

# Trumbullplex

## DIY anarchist living in the heart of Detroit

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In a not-so-typical area of Detroit, close to Wayne State University, slowly redefined and made more attractive for investment and middle-class living, the Trumbullplex and some of its immediate neighbors stand out. Trumbull (for short) is a 17 year-old shabby DIY anarchist living arrangement more concerned with how to be supportive of one another and less how it's seen by the broader community.

The Trumbullplex proper is two large houses in various states of disrepair and a medium-sized community/work space, called the "theatre," soon to be home to a zine library. This part of the complex is attempting to be especially organized compared to the whole because it serves many different uses.

The theatre is attached to "the big house" and helps raise money and spirits for all sorts of projects in the community. For three years it's been run by a small semi-autonomous collective composed of "x-plex," current residents, and friends. Trumbull is well suited to be home to about ten idealistic young people with other animals, and occasional guests, but the Trumbullplex community extends beyond these buildings.

With a good bit of moving in and out and a handful of longer-term residents, it's proven to be a challenging environment, especially, it seems, for parents. It's seen its share of children running about, but more often they're not staying there.

As our community tries to extend itself beyond an often tightly-woven group so we may share our space, time and other resources with many different types of people, successful events help us realize the impact we have on others and how it feels to effectively work together.

Here, the theatre and its efforts play a key role. Each well-done event is a small victory that indicates how many hands, heads, and hearts—however flawed—can get the job done. When in doubt, this unity indicates the whole project should at least continue, regardless of whether you feel you personally can maintain your efforts there.

Trumbullplex has heart, but it's got problems not unlike Detroit's. There is a perpetual call for self-reflection and possible reorganization, but these are sensitive issues unlikely to receive the full attention they deserve in a timely manner.

Efforts to find consensus in the particulars of how, what, where and everything in between mean we are often immersed in some level of drama. The notion you have to learn to agree to disagree is strong, and momentum for projects are often left in a state of imbalance as individuals sometimes struggle to finish it themselves or to advocate for collective attention.

Compared to the amount of hanging out that happens, this can be a source of tension. Good intentions are widely available, but to say that friends and associates don't really want to hold one another accountable all the time is an understatement.

The original mission statement was thorough and forward thinking, a good basic set of guidelines for what to do when concerns arise. For better or worse, it understandably doesn't help when it comes to day-to-day living together, so it's not really something folks rely on much these days.

The creative use of our property–owned and managed together, with no bosses but different personalities and opinions in play, all with little money (we do not solicit grants)–creates situations where you remember that it’s about how people treat each other. That is also where the beauty of continuity to the past adventures in collective organizing shines the most. There have likely been over 150 residents so far since 1993 and it’s still going.

No matter how old you are or how long you’ve been involved, if you are paying any amount of attention, it’s hard not to feel a nagging, “I wonder what will happen next around here?”

Perhaps this is what ties us together, that invisible waiting for...who knows what? At times, it seems we each believe it’s about the relationships, but those relationships are not the same for all and inevitably someone usually feels left out.

There is privilege and informal hierarchy and issues a-plenty, but the unavoidable political matters of who participates and how much in this or any context cannot be worked out under a planned system or single vision. It must be a fiery transformative living process for those who dare engage in it. I call it “struggle,” and in fact we do struggle a lot at Trumbullplex. This must mean we are on the path to some level of social enlightenment, right?

After all, there is hope. We are not all on the same page and sometimes there’s good reason to want this, but with as many different people who have lived at the Trumbullplex, it does get a little bit hard and one wonders what it would take for things to go a little smoother. It seems that new folks come from out of all sorts of weird books, so we probably never have been on the same page. But getting close counts.

Over the years, after a lot of hard work and critical thinking, I’ve thought it necessary we “get it together” and not risk losing what so many different people have contributed to already. I am beginning to realize, however, that is what I want, and there is no reason why one individual should get what they want no matter how dedicated they have been.

Our full potential may be limited, but for good reasons, and perhaps for the best. It’s a fantastic situation and means something different to each person involved; as much as you can try and observe the process, it’s not something to be rushed. Along the way it is crucial that each give back, and I’d still suggest even giving it your all!

The Trumbullplex is an inspiring, still-growing 17 year-old, and when it matures, it will figure out how to deal with issues like folks who are not contributing enough to its well-being and to the community’s, and then it will be a force to be reckoned with. One only hopes that opportunities for all to learn and grow when questions are asked or mistakes are made will not get lost in the confusion, critiques or complacency.

We need to make our lives in relation to one another sacred, not scared (if it were all only a simple spelling error!). Trumbull perhaps unwittingly helps others find that in themselves.

So, what I have learned about doing-it-yourself is that if you do decide to do things that help others, then commit to it regardless of whether you get back up or not–do so without fear or regret and you will empower yourself.

If along the way you begin to burn-out and wonder whether it is possible for people to ever resolve their differences to build something amazing together, then just remember, doing nothing is not an option.

#### **Some of our accomplishments...**

Ten years before the now-booming Detroit urban gardening movement, we were hard at work lending a hand and working together to reclaim land for growing community and our own food. We have a beautiful orchard, multiple gardens, chickens and bees.

- we have made it a point to interact with the homeless in the area as our neighbors, also people with disabilities or mental and emotional health issues, usually through a free box (which is no easy task to keep tidy)
- we have solid and often loving relationships with our neighbors and realize through them what it means to actually be a community. We have hosted and introduced countless numbers of people from all over the world to Detroit
- the T Plex is and has been an ally to LGBTQ people.
- a third house was purchased in Southwest Detroit and failed as a woman’s collective, but is now home to an x-plex family still involved in the community

- we have opened our homes up to tours and consistent (though not always well-publicized) potlucks: Food Not Bombs, Anti-Racist Action, and many radical artists have all found a home there. We have hosted weddings, dinners, memorials, the circus and sideshows, puppet troupes, and punx from Los Crudos and Chumbawumba to Defiance Ohio and The Suicide Machines
- we are very supportive of independent music in general with amazing bands performing in our theatre like Ida, Lungfish and Teeth Mountain. Poets, fashion shows, a million creative varieties of fund-raisers, and a billion youth who just needed a place to go and be with others who wanted to have fun and celebrate, or commiserate, like humans need to do without having to pay an arm and a leg. we've had problems with our neighbors but raised money for them when they were in need
- we've smashed bottles and TVs and torn down walls, been arrested together, danced 'til the sun came up, and been harassed both by the police and the feds, then used the large floor space to make banners for demonstrations
- art shows galore, a sprout-growing business, and zines! can't forget about all the zines and literature distros, plus workshops, work with local promoters and tons of local bands
- we were the only DIY all-ages, cheap, trying-to-be-safe-and-cool space in Metro Detroit
- we don't do grants, so if /when you visit and its not all you expected, please cut us a little slack, at least we're still here holding down the D, and that's Das in Detroit, defiant, determined, and DIY as fuck!

John Clark (a.k.a. Hone A) is a DIY community builder/repairman, slater, poet, partner, parent, and member of the Trumbullplex Theatre collective. He hopes to write a history of the Trumbullplex in time for its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. If you are ex-plex, have stories, photos, rare flyers feel free to write him at 2931 Poplar, Detroit MI 48208 or email trumbullplex — AT — gmail — DOT — com

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