14 October 2015

A-5 Can define and analyze a creative process.

1. Can define the concept of creativity.
2. Can identify, analyze, and describe the components of a creative process in one or more fields of human endeavor.
3. Can explain how engaging in a creative process affects one's perception of the world.

L-4 Writing Proficiency Portfolio Exam Narrative Essay

The Cubist and the Squares:

Chicago and the Untitled Monumental Picasso Sculpture

Preface

As a general contractor in Chicago I was solicited in 2013 to make renovations for a rental property owner. Part of the scope of work included replacing a set of derelict wooden stairs with a new metal one. I consider my trade and skill knowledge base to be deep and wide, but I had never learned how to weld and this was a great opportunity to "earn while I learn".

Welding, as it turns out, requires much more skill and finesse than I originally thought. My crew and I did eventually finish the repairs but the stairs took longer than expected. As a native Chicagoan with a newfound respect for the welding trade in mind, I started to wonder: "How in the world did they build that Picasso sculpture in Daley Plaza?"

Through independent research I discovered that the National Archives at Chicago (7358 S. Pulaski) had a trove of documents relating to the entire process of getting the sculpture designed and put into place. I took a day off and went down to the archives to take a look at what they had. Fascinated, I brought back copies of photos and documents, many of which I have used to write this paper.

Introduction

In the story that follows we will explore the creative process as it relates to the conceptualization, design, construction and installation of Pablo Picasso's giant sculpture in the plaza of the Daley Center in downtown Chicago. The story begins with the climax, then restarts at the true beginning with an idea: "we need a piece of art created to augment this building we have created". We'll see how parameters are defined for the creativity to take place, then explore how an artist's perception evolves over time to result in the final product. The creative process continues to flow as the baton is passed to the builders, who must turn a pint-sized model into a gallon-sized permanent reality.

Creativity can be defined as "… a phenomenon whereby something new and somehow valuable is formed." ("Creativity", Wikipedia). The word "creativity" has many different meanings for many people. For engineers, it can be the novel solution to a problem. For novelists, it could be the entire process of writing a book. A painter might tell you that creativity is something that happens in the mind only, and that paintings are simply the physical manifestations of these thoughts. A classical aesthete may say that modern art requires no creativity at all, and that splattering paint or piling garbage are simply processes requiring no imagination.

The process of creating the "Chicago Picasso" sculpture involved many people besides the great artist himself. From an architect's perspective, the sculpture is but one component of a greater project. Many of those involved wrote personal anecdotes that reveal their thoughts at the time. They detail how working on the project shaped their views towards Picasso and his

earlier works, towards the city of Chicago, and towards the entire concept of urban art, especially large sculptures. In fact, up until the Picasso, civic art had been mostly of civic leaders, and definitely not abstract (Artner, 2015).

Let us take a trip back to the turbulent 1960's.

Unveiling

August 15, 1967: A crowd of 50,000 people stands in and around the plaza of the Chicago Civic (now Richard J. Daley) Center. Another 10,000 watch down from nearby buildings. The adjacent Washington, Dearborn and Clark streets are "closed by the mass of people… several blocks in every direction" (Penrose, 1967, p.1). The crowd surrounds around a huge mass cloaked in a green tarpaulin perforated by wind vents. Speeches are made and applause rings out. Mayor Richard J. Daley presents a gift "to the people of Chicago" (Artner, 2015). A rope is pulled and the tarp drifts down after "…just the right amount of obstacles so that the dramatic effect was heightened" (Penrose, 1967, p.1, see fig. 1).

Fig.1 - Civic Center Plaza, August 15, 1967 (Tribune Co.)

A massive metal sculpture 50 feet tall and weighing 162 tons shows her face (Artner, 2015). The crowd applauds again and the debate begins, which hasn't stopped to this day.

"It looks like an ugly monkey!" Some people say.

"It's obviously a woman's head" say others.

"No, no, no, can't you see it's a bird?"

Mike Royko, famed Chicago newspaper columnist and muckraker, said "Its eyes are like the eyes of every slum owner who made a buck off the small and weak. And of every building inspector who took a wad from a slum owner to make it all possible.... You'd think he'd been riding the L all his life" ("Chicago Picasso", Wikipedia).

Col. Jack Reilly, the mayor's director of special events, wanted the sculpture removed. Ald. John J. Hoellen recommended the City Council "deport" the piece and construct in its place a statue of "Mr. Cub … Ernie Banks" (Arter, 2015).

Sir Roland Penrose, English surrealist artist, friend of Picasso and point man in France for the Chicago project describes it from an artist's perspective:

> Serene and evocative … the great head is more than a head. At first sight it is the head of a woman with ample flowing hair. The simplicity of the outline … prompts the imagination to fill in the empty spaces and also encourages other associations, just as words in a poem can convey more than one meaning. The two wing-like shapes … suggest with equal truth the fragile wings of a butterfly or the powerful flight of an eagle, while … the rods that connect them with the profile seem to contain the music of a guitar. The magic of this great head lies not only in the … combination of shapes … and its vital proportions but also in the unprecedented way in which human features are established in space. The materials of which it is made are primarily air and light, held together decisively by the rigid metal. …Subtlety, simplicity and strength combine throughout to make this a splendid evocation of that concentration of wonder, a woman's head. (1965, pp.3-4)

Back to the Beginning

1960: Chicago architecture firm SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) is leading the design effort for the city's new Civic Center building and plaza. The plans include a monumental sculpture, and a roomful of architects must agree on a single artist to design the massive art piece. Architect Manny Carter recalls "It was suggested we put names in a hat, and, remarkably enough, everyone had chosen Pablo Picasso" (Lanier, 2015).

William Hartmann, head architect of the SOM office, proposes Picasso to Mayor Daley. The mayor replies “if you gentlemen think he’s the greatest, that’s what we want for Chicago, and you go ahead” (Lanier, 2015).

Hartman is given a lofty task: Convince the greatest living artist at the time to design a public sculpture far larger than any of the artist’s works to date. He contacts Roland Penrose, an artist and close friend of Picasso, and asks for his help in convincing the master to take on the commission. Penrose agrees and writes to Picasso:

> “There is an ambitious project to speak to you about. Some American friends from Chicago have written and telephoned me twice to ask if you might be tempted to design the maquette (model) for a monumental sculpture to be erected in the principal square in the centre of Chicago.” (Sotheby’s)

Picasso agrees to a meeting with Penrose, Hartmann and the other chief architects for the project. As gratuities, the delegation brings: “A White Sox uniform, a Bears helmet, a fireman`s hat, an Indian war bonnet and photos of Ernest Hemingway (a longtime friend of the artist) and Carl Sandburg.” (Gapp, 1992). Since the artist has never been to Chicago, they also brought a scale model of the Civic Center Plaza and a large photo album filled with pictures of the city.

Initially Picasso shows interest but will not commit to the project. After several more visits by Hartmann, the artist agrees and says: "You know I never accept commissions to do any sort of work, but in this case I am involved in projects for the two great gangster cities" (the other being Marseille, France). (“Chicago Picasso”, Wikipedia)

Rewind a Little More

1950's: Picasso begins exploring the female form in sheet metal sculptures, where he focuses on "building the face out of separate planes and opening up the body to reveal the space within". (See fig. 1 & 2, Sotheby's)

Pablo Picasso, *Sylvette*, 1954, painted metal. Sold: Sotheby's, New York, 7th May 2013

Figure 1, (Sotheby's)

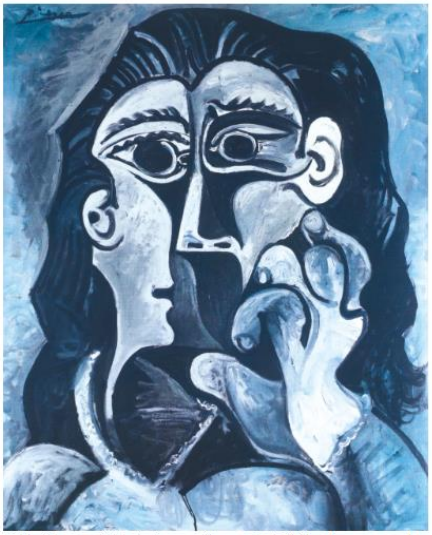
Pablo Picasso, *Femme au chapeau*, 1961-63, painted sheet iron. Fondation Beyeler, Basel

Figure 2, (Sotheby's)

In the early 1960's, Picasso executes many drawings of his wife, Jaqueline, which "…illustrate the gradual opening up of the space between the centrally parted hair and the elongated, flattened nose and neck, which in many of them is fashioned as a carved chair leg." (See fig. 3 & 4, Sotheby's)

Jacqueline Roque at La Californie, 1956. Photograph by André Villers

Figure 3 (Sotheby's)



Pablo Picasso, *Tête de femme (Jacqueline)*, 1961, oil on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Figure 4 (Sotheby's)

Picasso had been fascinated by the concept of monumental sculpture for many years. As Penrose said in 1965:

> It occupied his thoughts particularly in the early 30's when he first designed sculptures made of thin rods enclosing volumes of empty space and also painted many canvases and made drawings of great sculptural heads piled up against the sky which can be thought of as architectural projects big enough for human habitation. (p.2)

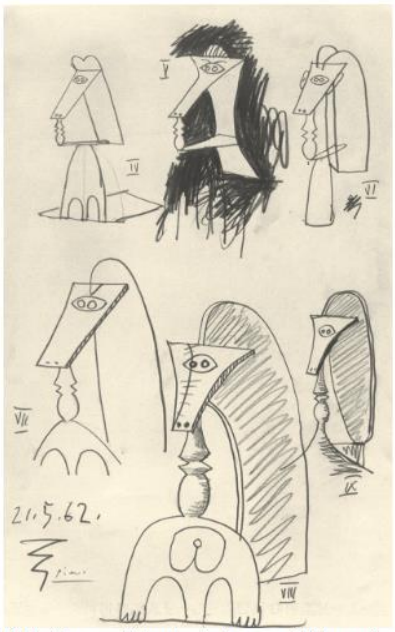
The creative foundations are there for the artist to work on the grandly scaled project, and looking back we can see how over two decades of Cubist thought, Picasso finally arrives at the result visible at 50 W. Washington street.

The Maquette

After Picasso accepts the commission, he proposes simply enlarging one of two wire sculptures done in 1928, but Hartmann insists on something new (Sotheby's). After repeated

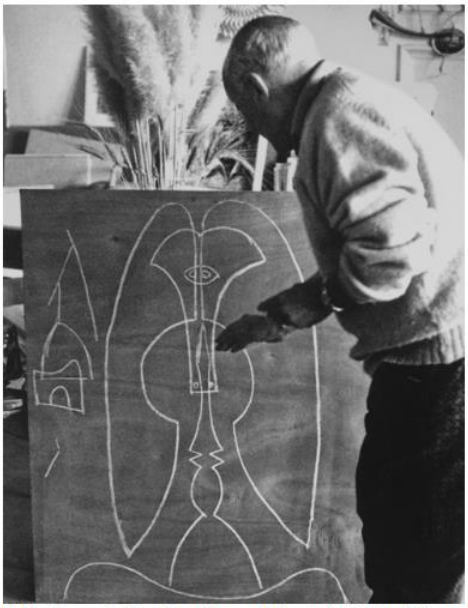
calls and visits to the artist by both Penrose and Hartmann, in March 1964 Penrose walked into Picasso's studio to find:

> …a great head made in metal with a strange connection in rods between the large sheets that suggested hair… [It] suggested to me the face of a mandrill, but with great force and subtle appreciation of a woman's head" (See fig. 5 & 6, Sotheby's).



Pablo Picasso, *Six bustes de femmes*, 1962, pencil on paper. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Figure 5 (Sotheby's)



Pablo Picasso in Mougins with one of his studies for the Chicago Civic Center Sculpture, France, 1967. Photo: Archives, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Figure 6 (Sotheby's)

Progress had been made, but Picasso was still not finished. Hartmann despaired that if the artist wouldn't declare the maquette ready by the end of 1965, he'd "…have to look elsewhere for a solution" (1966, p.1). According to Penrose, it wasn't until Picasso

> …had lived with his new creation for over a year, watching it while in conversation, meditating on it and looking at it lighted from different angles that he finally endorsed it as the sculpture conceived and intended for Chicago. (1965, p.3)

Picasso had given his OK. Hartmann was overjoyed. He had spent a week straight with the artist and his wife, all the while suffering "…tense, taught, nervous feelings…almost like having a baby" (1966, p.1). The approved maquette was padded and crated, but the French government had to sign off on the release before it could be shipped by air to Chicago. With it waiting in an office in Cannes, Hartmann held his breath and fretted - "Picasso could change his mind". (ibid, p.2)

Hartmann finally got word the precious cargo was aloft and en route to the Art Institute of Chicago, where it would be kept under guard. When Penrose heard that the maquette had arrived, he wrote Hartmann: "Once more a thousand and one congratulations on your coup and our very best wishes for its homecoming" (Hartmann, 1966, p.3).

At the institute, Mayor Daley views and approves the design. "It looks like the wings of justice" (Lanier, WTTW) he says, and sends Hartmann back to France with a $100,000 cashier's check (Picasso had never quoted a fee). The artist refuses payment, saying "This is my gift to the people of Chicago" (ibid).

The Sculpture

With the art design finished and a 42" high model to work off of, SOM is tasked with the fabrication, logistics and installation of the full size piece. The first task is to decide what material the 50 foot tall sculpture will be made of. The natural choice is Cor-Ten, a patented ferrous alloy created by U.S. Steel (U.S.S.) ("Weathering Steel", Wikipedia), and the same material used to clad the Civic Center building. An outdoor sculpture made of Cor-Ten will

never require painting. The alloy's unique metallurgical properties will cause a rust-colored patina to develop on exposed surfaces which will prevent further corrosion (ibid).

The firm turns to the American Bridge division of U.S.S. based in Gary, Indiana, for the fabrication and erection service. American Bridge quotes a price of $337,500 ($2.4 million adjusted for inflation, paid by charitable donors), and will build a 12 foot (1/4 scale) wooden prototype before beginning the steel work (U.S.S., 1966).

U.S.S. engineer Anatol Rychalski heads the project at the Gary yard, recalling "We had to roll steel to sizes which have never been rolled…which means that the whole technology had to be to some extent improvised at the time." (Lanier, WTTW) Slight modifications to the design need to be made to ensure the giant sculpture will stand the test of time. A U.S.S. steelworker is overheard saying "You know, fellas, Picasso might have been a great artist, but I tell you: he ain't no welder" (ibid, see fig. 7).

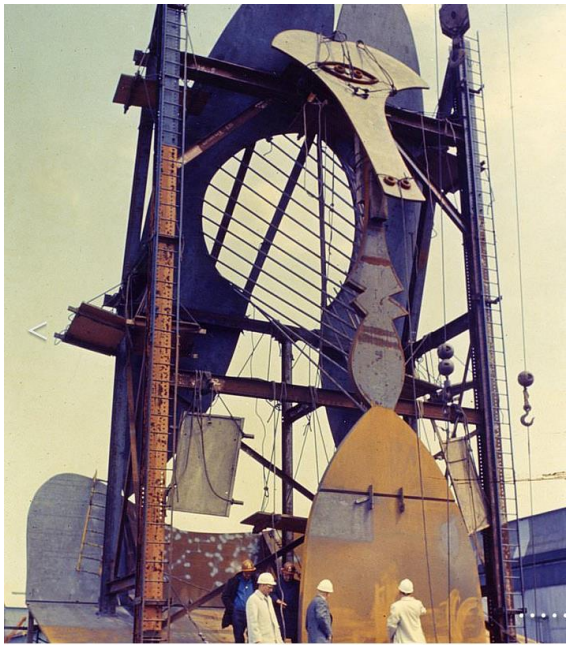


Figure 7 – Fitting the Puzzle Together, Gary, IN, 1965 (SOM)

The 1, 2 and 6 inch-thick flame-cut plates and connecting rods are secured to trucks and brought to the plaza, where a 20 ton crane awaits. U.S.S. (1966) specifies they will use "…surveyor's instruments to set the sculpture exactly level and at the correct elevation" (p.4). Care in handling and erection is promised to "…prevent twisting, distorting, denting or otherwise damaging" (p.4) the sculpture's components. All parts will be "…placed to an accuracy of 1 in 1000 of the length of the member" (p.5), then joints will be "…matched, welded, welds dressed and sandblasted" (p.4). For a blemish-free appearance, "No identification markings shall be made on surfaces … Bolts shall not appear on exterior exposed surfaces" (p.4).

The entire operation is carried out within a temporary enclosure to shield the work from the public. When erection is completed, the entire 324,000-pound untitled work is sandblasted to clean and prepare it for the slow weathering process (U.S.S., 1966, p.4).

The Ceremony

Left behind after all the scaffolds and rigging are cleared away is a huge billowing mass in the middle of the plaza. In preparation Chicagoan and Pulitzer prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks writes a poem. Conductor Seiji Ozawa and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra practice their Beethoven. Three clergymen write invocations (Gapp, 1992).

The morning of August 15, 1967 Roland Penrose describes the weather as "Picasso-like…we didn't know whether to expect rain, clouds or bright sunshine. Some of each occurred" (1967, p.1). A stage and 2,000 seats are placed in the plaza. The Orchestra arrives and begins to

unpack and adjust their instruments. Police patrol the streets, which begin to fill and swell with a huge crowd.

(Back to "Unveiling", p.3)

Love it, hate it or indifferent to it, "untitled" affected all the people who worked on its creation, and for many people is a gateway into the world of modern art. Plus, it doubles as a great playground slide (see fig. 8 &9).

Fig. 8 – The Morning of the Unveiling (National Archives)

Fig. 9 – Present Day (camelsnose.com)

"The Chicago Picasso"

Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms.
Art hurts. Art urges voyages–
and it is easier to stay at home,
the nice beer ready.

In commonrooms
we belch, or sniff, or scratch.
Are raw.

But we must cook ourselves and style ourselves for Art, who
is a requiring courtesan.
We squirm.
We do not hug the Mona Lisa.
We
may touch or tolerate
an astounding fountain, or a horse-and-rider.
At most, another Lion.

Observe the tall cold of a Flower
which is as innocent and as guilty,
as meaningful and as meaningless as any
other flower in the western field.

Gwendolyn Brooks, 1967

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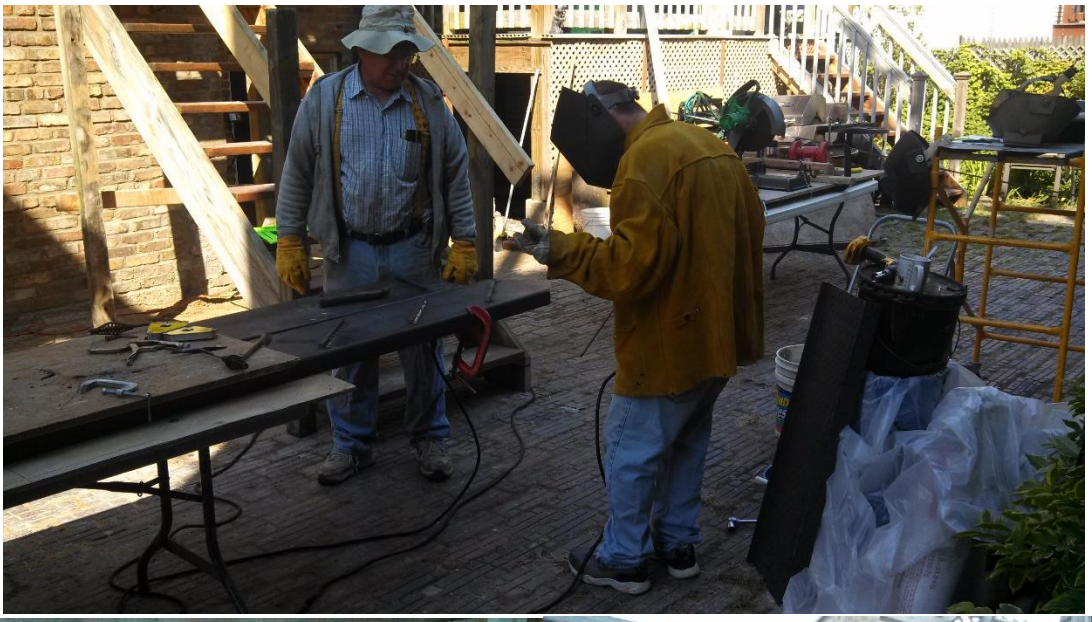

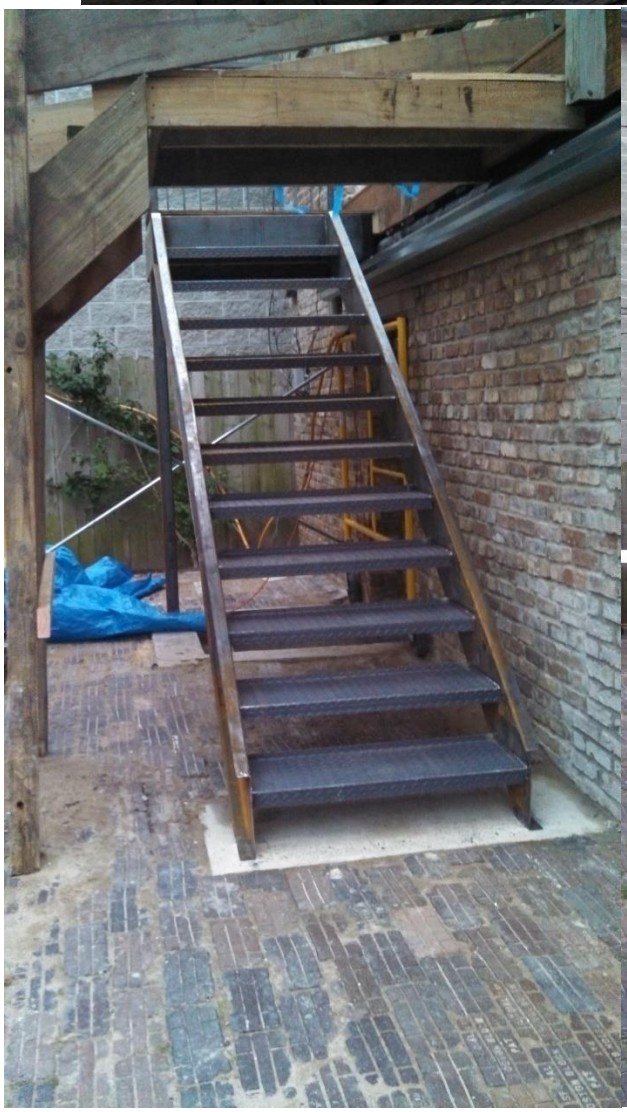

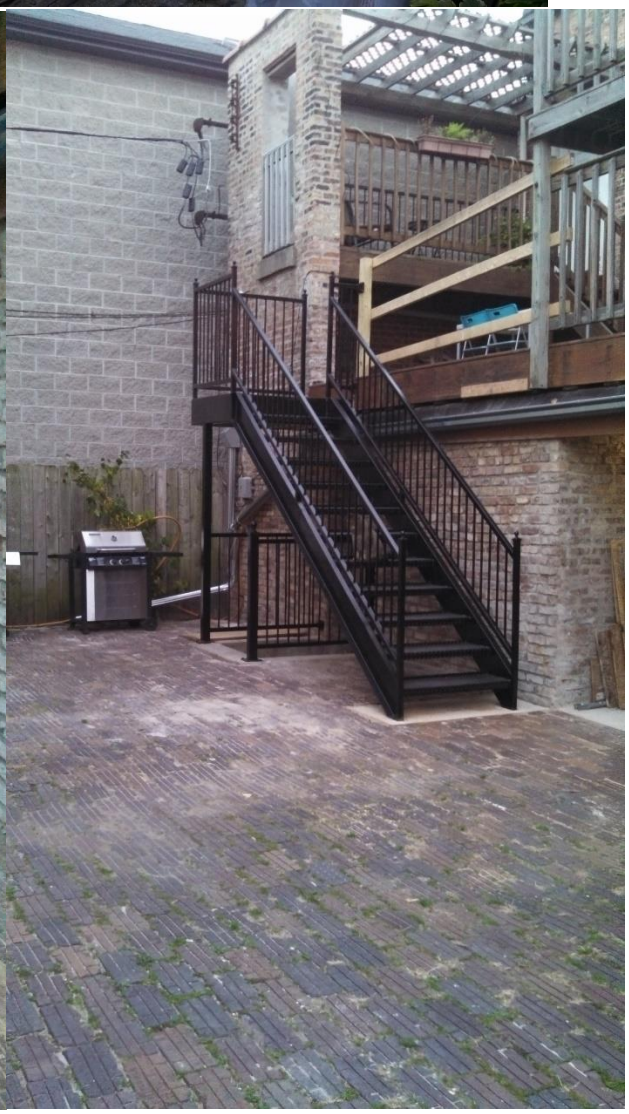

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