

# ORLANDO *polaroid project*

Winter 2016  
ustler development

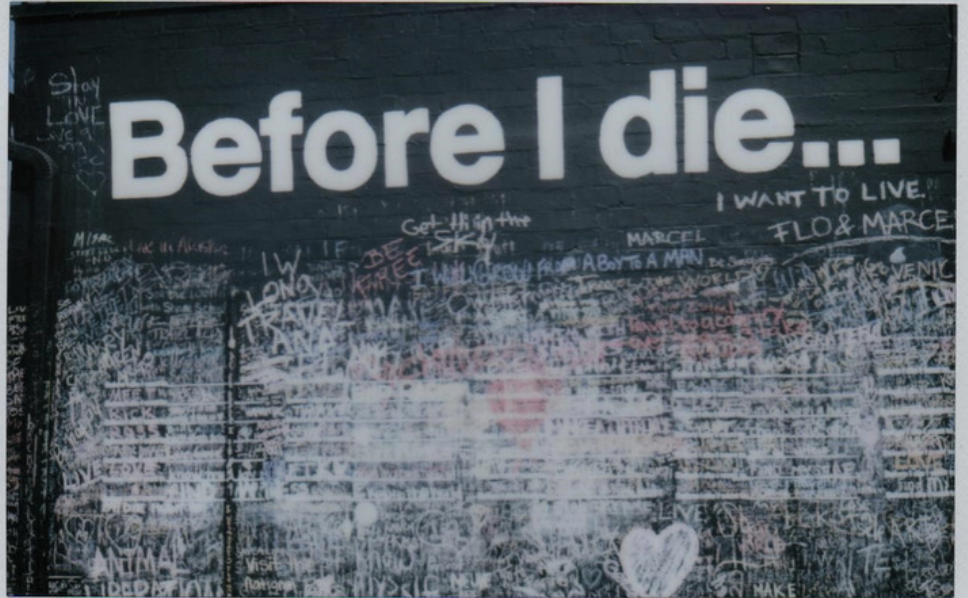


ORANGE AVE

## A COMMUNITY EFFORT

"Cities have the capability  
of providing something for  
everybody, only because,  
and only when, they are  
created by everybody."

– Jane Jacobs



TWO LEFT FEET



# 2016 was the year of the Orlando Polaroid Project.



Feathery drifters



② CH CH CH CHANGES



OPP was the result of several urban planning ideas and challenges that I've been thinking about for the past few years. I have found some validation in the popularity of cities and the documented market shift to walkable urbanism, but I'm left wondering why the places we are building don't feel better or create a sense of community.




From a technical standpoint, planners and zoning officials seem to have “gotten the memo” and walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods are now the standard. Moreover, market forces are clearly moving from drivable suburban to walkable urban development. This should be great news.

More apartments, higher density, social diversity, better planning, walkability, transit options, support of local businesses, community initiatives - all of these things should lead to better urbanism.








In the case of Orlando, we have a lot of the bad stuff but it seems to me that we want to improve things and are well positioned to build better places. Of course, I have felt this way for a long time and have spent the better part of the last twenty years trying to build meaningful and unique urban places. I'm not sure how much we've moved the needle, but I know it's worth trying.





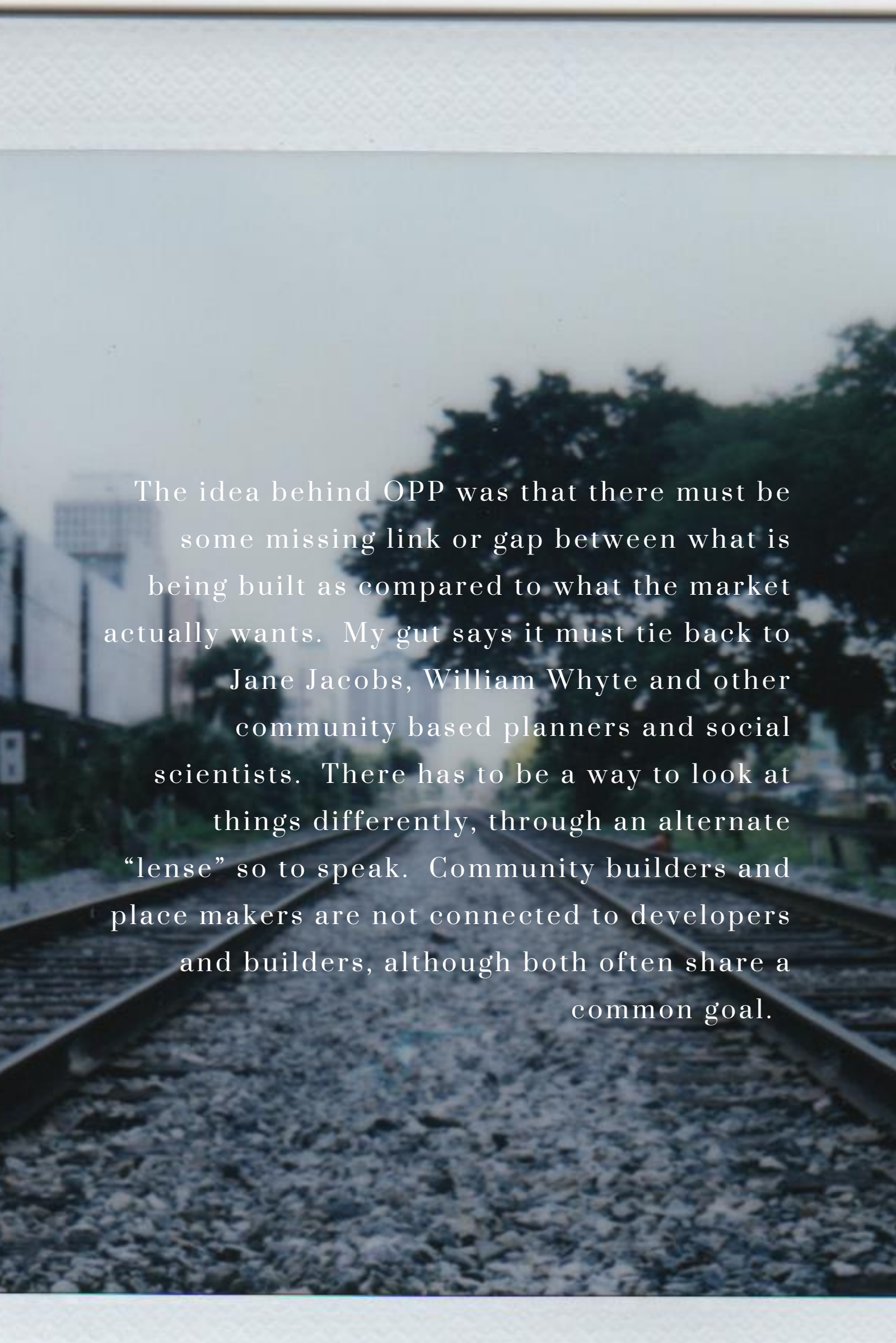
Great cities and public spaces are not built by developers or created by planners. They are hatched and sustained by people and citizens. To me, this reality is clear, yet misunderstood. I want to make the connection more obvious and intricate. I want to be a better listener, facilitator and aggregator of the things that lead to great urbanism and authentic places that are valued. How do we build places and not just buildings?





I believe that the things mentioned above, and many others, are working in our favor. But, I also struggle with how to achieve the end result. A lot of the new buildings are in fact in urban locations, but they are not really contributing to sense of “urbanism” or community.



A photograph of railroad tracks receding into the distance, flanked by trees and a building under a cloudy sky. The tracks are made of gravel and metal rails, leading the eye towards the horizon. On the left, there's a white building with a grid-like pattern. On the right, there are dark, leafy trees. The sky is overcast and grey.

The idea behind OPP was that there must be some missing link or gap between what is being built as compared to what the market actually wants. My gut says it must tie back to Jane Jacobs, William Whyte and other community based planners and social scientists. There has to be a way to look at things differently, through an alternate “lense” so to speak. Community builders and place makers are not connected to developers and builders, although both often share a common goal.



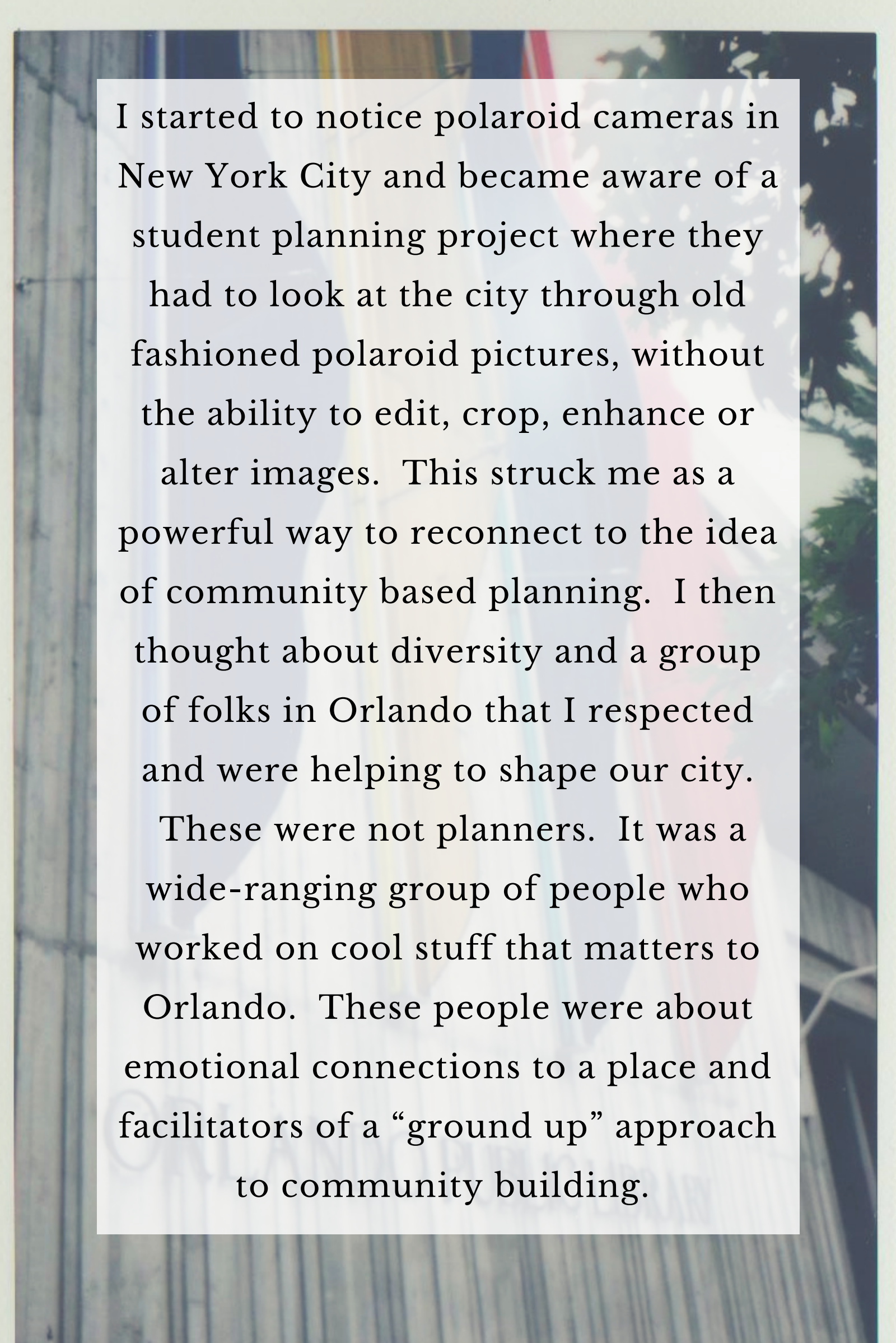


Meant for Consumption: Will changes spoil The Milk?



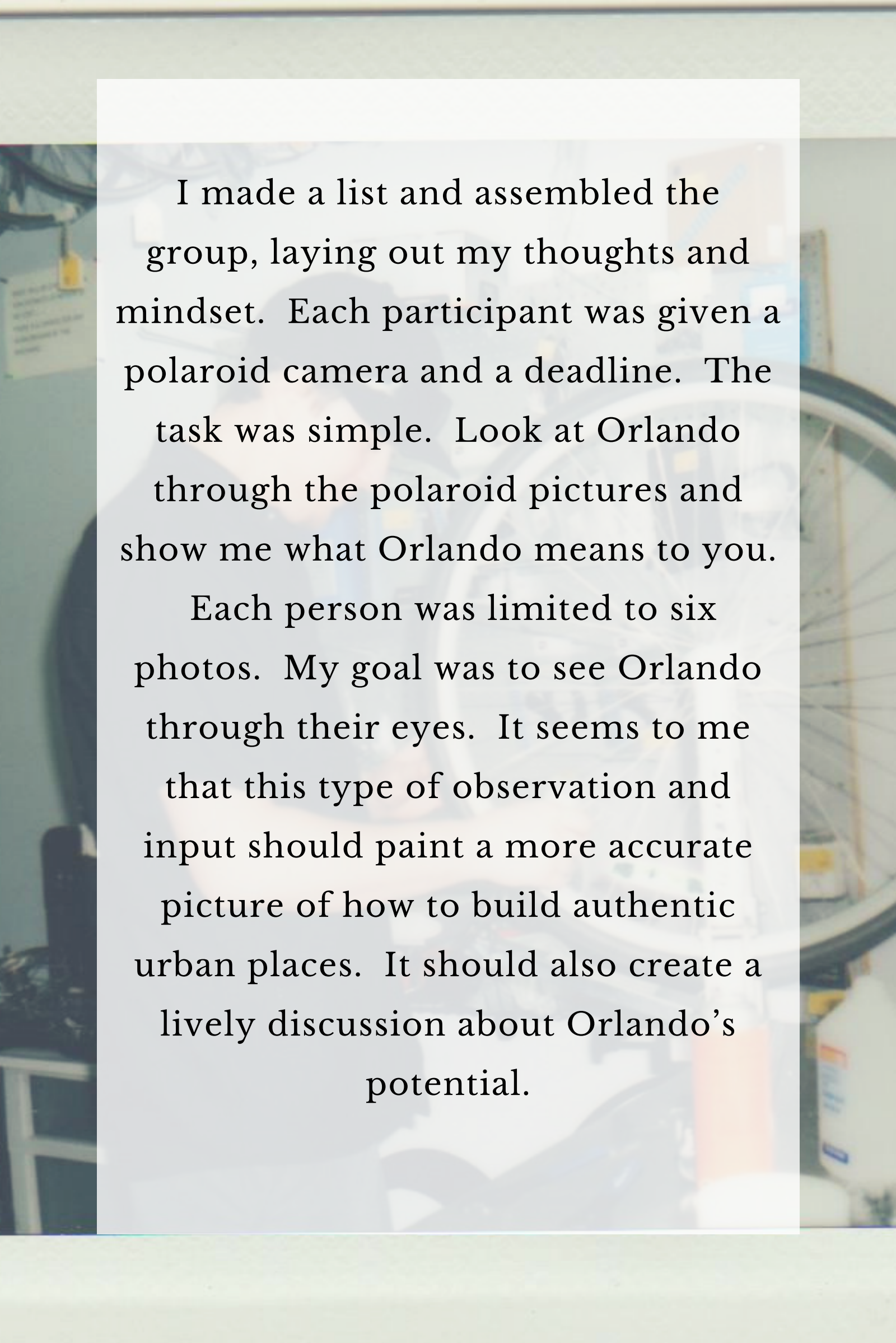
LIVE



The background of the image is a composite. On the left, there is a close-up of a Polaroid camera's lens and flash area. On the right, there is a blurred photograph of a city street with trees and buildings. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rectangular area in the center.

I started to notice polaroid cameras in New York City and became aware of a student planning project where they had to look at the city through old fashioned polaroid pictures, without the ability to edit, crop, enhance or alter images. This struck me as a powerful way to reconnect to the idea of community based planning. I then thought about diversity and a group of folks in Orlando that I respected and were helping to shape our city.

These were not planners. It was a wide-ranging group of people who worked on cool stuff that matters to Orlando. These people were about emotional connections to a place and facilitators of a “ground up” approach to community building.

The background of the image is a blurred photograph. On the right side, a bicycle wheel with spokes is visible. On the left side, a person's arm and hand are partially visible, holding what appears to be a camera or a similar device. The overall scene suggests an outdoor setting, possibly a bike path or a park.

I made a list and assembled the group, laying out my thoughts and mindset. Each participant was given a polaroid camera and a deadline. The task was simple. Look at Orlando through the polaroid pictures and show me what Orlando means to you.

Each person was limited to six photos. My goal was to see Orlando through their eyes. It seems to me that this type of observation and input should paint a more accurate picture of how to build authentic urban places. It should also create a lively discussion about Orlando's potential.



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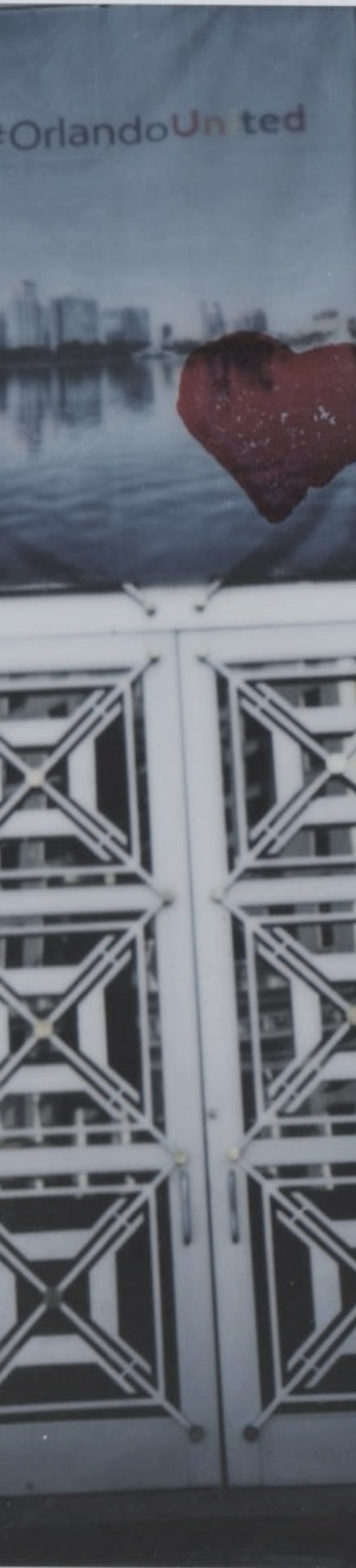
Everyone had a different take on things. The pictures were diverse. But, they showed a focus on human elements and visual cues that “said Orlando”. It struck me that most of the images were focused on unique people or things that were memorable. Jane Jacobs used to talk about the complexities of neighborhoods and the thought-provoking observations of daily life at street level. It was useful to see how everyone applied this approach.

#102



There were four meetings of the group. We shared our backgrounds and stories. I explained my commitment to Orlando and my mindset of real estate development as a “took kit” to deliver social and community well-being. Each participant shared their story of why Orlando mattered to them.





In my mind, if we want to build better places, we need to start with a process like OPP. It seems that this approach is more authentic and useful than design charrettes, preference surveys, market studies or zoning codes. If we can get communities to present their own photos and images of what Orlando means to them, this should form a good base for community building. Developers are often dictating their vision of what a so-called “place” should be, yet they have not undertaken a process like OPP.

In Orlando, we have placed great emphasis on big projects and goals. These things are necessary and provide value. But, if we stop there, we have merely achieved a certain level of success by checking things off a list. If we don't focus on furthering the effort and leveraging our accomplishments to foster community building, the result will be underwhelming.

I hope that OPP participants feel like they had a voice in what we will plan for new projects. I want to build what they want. I need to figure out how to make the pictures transform themselves into the places that we develop. I have to figure out how to help these ideas grow and flourish.



At the end of OPP, I felt much more connected to everyone that participated. I hope I forged a better relationship amongst a diverse cast of Orlandoans who feel encouraged about our future.

Much of my intent was just to get the ball rolling and have us think more about how projects like OPP can make a difference.

But, on a personal note, I also wanted to simply say “thank you” to the participants and help them be heard via a framework to share ideas. This type of collaboration can be impactful and I look forward to continuing the exercise.

I am not sure of our next step and am looking for input from everyone. Maybe this was just a fun exercise that made us all better friends along with furthering some critical thinking about what “urbanism” should look like. If so, that is a good result. But maybe this project will make us think deeper, try harder and keep going. I hope so. And I look forward to hearing from you about what we can do next.



**OPP was ultimately about the participants and their vision of Orlando. From my standpoint, it made me feel good to know that we have a great group of people that are doing amazing things.**



Temporary Public Art.



LOOK UP

A special thanks to Ashley and Charlotte for helping me.

Happy new year everyone. Please rest assured that your efforts make a difference. More than anything else, I believe better urbanism and a higher quality of civic life will shape Orlando's future.

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody." – Jane Jacobs

"It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished." – William H. Whyte

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Sarah Peerani**

**2016 inaugural  
class**