

Susan Floyd Barnett

Palimpsest

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All photographs and text are by the author with the following exceptions:

Archimedes Palimpsest images, page 32-33 courtesy of the Walters Museum, archimedespalimpsest.net.

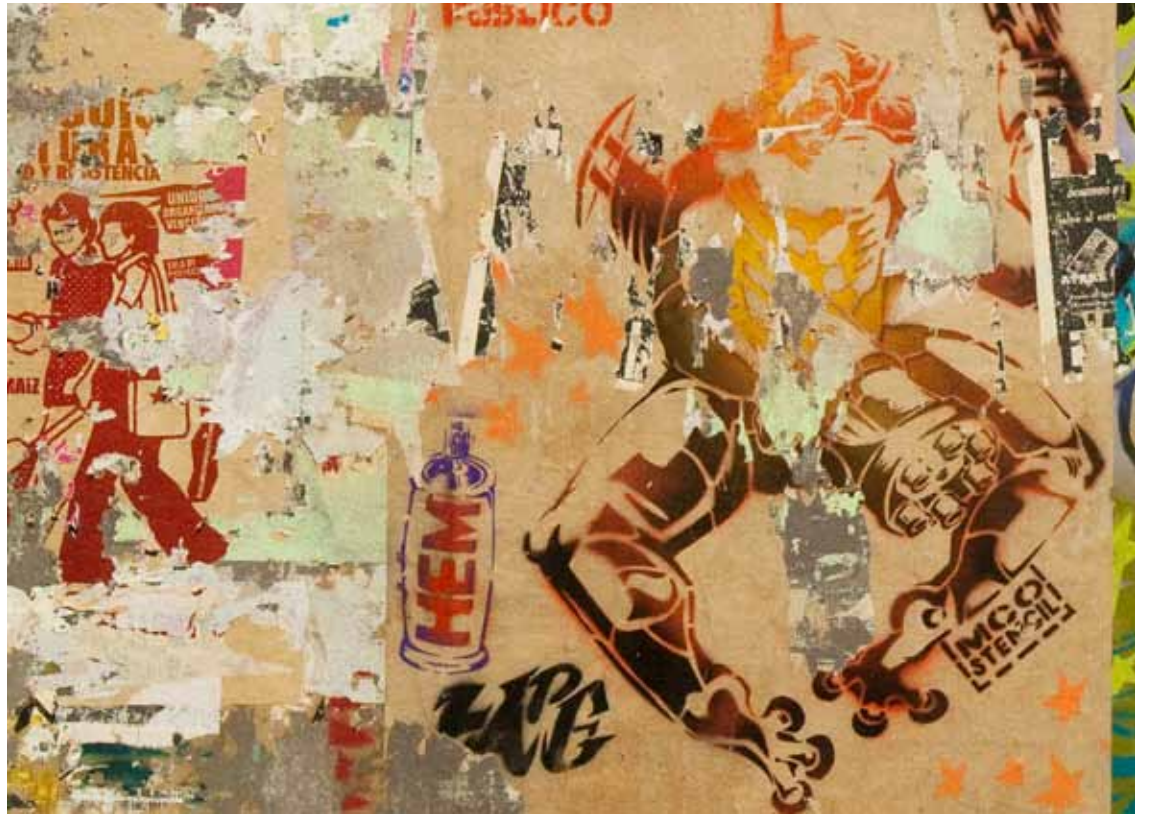
Frontispiece: Italian Choir Manuscripts, c. 14th to 17th centuries, UW-Milwaukee Special Collections, Acc. No. 1987.158.

Palimpsest (preliminary)

1. [The parchment was] scraped again, [and] prepared for writing on and wiping out again, like a slate. 2. A parchment which has been written upon twice, the original writing having been rubbed out.

Handwritten musical notation on a palimpsest page. The text is mostly illegible due to fading and bleed-through from the reverse side. Visible fragments include "te di rora", "patoris qui", and "mora".

Decorated musical manuscript page. The text is written in black ink on a white background with red four-line staves. A large, ornate initial 'D' in blue and red with gold filigree marks the beginning of a section. The text includes: "Satto", "fede co", "Dignourit nec.", "post:", "pent:", "ois a d. a. a.", "usq berabe e go rice", "lis famul, ppheta esset do", "min. p. Magt. a.", and "id". The page is decorated with floral and foliate motifs in blue, red, and green.





*The present overwrites the past, scraping away history to prepare its own blank slate.
New is layered over old in the name of progress or expediency, covering, yet colored by what went before
in ways that are unanticipated, unacknowledged, and often unseen.*

Oaxaca Muralla, 2009



Goldmanns, Milwaukee 2011



Dreaming of Big Sky Country, Milwaukee 2011



By Design, Milwaukee 2008



The Architecture is the Museum, Milwaukee 2010

Real estate become an abstraction. Suddenly, assets of the middle and working classes were scraped from electronic ledger sheets like ink from parchment, leaving empty homes and businesses amid once-booming suburbs.

These suburbs, in turn, had been constructed over abandoned farms; the peeling barns razed and crops scraped away to receive the latest manifestation of the recurring American Dream. The old land lust was embodied in particle board and wall-to-wall carpet, weed-free lawns and vinyl-sided two-car garages.



Row Crops, Elgin IL 2009



Commercial Site, Elgin IL 2009



Falls Road, Grafton WI 2008



Hired Hand's House, Central Illinois 2010

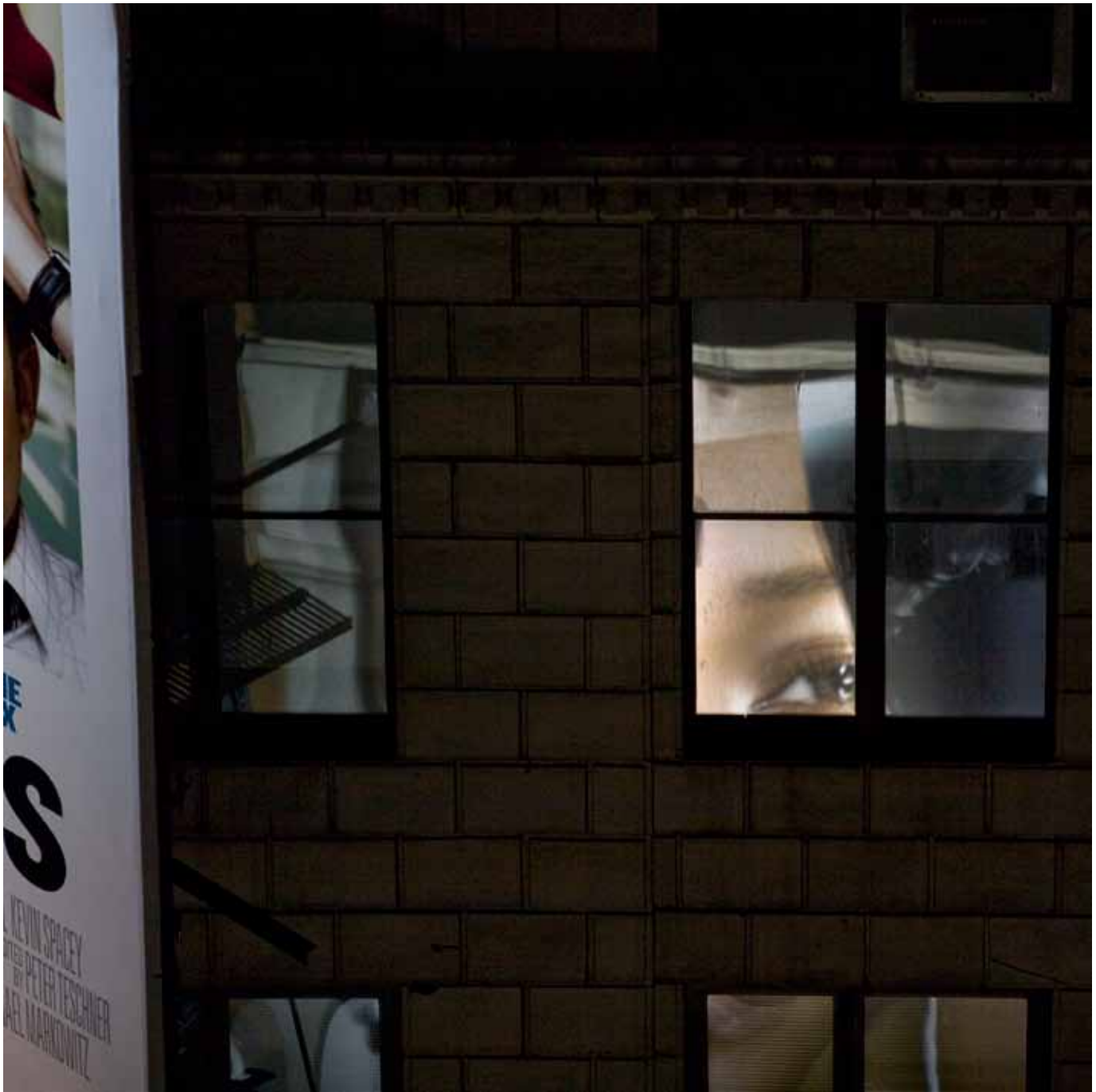


Facade, Thomasboro IL 2010

In this age of churning newness, the burning edge of consumption constantly recycles itself into retro chic. Styles fade and renew faster than outmoded clothing and furniture can be delivered to thrifts. The strip malls that doomed the downtowns of small communities, themselves now suburbs linked by highways to urban centers, stand with empty windows reflecting vacant acres of webbed and crumbling asphalt overlaid with a geometry of fading white and yellow stripes.

Ledger Sheet: Rows and Columns, Elgin IL 2009





Looking out on Broadway, NY 2011



Sunset at the Strip Mall, Grafton 2011

Twin City Plaza, Grafton 2009





Untitled, Quincy 2011



Big Ben, Milwaukee 2011



Waterbeds 4 Less, Quincy IL 2011



Sunlit Days Inn, Quincy IL 2011



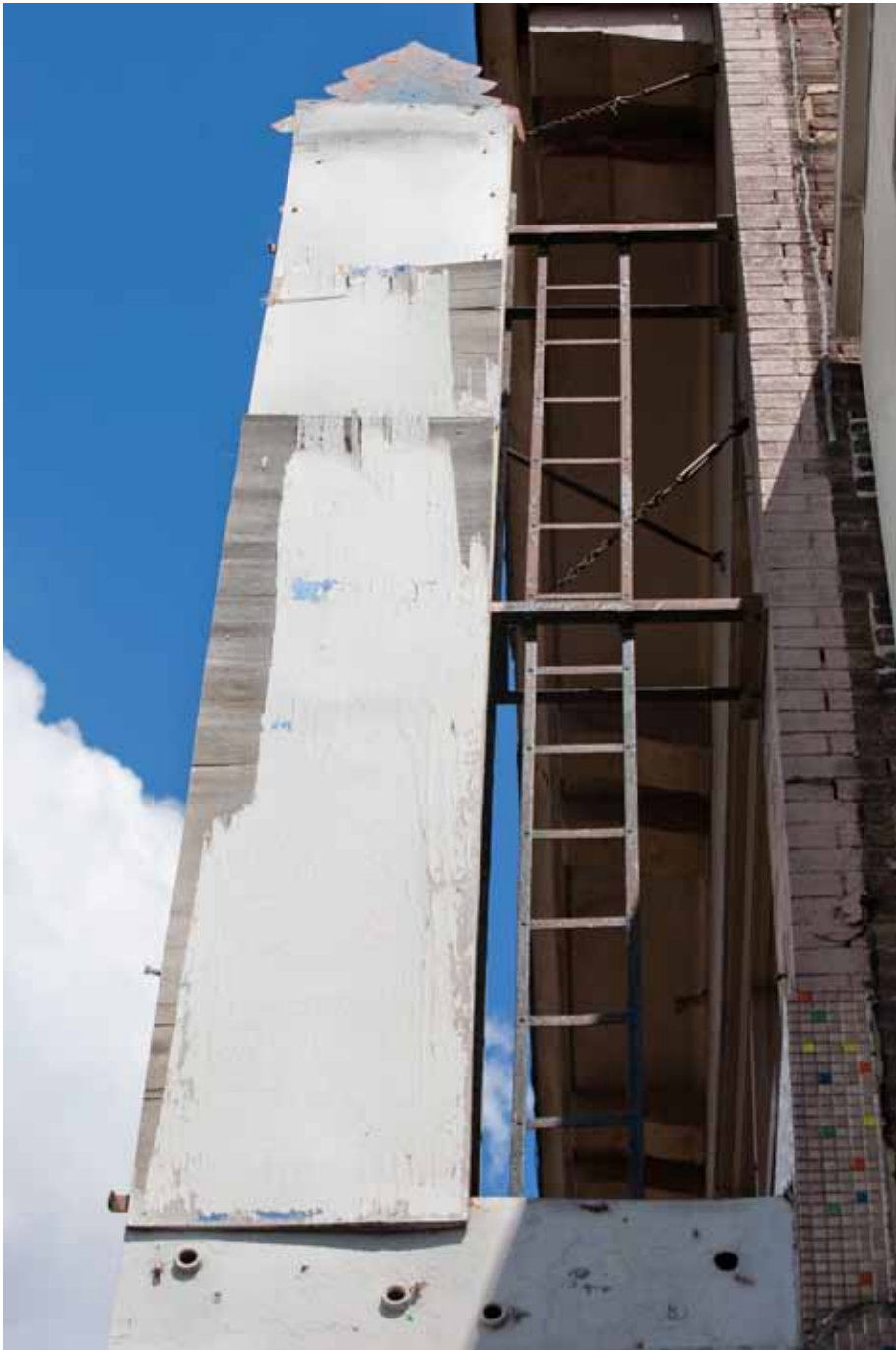
National Building, Milwaukee 2011

V u

L e

Boo

ishing Text



Tabula Rasa, Milwaukee 2011



For Information, Milwaukee 2008



Coin Wash, South Milwaukee 2009



Pay Phone, Milwaukee 2011



Call it vandalism, art, graffiti, or free expression, the urge to write over something intended for another purpose is part of being human.

"I was here!"

Agave, Oaxaca, 2009



Grain Elevator, Camargo IL; Muralla, Oaxaca; Birds of Grant Park, South Milwaukee; Whiting, Milwaukee, 2003-2011

A thousand years from now, when twenty-first century landfills are mined, will shattered hard drives and plastic shards still reveal traces of our culture's wisdom?

The text of the Archimedes Palimpsest is an invisible stain hidden beneath the decomposing pages of a thirteenth-century prayer book. The only extant copy of two treatises written by the Greek scholar in the third century BC, Archimedes' text and drawings were carried forward through the centuries as hand-scribed copies of copies on vellum, the medieval equivalent of migrating data from floppy disk to hard drive; from film to VHS to digital media. Eventually, the vellum inscribed with the last copy of the two treatises was scraped and re-used.

According to Wikipedia, itself a continuous palimpsest of ideas, "the existence [during the Middle Ages] of cleaned parchment that was never overwritten suggests that there was also a spiritual motivation, to sanctify pagan text by overlaying it with the word of God, somewhat as pagan sites were overlaid with Christian churches to hallow pagan ground."

Archimedes' treatises were scraped away, the vellum cut in half and re-written, and the works lay dormant beneath devotional text for centuries. Almost invisible to the eye, faint chemical residues of the original text remained beneath candle wax, liturgical prayers, and twentieth-century forgeries. In the first ten years of the new millennium, using the most advanced imaging technologies, most of the ancient text was revealed.

I imagine the Archimedes Palimpsest lost and forgotten again, its only record coded in binary language, inscribed on silica sand. Only time will tell whether this, or any of our electronic palimpsests, will be recovered. Digital memories may prove to be as fleeting as thought, the entire body of collective knowledge as ephemeral as the soul.





Photographs courtesy of the Walters Museum, archimedespalimpsest.net.



The cathedral at Mitla (the place of the dead) was built on an ancient holy site, from the stones of temples the conquistadors destroyed.



Mitla, Oaxaca Cathedral, 2009



Pastor Ted's Mobile Church, Milwaukee 2011





Dements of God; Nancy and Jesus, Hwy 61, Vicksburg MS 2009



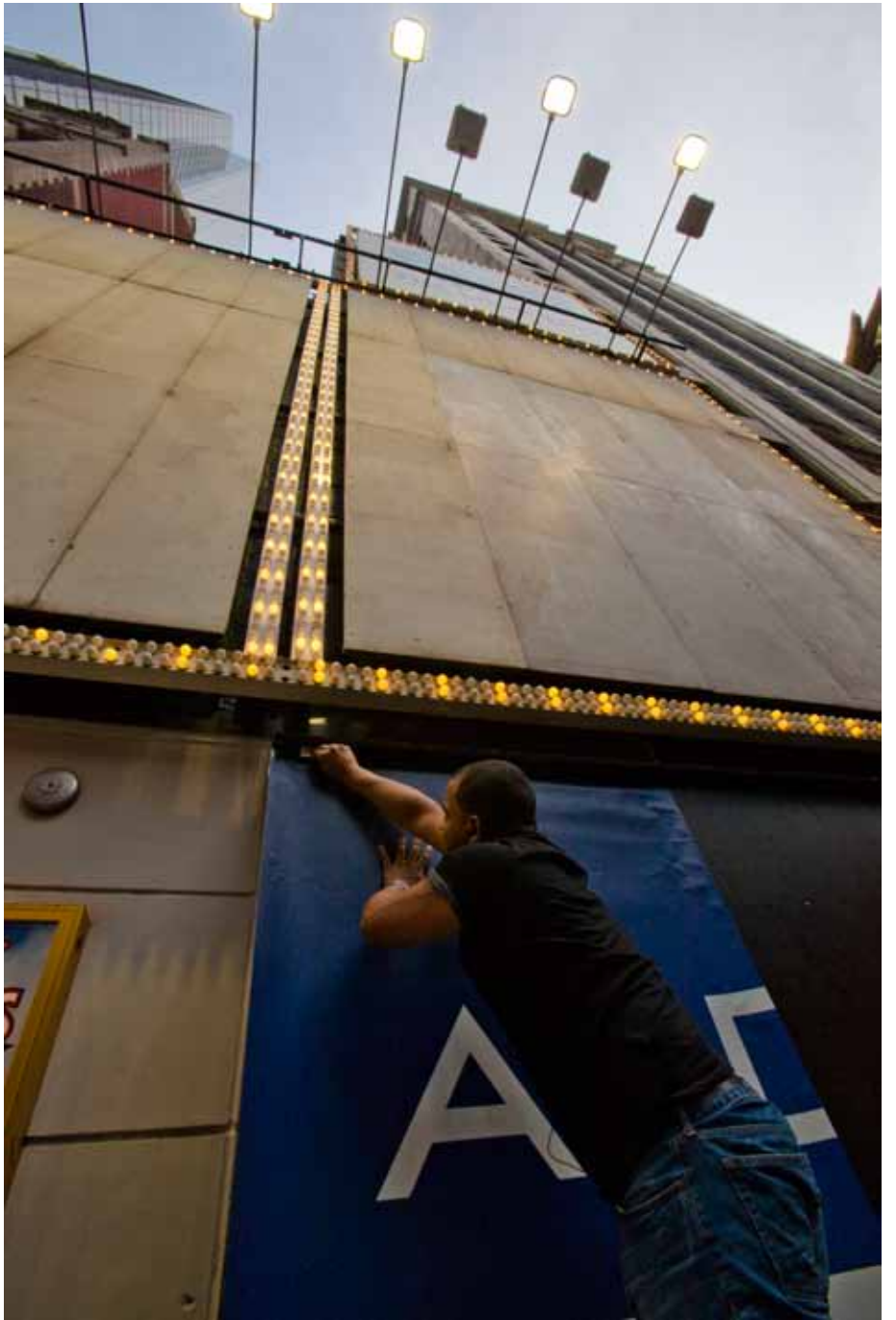
Elevate, Greenville MS 2011



The Alternative, Warsaw IL 2011



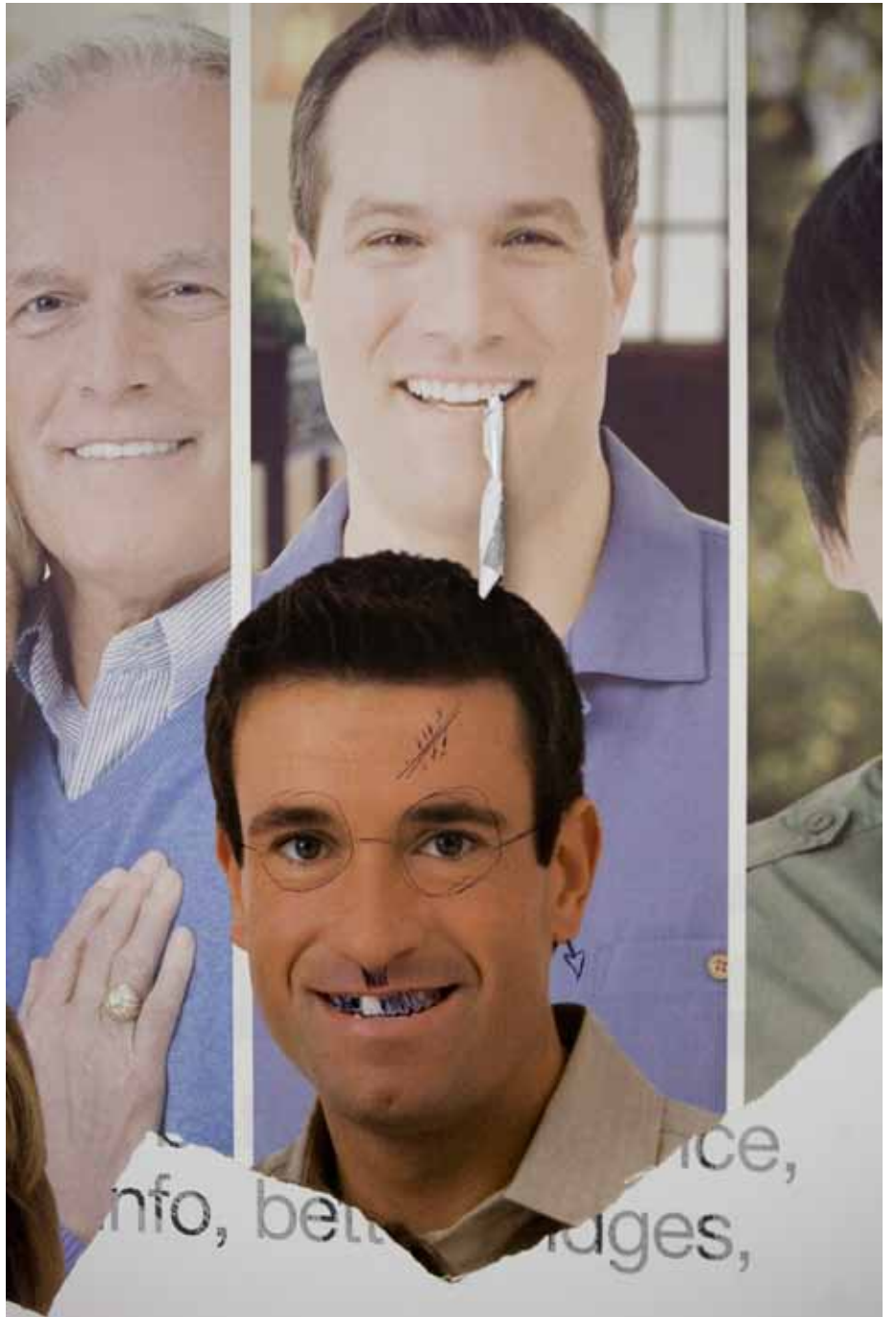
Grant's Soul Food, Milwaukee 2010



Broadway Marquis, NY 2011



Getaway, Chicago 2011



Subway Poster, NY 2011

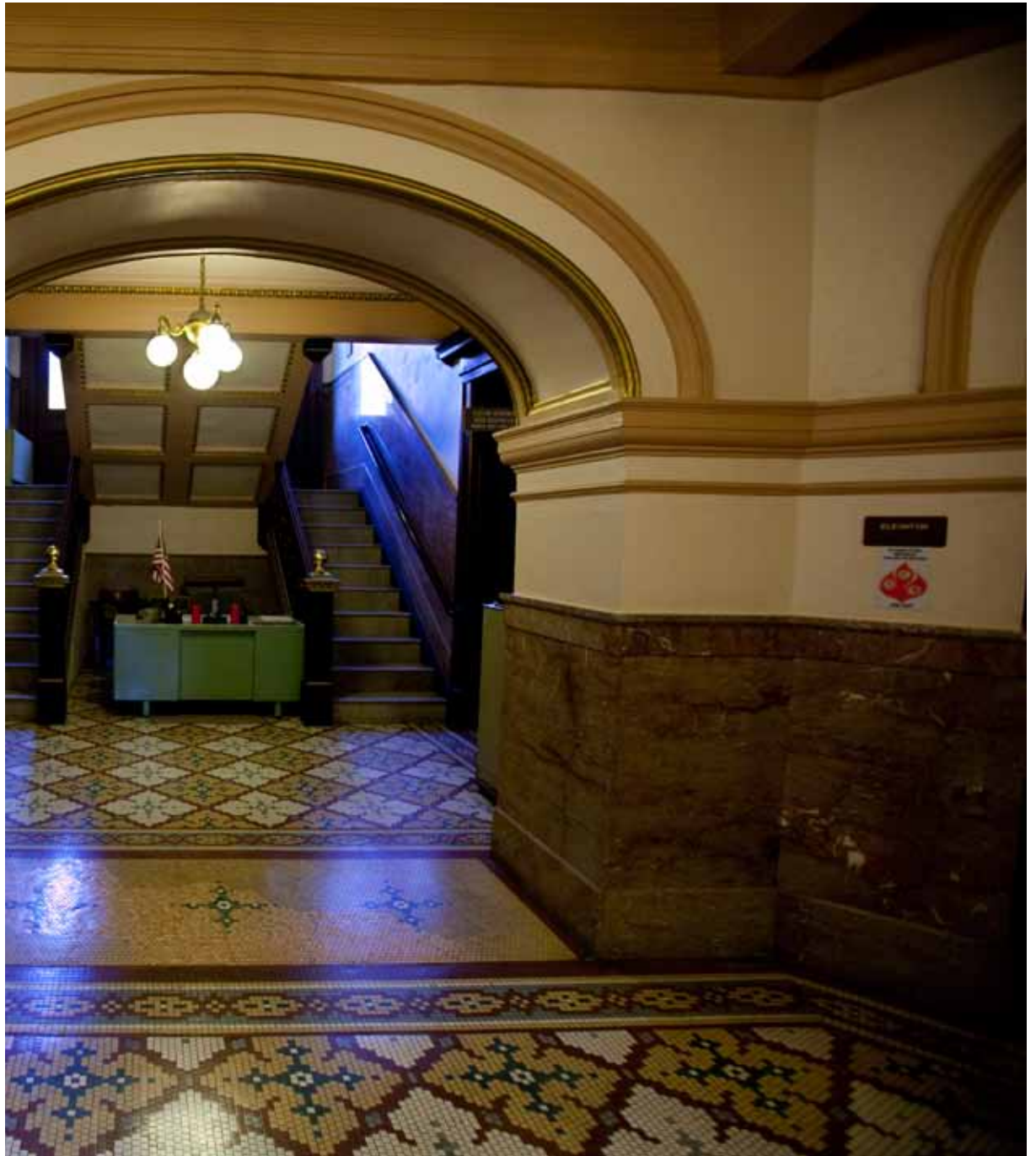


Revision, South Milwaukee 2011



Subliminal Hypnosis, Quincy IL 2011





Democracy goes better with Coke, Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage IL 2011





Fourth of July Windows, Warsaw, IL 2011



Big Joy, Greenville MS 2011



Main Street, Warsaw IL 2011





Archetypes, Shop Window, Warsaw IL 2009

Slipping Away, Milwaukee WI 2011



Palimpsest (pæ·limpsest), *sb.* and *a.* 1661
[ad. L. *palimpsestus* *sb.*, *a.* Gr. *παλίμψηστος*
scraped again, *f.* *πάλιν* again + *ψηστός*, *f.* *ψην*
to rub smooth.] **A.** *sb.* †1. Paper, parchment
etc., prepared for writing on and wiping out
again, like a slate -1706. **2.** A parchment,
etc., which has been written upon twice, the
original writing having been rubbed out 1825.
Also *fig.* **3.** A monumental brass turned and
re-engraved on the reverse side 1876. **B.** *adv.*

Of a manuscript : see A. 2. 1852. **2.** **O.**

monumental brass : see A. 3. 1843.



*Self-portrait after Thomas Smith
Susan Barnett is an artist, photographer and curator living in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin*



Posted..., Lions Gorge, Grafton, WI 2006