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The Necessity of Agency: Social Practice in Late Capitalist Modes of Cultural Production

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THE NECESSITY OF AGENCY: SOCIAL PRACTICE IN LATE CAPITALIST

MODES OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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As art has become more and more coopted in globalized capital, and the role of art as labor has become more and more obscured by questions of class and increased technological reproduction, socially engaged art (SEA) is a gesture toward the reclaiming of art as communal (and therefore inherently class-conscious) event. By a careful analysis of the role of the market in the identification of something as art, and the role of celebrity as a function of such a christening, I take a critical stance as a basic methodology for what is ultimately a class-based analysis of art, as suggested, for instance, by the work of Ben Davis. It is only by the careful working out of such class assumptions regarding not only art, but the act of writing about art, and certainly the act of writing about art in a dissertation within an institution that bears authority regarding the establishment of art practices, that the ground can be cleared for a constructive argument. This is an argument that has only gained in force in the art world

itself as more and more artists have sought to create artistic experiences outside of the normative function of the gallery or the power structures of the university.

By examining the class structure of art practice, the dissertation will assess the role of art as labor, and the role of art in production of community cultural development. Through various socially engaged projects, I analyze art not as an object-oriented means of production within a system of commodities, but as the encapsulating "house" of community. As such, art practice is that which opens onto self-realization of the collective within the horizon of the new. This, it should be noted, is also most often today seen as the role of science. The position of the expert haunts both art and science, but whereas it is a burden for art to carry such a vestige of neoliberal enlightenment, science readily accepts the figure of the expert in science as the one who enlightens. In this way, both art and science make truth claims, but science—in its aspects as cultural guardian of positivism—leads into a labyrinth of technology; art, on the other hand, leads into the open.

Education, therefore, is not something that teaches art, but is in itself an art practice, a socially engaged practice that is fully in keeping with a class-based notion of art. Through the communal production of knowledge, art again has a particular truth-value that is established through communication. Art is both an inherently political discourse, but also that discourse which is established through the creative and intimate space of silence (again, a space that is foreclosed through the vantages of power). Through education, through the juxtaposition of "class" and "Class," art establishes a radical aesthetics, in the old sense of radical—getting to the root.

This radical act, then, is the radical act of site-specificity of the immediate temporality that constitutes the practice. As a landscaper prior to beginning my art practice, I understand art as "earthwork," the tending and nurturing inherent in gardening, but also the clearing necessary for such an event to take place. As I have suggested, this is exactly what is required for art as radical rootedness to come to the fore. Art is a temporal modality of being: it is inherently futural in its activation, though rooted in the past. That is what has drawn me to print as propaganda, knowing its rich history, but also its possibility as what Carse calls an "infinite game."

Art is a necessary communal practice that has been coopted to support the logic of late capitalism. This has uprooted it into the flow of commodities through the art market. Experimental practices such as socially engaged art are necessary to destabilize and undermine this power structure to retain the grassroots, radically democratic nature of art.

DEDICATION

This paper and the accompanying creative production are dedicated to all of those who

have worked alongside me as collaborators: fellow artists, students, community

members, and my #uprooted partner in and for this art-as-life , Derek T. Smith.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The artistic 'voice of the people' is the voice of a people to come."

--Jacques Ranciere

Socially engaged art is but the latest permutation of contemporary art, often with the focus on participation, or "interactivity," but also with an underlying belief in the ability for some communal art form to elicit change within and even outside of the existing social structure, including that of the art world and art market. This very aspect of socially engaged art--its existing as aesthetics *and* politics--makes it ripe for criticism from all angles, and seems to make its very existence intermedial and therefore unintelligible. Curator and doctoral candidate in art history at CUNY, Chelsea Haines in *Bomb* magazine wrote as recently as 2012: "Much of the debate over socially engaged art in recent years appears to have less to do with what it is (the practice itself) and more to do with how to describe it (what terms we use to define it)" ("SEA Change"). This basic suspicion of art that masquerades as social activism, or community work taking on affectations of art, is clear from the very beginning when discussing socially engaged art. Shannon Jackson, Chair of the Humanities at Berkeley, gave this take on the issue in a recent interview: "To some, an explicit social mission redeems the art object, to others it compromises it. For some, the social is figural, for others it is literal." What is clear from the start is that the area of art practice known as socially engaged art

is one of tension and contention. But a glance back at the history from which this art

form derives should make clear that this is not only something that should be expected,

but something that, according to its artistic pedigree, should actually be cultivated.

With the changes that came after the Industrial Revolution in the latter part of

the 18th century, which only grew exponentially throughout the 19th, art practices slowly

began to shift as well. What actually constituted the idea of "art" itself, by the advent of

the 20th century, had transformed from a focus on technical skill in what were seen as

the "fine" arts, and the concomitant emphasis on "aesthetics," to an idea of art no

longer dependent on bourgeois notions of beauty or exceptional skill. Rather, art

became the vehicle of the artist, often itself a provocation against those earlier ideas of

what art is. Art itself became a way of transforming what could conceivably called art.

Although this shift could be described in a number of ways, and a number of causes

ascribed to it, it is the position here that with the advent of modern industrial

capitalism, with its emphasis on mass production, the growing urbanization of such

centers of modernity, and the influence of technology itself, that art as such became a

self-questioning practice that more and more relied upon the determination by the

artist that the work of art was indeed a work of art. And this brought with it, of course,

the self-proclamation of the artist to be the artist and therefore endowed with the

ability to make such determinations. Art, then, was what the artist said was art.

"But is it art?" is the stereotypical question from the 20th century, and groups

such as the Futurists and the Dadaists brought this particular question to the fore. Art,

for these two groups, was something beyond the careful and technically exquisite

representation of the external captured in the creation of the aesthetic object: be it painting or sculpture, or even symphony and dance. For the Futurists in Italy, led by Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, these eleven theses were the guiding principles for the new understanding of art:

1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.

2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt.

3. Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.

4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.

5. We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit.

6. The poet must spend himself with warmth, glamour and prodigality to increase the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.

7. Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man.

8. We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the

impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed.

9. We want to glorify war — the only cure for the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.

10. We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.

11. We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons: the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; bridges with the leap of gymnasts flung across the diabolic cutlery of sunny rivers: adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon; great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle, and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.

(Marinetti)

Despite some of the more "outdated" ideas here regarding women, for instance, the manifesto of Futurism, dating from 1909, pointed to a revolution in what could be considered art—and art's place in society. With their avowal to want to destroy museums and libraries, which might be interpreted as barbaric anti-culturalism,

Marinetti is revealing the moribund nature of bourgeois attitudes toward art. The objects sealed up in museums are dead and their effect on the living is stultification. With their adulation of speed as the preeminent aspect of modernity, and embracing it as such, the Futurists are espousing an active art that is vigorously involved in the society from which it emanates. The museums that held the masterpieces of Western culture, according to Marinetti, were places of death and decay: "Museums, cemeteries! Truly identical in their sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know each other." He continues: "To make a visit once a year, as one goes to see the graves of our dead once a year, that we could allow! We can even imagine placing flowers once a year at the feet of the Gioconda! But to take our sadness, our fragile courage and our anxiety to the museum every day, that we cannot admit! Do you want to poison yourselves? Do you want to rot?" (Marinetti). Like poisonous standing water, the art of the museums should not be confused for the moving waters of living art. Marinetti sardonically adds concerning museums' suffocating and putrid atmosphere: "For the dying, for invalids and for prisoners it may be all right."

This is not to say that this is the first reconfiguration of the concept of art itself, but it is certainly one of the most straightforward attacks on the notion of art that had become, according to Marinetti, revered and mummified in bourgeois society. "Standing on the world's summit," Marinetti concludes, "we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars!" As much a cry of defiance (and youthful insolence, since Marinetti points out that none of the Futurists is yet thirty-years-old) to the modes of existence that were crumbling beneath the onslaught of modernity, the manifesto's

understanding of art puts it as an action (though one that is wholly masculine in its substance) squarely at the center of becoming modern. Art's relationship to society is paramount in this argument. The new art of speed proposed by Marinetti is not an anemic representation of society, but the muscles by which that society could and should be transfigured.

What is essential here is not to trace a complete history of the precursors of socially engaged art, but to establish the importance for the 20th century in seeing art as a vehicle for transformation, and the willingness to call that art which provides that transformation. It is not just the methods and materials that are undergoing a new development, but an evolution of the understanding of what art itself does, its affective nature, and its ability to change how we think and act in the world. No longer was art simply the production of precious objects (though that continued, and often created the very target against which this new form of art struggled), but art was itself an act of revolution, radical in that it struck at the very roots of bourgeois mentality (and bourgeois morality, especially), to, as Marinetti put it: "Undermine the foundation of venerable towns!"

Art itself constitutes the "pick and hammers" by which the Futurists thought to rid the city of bourgeois moral rectitude. Art is the incendiary device of the revolutionary. "From the inception of the Futurist movement," writes Günter Berghaus in his *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction 1909 - 1944*, "Marinetti made it quite clear that he saw in Futurism not only an artistic, but also a social and political force of innovation" (47). Berghaus does, however, emphasize the

fundamentally artistic nature of this innovation: "Life was to be changed through art, and art to become a form of life" (47). For example, Marinetti, according to Berghaus, "believed that theatre as a form of 'cultural combat' would lead the artists out of their ivory tower and give them a chance 'to participate, like the workers or soldiers, in the battle for world progress'" (73). These Futurist artistic provocations were meant to confront the public with its own vacuous complacency.

Confrontation was also the hallmark of Dadaist reactions to the horrors of World War I, and what the war revealed about rationality and the hope that a better world might come about through the grounding of civilization on the bedrock of reason. The war was a clear manifestation of the use of rationality in the pursuit of madness, which brought into question the glorification of reason itself as the height of human thought. In reaction to the industrialized, efficiently organized, and rationally produced armaments and battle plans (resulting in the nightmare of trench warfare), the Dadaists turned to absurdism, logical contradiction, arcane poetic symbolism, and black humor as modes of protest and renunciation of the suicidal tendencies of the early 20th century.

Tristan Tzara, in 1918 no longer extolling the possibility of war as a great antiseptic, wrote: "Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries. Without aim or design, without organization: indomitable madness, decomposition." With the great forces "clashing by night," Tzara looked to the unique and incongruous individual as the

mode to stand against the mass destruction. But lest someone take him for another

utopian blatherer: "… I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate

common sense," he wrote.

The performances at the *Cabaret Voltaire*, the birthplace of Dadaism in Zurich,

Switzerland, were provocative, but often of a less directly political bent than those of

the Futurists. Without a particular position to extol (as Futurism ultimately did with

fascism), the Dadaists sought more to disrupt the order of society, an order that would

lead to the destruction of tens of millions of human beings in a handful of years. But

what both movements had in common was the embracing of a status outside an art

world that had been completely co-opted by bourgeois society. Though they often had

very different goals, both the Futurists and the Dadaists accepted as art forms works

and performances that could not easily be categorized according to 19th century

aesthetic models. Dadaism, in particular, has had a lasting impact on modern art. "And

for all its zaniness," wrote Paul Trachtman in *Smithsonian* magazine for a major 2006

retrospective on Dadaist art in the National Gallery of Art, "the movement would prove

to be one of the most influential in modern art, foreshadowing abstract and conceptual

art, performance art, op, pop and installation art." As the Dada experimental events

became more and more "accepted", leaders of the movement desired to move from the

stage into the "streets," as Andre Breton stated,"taking to the streets," would be a way

to forge a closer connection between the event and everyday life. (Bishop 70) As the

development of a closer connection was attempted, the negation and anarchism that

had been such an essential element of Dada, began to become more gestural and refined, as Bishops puts it, "a more meaningful form of participatory experience." (71)

What art *could* be suddenly became the focus for art, not merely what it had been up to that point. What it could be was often a function of who it was who claimed something to be art. Personalities like that of Marcel Duchamp flourished in such an environment, where his *Fountain*, a porcelain urinal signed "R. Mutt," would change forever what could be called art. What became clear was that art was just as much about the trappings of the art world, the privileged worlds of galleries and museums and art collectors, the "authority" of the artist to bestow the title "art," and the porous wall that divided art from the mundane world of craft, and even plumbing. What could be art, how far that title could be expanded, became as important a question as what art could be.

This was a clear topic of concern for the group called Fluxus; influenced by both Duchamp and composer John Cage, it included a wide range of painters, poets, and musicians and operated chiefly in the 1960s and 70s. Again, the intent was to broaden the rigidified concept of art. In Fluxus and in the work that followed in a similar vein, art became fundamentally conceptual. Whether an intermedial piece as theorized by Dick Higgins, or a set of instructions for a possible art piece by Sol Lewitt (though not a Fluxus artist, his work followed in this vein), the conceptual apparatus through which an art piece might come into existence is as important as the piece itself. Some would argue even more important, since the "work" of art was in its process, or conceptualization, not in any specific object ultimately produced. In fact, to move away from the capitalist-

centered production of art pieces intended for sale or display is one of the prime

impetuses for the work of such Fluxus members as Robert Filliou. The delineation and

sequestering of an art world away from the "real" world, which was a function of the

capitalist system of value bestowed upon unique works of art made by artists of

"genius," was an important issue against which Fluxus struggled.

"Unlike previous artistic movements, Fluxus sought to change the history of the

world, not just the history of art. The persistent goal of most Fluxus artists was to

destroy any boundary between art and life. George Maciunas especially wanted to,

'purge the world of bourgeois sickness....' He stated that Fluxus was 'anti-art,' in order

to underscore the revolutionary mode of thinking about the practice and process of art"

(http://www.theartstory.org/movement-fluxus.htm). It was no longer a matter of what

object could be designated as art, but whether art as a category at all was even

necessary or desirable. This is echoed by O.F. Smith's statement that "Late Fluxus sought

to more completely abandon any distinction between categories of experience such as

art and non-art" (10). Various configurations of "anti-art" emerged from these ideas, but

it was the demolition of the wall that circumscribed art that helped prepare the way for

later performance art, and ultimately the focus of this dissertation: socially engaged art.

Art was no longer just the rarefied world of celebrity artists, elite academicians, and the

purview of tony collectors. Art was not to be differentiated from life, and the artist no

longer had a privileged position above an anonymous audience. In fact, in works such as

John Cage's *4'33"*, wherein a pianist sits silently at a piano for the duration of the piece,

the audience is as much the artist as the musician or the composer, because the

audience is co-creating the aural experience. Marcel Duchamp provides another key link here, with his broadening of the creative act. It is not far to go then, to the ideas that underlie socially engaged art. Claire Bishop in her essay "Participation and Spectacle: Where are We Now?", writes: "[T[he dominant narrative of the history of socially engaged, participatory art across the twentieth century is one in which the activation of the audience is positioned against its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption" (36).

Although still known by a plethora of terms—social practice, dialogic, and participatory art being the most common—I shall use the term socially engaged art because it 1) still maintains the term art, which brings with it the possibility of various aesthetic aspects that might be otherwise lost (for the concern here is not merely to abandon art all together, but in large part to relocate it), and 2) it brings to the fore the social nature of art, and therefore the difficulty of dealing with these concepts within the constraints of the capitalist social structure. Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, on the other hand, use the term "community cultural development" as they feel it brings together the emphasis on collaboration among community members (including artists); the broad range of connotations associated with culture, rather than the narrower term of art; and the determination to change through development (4-5).

Boris Groys, on the other hand, talks of "art activism" when he writes: "Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art—not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself" (www.e-

[flux.com)](flux.com). What Groys is writing is clearly coming out of the Fluxus tradition, though he does not use it by name.

In his *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Pablo Helguera seeks to introduce socially engaged art in this manner: "We can distinguish a subset of artworks that feature 'Experience of their own creation' as a central element" (1). He goes further to add: "Conceptualism introduced thinking as artwork- the production of art object became optional" (2). With that basic move, socially engaged art practices are seen as immediately revolutionary particularly because socially engaged art practices do not produce work that is commercially viable, a commodity that can place itself easily within the art market. The move out of the gallery, out of the place as artist as sole author--not to mention the fact that once the work is placed into the hands of the public as co-creators, the direction becomes unpredictable, its outcome unknown--all of these militate by post mid-19th century against the traditional notion of art, art collecting, even art exhibition. Helguera believes that this in-between position, being between fields of art and other disciplines, is "exactly the position it should inhabit" (4).

By challenging the previously accepted constructs of the art world (particularly the art market), by moving into the public- by removing themselves as sole authors-artists are STILL acknowledging their connection, and relationship to the domain of art. Social practice aligns itself with other disciplines, and by doing so is "moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity" (Helguera 5). At root, socially engaged art, for Helguera "exists somewhere between art and non-art and its state may be permanently unresolved" (8), and comprising thereby an intermedial space.

Thomas Finkelpearl ties the advent of participatory art to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and to organizers such as Saul Alinsky, where "[c]ommunity organization, undertaken on a massive scale by SNCC and articulated by Alinsky, became a staple of social movements throughout the country" (11). He then goes on to cite Sherry Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," which was written for HUD in 1969, trying such participation to the fundamentals of a democratic society. In her "ladder," Arnstein begins with the least desirable approach—"Manipulation"--and ascends to "Citizen Control" (11). The applicability to the traditional artist/audience relation is unmistakable.

What is clear through these initial examinations is that socially engaged art is an art practice that draws its history from a twentieth century attempt to overcome restrictions set upon art particularly in the 19th century. A series of moves away from the museum and gallery, away from the esoteric aesthetic critique of the academic art historian, away from the singular skill of the artist as genius, and away from art as commodity, all have left their mark on socially engaged art. The very variability of the name of this particular art practice points to the fact that there is a multiplicity at work here that is not intent on being reduced to a conventional standard. As will be seen, the focus on this practice, is its praxis, its focus on what works within the given framework of the moment. This, of course, brings with it many problems of its own, with the main question still the age-old nagging question: "Is it art?" Why isn't socially engaged art just social work? Why makes it distinct? What value does the "art" aspect bring to social

transformation? Does this mean that art is only "good" when it is participatory and that traditional art practices, inasmuch as they still exist, are somehow wrong-headed?

As should be clear, these are the sorts of questions that plague any transformation in art, and could be said of just about any art practice up to this time. What once was revolutionary becomes commonplace, until it is the staid face of the tradition that itself needs to be overthrown. What was revolutionary yesterday is passé today. So it is with socially engaged art, which may well be past its prime even as of this writing. What still retains its relevance, however, is the role that art must find for itself in the interstices and corners of a commodity-driven world that seeks to subsume art under the rubric of design, and make of it nothing more than the aesthetics of capitalism (Steve Jobs as design guru), investment opportunities for the wealthy, and entertainment kitsch (Van Gogh "Starry Night" mouse pads, for instance) for the rest of us. But perhaps there is a kind of escape possible: a connectedness to the present, an attentiveness to the moment, to the immanent, and through this to accepting of the intermedial spaces where there is no drive toward completeness or being fully determined.

Socially engaged art is about the immediacy of art, the profound entanglement of art, community, and individuality, and how those aspects are brought out in the politics of art. All art is political is the underlying theme of this work, whether or not it purposefully makes politics its subject matter. Socially engaged art embraces this fact. The German philosopher Karl Marx famously said that up his time philosophy had only described the world, but the point was to change it. Socially engaged art takes that

statement as a challenge for art to continue its possibility as catalyst of change. This is

particularly vital in a world where capitalism is very adept at co-opting the sensual

aspects of art for its own propagation. Thus, we can agree with Nato Thompson's

answer to whether or not socially engaged art is truly "art":

> The issue of whether something is art is not ultimately what is at stake. If
>
> anything, socially engaged art points out the obvious fact that there is a
>
> crisis of cultural production… As opposed to wondering whether or not
>
> something is art, we must tease out how to navigate the crisis that is the
>
> incorporation of cultural production into the very machinations of power.
>
> (*Future Imperfect* 21).

Thompson hits upon what is salient about the turn to socially engaged art: Art

production, as cultural production, has been inherently bound up with systems of

power. Whether we are talking about museums and galleries, and the means through

which this institutions are funded in a capitalist economy, or the question of art's

relationship to the public, which brings in concerns about cultural education, art has a

fraught relationship with social power structures. Again Smith shows how much of this

has come from Fluxus inspiration "revolving around two basic ideas: first, art is a

reflection of reality and, accordingly, a means of knowledge; and second, art has a social

function, namely to help change the world and humanity itself"(7). Education, then

becomes a fundamental aspect of art practice, and it becomes necessary for Fluxus, to

carry out its project, "to create an educative art for the masses" and to determine "the

means to carry it out, through the development of non-traditional forms and new

distribution mechanisms" (Smith 8).

But by addressing these problems, socially engaged art inevitably gave rise to others. For instance, is community engagement the goal on its own, or is that a means to some further goal? Is it enough to gain participation, even if tangible change within the community is not achieved? And if the latter is the goal, how should such goals be determined?

Pablo Helguera, for instance, in his reference primer for social practice, "Education for Socially Engaged Art", says one unresolved issue is "Does SEA, by definition, have particular goals when it comes to engaging community?" (11). Shannon Jackson, in her analysis of current celebration of "hybrid" work in *Living as Form*, points out that "Such hybrid artists still measure their distance from traditional art disciplines and their conversations and support networks often remain circumscribed by them" (88), and then questions even further if socially engaged art projects that are specifically mission/goal driven, such as those that strive to reveal "the artist in everyone" risk becoming a form of "social prescription" (90)..

There are, of course, concerns and mixed messages when dealing with community-based arts projects in and of themselves. What is the potential of a public forum for aesthetic inquiry, when navigated by an art perspective? Does it become suspect through having such a genealogy, especially in these neoliberal times. Shannon Jackson, again: "Funny how acts of citizenship suddenly become unpatriotic once under the rubric of art" (Living as Form 92).

The suspicion of art goes hand-in-hand with its ambiguous role in a capitalist society. Yes, it is easily identified as a source of luxury item for the wealthy, a potential field for investment, a source of cachet for the sophisticated, but it is also the labor of a certain class of society, and as such, it is open, as Ben Davis offers, to a Marxist critique based on cultural production. Davis sees the labor of the artist as a fundamentally middle-class mode of production, which certainly militates against those who see the "starving artist" as the symbol of bohemian, leftist, and anti-bourgeoisie activity. But a dispassionate assessment of the class structure of artistic production should be the ground for any further analysis of the role of art in a capitalist society, and therefore the ability of socially engaged art to fundamentally change that society.

Through this brief examination of the possible precursors to socially engaged art as a redefined art practice outside of traditional or existing modes, there are several threads that stand out as important: 1) the need for an art practice outside the capitalist economy that has stratified communities into competing socioeconomic interests, 2) the importance of an inherently artistic response (as opposed, say in Dadaism for example, to say a scientific/logical one), 3) a focus on the social as the prime site for change and possibility, 4) the requirement, then, of a class-based analysis of artist as laborer, and 5) a critical approach to both the underlying presuppositions regarding the commonly accepted understanding of art's functioning within society (which is not the same as answering the question "Is it art?") and the presuppositions that socially engaged art, in turn, brings with it.

Artist Rick Lowe expresses the issue in this way: "One of the biggest concerns I have for the field of social and community engaged practice is that we don't have serious critical dialogue about the work being practiced and produced," and then makes his anxiety explicit by adding "I'm talking about how our work relates to issues of power, privilege, appropriations, exploitations, etc." (*Future Imperfect* 23). As with Thompson, what must be faced is the lack of a substantive critical approach, not just determining if it is art or not. This is what the dissertation does: provide an attempt to give a critical perspective, not just total acceptance of what is currently new and in play. It is therefore with a dispassionate eye that art practices that claim the mantle of community should be examined, and it is well worth reminding ourselves of Shannon Jackson's insights, namely that "the same interaction that reads as social engagement to one group might seem to be a narcissistic violation of social ethics to another" (Interview). It is the goal, then, of this dissertation to examine these issues with thoughts toward an artistic community to come, that community for whom the word art is rendered if not meaningless by its synonymity with the word life, but hardly less encompassing of human endeavor.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

In late capitalism, science and technology have a dominant role in framing our experience. Because of this, the term research is often understood as being solely a scientific process. As education turns more and more to STEM (Science,Technology Engineering, and Mathematics), the arts and humanities have been relegated to an inferior position. It is against this dominant ideology, an ideology that is that is invested in capitalist modes of production and institutions of power, that I have postioned my creative output and which is the foundation of my research in this dissertation. In the conclusion to her book *Collaborative Arts-based Research for Social Justice* (2016), Victoria Foster writes that "Researchers for the most part see their work as contributing to the greater good and assume that they are representatives of such an ideal…. Yet the reality is that, without a very considered attempt to counter this, the outcome of research is a direct reflection of the dominant ideology" (115). The tradtional understanding of research is that it involves the analysis of data in order to increase and improve understanding, and is fact-based and that this, therefore, is the guarantor of the validity of the research. This very bias in favor of "objectivity," however, is exactly the bias that skews research towards supporting the status quo, and why methodology itself is important here to take a critical stance toward those very presuppositions. In other words, the seemingly neutral viewpoint of scientific research is actually fraught with the ideology of dominance against which much of the art and theorizing of my

practice is pitched. It is important, therefore, that I discuss this methodology in a way that illuminates these concerns.

The immediate issue is that there is not seen to be an issue. The idea that there is no reason to question the structure itself or rational argument itself, is the essence of the problem. This is the case as the presuppositions that exist in this form of thinking are supposed to be the proof of its validity. Therefore, the certainty that there is no need to search for an alternate viewpoint is the proof that there is no need to search for an alternate viewpoint. The very impetus for socially engaged practices is the notion of working outside of existing frameworks. It, in itself, questions all presuppositions, as well as the conventional art- making modes and the theories that support them. Victoria Foster, Senior Lecturer in the Social Sciences at Edge Hill University, UK, in her book *Collaborative Art-based Research for Social Justice,* introduces these theories and relevant methodological context, helping to reveal " [W]hen art-based research can be a fruitful approach to take, and also outlining a convincing rationale for using the arts as a way of understanding and representing the social world" (114). Foster emphasizes the value of participatory research and art-based methodologies in social justice inquiry. She reminds us that "Criteria are not found; they are made" and quoting researchers such as Patti Lather, whose book *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (1991), that without finding alternative modes of legitimation "we are bound to 'revert to the dominant foundational, formulaic, and readily available codes of validity'" (114). Foster also claims that "arts-based research might address issues of consumption and possession in relation to its research outputs. Such an issue is

particularly pertinent in the academy, not least in terms of what counts as knowledge

and the increasing expectation on academics to fit into a particular mould" (115). Foster

looks to the 2010 work of Norman K. Denzin, *The Qualitative manifesto: A Call to Arms,*

in particular for this line of her argument, whose analysis of qualitative inquiry ties it

directly to politics and social justice. What does and what does not count as evidence is

a political determination, and who gets to make that estimation is a question of power.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous*

Peoples makes the claim that the determination of what counts as knowledge is a

colonizing practice, resulting in the poverty and precarity of indigenous peoples and the

destruction of their worlds through the unquestioned assurance that Western norms of

rationality are inherently superior to "primitive" modes of understanding (172). Smith,

along with Foster, insists that this is not the goal of researchers, who are often working

with the ideal of benefitting those they study, but that the difficulty of thinking outside

of the dominant ideology undermines any such ideal (Smith 2). Foster insists that

"without a very considered attempt to counter this, the outcome of research is a direct

reflection of the dominant ideology" (115). But before a "very considered attempt" can

be made, there must be a realization that such an attempt has value and is necessary.

Often enough, as Dwight Conquergood writes, there is an arrogance on the part of

Western modes of knowledge and understanding that supposes the choice between

rigorous and objective theories and the knowledge of often non-white and non-male

communities is "the choice between science and old wives' tales" (146). Foster even

quotes Denzin and Giardina (2010, p. 30), saying that "there is increasing

acknowledgement that the ubiquitous evidence-based approach to generating and

evaluating knowledge is itself a 'fable'" (116). The fable is that these modes of

knowledge are not direct constructs of a particular way of seeing and acting, and that

they are not at the root of the atrocities that have been committed to the indigenous

peoples of the earth. This fallacy also extends to the excesses within Western society

itself, and its desire to look on everything as a resource for exploitation in order to

augment its power.

It is to the question of power that Lisa Cosgrove and Maureen McHugh turn in

their article "A Post-Newtonian, Postmodern Approach to Science: New Methods in

Social Action Research," in *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (Hesse-Bieber and Leavy,

2008): "Rather than strive for (an impossible) objectivity, scientists should embrace the

value-laden nature of our work by bringing issues of power to the forefront of our

theories and methods" (73). Cosgrove and McHugh take as their starting point that

experience itself is a sociopolitical construct, stating, "Specifically, we need to explore

the relationship between epistemology and methodology and recognize the

impossibility of any method as a guarantor of truth" (73) and therefore knowledge

derived from that construct cannot be somehow outside of it. There is no privileged

position from on high that is not tainted by cultural prejudice, and this very desire for

such a position is itself a cultural prejudice. The possibility of such an exterior

perspective is described as a modernist conviction that "true knowledge represents

something real and unchanging about ourselves or about the world around us" and that

there is therefore no need to interrogate the relationship between power and truth,

because, according to this account, scientific facts exist independent of the scientific community that discovers them (74). Against such claims, Cosgrove and McHugh offer "an approach to knowledge generation and science that questions the belief in absolute or ahistorical truths by emphasizing the partial and impermanent nature of knowledge" (74). In this way, it is incumbent on the researcher to establish his or her ideological framework without pretence to an "objective" stance, recognizing that knowledge is a culturally-embedded and contingent construct, and is therefore political and a manifestation of the power structures that support it.

Similarly, Graeme Sullivan in his *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (2005) writes "The hegemony of the sciences and the rationality of progress made it difficult for the visual arts to be seen as reliable sources of insight and understanding" (33). In detailing various other modes of research and the perspectives, attitudes and ideologies that inform them, Sullivan addresses critical theories, with their "characteristic oppositional stance, interdisciplinary perspective, and political agency [which] were geared toward individual empowerment and social change" (54). He then quotes Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) at length: "We are defining a criticalist as a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts a certain basic assumption: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription...and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption" (54) and that, finally, conventional research reproduces those very

systems of oppression. The "critical stance" that I have argued as my own clearly falls within this approach.

In the conclusion to their essay, Cosgrove and McHugh write that "The epistemological assumptions of traditional research paradigms may undermine our ability to develop a liberatory or social action research agenda" (83). I would go further and declare that such assumptions *do* undermine such abilities, and as such, need to be confronted in their unexamined original role. In order to thoroughly critique the social through socially engaged art, it is necessary to confront the power structure of that social construct, which includes for art the roles of both the gallery and the academy, which involves their position within capitalist commodity systems and (for the academy) the role of debt in the act of earning a degree, whether art-based or not. This is part and parcel of its *situatedness*, of its focus on immediate and contingent art practices, all of which serve to confront a status quo that has, of late, become even less of an equitable and just society. As such, it is necessary to oppose the disembodied, rational, white, male voice that is the voice of oppressive society, that one recognizes as the voice of reason, that is the voice and language of power.

In a 2017 article on the *Art Practical* website, Ranu Mukherjee discusses her collaboration with Ted Purves, who created the first social practice curriculum at CalArts in 2005. In her discussion of how she came to work with Purves in 2009 within the Social Practice Workshop, she states, "He knew I didn't easily fit into siloed academic or art-historical categories and that I might enjoy the constantly emergent quality of the job." Later in the article, Mukherjee describes Purves's approach to the program he instituted

in 2005, where he refrained from using the word "art" in its title "because he didn't want to treat it as a medium aligned with other art-historical movements. He saw it as a set of fugitive practices and potentially liberating challenges to the encroachment of neoliberal capital into all aspects of our lives." Purves used notions of barter and exchange as the basis for much of his work, and based projects on ways to work outside of traditional capitalist methodologies.This flexibility is echoed by Hesse-Biber and Leavy, who cite a "Growing Need for Emergent Methods within and across the Disciplines"(2008), when they write that "emergent methods are often discovered as a result of modifying more conventional research projects when traditional methods fail to 'get at' the aspect of social life the researcher is interested in" (3). Those non-traditional methods are what is meant by Mukherjee when she speaks of "fugitive practices" that are outside the dominant power structure. "Researchers who utilize an emergent method may simultaneously find that they are negotiating both an 'insider' and 'outsider' research identity. As researchers, they are insiders, given their familiarity with the research process, yet the questions they now raise about what seemed familiar are now novel, and the methods they employ are not familiar" (Hesse-Bieber and Leavy 4). What this speaks to is both a changing understanding of art's role in the social and a recognition of the various roles taken onnby many artists. Within the scope of my own work as socially engaged artist and teacher, the work has occurred both inside and outside of established institutions, be they the academic institution or the gallery, and the world outside of it: the community and the critique of the structures that both support and sometimes hinder this work.

Combining the role of artist, researcher, and educator presents a dichotomy of both continuity and opposition. As Graeme Sullivan points out when discussing the role of visual arts practice in academic research: "Those who seek academic status for the profession invariably have to respond to the challenge of setting creative practice on a more solid discipline foundation. As such, the university exerts its own agenda and in doing so helps shape an institutional artworld" (26). There is a schism between educator in an institution and the role of artist as innovator working outside the system, which creates tension between these roles. In addition, there is the role of researcher, analyzing, observing, studying, reading and networking with others currently involved in socially engaged art. These three roles- artist, educator and researcher do not form a smooth unity, but pull at one another, and it is based on the situation at hand that determines in what combination these three roles emerge. As a researcher, I have focused on not ony the historical development leading to what we now call social practice, but also the current theories and actual projects being created, including discussions with artists and collectives. I have participated in socially engaged art organizations such as Creative Time, the preeminent international organization for social practice, and presented research and worked with other researching artists at Emerson College. As practicing artist, I have developed a range of projects exploring levels of collaboration and socio-political inquiry, working both inside and outside of conventional art institutions. As an educator inside the university system, I have employed approaches based on my research and work as an artist, to create an experience that uses the insights of Pablo Helguera, Nato Thompson, and Paulo Friere,

as well as my work in an initiative with the first online open curriculum in social practice

conducted by Duke University in 2015. But these roles overlap; projects can be site-

specific and documentation can be exhibitied in the gallery, the online course was both

education and a social artwork, and as social practice is focused more on process than

product, my classroom becomes the artwork as it creates the project that positions itself

in the community. These roles are fluid, flowing into each other, but also they present

friction. Much of social practice positions itself as a critique of systems, be they the

institutions of gallery or academia, of government, or of capitalism itself, yet they

cannot at the same time divorce themselves completely from these structures. Many of

the large scale projects developed by nationally recognized artists and organizations

that are mentioned in this dissertation have connections to galleries, universities, or rely

on corporate sponsorship.

Since socially engaged art work either outside the institutions or knowingly

within them to enact change, we who call ourselves socially engaged artists often find

themselves at odds with the current systems in place--even ones that benefit the artists.

Through involvement with, or contextual research in other's works, it is revealed that

not all socially engaged art projects are necessarily what they profess to be. Some suffer

from elitism, acts of gentrification, exploitation or cultural appropriation, for instance.

As a result the researcher must come with a critical eye not just for the social

institutions of power, but for the claims made on behalf of socially engaged art itself.

Finally, as far as the role of educator, it has been only recently that academic institutions

have recognized the value in incorporating social practice into their programs. This

raises the question: how does one teach within such institutions, while at the same time acting within the context of socially engaged art? My personal approach as artist as well as for the scope of this dissertation research, has been to incorporate the pedagogical ideas defined by Paulo Friere and Pablo Helguera, to continously be involved in the work of the organizations that create work and conversation on social practice, and to acknowledge the porousness of the flow that happens between maintaining an activist stance, and working within those systems.These are systems form which I cannot, and admittedly would rather not, remove myself from. Navigating between these roles, and taking the role of active participant in *creating* projects rather than simply researching from the point of observer, as well as allowing for process to dictate direction projects might take, has informed the body of my thinking and creative production.

It is against these distinctions and often arbitrary divisions and hierarchies that the socially engaged artist/researcher/educator works, which requires this methodology of cross-pollination that not only undermines the borders and the watchtowers that have been erected to protect the status quo, but also opens the possibility of new modes of inquiry. The artist collaborates in the creation of the space for the possibility of knowledge; the researcher collaborates in the question of knowledge's formation and what even counts as knowledge within certain social systems; and the educator collaborates in the participation of that knowledge. This is the horizontal power structure of collaborative production of knowledge that is not based on hierarchical, institutional departmentalized methods of control.

"In a society where artistic research is as valued as scientific research," Louisa

McCall wrote in 2014, "we will know the facts, but we will know the stories too, and our

knowledge therefore will be--dare I say--truer" (Burton, Jackson, and Willson 462). She

ends her comments of artist as researcher with the following assessment: "To regain our

sense of connection, agency, and empathy--which are vital to a just and sustainable

society--we must consider the different kinds of questions and outcomes that artists are

proposing as indispensable to our system of knowledge production" (462). In McCall's

view, art research is not seeking to replace science, but to supplement it. The facts and

logic and equations that constitute knowledge have also worked to isolate humans from

themselves (the loss of "connection, agency, and empathy") and it is time to consider

the alternatives that artistic knowledge production might offer. The concern here, of

course, is that those alternative outcomes may well become incorporated into the

present system, and they themselves becoming modes of oppression. Nor is it very likely

that the dominant culture will be changed by a supportive suggestion from an artistic

source, but through my own artistic practice and research into the work of others, I

have seen it is it is possible that even small acts and gestures to impact a community,

something artist Ceclia Vicuna has called "tiny acts of revolution."

Scientific methods produce a knowledge that is most often quantifiable and

verifiable; therefore, what art produces as knowledge is often outside of these

frameworks. Even if one says knowledge is information about the world, it is the thesis

here that science does not produce mere information about the world that is then

assembled, collated, and filed away until someone might be interested in looking up a

certain fact. Rather than information about a world, science actually creates a world itself, and that world is composed of that about which the information is gathered. Thus, science can never discover a fact that will not fit into itself. Art, on the other hand, creates worlds that readily overthrow themselves and what does not even count as "art" is the very thing that most often revolutionizes art.

If the methods are so varied and un-prescribed, then the methodology must be one of openness to agency, to accept that knowledge through art comes in ways that might not look like knowledge as we typically define it. Perhaps what this methodology looks to is not another fact to be "discovered" and then added to the pile of already ascertained facts, but the disclosure of a world not yet considered.

Specifically, the methodology that most aligns with the practice that I have here enunciated is that of "a/r/tography," where the nexus of artist-researcher-teacher is that center through which the possibilities of new meanings are created. Rita Irwin, working with these ideas on the University of British Columbia site devoted to A/r/tography, lists some of the methodological concepts as being "contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher" (artography.edcp.educ.ubc.ca). Similarly, I have created a series of work that is entangled with the process of textual enunciations that here perform as a dissertation. By working within the social structure through my site-specific works, I have been able

to open a position for myself that is itself *in situ*, thereby creating the space for artist-teacher-researcher, and allowing an autoethnographic analysis, an approach that seeks to describe and thereby analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. In this way, I analyze my own production of that combination of roles,examining my own production of art in the section of this paper devoted to my projects, analyze their agency as socially engaged works, as well as my role of "teacher," both professionally within the academic institution, but also as facilitator of knowledge production through art. The two roles are entwined with one another, so that both my art practice and my teaching are meant to produce the possibility of alternative meanings from within the structures that I critique in my research. Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, in their volume *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research,* claim that this way of coming to understanding "Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences" and they later state that, since social life is itself "messy," then we must formulate a method that is able to accommodate such "mess and chaos, uncertainty, and emotion" (1).

Again, with the various theoretical underpinnings here presented, I have used narrative to engage with others and allow them to express their own understandings of social lived experience (for instance in *The Museum of What's Left*), performative in such works as *#nothere* that engaged the public in the struggle of hauling a net of shoes to the state capital, the use of metaphor/metonymy in projects like the sourdough distribution, and many others where the production of the social is directly engaged

with, analyzed, in and out of which, meaning generated. During this time I have engaged in dialogue with other artists concerning our shared practices of socially engaged art, have observed the reactions and interactions of audiences, and engaged in the radical pedagogy outlined by Freire. All of these I have then documented to form the two-part structure of this dissertation of theory and practice. In this way I have examined my own position as artist, student/teacher, researcher, and author of this present work as direct material, which I have here presented within the critique of late capitalist cultural production.

To tie all of these strands together is difficult, and it is likely that some of the material here will balk at being formed into a perfectly smooth conclusion that answers the important question and leaves the reader hungry for further discussion. Rather, some of the pieces here have been left unprocessed, raw footage of the modes with which I engage with art and audience, fellow students and fellow teachers, social constructs, and even myself as primary material. The purpose of critiquing the institutions of late capitalism within which art and education work has been necessary in order to create an alternate perspective, and to open a space for my own work to be analyzed. The end of research is to create meaningful perspectives, to interpret material as evidence, and to further differing possibilities that help us understand who and what we are. Through arts-based research, it has been my intent to contribute to these understandings.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART: DEFINING THE PRACTICE

In 1993, Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson developed *The Roof is on Fire* as part of *The Oakland Projects*, a ten-year-long (1991-2001) series of installations, socially engaged art events, political interventions, and performances in the Oakland, California region. In this particular project, Lacy and Johnson spent two years prior to the start of the project building community relations, working with the local high school teachers and students to enhance media literacy and arts education in order to establish the trust required for the project they had envisioned, as well as to teach the technical understanding required for the project's performance. "*The Roof Is On Fire* featured 220 public high school students in unscripted and unedited conversations on family, sexuality, drugs, culture, education, and the future as they sat in 100 cars parked on a rooftop garage with over 1000 Oakland residents listening in" (http://www.suzannelacy.com/the-oakland-projects/). The resulting documentation was then broadcast on a local television station, but gained national attention through CNN.

Nato Thompson discusses this work in his analysis of *Culture as Weapon*: "A rooftop as a place for conversations in cars would be strange enough, but black youth having public conversations with police was altogether unheard of. And perhaps what made the encounter all the more surreal yet urgent was the obvious fact that these two groups probably have the most to talk about. The performance was part media stunt, part community organizing effort, part art project" (148-147). He then goes on to

discuss the fact that Lacy had studied under Happenings artist Allan Kaprow at the University of California at San Diego, and the role that Kaprow's Happenings had in laying the groundwork for such projects as *The Roof is on Fire*, and the resulting blurring of the lines between art and life. Thompson notes that Kaprow's ideas about the porous border between life and art led Lacy to think that "life itself could be choreographed and shaped. Public encounters could be used as clay by an artist" (147). In this way, Thompson draws a direct line from Happenings and Fluxus to socially engaged art: "Thus, the influence of Kaprow…came to inform a practice that would define socially engaged art to come: a political art practice that worked with people in public to produce unique, and dynamic, encounters" (147). The work of Beuys cannot be overlooked here as well, especially his theory of "social sculpture" where, according to the Tate museum's "art terms" webpage: "everything is art, that every aspect of life could be approached creatively and, as a result, everyone has the potential to be an artist" (http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/social-sculpture).

At the same time, in Chicago from May to September in 1993, Mary Jane Jacob curated series of eight projects led by artists but with "citizen collaborators." These projects, *Culture in Action*, would become one of the seminal works in developing socially engaged art. In his analysis of this project , "*Exhibition as Social Redistribution*," Joshua Decter, a New York-based curator and writer, wrote that *Culture in Action* worked "to challenge the parochialisms of public art and the conventions of site specificity: she created an urban platform for artists to research, develop and implement innovative projects that reimagined art as an instrument for new modes of

social participation and community engagement" (14). Decter directly cites Beuys'

influence in the development of such art practices, particularly his theory of "social

sculpture; art that exisits outside of galleries and in the world. He goes on to describe

how Beuys ' influence went perhaps "beyond the recognizable precincts or institutional

frames of art" (15). It is, of course, that transgression of recognizable "institutional

frames of art" that makes socially engaged art difficult to define.

Pablo Helguera, in his *Education for Socially Engaged Art* notes: "We can

distinguish a subset of artworks that feature 'Experience of their own creation' as a

central element" (1). Whereas for much of art's history, the focus was not on the

experience of the creation of the work (an area reserved for the artist guided by his or

her creative concepts and unique skill), but on the object created through that process.

With the revolutionary parameters of the 20th century, and the development of new

forms of art, such as conceptualism, such processes were integral to the artwork itself,

not merely a necessary but preliminary step. Conceptualism introduced thinking as

artwork, and the object, therefore, became an optional result, the aftereffect of the

making rather than the focus of the artmaking. Helguera notes that "social intercourse,"

art that at its core invilves community, collaboration and process,is also a factor in

socially engaged art's existence. It is something that again transgresses the "institutional

frames of art," which most often sought to create a clear demarcation between actor

and audience, and an enforced passivity on the part of the audience members

themselves.

With such breaches of institutional framing in mind, it is understandable that

some have looked to the term "social practice," pulling it away from its history as an art

form, and emphasizing its inherent reliance upon others as a component of the work.

The issue becomes whether this is even art anymore or is it activism? Ethnography?

Social work? This inherent difficulty in identification of the form itself is then

exacerbated by the fact that socially engaged art practices do not produce work that is

commercially viable, a commodity that can place itself easily within the art market. The

move out of the gallery, out of the place of artist as sole author--not to mention the fact

that once the work is placed into the hands of the public as co-creators--the direction

becomes unpredictable, its outcome unknown. All of these work against the traditional

notion of art, art collecting, even art exhibition. Helguera believes that this in-between

position—the position of intermedia if seen as a process of undefined experimental

engagement--is "exactly the position it should inhabit" (4). By challenging the previously

accepted constructs of the art world (particularly the art market), by moving into the

public and removing themselves as sole authors, artists are still acknowledging their

connection and relationship to the domain of art. Social practice aligns itself with other

disciplines, and by doing so, is involved in "moving the works temporarily into a space of

ambiguity" (Helguera 5). It is this space of ambiguity, the open-ended structure, that

marks this work as art, rather than a goal-oriented social work meant to alleviate certain

problems, issues, and injustices through direct means with a clear outcome.

The following are from the exhibition programme guide for "Culture in Action":

"Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago" features

eight projects by artists' teams and citizen collaborators

sited throughout Chicago from May to September 1993.

Over the past year, the invited artists have developed

partnerships through a process of public exchange that has

extended the role of the audience beyond spectator to

that of participant. Forging a fundamental link between art

and education, this process of local engagement has led to

artworks that reflect a shared voice."

And:

"Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago" reflects the

social concerns which fuel artists working in the public

arena today, while serving as an urban laboratory to

actively involve diverse audiences in the creation of

innovative public art projects.

(Decter 21)

What these quotes address is the long-term processes involved in the spectre of

research and development as well as actualization of socially engaged projects: the

year-long relationships forged prior to what we would commonly call the making of the

art proper, and also the term in the second of "an urban laboratory," both of which

seem outside the typical framework of what had heretofore been understood as art

making. Both focus on the immersive nature of the art within communities over time.

They also demonstrate the degree to which they are actively engaged in the processes

themselves. A "process of public exchange" was used to create "partnerships" and the democratization of the art process. Speaking of a greater democratization of art that exists in socially engaged art, Miwon Kwon writes,

> Qualities such as pluralist inclusivity, multicultural
>
> representation, and consensus-building are central to the
>
> concept of democracy espoused [by practitioners of
>
> socially engaged art]. Rather than an object for individual
>
> contemplation, produced by a distant art specialist for an
>
> exclusive art-educated audience equipped to understand
>
> its complex visual language, new genre public artists seek
>
> to engage non-art issues in the hearts and minds of the
>
> 'average man in the street' or 'real people' outside the art
>
> world.
>
> (Kwon 107)

By doing so, they empower what once was audience, moving them into the role of making as artists themselves. Again Kwon: "This ownership of art, or more generally cultural representation, is the basis for the integration of art and everyday life and a powerful force toward social and political change" (107). The passivity of a consumer-based culture, as well as economy is embedded in the basic museum or gallery structure, where the audience members are meant, as if in a theater, to receive the experience, they are receptors, but not collaborators in the works. Breaking down the wall that keeps the viewer from being co-creator is at the core of socially engaged art

and running from such predecessors as the Futurists, Dada, Fluxus, and conceptual art,

and is at the heart of empowering individuals to partake in a radically democratic

process of art making in order to transfigure the social: to mold the form of the social.

Tom Finkelpearl talks about the devaluation of the "commons" spaces in

American cities--and the need to reinvent these spaces, focusing specifically on the

"relational, interactive use of public space" (35). In this way, artistic social cooperation

are the core cooperative processes that infuse all the projects "but what they make

differs widely. In some cases they make objects; in others, social environments." He

continues:

> These ventures might take the form of a classroom or
>
> educational institution (Wendy Ewald, Tania Bruguera, Brett
>
> Cook, Mark Dion), a party or parade (Pedro Lasch, Daniel
>
> Martinez), a cooperatively created film (Harrell Fletcher, Evan
>
> Roth), an intercommunity meeting place (Mierle Ukeles), a
>
> research project (Ernesto Pujol), or an urban redevelopment
>
> project (Rick Lowe). But for all these projects, the art is a
>
> process of cooperative action--even as conflict and
>
> argumentation are sometimes important constituent
>
> elements. In the conclusion I make my own argument for the
>
> value of an American pragmatist reading of the
>
> antispectatorial art of social cooperation.
>
> (Finkelpearl 50)

Daniel J. Martinez was one of the original artists involved in *Culture in Action*, staging a

parade of various community groups titled *Consequences of a Gesture.* Working with the

histories of immigration and labor in the Chicago area, Martinez sought to "refashion

the tradition of public gatherings and May Day parades into a symbolic act that would

bring distant communities together" (*Exhibition as Social Intervention* 136). By staging a

parade, which carries with it a sense of pride and power (the parade controls the street,

even if it isn't a procession involving military), Martinez offered the local population,

including schoolchildren and members of local clubs, the opportunity to celebrate their

own potential as actors within their own neighborhoods. A parade is an open-ended

performance; people can tag along at the end of it, becoming self-appointed members

of the parade. This self-designation as a participant is at the crux of socially engaged art.

It is at the core of the anti-spectatorial nature of the work, and taps into the symbolic

and ritualistic nature of art at its most carnivalesque. It is a moment of bringing together

the community, the various ethnic groups, street gangs, religious affliliations, and has

since been an annual part of the local culture.

In an interview with Michael Brenson from 2013, Martinez talks about the

relationship between such projects as *Culture in Action* and the traditional vocabulary of

art criticism, noting that new forms of socially engaged art do not conform well to the

traditional forms of judging artistic value: "The consequences of 'Culture in Action' are

not to be quantified through the vernacular of the critical art apparatus. Therefore, I

think it's beneficial for us to attempt to conjure languages and terminology that are not

about pinpointing, but actually continuing to unpack and free these projects from the

constraints of the tools of criticism" (209). Not only does socially engaged art bring with

it a host of projects previously unrecognized as artwork, it also demands a new form of

understanding those works. As Martinez emphasizes, the works themselves are

concerned with the expansion of the possibility of art, not its limitation. A critical

apparatus that is intent on creating boundaries, walls, and borders is inimical to

gestures of liberation. For Martinez, what is at stake are the "unknown possibilities for

art-making" (212), those practices to come that will burst the constraints of such

hidebound regulatory classifications, which causes him to wonder about what would be

required for artists in the twenty-first century "to maintain genuine freedom and

autonomy" (212). The use of the word autonomy is important, as it suggests the artist

must be the one to furnish the laws by which he or she creates art. To go even further:

the art practice itself must generate its own laws in relation to its context, not seek to

conform to those already in existence. Nor does this imply that those rules can then be

generalized to fit a whole range of similar projects. It is important to be willing to exist in

uncertainty regarding art rather than impinge on its self-regulating nature, though this

does raise the issue of the relationship between art's autonomy and the desire to break

down the barriers between art and life. Socially engaged art exists at this tension,

without fully answering that concern. the Projects like *Culture in Action*, therefore, are

important precursors for how socially engaged art subsequently manifests the desire for

art's self-liberating capacity.

At this point, the question must be asked as to whether or not socially engaged

art's claims match up to its results. It is not simply a matter of applying outmoded

critique to the latest of artistic expressions, but how one determines if a socially engaged project was successful? What criteria should be used in determining a project as effective? Or is that simply following down an unnecessary and highly problematic path? Daniel Martinez claimed for artists "a unique license to try out propositions without a utilitarian purpose" (Finkelpearl 51), but that does not preclude the ability to discuss a work, even if it is only according to the work's own parameters. There is, however, a fine line between a discourse of description and one of prescription, between describing what something is and stating what something *should* be. What is most important when analyzing socially engaged art is that the critique is not another manner of co-optation, and that the power structures inherent in such discourses (art criticism, academic treatises, or even the requirements surrounding proposals for possible grant funding) are not reinscribed through the logical (and therefore seemingly neutral, objective, and "natural") constructs of the dominant culture.

One of the main ways the dominant culture safeguards what it cannot at first admit into itself is to minimize and dismiss. Rick Lowe, for instance, quoted in *Future Imperfect*, laments the lack of serious dialogue around the work currently being practiced and produced. He calls for an art that rises above "capitalist articulation" and towards the "completely different direction" that social practice might take as a result of critical debating: "I'm talking about how our work relates to issues of power, privilege, appropriations, exploitations, etc." he states (23).

Lowe's most famous work is *Project Row Houses* (PRH), a seminal work of socially engaged art based in the Third Ward of Houston, Texas, founded in 1993.

According to the project website, *Project Row Houses*: "PRH shifts the view of art from

traditional studio practice to a more conceptual base of transforming the social

environment" (projectrowhouses.org). By focusing especially on the lives of inner-city

African-Americans, the project offers art practices as a mode of culturally enriching the

local community that meets that community where it is, locally and contingent upon the

actual needs of that community. Art is not something either locked up downtown in a

museum dedicated to the rich, nor is it relegated as a statue in some park or other.

Lowe's work is specifically not gentrification, it is not simply the move of artists turning

abandoned buildings into studio spaces. His project has created community centers,

housing for unwed teens, libraries, and educational spaces.

The programs of the PRH are categorized under five headings that were inspired

by African-American painter John Biggers: "Public Art, Education, Social Safety Nets,

Sustainability, Architecture." The Architecture section works with the idea of the row

houses or "shotgun" houses of this impoverished section of Houston. The attempt to

help mitigate the affordable housing crisis of the area hinges upon two ideas: "The

beautiful form representative of a specific style, spirit, and society" and "The need for

social action in our community that gives life to the project." A representative form (in

this case, of architecture) aligned with the need for social action are the two motivating

forces for the projects under the heading of "Architecture." The form is representative

of a certain community and working with that form also works with the community

itself, and the community is in turn shaped by the forms in which and through which it

dwells. In fact, all five pillars of the project provide an overall concept under which

individualsengage in projects that reflect the lived-experiences of their everyday lives. PRH (Project Row Houses, the organization) has created a sister corporation called Row Houses CDC, which has developed a series of dwelling structures in order to help the people living in the Third Ward remain there and thrive. The project website explains:"Row House CDC provides affordable community housing for low and moderate income households while preserving the culture, architecture and history of the Third Ward.Thus, the focus is strengthening, sustaining and celebrating the life of the Third Ward community." The artists working within the context of PRH CDC are not creating items of luxury for possible investment, but are working within a community, *as* a community; a community that is creating its own form, its own aesthetic structure.

With much the same idea of communal authorship, *The Laundromat Project* of Harlem, New York, describes itself in this way: "We amplify the creativity that already exists within communities by using arts and culture to build community networks, solve problems, and enhance our sense of ownership in the places where we live, work, and grow" (laundromatproject.org). This ongoing project is also engaged in creating places for artists and community members. For instance, in a current (2017) project, *The Kelly Street Collaborative*, the Laundromat Project, in collaboration with Workforce Housing Group, Kelly Street Garden, and Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, to renovate a two-bedroom apartment in the Bronx to be a hub for socially engaged creativity. Throughout its existence, *The Laundromat Project* has emphasized the relationship between art and education (most often taking place in local laundromats, which the group sees as vital community gathering places), either offering education in

the arts directly, or combining artists with community members to create solutions to local problems. As their website states: "Over the long-term, we intend to foster and support artist-leaders who are empowered by, committed to, and fully conversant in community-attuned art practices" (laundromatproject.org). In this way there is a reciprocal relationship between the artists and the community in which they work.

In both *Project Row Houses* and *The Laundromat Project* as well as most other socially engaged art projects, the underlying commitment is to the community itself, with the assurance that the community, regardless of socio-economic status or racual structures, has within itself the capacity for creative change. These are not instances of an artist from outside the community coming in to train the people, but people living the problems of their community working alongside artists (many of whom come from similar backgrounds) to form their own community in a way that better meets their own needs. But it is with artists that this work progresses, as artists most often have the skillset and the imagination to see problems outside of a particular training and background, who are used to creating in ways that often do not mirror the productions of the dominant class, and who, for the most part, must be ingenious in their sources of funding for their projects. In other words, artists are used to working in marginal spaces, which allows them to successfully interact with marginalized communities. *Women on Waves* is the pre-eminent example of just such a use of artistic imagination to solve a social exigency.

Rebecca Gomperts, the founder of *Women on Waves*, studied visual arts as well as medicine before becoming an abortion doctor and activist. She sailed on a

Greenpeace vessel to South America, becoming a doctor and activist who performed abortions and advocated for women's right to choose, and to "empower women to exercise their human rights to physical and mental autonomy" (womenonwaves.org/en/page/650/who-are-we). The website continues by stating that in "giving women the tools to confront repressive cultures and laws," Gomperts wanted to ensure "that women have access to medical abortion and information through innovative strategies." It is the "innovative strategies" here that is of importance todissertation, with its mixture of art project and direct political action. *Women on Waves* is not an art object *about* the oppressed position of many of the women around the globe, but actively provides abortions and disseminates important information. The latter has become such an important aspect of the work that a project entitled "Women on the Web" was created as a clearinghouse for safe abortion information, including ways for women to self-induce abortions through pills, which are carried on drones. By providing a ship that lies in international waters, women can have access to abortions beyond the reaches of their countries' restrictions. In addition,by working the boundary between art and political action, activism and design, *Women on Waves* has been able to exploit legal loopholes in order to directly affect the lives of women. *Women on Waves* turned to Atelier Van Lieshout (AVL), a collaborative art group founded in 1995 by Joep van Lieshout, which focused on the interaction of art with real world problems. Their design for the portable abortion clinic in a shipping container was exhibited in the 2001 Venice Bienalle. In Nato Thompson's *Living as Form*, the end of the boat's use as a sea-going abortion clinic is countered by its having been displayed at various arts

exhibitions "in homage to the organization's roots in the arts: early funding was

provided by the Mondriaan Foundation" (251). The description of Atelier Van Lieshout

on InstallationArt's website describes the ideas enacted here:

> We can delineate a line interconnecting the work of AVL
>
> with the theatrical actions of artists such as Paul McCarthy
>
> and John Bock. But McCarthy and Bock remain contained
>
> in the jewellery box of the art institution whereas AVL
>
> have at least one foot in the real world. It is to AVL's credit
>
> that they can combine a subversive discourse of the body
>
> with rational contributions to society rather than being cut
>
> off from social function by total dependency on the
>
> socially marginalised elitism of the art system.
>
> (installationart.net/Chapter3Interaction/interaction06.html)

Clearly in these and in many more instances, the fact that participants are artists

is not tangential, but fundamental to the possibility of these projects. The role of artist

as one who can function creatively across borders is paramount to these projects

One project that directly confronts this "jewellery box" world of elitism is Paul

Ramírez Jonas's 2010 project *Key to the City*, which, according to CreativeTime's

description, "bestowed the key to New York City—an honor usually reserved for

dignitaries and heroes—to esteemed and everyday citizens alike. For this participatory

public art project, Ramírez Jonas reinvented the civic ornamental honor as a master key

able to unlock more than 20 sites across New York City's five boroughs and invited the

people of the city to exchange keys in small bestowal ceremonies"

(creativetime.org/projects/key-to-the-city). In this ritualistic act, the key is actually a

functioning key that opens certain places that people might not go to on their own, and

therefore is not only a canny send-up of "dignitaries" and their celebrations, but also an

invitation across often self-imposed borders. The key as symbol of both invitation and

access stands at the center of this participatory art project. Although its action is far

more subtle than some of the projects mentioned earlier, this is still a means through

which an artist and community members reconfigure space in order to take it from the

hands of a power structure and democratize it. Space is not only a physical entity, but is

a symbolic one as well. This simple exchange of keys recreates space as a less

hierarchical structure.

The tendency to de-hierarchize is a common feature across the spectrum of

socially engaged art projects, with the emphasis being placed on the creative role of the

community, or audience as participants. The traditional understanding of artistic agency

has been that the artist is the agent and the audience a more or less passive recipient of

the action that the artist initiated. Whether the sculptor carves form from the block of

marble, or the playwright creates dialogues, or the painter arranges pigments on a

canvas, the role of agency has typically resided in the artist as creator. This is no longer

the case with much of socially engaged art, where collaboration and communal

creativity are fundamental to the artistic process.

Pablo Helguera, in his *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and*

Techniques Handbook, gives a quick taxonomy for participation in art, with the first level

describes the traditional audience as the ones who behold the art object (14). Helguera is aware of the criticism launched against this role as that of "passive" recipient by theorist Jacques Rancière but nonetheless sees participation at this level as the lowest level, according to his understanding of socially engaged. This is the level of the viewer in a museum or art gallery, who may be moved or not by a piece of art, but ultimately had little to nothing to do with its creation.

The second level of participation, according to Helguera, is that of completing a simple task designated by the artist, which then completes the art piece (15). An example of this level of participation would be Sophie Calle's recent piece in a Brooklyn cemetery where visitors wrote their "secrets" on a sheet of paper and then slid them into an opening in a monument that was inscribed with the words "Here lie the secrets of the visitors of Green-Wood Cemetery." The artwork requires the direct participation of the audience for it to be completed, but it is conceived and directed by the artist. The participation of the visitors is little more than that of being used as a tool by the artist for the successful completion of the piece. The participants are somewhat autonomous (they could write something other than a secret, for instance), but their contribution is still rather strictly defined and they did not have an active role in the project's conception.

A deeper level of participation is what Helguera calls "creative participation" (15), which requires the audience to assume an active role within the piece that is not completely predetermined by the artist, but is within a structure determined by the artist. The example Helguera gives for this is Allison Smith's 2005 piece called *The*

49

Muster, wherein "fifty volunteers in Civil War uniforms engaged in a reenactment, declaring the causes for which they, personally, were fighting" (15). Again, the artist is the one to develop the project, but now the community is involved with creating their own roles within the project, akin to experimental theater pieces where the audience themselves perform the roles of the actors. In this way, the artist creates a space in which the participants are asked to perform a creative function.

The final stage of participation is "collaborative participation" where "[t]he visitor shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration and direct dialogue with the artist" (15). The artist, then, is one of the voices in creating the project, but must work collaboratively with and within the community. Most of the projects developed as socially engaged works, if they do not fall under this level of participation, see it as the ultimate goal of socially engaged art. Each time a project is described as working "within" the community and growing "out of" the needs of the community itself, it is this level of participation that is being declared. Here the artist is a facilitator for the goals and needs of the community members, and the decisions are shared as democratically as possible. This sets the bar high. As a result, projects often fail to meet this level of democratization.It should be noted that Helguera here speaks of the "responsibility" that the visitors share with the artist concerning the creation and production of the project.

Helguera does go to some pains to insist that one level is not inherently "better" than another (and many complex projects have an amalgam of the different levels, depending upon the goals of the project at the time), but what is useful about having

such a delineation, according to Helguera, is in "evaluating a work's intention in relation to its actualization" and in valuating "the way in which it constructs a community experience" (16). Again, it is instructive to notice that Helguera here talks twice about evaluation: in other words, judging the success of a project given its stated goals. Socially engaged art can often be given the criticism of community "feel good" projects, where non-artists are allowed to don the guise of "real" artists, perhaps to paint a colorful mural on the wall of a community center, and then dismissed as lacking the serious grounding of more formal (read "traditional") art practices.

Even as recently as 2015, Grant Kester, in discussing this issue and noting that Claire Bishop did not mention certain aspects of a Hirschhorn project because they likely seemed "retrograde 'community-art'" would argue that "In some cases, the artists themselves seem simultaneously drawn to, and embarrassed by, the collective, participatory dimension of their own work" (64). Kester then notices the artist Francis Alys' focus on the art world reception of his monumental 2002 work, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, where hundreds of participants collaborate on moving a sand dune in Peru: "Francis Alys avoids any extended discussion of the actual mechanics of the collaborative interaction and negotiation necessary to bring the work into existence, focusing instead on hermeneutic issues around the work's transmission in the art world, or on the symbolism of the performance as a 'mythic' image" (64-5). Kester concludes with a rather damning image himself, of the five hundred participants "reduced to an undifferentiated collective mass, laboring among clouds of sand as a literal illustration of Alys's poetic imagination" (65). Not only does this project not meet the ultimate level of

Helguera's taxonomy, but the community for which and through which this project was realized, is reduced to mere brute labor under the individual artist's command. This raises many concerns about the exploitation possible in socially engaged work, which should trouble any simplistic account of projects that include the community. Just as "plop art" was justly criticized for using local space for its often unrelated artistic or even bureaucratic goals, so too can attempts at socially engaged art become unrelated to the social in which it appears. The socially engaged artist cannot come down from a privileged position to use the labor of the local population to create greater further artistic fame for the artist, thus most of the projects begin with artists (if they do not come from the community itself) immersing themselves within the community, often spending years living and researching the issues important to the community itself. Thus the artist must steer between the anxiety of not being "artist" enough (and becoming seen as mere social activist or worse, "retrograde" community organizer) in the eyes of the art world, and losing touch with local populations who may not have access to the often arcane world of artistic innovations.

Another attempt at introducing rigor into the concept of socially engaged art is one offered by Mario Ybarra, Jr., under the guise of a pragmatic, problem-solving format. In 2015 Ybarra, a Los Angeles artist, visited the Getty Museum's intern program that is run each summer for interns considering a career in the arts. Ybarra is an alum of the Otis College of Art and Design, on the website of which is given a biography of Ybarra that ends with the following: "Ybarra conducts workshops for kids around the country with other artists in the 'Slanguage' artists' collective. He and his artist wife,

Karla Diaz, also organize shows for New Chinatown Barbershop in L.A. Ybarra has also curated a survey of graffiti art at the Inshallah Gallery, L.A. and an exhibition of ball-pen drawings by inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison" (otis.edu/alumni/mario-ybarra-jr).

Ybarra's work is steeped in his heritage, his neighborhood, and his family, and these roots are deeply communal. Nonetheless, Ybarra offers a lecture to the Getty's interns that focuses on artistic process and, to some degree, marketing to the art world. He uses the homey analogy of baking a cake for the creation of an artwork, giving six aspects of any creative project. The fact that he is delineating the six steps of *any creative project* makes clear that we are talking in abstraction here, attempting to come up with universals that apply to any situation whatsoever. In many ways this can be seen as counter to the ideas of socially engaged art itself: a radically localized process that must come from within the given community.

The cake Ybarra baked was actually for his mother and he tells an anecdote about wanting to better the cake his sister made the year before. But then he listed the six important steps:

1. intent: He wanted to bake a cake for his mother's birthday.

2. content: The cake was going to be a chocolate cake with certain ingredients.

3. context: It was his mother's birthday.

4. production: The actual baking of the chocolate cake for his mother's birthday.

5. distribution: The serving of the chocolate cake at the birthday party (and, the website noted, "the need to convince his family that the cake was amazing").

6. documentation: Again according to the website: "he had to leave proof that he

   had made, if not an amazing cake, at least some kind of cake"

It is interesting to note how qualitative judgments step in (an "amazing" cake) as

well as the unexplained "need to convince" and "had to leave proof." If a cake were

really being discussed here, it is hard to imagine how one might convince a person that

a cake is "amazing" if it is not baked well, or if it is delicious, why convincing would enter

the picture. Even more perplexing is the idea that he *had* to leave proof that he had

made the cake. The image of a kitchen piled with dirty bowls and coated with flour

come to mind--which his mother then had to clean up--is ironic, but it is hard to imagine

what other "proof" of cake baking, other than the cake, there could be. And once the

cake was eaten and the dishes washed? It seems that the metaphor might be a bit

stretched in order to come up with universals that apply to any creative project that can

then be told to interns in a pithy, easily rememberable format. But what seems more

important for the discussion here is that this attempt is once again to give a veneer of if

not respectability, at least of rigor and "best practices" to the art process. But if the six

steps are strained even within the metaphor Ybarra uses for cake baking, then it is even

more worthy of questioning as to its application to any creative process whatsoever.

What seems more at stake here is the desire to have a handy guide that one can

transmit in a fairly informal lecture to prospective art "professionals" (the word used on

the website itself). So handy is this guide, that Ybarra uses the image of a hand, with

each step on a finger and "Documentation" written across the palm, suggesting that this

is really the base for the others. The role of documentation in socially engaged art is a topic that I will get into later in this dissertation, but clearly it is already problematic at this point.

I have gone into some detail here to make clear that even in what seems a fairly innocuous idea (six steps in the creative process) is actually fraught with many questions and has underlying it far more traditional understandings of the role of art in society than one might think looking at Ybarra's work. It is a useful framework, and one that I regularly use in my classes, but it is not without its problems when simply applied as a cookie cutter (different baking analogy) approach to art making, particularly that which is purporting to be socially engaged. Yet we can see that there is a desire to make socially engaged art more structured, more rigorous, more abstract, and therefore more acceptable to art "professionals." What is often at the root of such attempts at codification is the insecurity that Kester spoke about.

Such insecurities as those described by Kester, are fed by the prejudices and presuppositions that infuse the art world, and are particularly complex when it comes to socially engaged art projects. On the one hand, artists wish their works to be seen as art by the accepted judges of such things, but on the other hand, they eschew the trappings of that world and claim different goals. These concerns can be exacerbated by the role the participants play in the project, as witnessed above with the moving of a sand dune in Peru. Art is always concerned with audience in one way or another (even if by renouncing such a concern), and the inclusion of the audience into the artwork raises many new issues about the relationship between the audience and the artwork. In

Helguera's taxonomy, the simplest form of socially engaged, participatory art is that of

the traditional audience who remain passive recipients of the art piece, such as those

who attend a symphony or walk through a museum. This level of participation is

deemed insufficient by the standards of socially engaged art: the whole intent is to blur

the lines between audience and artist, making it, as much as possible a truly

collaborative art piece. Helguera, however, does mention the critique of this idea as

posited by French theorist Jacques Rancière , whose work *The Emancipated Spectator*

has become an important text for working through the relationship between artist and

audience.

The work of french theorist, Jacque Rancière, is imprtant in this understanding

the artist and audience connection, stating: "Being a spectator is not some passive

condition that we should transform into activity" (17) and hence Helguera's emphasis

that his taxonomy is not value-based, that the first level is not somehow lesser in

importance than the fourth, though it is hard not to feel that there is some sort of

ranking underlying this, as far as socially engaged art is concerned. For Ranciere, what is

important is what he terms that "third thing" generated by the art relationship itself: "It

is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the

third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which

subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and

effect" (15). In other words, the desire to give the spectator "agency" is fundamentally

misguided, according to this concept. The audience is not an empty vessel coming to the

art project in order to be filled with the excess of creativity or inspiration embedded in

the artwork, but rather that which is created between and among all participants in the art event. The event of art, whether it is a painting on the museum wall or a happening in a New York field is not a unilateral event. "Like researchers," Rancière writes, "artists construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skill are exhibited" (22). This suggests that the prejudices and presuppositions inherent in the passive spectator work to offer the artist a status that is exactly that status the artist seeks to find within the work, like a researcher who controls the parameters of a study in order to ascertain precisely what it is he or she wishes to know or demonstrate about what is already known. It is a hermetic world where the power of the one is made possible by the passivity of the other. In this case the passivity of the audience creates the possibility of the power of the artist. But Rancière discounts this as a fallacy meant only to create the very world it pretends to take for granted: the spectator is not bound, but free, so that the manifestation of the skill of the artist is "rendered uncertain in the terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure." He goes on:

"The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators" (22).

Any relationship to art then, is an event of translation and of active engagement. A spectator does not merely see "The Starry Night," but participates in the creative process with Van Gogh through an act of "translation," incorporating the artwork into the idiom of the spectator, appropriating it, making it personal and living as art. Without

this act of translation, without the creation of the "third thing," without the always

already active participation of the spectator, then art as the event of that creative

participation, does not occur. Therefore, it is a prejudice to suggest that "mere"

spectators need to be moved into a more "active" role, a prejudice that actually seeks to

fortify the privileged role of the elite artist. Perhaps this is an idealized form of

spectatorship, one that disavows simply reinscribing the dead "translations" handed to

the public, but it does suggest that the equating of spectator to a role of passivity is too

reductive.

The community is already an artistic body. Without this, there would be no

individual artists. This prejudice has its roots in class distinctions. Rancière bases his

analysis on the correspondence of two workers from the 1830s that he encountered

while researching "the condition and forms of consciousness of workers at that time"

(18)) that are carried down to this day: that workers are the matter that needs to be

given form by the inspired capitalist. Thus, the artist is the inspired puppeteer who

creates the play in which the puppets might appear to have agency, but that is really

just proof of that artist's skill. A cake, after all, cannot bake itself. Ranciere correctly

detects the underlying presuppositions of seeing baking a cake as a metaphor for the

artwork, and how they further reinscribe the class privileges at work within society.

CHAPTER 4

SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

In her book on social practice art forms, Shannon Jackson, Berkeley professor

and theorist on performativity and theatricality, writes the following about the various

attitudes different artists have toward the "social" aspect of socially engaged art:

"While a radical progressivism is often assumed in experimental art gatherings,

a closer look reveals a number of questions about what social models such

varied social practices actually imagine. Whereas for many the word "social"

signifies an interest in explicit forms of political change, for other

contemporary artists it refers more autonomously to the aesthetic exploration

of time, collectivity, and embodiment as medium and material. Even when

social practices address political issues, their stance and their forms differ

explicitly in their themes and implicitly in their assumptions about the role of

aesthetics in social inquiry" (Jackson 14).

If one is engaged in art "socially," what does that mean? Isn't "socially engaged

art" a redundancy, as all art, assuming an audience has the idea of "social" built into it,

and one would be hard pressed to find art that is not created by some form of

engagement with its social context. Here, Jackson is trying to tease out some of these

questions, despite the overlapping and complexity of the issues or the lack of concern

by some artists over those very issues. Rather than getting lost in a labyrinth of

theorizing, it may well be best simply to perform the work first and let the definitions

and distinctions come afterward in some form of emergent or grounded theory. On the

other hand, what is the point of calling something socially engaged art, if it is incapable

of defining that very social aspect? This section intends to work through some of the

aspects of that sociality not only in order to fully understand the meaning of this hybrid

art form, but also to emphasize the importance of socially engaged art in contemporary

practice. With this in mind, it is important not to confine ourselves to vague statements

about the social, but to analyze as well the social confines in which art itself exists. The

social is not simply all its constituents in some utopian space of equal rights, but is a

system of interdependent institutions in which constituents of highly divergent power

create and occupy space. Thus, the art world is a particular coming together of

institutions such as the art market, galleries, museums, and academia. Artists

themselves rely on the social institutions that allow them to sell artwork for money, but

also obtain grants from governments or non-profits, or teach in universities. In her

discussion of this topic, Jackson considers the expansion of neo-liberalism and the

coinciding reduction in state-sponsorship for the arts, warning: "If progressive artists

and critics unthinkingly echo a routinized language of anti-institutionalism and anti-

statism, we can find ourselves unexpectedly colluding with neoliberal impulses that

want to dismantle public institutions of human welfare" (16). It is important, then, to

examine these institutions critically, and not to fall into a mere rhetorical stance that

can then be assumed by those institutions, and equally important to be fully cognizant

that there is a fine line here that can seem like acquiescence to social injustice. Do these

institutions actually need rhetorical "collusion" to carry out their dismantling of social

welfare programs? Was it due to the "routinized language of anti-institutionalism" that

art programs were under attack in the Reagan years and are so now again? What is clear

from these first glimpses into the subject is that the "social" in socially engaged art is a

difficult and complex topic, and is not so easy as simply suggesting that collaborative art

forms working for the public good are, well, good.

Figure 1. *Please Love Austria,* Christoph Schlingensief, Vienna International Festival,

2000

In his infamous work *Please Love Austria*, Christoph Schlingensief locked a dozen

refugees in a shipping container to live for a week and conducted a game show where

these refugees, who were seeking political asylum, would be monitored by an audience,

who would then vote on who should be deported, with the winner receiving "either a

cash prize or a residency visa, granted through marriage" (Thompson *Living* 24). The

container was decorated with flags from an Austrian right-wing party and a huge banner

reading "Ausländer Raus" (Foreigners Out) and calls to honor and loyalty. This artwork

was clearly a provocation of the highest order, not only to the strong component of

racism in Austrian society, but to the individuals who encountered such a spectacle.

There was no neutrality to be had when confronted with something that seemed to on

the one hand be so profoundly racist, but yet was exposing that very element in a social

order that was presenting itself as inclusive. This is therefore inclusive of racist ideology

and serves only to hide the power of the xenophobia within it. Nato Thompson, former

curator of CreativeTime, states: "The project took place in a public square, and provided

both a physical space for people to come together as well as a mediated space for

discussion. This gathering of people wasn't what one would call a space of consensus

but one of deep discord and frustration" (24).

This project clearly could be described as injurious to the public good, by

fomenting discord and inciting racism (or inciting those who perceived the project itself

as racist, as spray-painted graffiti at the site suggested), and could generally be seen as

an attack on the sensibilities of anyone who came into contact with the event. Yet, the

social order in which it was placed was one that created a sense of stability and calm

through tolerating a strain of virulent racism, and allowing the ideology of racism to

become an accepted part of its political discourse. If one did not disrupt the social order,

then one was necessarily complicit in it. One does not have to be a racist to benefit from

living in a racist society—unless you are on the receiving end of it, of course. As Lucy

Lippard noted, "Conventionally artists are not supposed to go so far beneath the surface

as to provoke changed attitudes. They are merely supposed to embellish, observe and

reflect the sights and systems of the status quo" (qtd. in Gran Fury 277).

But to return to Shannon Jackson, she reminds us that "If a political art discourse

becomes too enthralled with breaking down institutions, then it ignores the degree to

which we are in fact dependent upon institutions. Yes, the 'institution' constrains; but it also sustains" and later: "But I think that we all rely upon supporting systems—whether they are repairing our highways, picking up our garbage, installing our exhibits, or folding our socks—more than we realize that we do. Support is noticed less when it is working for you; it is more often noticed when it breaks down or is taken away" (artpractical.com). One can look at the support of the system in place and suggest that there still needs to be a routine to make the trains run on time, but if those trains are headed to Auschwitz, then that is not an option. And (to be less extreme) if it is a racist social order that you are relying upon to ensure that people of color have no choice but to fold your socks for you if they hope to survive, then it might be necessary to do more than notice the support system. After all, it is not a system that is "picking up our garbage," but human beings caught within that system.

In contrast to this line of thinking is the decades-long work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, particularly her "Touch Sanitation Performance," which ran from 1979 to 1980, during which she shook the hand of every sanitation worker who would do so, almost 8,500 people. Ukeles's work s from an office on Beaver Street in Lower Manhattan, deep within the headquarters of the New York Department of Sanitation — where she has been an unsalaried artist in residence since not long after she proposed the idea to the city agency in 1976. In a 1969 manifesto written by the artist, Ukeles ironically points out what Jackson was trying to illuminate: "The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?" But the question is—even prior to the revolution—who *is* picking up the garbage? Ukeles's work has

come under criticism for leaving the system intact that she brought into the open. In a

review of Ukeles's retrospective at the Queens Museum, Jillian Steinhauer writes:

"Much has been made of Ukeles's success in crossing gender and racial barriers with

'Touch Sanitation Performance,' but it strikes me that its shortcomings result from her

not crossing them in a deeper, more meaningful way. Ukeles came to understand the

workings of New York's sanitation system, but she failed to grasp the larger social

system in which she and it existed" ("How Mierle Laderman Ukeles Turned Maintenance

Work into Art"). Such criticisms, however, may well fall into the category of decrying the

legitimacy or purity of something because it did not go far enough. Even if there are

artist interventions that went well beyond what Ukeles's was doing (Ben Davis and

Mostafa Heddaya in their reviews of the show pointed to the Art Workers' Coalition as a

more powerful example of an artist intervention into the socio-economic sphere), there

is a clear line between what Ukeles has spent years accomplishing and what Jackson

implies through her rhetoric. Not only did Ukeles fold her own socks, but she elevated

the labor of the washerwoman to that of art by washing the steps of the Wadsworth

Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1973. In her manifesto, Ukeles

lamented, "The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages,

housewives = no pay" and "Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things,

and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art." What is important here is

that Ukeles was not just performing a pose, but performing her expected work of being

a woman, a wife, and a mother *as* an artist, therefore bringing the underlying structures

of oppression into stark relief.

It is important to examine the structures that create the art world as such. This analysis will be incomplete because any attempt at an exhaustive listing of every aspect of such a structure will necessarily fall short. The desire here is to illuminate a structure that is fundamentally oppressive, that is used to keep a certain social order in place, and then make apparent why socially engaged art is a unique, creative, inspiring, and ultimately metamorphic reaction to that structure.

The change in the way the artist saw the institutions of art, primarily the gallery and museum as proper places for art, began with Minimalism's change in focus. Minimalism as an art trend, often seen as a reaction against the passionate individuality of Abstract Expressionism and Modernism's creation of the artistic "genius," sought to limit the presence of the artist within the art work. Socially engaged art has at its core, a more neutral role for the artist. Writer James Meyer, in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, refers to a seminal exhibition of minimalist sculpture held in the Jewish Museum, and curated by Lucy Lippard and Kynaston McShine. About the exhibition, McShine remarked, "It was not a show of canonization of three people" but a show of inclusivity, of "work worth looking at" (Meyer 24). The work in the show not only used more common, everyday materials such as plastic and sheet metal (rather than bronze and steel or wood), but the exhibition promoted a new sense of scale as well. "Sized to the viewer's body, the site of the particular gallery space, removed down from the pedestal and placed on the floor," the work exemplified a new interdisciplinary hybrid of sculpture and architecture (Meyer 24). But, as chronicled by Meyer in his work, by the end of the 1960s, the move toward "dematerialization" was already beginning. In

discussing Robert Morris's turn to "Anti Form" (the title of an article he simultaneously published in *Artforum* in 1968), Meyer writes: "[T]he notion of anti-form implied something like an unmediated physical encounter with matter, an encounter unfettered by language and *a priori* assumptions" (267). In conclusion, Meyer continues, after Morris's critique of Minimalism, it was "Perceived as the ultimate capitalist art form, as a rational methodology uncritical of a totalizing industrial order" (268). Morris shifted his view from a focus on the creation of a three-dimensional work to an understanding that included not only the space but the spectator, theorizing "a co-extensive relation between the viewer and the three-dimensional work, a mobile spectatorship conducted in real time and space" (Meyer 268). Ultimately, this, too, merely created a space of control, a theatre of defined access and perspective. Now "the floor or ambient space rather than the background wall became the plane of perception," but the movement for minimalist art was clear and postminimalism (coined by Robert Pincus-Witten in 1968) was "meant to suggest an expansion of formal possibilities opened up by minimalism rather than its critique" (Meyer 269).

Shannon Jackson, in *Living as Form*, speaks as well of the connection between the advent of minimalism and the ultimate move to the social. This, according to Jackson, was one of the instrumental moves that laid groundwork for the transition to social engagement, citing "the return to time-based work, the entry of the body of the artist, the explicit relation to the beholder, the avowal of the spatial and institutional conditions of production" as important factors (91). As Minimalism opened up the

possibilities of art's *form*, it also opened up the possibility of critiquing art's *place*, as shown by the following.

In his analysis of the museum or the gallery as what he calls a "[p]rivileged place," artist Daniel Buren (who himself was initially classified as a Minimalist artist) writes:

> Privileged place with a triple role:
>
> 1.   *Aesthetic.* The Museum is the frame and effective support upon which the work is inscribed/composed. It is at once the centre in which the action takes place and the single (topographical and cultural) viewpoint for the work.
>
> 2.   *Economic.* The Museum gives a sales value to what it exhibits, has privileged/selected. By preserving or extracting it from the commonplace, the Museum promotes the work socially, thereby assuring its exposure and consumption.
>
> 3.   *Mystical.* The Museum/Gallery instantly promotes to "Art" status what it exhibits with conviction, i.e. habit, thus diverting in advance any attempt to question the foundations of art without taking into consideration the place from which the question is put. The Museum (the Gallery) constitutes the mystical body of Art.

"It is clear that the above three points are only there to give a general idea of the Museum's role. it must be understood that these roles differ in intensity depending on the Museums (Galleries) considered, for socio-political reasons (relating to art or more generally to the system)" (Hertz 189).

Within his first division, Buren reminds us that the museum or gallery itself is a kind of frame for the work of art. What functions outside the work of art to create a certain display of the work, is itself a part of that work. We can not look at the work of art as existing in a perceptual void, where we dismiss everything around us; the work is grounded in a certain place and time, a certain set of perceptions. But it is not only in what lighting, in which room, or behind what glass the art piece is displayed. The museum or gallery controls when art works may be perceived, by controlling access to art through its "business" hours. Even who can have access to the art is controlled, through memberships, private openings, all meant to create levels of privilege in relation to access to the art itself. In this way, the institution is not only a privileged place, but a privileging place as well. It is therefore, in the case of the museum or gallery, grounded in a certain authorial frame, a certain structure of power. Through the museum's authority as an institution, it guides our perception of the work and we see through the lens of that institution. The ways in which the museum displays the work helps control any understanding of what it is we are even perceiving. And, as seen in the third section of Buren's argument, it is the authority of just this institution to direct our perception of what art is in and of itself. But at the very least, at this point, the museum or the gallery controls the "aesthetic," which ultimately refers back to perception and

sensation, the manner of the event. And it is the event of art that is taking place, and it is taking place within the gallery or museum. Art is a relationship that takes place, and it is doing so, most often, within the confines of the "white cube," creating an artificial atmosphere, a prescribed pre-determined environment.

But it is clear from Buren's second point that there actually is something that can thrive within these structures: money. The museum or gallery becomes the site of an exchange of capital. The work of art becomes the bearer of capital solidified, seemingly slowed down within the confines of the white cube, while the value invisibly increases, the more people look at the art work. And, of course, the more people, the more money the museum can charge, and the more likely it is to get "gifts," governmental and corporate endowments, and can use its "brand" to leverage more investments in various capital campaigns. The more income the museum or gallery controls, the more space it can acquire, or the more prestigious the space. The privilege of the privileged space increases dynamically.

Finally, Buren comments on the quality of the "mystical," in other words, that semi-magical quality a high priest has for sanctifying certain objects with a sort of dazzling aura. The power to confer the title of "Art" upon this or that work is a power of raising the mundane to the wondrous. In a world of commodities all vying for supremacy, and given the relationship this institution has with investments of many kinds, this power is highly significant, but it is to something else that Buren turns his attention: the ability "to question the foundations of art." If the museum and gallery become the mystical body of "Art," then it can be considered in the relationship to the

manner in which the Catholic church sees itself as the mystical body of Christ on earth.

In that way, the dogma of the church, established by an infallible patriarch, is above

question, something that the faithful are required to take on faith, without question.

What can and cannot be art is decided by the unimpeachable authority figures with

direct lines to ultimate Truth. It is these who are the guarantors of the value of their

jealously guarded "Art."

It is, of course, because of these special powers that Buren and others think the

institution of the museums and galleries and their relationship to art need to be

questioned and reevaluated, particularly in regard to their tendency to create a space of

privilege that removes art from contact with what is commonly called "life," and the

concomitant "deprivileging" of life in relation to art. In his introduction to *Living as*

Form, Nato Thompson seeks to give four broad overarching "manifestations" to this

desire to connect to "life": 1) *Anti-representationalism*, where, "in reaction to the

steady state of mediated two-dimensional cultural production" there is a focus on

"methods of working that allow genuine interpersonal human relationships to develop"

and a "privileging of the lived experience"; 2) *Participation*: "art that requires some

action on behalf of the viewer in order to complete the work"; 3) *Situated in the "Real"*

World, a vital concern for many artists who worry, as Thompson notes, that "the

designated space for representation takes the teeth out of the work"; and finally the

intent of 4) *Operating in the Political Sphere*, where such is seen as the most direct

means of having "impact" in the world outside of the rarefied environments typically

sanctioned as those of art (21-22).

In their lists, both Buren and Thompson seek to develop Minimalism's concerns for not only the form of art itself (its object-oriented production), but also for the form of art's environment. Minimalism and other forms associated with the dematerialization of art in the early and mid 1960s pointed the way for the breaking down of these barriers that had defined art and art's access, which the move to socially engaged art forms sought to disrupt.

Alongside the privileged places of the galleries and museums stands the role of academia, particularly the "art school" as such. What is clear is that the authority of the academic institution is similar to that of the galleries and museums discussed above. In teaching art practices and art history, in purchasing and displaying art works, in hiring artists "in residence," the institution of the university (most of which contain galleries and museums of their own) plays a significant and, again, privileged role in determining social relationships to art proper. The university itself becomes the frame in which the work of art is seen. This now can mean sculpture outside buildings, gardens, performances, and video, the gamut of art practices we currently associate with academic institutions. Where a museum or gallery might have a certain reputation or a certain cachet for its display of artwork, the university includes both the ivy-covered halls of its tradition with the innovative research and pioneering technology of today's modern university. This, of course, feeds into Buren's second concern of economics: the wealth of the top modern research university far exceeds that of many of the world's galleries and museums, which not only is a concern regarding which artists will be selected for lucrative projects to create art for the campus, and artists who also require

teaching positions in a time where the humanities and the arts in particular are being

defunded at historic rates. And ultimately this speaks to Buren's final point, for the

university has then in its power to christen those works it chooses as "important," and

fund those artists as professors it sees in keeping with its role as the embodiment of

higher education, and to determine what, as art, should be taught. The culture loves the

stories of the self-taught artist who scrounges in poverty, but whose light of genius can

not be denied, and ultimately breaks into the highest ranks of the artistic realm. This

sort of romanticization helps the system keep in place its touchstone of the

"miraculous," the discovery of great talent hidden in the drab world of dreary jobs, but

it belies the reality. Universities, colleges and art schools, despite having had art

programs cut from the earliest stages of education, are full of students working through

credit hour after credit hour studying art history and taking classes in the various forms

of studio practice. It is also very important to point out that many of those students are

going deeply into debt to do so.

For instance, a February 2013 article from *The Wall Street Journal* titled "A

Degree Drawn in Red Ink" had the subtitle "Graduates of Arts-Focused Schools Are

Shown to Rack Up the Most Student Debt," estimating the median debt load of a

student from a school specializing in art, music and design as $21,576. A March 2016

article from *U.S. News and World Report* had just as grim an assessment, which cited

government statistics to put the median annual income of a "fine artist" at $44,000

(wildly successful outliers should not have as huge an impact on median calculation as

they would have on the average) and that of photographers at a mere $30,000. The

article continues:

> "It's a big responsibility to put young people out in the world
>
> following this track, and it weighs on you as a professor," says
>
> Mary Ellen Strom, who teaches courses in video and directs
>
> the MFA program at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in
>
> Boston, where tuition runs $42,000.

Still, the article states, graduate programs are growing, and there were more than twice

as many Master of Fine Arts degrees given in 2012 than in 1970. The economic power

that Buren questioned in regard to galleries and museums is not only a factor in

universities' ability to commission, buy, and sell art, it is also a formidable means of

control through the burden of debt.

At first glance it might seem that this last is a tangential affair, that all students

go into debt to finance their college educations and it has nothing specifically to do with

art, but a recent article by a professor at Iowa State discussed "whether the

extraordinary profits from contemporary art sales are related to mounting debts

incurred by art students, the reliance of museums on a contingent workforce or unpaid

labor by art students, or investments by museums in urban gentrification and real estate

development" (Rectanus 1-2). This is a complex of relationships that is one of

"asymmetrical networks of exchange, dependency, and debt" (Rectanus 3). Similarly, a

conference held at Cooper Union in January 2015 wonders this on its website:

We live in an era of unprecedented profits from

contemporary art sales and massive debts incurred by art

students. Are these phenomena related? Is it a coincidence

that in an age in which art can be made from nothing, the

price attached to an art degree is staggeringly high?

A coincidence, it clearly is not. The road to art is an expensive one, where

individuals travel without any surety given that anything will be given in return other

than proof of having completed (or at least attended) the institution. Demanding high

price for so uncertain an outcome,it is little more than gambling and betting against the

house. This is especially important to the concerns of socially engaged art, as Rectanus

mentions, citing both Grant Kester and Nato Thompson: "Within a field of social

relations that is increasingly defined by debt, we can also identify intersections with

contemporary discourses on art and activism, most notably in debates on 'relational

aesthetics' or 'socially engaged art'" (4).

One art project that gained notoriety across the nation was that of *MFA No MFA*,

whose member Lee Relvas spoke at the 2015 CreativeTime summit in which I

participated. This was a group of graduate art students at the University of Southern

California's Roski School of Art and Design who all dropped out of the program in

protest against "administration malfeasance and 'unnecessary institutional bullshit'"

(http://creativetime.org/summit/nyc-2015/speakers-2/mfa-mfa/). The entire graduating

class repudiated the ties the program, the department, and the school had to debt,

financial oppression of various sorts, and, as Relvas tells it, "to act upon our desires to

put our energies toward structures that encourage participation, agency, more weirdness, and more joy." The modern university is a product of and a reflection of the international corporation, she reminds us, stating that the tuition for USC has increased "an astounding 92% since 2001," while compensation for the highest tier of administrators for the university had more than tripled at the same time and eighty percent of the faculty is adjunct, burdened with low pay, few to no benefits, and part-time and/or itinerant status. But it is her description of the "muscle memory of debt," where she felt the shame and anxiety from being thrown into collections due to student loans, that is the most compelling, as she recounts how she and the other members of her class were informed that their financial packages were being shrunk despite old promises. As her time ran out, the warning music sounded, and Relvas, in one of the more inspiring moments of the summit, began to chant her final points in tune with the music: "Not what are we up against, but what are the openings? Not what are the resources, but what are our resourcefulness? What can we do when we do it together?" For Relvas, this was not an abandonment but a move to "elsewhere," that was outside the calculus of the accrediting machine.

Again, this is hardly the sole purview of art school students, but a crisis in college education generally. Even so, it has an important impact on art students specifically. Many if not most students go to universities in order to get the education and training to embark upon a successful career, not merely to have access to what was formerly called a "liberal education." It is no longer the case that those who simply seek training to work go to a trade school. In fact, many former trade or technical schools have

changed their names to seem more like the all-encompassing liberal arts college. At the same time, however, the colleges and universities have become more and more high-end trade schools, places for students to study engineering, biology, and chemistry, but also education, hotel management, and culinary arts in order to train students for positions after their schooling is complete.

The argument I am making is not simply that the students of these programs are much more able to attain employment after attending college. That is true, and that makes the parasite of school debt even more difficult to accept, let alone defend. But why this is of vital importance to art students and to those of us interested in socially engaged art in particular is that the scale of the debt manipulates students to participate in the status quo of the social order in hopes of alleviating that debt burden. The idea is that a student who is heavily in debt is much more likely to enter the job market more intent on maximizing his or her earning in order to pay on the debt and still make ends meet. And that may be fine for a dental hygienist, whose career is in no way one of critically examining the social order. A dental hygienist relies on the social order, the support of the system,on the trains running on time, as Shannon Jackson has it, so that appointments can be filled. But the role of the socially engaged artist is not simply to fit within the status quo, to play the part of the cog in the machine and thereby earn a paycheck. Rather, the role of the socially engaged artist is to gain a vantage point outside of the machine (inasmuch as that is even possible) in order to see the social as the material of possibility. To see, as Paul Ramirez Jonas has that "The public has a form and any form can be art" (Thompson *Living* 22) means to step out of

the social order at least enough to gain a perspective that is not wholly one with the social order itself. Whether or not a certain dental hygienist does this is one thing, but no one expects it as a matter of the dental hygienist's job. This is why the relationship between socially engaged art and education is so vital--and why, of course, it comprises its own section of this dissertation.

Finally, I wish to address the role of the art market as one of the institutions of art. There is simply no way to deal with something this complex, this immersed within the global trade system, this open to diverse opinions in such a small space as I have for it. Still, it would be a glaring omission not to discuss that institution that is most clearly a pretext for global capital investment. But I have elsewhere discussed Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull, or the late Jean-Michel Basquiat's record-breaking sale. Rather than analyzing the market, the relationship of the auction house to the gallery, comparing the investor to the collector, the role of celebrity and the signature, all of which is important, I would instead like to discuss a documentary I have seen several times that focuses on a specific piece of socially engaged art. This will not answer all questions concerning the art market, surely, but I believe it will offer a striking example that might best complete this section about the role of art institutions, especially in relation to socially engaged art.

The winner of countless awards, including audience awards at both Sundance and the Berlin Film Festival, as well as being nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary, *Waste Land* chronicles the activities of artist Vik Muniz, a resident of Brooklyn, but a native of Brazil. Muniz worked with the trash pickers of the world's

largest dump outside of Rio de Janeiro to create self-portraits of them out of garbage. The film's website proclaims that it "in the end, offer[s] stirring evidence of the transformative power of art and the alchemy of the human spirit." Certainly as Muniz works with the "catadores" (those sifting through the dangerous ocean of trash for sellable scraps), convincing them to see themselves in a way they had never imagined, and comes to know them as individual humans, the movie is poignant and captivating. Watching the process whereby the catadores become the artists, designing an image of themselves with the garbage that is both their curse and their sustenance is dramatic and revelatory.

Muniz has gained fame for his series of photographs of images in eccentric materials, including chocolate syrup, sugar, and dirt, which have been widely exhibited. Late in the film, it is decided that the photographs Muniz takes of the garbage portraits should be taken to a gallery in London, which *Time* puts this way: "Toward the end of the film, Muniz goes to London to auction the work at Phillips de Pury, selling one portrait for more than $64,000. He returns 100% of the proceeds to the subjects so they can improve their labor union to educate and protect the workers of Jardim Gramacho" (time.com/3775724/portraits-with-purpose-vik-muniz-in-waste-land). This is the source of the film's "feel-good" reputation, and the central point I wish to make here.

Whether or not the auction raised tens of thousands of dollars to help the indigent workers at Jardim Gramacho (the local name for the enormous trash heap), and whether or not that money was then used for unionization of the workers, or seed

money for a business, or education, is not the point. No one would begrudge these poor people any benefits they might gain during a painfully deprived life. Again, that is not the point here. What is significant is that in order to gain access to that money, the few representative catadores had to attend a gala reception at the gallery, where the hyper-wealthy could fawn over them as if exotic animals, then assuage their feelings of privilege by splurging on photographs of these workers made from garbage. It was by becoming themselves a commodity to be traded in at auction, to show their scars before the rich to prove the value of the photographs, that the poor workers could be given the charity from an auction. In other words, they had to go to the beneficiaries of the very system that was causing them this pain and suffering, to ask for largesse. And then, when a handful walked away with those few dollars in their grip, we are all to rejoice in the "transformative power of art and the alchemy of the human spirit." The capitalist system of the art market saved the wretched of the earth.

What is evident from the overview just presented is that art exists within the capitalist economy not merely as a commodity for sale, though that is its most recognizable form, but also as a contested space within and between various institutions, bureaucracies, and financial instruments. Whether it is a diamond encrusted skull or a self-portrait in trash, art is routinely co-opted by the prevailing social order, which incorporates within itself that which appears to threaten it, thereby nullifying its power to change the status quo. Socially engaged art must confront how art practices are routinely recuperated within the society with which it wishes to "engage" so that it does not end up, like the catadores of Waste Land, looking for help from the beneficiaries of the system that is

causing their oppression. In order to engage with the social structure in which art finds itself, it must adopt a critical stance at its own position within that society. This is not the same as finding a vantage point outside that structure, from a position of some sort of purity. That is not possible.

CHAPTER 5

ARTIST AS LABORER

"Art in the United States went to work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as both artists and critics began to identify themselves as art workers—a polemical redefinition of artistic labor vital to minimalism, process art, feminist art criticism, and conceptualism." So wrote Julia Bryan-Wilson in the introduction to her groundbreaking analysis of the move of radical artists from pretending to be outside the circuit of capital, to full acceptance of their central role as producers of culture. As such, Bryan-Wilson notes, "art work is no longer confined to describing aesthetic methods, acts of making, or art objects—the traditional referents of the term—but is implicated in artists' collective working conditions, the demolition of the capitalist art market, and even revolution" (1). Her 2009 study is confined to the Vietnam War era, a time fraught with overt politicization not only from those either opposed to or supportive of the war, but also regarding "Black Power," feminism, gay rights, as well as concerns about workers and the role of artists within this turbulent time of social change. Bryan-Wilson examines the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) and the participation of artists Carl Andre and Hans Haacke, as well as feminist art critic Lucy Lippard. She includes Robert Morris' 1970 New York Art Strike Against Racism, War, and Repression (The Art Strike) in her analysis. Through investigating the underexamined relation between these important artists and their roles in the AWC and the Art Strike, Bryan-Wilson seeks to make explicit their understanding of artistic labor as work, which also includes just how art works

within a capitalist economy, especially one so overtly complicit in militarism as that of the Vietnam War era (2).

What Bryan-Wilson makes explicit, and what points to its importance as a precursor for the direction of my own analysis, is that the artists here under consideration (and the two movements generally) did not yet question the paramount role of the individual artist: "The group identity of the art worker exerted pressure on individual understandings about artistic labor within the AMC and the Art Strike. In addition, though art workers attempted to organize collective political actions, collective art making was not widely embraced or emphasized. Most did not question single authorship, even as they identified as a coalition" (2). Thus, the awakening of the artist's conscience to his or her own function as laborer was not tantamount to a formation of class consciousness complete, and in some cases could be criticized as a sort of performance of artist as laborer, rather than an acknowledgement of strict Marxist understandings of labor and ownership of means of production. The artists of the Vietnam War era were taking sides against an artistic system that they saw as entirely complicit in the war economy, but this did not mean that they were marching side-by-side with construction workers, who more often than not found themselves on the opposing side of the divide concerning the war itself. Bryan-Wilson describes a November-December 1971 issue of *Art in America* that had Mark di Suvero's 1966 piece *Artists' Tower of Protest* (typically known as *Peace Tower*) on its cover. Bryan-Wilson writes: "In the accompanying article, artists were referred to as 'artist-builders' and contrasted with the 'hardhats and jocks' that reportedly 'came around to harass and

make trouble.' Such polarization of 'artists-builders' against hard-hat laborers is symptomatic of the persistent class tensions embedded in the term *art workers*" (7).

Figure 2. *Artists Tower of Protest,* Mark Di Suvero, Hollywood , CA, 2012

(http://www.lalouver.com/exhibition.cfm?tExhibition_id=711)

What both of these instances make clear—the attention on the individual artist as opposed to the class and the opposition between "artists-builders" and construction workers—is that the notion of the artist as worker, as laborer, as an instance of class relations as present in alienated labor, is still nascent. This is made explicit in the following account of the AWC: "Its narrative is especially complicated given the many inconsistencies that attend the term *art worker*—not least, artists' incompatible moves to identity with and distance themselves from 'the workers,' a category itself under great pressure at the time" (14). In other words, how literally artists should take their self-understanding as workers within a class structure was still conflicted, but this should be no surprise since the question of "worker" within the United States was itself

one that was deeply divided and divisive. Bryan-Wilson also noted that the artists felt

more in common with the students protesting the war than the workers who

sometimes broke up those protests and that in keeping with this move, "some art

workers distanced themselves from blue-collar labor by embracing 'deskilled' art or

turning to scholarly methods such as data gathering" (25).

Although it can be said that 'artists as workers' was a main component of the

arts programs of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression,

it must be noted that this was not strictly a coalition of artists who saw themselves *as*

workers, but a program that had the reduction of unemployment among artists as its

primary aim ([www.wpamurals.com)](www.wpamurals.com), and thus was a top-down emergency response to

the exigencies of the time. It was not an attempt by artists to claim the mantle of

workers for the labor that they do within the field of cultural production. Even in the

late 1960s, as demonstrated above, this consciousness was more the site of a conflict,

rather than of solidarity.

To move to a more direct treatment of the artist as laborer, I will consider Ben

Davis's Marxist class analysis to reveal the position of the artist in capitalism. According

to Davis, the artist is an essentially middle class figure, inasmuch as the artist has some

level of self-determination over his labor, as is stated in 3.1 of his *9.5 Theses in Art and*

Class:

> "Middle class" in this context does not indicate income level. It
>
> indicates a mode of relating to labor and the means of
>
> production. "Middle class" here indicates having an individual,

self-directed relationship to production rather than administering

and maximizing the profit produced by the labor of others

(capitalist class) or selling one's labor power (working class).

                                                                    (28)

I believe it is important to solidly anchor our understanding of the artist in society in

notions of class in order to work through questions of authorship, co-operation, the

artist's role in the social, the artist as producer of "fine art" investment material or

dematerialized "happenings" in reaction to such. The reluctance to rigorously examine

the class role of the artist, I believe, is similar to the quandaries concerning the worker

generally in the United States—a generalized unease with questions of class and labor

that may stem from old conflicts with communism (and its reliance on such categories),

but also may be indicative of the unresolved nature of these concerns. Some might see

the desire to pin the artist to a certain class as reductionist, but I would counter that not

to do so is to stifle any attempt to elaborate on the integral role artists should have in

human societies and why they often are seen as having a peripheral role in our own.

And, as Davis himself points out, it is important to have a credible understanding of the

role of the artist in a society dominated by corporations and wage-laborers in order to

know what is and what is not realistic as far as what one expects of an artist (25). Much,

as Davis notes, of such expectations are vastly overblown. If we are to analyze the role

of the artist in formulating and carrying out socially engaged art projects, it is best to

temper ideas of the artist as hero. Firmly grounding the practice of the artist in the class

of artistic production offers a fundament on which we can build an argument, and

against which we can critique both ideas and practices. With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Davis suggests that accepting the middle class nature of artistic production may be akin to accepting the heliocentric cosmology: destructive to one's vanity (no longer being the center of the universe), but far more reliable for ascertaining what is and what is not possible (25).

Why is it important to categorize the artist in this way? Aside from the importance, as Davis points out, of defining the term being discussed so that expectations can be better grounded in reality, there is also the fact that the artist is a component of the "art world," an economy (among many other things) and a field of production. Gregory Sholete, artist, writer, and art professor at CUNY, defines the art world as "the integrated, trans-national economy of auction houses, dealers, collectors, international biennials, and trade publications that, together with curators, artists and critics, reproduce the market, as well as the discourse that influences the appreciation and demand for highly valuable artworks" (20). As with any such definition, this one can face many exceptions and criticisms, but it is useful to see the system's skeleton, as it were, laid bare. And that is what the art world is: a system of production, consumption, and circulation within the larger economic system. It is no more reasonable to want to extract the artist from the system in which he or she exists as artist than it would be to extract the autoworker from the systems that define that mode of production. The fact that an artist most often does not punch a time clock points to the middle class condition of that mode of production, as Davis delineates it. For the socially engaged artist, it is even more apparent: the artist makes no pretense of being disengaged from

the socio-economics and politics of the social, but rather has those interlocking systems

as the givens, the literal materials (in a Marxist sense) of creation. It is that condition

that Sholette calls "bare art:" a condition where any mystifications and trappings that

would hide the art world's function as cultural labor are stripped away, and museums

have become a kind of banking system for capital as art. Sholette sums this situation up

by quoting one of the founders of Occupy Museums, an organization that uses the web

and social media to focus attention on social and economic injustices associated with

museums and other art and culture based institutions. Sholette states, "The

contemporary art market is one of the largest deregulated transaction platforms in the

world—a space where Russian oligarchs launder money, real estate tycoons decorate

private museums for tax benefits, and celebrities of fashion, screen, and music trade

cash for credibility" (24). It is little wonder, given such a picture, that Sholette uses a

grinning bejeweled skull crafted by Damien Hirst (19) as a means of illustrating his

point.

On the other hand, that accumulation of capitalist star power, Ben Davis notes,

transforms common anonymous and collaborative art practices into something radical:

"despite how, outside the boutique sphere of the visual arts, most creative labor in a

capitalist society is performed by anonymous professionals, often working in teams"

(54). This is clearly true in terms of, say, video games, where teams of professionals

work in offices just as much as do advertising workers. But what also needs to be noted

is that by the time a celebrity has made the A List to walk the red carpet, their image

itself is the accumulated labor of myriad anonymous laborers, from the designer dress

to the seemingly careless slouchings of the latest bad boy. Each image is made up of

multiple images, each carefully produced. And in this way, even the "boutique" sphere

of the visual arts, in order to be "boutique," is a carefully orchestrated complexity of

images, the machinery of which is built by unknown culture workers. Pierre Bourdieu, in

his influential *The Field of Cultural Production*, puts it quite bluntly:

> The question can be asked in its most concrete form
>
> (which it sometimes assumes in the eyes of the agents):
>
> who is the true producer of the value of the work—the
>
> painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the
>
> playwright or the theater manager? The ideology of
>
> creation, which makes the author the first and last source
>
> of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural
>
> businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the
>
> same time the person who exploits the labour of the
>
> 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by
>
> putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or
>
> staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered'
>
> and which would otherwise remain a mere natural
>
> resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the
>
> more strongly he consecrates the work.
>
> (76-77)

Who here is truly the genius? Elvis Presley or his manager "Colonel Tom" Parker? Where does the value emerge? What is clear is that it is in the circulation of value within a system, which is not the purview of any single individual within the system, even of the "King of Rock n' Roll," but the countless unknown labors of a multitude of people within a given project. Of course there are those who exploit the system more dexterously—Andy Warhol and Salvador Dali, both of whom ended up doing television commercials—but that there are a few, rare images at the height of artistic celebrity only seems to fulfill the belief in the sacred, unique quality of the genius artist, beyond the reach of mundane questions of capital. Hiding the multitude of cultural laborers (all the while assuring them that if they have "talent" and a little luck, then they too may be "discovered" like, Basquiat or Jeff Koons, and ascend to the heights of the truly gifted and adulation will follow), allows the system to perpetuate the romanticized stereotype of the "starving artist," and thereby avoid any concerns typically tied with the less "sacred" realm of labor.

Though the art world might seem less sacred in its current functioning, once a urinal was hung on a wall and declared "art," Davis points out that this idea, that anything goes within the contemporary art world, "is both distraction from and guarantee of its opposite, the reality that 'visual art' is a very strictly delineated, rarefied, and exclusive sphere" (89). Sholette makes a similar point when discussing Theaster Gates's work of mixed-media assemblages as commanding the highest of prizes on the art market, but then wryly states that the furniture made from found materials under Gates's patronage "have not rocketed to blue chip status; perhaps

because not even the Turner Prize can overpower an art collector's preference to possess an individually authored art object" (133). The movement from the sacred to celebrity in the art world (as in media generally) is indeed a small one.

Figure 3. *Migration Rickshaw,*Theaster Gates, 2013

But underneath the "glamour" of working in such creative fields as software development, where vast amounts of money are made and the future is being designed, there lies the drudgery of working, for instance in Electronic Arts, a Fortune 500 company, where "seven-day workweeks had one from being an exception, used during 'crunch' periods when completing a game, to mandatory, with no comp time, sick days, or overtime being offered. Management hid behind an exemption to California labor law for skilled 'specialty' workers" (19). Sub-contracting as well, allows for the abuse of labor within these 21st century workplaces, where the luxury of working from home simply translates into never being away from work. For Davis, these conditions are very reminiscent of the assembly line or even the textile mills with which Marx was familiar (21).

But it is not just the downtrodden computer programmer of video games--the

production of which, it is to be noted, has become "the single largest arm of the

entertainment world, surpassing the Hollywood giants" (Davis 19)--but the art world

generally that has taken on the structure of the globalized functionings of capital, often

mimicking the very start-up structure of the tech world. This should be no surprise,

Gregory Sholette tells us, as art in the neoliberal world "was reborn as a creative

instrument for sparking broader economic development" and, as he quotes from a 2010

United Nations sponsored report, "culture helps to 'circulate intellectual capital' thus

providing part of a powerful engine 'driving economic growth and promoting

development in a globalizing world'" (57-58). The art world, by and large, has seized

upon this role, and even celebrated it. Davis writes: "In fact at the end of 2009, the Tate

Modern even gave the new art-commerce synergy a kind of manifesto. The exhibition

'Pop Life: Art in a Material World', a manifesto designed to celebrate artists who have

embraced commerce and the mass media to build their own brands" (Davis 128). Art as

"brand" is art that has fully integrated itself within the capitalist flow and the circulation

of images that it projects. Davis points to Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God*, where the

price tag of the ultra-luxury piece was as much a part of the "art" as the nihilistic object

itself that foreshadowed the gauche Trump world to come, as well as Jeff Koons's stint

as Thanksgiving Day parade balloonist, where "his artwork was in effect reconceived as

a massive ad for itself" (127). Of course, any critique of these bids for self-

aggrandisement mixed with self-exploitation always run up against the rejoinder that

they are ironic, and that the manifest commercialism is itself a "take" on manifest

91

commercialism. But that is of no concern to capital: it absorbs critique, ironic stance, and fawning theatricality impartially.

On the other end of the scale from *Pop Life*, is the 2003 exhibit *Work Ethic*, with work by artists such as Vito Acconci, Hope Ginsburg, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, and Richard Serra among others. This exhibit, according to Helen Molesworth, mapped the change in labor practices in the United States after World War II:

> Many artists (like their working and professional
>
> counterparts) no longer felt compelled to offer a discrete
>
> object produced by hand. Rather, they explored ways of
>
> producing art that were analogous to other forms of labor.
>
> Art could thus be made with unskilled manual labor, with
>
> highly regimented managerial labor, or with labor that
>
> resonated with ideas borrowed from the service economy.
>
> (18)

This was an exhibit that focused on works produced from the 1960s on. Molesworth contends that this art was produced as a radical reaction against the traditional bases of art, where art itself was being questioned, and the intent of groups like Fluxus to create ephemeral works never meant to be placed in museums. By linking these artistic reactions to the changes in labor of the times, she then can note that in the early 21st century, with its seismic changes in labor and its resulting crises, that "[a]s commodities are now almost exclusively produced in developing and non-Western nations, the labor of developed nations has increasingly become the management of information and the

production of experience. Experiments in Conceptual and Performance art of the 1960s

seem particularly germane in this context and may even offer strategies for

understanding, coping with, and resisting these recent developments in our ever more

globalized economy" (18-19). Thus, the art world, by working with the shifts in labor

techniques, can align itself with the changes in work, and serve to draw attention to

those very concerns. But these are works that are difficult (though not impossible,

clearly, for an exhibit was made and a book was published) for capital to capture. In that

way they illuminate the edges of the invisible structure of capitalism, a structure that is

itself almost impossible to comprehend because of its interwoven nature into daily life.

Parts of these works, if not their whole, escape capture.

As art negates its place as a luxury object, there became a move in works such as

Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece (1964)* where the viewer moves into the role of participant; they

become necessary to the process if not the completion of the art itself. In Ono's work,

she invites the audience to approach her as she sits motionless in her best suit, as they

begin to cut away a part of her clothing and take the pieces away with them. The

impulse, she has said, was her desire to create art free from the ego of the artist,

"where you are saying take anything you want, any part you want, rather than pushing

something you chose onto someone else" (openculture.com/2015/05/yoko-ono-lets-

audience-cut-up-her-clothes.html).

Figure 4. *Cut Piece,* Yoko Ono, 1965

Another instance would be the ubiquitous Felix Gonzalez-Torres' installations, each consisting of a pile of 175 pounds of brightly wrapped candies: he provides the materials, but the actual artwork happens as the passersby are poised to contemplate the taking or not-taking, and become complicit in whatever activities that take place- inside the sacred space of the gallery. Not only is the move away from artist as sole creator and interaction with what was once the audience, now turned collaborator, it is also clear that these collaborators are performing "work."

As this move from passive spectator develops, an environment occurs where "work and leisure" begin to blur. "Artists were becoming service providers as opposed to object makers, mirroring the larger societal transformation from a manufacturing to service-based economy" (Molesworth 168). These pieces not only reframe the question of the artist as worker, but also raise the question of the role of the artist itself. Who really is the artist here, when the art cannot be completed without the labor of the supposed non-artist? Where exactly does the labor of art take place? It is with these

94

questions in mind that I turn to the relationship between labor and socially engaged art

in particular.

Socially engaged art is, on the face of it, deeply concerned with labor. If, as Marx

states, labor creates the material from which society is formed, that the productive

forces of labor are those from which society is constructed, then art which engages with

the social is inherently engaged with labor. And since art, which this paper has gone to

lengths to show, is itself a form of cultural production, a form of labor, and can take as

its subject matter stances toward labor, toward society, toward art as itself a social

labor, then working through questions of art as labor that ultimately includes the

formerly passive spectator is of great importance to understanding socially engaged art

as a social practice.

Adeola Enigbokan, artist, writer, and professor at University of Amsterdam,

recounts a particular socially engaged art project that she created at Queens Museum,

which according to Enigbokan, has rebranded itself through a multimillion dollar

renovation as"the premiere institution for community-engaged social practice in the

city" (18). With her background in environmental psychology (the impact one's

environment--including the effect of certain kinds of built structures rather than others--

has on an individual's psychology and therefore behavior), Enigbokan was curious about

this museum that portrayed itself in such a way, and yet still maintained itself as a

workplace, "a site of the production of (socially engaged) art, and not merely of

symbolic consumption" and that led to her developing her project (19). In her socially

engaged project, Enigbokan worked for "a few days" over an eight-week period in

various jobs at the museum, performing everything from curatorial functions, to helping

an artist (who had "the dubious privilege of paying the museum to work there"), to

listening to the custodian as he worked (she notes that the custodian was the only

member of the museum's workplace that did not allow her to work for free) (19). In her

concluding analysis of the piece, she commented that this project "made clear the

division of labor inherent in the production of socially engaged art at one New York

museum" (the custodian refused to participate in the discussion afterwards that took

place on a stage) and"the common experience for many workers, of a lack of choice in

one's work and in one's interactions, a sense that once a place or position has been

assumed...there is no way to seriously transform the rules of engagement" (20). For

Enigbokan, this revealed an important aspect of the museum and socially engaged art in

particular: "Ethical discussions about social practice must expand beyond considerations

of artists' own processes and principles, and beyond artist-audience interactions to

include these everyday details of the means of production of artworks themselves and,

in this way, to address the rules of engagement" (20).

What is important for us at the moment is the former of these: that the

"everyday details of the means of production of artworks" be a salient aspect of the

concern of socially engaged art. Art that takes as its basic material the social must

reflect on its own production from labor. It is important in this instance that the artist

must pay for the privilege to work and that the custodian was the only one who refused

to let Enigbokan work for free. As of this writing, the Queens Museum website is

accepting applications for part time positions: one is for Visitor Experience Agent, whose

responsibilities and necessary qualifications are given in nine paragraphs and whose compensation for a fifteen to twenty hour week is $10 per hour, the other states: "The Queens Museum is looking for freelance preparators to work for its upcoming exhibition installations." Both jobs, necessary for the functioning of the museum, come without benefits and are part time. Both are considered a kind of disposable labor within the structure of the museum that touts itself as community-focused.

This example reveals one of the tensions inherent in socially engaged art: the relationship among artists, audience/participants, and institution are particularly fraught. Socially engaged art is not simply art about social relationships, such as labor, like a piece of 1930s social realism, but is itself an enactment through art of social relationships. This makes socially engaged art's relationship to labor particularly critical, especially given the tendency of art institutions as sites of capital power to recuperate, or co-opt, any revolutionary critique. Groups such as The Carrotworkers' Collective, a group whose members primarily include interns, creative and cultural workers, and educators focuses on the conditions of free labour in contemporary societies. From their website: "The figure of the **intern** appears in this context paradigmatic as it negotiates the collapse of the boundaries between Education, Work and Life. Like Tiziana Terranova suggested in her analysis of free labour in digital media, we must conceive of free labour, internships, volunteer work not as a separate sphere of activity but as condition of late capitalist cultural economy." Even less than the workers at Queens Museum, these workers are offering up their labor free in hopes of getting the proverbial foot in the door. But the world of interning in galleries and museums is not a

brief anomaly, but is now an expected role. Similar to this is the expectation that artists

should participate for free in exhibitions in hopes of gaining "exposure." Workers in the

sphere of cultural production are often expected to work for free in the hope of gaining

long-term employment.

This again raises quite distinct questions for socially engaged art. What about the

labor of the participant? Doesn't socially engaged art rely on volunteers to create the

artwork that then gets credited to the artist, a sort of performance piece where the

artist is like the director of a play? One of the most famous considerations of these

questions is that of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra's work of delegated performances.

Claire Bishop writes that Sierra's work shifted in the late 1990s "from installations

produced by low-paid workers to displays of the workers themselves, foregrounding the

economic transactions on which the installations depend" (222). In installations like *24

Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (where the

workers are not seen, but the effect of their labor power and their payment is clear) and

People Paid to Remain inside Cardboard Boxes (where the laborers are still hidden from

view but are the focus of the work) to *450 Paid People* (where the workers are visible),

and finally to the piece, according to Bishop "that continues to be inflammatory: *250cm

Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People*" (222). In such pieces, Sierra finds individuals "willing to

undertake banal or humiliating tasks for the minimum wage" (Bishop 222). Here the

unspoken reliance on the invisible workers is methodically revealed in a manner that

was ripe for art world outrage, but Sierra, far from seeing himself complicit in the

excesses of capitalist wage-slavery, sees himself as "turning the economic context into

one of his primary materials" (Bishop 223). Far from sadistically manipulating the weak

and vulnerable in society, he is showing how sadistic a society is that creates such

weakness and vulnerability, and then exploits it for token payment, and then self-

righteously denounces the worker afterwards (for being prostitutes or drug addicts,

both of which Sierra has hired to work in his art projects).

Figure 5. *250cm Line Tatooed on 6 Paid People,* Santiago Sierra, 1999

(http://www.afternynemagazine.com/)

Santiago Sierra's work best exemplifies the distinction between socially engaged

art and social work, a perennial question asked of social practice artists. A social worker

would have done his or her best to ameliorate the marginalized position of the worker,

not seemingly exacerbate it. The artist is creating art: an open-ended realm of possibility

that more often creates conflict and further questioning than solutions and

homogeneity. Sierra was notorious for paying drug-addicted participants in the drug of

their choice, rather than in money, which would be contrary to any tenet of social work.

Ultimately, social work is seeking to help the individual(s) gain accessibility to positive

roles in a society, and ameliorate the injustices of that society that would prevent such

participation. That might be one goal of a socially engaged art piece, but it is hardly the

only one, and may not be part of any intention as far as the work of art is concerned. When Sierra is covering refugees with foam, he is not trying to save them, he is creating a piece of art with their cooperation that uses their marginality as material. In this way, the piece performs that very marginality.

It is this same willingness to problematize labor that socially engaged art diffuses the idea of the artist as singular master. Josef Beuys famously decreed that everyone is an artist. This may seem like everyone is special and everyone can create a piece of art that reflects that individual creativity. But it is hard to imagine that someone who spent as much time carefully constructing his own mythos as Beuys would be offering something so trite as this as the summation of his understanding of the artist. Paradoxically, it seems a function of Beuys's role as artist that he can make just such a declaration. Socially engaged art problematizes the question of artistic labor by problematizing the question of who is the artist. And certainly to claim that everyone is an artist in a society that so carefully awards that title only to a select few is problematic, particularly in a society that seems so eager to hide its class-based labor relations. Art is put in service of the ruling class, especially when it works to hide those class-based power structures. In this way, everyone as an artist can be co-opted into creating the semblance of the classless society. In this way, the merging of life and art as desired by Fluxus can take on an ominous meaning: just as the worker is alienated from their labor, and the artist is alienated from their art, so the living are alienated from life.

Most often, we are most often met with the idea of the almost mystical role of the artist. It is necessary to demystify the role of the artist in society because such

100

mystifications help conceal the power structures inherent in a capitalist society. By reserving the title of "artist" for those rare individuals with the ability, like Giotto, to perfectly inscribe a circle, or worse, the genius who can restructure our material culture, makes of the artist an elite figure within a social structure that caters to its own elites. Art becomes one of the stepping stones of aristocracy, far removed from the labors of the workers and their lack of "culture." The valorization of this kind of individuality allows for the rationalization of elite authority. The gifted chosen few are at the apex, and this arrangement should remain unquestioned, for the talent of the artist is the guarantor that this is a meritocracy. By the process of association, the ruling class is made up of those talented geniuses who have gained their position through superior talents. Nor can we question the value of such an arrangement, for the paintings and sculptures are exchanged among collectors for millions of dollars in transactions through organizations such as Sotheby's, that are termed auction houses, but are really just nodes in the transitions of capital, way stations and junctions of circulation. Then, quite often, the emblem used for that transaction is then "lent" to a museum, where it assumes its place before the public as visible guarantor of both rank and value. In other words, the power of the ruling class.

A clear example of understanding art as labor, and therefore subject to the class relations of power within a capitalist society, are the series of events commonly referred to as Art Strikes. The name itself is tied to the collective action of workers within such a system, where the only true power workers have within it is to collectively withhold their labor power. This action stops production and ends the possibility of profit, on

which the ruling class relies. It is little wonder, then, that the history of labor is replete with violent opposition against such actions by the workers. But what is ironic in this instance is that art, in order to negate its revolutionary ability, is seen as a luxury item, a dispensable endeavor that society can do without. So the idea of an Art Strike seems almost paradoxical, when imagining some artist standing before a blank canvas refusing to paint a still-life.

The first idea of artists in the United States collectively refusing to work, to participate in (using Adorno's term) the "culture industry," came in the late 1960s, amid strong union activity and the example of students refusing to participate in the Vietnam War. Gustav Metzger, whose auto-destructive art pieces directly responded to a world where nuclear annihilation was a daily concern, wrote: "The state supports art, it needs art as a cosmetic cloak to its horrifying reality, and uses art to confuse, divert and entertain large numbers of people. Even when deployed against the state, art cannot cut loose from the umbilical cord of the state…. The refusal to labour is the chief weapon of workers fighting the system, artists can use the same weapon" (*Art into Society Society into Art*, monoskop.org). But in the realm of conceptual art, the refusal of the artist to make art entirely is but the next step beyond Cage's *4'33"* and therefore but a performance piece in itself. How, then, can the refusal to labor, seen as itself a sort of artistic laboring, help to remove the artist from the system described above? Julia Bryan-Wilson, in *Work Ethic*, offers the instance of Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery*, "in which the artist announced that his one-person show consisted of closing the gallery. His 'work' thus existed only in the viewer's mind" (215). Though this clearly has

a dematerialized artist work at its core, it still functions quite well in the avant garde

world of modern art and strange gallery performances, where the attendee (if not truly

a "viewer" any longer) can expect some idiosyncratic experience from the artist.

Stewart Home, however, in his renewed call for an Art Strike, called upon artist

in general to renounce making art for a period three years, from 1990-1993. In this

iteration, Home states:

> One of the purposes of the Art Strike is to draw
>
> attention to the process by which works of art are
>
> legitimated. Those artists and administrators who are in
>
> the privileged position of deciding what is and is not art
>
> constitute a specific faction of the ruling class. They
>
> promote art as a superior form of knowledge and
>
> simultaneously use it as a means of celebrating the
>
> 'objective superiority' of their own way of life on the basis
>
> that they are committed to art.
>
> (stewarthomesociety.org)

In this way, the strike is not one that is only meant to highlight the gallery's power over

the material object (as it seemed with Barry's closing of the gallery), or against the

militarism of the Vietnam War era, but one that seeks to illuminate the hidden

relationship between art and class power within late capitalism, a relationship that has

been highlighted in this section generally. The concern of the artist to try to save the art

piece from being co-opted and commodified within the system has led to various

attempts to elude a system that routinely integrates what is opposed to it. Thus, the

non-art of Barry's opening can become the predecessor of many of today's museum and

gallery experiences, where the artist, for instance, might offer nothing but the

opportunity for the viewers to reflect in a darkened room on their own desire to see a

piece of art. Even the refusal of the artist to make art, the refusal of the laborer to labor,

rather than crashing the system, merely becomes yet the latest commodity, the latest

fad, the latest art world kitsch that people can buy into, and the mottoes printed on cool

T-shirts, sewn by laborers kept well out of sight.

CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION AS ARTFORM

In *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop completes her analysis of the relationship

between socially engaged art and education by describing several projects that focus on

radical pedagogy. On first read, it is difficult to say along with Bishop, how one should

categorize these disparate projects "When I found projects I liked and respected, I had

no idea how to communicate them to others," Bishop admits (246), and it might often

seem that the artist is "performing" (i.e., "playing at") being a teacher, or that some

performers have simply left being artists behind and become some sort of alternative

community-based educators. For most people, the realms of artist and teacher

undoubtedly overlap, where teachers may educate students in art history and teach

students to draw in perspective, for instance, and artists may give lectures about their

works that also rely on knowledge of past artworks, but the two are most often seen as

distinct "professions." One clear distinction is that artists most often create works that

have some palpable nature to them, typically visual, but whatever is created through

the teacher-student interaction is something not-so-easy to put one's finger on. Then

there is the question as to why an artist should want to seemingly give up their usual

pursuit for some of the more bizarre aspects of say, Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's

work, described at length by Bishop. With socially engaged art, however, it is less

difficult to see the move out of the studio leading to interactions with communities that

take on a more pedagogic feel. What continues to be important is to make clear the

rationale for this move, and ultimately, what is at stake for such projects.

Bishop begins her analysis of various pedagogic practices with that of Joseph

Beuys and his claim that "to be a teacher is my greatest work of art" (qtd. in Bishop

243). Beuys was famously removed from his position at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie

after accepting students into his classes who had officially been refused admission, and

accepting almost 150 students into one class (eai.org, Bishop 243). As a result, he later

went on to found the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary

Research: "Dedicated to realising the capacity of each person to be a creative being, this

free, non-competitive, open academy offered an interdisciplinary curriculum in which

culture, sociology and economics were integrated as the foundations of an all-

encompassing creative programme" (243). One of Beuys's later projects was 100 Days of

the Free International University in 1977, which offered workshops and seminars open

to the public on a wide-ranging number of topics taught by a cross-section of society,

from trade unionists and musicians to lawyers and sociologists (244). Although Bishop

does note that Beuys's method was more akin to a one-man performance piece (he was

the charismatic artist/teacher always at the center) and contemporary artists tend not

to place themselves in such a role, preferring to delegate positions in a more socially

engaged format, it is Beuys that Bishop sees as the precursor to much of today's

pedagogic practices.

In a 2011 article in PAJ: *A Journal of Performance and Art*, Patricia Milder also

notes Beuys's seminal role in nderstanding "Teaching as Art" (the title of her article,

with the subtitle "The Contemporary Lecture-Performance") and artists current

proclivity to "blur the lines separating art from discourse about art" (13). Milder

suggests that Beuys's theory of "social sculpture" fits in well with his move to pedagogic activities, herself quoting an essay by David Levi Strauss called "Beuys in Ireland": "Beuys's theory of Social Sculpture arose from his recognition that the core of sculpture is the transformation of matter or substance. If we include in our definition of matter 'the actual substance of thought or expression,' then the transformation of matter can also include thought, speech, and society" (17). Milder then describes Beuys's series of American lecture-performances in 1974 entitled Energy Plan for the Western Man, where "Beuys patiently explained his most basic ideas about art, politics, and education—that they are one. At the same time, he played out those ideas. He was explaining art and thereby making art; attempting to ignite creativity in others by making his ideas known to them through dialogue" (17). Milder, too, acknowledges the importance of the university founded by Beuys, saying, "Although Beuys founded the University and shaped the idea, it was not a hierarchical organization. No one had special importance within it. It was a political movement" (17), which is counter to Bishop's assessment that Beuys maintained a centrality based on his personality. "Milder, as well, describes the lectures as somewhat raucous affairs, where much of what Beuys had to say was not accepted without vocal criticism.

Another reference of Beuys's importance not only as an avant-garde artist but as a teacher is to be found, of all places, on the website of Deutsche Bank, under its "USA" page, where the brief article reads: "Deutsche Bank is joining together with seven museums in six countries to present 'Beuys and Beyond – Teaching as Art,' an exhibition of works on paper from the Deutsche Bank Collection."

The website's article (which was last updated in 2013) explains the process, and

ultimately the rationale for the show:

"Each museum curator is invited to initiate a visual dialogue

with Beuys and his students based on presenting an influential

teacher/artist and students from their own country. Featuring

important contemporary art from each host country, the

exhibition encourages an international and inter-generational

exchange against the backdrop of individual histories. The

exhibition touches on two subjects that are important to

Deutsche Bank around the globe: art and education"

(https://www.db.com/us/content/en/1588.html).

Whatever one may think about the particular relationship between Deutsche Bank and

the art world, what is clear is that Beuys's reputation for being a teacher, and for

integrating that role with that of artist, is an important aspect of his legacy.

In his "Lament for Joseph Beuys" in *The Essential Joseph Beuys*, Alain Borer refers

to Beuys as "The Pedagogue: Master Beuys," stating "No artist ever lectured as much as

Beuys: from teaching at the Staatliche Kunstakademie, to public lectures, countless

statements, conversations, talks and conferences, the great body of his work can be

seen as an immense didactic installation" (14). What Beuys was aiming for was a

transfiguration of society, the "Social Sculpture" that could be shaped anew by the

proper guide, the shepherd. Again Borer: "This image of the guide stems from the

stance he adopted and they way he acted, both being symbolic (teaching through

substances) as well as imaginary (the image of oneself as the messiah)" (24). It is not

within the purview of the present work to dig too deeply into Beuys's personal mythos

or his shamanic fabrications with primal substances such as honey and animal fat, but

what is relevant is the role of artist as involved participant with the social. Education—

teaching—is the means by which one gives form to the social, a shaping of matter

through the shaping of ideas (Helguera 72). Beuys states that his greatest work of art is

that of being a teacher,and then goes on to say that: "The rest is waste product, a

demonstration" (db.com). What is primary is the shaping of ideas, and what people

conventionally think of as the art work (where the art is) is actually just the material

working out of that which is truly essential, or mere waste, the scraps left behind from

the actual but immaterial art process.

      With Thomas Hirschhorn's anarchic *The Bijlmer-Spinoza Festival* (2009), the art

piece becomes a didactic "quasi-Dadist" work that seems difficult to pin down:

"deliberately misleading," "what proceeded is hard to describe," "my amused

frustration at its impenetrability," "insanely abstract," and "pointless to analyse the

specific content of this shambling spectacle" are all descriptions Claire Bishop offers for

various parts of this "festival" (which she said was less festival and more "a large

installation environment for hosting a programme of daily lectures and workshops"

(260-63). Clearly, if one thinks of teaching and education as the coherent transmission

of knowledge or information for whatever ultimate goal, it is hard for something as

chaotic as what is being described by Bishop to fit the bill here. Even the lectures

themselves were described as "a largely improvised philosophical ramble" and not "an

argument so much as a stream of philosophical consciousness" (Bishop 261). What is

being described can nowadays be accepted as a work of art (and then, perhaps, be

shrugged off as such), but it is difficult to see how this can truly be said to be a

pedagogical practice. When asked about the role of pedagogy in his construction of

Gramsci Monument in the Bronx in 2013 (since the likely audience of his work would be

unlikely to know who Gramsci was, nor his importance as a Marxist philosopher),

Hirschhorn replied: "When Gramsci says that every human being is in (sic) Intellectual, I

believe it as I believed Joseph Beuys who declared that every human being is an Artist,"

then following it with "I want to be truthful to Gramsci's affirmation, it's as simple as

that, there is no place for pedagogy, for disappointment or for cynicism" (Lookofsky).

Hirschhorn tries to portray his art piece as an affirmative experience, both for himself

and for those who come to it: "I want to be present–all the time–and I want to produce

something. Beyond my presence and my production, I want, through 'Presence' and

'Production' to create precarious moments of grace" (Lookofsky). Similar to Beuys, then,

what is being offered is a transfigurative moment. If every person is an "Intellectual,"

then the presence of philosophers such as Spinoza and Gramsci (both outside the main

stream of the philosophic tradition) also ensures those "precarious moments of grace,"

or art as a form of transfiguration.

Despite his seeming disavowal of pedagogy by lumping it together with

disappointment and cynicism, Hirschhorn's Gramsci Monument is an attempt at

changing the minds of those who encounter it (his focus, by his own statement, is

through the lens of Gramsci's seeing everyone as an intellectual the way Beuys claimed

everyone is an artist), and this intellectually transformative moment could well be seen as the pedagogic moment. For both Beuys and Hirschhorn, the artist creates such moments, and as Borer writes, this is a function of at least Beuys as "guide," which is the meaning of the second half of the word pedagogue, but clearly Hirschhorn as well is guiding people to the possibility of an encounter with his "moments of grace." Education is a kind of guiding, of shepherding (an analogy Borer uses as well), and even in the example of Hirschhorn's The Bijlmer-Spinoza Festival, with an ultimate goal of transformation: "he makes claims for art as a powerful, autonomous, almost transcendent force of non-alienation, but through projects that spill into the complexity of social antagonisms and deluge us with extra-artistic questions" (Bishop 265). Art as a guided creative force unleashed within the confines of society is inherently transformational, and it is within this role that it must be examined.

Society is reproduced through education. As Bourdieu points out in his analysis of educational institutions as consisting of a system of social reproduction, education itself is "the construction of that intellectual space defined by a system of common references appearing so natural, so incontestable that they are never the object of conscious position-taking at all" (139). The educational system is the means through which the culture of a society is passed on as being "natural," just as we say that something or other is "second nature" to someone, that this is so at a level beneath conscious thought. The individual is built upon that foundation of the social that is taken for granted as "the truth." "The educational system," writes Bourdieu, "plays a decisive role in the generalized imposition of the legitimate mode of consumption" (37). The

consumption that Bourdieu is referring to here is cultural consumption, the participation in the cultural norms that are prescribed through educational apparatuses. For instance, the determination of what is an important painting for an educated person to know. For ease, we can say Van Gogh's "Starry Night." It is now part of the canon of Western art history because it was christened as such by the cultural institutions of the 20th century and is now taught to students as such. The educational system is a complex of cultural norms that are inculcated into younger generations to preserve the culture of the old and works to incorporate that within it which is not completely inimical to its continuation.. Thus, what once was considered meritless (Van Gogh's painting) to the bourgeois tastes of the 19th century, becomes in the 20th a common signifier for "great art" and is reproduced as such. And something like Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" has kept its position for centuries as just such a signifier, having long ago lost its identity as a single painting. Now it is simply a "masterpiece," the necessary destination of those who visit the Louvre each year. Nor is it just art that is being consumed here. Clearly national histories are repeated in such a manner, even at the subnational level, where the view of the Civil War is reproduced generation after generation as either a failed but glorious endeavor, or the freeing of the slaves from the evil Southerners. It is with exactly this idea of education as cultural reproduction that questions whether "intelligent design" should be taught alongside Darwin's theories of evolution. It is not just what is taught, but why this rather than that idea is taught that is of primary importance.

It is common to assume that education is about instruction in necessary skills and information to be successful in society. Therefore, math, science, English, history

form the core of the average educational program. But what remains unquestioned is what it actually means to be "successful" in a particular society. Whether or not one should successfully merge into the society is rarely a topic for consideration. If a certain social order is unjust, should one be educated so that one can have a comfortable living in it? These are the questions of what is called critical pedagogy. Realizing that education is the indoctrination of cultural norms into the young, though not always the young, as can be seen by the social forces that have pushed mastering modern technology not so much at the young, but the adults over the last twenty years, critical pedagogy turns a questioning eye onto the presuppositions of what is being taught and why, and what are the ramifications of teaching particular ideas within the context of specific social organizations. Its primary goal is to look for ways to intervene in the educational system in order to critique and challenge the reproduction of oppressive systems among a people. In other words, it sees education as a tool for social justice. Most schools of critical pedagogy look back to theorist Paulo Freire as the originator of this attitude toward education. His Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a seminal work, and though writtenin 1968, still is the foundation for much of the theorizing around critical pedagogy today.

Freire begins his work by analyzing the problem of humanization, and doing so within the context of dehumanization as a "historical reality" (43). It must be remembered that Freire is writing during some of the worst abuses of human rights in recent Latin American history, and, when many of the military dictatorships guilty of those abuses, such as that of Augusto Pinochet, were openly supported by the anti-

communist foreign policies of the United States, including the 1964 military coup d'etat

in Brazil (Freire's home country), forming a military dictatorship that did not end until

1985. For Freire, and many like him, the possibility of dehumanization at the hands of

the military, supported by American capitalism, was all too real. It is, however, counter

to humanity to accept to live in a condition of dehumanization, according to Freire, and

therefore it is only a matter of time before those who have been made less-than-human

will struggle against those in power, though he warns against the oppressed becoming

the oppressors in turn (44). The oppressed are twisted by their oppression into believing

that what they must do to gain liberation is to be like those in power, thereby obtaining

power for themselves. Freire believes that the only true way for the oppressed to

become liberated is for them to free both themselves and their oppressors (44-54). The

means of such a liberation is radical education: the pedagogy of the oppressed, which

"animated by authentic humanist, not humanitarian, generosity, presents itself as a

pedagogy of humankind" (54). But since the educational system is controlled by the

ruling elites, and can therefore only be changed through a political power the oppressed

do not possess, Freire focuses on "educational projects, which should be carried out

with the oppressed in the process of organizing them" (54). The relationship here

between educational projects with people and socially engaged art projects is clear.

Freire's best known concept from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is that of the

"banking" system of education, where students are treated as empty receptacles into

which knowledge is "deposited" by those in possession of that knowledge, that is, those

in power. "In the banking concept of education," Freire writes, "knowledge is a gift

bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they

consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic

of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of

inquiry" (72). It is difficult to tell just how much of a straw man this caricature of

education is meant to be. On the one hand, anyone who has sat through the boredom

of standardized education can sympathize with this picture of vibrant young children

wasting their innate curiosity and creativity while they are forced to memorize and

regurgitate discrete facts (Freire even uses the learning of a capital of a state as an

example). On the other hand, this can only have been an example of the worst in

teaching, an oversimplification to make a point. But the point is an important one: not

only is this an often stultifying way to learn material, it also sets up a social dynamic of

passive consumption by the students, which will then be carried into adulthood. It is no

accident that Freire refers to this as "banking," as the ruling class deposits its ideology

into the people with an expectation that it will flower and bear fruit when those

students are then workers in support of the capitalist system. Freire makes this clear by

stating:

> It is not surprising that the banking concept of education
>
> regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more
>
> students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the
>
> less they develop the critical consciousness which would result
>
> from their intervention in the world as transformers of that
>
> world. The more completely they accept the passive role

imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the

world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited

in them.

(73)

Clearly Freire, like Bourdieu, understands education as a means of replication of the

social order. The crux of the problem is the idea that those educated within the system

are trained by that system "to adapt to the world as it is," which means leaving the

oppressive structures in place and at best working around them, at worst becoming

complicit in that oppression.

Although Freire is writing for the particular purpose of instilling a revolutionary

fervor into the oppressed in a certain place at a certain time, and therefore some of his

ideas may seem a bit utopian, or worse, outdated, his focus on the praxis of an

individual, that mixture of thought and action that automatically subverts oppressive

structures by granting to workers both the right to do and the right to think. Although

Freire admits that there does need to be "cooperation and, at times, direction" from

revolutionary leaders (which, of course, can be interpreted in many ways), but then

continues that those leaders "who deny praxis to the oppressed, thereby invalidate

their own praxis" (126), emphasizing again the reciprocal nature of overcoming

oppression. "By imposing their word on others," Freire writes, "they falsify that word

and establish a contradiction between their methods and their objectives. If they are

truly committed to liberation," he concludes, "their action and reflection cannot

proceed without the action and reflection of others" (126). Although what Freire is

specifically referring to here is revolution, and how to keep the revolution from becoming itself a force of oppression, the framework being created is also one that lays the template for socially engaged art, since art, too, is a praxis and, once established in a binary of those elites with talent and money versus the ignorant or untalented masses, it, too, becomes a force for oppression.

Freire's idea of "educational projects" that seek to involve the praxis of human beings could just as well have been a description of many of the socially engaged projects that I am about to discuss. "Educational," in keeping with the critique laid out above, must here mean creating an opening for human praxis wherein participants gain an awareness of themselves within a social structure.

As an underpinning for her thoughts on pedagogical practice in art, Claire Bishop also looks to the work of Jacques Ranciere, specifically his work The Ignorant Schoolmaster. In his chapter "Reason Between Equals," Ranciere writes the following when discusses how Jocotot, the eponymous ignorant schoolmaster, convinced his students to try to paint, though they were not "painters": "But it's not a matter of making great 'painters'; it's a matter of making the emancipated: people capable of saying, 'me too, I'm a painter,' a statement that contains nothing in the way of pride, only the reasonable feeling of power that belongs to any reasonable being. 'There is no pride in saying out loud: Me, too, I'm a painter! Pride consists in saying softly to others: You neither, you aren't a painter.'" (67). Ranciere, quoting Jacotot's Langue Maternelle, explicitly puts the act of oppression on the exclusionary act of the proud elite who sets him or herself up as the arbiter of "taste." The elite uses that moment in order to

control and limit who may or may not call themselves painters. Ranciere, on the other hand, is decidedly on the side of those who work towards greater liberation, to acts that work on behalf of human emancipation, not on behalf of those who would segregate and restrict in order to keep their own privileges. Bishop sees Ranciere's work as wanting not so much to establish the equality of "Reason Between Equals," but to take that equality as a presupposition for what happens next, a starting point for what is possible: "For Ranciere, equality is a method or working principle, rather than a goal: equality is continually verified by being put into practice" (266). Like Freire, the emphasis is on praxis, on doing and thinking in order to expand the possibilities of human liberation.

It is also just such a position that Pablo Helguera, artist, author and Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art, takes toward the relationship between socially engaged art and education. In the introduction to his aptly titled *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Helguera notes that, "Today, it is no secret that standard education practices—such as engagement with audiences, inquiry-based methods, collaborative dialogues, and hands-on activities—provide an ideal framework for process-based and collaborative conceptual practices," and then adds wryly: "It is no surprise that artists who work in this area feel at home in the education departments of museums, even if they would also like to be recognized by their curatorial departments" (xi). Clearly Helguera is not concerned with the same sort of critiques that those like Freire have aimed at "standard educational practices," but he is keenly aware of concerns about trying to codify "best practices" (a term used in education

departments for standardized methods of pedagogy) and how easily that might turn

into controls on art-making such that it becomes either neutered as a force for social

change or an arm of authoritarian propaganda. He wonders aloud, "Is it acceptable to

articulate ideal practices, or would that be detrimental to the autonomy of art-making,

which needs opacity and ambiguity to exist?" (xiv). The paradox is quite apparent:

education, at least as it is generally understood as transference of information and

acquisition of a particular skill set, requires clarity and coherence. The subject matter

may, it is true, be dense and obscure, with conflicting interpretations all being

acceptable. And this is what Helguera seems to be claiming for art-making itself. But the

practice of educating, the teaching of teachers how to teach, seems to be at the other

end of the spectrum, something that should seek transparency rather than opacity. This

puts Helguera in a bit of a conundrum and he insists that the "critical frameworks" he

offers are necessary, they should not be mistaken for the imposition of "moral or ethical

demands on art-making" (xiv). He concludes by stating that "to impose a sort of

methodology, or 'school of thought,' onto the practice would only create an

interpretation of art-making that the next artist will inevitably challenge, as part of the

natural dynamics of art" (xvi). Helguera's image of art overturning the accepted,

institutional, and standardized in favor of the freedom of the artist seems in the end

more in keeping with Freire's revolutionary theories about education. In fact, it is clear

Helguera is thinking of exactly what Freire describes as praxis when he states: "But

unless we don't really care about the outcome, it is important to be aware of why we

are acting and to learn how to act in an effective way," all the while acknowledging that

"an artist's successful project could consist of deliberate miscommunication, in upsetting social relations, or in simply being hostile to the public" (xv). Santiago Sierra's projects, for instance, easily fit within this caveat.

One socially engaged art project that fits well within the liberationist ideology of education as mapped out by the theories described above, is Campus in Camps, first initiated by Sandi Hillal and Alessandro Petti in 2012 as a response to the growing refugee crisis, particularly that of "[t]he oldest refugee population, the Palestinians, [which] is today more than five million, 1.6 million still live in some sixty camps across the Middle East" (http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/). With recent events, such as the war in Syria, the website states that "The last year marked the highest refugee population ever registered, 60 million people according to the UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)." In response to this humanitarian catastrophe, Campus in Camps was formulated as an experimental education project, one that "is a space for communal learning and production of knowledge grounded in lived experience and connected to communities" and "does not follow or propose itself as a model but rather as civic space in formation." Explicitly putting itself in contrast to traditional academic settings, Campus in Camps "place[s] a strong emphasis on the process of learning that cuts across conventional disciplines of knowledge, moving along a different vision, one which integrates aspects of lives, dialogs with the larger community and is not confined within the walls of academia. It welcomes forms of knowledge that remain undetected by the radar of traditional academic knowledge".

(campusincamps.ps/about). The goal is not indoctrination through any prescribed methodologies (they elsewhere claim taking walks as education), or standardized educational format, but are interesting in creating a communal space through which the experiences of the participants can be the possibility of knowledge creation. This double-creative aspect—creating the space for the creation of knowledge—is the artistic moment, coming straight out of performance art, installation art, and intermedial practices such as Alan Kaprow's Happenings.

"The Tree School" is one of the projects of Campus in Camps. According to the website, the tree was chosen for its possibility in creating space: "A tree is, in fact, the minimal element to form a school, a gathering place for people who share similar urgencies. The tree, with its characteristics and history, is the device that creates a physical and symbolic common territory where ideas and actions can emerge through critical and independent discussion among participants." With it's rather ambiguous statement that a tree is the minimal element to form a school" (There are no schools where there are no trees?), the explanation for the school in Bahia, southern Brazil, is poetic in its inception. Another instance of the artistic creation of space that can then be mobilized by and through the community is "The Concrete Tent," which takes the image of the refugee camp as a collection of tents which are meant to be transitional dwelling places but have become permanent in the case of the Palestinians and makes it permanent through its material: "The Concrete Tent deals with the paradox of a permanent temporality. It solidifies a mobile tent into a concrete house. The result is a hybrid between a tent and a concrete house, temporality and permanency, soft and

hard, movement and stillness. Importantly, the Concrete Tent does not offer a solution.

Rather, it embraces the contradiction of an architectural form emerged from a life in

exile"

(www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/).

Figure 6. *The Tree School,* Campus in Camps, Brazil, 2015

http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-tree-school/

What all the projects of Campus in Camps have in common is the collective production

of knowledge rooted in the lived experience of the participants, the refugees

themselves, and the recognition that such knowledge has intrinsic value. It is not

enough to offer them skills through which they can attain access to successful positions

within the dominant society, for that society is predicated on the removal of the

refugees. To deny their marginality is to side with their oppressors. What education

should not be is a serviceable mask to hide one's otherness, but it often is exactly that

when given in standardized forms within institutions set up by the dominant power.

Carol Becker, in *The Subversive Imagination*, analyzes *Campus in Camps*, describing this socially engaged artwork that has grown now into a collection of art-as-education projects where students are not passive recipients but full-fledged participants. They make spaces, intervene in their communities and take charge of re-imagining what it is to be a refugee living in a camp. A series of educational workshops, community organizational meetings—spatial and social interventions that at their core were aimed at improving living conditions and establishing order, but always with the temporal nature of "camp" in mind. They wanted to simultaneously develop their environment but also keep an eye toward their future and eventual freedom and liberation from this place of neither-nor.

What is important in both these projects is that they are interventions that are outside of the "humanitarian" as Freire described it. The community in place is not seen as a malleable substance that can be manipulated to suit the desire of an outside force, but rather is the source of any force of transformation. The ability to create and transform is not in the hands of a select and privileged, but is a human trait that has been systematically stultified through separation of knowledge from the broader scope of human lived experience. It is that same desire to separate off one area of life from another that is suspicious of art masquerading as education, or that scoffs at the well-meaning artist working with the beleaguered. Thus, The Silent University, initially underwritten by the Tate Museum, also fits into this framework of art projects that work in the complex field of political exclusion, landlessness, and art. In this pedagogic project, according to its website, "the Silent University has involved those that have had

a professional life and academic training in their home countries, but are unable to use their skills or professional training due to a variety of reasons related to their status. As collaborators, participants have developed lectures, discussions, events, resource archives and publications.

This undertaking, like Campus in Camps, began in 2012. It contains a set of lectures given by displaced academics, that focus on themes from the role of the Medes in the histories of Herodotus, to the psychosocial development needs of migrant children and the history of Kurdish literature. As can be seen by these few samples, there is a diversity of subject matter that mirrors the diversity of displaced peoples. Needless to say, there is also a range of languages in which these lectures are given. There are branches of the Silent University in cities such as Hamburg, Stockholm, London, and Athens, to name a few, and lecturers from such disparate places of conflict as Mosul, Iraq; the Democratic Republic of Congo; Almafraq, Jordan; Iran; and Hebron, Palestine (thesilentuniversity.org/lecturers/). Though this might look like a traditional top-down academic structure, it is important to note that these people are themselves the people displaced, offering their knowledge on a forum dedicated to the community of refugees, conforming to its own words: "The Silent University is an solidarty (sic) based knowledge exchange platform by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants" under the heading "Toward a Transversal Pedagogy" (thesilentuniversity.org). The transversality of the pedagogy is apparent when one tries to register online with the university. A dialogue box pops up that not only asks for name and email, like any other registration, but it also asks for the following: "Skills that can be exchanged" and "Total

amount of hours you would like to loan to the Creditor"

(thesilentuniversity.org/register/). In fact, the one registering, the student, is referred to

as "the Loaner," and the Silent University as "the Creditor," thus forming an educational

cooperative, a sort of credit union for education among and by the displaced.

Education has been fundamental to social art practice because of the inherent

relationship between education and emancipatory politics and experimental pedagogy.

It is the production of alternative communities of learning, which challenges hierarchies,

professionalization and homogenization, with an emphasis on the role of dialogue.

Grant Kester, Professor of Art History at the University of California at San Diego and the

founding editor of FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism, is one of the

leading figures in the emerging critical dialogue around "dialogical" art practices. He

stresses the necessity of educational experiences dependent on conversation and

exchange, and with an ultimate goal of increasing the access to the production of

knowledge. The question of accessibility is a difficult one in an era of education

privatization, where admission into the realm of education is most often replete with a

heavy debt burden, thereby entangling the student within the system of credit, debt,

and wage labor. It was exactly this question of access to education that inspired Nato

Thompson of CreativeTime and Pedro Lasch of Duke University to create *ART of the*

MOOC, where MOOC stands for "massive open online course". MOOCS are lecture

classes that are typically available for free.Using this platform, Thompson and Lasch give

a brief overview in a video and then offer an extensive interview with a socially engaged

artist. In the introduction to this project, the course emphasizes active participation of

the learners: "Online forums and opportunities to assemble outside of class allow participants to share their activities while developing critical skills. Through this hands-on, participatory approach, *ART of the MOOC* welcomes learners as collaborators in an unprecedented expression of public art and education" (creativetime.org/projects/art-mooc/).

In her segment during the MOOC, entitled "Suzanne Lacy and Contemporary Consciousness-Raising," Artist and educatorSuzanne Lacy, whose installation, video, performance, public art, photography, and art books focus on social themes and urban issues, sums up the concerns of forcing people into debt in order to gain access to education by discussing the numerous interweaving subjects required for socially engaged art projects to be successful, and just how such things could be taught within the current system of institutionalized education. This involves research into the specific non-art related topic, dialogue and entry into the chosen community, negotiation with community and possibly institution, and collaboration. Lacy asks, not completely without irony, "How do you train in guerrilla fashion to go out and work in the community?"

Finally, I would like to examine the work of Tania Bruguera, whose *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (Behavior Art Department), which sought to create an alternative art education space within the Cuba of its day (2002-2009). Bruguera's website states that the mission of the school is as "a Long Term Intervention focused in the discussion and analysis of sociopolitical behavior and the understanding of art as an instrument for the transformation of ideology through the activation of civic action on its environment,"

which is in keeping with the other goals for radical pedagogical practice examined in this

section (www.taniabruguera.com/cms/492-0-

Ctedra+Arte+de+Conducta+Behavior+Art+School.htm). The artful construction of a

space for free and open dialogue and creative exchange is the central figure for these

projects. The website also affords this insight: "This site and political-timing specific

piece is displayed through the creation of a pedagogic model that makes up for the

lack of civic discussion spaces on the function of art in present Cuban society and

promotes new generations of artists and intellectuals. This work offers a political

discourse stemming from art and promotes the exploration of relationships between art

and context." Certainly the same intent exists across the board in the projects

examined, and all are consonant with the theoretical underpinnings suggested by Freire

and Ranciere, among others. For Bruguera, working under the scrutiny of the

authoritarian Castro regime, the creation of that free space for workshops was

paramount. The professors, similar to the Silent University, came from various

backgrounds and social status, including dancers and former convicts, emphasizing

again that knowledge and creativity are ubiquitous, and not confined to a certain social

strate, though the control of access through privatization seeks to make that a fact.

Claire Bishop, in writing about Brugera's *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, wrote: "In the case

of Arte de Conducta, it's necessary to apply the criteria of experimental education and

of artistic project" (249).

  Not desiring to foreclose the area of pedagogic art practice, and to make a claim

for its necessity, is of paramount concern to these projects. For example,Paul Chan's

famous staging of *Waiting for Godot* in post-Katrina New Orleans, which became not only a play, a book, but also a socially engaged pedagogic project on the conditions for the possibility of the community that would be required to produce the play--and the waiting that it involved. There is little point in trying to parse out where the educational begins and ends in these projects, trying to draw some Venn diagram where exactly here is the art and there is the pedagogy, and begrudgingly admit to some overlap: rather, educational work is fundamental for socially engaged art. Bishop's conclusion concerning pedagogic projects invokes the radically experimental thought of Felix Guattari, and the problem of the two fields of endeavor inherent in these art works. She describes how each work of art must have a "double finality" and that this "speaks to the double ontology of cross-disciplinary projects we are so frequently presented with today, pre-eminently among them art-as-pedagogy" (273). For Bishop, these projects must cast light in both directions, as examples of social work that has certain constraints (such as working in a refugee camp, or in Castro's Cuba), but also as art "addressing both its immediate participants and subsequent audiences" (274). It is this double-bind that is explored, if not transcended, by the projects that have been discussed here as socially engaged art in the form of education.

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION

For socially engaged projects, the work takes place in the world, at a specific

time and place. It is focused on process, and immediacy of experience. What exists

beyond the duration of the project oftentimes is not an object, but documentation of

the event. In an important essay published in 1997 in *Art Journal*, Amelia Jones

questions the role of "presence" when researching and writing about art performances

that took place, some, she tells us, when she was a toddler. At age thirty, she continues,

she began to study performance and body art, but encountered a criticism for writing

about events she herself did not experience, that she had only read about or seen in

photographs. Her thesis is that her absence from the presence of the piece is "largely

logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic" (11). That the event took place at a certain

space and time, at which she was not present, but her experience of the performance

that she has through documentation is not an inferior relationship to the artwork than

that obtained if present at the performance itself. Since, Jones contends, an

"unmediated relationship" is not available to the audience, even of the live

performance, then the mediated relationship of the "viewer/reader <--> document" is

as authentic an "Intersubjective" experience as being present at the performance (11).

Jones concedes that there are certain aspects of the art performance that are unable to

be duplicated by immersion into the documentation, such as the tactile sensation of

bodily presence, but what is gained by the audience of later years is a historical

perspective with which to better understand the meaning of the performance, histories

and understandings that we create as audience over time. In other words, Jones sees the question of the performing art in ontological terms, and neither the performance as event, nor the encounter with documentation as event has ontological priority. Both events are, and according to Jones, both events are truly "intersubjective."

The question is certainly an important one, given the ephemeral nature of much of contemporary art. In an effort to counter the desire to label certain works of art permanent masterpieces, Twentieth century artists experimented with artworks that have impermanence and evanescence built into them. In this way, the radical finitude of art--and therefore its importance--becomes paramount. This existentialist viewpoint emphasizes the unique moment in time of the performance, the unrepeatability of the event that must be grappled with as present within time. The singularity of the event is essential to its meaning as art. Also, the art piece that is consumed by its own performance is unable (or less able) to be co-opted by the market. It is far more difficult to safely invest in Chris Burden's *Shoot*, where he was voluntarily shot in the arm by an assistant, than it is to secure capital in a Titian or Lichtenstein. Many who study the importance of this artwork were not born at the time of its performance. I was only fourteen at the time. So like Jones, I come to this much after the fact, like most others-- and one day *all* others--only seeing the grainy 8mm video of the arranged shooting. It hardly seems supportable that the only ones who can honestly speak about this piece were those who were present at the shooting, and once they are dead, nothing of significance can be said about it. But on the other hand, if these artists were eager to create a more dematerialized, more time-dependent art work, shouldn't this be the

result: that once it has occurred, its ultimate value as an ephemeral art piece envisioned by the artist is no longer available, and that any attempt at documentation is an attempt to usurp the artist's desire for artistic impermanence. However, it is important to acknowledge it is admittedly often on behalf of the artists themselves that the documentation is created to begin with. The documentation can itself become a commodity, thus in some ways negating the notion of working outside any capitalist or institutional framework- the works can be exhibitied, sold and also used as proof of the event. This evidence is necessary to gain sponsorship for large scale works and the documentation from one project is leverage for the next.

Documentation as historical record plays an important part in society. From legal archives to genealogical records to images of important events, documentation is essential to establishing the "truth": whether a certain event in the past happened as claimed is an important question to have answered as it speaks to a society's ability for self-coherence. The ability of historical documentation to be manipulated through computer software has sent a seismic shock through modern cultures, creating fractures along the lines of documentation's reliability. "Fake news" is the chant for anything that does not fit into one's preconceptions of what is true, but this same ambiguity allows some to accept as faithful reproduction of historical events any host of manipulated materials. This not only shows the ability of documentation to be altered, but also people's desire to have such documentation to underpin their worldview. Documentation provides basic grounding for a society to understand itself, and for individuals to recognize their own positions within it. It is little wonder that the ease

with which documentation can be changed into propaganda has caused uneasiness about its role in defining truth.

In the art world, photography and film (now video) have been the means, like in most other areas of life, for establishing the truth about past events. Perhaps the most famous for our purposes is Alfred Stieglitz's now famous photograph of Marcel Duchamp's 1917 contribution to an art show in New York: *Fountain*. Duchamp had Stieglitz memorialize the urinal signed "R. Mutt" with the date, but sometime afterwards, the urinal itself disappeared. Seventeen "replicas" of the urinal were made and now dot the art world (though how a replica can be made of a mass-produced item is another matter). It is the importance of the documentation of the original, the ghostly photograph of the urinal with its Picasso backdrop that has captured the imagination of the art world.

Art book publisher Phaidon offers this description on its website:

> "In the gently flowing curves of Fountain Duchamp
>
> biographer Calvin Tomkins claimed one could discern 'the
>
> veiled head of a classic Renaissance Madonna or a seated
>
> Buddha or, perhaps more to the point, one of Brâncuși's
>
> polished erotic forms. Others have likened the work to an
>
> erect penis and testicles or even "a modest woman with
>
> her head covered"
>
> (www.phaidon.com/the-art-book/articles/2012).

One thing is clear: for such an important landmark in art history

Fountain was incredibly short lived. After photographing the piece in his

studio, Alfred Stieglitz disposed of the urinal, meaning that what you will

gaze upon in any gallery or museum now will be one of 17 replicas

commissioned by Marcel Duchamp in the 1960s.

Here the historical record of what is arguably the singular event of conceptual

art's emergence into contemporary society is reduced to a single photograph. This, of

course, is not unique to the art world, as there are myriad examples of individual

photographs catching a historic moment. But this staging of conceptual art's genealogy

is in itself the authoritative moment through the very act of documentation. it is not

simply stating that such a work of art existed, but raises it to the stature of art through

the act of documentation itself. The photograph is clearly a photograph of a piece of art,

not a urinal. It is documented *as* art, and thus attests that it is (or was) art. The eloquent

descriptions recounted above are about the photographic image, not the glare of mass-

produced porcelain under incandescent light. The documentation is not simply an index

of a historical event, but is constitutive of that event as art.

In 2013, the Tate held a two-day conference in Lisbon on the role of

documentation in contemporary art, declaring:

> Although documentation is crucial for the survival of many
>
> contemporary works of art, it is never neutral: all
>
> approaches, formats, media and systems have their own

inherent affordances and blind spots and always transform

what they document. Furthermore, in process-centered,

technology-based or performative artworks in particular, we

often can no longer make a sharp distinction between an

original work and its subsequent documentation or

replication: documentation is part of the work's very core.

(tate.org.uk/about/projects/neccar-network-conservation-contemporary-

art-research/performing-documentation)

One of the presenters, Liliana Coutinho, professor at the Center for Philosophy

of Sciences of the University of Lisbon, stated the relationship between documentation

and the art piece succinctly, that the role of documentation is "Not only to depict it, but

also to produce it." For Coutinho, the art piece is an instantiation of social relationships,

and so the title of her paper that she read was "The role of artistic documentation in

conserving and convey [sic] social relationships," suggesting that both the art piece and

its documentation are involved in social production beyond simply being products

themselves. Thus, documentation is not only "part of the work's very core" and is

therefore constitutive of the artwork as art, but is also in a mutually constitutive

relationship with the nexus of social relationships that bound the artwork as art.

Rebecca Gordon, professor of art history at the University of Glasgow, in her

videotaped presentation at the Lisbon conference acknowledges that "Autonomous

objects whose communication is relatively stable from one context to the next is

increasingly rare.The democratization of artist materials has inevitably seen the

proliferation of process and performance-based practice, and with this move away from

artwork as object has come a reliance on documentation, both for re-performance and

preservation." This understanding of documentation is not only of preservation of the

performance (the focus of much of the conference) that could not otherwise have

existence beyond the ephemeral event, but also such supporting items as an artist

interview about the work of art. In this way, documentation is a complex of varying

modalities through which the centrality of the art piece becomes diffused.

Gordon's focus is on a piece where an audience had a choice to watch a

performance or to watch a live feed of the performance, which would have multiple

perspectives from different cameras. Since most people opted for the in-person

performance, this raised interesting questions of authenticity for Gordon, similar to

those Amelia Jones described above. Where does the "real" art piece occur? What is the

ontological status of art and documentation?

Clearly, artists such as Aileen Campbell, the vocal artist discussed above, who

creates a performance in one space and plays a videotape elsewhere simultaneously

sees documentation as something inherently part of the artwork itself. As such, it brings

more possibilities under the purview of the artist. The artist then can question the

assumptions that make the division between artwork proper and the documentation

that either supports it or, often enough, replaces it entirely. This seems a reasonable

extension of the space of art, to confront biases that say one activity is art while another

is something other. On the other hand, it is also a tendency in modern capitalist society

to make the artist as laborer take on more and more roles that once were part of the

gallery or museum. Just as workers find themselves required to do more and more

"multitasking" and to "do more with less," as corporations seek to gain the maximum of

profit from each worker, so too does this shift also suggest that there may be more here

than breadth of activity for the artist.

As suggested earlier, documentation also allows a gallery or museum to have a

display based on ephemeral pieces. Performances become photographs or video, which

will allow support of a cutting edge artist, while still ensuring that the institution

remains a valid entity and can meet its bottom line. This may seem like a win-win

situation, but certainly raises the specter of undermining the very artistic activity that

the documentation is meant to "support." And it is that very idea of support, discussed

in Shannon Jackson and analyzed previously that comes back into the picture. How does

one both create art outside the institution, and yet somehow be supported by that

institution in order to be able to have funds enough to continue making the art? If an

artist is a purist, does they commit a kind of artistic suicide as an outsider, creating work

with little or no audience? These are all valid concerns that do not lend themselves to

easy answers. The concern remains, however, that the more artists take upon

themselves, roles that heretofore were jobs for workers supplied by the institution, and

the more artists are willing to conform to a commodity-based social structure, the more

problematic this area is, especially for socially engaged art.

Art that touts itself as socially engaged must face the question of documentation

head on, as it bears all the signs of being co-opted by the institution that socially

engaged art asserts it critiques. The issues surrounding *Waste Land*'s Vik Muniz bringing

the photographs of the portraits of the workers made out of garbage to a London

gallery are far more problematic than Campbell live streaming a video of her jumping on

a trampoline while vocalizing, but both works reveal a growing trend on the part of

artists to further expand the horizons of what an artist as such *does*.

Another growing trend in the field of documentation of contemporary art is to

see artist interviews as a salient aspect of the documentation process. In this view, the

statements made by an artist regarding his or her work and "process" are integral in, if

not "understanding," then at least "documenting" an artist's work. This, of course,

raises concerns about the value of an artist's assertions about a work, the privileging of

the artist's statements. Authorial intent is a long-disputed source of the "truth"

concerning the work of art, be it literary or otherwise. Criticism seems to have long ago

jettisoned the idea that the author, as the creator of a work, has a deeper

understanding about that work, as if there were nothing about the work that did not

escape the awareness of the artist, that any connection subsequently made by a critic

had already been analyzed by the artist. Since this seems unlikely on the face of it, then

the emphasis recently on artist interviews seems to fall under the rubric of collecting all

relevant materials regarding the work of art. But again, this seems to have little support.

Why should the artist be privileged in this respect? Is it only the artist who can relate

what occurred during the creation and production of a certain art work, who can give

insight into the process? If it is truly such an insight that is being documented here, why

are there not interviews with the assistants who actually helped manufacture the piece?

Why not with the workers at the museum who helped install the piece? The truckers

who hauled the materials? And where should such documentation end? Why wouldn't we interview the neighbor of the artist or the person who sold the artist coffee every morning over the last decade? It may seem that this point has been pushed to the point of absurdity, but it exemplifies the question at hand: Where is the boundary for documentation and why is that the boundary? This is especially important for socially engaged work, where the artist is often the very one who has relinquished control over the piece and therefore, presumably, has the least to say about it. The community collaborating in its production can have as much input in the work's direction as the artist who initiated it.

Clearly the emphasis on artist interview is an aspect of modern culture's celebrity commodification. More than insight into the process or context of an art piece, the persona of the artist is what is being exploited for the purpose of sales. Just as there are myriad interviews with rock stars and Hollywood A-listers, there are interviews with artists who offer their insights on not only their work, but also their influences, and their life as an artist in general. But I would be hesitant to accept this simply as "documentation" as it is being presented in magazines and on websites.

But this does raise another similar question: In documenting works of art, how does one determine what is to be documented? This is particularly important in a socially engaged artwork or performance, but is also relevant to 2-D work as well. Where does the artwork begin and end? True, this is important as far as duration. When does the play begin? When the curtain goes up, would be the common answer. But there are plays that want the audience to register that they have entered the

environment of the play as soon as they have entered the playhouse, that they are now collectively "the audience." This extends the question as to where is the performance being enacted? John Cage's *4'33"* is a perfect example of there being no clear (in this case, auditory) delineation between the audience activity as audience and the performance on stage. Therefore, in documenting such a piece, the documentation must extend beyond what we traditionally think of as the place of the art itself.

Traditionally, in documenting a painting, the surrounding environment is seen as something to be dispensed with. The white cube is a space of support, but not part of the piece itself, though its role in creating the authority of the piece *as* art has already been discussed. Rather, what I am trying to pinpoint here is that our gaze is trained to ignore the white wall behind the painting, its blemishes and patches, the particular kind of white paint being used, etc., just as we are trained to ignore the frame in which a painted is set off from that wall. Even less are we supposed to accept the "Exit" signs or fire alarms, the plumbing and electrical outlets that are meant to be edited out from a perception of the work. Even in site-specific art, and those public scupltures referred to as "plop art," where the complete environment of the work is often ignored, and only those framing devices are included: the silver skyscraper behind the enormous sculpture, human figures included only to give a corresponding notion of the size of it, or its addition to creating an enjoyable outdoors experience in a park. Again, these are used only as frames, chosen by the "documentarian" to offer the sculpture in the best light.

For ephemeral pieces of art, this is even more of a question. If documenting socially engaged art, where should the documentation begin and end? For whose purposes is there documentation at all? Who should be considered the expert on the piece: the artist or the collaborators, many of whom could only offer anecdotal evidence of what it was "like" to be a part of the event. Or should it be the community in general, which is being affected by the work? And how to determine where that community begins and ends? It is a facile assumption that documentation is actually of the work of art without remainder, that the documentation offers a clear and coherent avenue into the meaning of a work's existence, and that the artist has an insight that is essential to understanding the creation of that work. Rather, documentation (or the claiming something as "documentation" or "research") is more often used as a support for the commodification of the art piece, or the replacement commodity for an art piece that has been determined as unusable for whatever reason by the institution.

Not only is where and when the art piece begins and ends a controversial aspect of the work, but also the concept of documentation itself as a project one that should be examined. Documentation, for the most part, purports to be the neutral and objective portrayal of an event. As has just been explored, this is not so insofar as the documentarian must make the critical decision as to what exactly constitutes the art piece to be documented, what is necessary context, and what is relevant or not in terms of our experience of a work through documentation. In this way, the documentation is not only not neutral, but is making a constitutive claim concerning art itself. It claims what is documented is the artwork and anything else is to be ignored, included

extraneous bits of information that might have gotten into the documentation itself. But this only goes so far as suggesting that the intent of documentation is to be a neutral lens that must make important choices in order to be a coherent and presentable bit of documentation. It does not question what documentation is *as* documentation.

When researching documentation and contemporary arts, the preponderance of results are either 1) the importance of documentation given contemporary art's variety of materials, some of which are ephemeral; or 2) how-to advice. There is little analysis on what documentation means outside of its use as a tool for "preservation." But clearly this needs further analysis, for it is not a simple notion to assume that documentation somehow preserves the artwork. It doesn't. A photograph of Ana Mendieta lying in earth does not preserve Ana Mendieta lying in earth. Nor does it often discuss, as Claire Bishop does, the intent of the documentarian beyond "objectively" portraying a particular art work. Bishop questions the role of documentation in instances like that of Jeremy Deller's 2001 work *The Battle of Orgreave.* In this piece, Deller had a community reenact a confrontation between miners and police that took place in the area seventeen years prior. Bishop recounts that this reenactment not only did not create a more unified community (often the goal of socially engaged art), but opened old wounds and flamed simmering animosities. She then notes the following about the documentation of the piece:

> It gathered the people together to remember and replay a
>
> disastrous event, but this remembrance took place in
>
> circumstances more akin to a village fair, with a brass band,

food stalls, and children running around. This contrast is

particularly evident in the only video documentation of *The*

Battle of Orgreave, which forms part of an hour-long film by

Mike Figgis, a left-wing filmmaker who explicitly uses the work

as a vehicle for his indictment of the Thatcher government.

Clips of Deller's event are shown between emotional

interviews with former miners, and the clash in tone is

disconcerting.

(182)

Bishop's example provides us with a layered issue: the original historical event

was a violent confrontation, but the reenactment is one of community

celebrationthough it, too, caused animosities to surface. Bishop points out that this is

similar to historical battle reenactments where some of the bloodiest violence in human

history is made into Sunday afternoon fare at which children tare often in attendance.

But it is the next layer, that of Figgis's video documentation, that is most important

here. Figgis, according to Bishop, is a "left-wing" filmmaker, and used imagery from *The*

Battle of Orgreave for his own political agenda: a film distinctly critical of the Thatcher

government at the time of the 1984 confrontation. Juxtaposing the reenactment with

the bitterly emotional narratives of the participants turns the imagery from the

reenactment into more a pseudo-documentation of the original melee, which can then

be elided into Figgis's propaganda.

The immediate answer could well be that this is not really documentation, that the original images were a documentation, but Figgis's use of them has taken it out of documentation into a form of propaganda. But as suggested earlier, as soon as decisions are made of what to include in the documentation (angry miners versus food stalls), or what is then placed next to the documentation (interviews with angry miners versus a pro-Thatcher minister), there can be little said for documentation's objectivity. In fact, as soon as a piece is documented and those pieces of documentation are then placed in a venue, a claim is being made about the value of the actual live event, the importance of the documentation itself as guarantor of authenticity, and the authority of the space of displaying the documentation. After all, one only documents that which is worthy of documentation. In this way, all attempts at documentation are essentially propagandistic arguments being made within a certain value system, as discussed in the "Institution" section of this dissertation.

The response to this concern may well be that because of contemporary art's general trend toward the ephemeral, art historians have no choice but to rely on documentations of various types in order to establish that very history. Many works would not be known at all outside of the documentation that has come down to us, and it is certainly better that these pieces, like Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, be known rather than not, and the risk of cooptation and propaganda are far outweighed by the art historical benefits of having those documents. But what is being argued for here is a more complex understanding of these pieces as works in their own right that may have a greater or lesser relationship to another piece, but which cannot be accepted as

neutral or objective portrayals of an artwork. Something as banal as the lighting of a sculpture for documentation creates something that is outside the sculpture itself, just as the initial lighting of it in a gallery or museum creates the "aura" of an artwork. This is even more apparent when documenting socially engaged art, whose very being is in a contested space.

Documentation seeks to present itself as a kind of scientific research, which in its turn presents itself as an objective endeavor to bring information, facts, and ultimately truth to light. But what has been seen is that documentation is in itself a process of decisions and contextualization that creates its own modes of truth that are neither neutral nor objective. The drive to document, the desire to perform that act, is caught up in ideologies of authority and verifiability that are often at odds with the structure of socially engaged art forms. Pieces created to elude the all-encompassing grasp of the art market being documented in order to feed that very art market are a clear example of this. But even more important is the awareness that documentation is a practice that brings with it the presuppositions of a any type of evidence, or matching up of image and event. In the current days of ubiquitous image manipulation through computer software this is a false premise, but even without those concerns the relation between documentation and artwork is a fraught one.

This fraught relation is again brought out by Amelia Jones in her critique of "presence" by referring to Kristine Stiles' critique of documentation. "Predictably, although many have relied on the photograph, in particular, as 'proof' of the fact that a specific action took place or as a marketable object to be raised to the

144

formalist height of an 'art' photograph, in fact such a dependence is founded on belief systems similar to those underlying the belief in the 'presence' of the body-in-performance. Kristine Stiles has brilliantly exposed the dangers of using the photograph of a performative event as 'proof' in her critique of Henry Sayre's book *The Object of Performance*" (15). Jones goes on to describe what is supposedly the documentation of an act of genital self-mutilation by Rudolf Schwarzkogler in 1966, which is analyzed in the opening chapter of Sayre's book. The problem is that this castration is a completely contrived event, using the acceptance of photographic "documentation" in order to create a gruesome event that did not take place. Jones points to "belief systems" that see photographic evidence as "proof" as just as much caught up in the idea of the truth of the art object as those who say she had to be there to witness the event in order to have truly experienced it. In this case, there was no event at which she could have been present.

The belief that "the camera doesn't lie," is actually a belief in the objectivity of technology, a reliance on the truth values of scientific representation. It is of particularly modern significance that science has come to be the go-to source for truth verification, and of recent note that science has been relied upon by art to supply it with a veneer of scientific validity. As contemporary society becomes ever more enthralled by its technology, so, too, does art seek to bring aspects of that thralldom within itself. Instead of using art to question science's claims to truth, rather science is often being used by art to lend itself respectability and claims to objectivity. Research itself is now part of the art practice, not something preliminary. Documentation itself is part of the art

practice, not something subsidiary. References to scientific engagements abound in various aspects of artworks as technology becomes more and more central to the creation of contemporary art. The underlying beliefs that have fostered the growth of technology now are seen as indispensable to art projects themselves. And just as Sayre accepts without question the existence of a presence documented faithfully by the photograph, so does the zeal for scientific underpinning—or even just appearances—betray a willingness to accept technological reproductions of all sorts as guarantors of truth. A sculpture made through a 3-D printer is already of more value than that made by more traditional means, and all of the schematics used to program the computer are now part and parcel of that documentative art process.

It is not my claim that art is only valuable when made by human hands, as that is easily subject to a reduction to absurdity. After all, computers and 3-D printers are made by human hands and are tools just like chisel and hammer. The problem throughout this chapter, is the willingness to give certain sorts of truth claims priority without being clear about the underlying prejudices that not only support those truth claims, but also the desire for the sort of events being presented as such. The desire to see science as the ultimate source of truth pushes people towards belief in technological documentation, and this is no better a prejudice than seeing painting and sculpture as true art, while socially engaged art is a sort of community center arts project, good for letting non-artists to feel creative before they go back to working at the grocery store. The move to greater documentation may be less a move to greater inclusivity and more

a move toward specialization and unchallenged rationality as a privileged relationship to

truth, the presupposed ground of documentation.

CHAPTER 8

THE PROJECTS

Systems of Exchange:

Museum of What's Left- Spring 2015

Sourdough Distribution Center- Summer 2015

Give or Take-Spring 2016-ongoing

Site-Specific Works:

#nothere- no place to land- Spring 2016

Vigil- Summer 2016

Maine Farmland Trust Residency and Maine Science Festival- Summer

2016

Community Driven Processes:

BedWritten/ #safetywork- Winter 2018

Silhouette Project- empowering girls- Winter 2018

Academic Collaboration:

MOOC-Creative Time (Duke University)- Fall 2016

Collaborative Symposium (Emerson College)- Spring 2016

Printmaking as Socially Engaged Action: Paper with a Purpose

#uprooted Mobile PrintLab, Black Mountain College, Ft. Knox,
Winter/Spring 2017

Horti-counterculture-Fall 2017

Women's March, Climate March,Washington, D.C.- Winter 2017

Nasty Women Exhibition, Knockdown Center, Queens, NY-Winter 2017

BedWritten/#safetywork- Winter/Spring 2018

Effigies/ #nothere- Spring 2016

 <u>Introduction</u>

Minimalist art distilled the notion of form down to the basics: drop, spilt, cut, fold, and basic geometric shapes. The work can be seen as extending the abstract idea that the art object is not a representation of some other object, or imitation of something found in the real world- a landscape, a portrait, still life. Nor is it an expression of emotion. Instead it is a direct reality in and of itself. Their viewer responds to what is set in front of them. This same connection exists in social practice; the intercourse between community and artist creates the works, there is a similar direct line of communication, and in the case of socially engaged art, often it is thought that the work is in fact this conversation rather than any outcome that might be produced.

Drop, split, cut and fold have been replaced with other actions. Miwon Kwon writes,"

[T}he situation now demands another set of verbs: to negotiate, to coordinate, to

compromise, to research, to promote, to organize, to interview"(Kwon 51).

Once involved in the facilitation of object-making, the social practice artist is now

a facilitator/educator/bureaucrat. The predominant role I have assumed in the projects

connected with my current practice and this research has been one of administration

and facilitation. In the methodology section of this paper the various roles of educator,

researcher and artist have been discussed, and it is because of the change to this often

managerial function, I have come to the conclusion that to say socially engaged art

completely removes authorship from the hands of the artist would not be wholly

accurate. The methodological move into this role has been accompanied by a realization

that the artist still has a central role. It is the artist who must familiarize themselves with

a particular community, a specific site, and even if the intent is to subvert an issue or

institution, the legitimacy of the work depends greatly on the artist' proximity to people,

place and meaning. Even when the work allows for the community to provide direction

and content, it is the artist who fills the role of narrator. By situating this art into the

world, rather than strictly a gallery or museum space, the work can address issues of

class and accessibility; it addresses a much broader audience. The art projects have the

ability to interrupt, intervene or assimilate and integrate themselves into a community

or site.

A recurring component of many of the socially engaged works I have facilitated

has been that of moments of agency or transcendence during or after my own

involvement in the project has ended. I am able to recognize these moments, these

shifts, and at times the direction of the entire project takes a turn, and in others, a

tension that some elements of a project create literally becomes the project itself. My

ability to see these events, and their importance, stems from an artist that has served as

an inspiration for my desire to create work that is participatory, that involves

community. A studio visit with artist Daniel Bozhkov was a catalyst for my

understanding of social practice. A New York artist who was born in Bulgaria, Bozhkov

makes artworks that involve performances, elaborate installations and a range of comic

conceptual conceits. He addresses daunting themes: globalization (he has worked as a

greeter at a Wal-Mart, where he painted a fresco), the American vision of masculinity

(he released a cologne inspired by Ernest Hemingway), and space flight (he installed a

kebab stand near the Berlin Wall in tribute to the first German cosmonaut).

At the time, I was developing a large-scale project for my MFA thesis. I had

several possible versions of the project, and I presented them to Daniel for his feedback.

Among the invaluable advice that afternoon, was this idea of tension- or friction in a

work, and a place wherein lies the unknown- that ambiguity that I would later learn

Pablo Helguera says is necessary for a work to have agency, and for a socially engaged

project that may function by "attaching itself to other disciplines, moving them

temporarily into a space of ambiguity, and it is this that brings new insights into a

particular problem or condition." (Helguera 5) The work can be envisioned, and the

structure planned, but in the world of social practice, there are other factors at play- the

participants, collaborators, and the reality that this art manifests itself in the world, and

the situations that it produces are to some degree out of the artist's control. You hand

the work over to the community, or the commons, the parking lot of a box store, and

there are circumstances that will contribute to the work, in ways you never imagined.

Responding to this, and letting this intervention in fact become the piece, was a major

realization during my practice-based research, both in the personal practice and the

educator arenas. It was this conversation with Bozhkov that began this line of thinking. I

was working at an abandoned Home Depot, and for Bozhkov, this epiphany happened at

the Skowhegan Wal-Mart. *Training in Assertive Hospitality,* a 2000 project placed Daniel

as a Wal-Mart greeter in the Skowhegan, Maine store, while part of a residency at the

Skowhegan School of Painting. As a greeter in the store, he was able to position himself

where he would be immersed in local culture, as well as that of the largest corporation

in the country at the time. Along with his job as store greeter, Bozhkov proposed and

painted a mural inside the store. The initial work was to "perform" and experience the

place of greeter, and then the project took the turn of fresco painting. But the project

did not end when Daniel concluded his residency, or completed the mural. For him, the

"real work" as he explained at that studio visit, was what happened after he left. He told

me, "The transformation that can happen, that track of abrasion is like an elevator to

somewhere else." He told me one can anticipate how the work will go, how it will be

received, but again, once it is out of your hands, something you and others set in motion

can shift. This happened to the Wal-Mart fresco. It remained on the wall for five years,

but its placement near the layaway department and warehouse doors resulted in

continuous wear and scratches, marks that eroded it over time. Realizing this afforded

152

Daniel an opportunity for another project; hiring an Italian conservator to evaluate the work, and create a report. At that time, the "corporate colors" for all Wal-Mart stores changed, and all stores adopted a new color scheme, and the mural was removed. As Daniel told me this, I began to see so many levels of realities colliding here, and it has informed my work ever since. He said, "These huge scratches and marks were the meeting place of two realities, Wal-Mart and the something that did not belong. The heart of the piece is right there"(Interview with Daniel Bozhkov, IMRC Center,February 2015).

Figure 7. *Training in Assertive Hospitality,* Daniel Bozhkov, 2000, Maine

www.artnet.com/magneus/features/coggins/daniel-bozhkov3-31-10.asp

Figure 8. *Training in Assertive Hospitality*: Fresco, Daniel Bozhkov, 2000, Maine

www.artnet.com/magneus/features/coggins/daniel-bozhkov3-31-10.asp

Figure 9. *The Museum of What's Left*: Poster, University of Maine, April 2015

Systems of Exchange

Museum of What's Left/ Give or Take

     While *The Museum of What's Left* and *Give or Take* both share an interest in

exploring direct exchange and cultural recycling as an artistic strategy, the museum

initiative was a project that again originated out of a class utilizing the strategies of

socially engaged work. Teaching social practice for me began in the spring of 2015. We

began our study with readings and research into the history and current work being

done in social forms. The group of students included a film student from Turkey, several

with a strong technology background, and also a student with graphic skills. In keeping

with my commitment to creating a space for group creation of knowledge and a non-

hierarchal approach, my intention was to provide the background and information on

socially engaged art forms and let the group itself form the project we would do. The

approach of the class was greatly informed by my participation and work done in a

project in conjunction with international socially engaged arts organization Creative

Time, and Duke University. I had worked with Creative Time at a number of their

research summits, and the knowledge and experiences contributed to the project,

which was a MOOC (massive open online course) conducted in the fall of 2015.

Designed by artist and Duke professor, Pedro Lasch, and co-facilitated by Creative Time

artistic director, Nato Thompson, this course presents public culture and art in their

radically reinvented contemporary forms, and the research became a solid grounding

for my own subsequent educational methods in social practice. The work linked major

developments of recent decades to wider topics like spatial politics, everyday social

structures, and experimental education. As the course title, '*ART of the MOOC*' implied,

learners and participants were encouraged to treat the MOOC itself as a public art

medium. Recognizing through actual experience complemented the research I had done

in recognizing education as a participatory art form. Through a combination of personal

practice, research and each subsequent teaching experience of socially engaged work, I

have been able to continue to develop an open-ended method of student -led inquiry

and I assume the role of facilitator, a "[N]on-expert, a provider of frameworks on which

experiences can form, and sometimes be directed and channeled to generate new insights around a particular issue" (Helguera 54).

It has been imperative to the success of both the class and the projects undertaken that all members, myself included, recognize the importance of the areas of skill and expertise that each brings to the class or project. Of equal importance is the need to resist pre-determining the outcomes of the collaborative work. This is a departure for many educational processes, but it allows a space for input and retains the emphasis on process rather than product. It is with this open framework that many of the projects that have come out of these classes have taken new directions and gained a richness that could not have been scripted. Most classes begin with a series of introductory exercises where the members perform social actions in the world, which pinpoint areas of interest for each, which lays the groundwork for further research, determining any potential overlaps, as well as map out a vocabulary of repeating themes that came up for each individual in their own bodies of work.

Maintaining a constant state of responsiveness and change, and directly responding repeatedly to the alterations of the work, and the community at large was the major impetus behind *The Museum of What's Left*. This project was part of a class specifically on collaboration, for which I decided to use not only a collaborative framework, but also a social model. What transpired was a fluid, organic methodology that is an inherent part of socially engaged work. The class group came up with an "open museum" without categories or institutional walls and framework to recycle and give new use and narrative to all sorts of objects. "You could start in one place with your

idea, but it was understood that it might not be anything remotely close to what you would have done by the time you finished the project" (Daniel Martinez in Finklepearl 55.)

The stages to the project were as follows:

Classroom Teaching- This initial stage consisted of readings and the contextualization of social practice, collaborative methods of working, and initial exercises. Students explored working with site, and development of project using the frameworks of Mario Ybarra and Pablo Helguera as reference, as well as critical analysis by Claire Bishop and Nato Thompson. Over the course of six weeks, small socially engaged pieces were developed, and a larger project, *JOYRIDE*, a mobile traveling disco disc jockey lab. These preliminary projects informed the final work, and the mobile Burro unit was a given parameter of the project. Students and I met weekly to determine the site and scope of the project, which was ultimately a pop-up gallery space based on the system of exchange and with an intention to subvert and critique the institution of the museum, the lack of true access to all, and the exclusivity of the system itself.

Set up Process- Using the mobile Burro unit as museum/gallery, and as communal space, collaborators worked as gallery docents and facilitators, and the community created the work itself. What was in the collection of the museum was thus determined by the community, and moreover, was in a constant state of motion, what we called being *"continuously in the make."*

The space included gallery type shelving for display and lighting, cassette recorder and

artist book for collecting narratives, instant printer to collect images of the collection

and its flow/exchange, as well as document the process of capital flow.

The Community Creates Content: The museum project was in place for twelve days. A

docent was on duty during the open hours, stationed outside the space. The museum

was located in a highly trafficked area of the university campus, and because of the

unique setup, it attracted immediate attention. The use of the Burro unit has been

successful in each and every project thus far, in no small part because of the structure

itself. It invites conversation, and the public is drawn in first out of curiosity about the

burro, and then fairly seamlessly into the project content itself. This, as Claire Bishop has

pointed out, is integral to creating social practice work. If there is a measurement of

outcome or success, it can be determined by this "point of entry", or accessibility for the

public. Even in pieces that can be thought of as confrontational or antagonistic, there

often needs to first be this place where the community meets the work, and for the

museum project, the Burro functioned as that liminal space between the public and

their ability to collaborate.

The intention of the project was to reframe the notion of "collection", and

extend it to a move from private to public, from orchestrated to improvisational. In

doing so, the piece interacts with the cultural economy, and that production system and

institution in which it is embedded. What happened was remarkable. Individuals came

to see what this thing was, and returned, bearing an item for the collection. They left

stories about the items, recorded in their own voices, or written by hand in a handmade

artist book. Others came to listen, to read and to see what was new. Items came and went, and other took their place. An example was an unopened love letter, traded for a piece of child's artwork. Another brought the pin given to them for 30 years of service to the university, which was given a short time before the individual received their termination notice. A crystal bowl held lengths of a daughter's hair; which for this mother, was the last time they saw their daughter, the glossy brown strands reflected in the museum lighting above each shelf. Two roommates had collected fortunes from fortune cookies for the three years they had roomed together, sharing a meal every Friday night while they studied. The lot of them was brought to the museum, and for days it became a constant source of conversation; "what fortune did you get?" Students and faculty, staff and community held conversations at the door of the space, people put down their phones and met face to face.

The analog quality of the project worked on every level: the handwritten journaling, the cassette recordings, the system of exchange and also the new system of determining value. Some who brought items were moved to trade them for something that intrigued them on the shelves. What transpired was often a conversation and dilemma about determining if what they had to give was in equal value to the item they wanted to leave with. And, this value was not simply a matter of conventional monetary value, instead, simple objects through their stories often held great meaning, and that became the determining worth. In a culture where so much emphasis is placed on money, class and status of objects, this system that developed was a new mode of intervention that had the ability to connect those who might never share conversation,

it was a method to also give those who might already have contact a deeper level of 'knowing" each other through sharing of stories that might never come up in their normal conversations. What set out to be a "[F]orm of critique of the institutions itself" in effect became so much more (Helguera 44).

What's Left: At the conclusion of the project, the question then became one of how to deal with the collection of objects that remained. Referencing Pablo Helguera, the timeframe for the project was set for twelve days, and the hours posted on the door. Through days of dialogue and collaboration, the group had determined in advance a framework that then was handed over to the community to provide content. But, at its conclusion, there were shelves of objects. The collaborative decision was to create art from the remaining objects in the collection, with random distribution to all members, and twenty-four hours to create a work that speaks to the project as a whole, with culminating exhibition of the works.

The project functioned as a form of participatory research into the life of a community, engaging the participants in what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls "thick description," the use of multiple sources, multiple types of testimony and evidence to construct a multi-layered, nuanced account of cultural life (*Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,* New York, Basic Books 1973). *The Museum of What's Left* employed a clear subversion of conventional art-world practices such as a static, institution-controlled museum collection, the role of visitor as passive contemplator, and the value of the art-object as being established by either the institution itself or the art market. Adams and Goldbland, in *Creative Community,* speak of this essential

feature in conducting socially engaged work outside of the institution," "Cultural values are transmitted and sustained by human beings in community, not by laws, edicts or court decisions" (Adams, Goldbland 66).

What we saw happen during this project was live, active social experiences, as the site for the work was located at a major gathering spot on the campus, but usual traffic patterns were interrupted; individuals stopped, participated, engaged in not only the museum creation itself, but immersion in conversation/dialogue with strangers. This immediate dialogue occurred in real time, a discourse happened that strengthened the community bonds, one which gives a form of democratic power to those in the community, as opposed to the current excess of passive, isolated, and disempowering head down eyes to the screen mode of passing through the world.

The project was communal as well as self-determined by individual's personal choices; it was in constant flux. We created a set of conditions that responded to a specific people, place and time, and it allowed for that community to have agency to then assume the direction of the work. Again, Adam and Goldband refer to community cultural development work as artists, either singly or in collaboration, using both artistic and organizational skills at the service of the emancipation and development of an "identified community" (Adams Goldbland 66). This line of thinking was particularly relevant to working in the campus community; we enter with a pre-determined identification of the population- student/faculty, on a specific campus. While narrative documentation and the acquisition of the physical collection were experienced at the individual level during the scope of the project, what we witnessed was a new

community being formed, one not based on age, major, student or faculty status, but a bond formed around stories, shared experiences and exchange- of object and discourse. Adams and Goldbland refer to this context of community as " dynamic, always in the process of becoming, never static or complete"(66). In our current socio-political climate of pervasive alienation and obsession with screen versus real-time, the socially engaged collective task is often to bring just this state of consciousness into being, that of belonging, but to multiple communities and part of a collective whole.

Sourdough Distribution Center

In the summer of 2016, the Burro unit took on the role of a distribution center for containers of my partner's thirty-year-old sourdough starter. Over the past thirty years the active yeast had traveled from Maine to Texas and back again several times, and had been dispersed into the hands of friends in every community in which we lived. For three months the original starter was divided into 100 containers. The Burro unit was again outfitted with shelves, and this time a table for sharing fresh baked bread and conversation. The mobile distribution center was stationed in Belfast, Maine, outside of a non-profit art center, which was showing an exhibition of work on the theme of fermentation. The community gathered around the Burro, as it became the site for not only distribution, but a social event of recipe trading, stories of family traditions and the literal breaking of bread. Once again, strangers became friends, and we received stories later of sourdough baking, of waffles and experiments. More than representation of fermentation, as the works in the gallery conveyed, this work, stationed in the world, in

the community, became a literal translation of that act of fermenting. It ferments within the culture and lives of the people, changing and altering those worlds.

There are many predecessors to the use of food as an origin for socially engaged artforms. Rirkrit Tiravanija was one of the first artists to create meals and used human interaction as his primary material, rejecting any notion of art as object. He began with cooking pad thai in Paula Cooper Gallery in NYC in 1992, and has since served meals in major galleries and biennales around the world. In 2005, in London's Serpentine Gallery, Tiravanija recreated his own East Village apartment inside the gallery, inviting visitors to move in for the duration of the exhibition, cooking meals and sharing daily life. *Conflict Kitchen*, a Pittsburg area project, involves a take-out window, selling cuisine from countries with which the United States is currently in conflict. Each separate iteration of the take-out restaurant is augmented by events, performances, publications and discussions that seek to expand the interaction the community has with a particular culture. The restaurant rotates their identity in relation to current geo-political issues.
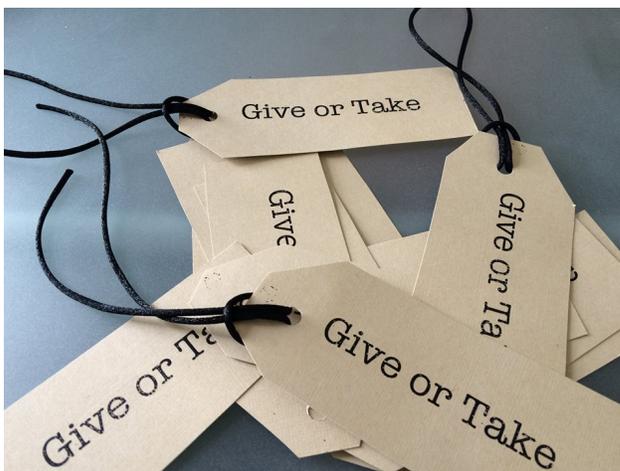

Figure 10. *Give or Take*, Socially engaged intervention, Winter 2016, 2017

Give or Take

The following is the promotional statement and mission for the project:

"Give or take- from me to you. One of a series of gestures to encourage direct action from one individual to another. Not relying on outside organizations, institutions, politics or government to enable common good. We are our own best agents of change".

This project was similarly based on a system of generosity and exchange. The pieces were placed throughout the community, in all socio-economic neighborhoods, on church grounds, bar parking lots, schoolyards, courthouses etc. A strong online presence in social media allowed the project to flourish. Participants posted their finds as well as their installations of new clothing for giving away or keeping themselves. Not only did social media presence allow for attention to the local project, but others took up the charge, installing their own Iterations in Colorado, Washington, and Pennsylvania. The agency of the project extended far beyond the local, into the national, and exemplifies the potential for social practice work. The project initiated a profoundly democratic and rhizomatic structure. As Tom Hayden declared in his 1962 *Port Huron Statement* on participatory action, "This is the notion that democracy is not only a governmental form but also a mode of living and communicated experience", an indictment on the status quo in America at the time, applies here as well (Finklepearl 13).

A second iteration of *Give or Take* (Winter 2017) called *Subversive Fashion*
consists of the placement of entire outfits of clothing installed outside of fashion
retailers for takeaway. Both the previous *The Museum of What's Left* project and *Give or
Take* utilize the idea of art as a direct action between artist and audience, eliminating
the middleman of any institution, be it the local charity, or in the case of art, the gallery
or museum walls.

A recent pubic art project directly relates to the theories behind this work. Artist
Miranda July, in the fall of 2017, conducted a two month long project in London, based
on a charity-based thrift shop. Primarily known as a filmmaker and author, July brought
together four British charity-based organizations to create one pop-up thrift store. The
organizations participating were all connected with different religious affiliations;
Buddhist, Jewish, Catholic and Islamic, and the shop was, ironically and strategically
installed inside a London department store. The real work is not so much about the
juxtaposition of art project and prestigious department store, but about art that looks
beyond itself to affect some sort of social change. Traditional Islamic garments displayed
with overcoats and handbags, the customer who was expecting to find the right haute
couture garment for a night out was confronted with another socio-economic reality
entirely. And, beyond that confrontation, the charities themselves experienced a surge
of donations and income.

In a recent *Art in America* article, Gabriel Coxhead writes, that the location, the
high-end designer section of Selfridge department store, "highlighted the acute tension
between competing economic ideologies" (112). The incongruous placement of the

thrift store items next to the couture luxuries in July's 2017 piece mirrored *Give or Take's* statement on the mechanics of capitalism, and the construction of a transactional space, though the importance of *Give or Take* lies fundamentally in its position as a socially engaged piece where the participants exchanged clothing.

The third segment of the project was *Growing the Resistance*, a mobile cart that is a space for a variety of exchange; herbs and plants, garden harvest, a soup cart and a free library have all been part of the operation. The beauty of the premise for all these projects is that the work of the initial construct ends up being assumed by the public, the act of giving clothing is taken up by participants and becomes reflective of the season, as well as the fashion tastes of the various participants. The project has included the actions of those who knit and place handmade pieces in the community. The cart project too, has taken on new modes of being, when periodically emptied of its current contents, participants have created their own versions themselves, using the space as a distribution point, where political stickers and signs are the latest items to pop up. This notion of exchange as the basis for participatory work can also be seen in the work of the collaborative group Colectivo Cambalache, founded in Bogota, Columbia in 1999, the co-creation of Carolina Caycedo, Adriana Garcia, Alonso Gil, and Federico Guzman. Their project, *Museo de Calle* began in the streets of Bogota, using a street cart, which functioned as an open space for bartering. Goods held within the cart could be freely traded between the collective members, and the audience with the only rule being no money was to pass hands.

"We organized a big barter and giveaway. We collected from family and friends...Clothing toys, and home appliances were given away for anything useful in exchange." (Finkelpearl 43). Over time, the collective has also begun to explore other forms of cultural bartering and exchange through the use of mobile sound stages and DJ stations, where people on the street can exchange their favorite music, or add their own voices to a live street mix. An early exercise in the first class I taught in social practice created a project titled *JOYRIDE*, which turned the burro unit into a mobile DJ station and dance party, traveling through the streets of downtown Bangor and the neighborhoods and mall area. Both *Museo de Calle* and *JOYRIDE,* share an exploration of immediate, on-the-spot exchange, which consistently sought to place itself in the public sphere, rather than within such set cultural containers as galleries and museums. Ted Purves, one of the pioneers of social practice has based much of his teaching as well as his projects on the premise of barter and exchange. He points to an undoing of the ideas surrounding both art and charity. These projects choose a more direct participatory approach to their conception. Rather than illustrate notions of generosity, these works actually intend to embody them, "{L}ocating the 'work' of artwork into a literal transfer of goods and services"(Purves 3). These works take the act of serving the public out of the hands of the experts; be they the government, organized charities, or retail establishments who have been given the authority and power, and places it directly into the community.

Figure 11. *The Museum of What's Left*, University of Maine, April 2015

Figure 12. *Give or Take*, Bangor, Augusta and Portland, ME, 2016-17

Figure 13. *Growing the Resistance*, mobile cart, University of Maine, Fall 2017

Figure 14. *Sourdough Distribution Center*, Waterfall Arts, Belfast, ME, July 2015

Figure 15. *#nothere: no place to land,* Site specific intervention, Augusta, ME , 2016

Site-Specific Works

  #nothere: no place to land

The state of statelessness becoming the norm in the world.

In a 2015 interview with editor Carin Kuoni, Thomas Keenan stated, "Migration, especially across the Mediterranean, is not exactly an institution, but it is a highly regulated and codified set of practices" (Kuoni 40).

        In speaking about the art of cultural development, Don Adams and Arlene Goldbland caution artists to remain aware of their own places of potential privilege and establish communal processes grounded in authenticity and research. The task of working in the world, with both artist collaborators and a specific community requires organizational and facilitator skills, yes, but there is so much more. I have come back

time and again to a definition Adams and Goldbland provide as I develop projects, as I facilitate classes on social practice and, most importantly, as I reflect on the outcomes.

Adams and Goldbland write, "The work cannot realize its full potential in the hands of organizers lacking in artistic ability and understanding. Vibrant creativity, a wide cultural vocabulary, the capability of conveying information through imagery, sensitivity to subtle shadings of meaning, imaginative empathy, the craft to shape bits of social fabric into satisfying, complete experiences that cohere as works of art- these are the stock trade of the skilled and committed artist. Without them, projects cannot rise beyond the level of well-intended social therapy or agit-prop" (Adams, Goldbland 67).

In the initial social practice class, what transpired was an apparent concern for the current political climate, the growing refugee crisis, and our "remove" from the suffering overseas. An accompanying concern over governmental issues on immigration reform and growing debates over admitting refugees into our nation, and, most notably, our own governor expressing his negative opinion on the refugee issue became the basis for one student's first action in the class. When a potential presidential candidate then announced a plan to erect a wall to keep out immigrants, a conversation about a potential project began to take form. This project *#nothere-no place to land* functioned on many levels. Part performance, documentary film, participatory event and part multi-venue collaborative exhibition, the initial concept carried with it an agency that allowed one aspect of the project to unfold into another. At any given point in the year-long series of components of the project (the extended time being a hallmark of socially engaged works positioning themselves in particular situations) , it was vital to keep a

meta-view of the piece as a whole, with attention to continuity, attention to aesthetic

form as well as content and sensitivity to the refugee community and the local site we

were working in. Support from a local shoe store chain, whose owner had a vested

interest in the notion of refugee (his brother died in the family's escape from Poland)

gave us the ability to think of the project on a much broader scale. The project

developed as a series of public actions: an interactive installation at a community-wide

event for peace and justice issues, distribution of an artist multiple based on the names

of refugee children lost at sea, and a participatory performative event at the state

capitol.

Five hundred pairs of shoes donated by the community were collected into a

used fishing net from a local lobsterman and brought to the site of the park near the

state capitol. One member of the group strained and struggled to drag the burden down

the road to the capitol building. When it was clear he could not carry the weight alone,

others, including passersby, joined in to help pull the load through the park, down the

busy street to the steps of the capitol, where participants carefully laid the shoes up the

flight of stairs leading to the capitol doors. The piece was documented, with audio from

the event as well as news broadcasts where the governor, local and national officials

spoke of the need to protect our borders. The film became then a traveling piece, along

with the shoes as a stand-in for those fleeing their homes, and a culminating exhibition

took place including the film, prints, distribution of the artist multiple, and an immersive

projection *"Echo"*, using audio recordings of a collaborating filmmaker who was at the

time following refugees through Europe, and sending us their personally recorded

stories, in their native languages. This was shown along with a 360 degree projection of

underwater footage, in a dimly lit room, packed with the shoes of men, women and

children, creating an immersive environment. Participants in the exhibition created

postcards to be sent for distribution to the refugees. The project employed the use of

printmaking, video, participatory performance, and engaged the community of Mainers

who had been told that their state would be better off without immigrants or refugees

at several points in the project's process. That exhibition served as documentation of

the action that occurred at the site of the state capitol, that space where the public not

only witnessed the action, but on their own, decided to become *part* of the piece,

collaborators which made their own decisions how they would take part. The need for

the ability for the community to take responsibility for the direction the work will take

exists at both the project level and in the classroom. I do not deny my role as facilitator,

nor as artist. They are the skills I lend to the group, but following that, groups of

students or community collaborators "enter a process of self-identification, ownership,

and evolution" based on the group interests (Helguera 22).

Artist Daniel Martinez, speaking about components of the Chicago *Culture in

Action* project, states "Each constituency was responsible for deciding how they wanted

to represent themselves; we had a series of discussions to determine how to facilitate

how each thinks and reacts, and does not leave representation without carrying its

marks." We began the #nothere project simply exploring each member's personal place

in the current social/political environment, and held innumerable meetings and informal

gatherings, along with the working through of several initial iterations rejected by the

group as we worked with current theories on social practice in contemporary art.

Careful consideration had to be given to issues such as possible exploitation, the

recognition that we were not part of the community we were speaking about, and the

need to approach the struggles of refugee and immigrant from a position that not only

was a reaction to the nationalistic rhetoric beginning to build, but the fact that we were

on the outside of this suffering, and in that way guilty of some role of complicity.

Another aspect of the project was the need to be aware of not limiting the work,

not trying to control too closely or to keep the work too insular. During the various

components of the project, by working with printmaking, video documentary,

collaboration with community and abroad, we were constantly exposed to ideas as well

as critique. One member of the project was creating clothing labels printed with the

children's names, and another was creating a series of prints memorializing a boat of

refugees killed at sea , where the work was presented to local printmakers, and thus,

through their feedback, refined and altered. Community members were integral to the

performance piece, not only for their actions, but dialogue to decide when and where

the action would occur. This has been found to be an integral aspect of social practice;

letting the participants dictate the direction of the work, similar to preparation for the

project, the research into site and community are the first steps to be able to determine

what framework the project could have.

One of the challenges to working within a specific community and its identity

and struggles becomes avoiding any sense of exploitation of that group, its individuals

and their particular issues. For this project we were fortunate to have a member of the

group from Turkey, who had first hand experience and was, in fact, then experiencing

his own insecurity over the ability for he and his family to be deported, and stories from

family in Syria/Turkey. The exhibition event would not have had the same impact

without the audio narratives of the refugees, which lent their presence to the work, as

well as the background narrative from the shoe store owner, which in some way gave

depth to even the sponsorship. The challenge of keeping the work open and not limiting

it to our initial vision also allowed for multiple projects to arise as we went along. We

did not predetermine each piece; instead, the project seemed to take on agency as one

element began to uncover the next direction the work needed to go. Showing the film in

multiple locations connected it to political leaders who were interested in linking

screening to upcoming legislation, which produced a new direction for the project.

Following the theories given by Paulo Freire and Pablo Helguera in terms of establishing

a horizontal framework within the group, no one member had more authority than

another, and this allowed for the expertise of all members to come to the fore. I

participated as just another collaborator, only facilitating in as much as creating the

space for dialogue to occur. Each member brought to the group their own skillset, but

also had points when they were abandoning those places of familiarity to do what the

project asked of them, be it performance, direct social action, confrontation, or

intervention in a public space. Those already comfortable in the public space were

presented with the task of repetitive production and physical labor. The entire group

edited the video documentation. One member learned to sew, another familiar with

sewing, then found themselves sewing in public and distributing the artist multiple that

had been created. The project was without a doubt horizontal and constantly questioning itself and its members, while also reaching into the community.

Finally, although this piece did involve social action and participation with the local community, it stayed still strongly within the scope of the initial group of artists. It was limited in its actual interaction over a sustained period of time both with and within the community. As Miwon Kwon states, " This interaction is considered to be integral to the art work and equal in significance (it may even be thought of as constituting the artwork)" (Kwon 95). Over time, I have been able to clearly see the importance of process over outcome, which the *work* is in the social component, and assimilation within the community.
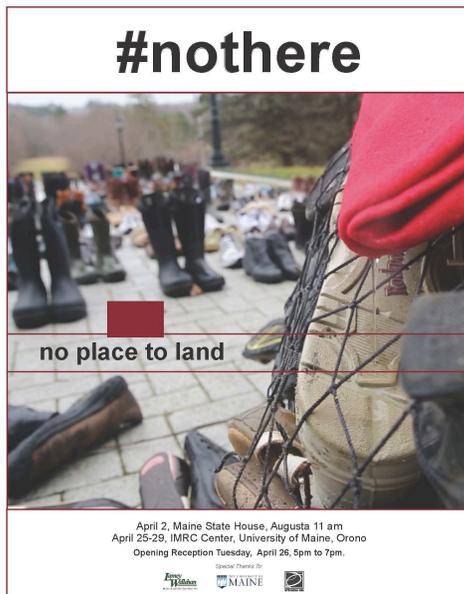
Figure 16. *#nothere: no place to land*: Poster, Augusta Statehouse and multiple locations in Maine, March 2016

Figure 17. *#nothere: no place to land*: Dragging Shoes, Augusta Statehouse, March 2016

Figure 18. *#nothere: Postcards to Refugees*, University of Maine, April 2016

Figure 19. #*nothere: Echoes,* video projection, University of Maine, April 2016

Figure 20. #*nothere: no place to land*: University of Maine, April 2016

Figure 21. *#nothere: no place to land*: Shoes*, Augusta Statehouse, March 2016

Figure 22. *Vigil*, Social Media Announcement, July 2015

Vigil

Public Smog, a theoretical clean air park created by artist Amy Balkin, is a art

project that works as a countermodel to the current expropriation of the atmospheric

commons. The project's intention is to open up a "park" in the troposphere or

stratosphere for public use whenever and wherever possible (Kuoni 66)). The project is a

response to the production and effects of ground level ozone, particle pollution, and

rising greenhouse gas levels and the off-loading of their associated risks onto those

trapped by it: geopolitically, spatially, and economically. Balkin uses interdisciplinary

research and social critique to refer to the link between nature and finance. The

attempt to set up a clean air park is structured thusly: the artist purchases carbon

credits, and withholds those credits from industrial usage, thereby subverting the cap

and trade system currently in place. She is used the claim of art to demarcate a space that is communal and outside the control of capitalist power structures. By making a claim that it is possible to buy a section of the air, she makes a claim for art's transformative agency, but also clearly critiques the shell game of carbon buy-backs. With these ideas of visibility and invisibility in mind, as well as the power structures that define for us what is public and what is private, that delineate borders and determine who can cross them, the framework for the *Vigil* project was formed. The project began as a collaboration between myself and several artists located in New York City, and expanded to a participatory collaboration with the local community.

The intention of *Vigil* was to create a space that was at once porous, and with a boundary that exists to include rather than exclude. *Vigil* occurred precisely at the time when the refugee crisis was beginning to be visible to the global world; ideas of who we would accept, where we would put everyone, and notions of borders, the "other" were just starting to come to the forefront of our everyday consciousness through the media. The group reacted to this by creating a temporary space, one that could work as a performance space, a space for making, and a space for releasing. We created this temporary space in our own garden. As artists we claimed the right to form a new definition of territory, one not dependent upon nation states and their armed borders. Instead borders were created through hanging of eco-printed textiles, and the expansive territory of music and the intimate space of a ritual fire. Participants came into this space, not knowing one another, and yet collaborated in creating this new region that now existed by their presence. The textiles became the flag for anyone willing to be

there. In this space strangers bonded by a rapid practice of object making from found elements, a communal meal was shared, and each participant offered a sacrifice into the sacred fire. Some had narratives written on paper. Others brought objects they wished to discard, and one threw her very last dollar, plunging herself into the poverty that is the underlying ground of the seeming wealth that is being protected by those borders we were opposing.

Figure 23. *Vigil,* Socially engaged event, Dover Foxcroft, ME, 2016

Figure 24. *Vigil*: Fire*,* Socially engaged event, Dover Foxcroft, ME, 2016

Maine Farmland Trust Residency

Figure 25. *Maine Farmland Trust Residency*, Rolling Acres Farm, Jefferson, ME, 2016

The following is a contribution by me to Carl Little, for an article in Art New England:

"Living in a small town in Central Maine, which is still reeling from the recent economic crisis, a town that has seen the disappearance of local industry and businesses, and where homes and farmland sit empty and fallow, my art has focused on these sites, these places of loss. As an artist, educator, and former landscaper, my practice attempts to combine these roles through site-specific projects that address the environment, through the use of sustainable methods and materials. As an artist I express our relationship to the natural world, but also important to me is the relationship of the worker to the land. For me, art must be grounded in the earth, not

only as a site of inspirational beauty, but because I have an abiding belief that our separation from earth, the inability to see ourselves and our future in a handful of dirt or a weed, speaks to a loss of an intimate relationship with place, with soil, creating an environment of alienation. It is that idea of alienation I worked from during my time at the residency, creating work that establishes a direct relationship to the site. Prints made from the plant material growing in what once were fields of crops, rubbings taken from the worn barn wood, and a garden I reclaimed from overgrowth all contributed to the body of work, and places of engagement. This emphasis on place and site and concern for the very ground beneath our feet is the core of my work, and through the opportunity of the residency, I was able to deeply form a relationship to this place, the soil, the plants that reside there, and through the mindful process of print and paint, create work that speaks to the importance of establishing and preserving the relationship to the land."

Just as artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, through her feminist and service-oriented work, relates social and process-based art to notions of labor and domestic work, the projects I have developed with the Maine Farmland Trust speak to elevating acts of labor, stewardship of place and engagement with community.

Chosen to be one of the inaugural artists for the Fiore Center Residency, located at an abandoned farm in Jefferson, Maine, a project of the Maine Farmland Trust, I chose to subtly shift the role of "resident artist", from that of the assumed role of *plein air* painter and studio centered creator of marketable objects, to directly engage with site in a different way. Rather than create representations, which mirror the landscape, I

saw myself as part of a long history of workers that had farmed that acreage, that had lived and died on that land, and I wanted to engage with those "ghosts" as well as the community.

Prior to the residency I determined that my initial research would investigate "dirt" or "soil" as both metaphor and material. The mission of the trust is to preserve and reclaim the rural landscape of Maine for future generations, and to keep Maine farmlands in the hands of Maine families, creating what the Farmland Trust call "Forever Farms." As raw material, dirt can transform the empty lot into garden or public park. Dirt grows and is built upon. Yet also the term can denote waste; filth, what is pushed out of the public eye, and in doing so marks territorialism and exclusion. Some of the theories that informed my research for the projects I would develop at the residency involved consideration of the relationship between dirt and art, between dirt and the issues that surround the state of rural Maine. I myself live in central Maine, and the economic implosion has continued to create ghost towns of what once were thriving small towns, and perpetuate the exodus from local farms, leaving great swaths of the area uninhabited. For several years my practice had focused on the housing situation in these towns, and now my attention turned to farms. Jao Ribas, in Entry Points, a volume of essays related to socially engaged projects sponsored by the Vera List Center for Social Practice, considers dirt and its relation to the social, "Is what is dirty what most calls out for justice, even as the civic becomes increasingly shaped by waste?" Jao Ribas, On Dirt, Entry Points 24) I began to think of the artistic concepts of figure and ground. For me, ground could be likened to the material, the state of society, and figure, as the

186

social; it can contaminate what or who it comes in contact with. Also in Entry Points, Mary Douglas argues in her landmark study *Purity and Danger*, "dirt is matter out of place."

While the soil in a garden nourishes life, the same substance tread on a carpet becomes a blemish or stain coming back to Mierle Laderman Ukeles, we see the notion of dirt appear and reappear. Her initial projects in New York City dealt with establishing a relationship between herself and city sanitation workers, These projects and their span of thirty years allowed the community to form connections with what was typically an eyesore, dirty, "unsanitary" and create a newfound respect for the systems which we all rely on in our daily lives. Ukeles current work centers on the site of Freshkills, a landfill proposed to be remade into a 2200-acre park in NYC. The work seeks to transform what was the world's largest landfill into a cultural destination, a reclamation and renewal of what was off-gassing 30 million cubic feet of methane gas daily. Out of this background research, the scope of my own work began to take shape.

Through a series of "reclamation" projects, I researched the site of the Fiore Art Center, which was once Rolling Acres Farm; I combed the fallow fields and barns, which offered much information about the history of the place, the developments in the tools used to farm, and the process by which nature had come to take over the landscape once controlled by human hands. I too, labored outdoors, to reclaim a lost garden, and in the process, becoming familiar with the events that had led to the garden's takeover by invasive weeds. It was imperative, if I was going to do site-specific work, to relate that activity to the farm, to the context of the place and by doing so, reveal the hidden

socio-political forces at play, that being the shift in the economy and the move to agri-business that had left these farms empty. Miwon Kwon, in her book on site-specific social practices, speaks of institutions which do not recognize the fact that they are structurally dependent on the "hidden and devalued labor of daily maintenance and upkeep" (Kwon 19). By amending the soil, weeding, digging, planting and reclaiming gardens that had been allowed to disappear undercover of weeds, I was offering an example of a different understanding of an art practice, it was not painting, but a socially engaged act, and my collaborators were those people from the past, those people under those monuments, in order to reconstitute the understanding of this site as a living and growing entity. This was not just a receptacle for us as "artists" to use as an exhibition of our work, it was a place with history and my role became that of unveiling and educating. Was it effective? Yes,. Those that visited for events and workshops saw me working, heard me speak about why I chose to work in this way, and also the "data" I had uncovered about the history and revealing what was right there, in a way other than what they expected. One of the tasks as I see it of the artist, whether socially engaged or as a sole author, is to present the world to the viewer or the participant in a unique perspective. This was unexpected, it allowed for participation, skill-sharing and gave a point of entry into the work for the community and members of the board of the farmland trust that came from a farming background. This is fundamental to any socially engaged practice- that allowance for a place of agency into the work, a point at which potential participants can relate to the activity, and then place themselves into the work, potentially altering it by what they bring. In this project,

the community gave me information about their knowledge of the area, they brought

me textiles to use for printing, they helped in the processes and a dialogue occurred,

and exchange that transcended the duration of my time there. This work did in fact have

the agency I looked for, the agency that Daniel Bozhkov explained to me years before.

Documentation for the work were requested for an educational presentation at the

Maine Science Festival, educating the public about plant biology, and the connections

between art and science.

The gardens I painstakingly labored to reclaim, have become, in fact an actual

yearly artist residency opportunity- to tend, plant and work in that which I sought to

reveal.

The socially engaged act of education and workshops were an integral part of

the time I spent at the residency. The relationships that were formed through the

workshops, through the connections between presentations of my work and gallerists,

as well as the local community became more important than the production of object

based art and I was reminded of artist Suzanne Lacy, who has said, "What exists in the

space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and

audience, a relationship that may itself become the artwork (Lacy, Mapping 20).

The initial research that preceded the residency included the collection of 100 soil

samples from abandoned Maine farms. These samples were labeled, dated and

mapped- giving both data about the economic conditions of rural Maine, as well

providing the impetus for a participatory event in the community. One of the most

important aspects of effective social practice is that ability to remain open and, as

Daniel Bozhkov had explained to me, letting the work have its own agency, being

attentive to the possibilities as they present themselves. This can only happen when we

relinquish total control of the work, and see beyond the paradigm of artist as sole

author, and focused on outcome and product.

Figure 26. *One Hundred Soils*, Maine Farmland Trust Residency, August 2016

The residency had scheduled visits from area artists and gallery owners, and a

large part of my role became to explain art that was not object oriented, not traditional

sculpture, painting and drawing. The pieces created by myself and the community were

mere "artifacts" of a place, of an experience. In addition to these artifacts, I presented

research data- how many farms were actually no longer working farms, and saw the

denial and surprise when I could visually document and map the facts. This educational

component was integral to developing a "point of entry" for both the local community

and those connected with the art world. The ability for individuals to identify with the project and to see their place in it is crucial to socially engaged art.

The other residents at the farm were indeed recreating the natural landscape in its idyllic beauty through their work, but the everyday aspects of a working farm, the contributions and existence of those who had worked the soil, and were now buried on what is the highest point on the site, a cemetery at its very center, were consciously omitted from all of the depictions of the landscape. It was the focal point of the farm itself, high on a hill, with tall monuments of white granite, a stone wall surrounding roses that had become hidden in the weeds. I was reminded of Cornell University curator and historian Jolene Rickards, a Native American who is also a citizen of the Tuscarora nation, speaking at a recent Creative Time summit. Rickards referred to the continued disempowerment and lack of recognition of indigenous art/artist, and the art world's strategy to deal with Native art as one of "[S]eamless integration into the international art scene,"(ahalenia.blogspot.com) and the creation and use of work without cultural context, results in what Rickards refers to as "erasure." At the Fiore Residency, not omitting this history, being cognizant of the need to spend time immersing oneself in the site and having a real knowledge from which to create any type of artwork, seemed imperative. And to simply paint a field and the lake beyond, at one of the sites (farms) that were fast becoming a relic of the rural landscape, contributing to the economic decline that was apparent in so much rural Maine, was to me, just such an erasure- as exemplified by the careful disappearance of the cemetery in the *plein air* paintings, and the strategy of setting up shop in a art studio and practicing

art without a connection to place. I say this not to discredit those practices so much as to explain my own sense of urgency to use my socially engaged and participatory work, to use a different approach. This sense of urgency has become the driving force in my move toward a more site-based and engaged way of working. "If we don't mark spaces," Rickard says, "the other side of it is erasure." (ahalenia.blogspot.com)

The work I did at this residency was work. It meant climbing and crawling. Digging through piles of objects, wood and years worth of tools in spaces under barns and in sheds. Wading through knee-deep weeds and burrs to understand the ancestors buried in that cemetery. It also involved taking frottage (rubbings to create prints) of the worn beams, the steps, the marks of measurement carved into the doorways of barns, the notches whittled into beams.

It was vital to understand this place to then be able to connect that site to engagements with others. And I felt I was also engaging not only with the living, but all those that had come before to be part of this place.

The process of eco-print; printing on cloth and paper to capture impressions of plant material, became the method I used to engage with the community and also form the basis of the workshops. Found objects were part of the process, as were re-deployed textiles from the area.

Through the workshops held on the property, I was asked to a facilitate similar event on the banks of the Sheepscott River, at a sacred Native American site, and the work saw agency beyond the initial residency. This site required a fire to be built on the shoreline to execute the artistic process, and two participants with that skill not only

built the fire, but labored to maintain the proper temperature for hours as the printing method requires several hours of steaming.

Figure 27. *Socially Engaged Workshops: Stillness*, Sheepscott River, ME, 2016

A performance related to the workshop used the textile pieces printed from that site as site-specific costuming, fashioned by yet another participant. This unification of art, labor, participation and openness to process allowed the initial work to expand far beyond what was initially planned, and created a place for others to share skills and expertise.

The soils collected prior to the residency were initially part of the research on no longer viable farms, and served as background for understanding and connecting to the work of the farmland trust in preservation of farms. As the project, and its offshoots

developed, it became clear that those soils should be part of a participatory project of their own. Small vessels were created to hold the soils, with labels of town and farm name and date. Packets of the soils were filled and marked with place and date of collection. Unconnected at the time to the residency, I had been making a fermented soil additive; EM1, which is a beneficial bacteria thought to enhance soil fertility. I had been making this liquid and using it on my own gardens. My background as a former landscaper has become a major connection in much of my recent work. I think of that act of gardening as a form of radical protest.

Packets containing the soil and the vials of the EM1 were later distributed into the community, inviting individuals to amend their own gardens with the soils from the abandoned farms, and to disperse the fermented beneficial bacteria I had grown for my garden into their soil, uniting and connecting this communal sharing that was grounded in the understanding of art as participation in small revolutions, thereby changing the way people understand something as simple as dirt.

The garden I reclaimed at the site of the residency, the farm that had once been called "Rolling Acres", was amended with the remaining soils from the 100 farms, the EM1 from my home and plants that formed the basis for a dyer's garden, those which textile artists could use going forward. As a former landscaper, I have long held the belief in the act of gardening as a form of revolution, as a radical act. I employ the use of botanical and horticultural related imagery in socially engaged printmaking connecting ideas of gardening to confrontation of social issues.

Figure 28. *Reclaimed Garden,* Maine Farmland Trust Residency, 2016

In her book, *Artificial He*lls, Claire Bishop talks about exhibition as a site for production, rather than just display of process, and the studio at the Fiore residency became just that. Visitors were invited to unroll the printed textiles, to create prints, to learn the species of plants present on the farm, and to become part of the work. Preparing the textiles, the collection of plant material, and the labor of gardening all contributed to an artistic practice that engaged with "the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary labor, but not simply as a micro-model of reification (Bishop 22). The use of the word project itself denotes process, rather than product, "process stressed over final documentation" (199) and through the workshops, the participatory projects, the work was in the experiences, and the projects that those experiences in turn created. By the end of the residency, gallerists and community members had commented on that expansion in thinking. The research and work in this project has shown me what socially engaged work could afford; people were able to expand their thinking and see these

process as worthy, and to be part of the work rather than just witness or reflect upon it.

It was clear that in multiple instances, people left having new insights about the socio-

political implications as well as a wider understanding of art-based work, breaking the

boundaries, or, as my own mentor, Dr. Laurie Hicks writes, the "[L]imits on what is

allowed to count as art" (Hicks 287).

Figure 29. *EM1,* Maine Farmland Trust Residency, community distribution of artist

multiple, July 2016

Figure 30. *Bundles,* Maine Farmland Trust Residency, community workshops,

August 2016

Figure 31. *Vestiges,* Maine Farmland Trust Residency, Eco-print, August 2016

Figure 32. *BedWritten/#safetywork,* announcement, University of Maine, April 2016

Community Driven Processes

BedWritten/#safetywork

BedWritten and #safetywork both respond to issues of violence, abuse and

harassment, but in keeping with the need to emphasize process, do not have a

singularly defined form. They instead utilize multiple strategies in various media to allow

for multiple points of access for those who have experienced these abuses, those who

are in a position to provide support, and those who are on the outside to create a

window in order to normalize the conversation of these issues through art.

No matter which of the many aspects of the project as a whole, the defining constant is

collaboration. Women have shared their words, women have shared their skills, have

gathered and provided support to each other, advocacy organizations have lent their

expertise and guidance, and the project has been allowed to remain fluid and shift along

with the decisions and needs of the collective group and the community.

BedWritten

The use of a bed as central focal point can be compared in part to the

instrumentalization of objects found in the works of Theaster Gates. His series A Way of

Working uses rickshaws as art objects that then act as supports for found objects that

then become exhibited and finally, return to the world in the creation of spaces that are

used by the community in new ways. This means of bringing the outside inside, of

antagonizing binaries such as form and content, medium and support, and art and

apparatus were inspiration for the BedWritten project. The site of the work was the result of careful consideration of foreground and background. The placement of the installation on the hill foregrounds the piece against the surrounding college dormitories which are the site for many of the reported incidents against women on campus. The bed frame works as the support for the text, the narratives of those who have been victims of abuse. The obvious use of the bed, as well as its clear visibility from any of the dorm room windows serves to make the invisible visible, with an aim to reveal and even intervene. This work looks to Chantal Mouffe's theory of antagonism as having the ability to challenge our conceptions, and the placement, its use of clear direct words from women, the creation of the work by women, and its position of standing on the hill, all of these aspects confront viewers. By the very fact of the domestic being placed outside, the comforting quilt on a bed confronts and challenges the expectations of the viewer, and this is exacerbated further by the inscribed haunting words and phrases of the quilt, and this covering a mattress of ice.

Shannon Jackson refers to working in this way in her essay on Theaster Gates, "To some scholars socially engaged art only does the deep work of aesthetics when it maintains discomfort and tension" (Entry Points 220).

By remaining open to process the project continually opened itself to becoming multiple projects, and this layering of media and entanglement of collaborators became its biggest strength. Grant Kester alludes to this type evaluation of a work, stating," "Pragmatic effects, concrete changes in social policies, the transformation of

consciousness or perception, subtle changes in discourse, all of these things get mixed

up together in really complex work"(Kester, qtd. in Finkelpearl 120).

Artist Sonja Ivekovic, speaking about her project Women's House, expresses

something that has been a major concern for me when working with specific

communities and their struggles. She states, "[I}t is important the artist does not

victimize or use their stories as mere material for her work; rather she offers concrete

tools for empowerment and seeks active collaboration" (Kuoni 134). I strongly identify

with Ivekovic, who does not see socio-political work and aesthetic considerations as

mutually exclusive. "As circles of human activity that overlap in a relatively small area,

that is the area in which I try to do most of my work "(Kuoni135). As I develop projects,

it is important to try inasmuch as the context will allow, to balance form and function.

Ivekovic's project, *Women's House*, focuses on working with women around the world

who are residing in women's shelters and canters for those dealing with issues of abuse

and domestic violence. Her ongoing project is, in part, a series of workshops created by

and for the women who reside there, raising global awareness about domestic abuse. In

2011, the Museum of Modern Art, NYC, mounted a retrospective exhibition of Ivekovic's

work, titled Sweet Violence, chronicling her projects in all areas of gender inequity and

exploitation. The content varies depending on the geographic location and the specific

primary struggles of the women at the time: the decline of abortion rights in Poland,

honor killings in Turkey, domestic violence levels in Italy and Luxemborg, and sex

trafficking in Thailand are among some of the issues she has confronted in her work. The

form each project takes is determined by that specific issue, but as well by collaboration

with the actual women who are the victims. Ivekovic starts with education and

workshops, and moves to varied strategies of presentation, such a plaster casts of

women displayed in galleries and museums with their personal stories. These cats are

created by the women themselves, each working with together, and through

conversations with each other, collecting the narratives of their struggles. The exhibition

of these pieces in galleries and institutions makes the issues visible, but also utilizes the

institution as a means for a political end. Ivekovic does not look upon aesthetics, or

form, and content (political investigation) as mutually exclusive, they work together in

her practice (Kuoni 135).

Ivekovic's use of postcards, posters, propaganda, public media campaigns, such

as re-appropriating the use of advertisements for famous brands of sunglasses- she

photographs the women wearing the sunglasses, and includes brief testimony of their

particular story in the magazine advertisement, also connects to the use of sunglasses to

hide bruises from abuse, employing a subversive use of media. Once again, this balance

of aesthetics and content is not always a consideration in socially engaged art. Many

times social practice sacrifices or denies the importance of aesthetics over form,

relegating it to an inferior role, or leaving any aesthetic element out altogether. Like

Ivekovic, I do not see the two as incompatible actions. In fact, achieving a balance of

both often has proved to be the point of accessibility to draw a participant or audience

into the work.

I also relate this method of working not only to projects such as these, but to the

very approach I have taken in my research, a more embodied, feminist approach. The

inclusion of narrative description and analysis of these projects and the necessity of

gathering narratives of the women in the project, letting these women largely

determine the shape of the content and the form, as well as providing a space for their

own expressions of their experiences actively, rhizomatically work to let new aspects of

the project emerge. The collection of women's stories and words, the sewing of the

quilt by women, the exhibition of women's work, and the outdoor public space designed

for women to use to perform, providing resources for help are just a few of the multiple

layers to the projects. Through all of these activities The exhibition at the conclusion is

but one component in the work, it is really the processes that lead up to the works, be

they the outdoor installation, or the exhibition of women artists, the processes involved

allow a space for community to form and offer concrete ways for empowerment. The

significance of this has continuously been impressed upon me, as through the project I

have yet to meet a woman who has not had some type of experience of this sort, be it

assault, domestic violence, harassment, discrimination or struggles with reproductive

rights.

The projects consists of two connected components; BedWritten, an outdoor

installation of an iron bed with mattress made of ice, covered with a quilt printed with

the contributions from one hundred women. This quilt was sewn in a performative

action by 11 women, all of whom are survivors of some type of gender abuse. The

installation also includes a kiosk with etched mirror signage, and displays materials

supplied by area advocacy agencies. The signage allows for those viewing to be part of

the work, and in some way complicit or held responsible for admitting, acknowledging

their role in the reality. The installation is located at a major focal point on campus, and has been planted months earlier, with 100 black tulips signifying those women who have had the courage to share their stories. This will be left in place until spring, as the mattress melts and supports removed to allow the tulips to emerge into the frame of the bed.

The second component of the project is #safetywork, an exhibition and performance event showing the work of eleven women artists, all of which are victims of sexual violence or harassment, as well as a collaboration of eighty middle school girls (Silhouette). Through all aspects of the project, the repeating theme has been one of gathering: the gathering of the narratives and sometimes reluctance, understandably, of women to expose themselves in this way, the vulnerability and need to block these experiences from memory. This was followed by the coming together of eleven women who had been victims of some type of abuses, who were willing to create work, and meet as a group. The women met repeatedly, sharing narratives, skillsets in the creation of the artwork, and strangers became friends. In a space set up like a factory, with rows of sewing machines, they stitched the blocks, and read the words other women had shared. It was difficult and yet, as a group, we were able to bond and find strength, as well as hold the experiences shared by the one hundred individuals who had supplied the text.

The project began a year prior to its implementation, and during the course of that year, the socio-political climate had shifted, and reports of women coming forward to report abuses by major players in the film industry, as well as the alleged actions of

the man who was now president of the country became a movement that had real

momentum. The projects began to be on point, and although unintentional, part of that

conversation. The location of the outdoor installation, was on a hill in a common space

facing dormitories on three sides, which had a reputation for being involved on many

reported activities against women At the start of the academic year, the campus made

news when several fraternity houses had hanging large banners from their houses,

proclaiming "Mother Drop off your Daughters Here", and "Honk if she's 18".

Figure 33. *University of Maine, Orono; Fraternities*, Beacon online

mainebeacon.com/misogynist-banners-at-umaine-underscore-a-lack-of-support-for-women-on-campus/ Aug 29, 2017 Sam Saucier

The banners made local news, and research led to seeing that this campus was

not the only one displaying these atrocities. My research focused then on the statistics

of reported crimes against women, and connections were made to campus

organizations that serve as advocates for victims of harassment, sexual assault, and

gender discrimination. Through previous projects, my review of the existing literature,

and knowledge of current social practice, I was keenly aware of the need to be sensitive

to the vulnerability of those who had and were currently struggling with the issues I was working with. The project could not just confront the issues; it needed to supply resources and agency beyond the scope of the initial project. I met with area organizations such as the Rape Response team of Bangor, partners for peace, Women and gender studies faculty, campus police and the w/omen's resource center. Through presenting the project at the invitation of these organizations, I was asked to serve on the Campus Committee for Sexual Assault and Violence. By connecting the project to these institutions, and moving my role from artist to researcher, and realizing the role our project would also assume as education tool, the mechanisms of social practice were truly in play. As Pablo Helguera writes, " Socially engaged art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines", moving them temporarily into the realm or art-making (Helguera 5). And it is in this shift that the work and its issue are made visible. Art affords a unique opportunity to work with social concerns outside of typical institutions, but also alongside and, sometimes, inside of them.

In her 2015 project, *Beauty in Transition*, artist Jody Wood offers a chance for women experiencing homelessness to reclaim their identities and, rather than have their images dictated by circumstances, to have the opportunity to present themselves as they would have others see them. Jody Wood has outfitted a box truck as a mobile hair salon, and positions it outside homeless shelters, offering free services to residents. Clients are encouraged to sign up for whatever services they would like, providing women with an individualized experience that can last up to two hours. Wood has

worked in several cities, NYC, Philadelphia and Denver, partnering with the area shelters

to determine the schedule that works for that particular institution, but in effect,

subverts that tactics of social-service organizations. The conventional mode of

operations for these organizations, which are dependent on ever more scarce funding, it

to spread their resources as far as possible, "offering just enough to keep people alive,

but not quite enough to really help them transform their lives. Wood offers something

beyond mere necessity" (Grady 118).

Positioning the project as an artwork rather than just a social service allows

Wood to bypass the requirements of a government agency, which would have to adhere

to certain guidelines and reviews to measure the success of the work. Instead, Wood

can approach each individual client as a person with unique identities, and tailor her

services to the specific group of women, and they way they each perceive their own

circumstances and needs. In Future Imperfect, Nahomie Marcena writes about this

unique affordance of art through this project, to address individual issues, " [Wood's]

ability to calibrate her response to the needs of individuals validates them and

reinforces their belief in their own humanity, potentially reinforcing the kind of inner

strength they may be able to draw upon to pull themselves out of the condition of

homelessness." Art, as a space of imagination, can provide a tool for envisioning an

alternate solution, and " an unexpected path into the future" (Grady 118).

The *BedWritten* and *#safetywork*, projects have worked in a similar manner; at

every level of the projects, there are women who have suffered the horrors and

indignities of everything from rape and domestic violence to workplace harassment and

everyday struggles to navigate a world in which they are often seen as marginalized. The projects have created a space for them to share their long buried trauma, to learn they are not alone, and to provide resources beyond the project itself, through alliance with area advocacy organizations. As a socially engaged practice, the essence of the work is the process, the spaces of dialogue that the collaboration provides. The gatherings are more important than the production of the quilt, or the installation, or the final exhibition. It is in the moments of conversation, or silent communal sharing of circumstances that the art happens, and the agency of the work that provides opportunity for those beyond the scope of the collaborators to witness and be transformed.

When speaking about the outcomes of Jody Wood's salon in a box truck, Marcena believes the success lies not in the simply the results of the services the clients receive, but in the " inner transformation of individuals who have restored to them a whisper of their former selves, and a bit more fortitude to fight for their basic human rights…" (Grady 120). *BedWritten/#safetywork* offer the opportunity for just this sort of experience, and it is only through establishing community and bringing these stories out of the darkness, front and center, that gender inequities and abuses will cease to exist.

Silhouette

As artist-in-residence for area schools, I have for the last three years had the opportunity to work with local middle school youth. The current group of gifted and talented students are, for whatever reason, entirely female. I have also had the privilege

of working in 2016 with the students from the Ann Richards School for Women Leaders

in Austin, Texas. The Ann Richards School, is an all-girls college preparatory public school

for students in grades 6–12 founded by former Texas governor Ann Richards and has

been named the 19th most challenging high school in the nation. I have done several

projects with the school, the earlier projects centering on environmentalism and

sustainability.

After the *BedWritten* and *#safetywork* projects were already well underway, the

#metoo movement, a social media campaign which demonstrates the widespread

prevalence of sexual violence and harassment began to sweep the country. Women

everywhere in all walks of life began to speak out about their struggles with all levels of

domestic, workplace and everyday acts of abuse. Both projects began for me, at a time

of political turmoil, a time when the nation was presented with a choice of a possible

female president, and allegations of sexual misconduct and misogyny were made

against the candidate that would eventually become the nation's leader. As an artist, I

am convinced of the power that work derived from personal experience can have, and

these topics were ones that hit close to home. It was out of this political climate, and a

sense of urgency around the future for the nation, and for females in particular, that

these projects were born. The *Silhouette* project extended this work to include

collaborations with young women, to bring their voices into the fold of participants.

Mammalian Diving Reflex, A Toronto based collective, views innovative artistic

interventions as a way to trigger generosity and equity across the world. Founded by

Artistic Director, Darren O'Donnell in 1993, Mammalian is a "research-art atelier

dedicated to investigating the social sphere, always on the lookout for contradictions to whip into aesthetically scintillating experiences" (www.mammalian.ca/projects). The group operates as a culture production workshop, creating site and social-specific performance events, and theoretical texts. Mammalian's body of work reflects knowledge and expertise on the use and function of culture. One of the collective's most celebrated projects held in multiple locations around the globe was *Haircuts by Children,* where children were trained for one week by professional stylists and paid to give haircuts in public spaces and galleries. Founder of the group, Darren O'Donald commented on the project, saying, "We live in an 'adultitarian' state, where the rules are based on very adult priorities and understandings of reality. Young people are disenfranchised and power- less; they understand they're subject to an authoritarian regime, whether they buy into it or not. But their unique perspectives also offer incredible potential for social, cultural and economic innovation" (https://chbooks.com/Books/H/Haircuts-by-Children-and-Other-Evidence-for-a-New-Social-Contract). The *Silhouette* project collaborates with middle school age girls in a manner that maintains a large space for their participation and can be understood as a vision of a very different role for young people in the world. The inclusion of young girls in the larger *#safetywork* exhibition, functions not only as an expression of their identities, but also their rights to be able to navigate the world free of the realities their mothers have had to face. Placing this work alongside those who have suffered the indignities and physical abuse of domestic violence, assault and harassment serves as a way to intervene and disrupt the stark inequalities perpetuated by the status quo.

Figure 34. *Haircuts by Children*, Mammalian Diving Reflex, various locations, 1999

Like this collective, my projects aim to create work that recognizes the social responsibility of art, fostering a dialogue between audience members, between the audience and the material, and between the performers and the audience. In all three of the women's projects, the work dismantles barriers between individuals of all ages, cultural, economic and social backgrounds and gives not only voice to issues long held hidden, but also is an example once again of the way agency can function in socially engaged work. The initial premise of creating a space for women to share their experiences through an installation, led to the second project of collaboration with the local community and then necessitated an expansion, to include not only women, but soon-to-be women who could be empowered to not be destined to live the experience of abuse and harassment of our generation.

For the *Silhouette* project, middle school girls took profile photos of themselves, which they then used to create relief printmaking plates. During workshops involving youth-led conversations around identity and empowerment, that dialogue and the printing of these plates with text, became a series of over 80 works to be exhibited alongside the *#safetywork* art.

As of this writing, all three projects are still underway. Research and theory have informed every step of these processes. For example, the ability to be part of Creative Time has given me countless opportunities to hear the stories of others doing this work, and so, when the weather has not cooperated for the planned building of the wall of ice that was to surround the outdoor installation, it does not translate into thinking "failure". Research brings with it the realization that when one works in the world, outside of the more carefully controlled environment of the gallery, circumstances will often dictate the way the work will take shape. By removing some of the artist's authorship, the project may not go exactly as planned, it simply cannot, it takes its own form, and these twists and turns are often what allow the work to have real immediacy and impact in the world. Over 100 women have shared their stories with me, eleven women are getting to know each other through both in person gatherings and social media sharing, and 80 young girls have discussed ideas of identity and insecurities. That is the agency and real artwork of this project. Yes, the walls will be graced with a horizontal band of 80 pieces of art, the exhibition will show works from video to sculpture to performance and print, the ice will melt outdoors and up will spring 100 black tulips, and advocates, artists and community will share an evening together, but

the real aesthetic beauty has been the conversations, the emails bringing two women,

once strangers together by their shared struggles. This is both the "social" and the

"practice" and this is the way art has the possibility of working to create change in the

world, and to reach people in ways that mere information and statistics cannot.

Figure 35. *BedWritten*: Kiosk, University of Maine, 2018

Figure 36. *BedWritten*: Sewing the Quilt, IMRC Center, University of Maine, 2018

Figure 37. *BedWritten*: Bed*,* outdoor Installation, Stewart Commons, University of

Maine, 2018

Figure 38. *BedWritten,* outdoor installation, University of Maine, 2018

Figure 39. *Silhouette*, Collaborative empowerment project with middle school girls, 2018

Figure 40. *#safetywork,* Artist gathering, IMRC Center, University of Maine, 2018

Academic Collaboration

Pablo Helguera writes, "Traditional pedagogy fails to recognize 3 things: first, the creative performativity of the act of education; second, the fact that the collective construction of an art - with artworks and ideas, is a collective construction of knowledge, and third, the fact that knowledge, does not end in knowing the artwork but is a tool for understanding the world (Helguera 80). As a research-based practitioner, I have found the roles of educator, artist and researcher to continually overlap, and it is within this methodology that my approach to teaching is grounded and is, therefore, the foundation for my practice.

According to Helguera there are four components of the curriculum for SEA:

1) Understanding the methodological approaches of socially centered disciplines including sociology, theater, education, ethnography and communication.

2) The possibility of reconstructing and reconfiguring itself according to the needs and interest of the students

3) An experiential approach toward art in the world that offers a stimulating challenge to the student

4) A refunctioned curriculum of art history and techniques, including an understanding of the ways these functioned in the past, and function now. (Helguera 87)

As an instructor of social practice, my role in the class is one of facilitator as well as fellow collaborator. Like Freire's idea of the "non-expert" I provide the framework, and we work together to form experiences which, as Helguera states, "can be directed and channeled to generate new insights around a particular issue"(Helguera 54).

However, it is necessary here to recognize that whether the instructor of record in a university classroom, or as the instigator of a socially engaged project in the world, I am still assuming the role of artist. I am still evaluating the project, adding my skill set as leader, as creator, curator, and in the case of either students or community at large, these populations can often have far less experience working in this manner, and so it is not from a neutral, dissolving of self-as-artist position that one can work. Claire Bishop speaks of artists who profess to absolve themselves of any responsibility or role in individual initiative, calling this an "elimination of authorship", a way to "redeem the guilt of social privilege" (Bishop, "The Social Turn" 179-185).

I have found that establishing a relationship between both student and community collaborators requires careful consideration and achievement of a delicate balance between my own role in creating the space for critical dialogue, and not being thought of as a mere problem-solver when things go wrong, or losing myself totally to the interests of those with whom I am working. I have found, in the best moments, that the shared skill sets of working within a group, the construction of mutual exchanges, and a level of equal participation by all involved to form projects that truly develop new insights and also have agency beyond the initial project itself. Again Helguera tells us, "Freire brought home the point that the differences in knowledge between the parties did not denote superior intelligence on either side but instead was connected to the difference in their environments, interests, and access to various opportunities" (Helguera 52). By opening the space of the educational experience, those in the group have the opportunity to insert their own contents into the structure that I have built.

This is not an easy task, and it has been vital to the process to acquaint myself with various methods of facilitation. The concept of Open Space Technology, a method of conducting meetings in business, has been a model for the way I navigate the process of teaching socially engaged art in the classroom. The roles of artist and teacher become one in that I see the socially engaged class as a work of art. This notion was clearly reaffirmed in my participation in Duke University's MOOC: we were organizing an online educational experience, but we were also involved in the execution of one large socially engaged artwork project that included many smaller works, and conversations.

Based on the Socratic method, developed by Chistopher Phillips, the project *Socratic Cafe*, conducts gatherings around the world where people from different backgrounds get together and exchange thoughtful ideas and experiences while embracing the central theme of Socratizing; the idea that we learn more when we question and question with others.

The idea began in the early nineties when Phillips, then a freelance writer, asked himself what he could do that would in some way "further the deeds of those noble souls who had come before him" and, as William James put it, suffered and laid down their lives to better the lot of humankind? The epiphany and also the answer for him was to be a philosopher in the mold of Socrates, and to hold Socratic dialogues with anyone and everyone who would like to engage in a common quest to gain a better understanding of human nature.
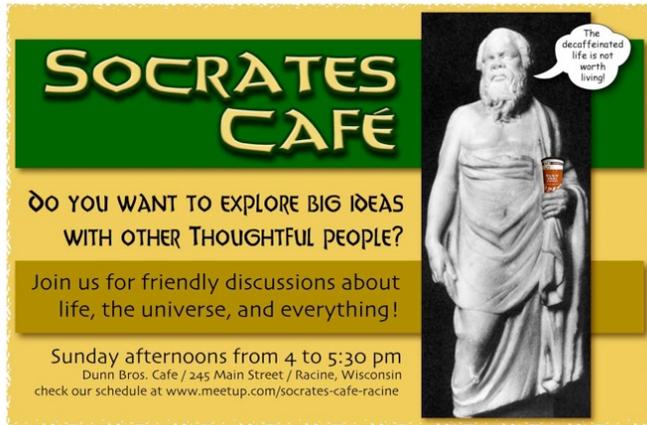
Figure 41. *Socrates Café,* Promotional graphic, 2017,

(mrblocher.com/socrates_Cafe.html)

This idea of conversation as socially engaged artwork related to the experience of the

online course. Conversations with individuals located across the world brought with

them the possibility of projects being created on a global level, brought new

perspectives and approaches. Similarly, in my own work as educator, both teaching the

practice and then as a group, developing socially engaged projects were grounded in

dialogue. There were no real lectures or speeches in the classroom, as those inherently

have a primary intent of what Helguera calls "conversion rather than exchange" (43).

The MOOC

In the massive online open course I collaborated in with educators from Duke

University on socially engaged art, artist Suzanne Lacy, in an interview, stated that"

education is a fundamental component of social practice", and the " ways in which SEA

itself operates are pedagogic."

The Art of the MOOC: Public Art and Pedagogy, delivered globally, involved one hundred participants from across the world actively engaged with creating collaborative work and hundreds of others who were viewing and commenting, and creating socially engaged projects in their communities and virtually with others in the course. Broadcasted over the Internet, viewers had the access to the materials and lectures, allowing people who may not have these resources in their communities the means to take a course on the topic, as well as to collaborate and learn horizontally from others world-wide.

Led by artist educator Pedro Lasch, with help from Creative Time artistic director Nato Thompson participants developed projects, collaborated and studied the current work being done in social practice, along with theory and critique of the collective projects.

When asked how artists are currently being educated in the field of social practice, Suzanne Lacy plainly states that *they are not*. The types of field work necessary in SEA; getting out of the studio, the institution, as well as the varieties of theories artists commonly use, are not part of the current academic environment in most institutions. The work is being made, she says, but formal instruction is not yet part of the mainstream curriculum in most academic settings (Lacy, interviewed in *Art of the MOOC:Public Art and Pedagogy*, https://www.coursera.org/learn/public-art-pedagogy).

Through my own research, and experience in collaboration and education, I have seen in the last decade, a number of universities begin to include the field in their art programs- beginning with California College of the Arts in 2005, and followed by those

such as Portland State University's Art & Social Practice MFA, and Social Practice

Queens, in connection with CUNY, all of which are referenced in this text. A colleague

and I presented our collaborative work, he, on experimental film, and my own work in

social practice at a symposium at Emerson College in 2016: *Assembling Bodies:*

Exchanges in Collaboration, an event which showcased projects that explored

collaboration as a subject matter. Selected graduate students engaged in panel

discussions surrounding collaborative methods of artistic production that raise

questions about process, conflict, community engagement, agency and authorship. The

objective was to challenge the thinking around various models and theoretical

frameworks relating to collaboration and to share these new approaches with a larger

community. This event afforded an opportunity to gather interviews with others

working in the field, to learn about social practice methodologies others were using, and

to begin to distill all the data, theory and analysis of projects I had developed, and

present them to others in the field. At the time, we were deep into production of the

#nothere project, and not only did we receive valuable feedback on the project, but it

validated the modes in which we were gathering research and translating it into the

series of participatory works.

Figure 42. *Assembling Bodies: Exchanges in Collaboration,* Paramount Theater, Boston

presentation, Emerson College collaboration, 2016

Printmaking as Socially Engaged Action: Paper with Purpose

The #uprooted collective

The use of printmaking as methodology aligns itself well with social practice

work. Print as art process can indeed be detailed and require specific sites and

materials, but it can also be reconfigured to capture both a DIY aesthetic and, by doing

so, a wide audience- or a wide body of collaborators. Artist and curator, Josh MacPhee,

who founded the political art cooperative Justseeds, is convinced that in our age of

pixels, with screens confronting us everywhere- from the gas pumps to the grocery aisles, any "evidence of the human hand in our visual landscape" makes these methods of making even more vital and attention commanding. "They jump out at us because of their failure to seamlessly fall in line with the rest of the environment" (MacPhee 6). I have found this to be true; there is power in the building of a print plate, the spreading of ink and reveal of completed print, a power that computer generated images do not seem to have. Perhaps it is the labor required, which is visible in the finished work, and the connection that it brings between creator, print and reception. The works can have both a utilitarian and aesthetic value, and it is for these reasons that the labor of printmaking has linked itself so closely to my own and other artists' social practice: both this mode of art-making and politics are as much about communication as they are community. The projects I have produced combine both of these elements, in a careful consideration of class, labor and specific communities. The prints can have subtle socio-political implications or bold in-your-face statements of propaganda, and the methods in which I have researched and deployed print range from community participation to cutting commentary carried in rallies and marches.

MacPhee writes, "Positive social change comes to our world from protest movements, organized labor actions, mobilized communities, large-scale boycotts, and sometimes even voting, civil disobedience and guerilla tactics" (9). He believes we are increasingly alienated from thinking of ourselves as part of something larger than "our own privatized consumer choices" (9). The use of print can move us from that space of

the modernist conception of isolated artist in studio to a more connected way of
thinking and working.

Figure 43. *This is What you Were Born For,* Francisco Goya, aquatint, 1810-20

From the early prints of Francisco Goya at the beginning of the nineteenth
century, printmaking has had a certain advantage over other art forms in that it is easily
reproducible, cost-effective, and has a potential for widespread distribution and
visibility. Prints have had a role of being a pragmatic method of socio-political
communication during every upheaval in society, such as Honore Daumier's thousands
of lithographs denouncing cruelty and corruption in France, and like Goya, often dated
the images in their titles to anchor them to a specific time and place. During the brutal
tragedies experience in World War I, Kathe Kollwitze's woodblock personalized and
universalized human suffering. The intimate images of bodies and facial expressions
protest in inconceivable injustice of war. Social art became significant, with 1930s seeing

the formation of a number of collective art organizations: John Reed Club, the Artists

Union the Harlem Artists Guild, and the American Artists' Congress using the labor

movement as a sort of prototype for their mission. Prints by artists such as Louis

Lozowick and William Gropper traveled around the country addressing racism and labor

unrest. Artist Franz Kline spoke to the strong association between the medium of print

and politics. When asked if he would consider creating his graphic images in lithography,

he refused, saying "Printmaking concerns social attitudes, you know- politics and a

public…multiplying, educating" (MacPhee 17). African American artists have used the

medium to express issues of race and sexism. Alison Saar, Elizabeth Catlett and Faith

Ringgold all created prints to communicate the struggles of the daily lives of persons of
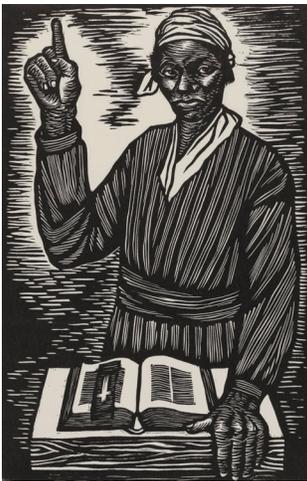
color.

Figure 44. *In Sojourner Truth I fought for the right of women as well as negroes,*
Elizabeth Catlett, 1947, linocut

Since at least the 1960s, the interest in graphic print art is everywhere. It appears in the form of posters, flyers, stickers; it is wheatpasted on buildings, walls and subway stations. The wall has become a public commons on which we express our thoughts, our fears and our hopes. Eric Triantafillou, cofounder of the San Francisco Print Collective, a collaborative print activist group, writes about print's powerful "ability to intervene in public space, to create new ways of thinking and new meanings that refuse the dominant ones, and develop tactics to help achieve these goals"(Mac Phee24). Triantafillou goes on to say, "The wall insists on an encounter. It wants to be used. But it is a space that gestures toward something beyond itself. It is not an end. It is a process of becoming." A image pasted onto a wall gets hidden under another image, the issues of today give way to the issues of tomorrow, and a palimpsest of history and constant evolution create an archeology of communication. The public space of images is in itself a kind of participatory social practice, with agency and constant process.

The link between socially engaged performative practice and print for me has been the sense of ephemerality: a socially engaged event exists in its experience, and a wheatpasted image on a street corner or a banner carried at a march are also specific to a time and a place. This art is grounded in its connection to transience and as such it accepts the passing of time, without the attempt to preserve the art as a perfect conception, located in a museum or gallery to conserve the piece. The act of conservation, of sequestering art inside the institution is also an act that preserves the work in a place that removes it from inclusivity. By placing the work—be it a print or a socially engaged project—out into the public domain it moves closer to embracing a

more democratic ideal. The conceptual notion of print as propaganda and mass-distribution works against this idea of timelessness. Embracing the transient nature of paper in the public sphere also adopts an ideal that accepts its role as art that fades because that particular nexus of time and place fade as well.

Figure 45. *Horti-Counterculture: Print as Propaganda,* 2016

#uprooted collective: Mobile PrintLab

"Intermedia is not only ineffable. It is inherently confronting, producing new thoughts, processes, forms that are not predictable; mongrels which defy categorization"

(Hans Breder, *Enacting the Liminal, 117).*

Artist Mel Bochner conflates the work of artist with that of other workers in all fields; science, music, engineers, clerks and accountants to name a few ,in his seminal work "Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art." This series of work is a collection of drawings and prints from fellow artists, among them Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse,as well as technical drawings, accounting ledgers and paperwork from workers and professionals in all walks of life. Bochner here sees a commonality, sewing together the work of both artist and other intellectuals. He assumes in this project the role of "manager", using a Xerox machine to copy the materials, draw charts, and graphs of the collection. He points to the infinite "reproducability of image and information", foretelling not only technology's move to seriality, but also the move to this mode's recognition as a form of artistic practice. Sol Le Wit also spoke to this approach of the artist functioning as laborer, saying,"[T]he serial artist does not attempt just to produce beautiful or mysterious objects but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise" (Molesworth 38).

This line of thinking is directly related to the formation of the #uprooted collective and the working modalities the collective has developed, using a DIY

sensibility and print as one of the primary methods of communication and engagement. The members of the group vary according to the specific project, and expand to include the community as collaborators. The name itself denotes mobility, nomadism, and the displacement or dispossession that permeates so much of the current political climate. The intent of the work is to emphasize the ephemerality of the materials as well as offer a space of accessibility into what can be seen as a closed system. We invite the public as collaborators to create the work. There is a synthesis in these processes of high and low tech, of fine art and "low art", and the community is encouraged to be our collaborators, with no limits to ability, experience or age. The collective employs the use of technological tools, such as the laser and CNC machine to cut woodblocks for print, while at the same time employing a lawn roller to stand in for a printing press in mobile projects. For the inaugural iteration of this process, #uprooted collective went on the road to Black Mountain College. As invited artists, interested in collaborating not only with each other, but in a socially engaged community project, we designed a printmaking mobile studio, where we served not as "artists", but as workers, printing the plates made by the participants, inking and rolling, and then, similar to Bochner, cataloguing as would a clerk. We "filed" the plates made by the community one by one to create a record of the event, and to reproduce a series documenting the event later in the studio. The research leading up to the project included consideration of Helen Molesworth's statement of"[A}rt's increasing porousness to the economic and social conditions of its production as well as its ability to represent and critique' (Molesworth

39). Referring to the quote by Hans Breder at the beginning of this section; the Mobile Printlab was a *mongrel.*

In this project we are subverting the requirement of mapping certain institutionalized equipment that suggests in order to do the work one must have exclusive access and that the art that is produced must be assessed according to the techniques that only those tools can provide. By creating the possibility of alternative means and modes of production the project thereby creates a more democratic space. The function becomes not one of creating aesthetically pure forms of art; the process itself and the community it builds are as important an art form as what is put upon a piece of paper at the conclusion. We are taking the print studio out into the community, giving accessibility and visibility. The project functioned on many levels: artist as laborer, Beuys' notion of everyone is an artist, and more deeper theoretical concerns about the role of artist in the current artworld, with its demands to be the physical labor. It highlighted the "work" behind artwork, the need of the public for "interactivity", and the privilege of access to technology. While these were the theoretical mechanisms in place, on the surface it provided a community space for dialogue and creative engagement, even skill sharing between participants. The project had at its core a commentary on the seemingly limitless co-optative power of capitalism, which, Ursula Meyer, in *Social Works* calls radical art, "with its disruptive function within a given social, political, economic or psychological framework" (Molesworth 222). As work increasingly becomes a part of all sectors of life, technology allows for our constant access to work from not only the office, but on our commute, and in our homes, we are

among those artists who choose to disrupt the need for product and production, by just such disruptive projects.

In *Creative Community*, Adams and Goldbland caution the conventional emphasis in artistic practice on notions of beauty. Aesthetics. This relates particularly well to the DIY print project. I was worried when viewing documentation of the various iterations of the project, that it appeared too utilitarian, too DIY. I had, indeed, considered the consistency of black tables, silver buckets to hold tools, and the use of black and white materials with which to create the print plates. But still, when looking at the images of the various events- they all looked similar, simple folding tables, buckets for supplies, a line for stringing and drying the pulled prints, plywood on the ground to act as a bed for the press, which was one of the collective members pushing a lawn roller filled with gallons of water from the site. Only the site, outdoors, indoors, and the participants varied. At some events there were primarily adults, and others involved just as many children, building plates with parents. I recorded the data- adults, children, young adults, the type of plates they were building, the imagery, the average time spent making the plate, reactions. This particular project had the most opposing thinking for me; was this a kid's art project? Was it too simplistic? Where was the "edge" we as artists are supposedly drawn to creating? It took having some distance from the project to see what was happening. "Creating partnerships that don't result in easy dialogues-real border crossing" as Adams and Goldbland put it (22).

The writers talk about giving credibility to the ideas of the participants, providing the tools for them to make a space for themselves. There was emphasis on the process,

but there was a product as well, only I began to see that that product was not the prints

the participants were able to create and take home with them. In fact, many left the

prints hanging, some even saying that the process was what was meaningful to them,

and left the prints as testimony.

Coming from a studio practice line of thinking, the tendency is to think in terms

of our own standards for what we consider "art." When left to the community of

participants, ones we do not screen for artistic talent and ability, the open-ended nature

of social practice means anything can (and does) happen. Therein lies the question still

under debate: "community vs. quality." But what is it that we are determining, quality of

what? Experience or commodity? While my consideration for presentation, and

consistency in materials and their ability to produce prints, ink quality etc. was present,

this was not designed as a master print shop. The works were as varied as the

participants, richly complex plates alongside simple geometric shapes. Full portraiture

resided with text based plates spelling out lover's names (in reverse- I was careful to

mention this necessity).

I finally realized that the grounds for evaluating these projects lie in a different

sort of analysis. From Adams and Goldbland, "some artists reject end products they

consider to slickly produced, too aesthetically similar to their art-world or commercial

counterparts. From this perspective, a homemade or 'folk' aesthetic seems most in

keeping with community-based work, because it presents no barriers to comprehension,

carries no off-putting social codes: community productions should look funky and

approachable or else they risk looking intimidating" (23). It is, I realized, the criteria

appropriate to the intention of the piece that this work should then be judged by. If we go back then, to the differentiations between the various iterations of the #uprooted mobile print studio, the variances were listed as participants and site. If that is the data, and the intention of the work was to create a space where the boundary between what we call high and low art, between trained artist and community, and exclusivity of studio to inclusivity of siting the world in the community at large. Adams states, " The elite arts' status derives in part from epic efforts at purification and classification, segregating those enterprises deemed to be "high art" from the vulgarity of popular entertainment" (Adams, Goldbland 24). What was the intention? It was to create a space for the community to create art in a media typically reserved for printmaking studios, with its presses and inking tables, drying racks and mordants.

We used chipboard and foam sheets to create the plates, scissors to produce a relief plate; a take on the collagraph. The ink was water-based to allow for easy cleanup- of humans as well as the tools. The press? A lawnroller used for laying down sod, filled with water, exerting 300 lbs. pressure, rolled over a bed of beveled plywood, and covered with a fleece airline blanket. We could pull three to four prints in one roll. An inking table was set up using Plexiglas and a roll of paper loaded onto a cutter. The setup was well thought out, but in true Black Mountain mode (our initial event), of welcoming chance and indeterminacy, we did not make demo prints to ensure success.

If success could be determined by the number of participants and their comments, then Black Mountain #uprooted was cause for celebration. Seventy-five plates were created in four hours; prints were hung to dry down the length of the split

232

rail fence that delineated the property. Artists worked next to those who were not sure

what a "printing plate" was, never mind a collagraph. Those who were hesitant to try,

looked on, and many ended up using the leftover cuttings to create their own plates.

Some participants lingered for hours over their work, others created quickly and came

back later to see the print we had pulled from their plates. Imagery ran the gamut from

socio-political references to landscapes, portraits and abstract designs.

Figure 46. *Mobile Printlab:* Black Mountain ReHappening, 2017

Figure 47. *Mobile Printab*: Rolling the Print*, Black Mountain ReHappening, 2017

Figure 48. *Mobile Printlab, Roll Your Own,* IMRC Center, 2017

Figure 49. *Mobile Printlab: Flow,* Ft. Knox, ME, 2017

Horti-counterculture

As a printmaker, I produce work with the understanding that I am contributing to

and continuing the tradition of politicized printmaking that was discussed earlier in this

section, a tradition that began with Goya in the early nineteenth century. As an activist

as well as artist, there is a compulsion for movement, of keeping an issue alive, and for

producing images that represent social conflict. Within the vast multiplicity of signs,

slogans and symbols used in graphic art of dissent there are clearly many which repeat

over and over again. Likewise, my own work has developed a vocabulary that began in

2010 with an image of a broken chair, used to represent a failed system when my

practice centered on the economic foreclosure crisis at the time. The most direct way to

speak to the effects this situation was causing in my own town was wheatpasted street

235

art. I printed and pasted on every foreclosed home, and there were an unsettling large

number. My theory was that this was an act of making the invisible *visible.* As the

founder of the San Francisco Print Collective, Eric Triantafillou, states, " The wall insists

on an encounter. It wants to be used. But it is a space that gestures toward something

beyond itself. It is not an end, but a process of becoming" (MacPhee 25). While my

intention then was to create a dialogue, I instead had the realization that there was to

some degree a disconnect, between myself and the specific public I was trying to reach,

and that there was a possibility there, but I needed to stop and reflect on the images I

made and for whom I was making them. Could they incite and inspire and still reflect

the social reality? How could these images do more? A rethinking of vocabulary, of

process and of site was necessary.

The site of much of my work is, obviously, where I live; rural and economically

struggling. The tactic I began to develop looked at how I produced the images, and the

contexts in which they were made as well as distributed. *God Bless Graffiti*, a collective

founded in Chicago in 2000, worked to combat growing national and international anti-

graffiti trends. The group published "Give Graffiti the Thumbs Up" brochure to help

educate the public about what they call "the truth of graffiti." The pamphlet distributed

through repurposed newspaper boxes in in Chicago, San Francisco, and Columbus, Ohio,

and by hand by underground street artists. The success of this project eventually lead to

recognized subway ads, and graffiti Bible tracts (www.gregorysholette.com). It was

through studying the strategies of these and other such collective practices that I

reached a greater understanding of ways in which to use print as a socially engaged and politically motivated process.

The words that kept coming to the surface were "radical" and "root." Stepping back and looking at the space I was working in, I saw clearly how the origins of the word radical, and the rural environment were linked. With a background in landscaping, having held a former position as such in my town, and a good deal of my own practice composed of acts of guerilla gardening, the idea of linking gardening to my print imagery was born. Guerilla gardening is planting as a form of protest, and has links back as far as the gardens planted around the factories of William Morris, the gardens planted by WWI troops in the trenches and Jewish ghettos. The juxtaposition of plant and ideology goes back much further than our current urban planning efforts; the individuals against private propertization of communal lands such as the Diggers of the 17th century are one example. In 1819 William Cobbett wrote, "If I sowed, planted or dealt in seeds, whatever I did had first in view the destruction of infamous tyrants" (McKay 78). I began to intently focus on who the work I made was speaking to, and its accessibility to that intended audience. On the one hand the desire is to create work that can be part as a socio-political movement off change in the world, and on the other, stand up to its relationship to art itself. Lacy, in an essay titled "Broomsticks and Banners," speaks of the contradiction that occurs when we deepen our critical and political perspective,"[W]e continually challenge our own concerns, understanding how they fit into an involved, sophisticated, and highly manipulated social order; we learn

how to communicate effectively with audiences outside the art world" (Lacy, *Leaving Art,* 113).

Effective communication then meant relating to the geographic area in which my work was positioned. The *Horti-counterculture* prints were based on ideology of radical gardening, and yet, related to my audiences; be they the rural town I lived in, or the later works occurring in urban spaces that could connect them to ideas of guerilla planting. The initial prints used CNC technology to create large-scale woodblocks, which were then printed onto textile and paper. Lasers were used to create smaller images, printed onto stickers and buttons. Labels were printed as signage for a gumball vending machine that dispensed seed bombs, which emptied its contents in the course of one day. Technology allowed for mass production of materials at a time when the political climate was becoming heated and centered on, as Judith Butler aptly stated, "moral concepts of personhood, self-belonging, agency and self-identity" (Butler 13). These materials were distributed through guerilla wheatpasting in 2015 in Washington, D.C. during an event at the Creative Time Summit *Occupy the Future,* locally as labels in other projects, and screenprinted on wearables.

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Figure 50. *Horti-counterculture,* Woodblock prints, 2016

Figure 51. *Occupy the Future, Yesterday,* Creative Time distribution of print event, 2016
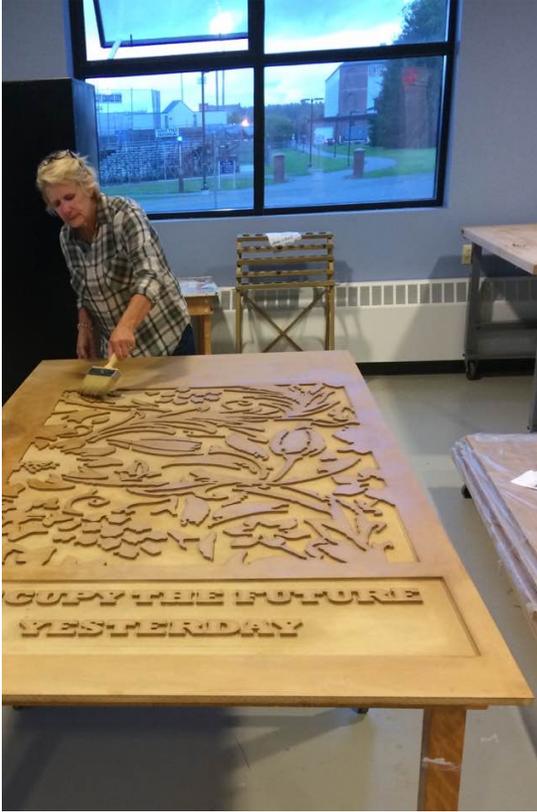
Figure 52. *Occupy the Future, Yesterday*: Woodblock, 2016

Figure 53. *Pollinate the Future,* CNC woodblock, 2016

Paper with a Purpose

There is no denying we have arrived at a critical historical moment, and that the work we do must reflect that moment, and its urgency. For those of us working as socially engaged and activist artists, it contains a sense of foreboding and desperation as well. The Women's March, January 21, 2017 in Washington D.C. and around the world became a rallying cry and location where the work of #uprooted collective needed to take place. The particular point we found ourselves in, especially for women, necessitated the work take the form of a "march." From the moment the #uprooted collective was designated to be an arts organization partner, to the dissemination of the documentation afterward, the collective experiences were considered *themselves* a work of art. Prior to the march #uprooted collective designed a uniform of black, including black "pussyhats." Yes, I know the crowds sported millions of hand knitted bright pink hats, but that was a performative act occurring during the march, and the result of another art practice: the women who knitted the thousands upon thousands of hats to show the crowd as one unified body. Before we realized that would occur, and as none of the group's members were able to successfully knit, we made the uniforms, created artworks on textiles and paper that would be used as carrying banners, and started a social media blitz as well as enlisting a few more collaborators. Every act of the process of organizing, making and planning was a component of the socially engaged "art." Due to the enormous numbers of marchers expected to attend the event, the purchase of subway metro cards was recommended to take place well in advance, and when it became apparent the cards would not arrive in time for our departure, slight

panic ensued. When the number of people predicted to attend reached the hundreds of

thousands, the collective wondered if we would even get to the march site. The plan

was to rent a large van and drive to Washington from Maine, and we were picking up

collaborators along the route. I began to wonder and worry that we might not be able to

get onto the metro, find a place to put the van, and that there would be so many people

there in the city that all our efforts to leave work, create art and plan would be for

naught. It was then that a fellow #uprooted member reminded me of a very, very

important fact, one that I carry with me into all my subsequent projects ever since. He

said, " The moment we decided we were going to participate in this action, the 'art'

began. Once we enter the van, and start driving down the interstate south, we are

performing, we are making the art, and this performative art is not just its connection

with the march itself, but its participation in the 'social.'"

Figure 54. *Rallying Cry,* Woodblock print, 2017

Figure 55. *I am not a Weed in Your Garden,* banner, Women's March 2017
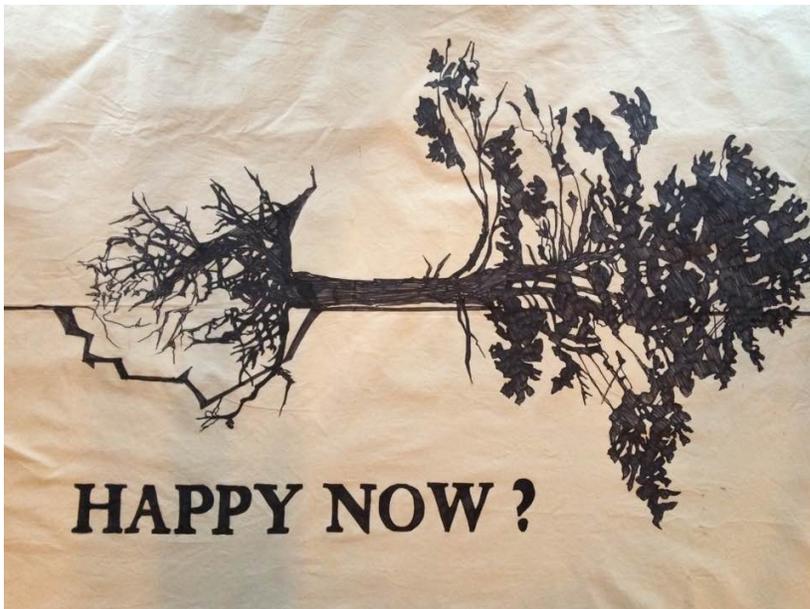

Figure 56. *Happy Now?* Climate March, Washington D.C., 2017

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In his recent book *Why Only Art Can Save Us: Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency*, Santiago Zabala, professor of philosophy at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, writes: "The truth of art no longer rests in representations of reality but rather in an existential project of transformation" (7). For Zabala, the state of affairs in current society is one of a denial of the emergency in which we find ourselves. What is most glaring, according to Zabala, is the *lack* of emergency manifested during this clear time of emergency. In other words, that everyone wants to to go on as before, as if things have not reached such an elevated pitch of emergency that they have. Zabala sees this as so important that he claims that in his book, his intent is not simply to criticize previous aesthetic theories or propose a new one; rather, I wish to point out the aesthetic emergency" (6). Merely providing "art" that fits nicely into the current state of affairs, art that does not reveal the emergency of the perception that there is no emergency, is only to help hide what must be brought into the open. "Science will remain satisfied with measurable truths (information regarding the state of things)," Zabala writes, "but art demands we enter into conversation with the work, that is, intervene existentially" (10), which opposes "the reduction of art to representable objects to be felt, contemplated, and reproduced as we please" (13). It is an existential crisis for the society that denies its own state of emergency, and for art as the practice that practice calls attention to that state of emergency, if only at its margins.

What Zabala is pointing to is the role art must play in a world threatened by its refusal to even look at its own ways of existing, ways that reduce art to commodities as it turns everything else into a disposable resource. Zabala then cites a 2011 essay "Financialization of Art" by Mark C. Taylor, which criticizes art that "loses its critical function and ends up reinforcing the very structures and systems it ought to be questioning," but looks toward art that is "a transformative practice that is insistently critical" (Taylor qtd. in Zabala 29), though maintaining that level of commitment may be somewhat difficult.. In order to confront us with our lack of a sense of emergency in the face of emergency, both Zabala and Taylor emphasize that art"should be insistently unsettling and disturbing. The art that really matters engenders rather than removes anxiety" (29). It has been in agreement with this statement that I have pursued social practice generally, and it has informed the writing of this dissertation specifically. Socially engaged art works at the ruptures of society, the margins and liminal spaces that reveal the emergency of the absence of emergency, and that—at its best—pulls away the veil of "normality" to reveal the casual cruelty of a system that not only is "unsustainable," but that deliberately devours itself without concern. The theories that I have used, the projects that I have created, and the dissertation that I have written all serve to disrupt that insouciance, to intervene and make a claim for art's existence outside of galleries and museums and in the lives of people culturally trained to think of art and artists as "useless." In this way, art has a role, as Zabala puts it, in "escaping political, social, and environmental annihilation" (132). Such terms might seem overwrought, but it is that very tendency to tut-tut that seeks to disempower the

245

transformative essence of art, by claiming there is nothing in need of transformation, even as the emergency bears down upon us with all the weight that it can muster.

One of the significant modes of art production over the last hundred years has been that which seeks to transfer authorship of the art piece from the sole artist working in isolation in his or her studio—the picture of the iconoclastic genius who has the will and unique talent to transform not only art, but the world—to the community generally in which that art has meaning. The romantic concept of the sole genius is as much a cultural ideal as the sole entrepreneur standing with his or her plans for the factory, the great individual with the vision, the will, and the know-how to create where before there was nothing. This ideal is itself a manifestation of the culture that is willing to allow the majority of humanity to suffer while celebrating the overwhelming wealth and power of a few key individuals. In other words, it is symptomatic of the "emergency of the lack of emergency" that is central to Zabala's understanding of the need for art in contemporary society. It is the thesis of my doctoral work that it is not just art as it has been traditionally understood throughout history since the Renaissance (and particularly since the Romantic era), but the ideal of socially engaged art that is the key to some of the ills of contemporary society, particularly that of the enforced ignorance through educational practices geared toward becoming contributing members of society and the relegation of art to a luxury commodity. These two factors work in conjunction to keep the emergency hidden in plain sight, and against which my work is intended to militate.

Across the world, social practice, or socially engaged art, has emerged as the pre-eminent form to challenge a social order that lauds conflict, rationalizes waste, institutionalizes oppression, and reduces art to the novelty of a dancing poodle video on YouTube. Art programs have been slow to accept and incorporate the conceptual framework that has been the impetus for this change in attitude. Now institutions like Massachusetts Institute of Technology and California College of the Arts have joined early proponents such as Queens College in supporting this more communal form of cultural production, but this has brought with it concerns of co-optation of social practice by the very institutions it is to critique. The question of whether socially engaged art can long bite the hand that feeds it is of specific import to work such as I have done, which that endeavors to exist both in and outside the institution, and is then reported upon by a dissertation that seeks to both stand apart from the established norms with its substance and yet be offered within the framework of a doctoral program at a university. It is necessary for such friction to take place, for it is only then that the contours of such an art practice can actually come into view.

By bringing together the theoretical framework for my practice, the underlying conceptual apparatus that informs my work, the history and current instances of socially engaged art, and the various projects of my art practice which I then analyze in reference to these ideas, I have hoped to open a space for the possible questioning of this practice in and of itself. I am committed to the theory enunciated as the foundation of my social awareness generally, and have dedicated my specific art making to the ideals of socially engaged art. What conclusions can I draw from years of research and

personal practice, experience and reflection, and how do they then relate back upon my work and the ideas that inform it?

To begin with, it is important to keep in mind that I do not see socially engaged art as a "replacement" for individually created art pieces, nor do I see this practice as some sort of evolutionary "progress," where contemporary art practices have somehow superseded those that came before. The most recent art is not the more valid. What is important about socially engaged art is that it deliberately uses the resources of art to address the precarity that confounds so many on a daily basis. It is revolutionary art, but revolutionary in its existential critical stance, not in its application for a rigidly identifiable goal of propaganda. In this way, it is social practice, not socialist realism. It is something itself within the community, not a set of iconography meant to label or represent. For instance, in *The Museum of What's Left*, the intent was to empower individuals to participate in the creating of a museum, an institution that seems far beyond the power of most people to affect. In a typical museum, one is forbidden to touch the art, let alone take it home, or exchange it for another piece of art. This simple act of empowerment was active within a community and contained the agency for change within itself. It wasn't simply *about* museums; it was a museum itself. There were no slogans suggesting the bombing of museums as corrupt institutions of the capitalist class, or even for the occupying of museums. The intervention opened up a space for "museum" to mean something other than that which the power structure had previously prescribed.

The ephemerality of such projects seems directly related to the relative power of

its agency. For instance, Mary Jane Jacobs, in discussing her project *Culture in Action* in

Finkelpearl's *What We Made,* made the following statement: "Here is the opportunity

to create new infrastructures within these communities-structures that can last much

longer than the artist's presence, that will go beyond the artist and even beyond the

art" (54). Here Jacobs is making a claim for the durability of such projects, suggesting

that their duration is an inherent aspect of their power. But this can be a daunting

challenge for an artist who is not heavily funded. The possibility of creating "new

infrastructures" must be seen as existing on the micro level, creating short-term

changes in routes of information, sudden collections of intentionality, flash moments of

alternatives. These, too, weaken the entrenched power structures and can over time,

indicate points of weakness, or weaken those points themselves.

Miwon Kwon, in *One Place After Another*, speaking about Chicago's Culture in Action

Projects and its ability to be the impetus for organizing the community in a more

sustainable fashion wrote that the ability to outlive the project, sustain itself over time,

exceeding the status of "art project," depends in part on the participants or

collaborators from the community having a real stake in the outcome, and realistic

expectations. A project that relies too heavily on the intervention or support of

institutions or third parties is obviously overly susceptible to collapse after this support

is withdrawn (134). On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that the initial

community itself is not in a vacuum: they are subject to the influence of the established

power structure. The art project does not go into a neutral world, but is working in

relationship to an already existing power structure. In other words, the pre-existing

community has already been taught to view the current state of affairs, the established

hierarchy, as natural, and any attempt to disrupt it as unnatural. Ingrained suspicion of

"outsiders" and "foreigners" (whether from another country or just a nearby state) is

meant to promote the idea that the status quo is the way things ought to be. So not

only does this introduce the question of duration of change, but also of instigating

change. Should we, in a radically democratic process such as socially engaged art, expect

that the spark for change must regularly, if not always, come from within the

community itself? This is an important question for the role of education as art practice

that is to follow. But what is clear at the moment is that there is a case to be made for

the impact of an ephemeral temporary act, even though sustainability is a loftier goal.

The success of a project cannot be measured in these terms. Consider, for instance,

Culture in Action's Street-Level Video program, where area youth participated with

artists to learn aspects of video production, and created videos which addressed

concerns the youth faced in their daily lives. This project, organized by Inigo Manglano-

Ovalle in 1993, used the initial framework of the exhibition offered by the institution

(the non-profit public art organization Sculpture Chicago, conceived and directed by the

independent curator Mary Jane Jacobs) as a way to develop neighborhood alliances that

outlasted the span of the project. Suzanne Lacy, writing on her website, sees Culture in

Action as "an excellent example of the various diversities and also the difficulties

inherent in social practice, an experiment in process, dialogue, interaction and

education." She goes on to contrast her own project, "Full Circle," with the above-

mentioned video project. Lacy describes her project as a temporary, "guerilla"

installation, where one hundred boulders were placed on the sidewalks of downtown

Chicago, a city that had no notable monuments to women. Springing up overnight, the

boulders had plaques of ten important female historical figures and of ninety living

women who had exemplified women leaders of Chicago. The boulders themselves came

from a female-owned limestone quarry in Oklahoma (suzannelacy.com). In this way, a

city that had no important monuments to the role of women in the city's life, had one

hundred monuments suddenly appeared overnight. These monuments were placed so

that people had to walk around them, disrupting the familiar flow of pedestrian traffic,

and therefore the ability of people to continue blindly within the "natural" hierarchy of

power in the city. Lacy then followed this with a dinner at Jane Addam's famous Hull

House, a center for the education of women and for social justice projects. "The dinner

was an opportunity for these notable women to participate in a work of art that actively

envisioned the future within the context of a place rich in historical significance"

(suzannelacy.com).

The question is not whether one is better than the other, but to what extent, in

order to be effective, the socially engaged piece must have agency beyond the duration

of the work, or the artist's involvement with it. Certainly, the artists themselves set

something into motion wherein the participants become collaborators, which in itself

denotes a form of agency. The piece itself could have an impact, even if it is not of

sustainable nature. Joshua Decter, in an essay about the efficacy of socially engaged art

and the possibility of producing verifiable change, wrote: "While social practice and

socially engaged art and exhibition projects have sought to utilize art as a platform or

vehicle through which to implement verifiable change on the ground by working with

urban communities, municipal governments and the private sector in order to defend

the interests of those who cannot always defend their own interests (Rick Lowe and

Theaster Gates are two well-known examples), such initiatives remain the exception,

even if these exceptions have the power to prove the rule-someday" ("Public

Servants" 67).

It is this specter that has haunted social practice since its inception: the fear of

artists as social justice dilettantes, dropping in with their celebrity on the moment's

cause celebre. But the fact that this does happen should not deter us from the idea that

socially engaged art has a role to play here, and to wring our hands over the word

"verifiable" may well be simply accepting the mindset of the entrenched power

structure. Accepting the challenge to prove quantifiable results diverts attention from

the easily quantifiable injustice of the present system. The point is to create a space of

possibility where none existed before, not to foreclose the possibility of change by

demanding verifiable results. In many instances, the artist must be satisfied with

indicating the place where change *might* happen.

It is worthwhile at this time to bring in the writing of James Carse, whose

concept of an "infinite game" was highly influential on my own work. In this work, Carse

contrasts a finite game with an infinite one, where finite games are those that are

played until a winner (whether team or individual) is proclaimed and the game is over.

The point of the game is to end it, and end it successfully, having garnered power,

through riches or prestige, by that end. Winning the Super Bowl is just such a game. An infinite game, on the other hand, is a game that seeks to keep play in action for as long as possible. The point of the game is to keep playing, and perhaps playing with demonstrations of skill or humor, but to keep playing, to be able to adapt the rules in such a manner that the rules are there to create possibility within the game, not to create a border of exclusion. Change, adaptability, creativity, interaction, collaboration are there to keep the game in play, not to end it by "winning." The "game" of *The Museum of What's Left,* the project in which the community created the museum collection in a continuous system of exchange, was in those exchanges, and the game persisted only so long as those exchanges continued. In this space of gaming, the horizon that emerges from this space is one of possible continued transformation. As Carse writes, "We are never somewhere in relation to the horizon, since the horizon moves with our vision," concluding: "Every moment of an infinite game therefore presents a new vision, a new range of possibilities" (70). It is toward the *possible* that socially engaged art looks, realizing that there will never be a moment of completion. Carse acknowledges this fact when he discusses the role of struggle in culture: "Culture, however, does not consider the works as the outcome of a struggle, but as moments in an ongoing struggle--the very struggle that culture is" (54). Just as we can never finally walk to the horizon, we cannot come to a settled completion of the "game" of art.

This idea supports the three-part role of educator-artist-researcher as the nexus for this dissertation. Carse notes that "Art has no scripted roles for its performers. It is precisely because it has none that it is ART" (67) but the same can be said for educator

as well, in the sense in which Freire developed this theme. Too often the idea of a

teacher is that of one containing a finite set of information that then needs to be

deposited into the minds of the students (Freire's "banking model," discussed earlier).

As models of liberal education give way more and more to that of training, and the

burden of debt grows ever more onerous for those trained, it is all the more pressing to

see education within the context of an infinite game, to see its parameters as being only

immediate and not premeditated, and therefore as a socially engaged art practice.

In parallel to the ideas of Freire and Carse's infinite game, Polish artist Grzegorz

Kowalski of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts rejects the ideas of "master" and

"apprentice", emphasizing "open-ended tasks that also function as a form of collective

analysis, both critical and therapeutic" (Bishop 257). Bishop explains that Kowalski had

studied under Oskar Hansen, an architectural theorist, who "proposed 'open form', in

which a structure can be added to, encouraging participation and a more vital

relationship with reality, in contrast to 'closed form', to which it is impossible to

incorporate additions" (257). The basic distinction is that participation is not only

encouraged, but essential to the project, while the latter is a highly structured,

hierarchical paradigm. Kowalski adapts this idea into a form of pedagogy. It is the

student of Kowalski, artist Pawel Althamer who then pursues these ideas with such

projects as *Einstein Class*, "a six-month project to teach physics to a group of seven

juvenile delinquents in Warsaw," as related in Bishop (256-57). Althamer and another

artist, Zmijewski created a project entitled *[S]election.pl*, that sought to push these ideas

to their limit: "Constantly mutating and entirely chaotic, the exhibition was spread

through several galleries of the California College of Art but defiantly broke both educational and exhibition conventions by subjecting individual contributions to one rule: anyone could adapt or amend or improve or destroy anyone else's work" (Bishop 259). Apparently the pandemonium was such that Kowalski distanced himself from the project, and his association with it, and the exhibition was "critically panned as incomprehensible" (259). In this, methods of control are given the priority over those of unleashing, for the anarchic impulses of freedom and creativity not only cross boundaries, but often make them seem impotent, and such challenges can prove frightening to the structures intent on order. Bishop recounts an example of Althamer pushing his daughter through a museum in a shopping cart, allowing her to "interact" with the art objects, until a museum guard peremptorily halted their foray: "In this juxtaposition of the girl's tactile curiosity and museum prohibition, the viewer sees yet another indictment of the museum as mausoleum, but this time staged as a confrontation between a child's enthusiasm and the deadening interdictions of the institution" (259). The phrase "tactile curiosity" speaks to the educative quality of Althamer's seemingly irresponsible but definitely irreverent attitude toward both art and education.

This play between chaos and structure, however, is a familiar one to artists. It is a particularly important one within art-based social practice, where the intent is to foster and accept a non-hierarchical structure and communal authority. Pablo Helguera places this as central to his rethinking of traditional pedagogy through art, that "the collective construction of an art milieu, with artworks and ideas, is a collective

construction of knowledge" (80). Along with this, Helguera notes the "creative

performativity" of the educational process, as well as emphasizing the role of art as "a

tool for understanding the world" (80). Focusing on understanding, the construction of

knowledge, and the performance of the "act" of education, Helguera looks to "art-

making in which art does not point at itself but instead focuses on the social process of

exchange," which he sees as benefitting from art's "unique patterns of performativity,

experience, and exploration of ambiguity" (81). It is this ambiguity-admittedly pushed to

extremes by artists such as Althamer-that opens up the possibility of art working within

this space, and bounded by the shifting horizon of Carse's infinite game.

The political theorist Antonio Gramsci, in 1919, mapped out the problem of the

schools as central to his political hope for a new state. At the end of an article he

published in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, he posed a series of questions focused on the

transformation of the schools, suggesting that among the readers-"a strong contingent

of young students, artists and teachers of different levels" (40)-of that review were the

people qualified to both pose and solve these problems. Again, artists are central to the

thought of restructuring education, and, put in the company of students and teachers as

having the necessary background to make decisions, they are as integral to the proper

functioning of the school as the other two.

As access to education becomes ever more restricted through privatization,

which means ever more incorporated into structures of wealth on the one hand (private

schools, religious schools) and debt on the other ("public" higher education), the need

of the artist-as-educator increases, but so does the threat to that model. It is not only in

clearly authoritarian regimes, such as Castro's Cuba, in which Tania Bruguera focused

her school-as-art-project work, but within the structures of capital that the artist must

fight to preserve educational frameworks that are not encoded with the unquestioned

ideology of the dominant power structure.

Ted Purves, who taught at CalArts and developed the first program devoted to

social practice, focused exactly on these issues in his book *What We Want is Free* (the

second edition was co-written by artist, writer, and activist Shane Aslan Selzer). Purves

and Selzer understand the elements of exchange as fundamental to the social forms in

which art itself happens, mapping out the three modes of exchange that form the basis

of the networks of exchange within a society: gift (the example is of a parent feeding a

child without expectation of monetary return), redistribution (all bus patrons pay the

same amount regardless of how long they ride the bus, thus sharing the burden of

maintaining the system regardless of how long one's individual ride is), and market

(prices in a grocery store fluctuate depending on the various forces at work within and

upon a capitalist economy) (7-8). "These systems," the authors write, "are the ground

upon which artists' projects assembled and investigated in this book are constructed. It

is the landscape that they occur within, as well as what they are attempting to make

meaning of and from" (9). The example that follows is of an artist in Nigeria who

conducts traditional basket weaving workshops that use waste products as one of the

materials for the baskets. Yes, actual baskets are made and are displayed and sold, but it

is the artist's work within the system of exchanges that is analyzed, particularly the

educative aspect of conducting a workshop not only to revive traditional basket weaving

techniques, but also to educate the local population on the problem of waste, the importance of recycling, and the ability to modify the exchange system in the society to deal with its dangerous excesses.

Purves and Selzer see such configurations of exchange, and the social form they inhabit, as related to the hierarchies of power, clearly shown in their reference to Michel Foucault's essay "The Subject and Power," where the "problem of the present time" is brought to center and, for Purves and Selzer how we exist in the contemporary world of globalized capitalist exchange and the difficulty of slowing these exchanges down in order to critically attend to them (17). This is emphasized in their quoting of an article by art critic John Berger titled "Where are We" that criticizes the contemporary age as one of tyrannical chaos that is willing to subvert all through its interlocking power structure "so that everything collapses into its special form of the virtual, from the realm of which-and this is the tyranny's credo-there will be a never ending source of profit" (14). In this context of global capital and structures of power, both Santiago Sierra and Rirkrit Tiravanija are used as examples for how to critically examine, through art, the problem of the present time: Sierra through his paying a person to repeat the statement that he (the participant, would only be paid a small amount while the project itself would generate tens of thousands of dollars, thereby highlighting the inherent inequality and injustice of the art market (and the capitalist system generally); Tiravanija, on the other hand, calls the gallery system into question by cooking food and handing it out for free to anyone who comes into the gallery, thereby turning possible buyers and the visitor into "guests" (11-12). Neither practice seeks to "fix" the current

system but is educative in its tendency to disclose aspects of a system that has been normalized by the exercise of global capitalism.

Stephen Duncombe validated this argument when he reminded his readers that "Neo-Liberalism is created and sustained--and challenged and dismantled--by systems of meaning, understanding and legitimation. As such, it depends upon the flow of culture: images, ideas, signs and symbols, and those who can manipulate, communicate, and distribute such information" (439). Education falls squarely within this sphere, and it is the importance of just such education that Gramsci is contemplating in his "War of Position," wherein, as Duncombe has it, of "challenging 'normal' political modes culturally rather than militarily, or politically by (re)presenting an alternative" (439). That alternative does not have to be a solution; it can be basket or a meal, a move to make visible the hidden apparatus of power.

Understanding education as a mode of cultural flow moves it within the sphere of art practice, but it is important to realize that attempts to "challenge and dismantle" are based on the idea that "'normal' political modes" are an enactment of pre-existing cultural power. As Purves and Selzer emphasize, art is always already happening within a complex of exchange systems, and clearly so is education. The artist-as-educator must facilitate opening the radical space of democracy, but also must be aware that the threats to such a space do not always come only from entrenched power structures, but though the workings of democracy itself. The artist must be aware that if the ideal for social practice is that of the radically democratic, socially engaged art may be usurped and co-opted by its participants.

My own practice in education was intentionally constructed as an art practice. After

reading Freire and of Tania Bruguera in particular, I wanted to create a classroom that

was "deskilled" as Pablo Helguera calls it in his book on education. In other words, I

wanted to create a classroom experience where I was not the "expert" in the field, but

that the class as a whole could come up with its own understanding of what the

knowledge was in the classroom experience. Granted, I, like everyone else in the room,

had a certain skill set that I could bring to the table, but it was of no more intrinsic value

than those brought by the students who took my classes. In fact, I consciously

constructed aspects of the class where I definitely was not the expert, and the student

became the master. In addition to Freire, Jacques Ranciere expressed this line of

thinking in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The student is not an empty vessel into which

the teacher "as expert", pours knowledge; every student comes with incalculable

amounts of knowledge already in place. Rather, it seemed to me, that the need for the

teacher to be the expert was tied into relations of power, and particularly issues of

institutional power, and in teaching social practice, this is a position that needed to be

questioned.

On the other hand, as in the concern of democracy stated earlier in relation to

the Pawel Althamer project, I could not allow the very act of opening the class up to a

more democratic and horizontal structure to be the very undoing of the class. It could

be the result of my artistic-practice-as-class that the students would simply not want to

have class, or would not want to work or participate. It became necessary to ground the

class in the ideologies of social practice so that they understood the intent of the class

was for it to be an instance of social practice, not that of me, as expert, training students in this or that technique or simply passing along my own knowledge about socially engaged art. I did that as well, hoping to instill in them the passion I had for this work, but the classes were never simply art history classes.

Yet all of this raises the concern of being co-opted by the institution. Ted Purves started the first social practice program at CalArts as recently as 2005, and now, here in central Maine a series of classes have been instituted on socially engaged art. What does this mean for this form of art practice? Is it just that social practice is finally getting the acknowledgement it deserves? Or is it that what once was radical and outside the institution has been recuperated and is now as acceptable (or even as passé) as other once radical forms of art? Is it even any longer the same form of art, given its context from within the institutions that it once called into question?

Gregory Sholette writes about the answers to similar questions in his *Future Imperfect*: "Does culture ever act to directly shape socioeconomic reality, or is it in turn always molded by these forces? And if capitalism is the totality of our existence, then how can any artistic practice be substantially 'anti-capitalist' or 'radical' or 'subversive' and therefore let us call it 'pro-human' or 'pro-society'?" (22). As a researcher, I have moved along this same axis, exploring what is possible considering the given social structures. This was a particularly important question for me, working and living in such a rural area.

Socially engaged art is most often found in urban areas. Creative Time, the most important organization for socially engaged projects, held its last few annual three-day

conferences in Brooklyn; a poor section of Washington, D.C., facing gentrification; and a modern museum in Toronto. Even the majority of the presenters lived and worked in urban centers. Those who were working, as one woman did, with poor villagers in India, typically returned to an urban lifestyle and job at a university. My own position was drastically different: I lived in the least populated county in one of the most rural states. In a conversation with Nato Thompson in a Washington, D.C. Starbucks, we spoke about the difficulty of working in rural areas, areas that have no context for art of this nature, and how so many of the projects being presented at the conference had the leverage of institutional backing or at least more support than, for instance, with which my #uprooted collective has and continues to work. My own experience with wheat pasting the image of a broken chair on foreclosed and abandoned homes, using it as an icon for a broken system, and using it in the local community, brought me face-to-face with the related issue of the denial of the economic reality. Nato also commented on "the statistical nature of socially engaged art." At the Creative Time conference we are seeing the successes, but statistically there are many more projects being attempted, and they are not "failures," he insisted, but rather part of the work of socially engaged art as a whole. "You have to consider it in terms of an aggregate of processes," he said. As related earlier, I gained an insight into the importance of entry points from this work, and, from Nato, the necessity of repetition. I had to learn to carefully research the specific communities and collaborators in and which I was working. The work could be antagonistic, confrontational, but there *had* to be a place of access for others to gain a footing into the work, a point of entry that drew them in as participants, where they

were not being exploited or used for mere completion of a project. It was about

understanding, and about process.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is important here. According to Gramsci, it is not

just through violence and overt displays of power that the dominant ideology maintains

control, but through the repetition of the ideology until it no longer appears as ideology,

but the perspective of "normal" people (www.theory.org.uk/ctr-gram.htm). The

ideology is repeated so often, from childhood on up, through schools and on media, that

it becomes unquestioned "common sense." Part of that common sense is that art is

something regular people don't care much about, something for which the working folk

don't have time. It is often looked upon as non-essential to our daily experience, as

luxury or as vandalism, in the case of street art. Either way, it is a marginal experience

according to many common stereotypes. This is reinforced by the emphasis on

"practical" matters; the regular attacks on funding of the arts in the public interest, the

shrinking of humanities departments across college campuses in favor of fields which

offer straightforward career opportunities. It is impossible to get outside this ideology; it

is only possible to recognize it as such. This is why Nato Thompson emphasized

repetition as necessary for socially engaged art projects: the practice is unfamiliar to

many and therefore can seem alien and even threatening. It takes time to make cracks

in the wall of cultural prejudice.

This is why many of the successful socially engaged art projects are often the

ones that involve children or artworks such as community wall murals: they are

innocent self-expression and help foster self-empowerment are messages of hope and

positive relationships, the "feel-good" genre of social practice. The most recent art project in my own town in central Maine was a painting on the side of the local grocery store that showed multicolored hot air balloons floating over the town and the river that runs through it. From the perspective of the painting, the town is an idyllic place of green trees and white steeples. It is not necessary to explain how this fits into Gramsci's theory, but it is important to point out that it is seen (even if without realizing it) on a regular basis by everyone in the town, a message repeated on an almost daily basis. Equally important on another level, however, links the project to the thinking behind Santiago Sierra's artworks that used paid collaborators. An artist neighbor and I were the first contacted to be the creators of this mural. What is invisible in this mural-as message is the fact that the artists were asked to do this work *gratis.* Two weeks of labor, and multiple proposals for designs were to be done for free, in exchange for exposure. As artist activists, as artists as laborers, we declined.

Jacques Ranciere in *The Emancipated Spectator* denied that the common people were mere passive recipients of culture who had to be told what to think in order to get them to engage with art. For Ranciere, even a mere observer of a painting on a wall comes to that encounter with an entire history which is then engaged by that observation, and that there is nothing passive about the encounter. It is not, therefore, that people need to be taught how to engage with culture, for they are always already immersed in culture, reacting and interacting with it, but that they are being trained to accept the culture that reinforces the dominant power structure as "natural," and to be hostile to that which questions, let alone opposes, that hierarchy.

One of the key research elements of this dissertation has been not in studying whether

or not socially engaged art "works," because the question itself is incorrect. It is not a

question of the role of the scientist objectively observing from above whether or not a

new drug is effective compared to a placebo. It has been in coming to realize that such

activities are never in themselves "objective," that they are involved in the dominant

culture, and therefore are granted as accepted ways of knowing, where art forms such

as social practice are regarded as fringe, or worse, fads. They are kept at bay until they

can be recuperated, tamed and brought safely within the system. As Ben Davis wrote:

"You cannot prevent innovations in art from eventually being given a capitalist

articulation" (*Future Imperfect* 22). The mural that glorifies life in rural Maine is, after

all, on the side of a store, and not promoting the community on the side of the town hall

or police department. Socially engaged art is as much a part of the capitalist structure as

art auctions at Sotheby's. It also offers a future exposed to possibility that is not

completely rationalized and controlled, not wholly calculable and pragmatic, offering a

research without return.

In her collection of essays *Leaving Art*, Suzanne Lacy ends with a tribute to the

influence of Allan Kaprow and his blurring of art and life that opened up possibilities for

feminist art with an "art that went beyond simple protest politics and engaged the

public sphere in multiple and open-ended ways" (321). This open-ended engagement

was a form of inquiry, a testing and researching the possibilities of art. To search for

what one is looking for is to try to close the circuit, to complete the game. To search in

order to keep the search in play is the open-ended engagement of Kaprow, the infinite

game of Carse, and the "leaving art" of Lacy.

Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña creates "ephemeral, site-specific

installations in nature, streets, and museums [which] combine ritual and assemblage.

She calls this impermanent, participatory work 'lo precario' (the precarious):

transformative acts that bridge the gap between art and life, the ancestral and the

avant-garde" The work symbolizes the political and social struggles of her country and

more recently has taken the form of participatory projects

(www.ceciliavicuna.com/biography). These precarious, but transformative moments of

art are tiny revolutions that do not take place outside the world of colonization and

genocide, of sexist violence and racism. They are but rather small openings, cracks,

ephemeral twists of possibility that do not pretend to reverse the world order, but are

all the more necessary because they cannot reverse it. They proceed with the

awareness that true transformation can only come from within--with the repetition of

small, momentary revolutions the weight of which cannot be felt, until the world

changes under their burden.

For Ben Davis, this idea is best exemplified by the work of Rosa Luxemburg, who

wrote in *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* that Luxemburg knew

that "there will have to be many, many small victories and tiny, inspiring acts that lead

up to any movement that makes even modest systematic changes in society" (448). And

Deborah Fisher agrees: "A great artwork embraces paradox, and contains multiple,

sometimes contradictory, truths. I think this quality gives a great SEA project the ability

to reframe, reshape, or for a moment redistribute power. Strike Debt's *Rolling Jubilee*,

for example, can infiltrate and destabilize power structures that feels monolithic

precisely because it is not designed to solve the problem as much as it's designed to

exist as a gesture and as a result at the same time" (*Future Imperfect* 27).

Likewise, Theaster Gates in an interview offered his own take:

> Some kind of work simply needs to happen. There are
>
> things, whether they make sense or not, whether they live in
>
> the art market or in a gallery, that I need to make. It requires
>
> something that is not rational, that is not linear, that is not
>
> speculative in the way of finances. Rather, there is a kind of
>
> internal impulse to say, this is where I am and this is what I
>
> do, therefore I will do it here.
>
> (*Entry Points* 201)

All of these quotes suggest that what is at stake here is something other than the

traditional conception of research, that what is required is a steadfast opening to art's

possibility that cannot be foreclosed, cannot be classified or re-categorized in terms of

expectations that are considered "normal" or "common sense." What is ultimately

needed is an expanded notion of what art is, what it is for, and what it can be. As

Shannon Jackson wrote, "Our conceptions of expanded art need to stay expansive"

(*Living as Form* 93). It is the longing for final conclusions, grand unified theories, and the

act of defining, labeling, and ordering that so often carries with it the seeds of the very

structures socially engaged art is seeking to avoid. What is needed is temporary,

transient; a dissertation written in a minor key, that takes its stand and willingly moves aside for another. This work, too, is precarious, creating its space momentarily, a bridge that is here to serve an immediate purpose, but one that can also be dismantled, to leave the river as it was.

For the 2016 Creative Time conference held in Washington, D.C., the slogan was "Occupy the Future." Much of what I have just written can be seen to fit under this idea. With its reference to Occupy Wall Street and all of its permutations, the slogan suggested that with our activism we could create a better future by already occupying it before the current unjust world order could inhabit it. The slogan, despite being impossible, made a lot of sense given the concerns of urban gentrification, the assault on the environment, and the many other issues being addressed by the artist activists at the conference. But the idea of occupying the future struck me as itself a rallying cry of colonization. We could see what was wrong in our present, so we then assumed we should be the ones to take over the supposedly empty future and occupy it. This slogan struck me as the very attitude that should not be carried into the future. My concern for this led me to cerate a series of woodblock prints that read: "Occupy the Future, Yesterday". These prints emphasize the problematic nature of the original concept and to suggest if we are to have a better future, it will happen by working through the past, not taking some imaginary rocket ship to that future world where we repeat those actions that brought us to our current state of being.

Instead of thinking in terms of "occupying," which is rather close to the idea of investing and hoping for a payoff sometime in the future, and of drawing final

conclusions, which again seems caught up in the logic of dividends, I look again to Ted

Purves' idea of the gift economy. In an analysis of the Situationists in the first edition of

What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art, titled "Blows Against the

Empire," Purves discusses the idea of the uncalled for gifts of the Situationists

interventions in the 1960s. The gift of the Situationists radical acts not only destroyed,

Purves argues, but created: "What it creates is the existence of something altogether

different, a community and a bond that is not the bond of bondman to master or of

addict to dealer, but of the giver to the receiver, who then becomes kin and neighbor"

(27). Art as a gift that forms community, rather than that which creates debt or is based

on an overarching value structure where everything can be valued in terms of dollars, is

the focus of Purves' work. The gift transaction, Purves notes, is fundamentally different

from those of capitalism, creating and receiving social bonds and strengthening social

ties, and the use of the gift in radical art practices is valuable in the process of creating

greater social and artistic freedoms (28). Tom Finkelpearl sees art in a similar vein, not

merely "a tool for emotional and psychological transformation" but something that is

fundamentally transformative in everyday living (53). The gift can never be a

commodity, and always contains the seed of social potentiality within it. A gift always is

a socially engaged act, even when refused. And in its possibility of being accepted or

refused, it is inherently futural in its being.

As we have seen, socially engaged art, in contrast to more traditional modes of

art's object making, seeks to disrupt entrenched structures of power by the artist giving

up the role of central figure in order to promote various forms of sociality. Often, this is

done with a sense of political activism and desire for social change. However, this does not go far enough. It still stays rooted in areas of rational technological thinking with humans at the center. The transformative nature of art and its relationship to the possibility of transforming human modes of being suggest that the notion of socially engaged art go further than current modes of art at work in society. Although it may have that result, art is a way of looking towards the future that is distinct from a technological tool used for constructing a more just society. Art is a practice towards the future and is therefore an infinite game, a gift that cannot be used towards a finite goal without impoverishing its existence as art.

Again, it is Ranciere that I turn to in order to offer an articulation of the relationship between the futural aspect of art and its social possibility: "The artistic 'voice of the people' is the voice of a people to come. The people to come is the impossible people that would be at the same time the divided people of the protest and the collective harmony of a people attuned with the very breath of Nature; be it a chaotic or a 'charismatic' nature" (Ranciere 4). The "impossible" people are those beyond imagination, the future unoccupied, the future gift of an unimagined and impossible art that lies outside our use of art as a commodity, ornament, or even a tool for social change that seeks a harmony without remainder.

To conclude, I would like to discuss my most recent project in relationship to the set of ideas I have just reviewed. *BedWritten/#safetywork* were developed as socially engaged art that directly intervened in the site of violence against women. Situated in a space that is flanked by three dormitories on a university campus, and occurring in

tandem with the #safetywork exhibition inside the performance space, as well as the

Silhouette project which lined the halls, the series of projects have direct engagement

with the current socio-political environment. What I immediately encountered with this

project, as with previous work, is the fact that I must relinquish control as sole author.

As soon as an artist moves beyond the safety and security of the highly controlled

atmosphere of gallery, museum or studio, the ability of the artist to determine the

parameters of the work is greatly curbed. This is due to the inclusion of collaborators

and community into the work, their contributions and decisions, and the skillsets they

bring. Equally important factors in the direction the project takes are notions of site, and

the socio-political climate at that moment. In the case of *BedWritten,* a wall of ice blocks

was intended to be built by a group of collaborators, gradually concealing the bed from

view, and afford a surface on which to video-map imagery. The weather did not

cooperate, and after multiple attempts and iterations of the construction, the group as a

whole decided that aspect of the project would not come to fruition.

Although this could be seen as failure, what it actually reveals is the exposure of

art to life outside of the role of carefully contrived object. The barrier between art and

life is removed, or is at least, porous. In addition, the project, although based on a

clearly defined issue, does not offer "solutions" to that problem.

BedWritten/#safetywork creates a space for connections. It allows what is hidden -

buried inside those who have endured the abuse, also that which has been swept under

the rug in society as a whole- to come into view. It stands as an act of place making, an

opening up to the possibility for change, a work that points to an unoccupied future, the possibility of a future to come, a future community unplanned by the present.

It is not a matter of socially engaged art, such as *BedWritten/#safetywork*, being somehow more true or pure than art forms that came prior to it, as if art were progressing to some ultimate truth that it might one day achieve. All art, like all labor, is situated in its historical, socio-economic context; social practice focuses on making that context explicit and, inasmuch as is possible, makes working with that context a part of the art piece itself. In this way, socially engaged art is a highly temporal form of art making: it works with the structures of the past that give shape to the present, reconfiguring them through direct interaction in the forms of the communal. Although the goal is often to ameliorate some social ill, this is not always the case, and can be one of confrontation and exacerbation, laying stress upon the sometimes hidden, sometimes overt oppressions within a social structure. Still, it is well to bear in mind that *all* art implicitly engages with such systems of power, though typically in a way that simply assumes them without question. All art, therefore, is political by its very nature of being made within a social framework; socially engaged art makes those politics, and questions of complicity within that system, *explicit*.

The question of art's role in society is a fraught one, particularly in a capitalist society where workers are routinely alienated from their labor and art is often seen as a practice of elites for elites. Concerns of who is an artist, who *gets* to be the artist, and who is authorized to determine whether something is or is not art are all indicative of a social structure that is uneasy with the transformative power of creativity unharnessed

272

within a community. By first of all seeing the artist as a laborer, art is seen as a

component of a class structure that acknowledges the disparities of power and avows

the abilities of common people to use that power for the sake of change. In this way,

socially engaged art is radically democratic, rooted within the community and therefore

self-transformative.

With the social and economic disruptions that have come with modernity, and

which seem to accelerate from year to year, and with the ever-increasing global nature

of capitalism that has thrown workers into free-flowing labor resources and excluded

bodies from the social space, art that not only reflects these elements of chaos and

control but actually works with these as their fundamental materials is an important

marker of art's relevance. Paradoxically, the move to create beyond art, to synthesize

the often distinct concepts of art and life, has been an important factor in the

development of socially engaged art, arising from such artists as Allan Kaprow and

Suzanne Lacy. The drive to find an art beyond art indicates the importance of artists'

awareness of art's complicity in a world where very few have so much and the vast

majority across the globe is marginalized into bare subsistence.

With this in mind, the title of Nato Thompson's recent book about socially

engaged art is instructive: *Living as Form*. Since art has always been concerned with

form, it is an important shift to return art towards its primal role of forming the life itself

of the community as a whole. Not only life, but also the actual act of *living* in its daily

socio-economic and historical being is a form for artistic transformation. As technologies

give rise to a virtual world to which more and more the privileged can orchestrate into a

mixture of fantasy and disengaged individuals from the realities around them, the more

important it is that the living understand their living as an art form open to the future, a

living beyond the rational calculations of social discipline or the crises of international

capital, that is art's ultimate ground: freedom.

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