The shared virtual spaces have profound topographies and languages of their own, but these Drift Journeys are inviting you to explore the physical world around you, so please try to stay there.
- Bring a pencil or writing utensil with you. Feel free to write notes on the pages of this book.

Drift Journey 1: A Series of Open Instructions

Begin at a crowded place.

Notice all of the individual people that make up this crowd.

Notice the angle of someone's features.

Notice the hem line of someone's sleeves.

Notice the hand movements of someone speaking.

Now soften your gaze and turn your attention to the crowd as a whole.

Notice the flow of people.

Even if you are standing apart, notice that you are a part of this crowd.

Turn your attention to the empty space between people.

Now, imagining yourself like water flowing between rocks, weave your way through the bodies in the crowd by focusing on the spaces in between people. Do this for as long as you like.

Now stop and step out of the crowd.

Take a minute to notice the feeling in your body now.

Walk backwards for as long as you dare.

Stop. Find a place to rest.

Find birdsong. Listen to it. Now begin to follow it as far or as long as you can. Go wherever it leads.

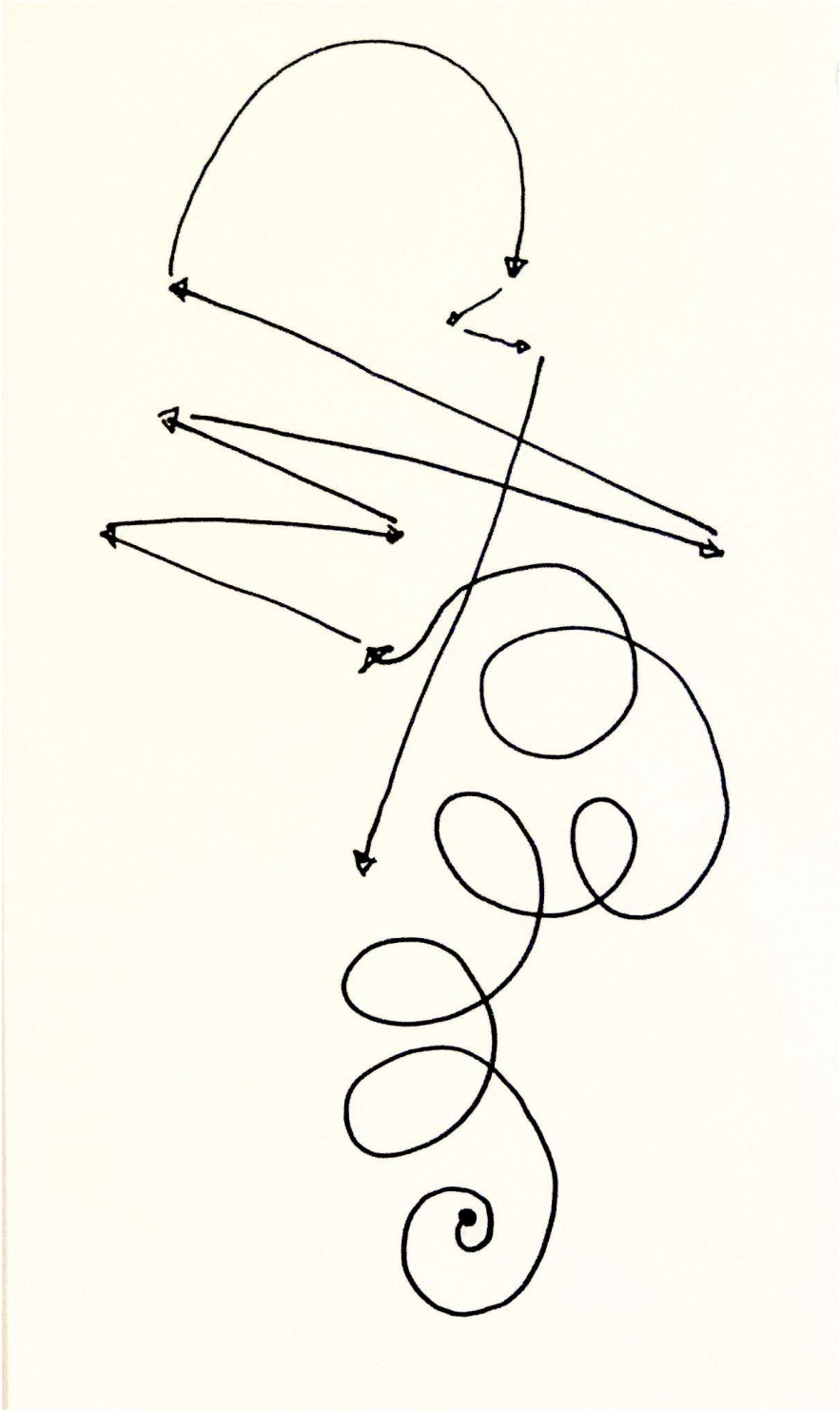
Rest.

Now, turn your attention to all of the corners you can see. How many are there? Choose one corner to explore.

Once you've explored that corner, let your attention land on another one. Go there and explore it.

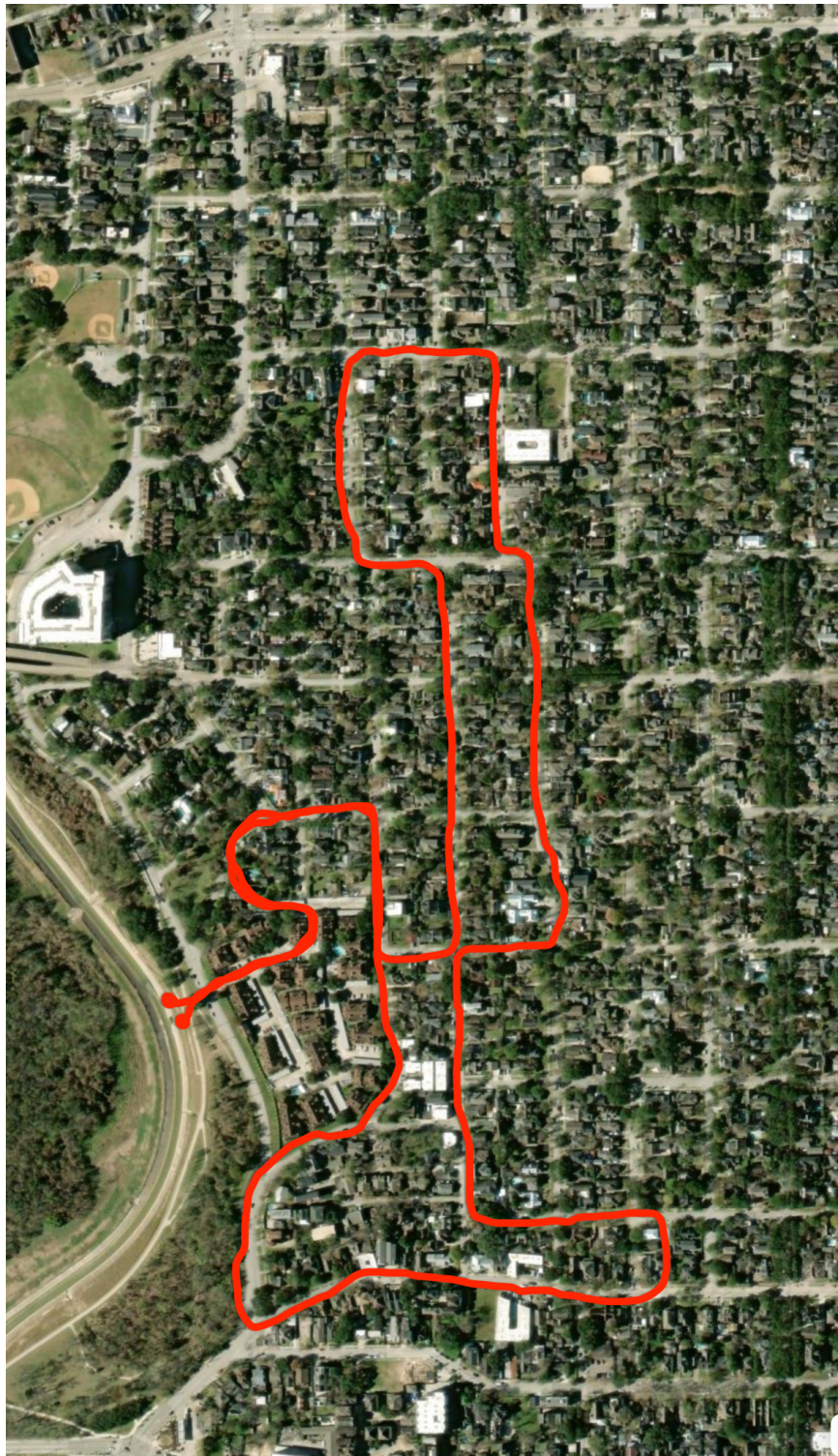
Repeat as many times as desired.

Go to the beginning. Follow this map from start to finish



Step 3

Go to the beginning. Follow this map from start to finish



Step 4

Put your pencil to the paper below. Draw a wandering line.

You are at the beginning.

Follow your map from start to finish

Drift Journey 3: Take a Chance

Note:

Setting up principles of chance operations is a creative technique used by composers, poets, choreographers and other cultural producers throughout history. Each of the instructions below orchestrates a randomization process that will determine your actions. The point of using this here is for you to relinquish control of your choices in order to be open to experiencing the serendipitous situations that can and do arise all the time.

Take the number that corresponds to your birth month. Multiply it by 7. Walk straight for this many minutes.

Stop.

Look up.

If you see leaves on branches above you, walk with a skip in your step. If there are no leaves to be seen, continue on your way while softly humming a tune. Continue for five minutes or until someone gives you a smile.

Slow down, but keep moving.

Slow down.

Let your attention settle on something in your line of sight.

Consider this object of your attention.

Give it a name.

If the name you have given it begins with a vowel, turn right and walk at a brisk pace, with a consonant, turn left, and walk with slow intention.

Look for a lamppost.

When you reach a lamppost, stop.

Wait.

Turn your attention to the people around you.

Begin counting everyone you see wearing a green shirt.

When you reach the 8th person, follow them in the same direction.

Not too closely!

Stop when you get to a street corner. Do not cross the street. Round the corner instead. Keep walking.

Stop when your feet are tired.

If there are clouds, go directly home without retracing any steps. If there are no clouds, find a bench to sit on and wait until you're ready to move on again.

Drift Journey 4: Invisible supports

Begin walking.

Still moving, turn your attention to the ground on which you're walking.

As you're walking, find a piece of living earth to stand on.

Contemplate the gift of support this earth gives to you.

Pausing, find a way to give a gift to the ground beneath your feet.

Continue on your way.

As you walk, begin to turn your attention to the surface of your skin.

Feel the temperature and movement of the air around you.

As you walk, consider the fullness of this air.

Turn your attention to how it moves as you move through it. Arms and legs, torso and head.

Pay attention to the air as it fills your lungs, breathing in.

Feel it cycle through your body and rejoin the air around you, breathing out.

Consider the support that the air offers you at every moment of every day.

Find a way to give a gift to the air. Take as long as you like to do so.

Continue on your way.

Turn your attention now to your feet

Feel each part of the sole of your foot as it touches the ground.

Notice the smallest adjustments the bones, muscles and tendons make as you move.

Consider the support your feet offer you as you move through this space, right now.

Find a way to give a gift to your feet.

Continue on your way.

As you walk, now turn your attention to the people in your environment.

Contemplate how miraculous it is that you are all here, at this place, at this moment in time.

Consider that this time, and this place, will never happen again.

Find a way to give a gift to a stranger.

Continue on your way.

A Kaleidoscope of Sound

In 2018 I went to Creative Time's then annual summit in Miami and was introduced to composer Pauline Oliveros' process of "Deep Listening" through a beautiful guided nature walk led by artist Fereshteh Toosi. This process is akin to other sensory attunement exercises, except rather than inviting heightened awareness of multiple sensory inputs each in their turn, this focuses, as the name suggests, deeply on listening. By letting the experience of listening unfold and open up into layer after layer of perception, "Deep Listening" offers a kaleidoscopic view of yourself as a part of a world alive with sound.

The journey below is an invitation to explore this resounding world around you. It will take approximately an hour from start to finish. For the duration of that time, your entire focus is on experiencing your sonic world. Of course, you will use your sight and smell, touch, sense of time and your body in space, but let those senses recede in importance. Let them take a break, and instead, let sound be your guide.

You may begin this journey at any point along the BeltLine. As with the Drift Journeys, this walk may take you out into the neighborhoods around you. Be open to experiencing the diverse sonic landscapes this offers you.

Please bring with you these instructions and something to write with. Fundamentally this is a solo journey. However, feel free to invite others to participate alongside you. It can be fun and enlightening to discuss the experience after your journey is complete.

Sound Journey: the world alive with sound

Begin by standing in a stable position, both feet planted equally on the ground.

Turn your eyes to soft focus, so that you're not looking at anything specifically.

Turn your attention to the sounds around you.

Notice that there are some sounds that are far away, some in a middle distance, and some quite close to you. Take each in turn.

For two minutes, listen to everything you can hear far away.

Now for two minutes, turn your attention to the middle distance—what sounds come forward to your attention now?

Finally turn your attention to the sounds closest to, or coming from within, your own physical body.

Now begin walking. For the next 10 minutes, allow yourself to walk slowly, in silence. Simply receive all of the sound in your environment. Make sure to tune into the sounds that are coming from the different focal points in your environment—background, midground and foreground. Let these sounds overlap and co-mingle. Open your senses to receive all of the sounds around you, all at once.

Stop.

Read this set of instructions and then close your eyes.

Listen as you take two deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Open your eyes.

Find a place to rest and get your pencil.

In the space below, make a sketch of the sounds you experienced in your walk. These sketches can be a series of marks or a series of images—just make a notation of what your experience of the soundings around you were like.

Now let your attention land on something sounding close to you. Begin to focus on that sound—its quality, size, tone, pitch, resonance, timbre, frequency—whatever qualities you can perceive. Familiarize yourself with the qualities of this sound. It may change or stop and if it does, allow your focus to seamlessly land on another sound close to you, building up a relationship with this plane of your sound-scape.

After a few minutes, begin to expand your focus. Let your attention land on a sound far away from you. Tune in to the qualities of this sound. Spend the next few minutes building a sense of the soundscape in the distance.

Now imagine that the sounds in each plane are having a conversation with each other. Experience their relationship through rhythm, pace, volume and frequency.

Now imagine that you are part of that conversation.

Walking, moving through space, begin to perceive how the sonic conversation changes as you change location, changing relationship with the sound-filled environment of which you are an ongoing part.

As you walk, let your fingertips trail along surfaces nearby. Notice the sounds that this contact creates.

Sounds can of course be heard by the ear, but sounds, being waves, can equally be ‘heard’ through your body as vibrations. Notice all the ways that these sounds can be received by your body.

Now notice the sounds of your feet as you walk. And again, notice the sounds for how they land in your ear, and ripple through your body as vibrations.

Also begin to notice where and how the sounds you’re receiving take your thoughts. Maybe they create stories about the sounds or draw forth memories.

Find a comfortable place to rest and for the next five minutes, write or draw in the space below a stream of consciousness of what thoughts arose through this experience of deep listening.

Don't censor yourself. Just write. This is only for you.

Thank yourself, and the resounding world around you.

Gather Together

I had the pleasure of going on foraging walks with teachers Marie-Lies from Fleur and Forage and Baba Sol with Garden Like a Boss recently. I cannot recommend enough going on a rambling stroll with a leader such as these two individuals, people knowledgeable on foraging, plant identification, and the edible, medicinal and creative applications for the plant life that grows within our communities. There are plenty of apps that offer fun ways to identify plants and learn about them, but there is no substitute to train your eye and mind differently than to take a walk with someone who fundamentally sees the community of plants growing around us in a specific, nuanced and knowledgeable way.

While I cannot offer you expert knowledge here, I want to offer you an activity to do along the BeltLine that might give you a new perspective and unlock possibilities for working with the natural life around you in a different and fun way.

Kudzu.

If you've spent any time in the South, you know what it looks like and how thoroughly this non-native, invasive vine takes over the structures around which it grows. Inspired by conversations with expert foragers, and thinking about what areas of the BeltLine could be foraged responsibly in an unguided way, there's no better contender than Kudzu. While this vine is much maligned, it also has a lot going for it. There are edible and medicinal uses for it, it's used for paper and for making fabrics, particularly in its native environment of Japan where it was the basis for the traveling cloaks of Samurai. My invitation to you here is for you to consider the sculptural possibilities of this abundant resource. As a basis for basketry, the Kudzu vine is a fantastic option.

I checked with the folks at Trees Atlanta who manage much of the land adjacent to the BeltLine and Brian Williams, the Urban Forestry Director there, said it's totally fine to forage for natural materials along the BeltLine as long as it's done responsibly. Whenever you're foraging, the rule of responsibility says to only take up to one tenth of the available supply (or "take 1, leave 9").

Below are suggestions of when to forage, where to forage, what materials you'll need, how long you'll need to make a basket, and links to a really great tutorial by self taught craftsman, Jimmie

Dinkins. Mr. Dinkins' tutorial is a perfect starting point for your journey making baskets from foraged Kudzu—it's very clear, he makes the basket right where he's foraged the material from, and he is a generous teacher. I've also included links to other artisans in the South East who are weaving with Kudzu, so if you're interested in learning more or taking different approaches, you have some other places to expand your explorations.

Activity: Make a Kudzu Basket

The best time to gather vines for building is during the winter months, after the first hard frost. This is because the 'sap is down' and the leaves have largely disappeared from the vine. Luckily for this activity, we often have beautiful and relatively warm days that follow hard frosts, so, pick a fine day in the winter and go out to the BeltLine either by yourself or with a small group of friends (up to 5 at a time seems like a nice number). You will need about two hours from start to finish to make a small to medium basket. You should dress appropriately and bring with you pruning shears to cut the vines, gardening gloves, and a phone from which you can stream the tutorial videos on the step by step basket making process.

Locate the vines and identify strong but flexible ones that are about the size of a pencil, or a bit larger. Using your pruning shears, cut several lengths of Kudzu that are each about 15' long. Walk out of the patch of vines and find a place where you can sit comfortably for the duration of the basket making activity.

If anyone comes up to ask you about what you're doing, tell them. If you so choose, share this booklet with them, and invite them to join you.

Step by step instructions

Beginning with video number 11 in this series, South Carolina artist Jimmie Dinkins demonstrates how to make a basket with the materials you've just gathered and the tools you've brought. Follow this link and learn from another great teacher. <https://www.knowitall.org/video/natural-state-spotlight-jimmie-dinkins>

The second link here is a printable PDF of the key instructions from the video. If you would prefer to do this activity tech free, I suggest watching the videos first, then printing this pdf and bringing it with you on your foraging and crafting adventure.

https://www.knowitall.org/sites/default/files/kiad7/kudzu_instr_reduced.pdf

Further Resources

These links introduce you to a few other regional artists working with Kudzu, and offer different insights into ways this plentiful material can be used, treated and transformed!

<https://towncarolina.com/dream-weaver/>

https://www.tiktok.com/@delia_of_the_greenwood/video/7226018884246162730

<https://www.mattommey.com/basket-weaving-techniques/how-to-weave-a-basket-with-kudzu-runners>

<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/weave-a-basket-zmaz93asztak/>

<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/kudzu-baskets-kudzu-crafts-zmaz10aszraw/>

Tree Time

I love trees. Bark photographer and limb lounger, trees have always felt like good friends. They have also always felt as invitations to imagine the past. Whether a tree has lived forty years or four hundred years, it has stood, and borne gentle witness, to a single place for its entire lifetime. The power of this deep relationship that trees have with place over the entire duration of their lives, invites me, when I let it, to think and dream in a different time signature. Tree time.

Tree time is relatable. When we stand face to face with a tree we can think: What must it have been like for people here when this tree was just coming into the world? What did this place look like, feel like? And how long will it yet stand? Will it witness the world changing for another hundred years, or more?

Tree time is also equitable and inclusive. It has witnessed all life passing through this place. The waves and movements of human histories don't vie for space in the tree's lens of history. They all exist as they happened, without the burden of human-centered hierarchy. How do we contend with history? Whose do we tell and when? And how does it live with us in the present? These are all questions that are both upheld and circumnavigated when we approach considering it through the lens of Tree Time.

When we see the New Urbanism of the BeltLine today, we are presented with visions of the future and of coming change. But the BeltLine corridor itself is not new. It was created around the turn of the 20th century by several train companies to move goods around the outside of the still very new and growing city of Atlanta. And that system itself traversed earlier human and animal created pathways of migration and trade.

With the construction of the BeltLine train system however, the landscape was deeply altered. Denying hills and valleys to create a rail path encircling the city required cutting through forests and covering over freely flowing waterways. Because of this, tree-elders that live directly on the BeltLine are younger than they otherwise might be.

As I was conducting months of embodied, place based and archival research on the BeltLine, and thinking about the walks that I wanted to offer in this book, I kept my eye out for any information I could get on old and champion trees along the corridor. I knew that in order to reflect on place through a historical lens, I wanted to anchor it not in a particular person or era,

but through the lens of history that trees offer us. This history is multiple, it is inclusive, and it is as a witness.

In harmony with tree time, I wanted to craft a walk with a long duration, connecting places that feel distant in our mental maps. I wanted us to experience multiple layers of history that live alongside each other and invite participants to explore places newly built, long standing, or possibly even wild. I wanted walkers to be surprised by delightful moments of whimsy in neighborhoods, and also have to navigate the difficulties of finding a way to cross past interstates and railroads without the aid of a car. I wanted to make a path for people to have chance encounters with people, places and the city infrastructure as humans with bodies, navigating their way through our own built and given world. And with specific trees as points of orientation, as departure and destination, my hope is that you can feel held in the frame of reference of tree time. Of a consideration of all that has passed here, and, all that has yet to be.

Greg Levine from Trees Atlanta was instrumental in helping me create a shortlist of trees that fit the bill. I made a rough map from the spattering of them all and considered what shapes emerged when I started to draw lines between them. Two clusters began to catch my eye, and made me think about the experiences I've had while navigating the entire length of the built and unbuilt BeltLine on foot by myself.

I also thought about how people verbally compare the areas of the corridor with one another in conversation. For example, you'll often hear comparisons between the East and Westside, but I had never heard anyone draw a similar comparison point between the Northside and the West. What starts to emerge when we move through layers of history and infrastructure, and draw imaginary lines between these two parts of the city? The following walk takes old and/or champion trees in each of these two communities as its two anchor points. Pairing Ashview Community Gardens and Washington Park's oldest trees with those in Tanyard Creek and Atlanta Memorial Park, what histories are revealed in the encounters and the journey in between?

The walk that follows is the only one in this series that is necessarily tied to a specific place. As such, the nature of this walk will be very different when you follow it, from when I am writing this. I have walked this 7+ mile meander twice so far, separated by several months, and the changes due to construction have already changed the experience of it drastically. That said, I believe the experience of following this journey with an orientation toward Tree Time can serve to deepen the experience of multiplicity.

How to take a Tree Time walk:

- ◆ I've written Tree Time as an endurance walk. If you decide to do it all in one go, give yourself all day to do it!
- ◆ You're also of course welcome to also walk it in stages instead.
- ◆ Whichever you choose you should:
 - ◆ Bring water!
 - ◆ Take snacks!
 - ◆ Bring friends!
 - ◆ Take breaks!
 - ◆ Grab a lunch!
 - ◆ Talk to people along the way!
- ◆ There is a great deal of history and story about place and infrastructure that I'd like to share with you here, but the content is currently being formulated for the live walk that we will conduct in November 2023. After this point, the histories and reflections will be incorporated in the walking instructions both in audio and written forms, within subsequent drafts of this piece.

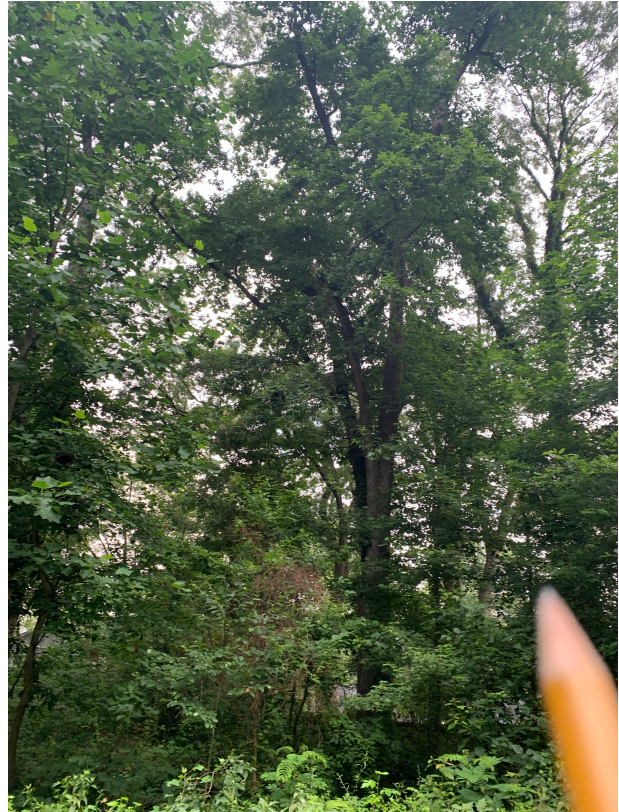
Tree Time:
Ashview Community Gardens to Atlanta Memorial Park

Start where Holderness and Fenwood Street connect at a dogleg, and walk onto the BeltLine. In front of you in a grove of trees stands a Blackgum Tree that's about 125 years old. That's from when the original BeltLine was being built and this was firmly outside of the city limits of Atlanta. As of now, the BeltLine land has been bought with funds almost solely raised from a city tax and is owned by some, slightly indefinable, part of the City of Atlanta. That means, if you're an Atlantan, it is yours.

Turn north and begin walking along the Beltline.

When you reach Washington Park Tennis Center, at the time of this writing, there's a great deal of construction. Find your way through that construction, keeping the Tennis Center to your right. You'll see that the paved path of the BeltLine turns off to the right, while there is also a wooded pathway that continues in a northern direction. Take the wooded path, keeping the railway line to your right. As you walk, you'll notice on your right one of the best groves of trees remaining on the BeltLine path. There are many trees, Beech, White Oak and Tulip Poplar in here that are between 80-125 years old.

Continue along this path until it dead ends. At this point, you'll need go left down a driveway to get to the road, which is Stafford St. NW. Turn right onto Stafford, then right onto Mobile St. NW, then take your first left onto Mayson Turner



Road. The next road you'll meet is Joseph E. Boone Blvd.

At this juncture, the BeltLine's construction offers an interesting choice: you can turn left, go up Boone and then crossing to continue right up Mayson Turner Road, winding through the westside of the Bankhead neighborhood. When I took this path, I had several really great encounters with local residents who were just interested in talking. In addition to just conversing about life and the world, I found it notable that they expressed little engagement with the BeltLine as something that was coming to their neighborhood. I'm sure there are some people in the neighborhood who are deeply engaged, but these encounters brought up the important question for

us to consider. Who does the BeltLine project actually serve as it is being built? How far does the impact of the project radiate into the community? And how deeply and seriously are the thoughts and realities of the communities this infrastructure project is bringing transformation to, being foregrounded and attended to?

Alternatively, you can look across Boone and see an unpaved path that continues north, with the railroad to your left and Azalea Gardens Apartments to your right. This path is currently in the kind of state of



“wildness” that people would, a year ago, speak in wistful tones about the SouthSide Beltline. It’s got that feeling that something is coming, but that you get to have a sneak peak of a place before its totally owned by concrete and mixed use development.

Whichever path you take, you’ll be making your way toward Donald Lee Holloway Parkway. Once there, join up with the paved Beltline Westside connector, turn left toward the Westside Beltline and join up with trail. This follows Marietta Blvd NW for a while and you’ll walk along it past Fulton County Animal Services and the Fulton County Jail. Just past here, you’ll cross the street to Foster Street and turn left to go north on Rice St, past Mt. Ephraim Baptist Church. This will just take you parallel to Marietta to walk through the smaller and more welcoming streets of the Howell Station Historic District.



Following Rice you’ll join back up with Marietta (at the intersection of Marietta and West Marietta, in true Atlanta style). Cross over West Marietta to continue north on Marietta for one block until you reach Huff Road. Turn right onto Huff and you’re now in both historic and heavily under development Blandtown. As you walk down Huff, you’ll notice a huge mix of warehouses and businesses, mixed use developments and single family homes, as well as nods to the history of this neighborhood, with



signage and at least one historic building remaining as a landmark. Here you’ll also find what is now a super fun detour. You’ll have to backtrack to Huff at present if you take this detour, but its worth an extra bit of time for the fun and flair of it!

Detour to Audubon Bacon Park: After about 10 mins walk on Huff, you’ll reach Fairmount Avenue on your left. Go up Fairmount to Culpepper on your right and walk down Culpepper. At

present, Culpepper is unpaved and eventually opens up into a space that is not physically marked as a park when you get there, but on google maps, it's called Audubon Bacon Park. Now is your time to play and explore. This place feels like you've fallen into someone's whimsical enjoyment of nature and history. Street signs and historical markers spring up from mounds of kudzu. A tree swing and a shade pavilion await no one and anyone to make avail of what they have to offer. The live train tracks provide a border, but when there, the conductor was happy to see people enjoying themselves and gave a wave and a train whistle. Have a picnic, read a book, enjoy the cloud museum above your head. This is a place to wander and wonder with ease. When you're done, backtrack your way to Boyd Avenue which will lead you back to Huff Road where you'll continue along in an eastward direction.



Traveling along Huff, you'll see the Atlanta Water Treatment plant begin on your left. When you reach Howell Mill Road at the next intersection, take that to your left, continuing to follow along past the Water Treatment Plant. Just past this complex of city infrastructure, you see a street on your right named Trabert. From this point on, you've got a few choices. One of the trickiest bits of this whole walk is how to navigate the passage of the urban blockade of I-75. The history and complexity of why American cities are so dependent on interstates is something I suggest delving into. They are an entirely fabricated part of our lives that serve to deeply disconnect us from one another and historically have wrought devastation and displacement in primarily minority neighborhoods.

I offer you several paths to traverse this, well, monstrosity, and I invite you to do so with an idea of Tree Time. Some paths are more straightforward than others and each have their interesting points along the way, all of them incorporate off and on-road adventure and take a solid dose of resolve at points. Whichever you take, I invite you to think: What do these barriers feel like? What would it feel like if it were not there? Can you, by walking and moving mindfully, physically reconnect yourself to your city in a way that rejects the power that these constructions have over the shapes of our lives and communities? Each path and subpath eventually connects

back up at Tanyard Creek Park, where we pick back up with a constructed part of today's BeltLine.

Option 1: Continue along Howell Mill Road, for a little under a mile. Once you cross over I-75 (on a sidewalk, but still requiring a bit of gumption), you'll see Northside Baptist Church on your right. Go into the parking lot of the church and head down the hill onto Forest Hill NW. That dead ends into Channing Dr NW. Look to your left and you'll see Channing Valley Park. Go across the little bridge in the park with the playground on your right. You'll see a big open field. Take it and walk left. At the top of the hill, you'll be on Northside Drive. Walk north on Northside and take the first street on your left, Spring Valley Road NW. Walk down this and you'll be in a neighborhood that has a couple of great parks that seem like they're in people's private yards, but are actually public parks owned by the City of Atlanta (which means you!). One entrance is on Meredith Drive, which you'll see on your right if you're going down Spring Valley Road NW. Stop by there and explore it, before returning along your way. You'll see another part of the same park on your right. Its difficult to get down to explore it, but worth it!. Keep walking along Spring Valley Road until the road stops and there's a sign that says Private Drive. This is not a private drive, it is a public road that leads to another public park. I spoke to neighbors about it. They assured me, its a public road and there's just one person who keeps that sign up to deter people, but that person is in the wrong. Anyway. Walk down that pathway until you see the start of a gorgeous wooded path on your left that will eventually bring you out to Tanyard Creek Park.



Option 2: Here, I'll take you down Trabert. Turning down Trabert the road dead ends into Monday night Brewery. There's a parking lot to your left, which is an old Myers Carpet store and you can either go off road and navigate down the hill to get into the parking lot, or else go into the brewery, find the manager, and explain that you're exploring the BeltLine, and could they please (pretty please) open the gate so you could walk through and down the path where the BeltLine is coming. The Brewery, I believe, owns the building and grounds that you'll need to go through, and they've been helpful and accommodating when I've gone this way. Did I mention, you should grab a drink from them before heading along your way? :)

You'll meet a series of warehouse parking lots you'll need to go through (it does require a bit of an off road temperament here). They are for a storage facility and the Myers Carpet store and you're headed to Northside Drive, which you can cross over at the light at Deering. Turn north up Northside drive and walk until you reach the Atlanta Technology Center (ATC) complex. Here's where I give you two sub-options:

Sub-option 2.1: You can continue up Northside Drive and cross I-75 this way until you turn right on Echota Drive NW. If you choose this, stay on the right hand side of the road where you'll have a sidewalk almost all the way. Still, watch out for cars on this busy road. Go down Echota until you meet Walthall Drive NW. Turn left and you'll meet up with Tanyard Creek Park.

Option 2.2: Alternatively, you can go into the ATC complex, at the northern edge of which runs the train lines that the BeltLine follows. You're going to follow the train lines by walking along this extensive parking lot, keeping the train to your left hand side. You'll pass under an underpass and then there's a dirt trail through the kudzu up to your right. Take that and finagle your way down onto the Brookwood and Buckhead streets, making a path toward Tanyard Creek Trail. When you cross under I-75 here, you're separated from the train tracks by a safe distance. Once on the other side of the underpass, there is a path to the right through kudzu that I believe you can use to cross into. However, this part of the path, from into the



Kudzu and onto the Brookwood streets is the only suggestion in here that I haven't walked myself train runs, as I've just run out of time at this writing to physically trek this journey. It would be for the extreme off-roader, and will take an adventurous spirit and a risk-taking sensibility. Also, here's a great time to offer a reminder to please be aware and safe in your surroundings at all times.

Those options converged, now you should all be at Tanyard Creek Park! Make your way to the BeltLine Trail and head north. Along this path, we'll stop by several champion trees that are purported to be around 150 years old. With the age of trees, it's good to note that no one can be sure of the age of trees without taking a sample of the tree, so a lot of guesses are based on local knowledge.



The first one you'll meet here is a White Ash. It seems to have recently had storm damage, but it is beautiful and was named a champion in 2010, so has been quite a prodigious size for some time.

Near the exit of Bitsy Grant Tennis Center, you'll find a grove of trees on your left. Within this mini forest are two trees that catch the eye. One is a massive Tulip Poplar and the other is a huge White Oak. They stand bearing witness to the end of your walk, and hold within their experience your achievement, as well as decades upon decades of histories that have past beneath their ever arching branches.