FIELD

A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

1

Spring 2015

FIELD

A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

Contents

(continued)

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

Editorial

Grant Kester

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *FIELD*, a journal of socially engaged art criticism.[1] *FIELD* was created in response to the remarkable proliferation of contemporary socially engaged art over the past fifteen years. This is a complex, contradictory and unruly area of practice that is distinguished by its extraordinary geographic scope. Today we find socially engaged art projects under development around the globe, from India to Ecuador, from Senegal to Ukraine, from Cambodia to Ireland, and beyond. While otherwise quite diverse, this field is driven by a common desire to establish new relationships between artistic practice and other fields of knowledge production, from critical pedagogy to participatory design, and from activist ethnography to radical social work. In many cases it has been inspired by, or affiliated with, new movements for social and economic justice around the globe. Throughout this field of practice we see a persistent engagement with sites of resistance and activism, and a desire to move beyond existing definitions of both art and the political. However, to speak of a singular "field" is itself misleading, given the dramatic differences in geo-political context, artistic and activist traditions, vernacular languages of practice, and modes of address that frame work in any given setting and situation. At the same time, an often superficial concept of social engagement has become increasingly fashionable among many museums, art schools and foundations in Europe and the United States, leading to the emergence of the new genre of

"participatory" or "social" art practice commonly encountered in biennials, kunsthalles and art fairs.

This participatory turn is, of course, not unique to contemporary art. In fact, there is growing interest in new forms of public participation or interaction across a broad range of cultural and social fields, from debates over deliberative democracy in current political theory to new activist forms based on modes of crowdsourcing and collective mobilization via technology. Not surprisingly, this tendency has easily enough been trivialized or used to reinforce, rather than challenge, hierarchical forms of power and decision-making. In the arts I believe the renewed interest in social engagement and collaboration is the result of two related factors. The first is a sense of frustration with several decades of art critical discourse that has demonstrated an impressive vigilance about the various ways in which social or cultural resistance can be compromised by the hegemonic forces of capitalism, but a marked reluctance to learn from those moments in which social action can be productive, generative or transformative. And the second is the feeling, especially evident among a younger generation of artists, that it's necessary to begin again to understand the nature of the political through a practical return to the most basic relationships and questions; of self to other, of individual to collective, of autonomy and solidarity, and conflict and consensus, against the grain of a now dominant neo-liberal capitalism and in the absence of the reassuring teleologies of past revolutionary movements.

There is clearly a need for more intelligent and nuanced analysis of this diverse field. However, it has become increasingly evident that the normative theoretical conventions and research methodologies governing contemporary art criticism are ill equipped to respond to the questions this work raises. *FIELD* was created in order to foster the development of new critical forms, capable of addressing a broad range of contemporary socially engaged, collaborative and participatory art practices. Just as these new practices often cross boundaries between art, activism, urbanism, anthropology and many other fields, the criticism and analysis of this work

requires a new, trans-disciplinary approach that moves beyond the traditions of existing art theory and criticism and opens out to other disciplines, including those which possess a more robust model of field research and a greater sensitivity to the complex function of social interaction at both the micro- and macro-political level. In this sense *FIELD* is intended as an experiment or a test, a *Versuch* as Brecht might describe it, to determine if dialogue across institutional, discursive and disciplinary boundaries can produce a more incisive critical and analytic frame for socially engaged art.

During the journal's initial phase we'll be publishing three issues per-year (fall, winter and spring), with plans for a more frequent production schedule in the future. In addition to our regular call-for-papers we are considering ideas for special editions devoted to key issues and debates in the field. We are especially concerned with facilitating long-term critical engagement with contemporary practice. This kind of research is both costly and time-consuming, so we're hoping to secure funding to support the travel, lodging and research expenses of critics seeking to spend an extended period of time at the site of a specific project. In the same manner, we want to encourage a critical analysis that can gauge the long-term effects of socially engaged practices, by allowing critics to revisit a community or site once a given project has been completed. We are also working to develop mechanisms to incorporate the insights of participants and collaborators involved in specific projects, which are rarely included in existing critical accounts. Finally, cognizant of the limited geographic scope of our first issue, we are working to identify a network of international contributing editors in order to enhance our coverage of work produced outside of the established circuits of US and EU-based art production.

It is in the nature of this practice that many projects exist on the boundaries of art and some adjacent domain of cultural or social production. We are less concerned here with what has become a largely sterile set of debates about the status of this work as "art," than with determining, through the close investigation of specific projects, the ways in which power and resistance operate through

a manifold of aesthetic, discursive, inter-subjective and institutional factors. This doesn't mean we aren't concerned with the artistic status of this work, only that we believe a deeper understanding of this status is unlikely to result from the crude opposition between ethics and aesthetics or singular and collective authorship that has characterized recent critical dialogue. Rather, it requires a sustained and immersive engagement with site, process and practice that is able to move fluidly from the power dynamics encoded in the physical proximity of individual bodies to the macro-political framing of local or situational gestures in the context of global neo-liberalism. Unfortunately, existing debates have been premised on a problematic conceptual reification, as critics assign *a priori* ethico-political values to generic concepts of "disruption" and "consensus," irrespective of their actual function at specific sites of resistance. We seek, instead, to develop a pragmatic analysis that can help us understand how the forms of critical, self-reflective insight that we have come to identify with aesthetic experience can be produced in contexts and through forms of cultural, social or institutional framing, quite different from those we associate with conventional works of art.

If traditional aesthetic experience was premised on a utopian viewer-yet-to be who was sufficiently cultivated to adopt a properly disinterested attitude to the work of art, today's avant-garde is based on an equally hypothetical subject; the philistine viewer whose consciousness would actually be transformed by the now-programmatic forms of disruption delivered by the contemporary artist. The shift in contemporary socially engaged art practice to an aesthetic concerned with actual subjects and subjectivity, rather than rhetorical or hypothetical models of reception, poses a significant challenge to the conventions of the field. Critics frequently ignore the fact that those works most desperate to advertise their disruptive criticality are often just as likely to reinforce, rather than challenge, normative values and identities. At the same time, projects that incorporate moments of provisional consensus can also enact forms of intersubjective or institutional conflict that are directly

related to ongoing processes of both agonistic and antagonistic political action. One of our chief goals, then, is to overcome the imprecise understanding of resistance and criticality that is a typical feature of current art critical discourse. The art world is awash in theoretical *grand récits* and axiomatic declarations, but we are sorely lacking in any useful intermediary theories that retain a sufficient engagement with the materiality of practice to open up its complex interrelationship to larger political and economic structures. It is our belief that appropriate criteria for the analysis of socially engaged art can only emerge out of an epistemological inquiry that seeks to provide both a more comprehensive research methodology and a basic definitional language that would allow us to more confidently describe the scope and function of the work itself.

In This Issue...

Currently under arrest for her audacity in seeking to provide a forum for Cuban citizens to speak freely in the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, Tania Bruguera's work has consistently explored the nature of political speech and autonomy. *FIELD* 1 features an extended interview with Bruguera by *FIELD* editorial collective member Alex Kershaw in which she reflects on the changes that have occurred in her *Immigrant Movement International* (IMI) project in Queens. In developing IMI over the past five years Bruguera has long grappled with the question of sustainability, especially as IMI is now entering what she terms a transitional "political" phase. In her interview here she discusses the complex processes involved in the evolution of IMI, and reflects on the ways in which she has begun to withdraw from the project. We began this interview several months ago, prior to Bruguera's arrest by Cuban authorities. Remarkably, she was able to continue working with us to refine it even after her incarceration. We dedicate the inaugural issue of *FIELD* to Tania in the hope that she will soon be free and able to continue her work.

Existing writing on the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko focuses almost exclusively on the visual analysis of the images he projects, as they relate to specific urban and architectural contexts. As Wodiczko argues in this issue of *FIELD*, this form of criticism, while important, ignores what is for him an absolutely central aspect of his practice: the process by which he organizes constituents and collaborators to generate the material for his projections. In his essay here, Wodiczko describes a nested series of social and collaborative relationships that evolve to produce what he terms the "Inner Public" of each of his projects. Here the personal and political itineraries of specific collaborators, in this case in the cities of Tijuana and Londonderry, provide the essential foundation and performative content for any given projection, as it is later presented to, and perceived by, an "Outer Public" of viewers, critics and media. We hope to make contact with some of the Tijuana project's original participants for a follow-up report in a future issue.

The essay, "A Week in Pasadena," by anthropologists George Marcus and Christine Hegel and designer Luke Cantarella, outlines a new working methodology that they have developed at the intersection of ethnographic research and the design charette. The "Creative Encounter" is their term for a heuristic system of collaborative research that seeks to circumvent what can often become the monological inwardness of conventional scholarly inquiry. By formalizing epistemological impasses through a shared design process it opens up new insights into complex cultural problems, as evidenced by their work together at the World Trade Organization. What is of particular interest here is the capacity of the Creative Encounter to generate new, situational, theoretical models. These *petits récits*, to use Lyotard's phrase, evolve out of the experience of practice itself, and provide a useful model for how we might reconceive the creation of art theory.

Artist and critic Greg Sholette writes for us on the tenth anniversary of the influential Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) exhibition *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*. Sholette, collaborating with MASS MoCA

curator Nato Thompson, edited the widely circulated catalog for the exhibition (*Users Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*). For Sholette *The Interventionists* marked a watershed moment in the evolution of activist or socially engaged art, when new forms of tactical media retained a meaningful connection to a "long range vision of political transformation." In his observations on the vicissitudes of socially engaged or activist art since the early 2000s, Sholette reflects on the rapidly shrinking space for political dissent and opposition under a triumphant neo-liberalism, and speculates on the relationship between this impoverished public sphere and the turn towards gestures of superficial, de-politicized conviviality in contemporary art.

The questions of sustainability and transformation that are raised in Tania Bruguera's interview return again in Sue Bell Yank's study of Jeanne van Heeswijk's *Freehouse* project in Rotterdam. The project began in 1998 as an effort to survey existing economic and cultural resources in Afrikaanderwijk, a largely immigrant community in south Rotterdam. The goal was to facilitate the development of a self-organized and mutually supportive local economy among small businesses and cultural organizations in the area. As the project continued to grow and evolve over the intervening years it became apparent that it would have to acquire a new and more ambitious organizational form, involving its transformation into a larger Wijk or neighborhood cooperative. As Heeswijk begins to distance herself from the operations of the new Wijk it finds itself facing a central, and symptomatic, political challenge. How do you encourage people to participate in a cooperative enterprise if it involves some sacrifice of their immediate economic self-interest for the sake of the community's long-term, collective wellbeing?

Independent scholar, activist and writer Marc Herbst, in his essay "Thoughts On the Cultural Policy of a Failed State," draws on his experience living in Leipzig to reflect on the relationship between the anti-capitalist values of many artists affiliated with the anti-globalization movement in the 1990s and the experience of actually-existing socialism in East Germany. While residing in Leipzig

Herbst was struck by the imaginary legacy of East Germany, as conveyed by the "printed detritus" associated with state sponsored cultural programs. In this essay he negotiates the uneasy relationship between the utopian promise of socialism and its material reality. In particular, Herbst is concerned with the "wiggle room" that might exist between a given political system (whether state socialist or neo-liberal) and the potentials of cultural action within that system.

While it is now customary for museums to attempt to de-contextualize conventional works of art by placing them in settings defined by their class or race difference from art world norms (e.g., Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire Albinet* in 2004, which brought "master" works from the Pompidou to the banlieues of Paris), the expansion of social art practice is leading to a growing tendency to reverse the flow of cultural capital, by bringing varieties of vernacular culture (including the culture of activism) into the museum. In Sebastian Loewe's essay, "When Protest Becomes Art," the German critic examines the tensions that accompanied efforts by Documenta and the Berlin Biennale to appropriate or exhibit the Occupy movement as part of their programming in 2012. The ensuing collision of projection, misinterpretation, fetishization and opportunism reveals a great deal about the nature of both Occupy as a movement and current curatorial practice.

In her interview with *FIELD* editorial collective member Noni Brynjolson, Canadian artist Althea Thauberger discusses her project *Murphy Canyon Choir*, which was produced in San Diego and Tijuana as part of the 2005 inSite exhibition. The choir was composed of the spouses of active-duty sailors and Marines living at Murphy Canyon, a large military housing complex in San Diego. Thauberger was surprised to discover that many in the military enlist for economic reasons, and that their families often live at or below the poverty level. In her conversation with Brynjolson, Thauberger reflects on her own ambivalent relationship to military culture as well as the complex formation of the audience for the choir's performance, which combined art world cognoscenti associated with inSite along with the friends and families of the military spouses. Since active

duty military families relocate regularly we've been unable to locate any of the original participants to provide their own insights into the project.

Our inaugural issue also includes the first in an occasional series which we call "Re-posts." These are essays written by scholars outside the disciplines of art history and theory that shed light on key issues in our field. In this issue we are pleased to re-publish Francesca Polletta's essay "How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice," which originally appeared in the June 2005 issue of the journal *Mobilization*. Polletta is the author of *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), a penetrating study of the deliberative processes employed in the Civil Rights movement. In this essay Polletta explores a key transition period in the history of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as it came to disavow the non-hierarchical and consensus-based decision-making techniques on which the group was founded. By the mid-1960s, as Polletta notes, "participatory" forms of organization were increasingly associated with white, middle-class, student-based protest organizations. Polletta's essay provides an illuminating historical context for the current interest in non-hierarchical decision-making in contemporary social art practice, with particular relevance for work produced in the United States.

FIELD will regularly feature reviews and reports related to new publications, exhibitions, symposia and other forums for debate and discussion associated with socially engaged art. The current issue includes reports on two recent conferences. The first, by *FIELD* editorial collective member Stephanie Sherman, examines the June 2014 "New Rural Arts Seminar," organized by the Littoral Arts Trust in England and the second, by Megan Voeller, responds to the "A Lived Practice" symposium, organized by curator Mary Jane Jacob at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in November 2014. We are also pleased to publish a review by *FIELD* editorial collective member Paloma Checa-Gismero, focusing on an exhibition by Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves at the Museo Universitario Arte

Contemporáneo in Mexico City this past fall (*On the Return of the Lake*).

Finally, we want to express our sincere gratitude to Jorge Munguía and Blair Richardson of Buro Buro for their extremely generous donation of design and website building labor (including the design of the *FIELD* logo), as well as Jonathan Walton and Seth Ferris for their help with fine-tuning the website and formatting materials for our first issue. We also want to thank the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts as well as the University of California, San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities and Visual Arts department for their support. Most importantly, I want to thank the members of our Editorial Advisory Board and Editorial Collective (Michael Ano, Noni Brynjolson, Paloma Checa-Gismero, Julia Fernandez, Alex Kershaw and Stephanie Sherman). Without their passion, dedication and hard work over the past year the realization of *FIELD* would have been impossible.

Grant Kester is the founding editor of *FIELD* and Professor of Art History in the Visual Arts department at the University of California, San Diego. His publications include *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Duke University Press, 1998), *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004) and *The One and the Many: Agency and Identity in Contemporary Collaborative Art* (Duke University Press. 2011). He has recently completed work on *Collective Situations: Dialogues in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995-2010*, an anthology of writings by art collectives working in Latin America produced in collaboration with Bill Kelley, which is under contract with Duke University Press.

Notes

1. We've chosen the term "socially engaged art" because we believe there is some value in retaining the concept of "engagement," but we aren't overly invested in terminology and view the proliferation of terms to describe various forms or aspects of this practice (social, participatory, activist, and so on) as the healthy sign of a field that has not yet been subject to art historical closure.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

An Interview with Tania Bruguera

Immigrant Movement International: Five Years and Counting

Alex Kershaw

Immigrant Movement International (2010-ongoing). IMI council members outside IMI Corona office, Queens, New York, 2014. Photograph courtesy of the Queens Museum.

FIELD Journal caught up with Tania Bruguera to discuss Immigrant Movement International (IMI)—an organisation, socio-political movement and art project instigated by Bruguera. While

IMI's mission has evolved over the years, their focus has always been to increase the visibility of immigrants while providing greater access to political power and social recognition for some of the world's most vulnerable citizens. The project was launched back in 2010 out of a building in the Corona neighbourhood of Queens, New York, where IMI established a community centre with support from the Queens Museum and Creative Time. Over the years IMI has expanded by establishing affiliations and collective actions in other countries, such as Mexico, United Kingdom, Holland, Sweden, and Israel. From their Corona headquarters IMI has engaged in educational programing, symposiums, health and legal services, and workshops. Through this IMI has aggregated a constituency of members that are predominantly Latin American, mainly from Mexico and Ecuador, as well as a significant proportion from the Caribbean and China.

Activist in orientation, IMI has set out to raise public awareness of issues pertinent to immigrants through different zones of contact. These have included social service organizations, state and federal politics, local government, the art world, legal and judicial entities, and the media. In this process IMI has borrowed and adapted various methodologies from these fields in an attempt to solidify their desire to become a social movement.

One of IMI's steadfast theoretical models has been the testing of Arte Útil (which roughly translates as "useful art" in English). As the name suggests, Arte Útil is a platform, an address and a means for locating new uses for art in society. It seeks to provide beneficial, timely and relevant solutions for those involved with its projects. In terms of aesthetics, its aim is to recast the viewer as a user, while individual artistic authorship is swapped out in preference of the potential for its participants to expropriate the work and make it their own. In these ways Arte Útil is more about working with reality rather than simply representing reality.

For IMI, Arte Útil is practiced in the services and advice it offers to immigrants. At times it has combined political action and illegality,

as a means of challenging the law and what those in power define as legal. IMI has identified usefulness in terms of its potential to make progress on immigrant issues, and in its address, it has called on the viewer as a citizen who is asked to act politically. In this way politics becomes not merely the subject matter of the work but its material. However, the world IMI seeks to transform is also one of its greatest challenges. In trying to reimagine and then recast what has been bracketed as "impossible", Arte Útil embodies a utopian imaginary grounded in real world activity.

Central to what is at stake in a project like IMI is the difficulty in coordinating diverse individual desires with universal demands, and as a social movement, the challenge in generating solidarity through the recognition of difference. How is Bruguera's voice positioned in relation to the voices of the project's co-authors? How does the rhetoric of Arte Útil play out when tested by real world circumstances, where the ethics at stake present both opportunities and the potential for situations of inertia, or even worse, produce a backlash that works to dissolve or regulate the very practical demands for rights that are being asked for?

As an example of socially engaged practice inhabiting slippery spaces between art, cultural criticism, socio-political activism, and collaboration, IMI has agitated the persistent binary within art criticism between aesthetic integrity and social function. Given the project's long-term nature and its sometimes ambivalent attitude toward the traditional framings of the museum, IMI also raises questions about the suitability of art criticism's most cherished procedures for passing judgment. In the interview that follows, Tania Bruguera addresses some of these issues and questions and gives us a clear picture of the specific ecology of IMI by reflecting on the project five years since it began.

Immigrant Movement International (2010-ongoing). IMI community council members at work at the Corona office, 2014. Photograph courtesy of the Queens Museum.

AK: Tania, what is happening right now with IMI? What has changed recently and what remains of what it was?

TB: At IMI we are developing two main changes started last year, marking the arrival of Immigrant Movement International's maturity as a socially engaged project. First, was our decision to make IMI as a whole, independent from its project in Corona, Queens. Second, to create a community council that would take over the role Immigrant Movement Corona (IMC) was playing as the headquarters for the decision-making process.

In terms of the first change, transforming IMC from the headquarters of IMI to one of its cells, responds to the idea that immigrant issues can only be analyzed and worked on simultaneously at a local and at an international level. The ideal is to work toward creating a network where immigrants can share their political, social, and human circumstances. This is necessary since immigrants have become the alternative transnational class in what seems to be the creation of a global citizen, an identity that at the moment comprises of and is associated with the rich and the privileged. This is why IMI has accepted invitations to

visit other immigrant projects and to try to establish other cells, as well as collaborating with other immigrant groups in Holland, Mexico, Sweden, and Israel. On the other hand, IMC has kept a certain autonomy to enable the possibility for creating public events without putting the community at risk.

Our second change was the resolution to create a community council to take over IMC's role as the headquarters. This is now fully implemented. The project is workshop-based and we have created a system in which people coming to the project can not only be part of the workshops but also propose one, which they can then lead after making the appropriate preparations. This is how we created the first leaders in the project. Since the second year of the project we established a meeting every three months where all the workshop teachers meet to present what they have done and discuss issues ranging from administration to the project's identity and to what they envision for IMI. We called these the leaders' meetings. In these meetings we started making collective decisions

Immigrant Movement International (2010-Ongoing). IMI leaders' retreat at the Queens Museum, 2014. Photograph courtesy of the Queens Museum.

about the project. While some leaders taught for limited amounts of time, others have continued their workshops or proposed new ones, which means they have been involved in all aspects of the program for a long time now. Either way, all have influenced what IMC has become.

You had asked about what has remained the same. Well, the project has kept its relationship with the Queens Museum, not only as a fiscal sponsor and supporter but also as a consultant. Now that Tom Finkelpearl has gone on to other public functions, we were approached by Laura Raicovich, the museum's new director. We met Laura who shared her interest in keeping the collaboration with the project. We have also kept our relationship with Creative Time, though on a smaller scale. I'm proud of this because one of my goals was that institutions understand the need to have a long-term relationship with projects like this one. We are also still located in the same place and our presence has grown in the community. Although, for me, more important than numbers is the way in which the community has taken over the project. Now the council is in full control of the project, which I'm proud of.

AK: Tania, in terms of these most recent changes it seems like you are saying that IMC is simultaneously becoming more independent as well as undergoing an incorporation into IMI. How do you see IMI developing into the future? What kinds of things do you feel are necessary for the project to keep-on-keeping-on, so to speak?

TB: Well, growing from the leaders' meeting, I wanted to formalize the decision-making process by having the project fully run by the community. In order to do that we needed two things. First, we needed to establish the ecology of the place we wanted, while allowing it to guide the final goal of the project and its subsequent ethics and behaviors. Second, we needed to have specific training for those who wanted to be part of this process, so by the summer of the third year we established a project that we called "la escuelita". This was a series of classes divided into two

big groups—art (including: socially engaged, public sphere, Arte Útil and political practices) and activism. This activist preparation included visits to other public art projects in each area like *El Puente*, *Gramsci Monument* and *Between the Door and the Street*. The training process lasted six months and the Queens Museum provided some funds to pay those attending, since they were day-long sessions on a weekly basis. At the end of the first "escuelita" the community council was created. It was instigated by those who attended the training process and who wanted to be a more active part by making a longer-term commitment to the project. We created a consensus system and progressed from talking about empowering the community to actually giving them power over the project. The first council was for a period of one year, a sort of transitory "try out" council, after which its members could decide if they wanted to remain or to leave. Now we have a fully functioning community council and we are going to do "la escuelita" again so there can be a continuous system for building leadership. Hopefully this will ensure that the project evolves with the ideas of each new council member. We have to keep a stable and at the same time renewable energy.

In addition, at IMC we continue to be focused on Arte Útil and are inviting contemporary artists to join the project. Now the biggest

Immigrant Movement International (2010-ongoing). La Escuelita de Pensamiento Comunitario Tránsito Amaguaña at IMI Corona. Photographs courtesy of the Queens Museum.

challenge for the project is to find creative economic solutions for its sustainability—the rest is there. So we need ways to work towards the last goal, which involves working on economic models in order to achieve sustainability. Another thing that has also come up since our first public event, and I think we could focus on more in the future, is the use of Arte Útil in the project. I think that IMC could become an excellent and natural place to group people practicing Arte Útil on immigrant issues.

AK: It seems to me that one of the long-term goals of the project would be for IMI to have an ongoing life that is maintained by the participants separate or in addition to your own involvement. Even apart from practical considerations such as funding and staffing, this seems like such a difficult task to achieve—especially for a work that is in a large part forged through your own intellectual contributions and physical labor.

TB: All long-term projects inevitably change over time; they need readjustments in order to intervene in both the social sphere and the learned social behavior they confront as a means of arriving at their desired social or political goal. There is an ongoing negotiation between what is established and what you want to change. Long-term projects are educational processes and as knowledge evolves so does the project. These projects are about creating an ecology that embodies the desired change, where people can experiment with what they want before it is socially established, that is, before it becomes culture.

While you have to have a very clear idea of what you would like to achieve with the result, long-term projects should not have a pre-established form. Long-term projects have an unstable form, a liquid form, so that they can adapt to the complexities they confront and to the outcomes of collective authorship. These kinds of projects are not exhibited for a long time, they are shaped by a conscious decision to use art as one agent of social change. They enter inside the social tissue of a place, a group of people or an issue, in order to challenge it. Long-term projects are not passive

activities, they are active interventions where the artist is an initiator. They are constantly changing, constantly ongoing—their beauty is the way in which you can perceive how it dialogues with and places a force on social reality. Long-term projects are an ethical journey.

I would say that IMI in Corona has not changed but has evolved and has now entered its political phase. To have arrived at the political phase of the project is something that was my goal from the beginning. I remember the first time a community member said, "We are called a movement so let's become a movement." That day I could barely sleep, I was so happy. I felt as if the previous three to four years had been the time period needed to create the conditions for the idea I originally had, not as an imposition from an artist in their community, not as the accomplishment of tasks, but as a natural desire coming from the community. All these years have been about the preparation and the time needed to do the work we wanted to do at IMI. Now we are ready. However, working politically and on politics is always challenging for art institutions.

AK: An exciting component of the IMI project for me is the range of different outcomes the participants might expect from the project and then the kinds of things you personally would like to achieve. Also there seems to be a very interesting tension between the very practical and useful outcomes that are defined collaboratively and perhaps some of the more risky, transformational or even antagonistic possibilities for the project that might be attractive to you as an artist—possibilities that might expose participants to attention that is counterproductive to the aims of the project overall. How do you see the relationship between the artist and the community in projects such as this?

TB: Long-term projects indeed need patience; they are not as compacted, rushed, forced and therefore violent as short-term projects can be. In long-term projects you need to understand the importance of the time needed to prepare the conditions to do the work, especially when you work with vulnerable communities. In these situations you do not want to impose, you do not want

to have the come-do-leave artist attitude, because it is not about what you can achieve as an artist but what the community takes with them. Many times I have found out that part of what happens is that in order to do the work with the community, you need to first share knowledge and opportunities with them that exist outside their community. I'm not talking about trying to turn them into who they are not, but to make them reach for things they want but thought were not for them, just because everyone else said so or because they are perceived to be economically unreachable. This is a paralyzing energy you need to work against first. Once the community members understand that social prearrangements can be broken, you can start working in your socially engaged or political art with the community. From here an exchange can be started between what you propose as an artist and what they desire as a community. In that process the spectrum of possibilities as people and as citizens can be expanded. It is important to understand (especially for the people in the arts) that this is a two-way street. Here, when the work is properly done, the artist also expands their own spectrum as a citizen and as a person. For me, working with the community is not a task-oriented activity that either the artist or the community has to accomplish but an ongoing learning process, one that starts with the encounter of two languages—that of art and that of community experience. I do not think the artist needs to infantilize the community or that the artist has to artificially make them pseudo-artists to please the art community. In socially engaged practice, art is not a tool to make art but a tool to be used to make society work differently.

For me, what is exciting is not only the range of different outcomes the co-authors might expect from the project or what I personally want to achieve, but to find a way in which both can be achieved. My idea is to find a common ground where we can meet, where there is not a *theirs* and *mine* but an *ours*, where everyone can fulfill their desires and grow.

Also when you work with vulnerable communities through art projects there is also the possibility of putting them at risk. That is

Immigrant Movement International (2010-ongoing). IMI Women's Health group Mujeres en Movimiento exercise classes in Corona Plaza, led by Veronica Ramirez, 2014 Photograph courtesy of the Queens Museum.

also why, as I explained before, IMC became part of IMI instead of being an isolated project. However, I have to say that when I told the members of the council the reasons why I felt this separation was important, they said—show us your projects for performances, maybe we want to take the risk, let us decide. So, sometimes you have to understand that the vulnerability of the immigrant community is also its strength.

AK: As a means of developing these close relationships with the community that you speak about, duration, or specifically the brevity of an engagement, has often been used to problematize

socially engaged art practices. Should longevity be a goal for a project such as this? Is longevity even desirable?

TB: I do not think that longevity should be a goal in itself, but it is related to how long it takes to change the issue you are addressing. To either do it too quickly or to extend it for longer than needed are both dangerous. If cut short, that is, to leave the project before it has achieved its goal, you could leave the community frustrated. Also this tends to confirm the distrust towards artists who are seen as selfish and uncommitted to social and political causes. In this way the community can become even more discouraged and hopeless than before the project started. Extending the project for longer than necessary is problematic because socially engaged art projects should be done when needed and not as an exercise in form or experimentation with people or to avoid feeling lonely in the studio. However, if the project evolves, if the community sees some benefit and if the artist is still interested to continue the collaboration (or if the community has learned the working methodology and can continue on their own), then by using the built structure and human resources, the project can enter new challenges and start over. But none of this is possible if the community doesn't trust you—trust takes time and concrete actions of solidarity. Trust comes when the artist works not *with* but *for* the community, when they work for the people in the community's benefit and not for themselves.

You ask about longevity, but I would change that word to commitment. It is not about the length of time or about durability or about preservation of the project. Rather it is about the time that it takes to build and change something in a community. In my experience this is only achieved if the community not only feels represented in the project, but if they feel the project responds to their needs and if the project is useful to them. When you work for a group of people who are not familiar with contemporary art, Arte Útil is an excellent resource.

Arte Útil provides an entry point to contemporary art that guarantees attention and interest from an audience generally

Immigrant Movement International, (2010-Ongoing). Useful Art Association event, in association with the Queens Museum and Creative Time, 2011. Photograph courtesy of Studio Tania Bruguera.

disengaged and uninterested in contemporary art, or art for that matter. Seeing art as a tool is not the same as instrumentalizing art; it is a way to use all the knowledge you have on how to work with the symbolic, the representational and the imagined to handle a different social proposal. Arte Útil is not used to make society work better but for society to work differently. Arte Útil doesn't represent– it presents, it proposes and it implements.

In long-term projects I no longer consider concepts like audience or participants, but members, co-authors and friends. Friends may seem an inadequate word but in my experience with the long-term projects Cátedra Arte de Conducta and IMI the moment when you know the project has succeeded is when the people involved in it care as much as you do for it. They make it theirs and defend it because the project has become part of their life. It is a success when you are no longer seen by the community as an artist doing

an art project but as a friend they can count on to work towards the same political or social aims. Long-term projects create ecologies where people can live under a different political regime.

In order for such projects to happen and to catch the desire of the community to be part of it, you also need to work with what I call Political-Timing Specific, working with what is currently happening politically around the issue you want to achieve. From the perspective of art, Political-Timing Specific is the awareness that the political conditions can influence an artwork or that they have actually given birth to the need to do the work—the *raison d'être* of the work. It is as if, for a site-specific practice, you incorporate the political elements that determine and shape the artwork, its impact or its meaning. I use timing in the concept because a work done in this manner would develop and have the form it takes as a result of specific political circumstances. In Political-Timing Specific the project's aesthetic decisions are taken after political decisions. Working in a Political-Timing Specific manner is to work in an active way, it is to try to change things and not only to approach issues *a posteriori*, as comments or as lamentations. It is to abandon the position of the victim and to intervene—to be part of what is being politically built.

Immigrant Movement International (2010-ongoing). The monument quilt project to fight rape culture, IMI members in collaboration with FORCE artists and the Queens Museum, 2014. Photograph courtesy of the Queens Museum.

AK: Tania, you have spoken about the beauty of usefulness, as opposed the usefulness of beauty. The question of whether we judge a project through the category of art or whether we judge it through another category like political activism seems to me to be a somewhat unhelpful question in understanding and evaluating the work. I guess the challenge seems to be to find a different model for talking about the work. What kinds of critical models do you think might be useful for evaluating a project like IMI?

TB: I always think that one problematic issue in critique of social practice is that the project's voice is always that of the artist, as if the artist had agreed to handle some control of the work but not of the narrative created around it. I think that critiques of these projects should have the same multi-voice that the project itself has. There is a common mistrust among art critics of non-art-initiated people's ability to evaluate art. However, in this kind of project this does not apply because the people from the community are the experts and shouldn't be seen as mere quotes to give some "color" or legitimacy to the text. They are its co-authors. Also, to have some coherent critique to these kinds of projects one should have a text co-authored by an art critic or art historian and an expert from the field the work is addressing, whether they be a community organizer, a politician, or an economist, etc. This is because long-term projects are the encounter of one or more disciplines (art and pedagogy, art and community organizing, art and economy, art and design, etc.) and can only be adequately represented in a holistic manner. One art critical category cannot properly evaluate all the complexities the projects have. Also, due to the length and the constant natural evolution of the project and its own rhythms, a singular traditional critique cannot do justice to the project. The idea that a critique is a final evaluation of a long-term project can be a very harmful approach, because what is still under construction is evaluated as the final result. It would be best for the critical approach to assume the temporality of what was witnessed or what was thought in relationship with the things to come. Maybe in long-term projects there is no final result until the project is closed. I think criticism of

long-term projects needs to clearly state that it is about a specific moment in its evolution.

In terms of criticism I have also been a bit unsatisfied with the constant search for a model of the artist that is not appropriate for socially engaged art. People look for the authorial artist type, but in these kinds of projects artists are initiators. For socially engaged art you need another type, another model of the artist, one where the ethics of the practice is incorporated into what they naturally are. Art critics and art historians need to understand that traditional categories of art and traditional ways of analysing them will not do justice to socially engaged art, political art or Arte Útil practices. These practices are like a branch becoming more independent each day from what we have seen art doing. They come with a new way to comprehend the use of art as well as a new way to understand old concepts like audience and participation. These types of practices open a new regime of the symbolic.

Tania Bruguera is an interdisciplinary artist working primarily in behavior art, performance, installation, and video. She has been a participant in Documenta 11 (Germany) as well as in several biennales such as Venice (Italy), Johannesburg (South Africa), Sao Paolo (Brazil), Shanghai (China), Havana (Cuba), and Site Santa Fe (United States.) She has lectured extensively internationally among others at the New School in New York, the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, the Royal College of Art in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1998 she was selected as a Guggenheim fellow (United States). In 2000 she received the Prince Claus Prize (The Netherlands). She received her MFAs from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (United States) and Instituto Superior de Arte (Cuba). Her BFA is from Escuela de Arte San Alejandro (Havana). She currently lives and works between New York and Havana.

Alex Kershaw is an artist and writer currently working on his PhD at the Visual Arts Department, University of California San Diego.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

The Inner Public

Krzysztof Wodiczko

In this essay I would like to elaborate on the specific kind of public that emerges in my projects and that is generated from within the process of social and technical production of these projects. I call this public the Inner Public. *The Inner Public is critical to project participants' testimonial role and to the social integrity and complexity of the projects. For the participants, and for the development of the projects, the group and network of people who constitute the Inner Public function as the projects' first audience and informed interlocutor. The Inner Public also plays a role as secondary witness and as an emotionally involved "fearless listener," without which the participants' stories and testimonies – my projects' foundation – cannot be developed and shared. Participants receive moral support and tactical advice from the Inner Public, and, considering the risks attached to their acts of public truth-telling, a sense of protection. Participants are the nucleus and the core of the Inner Public. Through its involvement, the Inner Public generates the development and transformation of the projects. In sum, the integrity of any project, in all the stages of its production, including its public reception and its social afterlife, depends on the testimonial role of the project participants and the audience function of the Inner Public.*

Project Participants as Collaborators

My works in public space include participatory projections-animations of urban monuments as well as the performative use of specially designed communicative equipment. These projects'

purpose is to inspire and assist the people who choose to take part in them to become present day *parrhesiastes* (free, fearless speakers) and social agents.[1] By extension, the aim of these projects is to contribute to the process of animating the city as a site of agonistic public discourse and dynamic democratic process.[2] The most critical aspect of my projects is the process of involving, inspiring and assisting participant-collaborators in the development of their capacity for sharing and critically communicating their experience in a frank, fearless and emotionally articulate way. Through these projects they performatively tell the truth of their lived experience, not only on behalf of themselves, but also, as emergent social agents, on behalf of others who have lived through and continue to suffer unjust conditions of life, but do not have the advantage of such communicative media.

In most discussions about my work the focus is on the spectators rather than on the participants who are the key contributors to my projects. This is due to the fact that my projects are treated as spectacles or public events–something that is developed solely for the perception and reception of the so-called "public." Consequently, those conversations that refer to my projects tend to focus on questions and matters concerned with the "reaction of the public," the "audience's response," and further, of the "public impact" of the works. These issues are important, but in my view, divert attention from most of my projects' social and artistic objectives. When people examine my projects from an external perspective (that of the spectator), they risk missing the point of view of its inner workings and the projects' focus on the participants as project collaborators, performers, truth-tellers and testifiers. The external perspective also misses the psychologically developmental and aesthetic aspects of the formulation of public witness testimony.

To be fair, the limited focus on public reception is in part understandable, given that those who comment on a work are often not aware of the process that goes into the project's development. Since many participants desire to remain anonymous, and, due to the psychologically sensitive process of recording testimony,

the inner perspective of a project's development often cannot be shared. Thus, the work is perceived externally, on the basis of its final public presentation and in terms of video documentation. The focus on the final appearance of the projects misses what I consider to be the main point of the work: everything that is human and social and that contributes to the making of the project *before* the final moment of its public presentation and reception. This includes, among many other aspects, the initial meetings with the people who may take part in a project, the long process of their self-selection, the elaborate process of recording and re-recording testimonies, related conversations and discussions, as well as other developmental stages of the project–usually referred to as "preparatory" material.

In most theoretical and critical discussions of public art, there is rarely any emphasis placed on the value and meaning of projects for those who invest lived experience in them. However, a grasp of the psychologically developmental, therapeutic, educational and performative procedures of these works is crucial for understanding the social objective of such projects. In this essay I would like to recount the basic developmental stages of the process involved in making any one of my projects. This, I believe, is important for understanding not only the method of my work, but also the method of other artists' whose projects involve working with people. It's impossible to develop a more sophisticated account of methodology until we move beyond the narrow focus on audience reaction that is typical in much art criticism. Such a limited, external focus, seemingly insightful and no matter how well meaning, reduces the scope and understanding of the project. Considering the kind of work I do, I would much prefer if a more appropriate question was asked, such as: "What was the meaning and the value of the project to those who choose to speak, perform and address the public through it?"

To save one soul in a city by inspiring and assisting someone to break their silence and publicly share, address and denounce unacceptable conditions of life is to save the entire city. By salvaging

and expanding the inclusiveness of the city's democratic process and its public space as a site of critical discourse, the people who choose to be part of a project are not merely 'participants,' since such word would suggests too passive a role, but are active agents who take the project to heart and contribute to it by putting themselves on the line. For this, they must also develop an artistry—sometimes to the point of performative virtuosity—in making use of these projects in public space. A self-selected group of such collaborators and performative users always plays a fundamental role in each project. If they succeed in making sense of the project for their own lives and the lives of others, it is their success. If they do not succeed, I consider it my failure.

Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Tijuana Projection* (2001). Organized and commissioned by INSITE 2000, part of the project in the Border Art Festival of San Diego and Tijuana. Photo courtesy of Krzysztof Wodiczko.

Two Publics

Two kinds of publics are constituted by each project. The first public is internal. It comes from within the project and is formed through the discourse generated by and accompanying all the social and technical stages of a project's development, research, production and postproduction. I call this the *Inner Public*. The second public is external as it comes from outside the project and encounters the project in its final or near final form, through its public tests, final presentation and through the unfolding public discourse around it. It becomes a witness and an audience to what is presented as a final work, a result of the workings of the *Inner Public* itself. I call this second public the *Outer Public*.

In the development of each project, my primary focus is always on the formation of the *Inner Public*. The measure of a project's success is its capacity to inspire, assist, and protect the development and transmission of the public voice and expression of those who choose to take part in it. As they gradually begin creating and perfecting the project's narrative and master their communicative performance they become its formative force—its primary contributors. The formation of an *Inner Public* begins with a small group of potential contributors. This Core Group serves as an "avant-garde" in the formation of the *Inner Public*. These few people, three or four of them, encourage others to join the project. Even if later in the process of producing a project one of two of its members drop out for some reason (as it happened in the case of one of the projects I'll discuss below, produced in Tijuana), their formational function is crucial. The Core Group is not only a nucleus, it also serves as a reservoir from which the "participants" are recruited and the *Inner Public* further developed.

The Core Group benefits from the support of a team that develops a strong trust towards the project and, in this case, consisted mainly of the head of Factor-X, a Tijuana-based worker's rights organization, and her co-workers, as well as a group of family members and friends who provided hidden, behind the scene

informal support. Lawyers, curators, production and postproduction teams and of course myself are a part of the Core Group's support system. The process of decision-making regarding each step in the development of a project is shared by all parties. The project's discursive dynamic is an important aspect of the project because it brings to it both the inside and the outside perspective. Considering this dynamic, the Core Group, thanks to the formal support team as well as the informal support network that operates behind the scene, becomes the nucleus of the first public of the project, its *Inner Public*. The *Inner Public* is born of the project and acts as its foundation and vital force. Its role as social agent may go beyond the support that is offered to project participants because its members are connected with other social support groups and networks through which they may add critical support and an informed perception of the project.

The Inner Public

The project and the formation of the *Inner Public* begins as soon as those who keep coming to a project's initial meetings begin to discuss it and consider their potential involvement in it. This is usually a small number of people to whom the idea of the project has been presented. Often, they are initially suspicious of the project, for fear of being manipulated by it. At the same time, for some, their curiosity and intuitive interest contradicts and challenges this suspicion. Taking a leap of faith they may eventually choose to endorse the project's overall cultural aim and consider the possibility of joining it. Without fully knowing why, they are gradually drawn to the idea of contributing. Overcoming or at least temporarily putting aside their initial suspicion, they open up to the project and consider the possibility that in some ways it will be useful to them. At this stage, their role shifts beyond being mere participants. Rather, they become co-creators as they gradually become involved and invested in developing the project. Initial discussions become increasingly sharp and articulate and exchanged stories gain in honesty, fearlessness and emotional charge. What is said, and how

it is said, connects the participants' existential experience with a critical and political perspective.

As meetings proceed and are attended by new potential participants, who are often accompanied by their friends and families, the Core Group of those who are now fully committed to the project emerges. This group becomes the core of subsequent meetings. Every participant deliberates over the possibility of their direct or indirect, "behind the scene," involvement in the project by gauging what they might gain from it, emotionally, socially, and culturally. They take into consideration not only their own gain but also the project's social impact on others and on society at large. In this way, regular meetings are extended by other contacts and gatherings, behind the scene, which trigger the focus of the *Inner Public* on matters that are often kept private, hidden, or suppressed, and which then become issues of political and public significance. Despite the fact that the project's working meetings unfold within places that are not "public" and are that are invisible to the "outside world," these discussions are nonetheless part of the larger public discourse. This is because of the "publicness" of the project and the fact that issues that are normally hidden but that are then shared, exchanged and passionately deliberated are the very heart of these meetings.

Engaged in this discourse, members of the initial group finally confirm their "participation" in the project. They have come to perceive the social need for revealing in public the hidden truth of their lives, and they do so on behalf of themselves and others. They see the value of the project as a vehicle for such testimony. They also feel that through the project they can connect or re-connect with the larger society and in addition gain communicative skills. In this way, the Core Group of the project's *Inner Public* is formed. In further stages of the development of the project, and as a result of its social inclusiveness, this Core Group of the *Inner Public* will greatly expand. When expanded, the *Inner Public* will engage others who are not directly involved but who are supporting those who attend the meetings. Through its connections with the

broader city population, the *Inner Public* becomes an informative and supportive force affecting the reception of the project on the part the *Outer Public*.

Stages in the Formation of the Inner Public

The *Inner Public* is formed through the following successive stages. The idea of the project is presented to an art institution that is experienced in the production of media-based projects in public space, such as a media art center, public art festival, museum, etc. The institution then establishes an initial connection with those social support organizations that are most relevant to the project, be it a war veterans' association, a homeless center, a *maquiladora* workers association, an immigrant support center, or a transitional social housing service. These organizations in turn involve their cadre of social service workers as potential collaborators. The proposed project is then presented to other members of the organization. As the first objective of these workers is to protect and help the people they serve, they will likely raise many questions and concerns regarding the participants' safety and the project's concrete cultural, social and psychological benefits for the participants. These issues must be further discussed with both the social workers' superiors and with the art institution.

In the case of the Tijuana-based project, staged at El Centro Cultural, the process of determining the subject matter for the work, as well as identifying a potential urban site and learning about and discussing possible options and issues, included, among other contacts, the head of a team of social workers at Factor X, an urban sociologist from the University of Tijuana who's work focuses on the situation of Maquiladora workers in Tijuana (specifically addressing violence against women and their social and legal supporters by factory managers, the police, and unemployed men, and against police by drug cartel's etc.), and some very initial but important contacts with female maquiladora employees. The idea of creating

a projection-animation at El Centro Cultural, an iconic building in Tijuana which residents call La Bola, and of inscribing speaking faces onto it, developed in response to what I learned from these people. I thought that the idea of projecting, in the most familiar and accessible public space in the city, the magnified faces and voices of these who refuse to hide and be silent, who bravely tell the truth of their lives and share their critical position on the current situation in Tijuana, and who do so through the façade (face) of the most prominent structure in the city, made democratic and "parrhesiastic" sense. My initial sketches presenting this idea were than presented to the above mentioned people and to the curators, to whom I also conveyed my willingness to change the proposed projection idea, should they feel it was for some reason wrong or inappropriate. I was a bit surprised that it met with their approval without much question or worry. During the subsequent preproduction and production meetings the aesthetic direction of the projection itself was seldom discussed or questioned.

If the project "survives" this initial stage of consideration, examination and discussion, and if it promises both benefits and safety, it is now ready to move on and be presented to potential participants by a social worker, by myself and by the project's social production coordinator. Potential participants are initially skeptical and suspicious of being invaded and manipulated by the project. My responsibility is to make clear to them that my aim as an artist is to animate public space with the ideas, experiences, and voices of those who are marginalized from it, for their own benefit and for that of the larger public. It also has to made clear that the specific direction of the project is subject to changes occasioned by the participants' feedback and that the substance of the testimonial, critical and propositional input must come from them and not from anyone else. The participants are made to understand that they will be both the authors and actor-performers of what they say and how they say it through the project.

Despite the above explanations, the integrity of the project is put to the test once again by both the social workers and the

Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Tijuana Projection* (2001). The headset, equipped with a video camera, LED lights and a microphone allows the wearer to project her face and voice in real time onto the facade of El Centro Cultural in Tijuana. Organized and commissioned by INSITE 2000, part of the project in the Border Art Festival of San Diego and Tijuana. Photo courtesy of Krzysztof Wodiczko.

potential participants who feel curious but still skeptical about the undertaking. While discussions take place some among the potential participants express a guarded interest in joining the project; others no longer show up to the meetings. On the other hand, those who initially claim to have "nothing to say," but keep returning time to time to observe the proceedings, may come to be the most motivated, articulate and frank performers and animators of the projects. Still, the project is in danger of being psychologically compromised and even destroyed by potential participants, who doubt, mistrust, and scrutinize it for having been proposed to them from an external, unknown, and uninformed agent. It is now in serious danger of being rejected entirely. Despite such a self-defensive reaction, the social production team and I continue to

organize the meetings, determined that the project will somehow take place.

The obligation of the primary team is to survive this potential destruction and present itself as strong again and again. We may have to present the project to new potential participants as a way to spark the interest and confidence of those in doubt. It is now clear to the latter that they are the ones who must choose the project rather than be chosen by it: no one is going to be rejected but neither is anyone going to be a privileged participant. Upon such realization, the project seems to have survived the danger of destruction. Consequently, its use value has increased as it has begun to be perceived as self-confident, open, inclusive, and durable. As participants understand that the project is in their hands, they become both its users and collaborators. As discussions continue, the participants feel that they are ready to confront difficult matters and take on brave tasks, such as publicly sharing the harsh and often painful truth of their lived experience.

As the proposed project gradually loses its "outsider" status, it is progressively adopted and shaped by the inner world of the Core Group of potential participants. While it still belongs to the outside world from which it originated, it has now become part of the inner world of those who infuse it with their shared stories, testimonies and critical ideas. The project becomes a sort of "transitional object" for the participants who in this way become its collaborators.[3] To secure the project's developmental character, the issue as to whether it is "Wodiczko's artistic project" or the "art of participants testimonial performance," is formulated and brought into discussion by the organizers. It is not raised again, and—in the course of the increasingly emotional exchange and sharing of stories by the Core Group and later by the participants in prerecording and recording sessions—it is perhaps intuitively understood as an inappropriate and potentially disturbing question. The project absorbs the ideas, imagination, and hopes of those who now intuitively feel that they can somehow use it for the betterment of their own traumatized lives, and even further the lives of others like themselves. Some

sense a potential new role and even a mission for themselves as spokespeople and social agents.[4]

The meetings gradually take the form of an experience-sharing and truth-telling workshop, during which some participants write notes in preparation for the video recording. In some instances the project becomes a truth-writing workshop. Because writing is governed by a different part of the brain than the one responsible for speaking, writing helps some people recover suppressed and difficult memories. They may try to read them aloud before recording them for projection or before sharing them with the use of the performative equipment that I design for use in public space. At the same time, outside of the meetings, potential participants discuss the project with their friends, trusted members of their family, lawyers, psychotherapists, social workers, investigative journalists and so forth. They may be in a contact with lawyers (in the case of the Tijuana Projection through the Factor X social support organization) or psychotherapists, art therapists and cultural workers (in the case of Derry-Londonderry project discussed below through the Verbal Arts Center). They debate the meaning of the project and the risk and benefits that further and deeper involvement may entail.

An increasing number of people are now involved as indirect contributors to the project. The *Inner Public* expands in scale and scope beyond the initial Core Group, becomes more confident and committed to the project, and is more open and inclusive to newcomers. As others join the working meetings, the traumatic memories and difficult experiences are now shared and confronted. The project is now ready for further development. Supported by a network of informed and engaged members, the initial Core Group of potential participants has now become an integral part of the growing inner circle of the project–its *Inner Public*. This could include not only family and friends, but also social, legal, and therapeutic support networks, as well as a technical production and postproduction crew, including a film crew, video editing and special interface equipment crew, and a projection, sound and

lighting team, among others. At this stage, the formation of the *Inner Public* is complete.

The Inner and the Outer Public

The public media, especially their local branches, as well as socially minded journalists and reporters, tend to focus their attention on project collaborators and other members of the team, giving them voice through interviews. This offers an additional opportunity for the members of the *Inner Public* to share further with the *Outer Public* what they have to say, that is, beyond what has been already said through the projections-monument animations or public performances with instruments. Prepared by their own testimonial work in the project, the project's participants-collaborators-performers may now wish to say more, through radio, television, and the press. In this way the witnesses, listeners and readers multiply the points of conversation throughout the city. This increased mediation injects a pointed content to the exchange of information and views among the members of the *Outer Public*. The project takes place not only during the public presentation but also, and often, during the earlier projection and performances tests, when media people and passers-by stop and speak to the project's performative users, to the crew members, to project coordinators and to other members of the *Inner Public*. Ad hoc discussions about the project's technical aspects switch to questions related to the project's social aspects.

People in the city begin to hear rumors while driving by (stopping without turning off their car's engine). Because "someone was wearing strange equipment" or because there is "something involving the monument," the next day at work, or in some other situation, someone will ask someone else what was happening and may receive a quite informed and passionate answer. The public media, especially the press, use the secondary or ripple response to the project to acknowledge and address the issues that are still

too controversial to expose directly. Rather than "tackle the problem head on," the press takes the opportunity of the projection event or media performance itself and of the availability of direct statements and stories from people who collaborated in it, interviewing each of them (and myself) separately to raise issues with apparent objectivity. Typically TV crews interview the larger, diversified "audience," with the same question: "What do you think about this?" When present at that moment, the members of *Inner Public* often relay the question to others in order to trigger further public discourse and to reach toward the *Outer Public*.

Speaking of the impact of the *Inner Public* on the *Outer Public*, one must acknowledge the importance of "unintentional" contributors, collaborators and users of my projects. In one example, the projection on *El Centro Cultural* in Tijuana, such an unexpected collaborator was a professional interpreter who was commissioned from Mexico City to provide live translation of the unfolding of a real time projection narrative. At one point the interpreter burst into tears, unintentionally interrupting the flow of translation and of public reception. The emotionally disturbing narrative of the projection became emotionally disturbed itself. A large number of people, who had come from San Diego and knew little if any Spanish, and who had been wearing headphones to hear the translation, suddenly took them off. The translator told me later that this was the first time in her long career that she had experienced such an emotional and unprofessional reaction. This was a reaction that came from her heart or stomach, perhaps triggered by some of her own lived experience, a "Brechtian" interruption producing the "alienation effect."[5] She joined the project only at its final production stage but unexpectedly and unintentionally became its crucial collaborator. Her "unprofessional," emotionally charged behavior greatly contributed to the strength of the *Inner Public* and to the project's perception by the *Outer Public*.

The Outer Public as Witness

Even when viewers come to a project as mere spectators, they often stay there not "without interest" and listen to—and hear—painful stories and testimonies. They may stay through repeated cycles in the projection loop for ethical reasons. Despite even the rain, they perhaps feel obliged to listen and watch out of solidarity with those who bravely opened their mouth and spoke out. What is projected is not only the truth of what is said, but also the truth of the very refusal to remain silent about that truth—the truth about the possibility of doing so with emotional intensity, honesty, and with a sense of social mission. Testimony in public space is an assault on the silence about matters that are vital to the city and to its people. Viewers are reluctant to walk away from such a blast of truth. Perhaps they feel obliged to stay because what is said is difficult to hear and because it is painfully true.

It is possible that some spectators regret they were not part of the performance, because they realize its critical and proactive (transformative) dimension. Realizing this loss, they are ready to take on the role of relay, to speak up, to break the silence, and to design a more meaningful way of living with their own trauma. Were they spectators? Were they an audience? Although many may come with the expectation and intention to simply "enjoy" the projection as a "spectacle," they may find themselves drawn into it as unintentional witnesses, co-witnesses or secondary witnesses. They recognize through their own experience the truthfulness of the testimonial narrative of the projection. Staying with the projection, these viewers both reveal and publicly confirm the accuracy that is transmitted by the project's stories, testimonies and statements. Through their emotional focus on the projection, they build an empathetic bridge between themselves, as members of the *Outer Public*, the participants and the *Inner Public* of the project. Through their "fearless listening" they add to the credibility and the truthfulness of the project. Despite emotional difficulty, and even sometimes the rain, these committed and well-informed

people give an example to others to stay and bear witness. They become true contributors to the project and help build the civic consciousness of the *Outer Public*.

"Fearless Speaking" Requires "Fearless Listening" and Vice Versa

The projection at El Centro Cultural gained momentum when the project participants spoke through special wearable equipment to project their faces and voices "in real time" onto the gigantic façade of El Centro Cultural in front of the assembled crowd. They were encouraged when sensing the supportive focus and fearless listening commitment of this special and large contingent of the *Outer Public* and this added to their confidence and the emotional force of their fearless speech. This added to the external "moral support" received by participants by trusted and emotionally supportive social workers, friends, family members, lawyers, and others from the project team and larger network of the *Inner Public* who came to encourage and protect them. My own participation was temporary of course, but continuity was created through Factor X, a Mexican government sponsored organization that teaches the maquiladora workers about their human, legal and political rights, especially these relate to labor relations, which supported the project. They continued to use the original footage of the projection's testimonial videos as well as the video documenting the actual event of projection long after the projection event to solicit new members, to educate them and trigger their engagement. It was also used by Factor X social workers as part of their case studies presentations at national and international conferences on Maquiladora labor and border economy. This is another example of the influence of the *Inner Public* on the *Outer Public*, this time in terms of the "afterlife' of the project.[6]

Case Study: Public Projections in Derry-Londonderry, 2013

As was the case in Derry-Londonderry some participants may need to seek the approval and endorsement of larger groups of people before the can make a final commitment. They may need the approval of the segregated and embattled parts of the city where they themselves live and work. Participants, especially those involved in social work, have done this so as to protect their families, the people with whom and for whom they work, themselves and the project from violent repercussions. They present to others the larger benefits of the public dialogue that the project is hoping to encourage, and defend it against sectarian mistrust and opposition. Again, in the case of the Derry projection, dialogue was especially difficult and critically important, since it was based on and relied upon the participation of people of all ages from both the Republican and Loyalists communities, many of whom, in the not too distant past, were fighting and killing each other in a protracted civil war. Radical groups and militants from each side of the conflict were ready to threaten the project by posing the risk of violent attacks against participants and the larger public.

According to the account of a cultural worker from the Verbal Art Center, a cultural center responsible for co-organizing the project, and thanks to the engagement of the participants, community workers and activists, at least five hundred people from Protestant and Catholic parts of the city were involved behind the scene as part of the project's social and political support. These five hundred people greatly multiplied the *Inner Public* well beyond the twenty-two core participants (from both Catholic and Protestant communities). This was in addition to the similar number of people on the social, cultural and technical production team plus their friends and families as well as these who could not participate but were "around." The Derry City Council did not expect that the project would receive such broad social support. Its members were not aware or were not confident about the potential benefits of the

Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Public Projection for Derry Londonderry*, Lumiere Festival, Derry-Londonderry, Ireland. Produced by Artichoke, Commissioned by City of Culture 2013, photograph by Maria Niro. Photograph courtesy of Krzysztof Wodiczko.

project, secured by the very process of its production via an *Inner Public*, and expressed fear that the project would cause violence rather than encourage an open and inclusive dialogue in public space. The fears increased when the City Council was informed by Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, that it "cannot protect the project" against threats of attacks from militant paramilitary groups in the city.

Despite such a tense situation, the risk of violence diminished because of the support that was gained by the participants from their inner circles and because of the positive impact of informal community meetings that engaged influential groups from Catholic and Protestant sections of the city. Generated in this way by an *Inner Public* of nearly six hundred people that represented two

very different religious and political views, the project's method acted as a security blanket and buffer zone for the development of it's final presentation, when members dissolved potential violence by invisibly but effectively mixing with the *Outer Public* at various sites of projection. They did this by merging into the "audience," (*Outer Public*) during the projection without being recognized as members of the *Inner Public*. They would engage in conversations with spectators, "infiltrating" them with a more refined or informed perception of the project based on an understanding of the projection as a cultural contribution to the necessary work of an open and inclusive engagement with the memory of the civil war. People endorsed and protected the project as a cultural vehicle for the creation of an inclusive public space and for the transformation of a dangerously segregated city into a common place. They supported the use of public space for symbolic, nonviolent exchange, open to opposing views and beliefs, including the traumatic memories of The Troubles (the civil war in Northern Ireland).

With the support of its *Inner Public*, the project was ready to become a transitional zone in conflict transformation that could contribute to a positive peace process, based on open, "agonistic" memory discourse and not on the idea that this violent history should be segregated to public silence and private sectarian talk.[7] As a result of the presence and influence of the *Inner Public*, the violent members of sectarian groups from the *Outer Public* lost their social support and could not attack the project. Projections were staged at the Derry Corner, a site charged with the memory of Bloody Sunday and of the beginning of The Troubles. The project demanded an emotional focus on the voices of the participants who expressed opposing points of views, critical interpretations of the past and the present, and ideas about the future. By listening to disturbing memories and testimonies, the *Outer Public* actively engaged in agonistic memory and no violent reactions against the project took place. And so, the fears of the City Council and the warnings from Sinn Féin proved to be unfounded

Case Study: El Centro Cultural Tijuana, Baja California Norte, Mexico, 2001

For the El Centro Cultural projection in Tijuana, there were eight core members who finally chose to join the project. The work focused on women who had suffered domestic and labor-related violence. Through the larger-than-life projections of their faces the participants testified about their own experiences and those of hundreds of young maquiladora workers who had survived police assaults, drug violence, gender abuse and life threatening industrial working conditions. The project was organized by the InSite 2000 border art festival. Key to the project was the involvement of Factor X, which I've described above. Factor X, as I've noted already, is an organization that functions primarily to teach Maquiladora workers about their rights. Since the overwhelming majority of these workers are very young women Factor X also operates as a post-traumatic self-help support group for them, and thus indirectly supports their families. In their discussions with workers and their families Factor X helps them cope with, and reduce, the many forms of violence that they regularly encounter, including violence related to either the workplace or the police, domestic and sexual violence and violence they encounter in crossing the border into the U.S..[8] It is the first space in Tijuana in which these workers can share experiences that had been, due to shame, previously kept private, such as physical abuse, rape, incest, sexual abuse, their merciless exploitation at work, and medical and family problems in Tijuana, and in the countries and villages from which they came in southern Mexico further in Central and South America. Factor X meetings fostered arguments, discussions, confessions, grievances and new demands, and helped in the development of stories, testimonies and statements for the project.

My arrival at the Factor X center initiated a process of self-selection by potential participants. Because people seemed reluctant to participate, I was repeatedly questioned by a social worker, who insisted that I call her regularly but who was nearly

impossible to reach by telephone. I had to keep proving myself committed, qualified, and resilient, despite the fact that the odds seemed stacked against the project. I faced initial doubt and skepticism on the part of this social worker. Other members of Factor X as well as the militant lawyers' group that supported and protected its operation were understandably wary of foreign filmmakers and journalists who notoriously exploit local misery for their careers abroad, and who, doing so, simplify, romanticize and sensationalize the life of people and compromise their safety. However, in the end, a new perception of me emerged and I began to be called "artista polaco" (Polish artist), which gave me some credibility—though one could just as easily have called me American or Canadian. The name "Polish artist" was probably invoking the myth of the Pole as imaginary fellow-revolutionary from the time of Mexicans' nineteenth-century independence struggles and definitely as someone to be trusted more than a "Gringo" (a derogatory name for Americans in Mexico).

At each meeting, there was a different configuration of potential self-selecting participants. A discussion about collaboration led us to include the feedback and tangential involvement of even those who ultimately decided to not participate. Each of the potential participants began consulting with their families and friends before considering taking a calculated risk in agreeing to join the project. As it has been the case with many other projects, the eight people who eventually decided to embrace the project were each part of larger networks that were not directly involved but acted as witnesses, disputants or supporters. This multiplying e□ect also expanded to an outer circle of social workers, lawyers, and professionals. Some maquiladora women workers who came to the meetings to discuss their involvement in the project brought their babies and children. Others brought their husbands, brothers and sisters, and even their dogs. All of these became contributing members of the *Inner Public*, even the dogs.[9]

Because it was a public project, the contributing performers had to think carefully about what they would say and how to say it.

One striking example of the calculated risk involved in participating in the projection came from a woman whose husband had been imprisoned as a result of her report to the police and a lawsuit for incest. He had made it clear that upon his release he planned to kill her, but she chose nevertheless to speak through the projection with the hope of protecting herself. She hoped that the visibility and public knowledge of her situation granted by the project would lead to a degree of protection on the part of the media and the public sphere. The process of developing the project created a protective buffer zone of witnesses between the protagonists and those who might wish to act against them. Thus, from the initial core, the circle of the *Inner Public* began expanding into concentric networks of people who came to provide social protection and moral support to participants during the projection tests and later during the final presentations.

The following is an account of the people who contributed to the development and formation of the *Inner Public*. There were eight project participants and three social workers—members of the Factor X organization. The three social workers engaged a few others, plus some other volunteer rights workers who were working for Factor X. About six people engaged others in discussing and elaborating the project and so there were about eighteen people total. The initial group of users-contributors expanded through their closest friends and family members, who provided consultation, consolation, and opinions (eight contributors x three or four close contacts = 24-36 people). The friends and family members of the Factor X professional help network became implicated in decisions related to the project (about eight professionals involving five friends and family members in discussions = 40 people). There were also the social researchers and academics from outside of Factor X, like urban geographers from the University of Tijuana, a documentary filmmaker-activist, and the colleagues of artists from a border art collective (about ten people).

All of these people were highly engaged in discussions about the project and without them it would have been difficult for me to

learn about Tijuana's labor and cultural context. Also involved was the social production coordinator of the project and her assistant, two InSite 2000 festival co-curators, the director from El Centro Cultural, a translator, and a videographer documenting the project, as well as volunteer student helpers (six to seven people). Last but nor least there was an emotionally and politically committed technical production crew made up of around 25 people: a technical coordinator, a video and sound recording team (three to four people), a video editing team (two people), a video projection team (three people), a sound projection team (three people), people to light the building (one or two people), the videographers (three operators plus one technician), the real time projection interface, sound and video mixing team (two people), a professional interpreter, some university students and a few others who assisted.

All of the aforementioned people were the members of the *Inner Public*. They amounted to a sizable group of about 150-200 people. This *Inner Public* was always there, as Brecht would say, "not without interest," that is, with a willingness to become motivated, responsive, unnerved, at times shocked or radicalized by what they saw. Being a passive or active part of the tests and of the final projection event, some of the members of the *Inner Public* chose to act as the project's informal advocates as well as a protective buffer zone for the safety of those participants performing in public. Most of the 150-200 members of the *Inner Public* had been socially connected with a large number of people from various social strata in the main cities of Tijuana and San Diego. Through such links the *Inner Public*—a strong, well informed, and emotionally supportive context-specific nucleus—helped to generate some 450 to 600 members of the *Outer Public*. This developmental and interventionist *Inner Public* formed a temporary context-specific nucleus around which the project generated its *Outer Public*, which now includes the reader of this text.

Deliberations on the "role of the public" in public art must take into account the fact that in some cases such art, through the social and technical process of its making, may generate its own

public, a "public-within," the *Inner Public*, and that such a public may indirectly and directly effect the larger reception of work by a "public-without," the *Outer Public*. This may be especially evident in the case of artistic and cultural projects that are based on the development of communicative performance by the participants (collaborating contributors) and on the support received by them from their families, friends, and the projects' social and technical production team, as well as from other social groups, organizations and networks.

Krzysztof Wodiczko is renowned for his large-scale slide and video projections on architectural facades and monuments. He has realized more than ninety of such public projections in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, England, Germany, Holland, Northern Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. Since the late 1980s, his projections have involved the active participation of marginalized and estranged city residents. Simultaneously, and also internationally, he has been designing and implementing a series of nomadic instruments and vehicles with homeless, immigrant, and war veteran operators for their survival and communication. He received the Hiroshima Art Price "for his contribution as an international artist to the world peace", and represented Poland and Canada in Venice Biennale. The comprehensive monograph of his work has been published by Black Dog, London (2012) and his collected writing will be published in fall of 2015 by the same publisher. Krzysztof Wodiczko is a Professor of Art, Design and the Public Domain at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

Notes

This text, updated in Vinalhaven during the summer of 2013 and 2014, is based on lecture notes for the symposium *The Public in Question: The Politics of Artistic Practices*, held at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, May 4-5, 2007. Fragments are drawn from an unpublished interview I did with Dorris Somer at Harvard University in 2009.

1. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, edited by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001).

2. Chantal Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Model of Democracy," in *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 80-107.

3. D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, [1971] 1982), pp.1-25.

4. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence–From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

5. See Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, edited by John Willet (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964).

6. One year after the projection, a Ph.D. candidate from Dublin visited the Tijuana projection site and the Factor X organization. Her dissertation addressed Dublin issues through the encouragement of Factor X to think seriously about developing new educational and cultural methods on domestic and workplace violence as they relate to human rights and politics. Examining the Dublin and Tijuana situation, she referred to Foucault's concept of fearless speech. She later wrote me a note about her experience in that Tijuana bore out my own observations that the courage to speak depends on reciprocal fearless listening and that public truth-telling (testimony) and public truth-seeking (witnessing) are interdependent.

7. On the subject of conflict transformation and positive peace, see Hugh Miall, *Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task*, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004, available online at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/miall_handbook.pdf, accessed September 15, 2013.

8. Maquiladoras are Mexican factories run by foreign companies that export their products to the country of origin. More than 90% of all the murder victims in Tijuana are teenage women. The factories where they work broadcast their labor preferences on big banners that say "Girls Only." Murder is the most visible crime committed against these young women–and therefore against their families and children–but the private and common crimes of rape and incest are a significant feature of their exploitation. A large part of the population of Tijuana is supported by these women as cheap and dependable labor in the many hundreds of maquiladora factories along the border. Tijuana is a large metropolis and the great numbers of unemployed and frustrated men are sources of violence against women.

9. If the initial objective of Factor X was to teach younger maquiladora workers their rights, the projection also eventually became a forum for

the trainers themselves, regarding their social, political and cultural activity. Benefits could be perceived to come from public media art, including its art education and art therapy aspects, especially since the activists of Factor X raised issues linked to their own lives that would otherwise not have seemed primary. In many ways they began to work as a post-traumatic stress therapy self-help group.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

A Week in Pasadena: Collaborations Toward a Design Modality For Ethnographic Research

Luke Cantarella, Christine Hegel and George E. Marcus

This article describes a recent phase of an ongoing collaboration that has evolved since 2001 between anthropologists George Marcus and Christine Hegel and designer Luke Cantarella. The collaboration has been driven by the observation that the signature method of anthropological research—ethnographic observation and immersion in fieldwork—can benefit from some of the techniques and interventions that are characteristic of studio design inquiry and participatory art practice. It has also been propelled by our observation of the ways in which design or art commissions can evolve into ethnographic inquiries. Marcus founded the Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine in 2006, and he has since discovered that a number of new labs, collaboratories, or studios have emerged over the past decade or more to experiment with the classic orientations of ethnographic method, leaning especially toward design and art practices, combined with new visual and sensory technologies. In 2010, he met Cantarella when he was head of the Scenic Design faculty at UCI, and Hegel when she was an associate of the Anthropology Department at UCI. Cantarella and Hegel produced an initial project together at UCI that led to further, ongoing collaborations, including the Stern v. Marshall Archive (SVMA) project described below. An examination of this project provides an opportunity to articulate, in the midst of the creative process, the first draft of a working model of our activity together, which we are calling Productive Encounters.

Monday: Into the Wind Tunnel

A series of massive arched wooden trusses spanning the distant ceiling are among the first things one notices upon entering the Wind Tunnel, a cavernous hall on the south campus of Pasadena's Art Center College of Design (ACCD). It's an impressive white and grey space as big as a football field, and containing numerous reconfigurable studio spaces, a model-making workshop, a small electronics fabrication lab, massive cutting tables, large format printers and three self-contained rooms marooned in the space like icebergs in the open ocean. Originally built by a consortium of leading aerospace manufacturers at the end of World War II, it now houses the innovative Media Design Practices (MDP) program, an M.F.A. program that trains students to address social issues through design practice. It was here we came in the summer of 2014 to workshop an ethnographic project as guests of Elizabeth Chin, an anthropologist and co-director of the "Field" track of MDP, who was running a Laboratory of Speculative Ethnology focused on articulating "a synergy between ethnography and design that affirmatively claims space beyond normative, white territories."

While Chin's program uses ethnographic processes to enrich and problematize design practice, we hoped to bring design practices to bear in the framing of an emergent ethnographic project. In the fall of 2013 the three of us (Cantarella, Hegel and Marcus) had a series of conversations with legal anthropologist Justin B. Richland. As a result of these conversations Richland proposed a collaboration with us to explore a new working methodology focused on the famous Stern v. Marshall legal case, in which Anna Nicole Smith, and later her estate, sued her deceased husband's son for excluding her from his father's estate. Richland was very closely acquainted with the case because his father had represented Anna Nicole Smith. The goal was to formulate new research questions in the interdisciplinary space between anthropology and legal studies, using design studio practices as a key methodology. We planned to

spend a week together in the ACCD lab working towards the design of a Productive Encounter (see below) to be staged at a later date.

As a socio-legal project, the history of the Stern v. Marshall case, its procedures, arguments and ramifications presented a fascinating subject that might be read successfully through the normative, highly textual process of legal anthropology. However Richland was certain that the fabulous, both in the sense of extraordinary and mythological, quality of the narrative surrounding the case was seeping into the process of legal reasoning. Evidence for this seepage was easy to spot, for instance, in Chief Justice John Roberts' 2010 announcement of the Supreme Court's Stern v. Marshall decision in which he alluded to Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, reaching far beyond the procedural history of the case. As Richland pointed out, this literary reference was contrary to the only *legally* relevant way to describe the manner by which a case arrives at the Supreme Court; its procedural history. So how to understand (and investigate) the nature of this particular interface between law and narrative? How to tell a coherent yet authentic story about this phenomenon, which was burdened by an over-determined narrative and mired in such a dense, well-financed legal morass? This, we judged, was an ideal test case for our interest in aligning ethnographic analysis with research protocols associated with studio design exercises.

The workshopping of Richland's project at Elizabeth Chin's ACCD studio in the summer of 2014 presented us with an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the collaboration that we had begun in earnest three years earlier and which had already been developed into two fully realized projects. The first of was *214 Sq. Ft.*, a full-size recreation of an Orange County motel room commissioned by Project Hope Alliance to raise awareness about homelessness, and the second was *Trade is Sublime*, an installation piece comprised of a trio of short films exhibited at the World Trade Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. These projects trafficked in the territory between design and ethnographic practice, guided largely by the mutual experience of our team; Cantarella, a scenic

design practitioner mainly for theater, Hegel, an anthropologist with a background in theater, and Marcus, an anthropologist who has written extensively on methodological concerns.[1] Although these three projects differ considerably in site, subject and medium, they share commonalities at the intersection between design and ethnography that we are interested in examining more closely.

214 Sq. Ft. (Installation Detail) Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA. Photograph by Frank Cancian.

Chin's Laboratory of Speculative Ethnology, which was strewn with the tangible materials of her current project (sewing machines, Arduino processors, GoPro cameras, yards of Dutch-wax textiles from east Africa, and a profusion of post-it notes), was in many ways a familiar environment for us. Like a theatrical scene or costume

shop, it evinced the messy and rich process of refining ideas and the material manifestations of a studio-based design practice. At the same time, we sensed that the modalities of design practice and the research and analysis processes that they employ to might not immediately be legible in relation to our new ethnographic investigation for the *Stern v. Marshall Archive* (SVMA). We use the term SVMA to refer to the large collection of texts and materials related to the phenomena of Stern v Marshall that Justin Richland had accumulated while researching the case. We needed to articulate more concretely our process for layering design modalities into ethnography in order to work effectively with a new collaborator. Making our process legible to Richland would help organize our schedule and needs in the week to come; at the same time, a generalizable description of our working process might be a useful guide for others wishing to employ these same tools. Specifically, we were interested in explicating some of our tacit assumptions about what was happening in the projects we had created and in beginning to construct a critical framework for assessing the value and operation of what we describe as a Productive Encounter.

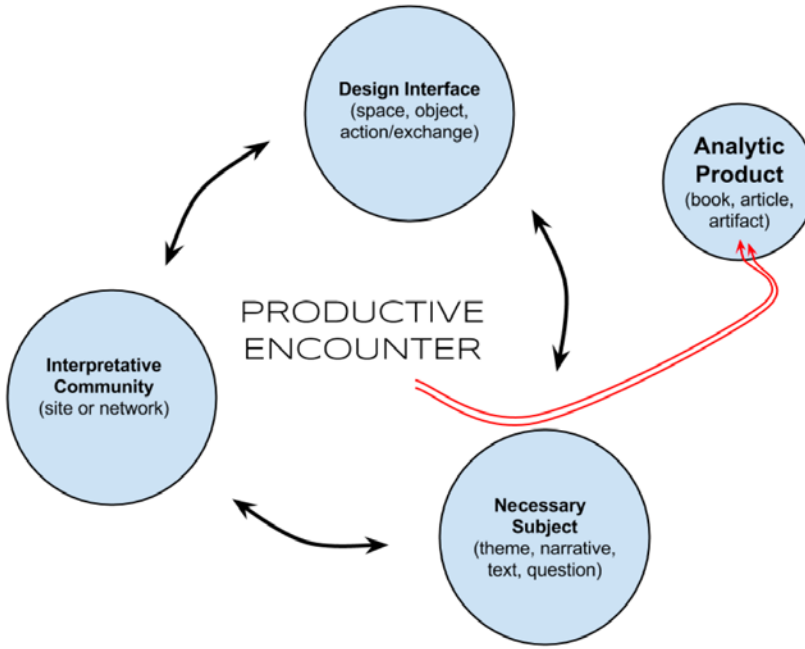
Our proposition for design-influenced inquiry in anthropology envisions quite different ethnographic modalities than are currently in use.[2] Although ethnography has certainly evolved since Malinowski and ethnographers now deploy a wide variety of technologies, collaborate with subjects, use various representational strategies, and undertake multi-sited research, among other developments, most of these innovations are layered onto the same operating principles that have animated ethnography from the outset. Good ethnography is associated with being there/inside and with direct contact/first-hand experience, combined with duration to enhance validity. These two key aspects allow the ethnographer, so it goes, to hear and see what the non-ethnographer does not, and even what the 'local' does not because of the tacit nature of her knowledge. Although it is acknowledged to varying degrees that reality is co-constructed by an ethnographer and her subjects, we continue to position ourselves as observers tasked with the thick description of

events unfolding around us, and the analysis of the knowledge and structural relations that they express.

Conversely, implementing design-based practices within the ethnographic endeavor offers a useful corrective to some of the inherent challenges to contemporary ethnographic research, such as the question of how to make "experts" the objects of study.[3] These practices make accessible aspects of fieldwork-in-process and open them to collective, collaborative assessment and reception by promoting the materialization of ideas and concepts into speculative design interventions. Traditional ethnographic research tends to be immersive and individualistic in nature. Design interventions, real or proposed, created alternate ways of "seeing" ethnography, beyond the reflexive reporting of ethnographic writing genres. In what follows, we describe a schema for workshopping such an intervention and elucidate it by exploring its application to the Stern v. Marshall Archive.

Tuesday: The Schema for a Productive Encounter

The figure below lays out a simple schema for understanding the relations of differing aspects of design and ethnographic practice that produce a Productive Encounter. The Productive Encounter is an exchange, dialogue, performance, interface or process that generates workable solutions to problems that emerge in pursuing ethnographic research on difficult objects of study, such as Richland's interest in opening up already constituted legal knowledge to new interpretations through an investigation of the Stern v. Marshall case. While this encounter may manifest itself in a plethora of differing forms borrowed from art, design, theater, dance and social science practice and be used to investigate a variety of themes, subjects, and sites (both construed as traditional "field" sites or as networked systems), the central object of the work is *always* the encounter itself and its potential as a space of knowledge production. In the same manner that Big Data analysis allows large, complex



The Productive Encounter

quantitative data sets to be easily read, the Productive Encounter provides the same sort of generalizable approach to qualitative data. This approach allows us to shift from a reliance on the subtle technical skill set of observational ethnography to a reliance on the potency of designed encounters that make explicit or amplify tacit knowledge. While this tacit knowledge may often take the form of "raw" ethnographic data, as SVMA will show, workshopping a Productive Encounter may directly generate or influence higher-level analysis as well, such as suggesting new metaphors, theories or analytical frameworks.

We define the Productive Encounter through the relationship of three constituent elements: the necessary subject (theme, text, anthropological question), the interpretative community (ad hoc interpreters, self-defined community, network of experts, ourselves, etc.) and the design interface (object/artifact, space,

process, game, etc.). The central design problem is how to articulate and combine these elements in order to maximize productivity. An important (but subsequent) corollary to the encounter itself involves the documentation of the knowledge that it produces and the generation of an analytic product (text or artifact) as a means to disseminate that knowledge. As we will explore in more detail below, the schema of the Productive Encounter hopes to re-center the ethnographic process on the encounter itself as a site of primary value—positioning any analytic work (resulting in writing for conventional publication genres) as often necessary but a secondary result. While the form and operation of Productive Encounters may mimic traditional artistic exchanges (as seen in galleries, theaters, etc.), we contend that their value lies in their power to reveal specific knowledge about social phenomena.

For the sake of clarity, we will expand on the schema through example. The following is a brief examination of how these elements came together and functioned in our 2013 project *Trade is Sublime*, which was developed as a scenographic proposition for ethnographic research at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Marcus's ethnographic work at the WTO began in 2008 as part of a multi-investigator study led by Marc Abélès by invitation from then Director-General Pascal Lamy and funded by a sizeable French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) grant.[4] Despite Lamy's support and the efforts of numerous ethnographers granted access to the Centre William Rappard (CWR) to observe institutional practices, interview members of the secretariat, and access bureaucratic artifacts, the organization proved frustratingly opaque. Normal ethnographic methodologies (long-term observation, interviews, etc.) largely failed to penetrate the professional culture of discretion that suppressed forthright reflection by the staff and delegates on the complexities of how the organization actually functioned.

The informants' careful presentation of productive continuity lay in stark contrast to the institutional crisis that was unfolding at the WTO during the slow failure of the Doha Round, a set of trade

Trade is Sublime (Installation Detail) World Trade Organization, Geneva, CH. Photograph by Luke Cantarella.

negotiations undertaken in 2001 and increasingly unlikely to be ratified by the member states. The failure of Doha potentially signified the end of the organization's ability to approve large, multilateral trade agreements, radically changing the nature of its geopolitical role from central arbiter of global capitalism to marginal player. Marcus sought a return to the site with a "second-act" project that could generate new and potentially richer ethnographic data about this inscrutable site. With this aim in mind, Marcus invited designers and artists, including collaborators Cantarella and Hegel, to propose ideas for what was framed at the time as an intervention or art piece that would engage those in the organization and in turn illuminate its tacit or hidden facets.[5] For this project, we began with a clearly-defined *interpretative community*—the missions and member-state delegates, and the secretariat and staff of the WTO based at the Centre William Rappard (CWR), a massive government building built in the style of a Florentine villa on the shores of Lake Geneva. This community maps well on to the traditional anthropological

notion of a "field site." It is defined by a specific geographic locale and, despite its vastly heterogeneous membership representing the 160 member states of the organization and international Secretariat and staff, it can be said to exhibit a coherent cultural system.

The *necessary subject* for this project was developed in part through the process of design speculation. The initial field research brought forward a number of themes around which to organize the research, including questions about transparency, translation, the problematic of national histories and aims within the framework of global governance, and the question of whether the WTO model for multilateral trade has future relevance. As such, there were multiple possibilities for a *necessary subject* on which to focus. Moreover, the process of brainstorming, prototyping, and refining the *design interface* functioned not only as a way to articulate a future encounter, but also served as an interim analytic process. Working in a design modality, through which one seeks to materialize ideas or values, maximizes the use of lateral reasoning and reveals unexpected ethnographic insights that often remain hidden when pursuing step-by-step logic-based processes. After

Everyone has to Follow the Same Rules (Still) pictured: Kirsten Schnittker, Jesse Zarritt.

positing numerous design ideas that related to our various research questions we arrived at a confluence of design interface and subject that held the most productive possibilities.

Our final design interface for *Trade is Sublime* was a triptych of short improvisationally-created films framed as 'proposals' for monumentalizing the WTO as a trade regime.[6] Each film explored one facet of the broader WTO institutional mandate to promote multilateral trade, namely: "Allow trade to flow more freely," "Everyone must follow the same rules," and "No decision is taken unless everyone agrees." These films were displayed on screens embedded within scale models of the CWR, which houses the WTO, and exhibited in a heavily trafficked passageway at the CWR. This design interface raised a number of questions that the team wanted to explore in more depth, including 1) what did the renewed (since 2012) institutional commitment to architecture and art at the CWR, and concomitant decisions regarding the renovation of the building and the selection of art for purchase and restoration, reveal about concerns within the Secretariat regarding public perceptions of the institution? 2) if the Secretariat was in fact seeking to monumentalize the institution through these efforts, what aspect of its institutional mandate might emerge as central in the process of self-monumentalization?, and 3) what did members of the Secretariat envision as the future of the institution, despite the failure of the Doha round and uncertain international support?

In sum, the schema applied to *Trade is Sublime* would read as shown in the figure below.

Designing, or staging, an encounter at the WTO served to catalyze new exchanges between the anthropologists and their interlocutors in the field site, and provided a useful technique for surmounting a typical ethnographic challenge: getting at tacit or exclusive knowledge. *Trade is Sublime* provoked a re-engagement with members of the Secretariat at the Centre William Rappard after a long absence by the researchers (Marcus and Jae Chung) and took up questions being posed by the institution itself in a non-

Population of the Centre William Rappard
(interpretative community)
+
An Installation of Three Short Films
presented as monument proposals
(design interface)
+
What is the future of the WTO?
(necessary subject)
=
A Productive Encounter

Schema for Productive Encounter at WTO

literal form to stimulate interpretive practices. Although it would be useful to develop a more thorough definition for the qualities of *productivity* embodied in the WTO Productive Encounter, for now we can suggest a simpler metric for understanding its value. *Trade is Sublime* was a designed encounter that provoked or revealed alignments between anthropologists and their interlocutors, and generated new anthropological insights.

Wednesday: Designing a Productive Encounter as a Workshop Strategy

We'll now consider the ways in which the Productive Encounter model outlined in *Trade is Sublime* was further developed in the SVMA project. After Hegel and Cantarella articulated an initial schema in preparation for the workshop, Richland arrived at the Wind Tunnel for an introductory day of conversation about how the Productive Encounter process could be brought to bear on his emergent project. The goal of the workshop was to use a

process of design speculation to identify potential interpretative communities for the SVMA as a set of events, imaginaries, and discourses (beyond those individuals who seemed most obvious to Richland, such as those who played a direct role in the SVMA cases, fellow legal anthropologists, and lawyers and law scholars), and also to identify potential design interfaces that could interpolate alternate interpreters, clarify his questions, and reveal what was difficult to see as yet in the existing data. Hence, our first day of discussion entailed assessing the particular conditions of Richland's project that contributed to his decision to bring design modalities into his working process, and responding to these conditions by developing a work plan for the following days that would make use of the particular resources (equipment, tools, materials, and design students) available to us in the lab.

The Conditions of the Project

It quickly became clear that Richland's research on the Stern v. Marshall presented a unique set of challenges for this ethnographic modality. Among these were temporal conditions that required re-thinking what kind of groundwork was necessary for a Productive Encounter. Unlike *Trade is Sublime* in which the design intervention occurred subsequent to an initial period of ethnographic inquiry or *214 Sq. Ft.*, in which the material object became a site that generated ethnographic data, Richland's project was emergent. Richland was fascinated by, and sought to resist, the popular narrative of a gold-digging beauty staking a claim to old money by manipulating the legal system, and a powerful family resisting these efforts through the use of power brokering. By beginning to identify a certain nexus of interrelated events that corresponded to primary sites in the world (the Supreme Court, Marshall's Texas estate, the television media, etc.), he anticipated that this case might be fruitful for examining the intersection of inheritance and wealth, bankruptcy law, and popular culture. Therefore, our collaboration began before much data, beyond some primary texts and interactions (media

clips, legal briefs, initial conversations with key players) had been collected. The nascent quality of the project and its complexity made it ripe for a workshopping, which would clarify the direction and scope of the project and make more visible the frameworks of understanding that grounded Richland's suppositions.

Moreover, this was a second major research project for Richland and a topical departure from his previous work, which focused on the discursive production of tradition in Hopi courts.[7] The Stern v. Marshall project focused on a new legal setting (U.S. non-native courts) and some similar issues (inheritance) but also new socio-legal questions (bankruptcy, political influence on court proceedings, the media's impact on legal reasoning, etc.). Added to these conditions was the fact that the socio-legal phenomena under investigation were primarily historical, so that many of the events had already occurred and would need to be examined post-facto. It was unclear what 'new' data could or should be collected, beyond interviews with those involved in the cases. Moreover, Richland's father had represented Anna Nicole Smith's estate (identified as "Stern," her lawyer) twice at the Supreme Court. As a result Richland had been deeply involved with the case, knew the parties and the particulars of the cases extremely well, and over the years Richland and his father had discussed the peculiarities and broader implications of the cases.

Ethnographers often begin research by integrating themselves into a community, building relationships and trust in order to avail themselves of insider knowledge. In this instance, familiarity with a key informant could limit the kind of remove required for rigorous analysis and we sought to develop a mechanism of defamiliarization that could provoke new readings of the cases. Hence, while the project represented a significant shift in topical focus for Richland, we also sought, through the simultaneous dispersion and cohesion of the subject matter, to allow him to recognize the limits of his normal methodology. Richland might have successfully continued along the typical path of legal anthropology, whereby he looked deeply at legal texts, legal institutions and actors, to glean social

insights from these cases. Instead he elected to move away from these methods, in large part to disrupt the narrative that had already strongly emerged for him as a way to interpret the material.

Declaring a Workshop Space and Time

Our design workshop was a declaration of designated time and attention focused on this project and on the particular conditions or challenges it presented; in this respect it was similar to a symposium or small conference where concentrated work and cross-fertilization can occur among scholars. Unlike these forums, however, our design workshop was not focused on refining or clarifying analyses of existing data. Rather, it was an opportunity to initiate collaboration in real time and physical space, through speculation on, and prototyping of, a potential Productive Encounter relating to the SVMA, to be implemented at some point in the future. Therefore, we held the workshop in an explicitly design-centric space at the PACCD where we were surrounded by the artifacts of works-in-progress, with all of their technical failures and unresolved design issues on view. The space was unfamiliar to all of us, and neutral in the sense that it was not a pre-existing 'field' site or work space for any of the collaborators except the design students we included in the process. Moreover, the Wind Tunnel as a dedicated space for design destabilized the analytical practices typical of anthropologists and placed the emphasis on playful speculation and materialization.

The Productive Encounter model necessitates cross-fertilization between designers and anthropologists, and it requires a framework to facilitate that collaboration. One framework that we propose positions the anthropologist, at least initially, as a client seeking proposals from designers who can (potentially) contribute to materializing elements of the productive encounter. For the purposes of workshopping Stern v. Marshall, this is how we chose to frame the interface between these groups. This further

necessitated that Richland reveal his numerous source materials, including jottings and reflections on the cases, articles that he had collected, legal writings and ephemera, which we collectively describe as the Stern v. Marshall Archive (SVMA), with the group, and invite interpretation. He had compiled these 'raw' materials and shared them with us, and in turn they would be shared with our other design collaborators. Taking raw materials out of the realm of confidential data, observable only to the researcher and perhaps an assistant or graduate students, into a more public (or micro-public) realm is not typical anthropological practice, bound as we are by IRB [Institutional Review Board] mandates and a tradition of individualized research projects, including the deeply private nature of fieldnotes. Sharing unfinished and partial work can make creators of all stripes vulnerable, both professionally and personally. Yet, we posit, vulnerability jolts one out of safe ways of working and thinking, and when we take the raw stuff of ethnographic projects out of hiding we truly commit to cross-fertilization.

Unlike other forms of collaboration in which participants seek to build some proficiency in the skills and knowledge that their partners bring to a project, the framework we propose is one in which no one converts to another discipline. Designers do not attempt to undertake ethnographic research or analysis. Likewise, anthropologists do not attempt to become designers, or engage in prototyping or modeling, in the course of a collaboration. Rather, each brings to the table a set of skills and propositions and invites the other to look at the necessary subject through the lens that they provide. Working with designers in this way certainly facilitates different conversations about social phenomena than might take place between social scientists, but more importantly it allows for moments of collision and disjuncture as collaborators struggle to find their way towards each other. Therefore, we asked Richland to bring his raw material to the table, but did not ask him to engage in design work per se.

Using design process modalities also changes the working process from one of slow, incremental accumulation of data to

one of explosive periods of experimentation. This upends the typical trajectory of ethnographic success and shifts *failure* into frame as generative and necessary. In classical ethnographic field research, even when ethnographers face the challenge of making useful contacts or gaining access to places, events, or materials, they analyze what they've accumulated and claim admittedly partial but valid insights. The failures—interviews that didn't yield fruit, gaping contradictions that couldn't be resolved, etc.—are largely edited out of the final analytic product. In the design workshop, we established from the beginning that failure would be assured because of the improvisational path we were taking, and that our task would be to sift through the failures of experiment as a way to see something new.

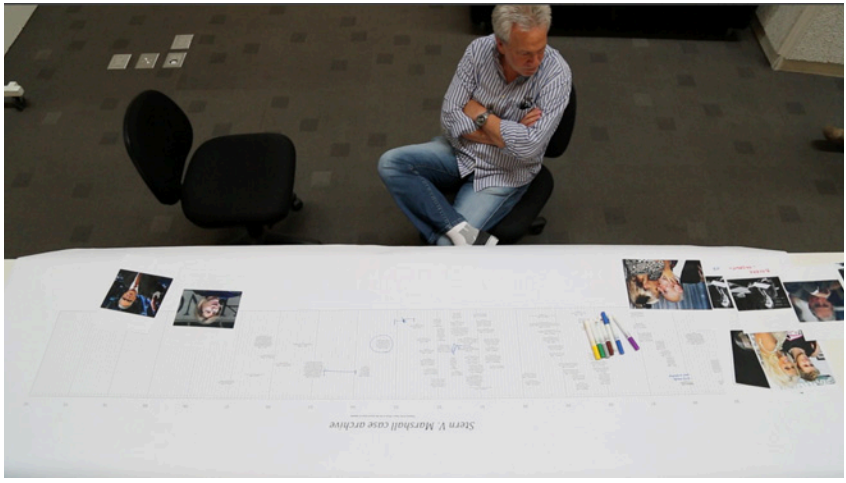
Hence, this day in the Wind Tunnel was a day of laying the ground rules for our design working process, moving Richland towards preparing a brief for working with designers, and deciding on some interim 'designed' encounters that might begin to address some of the conditions of his project. By the end of the day we had decided that the following day of the workshop would be comprised of a staged interview with Richland's father, in which multiple recording processes, a large-scale timeline and a series of images relating to the archive would play a role, and a charrette with graduate design students whose shared forte was user-interface design.

Thursday: Two Design Experiments

The lengthy discussions concerning the conditions, desire and problems of Richland's project the prior day had revealed a series of concerns relating to Stern v. Marshall that clarified our *necessary subject*. Our next task was to identify both the *design interface* and the *interpretative community/ies* for a future encounter. To do so, we harnessed classic techniques from ethnography (the interview) and design (the charrette) and altered them slightly (staging the interview, and inviting designers to propose ideas for

an ethnographic encounter rather than a user-interface product) in order to activate speculation on our subject. To clarify: these design-inflected processes were not intended to generate a Productive Encounter at present, but rather to help us posit possible future encounters without an immediate concern with whether or not our ideas could be operationalized.

Engaging in a process designed to be revelatory, one that privileges spontaneous insights over theoretical regimes can be thought of as typical of "design thinking." For designers, problems are solved not by assembling exhaustive knowledge banks then deducing solutions, the hylomorphic model.[8] Rather design processes favor limited understandings of a subject, its intent or aesthetic requirements, to catalyze a creative process. These limited understanding create gaps that the act of making and medium-specific insight fill. Of course, this description is perhaps equally apt for the ethnographer who shares a heightened concern with the generation of new insight. The key question for both designers and ethnographers is how to identify importance: what to focus on/what to see. Experimental strategies in both design and ethnography



Kent Richland. Photograph by Luke Cantarella.

seek to initially alter or counter normative impulses, so as to reorder what elements may be considered significant, a process that draws attention to or makes alien that which is familiar.[9]

Staging an Interview

We invited Kent Richland, the appellate attorney who twice represented the estate of Anna Nicole at the Supreme Court, to an interview at ACCD in the morning. Over the course of the previous years, Kent Richland had shared the details of the trials, appeals, setbacks and triumphs with his son, sparking a certain fascination with the case. The case for Richland *père* marked a personal triumph, trying a case at the Supreme Court being a mark of distinction in US jurisprudence. Richland's Los Angeles-based firm was to some extent an atypical advocate having a limited presence in Supreme Court cases compared to the attorneys for the Marshall family, thus displaying a fortuitous symmetry with the optics of the case that pitted a proto-typical Californian heroine (Anna Nicole) against the moneyed Eastern establishment of the Marshall heirs.

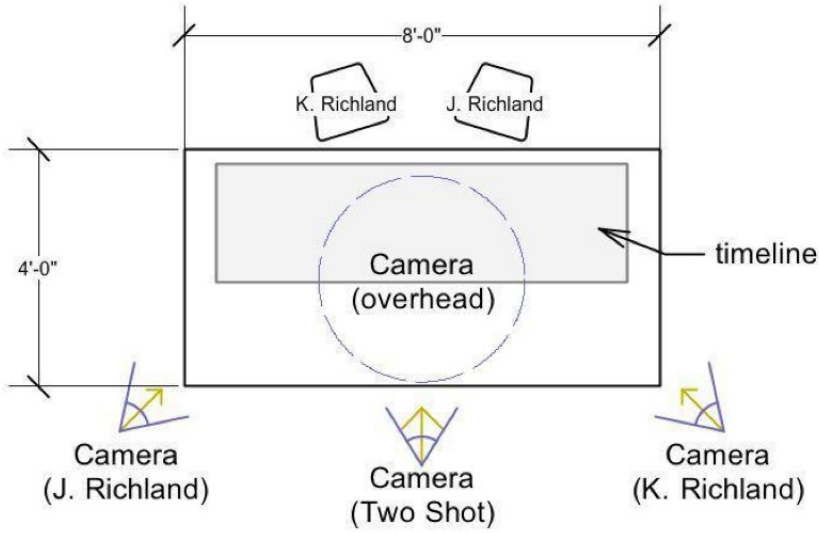
In preparing for this interview, we wanted to carefully think through the material conditions of the interview. In the classical ethnographic tradition, interviews are often unstructured or semi-structured, occurring in a carefully negotiated space and time to create the conditions necessary for an ideal response from their subjects. Whether this is achieved by positioning oneself in a context that is familiar and comfortable to the interlocutor (the domestic arena, worksite, or public space) or creating the conditions of comfort in an artificial space, ethnographers have long recognized that material conditions affect the response of subjects. Ethnographers are also trained to attend to non-linguistic facets of communication (body language, silence) and to their role in shaping the dialogue that emerges from an interview. A successful interview is one in which the interlocutor is at ease and expressive

because the frame of the 'interview' no longer calls attention to itself and is being experienced as a simple exchange.

For our interview with Richland, we reversed this typical course by calling attention to the interview frame and heightening its formal qualities. This decision was intended to disrupt and overcome two specific conditions. Firstly, Richland and his father were overly familiar with each other and at times would leave commonly understood or shared ideas unstated. Secondly, they had told each other the story of the case many times before, both during the course of events as they unfolded and in retrospect when recounting the case history. We decided to utilize theatrical strategies by designing an interview 'scene' that marked the temporal and spatial parameters of this encounter and used video and audio recording to impose an obvious technological mediation. These elements were intended to provoke a kind of meta-text concerning the valuation of the case as a significant event worthy of study as well as the ways in which its interpretation was inflected by personal history and kin relations (Richland and Richland *père*).

We staged the interview around a table in a more open or public intersection in the Wind Tunnel, covered with a large-format timeline of the case history as a material prompt, with four cameras simultaneously recording the event. The graphic below shows the set-up of the cameras. A high-quality video recording was shot from above framed on the tabletop to document the gestures and the spatial relationships of the respondents. An additional camera focused from center balancing the two figures in frame, while two additional cameras from left and right each focused on the individual respondents respectively. A master audio track was recorded separately using a digital recording device on the tabletop for higher quality sound. By linking the time-code on all the videos, it is possible to compare from multiple angles the event as it in unfolded over the three hours of the interview. This strategy has a double purpose. It allows us to re-watch the interview at a temporal remove and to shuffle moments of significance without being subject to a centralized point-of-view. We see the recording as a dynamic

framework through which to recall the interview data. This stands in contrast to the typical ethnographic practice of writing field notes that attempt both to recall and synthesize qualitative data. Field notes preserve what is recalled by the ethnographer usually directly after the encounter. A constant concern in fieldwork is writing things down while they are "still fresh" in the ethnographer's mind. We suggest that this strategy be complemented by a full-engagement with the power of documentation that allows the synthesis of events to happen at a greater remove. Recordings can be seen here not as a pale imitation of the actual event, but as a way of reconstructing them outside the subjective frame of the ethnographic eye.



The Staged Interview

But equally important is the effect of the technological apparatus on what actually occurs. Even if the recordings are never re-watched, the mere act of recording creates a drama of heightened importance around the interview itself. As a performance, aesthetic concerns (about the quality and amount of lighting, the type of

table around which the interview participants sit and their positions relative to one another, the objects they interact with) come into focus and can be used to reveal tacit understandings about what 'matters' in the discussion.

Our second device, a large-format timeline, served a similar purpose: to amplify the conversation by directing its course. The timeline is a standard graphical method to display data that charts incidents over time and could serve as a device to read the complex case history through a visual rendering. Working from a list of significant events in the case history pulled directly from http://www.factweb.net/timeline/, a website created by the attorneys for the Marshall estate, Cantarella organized the events chronologically using fixed columns for each year of the case. The result showed a pattern of clusters (years in which numerous rulings were made) and holes (years in which very little appeared to have happened). We printed the document on a large-scale (72" x 36") so that it could cover the table-top where the interview was being staged. This would allow Kent Richland to walk back through the history of the case, commenting on the holes and clusters and guiding the interview process. It also allowed numerous markings, corrections, and notations on the paper creating an increasingly dense artifact of the day's work. In fact, this document proved useful enough that we carried it over into the charrette process, where the design team could add their responses directly.

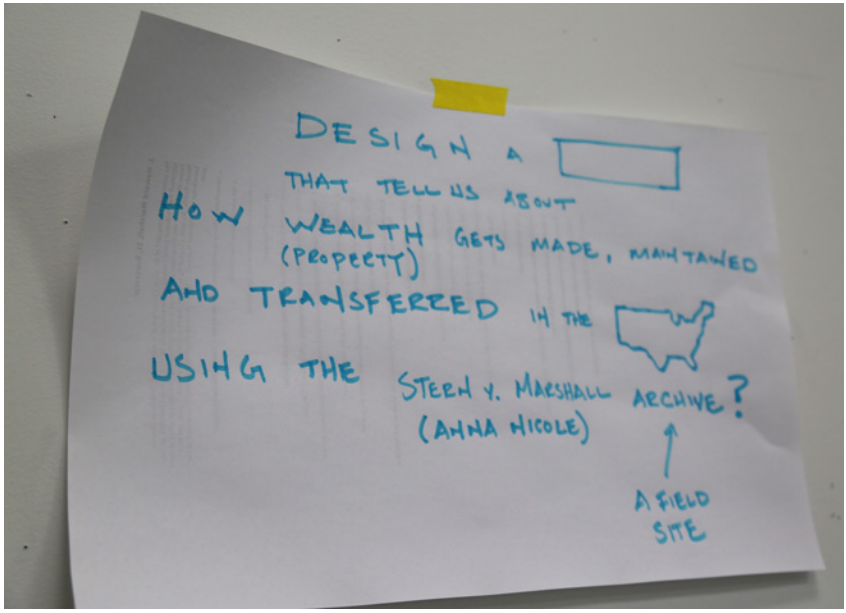
The timeline falls under the generalized category of a *conversation object*, a term that Elizabeth Chin has used to refer to a speculative object inserted into a ethnographic encounter to provoke response; there is a relationship to Grant Kester's "conversation pieces" as an innovative art/activism form, although here it refers to discrete objects rather than large scale interventions designed to prompt dialogue among participants.[10] The conversation object can masquerade in many forms, a significant artifact, a schematic (like the timeline), or an aesthetic object created in response to a particular ethnographic question.[11] Our basic conversation object, the timeline, materialized a complex set of past events and invited

debate and discussion during the interview as well as during the subsequent charrette.

The Design Charrette

A design charrette is a collective practice in which an assembled group of collaborators attempt to draft a series of solutions to a proposed problem. This methodology has become a standard strategy in a variety of design-based disciplines including theater making, urban planning, product design and software development, to name a few. Bringing together multiple constituents in the emergent phase of a design project makes it possible to capitalize on the divergent impulses and expertise of a group to generate a solution that no individual member has the capacity to propose on his or her own. The format capitalizes on rapid response, partial knowledge and productive misunderstanding. Individual members of the group are expected to engage without a comprehensive understanding of the goals or background of a particular project (as non-experts) and use the insights available to them to generate speculative solutions. Unlike a simple brainstorming session, the design charrette seeks to embody this knowledge in a variety of prototyped solutions developed rapidly and assessed by the group.

Applying the strategy to social conditions, the realm of ethnography provides both challenges and opportunities. Operating contrary to the normally individualistic design of ethnographic projects, the charrette allows us to make "public" the emergent phase of project development. While this occurs routinely during graduate study, in which projects are vetted by advisors and senior faculty, we see the development of charrettes being of particular interest to mid-career scholars engaging in second or later projects. Second projects by their nature often seek to extend the insights and expertise gained during initial research to new field sites or to extend them to related themes. More importantly, second and later projects in anthropology often challenge or require



Design Prompt. Photograph by Luke Cantarella.

innovations in the emblematic culture of method which inaugurates careers.[12] Scholars who have established institutional bona fides are in need of strategies to deepen their research interests without simply recreating the conditions of the initial fieldwork. There are several modes of design charrette that can serve as a potential model including theatrical collaborations (as was operative, for instance, in our earlier *214 Sq. Ft.* and *Trade is Sublime* 'second act' collaborations), architectural commission, and product design. We will focus here on the latter since it served as the tacit model for our work in Pasadena.

Our design charrette approach most closely modeled that used in product design, as typified by the client-designer relationship in which the client provides a brief that prompts a design response. The brief seeks to encapsulate the goals of the project. In the context of a product this may entail both intangible notions of style and brand identity as well as practical instruction about deliverables, cost-basis

and target audience. For example, a shoe company seeks to develop a new line of running apparel. They might present their in-house or contracted designers with an amorphous collection of inspirations for the product including both references to existing products made by their competition and other prompts only tangentially related to shoes themselves such as music, automobiles, fashion photography, and verbal descriptors. The design team then seeks to reflect back to the client not simply what they have asked for, but rather a better, more insightful materialization of their implicit desires. Therein lies the value added by the design process.

The setting of the Wind Tunnel gave us access to masters-level design students in the lab who could serve as designers for a client: Richland. As designers, they were accustomed to working in an information-poor mode, often expecting to produce design proposals based on very little information about what a client might want. We played an intermediary role facilitating this information-poor modality by asking Richland to present a brief about his project to the team. This is challenging for academics because we are accustomed to providing quite thorough material to our peers. Professionalism in our field is conveyed in part by performances through which we point to our rich data, theoretical framework, and the broader implications of our work. In turn, our peers weigh the significance and generalizability of our findings. Yet such completeness can foreclose or over-determine the design (and ongoing analytic) process. Moreover, placing Richland in a client position speaking across areas of expertise to designers forced both a translation process and a process of refining or prioritizing the set of ideas within his project. Cross-disciplinary collaboration is not uncommon among social scientists, and it is recognized that one of the values of collaboration is that it requires those involved to shed their disciplinary jargons. In our design workshop, Richland had to translate and also distill a sprawling set of materials and concerns related to the MSVA in order to instigate a design response.

This response came in the form of design speculation, a process often associated with architects or futurists. For our purposes, it

simply meant asking the designer to propose materializations or interventions in response to ethnographic concerns. Richland began by presenting the design brief and then gave a condensed case history of his experience and suppositions about the project. In regards to our schema, we posited the case archive as a *necessary subject*, the starting point upon which the other two elements (design interface and interpretative community) could be imagined. Then, gathering around the large timeline that was now partially annotated with notes and images from the morning's session with Kent Richland, the conversations progressed with the designers added additional notations and drawings. The speculation quickly focused on the use of storytelling devices. Charles Dicken's novel *Bleak House*, the novel alluded to in Chief Justice Robert's announcement of the opinion in Stern v. Marshall (SCOTUS, Case 010-0179), became a useful reference point. Published in a serialized form in 1852-3, the narrative centers on the case of Jarndyce v Jarndyce as it moves through the English Court of Chancery, and highlights the crisis the of the power of testators relative to the rule of law. The Victorian novel, dense in granular detail yet defined by an overarching thematic progression, seemed an appropriate corollary for the kind of narrative clarity we were seeking. In addition, we employed the large-scale timeline to help the group to visualize the three temporal zones that the case navigated: the possible future (imagined in the past at the creation of the will), the actual future (arrived at in the present) and the future future (posited as a consequence of court action).

Working from this incomplete understanding of the case and its implication while drawing from resources based on their disciplinary expertise, the designers were given the prompt to "Design a _____ that tells us about how wealth (property) is made, maintained and transferred in the United States using the Stern v. Marshall Archive" (see fig. 2). The four designers immediately began to conceive of possible devices, games, exercises and processes that could hypothetically be designed to materialize some or multiple facets of the prompt. The list, selections from which are

detailed below, was extensive and ranged from the fantastical to the easily rendered. As a first stage in designing a productive encounter, these proposals remained largely theoretical, but one

Fantasy District Court/Citizenship: Participants follow court cases in a game-like competition akin to Fantasy Football
Golddigger, the game: A claw descends to retrieve a nugget of fool's gold after donating a story about gold diggers
Justice Blinders: A series of nine personalized VR visors are designed for each Supreme Court Justice which present gender- and race-neutral avatars of the advocates
Forum Shopping Spree: A faux-market is set up at a convention of attorneys in which jurisdictions represented in the form of commodities can be shopped for
Short Story Contest: A contest is held to rewrite the case narrative from a multitude of perspectives
My Sovereign Space: Photographic representations of property as sovereignty
Constitutional Convention of My Bedroom: Jurisdictions are reimagined based on personal geography
Supreme Court of the Block: Establish a court of parallel justice to re-adjudicate cases in front of SCOTUS
Choose your own Verdict: Write a book on the case in the mode of a Choose Your Own Adventure
Wealth as Infection: Establish a Center for Wealth Control, wealth vaccines, and anti-accumulation creams

Design Speculations

could easily imagine a more extensive charrette project in which actual prototypes could be assembled. In fact, Chin's research facility at the Art Center, chock-a-block with making devices, is uniquely equipped to deal with that possibility. That said, even in a more resource poor studio environment, merely postulating ideas and deferring their articulation until later holds real value for the ethnographer. Addressed to a lesser degree was the identification of possible interpretative communities upon which to play out these ideas, although some of the suggested designs more easily implicate a particular community for engagement.

The staged interview and the design charrette were not 'productive' in the same way that more typical ethnographic methodologies are thought to be; there was no new 'data' collected that day. But they were both productive in the sense that they transported Richland to new vantage points, through acts of translation and visualization, from which to consider what he understood thus far about his subject. They also amplified certain aspects of the Archive that Richland had not been able to hear or see previously. By proposing an 'as-if' scenario, in which designers were asked to operate as-if they were developing ideas for a Productive Encounter that would be materialized and brought to fruition at some point in the future, the workshop set in motion collaborative interpretation and knowledge production, rather than the refinement of individual expertise, as a way forward in Richland's project. Our working assumption was that the further development and implementation of one or more of the ideas generated during the workshop would enrich Richland's ongoing investigation into the SVMA in ways outlined below.

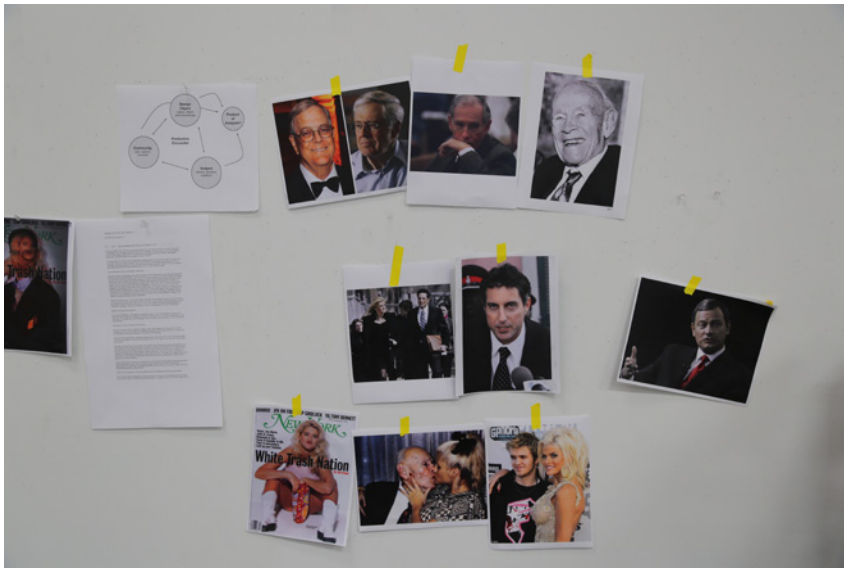
Friday: Productivity

We offer the schema for Productive Encounters both as a tool for ethnography and as a mode of critique through which ethnographers and designers can construct a collaborative process.

As a tool, it is best understood and assessed in terms of how it provides ethnographic methods that can address the specific problems of contemporary fieldwork identified, for example, in Faubion and Marcus (2009) such as the status of expert subjects and networked field sites.[13] As a mode of critique, its utilization lies in translating the dialects of social science into terms that design and art can respond to. These experiments could be simultaneously and somewhat differently produced through methods that come within the realm of contemporary art practice and its situated interventions. Jostling between ethnographic materials and design practices, such as we have described here, and related modes of situated contemporary art invention are on our future agenda. Here, we have chronicled the specific challenge, and methodological response, that was afforded us during our week in the Wind Tunnel, workshopping an emergent ethnographic project in a molten state, so to speak. It stimulated the formulation of the Productive Encounter model that we propose speculatively for the first time in this essay. Reflecting on our experiments in this modality prompts us to return to the question raised above: what makes the kinds of encounters we propose *productive*.

Ideally, a Productive Encounter clarifies and enriches solitary strategies of ethnographic research in progress through collaborative design modalities. These modalities a) encourage a self-assembling process that b) incentivizes and creates occasions for interlocutors to engage and c) amplifies thinking, ideas and insights among micro-publics and in relevant sites of inquiry, beyond those which might have been perceived or considered by the lone ethnographer cultivating subjects in the field. Productive Encounters thus generate unique, deeply felt articulations of contemporary problems that ethnographers have previously tried to gather and interpret in the classic fashion from their interviews, conversations, and observations.

These traditional methods have not provided a sufficient means to express and develop the research process as modes of thinking—collective, speculative, and creative—before conventional publication



Stern v. Marshall Archive research (detail). Photograph by Luke Cantarella.

and professional assessment. For now, Productive Encounters as experiments in methodological practice remain alongside or in the background of ethnographic process, but they have the potential to play a more definitive role in the evolution of ethnography as a form of observation, analysis, and representation. Here we elaborate briefly on each of the features that have contributed to the modality of Productive Encounters at the intersection between design and ethnography, and that have been especially useful for us in our own recent history of collaboration.

- **Self-Assembly:** *Productive Encounters encourage an exploratory working process that is theoretically and materially responsive to emergent conditions and questions, and that seeks to seriously 'play with' an analytic trajectory, embedded in research practice, that may otherwise be overly abstract and deterministic.*

One of the underlying logics of the Productive Encounter is assumption that the act of assembling, making or materializing something externalizes what are more typically internal analytic processes. Moreover, the making of these projects also provides a way to think through or reveal the process by they are made.

Using utility (a value championed in design discourse) as a guiding force, we seek a kind of self-assembling work that adopts an exploratory approach, in which an object, gesture or supposition is first made without a pre-defined theoretical framework; then in a dialogic process, the work reveals its own signifying systems. This responsive approach demands a lack of medium-specificity from the artist or designer (their responses can take almost any form). The only constant "medium" is the social phenomena itself, brought to the encounter by the ethnographer in some form, as data, notes or reflections on fieldwork in progress. Clear connections can be seen here to the rise of a complex array of time-based, social or relational aesthetic projects debated and assessed by scholars like Bishop (2012), Bourriaud (1998), and Kester (2004).[14] The Productive Encounter as a critique can be seen here as a corollary system that resolves issues of (social) scientific functionality and aesthetic robustness in hybrid design forms.

It may be useful here to think, in a strictly metaphoric sense, about the kind of relationship that is presumed to exist between an artist and the autonomous art object. For instance when a painter like Gerhard Richter suggests that his work instructs him, he creates a purposive schism between his intentionality and the product of his hand. Whether through an explicit process (chance procedures or otherwise) or simply the adoption of this stance, destabilizing the autonomy of the production of art has proved an effective strategy in the modernist tradition for moving past the limits of the investigator's own governing systems (aesthetic or otherwise). For Productive Encounters, the materialization of ideas creates a useful schism between observation and written analysis because it inserts an intermediary process by which the ethnographer allows working

or speculative knowledge to emerge through an encounter that is experimental, responsive and unpredictable.

Designing chance operations, as our design collaborators began to do with the *Stern v. Marshall Archive*, can help the ethnographer overcome the limitations of a habituated intellectual framework and develop new terms in which ethnographic data can be explicated. In Richland's work, large, implicitly subjective frameworks of understanding threatened to constrain his ability to clarify a working sense of the ethnographic 'real'. The iconographic power of Anna Nicole and J. Marshall Stern created make it difficult for him to tell the story in a satisfying manner, a problem Richland keenly anticipated at the start of his work on the project. For almost any researcher, the embedded framework of understanding (whether narrative, theoretical or aesthetic) limits the product. It is a box that one can not "think" oneself out of without collaborative help. The Productive Encounter process challenges the ethnographer to actively design a system that works around and trumps the limitations of individual reflection (ironically, this is the same license that the 1980s *Writing Culture* critique of objective realism in ethnographic writing thenceforward offered ethnographers) through the methods of collective understanding referenced above in the design charrette process.[15]

- **Incentivization:** *Productive Encounters use incentives and invent context-sensitive situations to materialize a micro-public or temporary interpretative community of variable composition to realize ethnographic ideas already active in planned or initiated field research. Engagement with an idea or subject is incentivized using design strategies like beauty, playfulness, utility, or exchange.*

Productive Encounters incentivize a potential interpretative community to invest in or draw near the subject of the research. Incentivization is an idea often associated with marketing or behavioral science; we seek to reclaim it as an active strategy for engagement with interlocutors that pushes against the notion that

anthropologists are unlike their interlocutors in their motivation to develop insights about the social world. The type and manner of incentive will vary widely depending on the design of the intervention and how a project is concretized. For example, was materialized in the form of multiple art mediums (film, dance/movement, architectural model, music), but its primary mode was not in concerned with or in service of the aesthetic regime of art.[16] Instead it merely used aesthetic tools to incentivize engagement. As such, formal beauty, indeterminacy (a provocation of curiosity through the combination of incongruous forms, such as using dance to convey multilateral trade, shifting perspective through the miniaturization of the WTO headquarters building in model form, or non-linguistic embodiments of institutional directives, etc.) and conditionality (drawing the audience near and inviting their active interpretation by framing the piece as a series of 'proposals') were declared *values* in the construction of the work. While the piece was not *art*, it masqueraded as art's double.[17] Moreover, although artworks were of value (decorative or otherwise—it was not clear) to those in the upper echelons of the Secretariat (as evidenced by their commitment to art restoration projects and purchases for the WTO building), art itself was not directly related to the work of the institution. Nonetheless, art became an opportune site for public discourse, and a space to be occupied by our ethnographically-informed intervention. Art's strength as a site of discourse was precisely in its weakness or irrelevance to the "real" work of the WTO. It became an ideal strategic place in which to situate ourselves in order to negotiate an engagement with the otherwise reluctant, indifferent or non comprehending informants who regularly passed through the halls of the building. This was in effect the production of a Productive Encounter as a second act of ethnography, stimulating engagement in a modality other than the vernaculars of economics, trade negotiation, bureaucracy, or diplomacy. These were the same values that were probed with variable success in the conventional ethnography that in this case preceded the 'second act' Productive Encounter.

214 Sq. Ft. (Front Facade) University of California-Irvine, CA. Photograph by Luke Cantarella.

Our earlier project, *214 Sq. Ft.*, employed a different set of incentives in keeping with its designated manifestation as advocacy. Cantarella and Hegel were commissioned by a non-profit organization, Project Hope Alliance, to manifest the experience of homelessness for the organization's gala benefit fundraiser. The project took the form of a mobile full-scale motel room designed to resemble the typical dwellings of the homeless families in Orange County, CA. *214 Sq. Ft.* incentivized engagement by documenting the spatial reality of an at-risk population and provoking curiosity, and a sense of permitted trespass, for the donors. The model motel room was a private space filled with the artifacts of family life in which one could, for instance, peek into cupboards and closets, glance through family photo albums and open the medicine chest; at the same time, objects in the space (a clock radio, a drawer, the heating vent, etc.) resonated with the voices of our audience through hidden audio and video elements that could only be overheard or glimpsed when drawing near the object. The hundreds of people

who have toured *214 Sq. Ft.* were explicitly invited to do so by event organizers; at the same time their journey through the space, their desire to look and touch and overhear, and in turn to reflect upon and discuss with other visitors, was provoked by design elements that engage them sensorially and emotionally.

Thus, Productive Encounters may deploy beauty, curiosity, play, problem-solving, reward, respite, excitement, insult/shock/counter-normative suggestion, knowledge, foodstuffs, currency or any other feasible incentive within the framework of their operation that has value within their interpretative community. Their efficacy (or productivity) can be measured in the aptness of each Encounter's particular design utilization of a priori available space for engagement within the conceived and incentivized interpretative community. The design workshop for the Stern v. Marshall Archive, the other variation on the Productive Encounter modality that we have have focused on in this essay, worked purely in the speculative realm to examine and re-configure the conceptualization of fieldwork yet to be done.

Reluctant informants are a common problem faced by ethnographers that the Productive Encounter seeks to reconceptualize in practical and specific ways. Most ethnographic projects face certain barriers in engaging subjects in meaningful and revelatory discourse. Reluctance may stem from issues of trust, language, class difference or simply the inability to express tacit knowledge. To overcome these obstacles anthropologists expect immersion (depth and duration are key evaluative criteria of ethnographic research) and mimicry (adopting the stance and argot of the native) of its practitioners. Both strategies rely on a brilliant individual fieldworker who can employ the techniques with skill and subtlety. A designed intervention, modeled here as a Productive Encounter, is a mediating apparatus and process that illuminates how ethnographic knowledge is collaboratively produced and not simply discovered and collected.

- **Amplification:** *Productive Encounters can amplify the more intimate and privately developed knowledge muted in the immersive and solitary frame of traditional ethnographic encounters, and can turn the volume up on tacit knowledge.*

Design practices amplify the hunches and suppositions of research-in-progress by testing out different compositions of developed materials and imagined micro-publics. In the Stern v. Marshall Archive workshop, in which we sought to develop ideas for a future Productive Encounter, we began to see this kind of amplification. It was activated in part through processes of translation as Richland spoke across the divide of expertise to designers unfamiliar with the concerns of legal anthropology, the specifics of bankruptcy law, and the complex history of the parties to the cases. Collaboration turns the volume up on what we understand to be true about something, or relevant, so that our collaborators can hear and contribute to its analysis; this is especially true when we build in the hurdle of working with collaborators who share neither our typical working practices nor our ways of thinking.

Amplification is also a useful way to understand the kind of operation a Productive Encounter might perform in lieu of, or alongside, traditional ethnography. We've noted above the way that ethnographers accrue data through a kind of embedded, durational practice that is intended to erase the experiential and communicative gap between the ethnographer and her interlocutors and in so doing lay bare tacit knowledge otherwise unavailable to outsiders. Yet, we propose, there may be other routes towards tacit knowledge. The installation sought to provoke an exchange by amplifying issues of contention beneath the surface at the WTO, which we made manifest in the work. By materializing (through abstract films) facets of the organization's guiding principles (Allow trade to flow more freely, Everyone must follow the same rules, etc.) our aim was to elicit agreement or denial that these principles reflected a version of reality. offered an alternate discourse of engagement that allowed interlocutors to re-frame their tacit understanding of institutional culture at the WTO within

the relatively level-playing field of aesthetics; something they had no requirement to be expert in, but had the right to comment on. This encounter utilized powerful open signifiers, in response to which informants were encouraged to construct meanings, as a mechanism to raise the volume on unspoken concerns about the future of the organization and the use value of a multilateral trade regime more broadly. When implemented as a 'second-act' intervention, as Marcus sought to stage at the WTO, the follow up deepens insights from the original fieldwork and can address the failures or limits of an immersive ethnographic method.[18]

In a similar vein, our *214 Sq. Ft.* installation was designed to amplify the lived experience of chronically homeless families through a fictional representation in three-dimensional form. It was a 'realistic' representation in that it was based on images and documentary footage of, as well as visits to, families in temporary motel housing. At the same time, it amplified that circumstance by taking varied examples and layering them together in the installation, and by making the furniture, the walls, and various objects 'speak' their plight. This in turn prompted visitors to encounter that phenomenon in a saturated way that had the effect of prompting many to express strong sentiments and beliefs about poverty, charity, homelessness in Orange County, morality, and other issues. For example, when the installation was relocated to the grounds of Pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church the piece amplified Christian fundamentalist morality tales within the context of the imploding Southern California real estate market of the first Obama administration. The installation continues to travel throughout California and the United States as a vehicle for Project Hope Alliance to raise awareness and funding, and each locale offers an opportunity to provoke varied interpretative communities to make explicit what otherwise might have remained tacit and internal.

In conclusion, our aim here has been to elucidate a model of ethnographic work that draws on design modalities and to convey the potential value of this type of intervention. We posit that Productive Encounters are one kind of solution to the challenges

of knowledge production for anthropologists. Design modalities disrupt typical ethnographic trajectories by repositioning experts into non-expert zones of discourse, creating chance operations and false constraints, opportunities for useful failure, and other operations that we consider productive for the overarching aim of deepening anthropological insight. However composed, such encounters have the potential to generate hybrid, deeply felt, embedded, and original articulations of 'contemporary problems' (the object of ethnographic work everywhere) not readily available through other forms.

Luke Cantarella is an associate professor of design at Pace University. He has designed over one hundred productions including work for the theater, opera, dance, film, television and commercial design. Theaters he has worked at include the Atlantic Theater Company, American Repertory Theater, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Yale Rep, Prince Music Theater, Northlight Theater, Repertory Theater of St. Louis, Rozentheater (Amsterdam), Lyric Theater of Oklahoma, Berkshire Theater Festival, Barrington Stage Company, Adirondack Theater Festival, CITY Theater, Synapse Productions, New World Stages, and many others. He has designed operas for Wolftrap, Curtis, Peabody and the New England Conservatory of Music. Luke's creative work often extends beyond the theater. Recent projects include *214 Sq. Ft.*, a meta-site for anthropology relating to the motel families of Orange County developed with Christine Hegel, the Center of Ethnography at UCIrvine, and Project Hope Alliance. He also co-created the installation *The Flocktree* with Jason Cantarella, a mathematician specializing in knot theory, supported by Ideas for Creative Exploration in Athens, Georgia. His paper *Originality, Autonomy & Control* was presented at the Prague Quadrennial 2011 as part of the IFTR Scenography Working Group. Luke received his M.F.A. from the Yale School of Drama in 2000. He completed his undergraduate work at Northwestern University, where he earned a B.S. in Speech in 1994.

Christine Hegel is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Western Connecticut State University. She received her Ph.D. from CUNY Graduate Center and was affiliated with the Institute for Money, Technology, and Financial Inclusion (IMTFI) at UC Irvine. Her work has

been focused on questions of contemporary legal subjectivity in the Middle East, which she examined through ethnographic research on contracting, litigation, and documentary regimes in Egypt. This research has formed the basis of essays in *Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa Into the New Millennium* (Indiana University Press), *Family Law in the Muslim World* (I.B. Tauris) and *Law, Culture, and Humanities Journal*. Since 2011, Hegel has been collaborating with George E. Marcus and Luke Cantarella on projects that explore intersections between design and ethnography. They have co-designed installation pieces *214 Sq. Ft.* and *Trade is Sublime* and currently are preparing a book manuscript on design modalities for ethnographic inquiry.

George E. Marcus is Chancellor's Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, since 2005—where he helped found the Center for Ethnography—and previously served as Joseph D. Jamail Professor (2001–2006) and chair (1980–2005) in the Department of Anthropology at Rice University, where he taught from 1975 to 2006. Marcus served as the founding editor of *Cultural Anthropology, Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology*. His text *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (coedited with James Clifford, 1986) is considered one of the most influential works of contemporary anthropology, marking a shift in its diversity and range of research styles. In the same year, he published *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (with Michael M. J. Fischer). He later published a retrospective collection of essays on ethnography, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (1998), which included a number of provocations—multisited ethnography, ethnographic complicity, and reflexivity—that would further guide anthropology into the next millennium. Marcus's more recent research has focused on the ethnography of institutions of global power, and how they reach into ordinary, everyday, diverse lives. He has also begun to explore in a sustained way changes in anthropology's signature method and how it might be influenced by experiments in collaboration with designers, artists, and visual media makers. Recent volumes include *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (with Paul Rabinow and others), and *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used To Be* (co-edited with James Faubion).

Notes

1. See, for example, Paul Rabinow and George E. Marcus, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

2. *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*, edited by Wendy Gunn, Ton Otto and Rachel Charlotte Smith (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

3. In Richland's case, this was a key challenge. How to describe the value of specifically *ethnographic* analysis for a legal discourse that was already subject to an expert *legal* analysis? See Dominic Boyer, "Thinking Through the Anthropology of Experts," *Anthropology In Action*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2008), pp.38-46.

4. Between 2008 and 2010, an international team of ten anthropologists conducted ethnographic research on various aspects of the operations of the WTO Secretariat at the CWR in Geneva. The 2008-2010 interval was a dramatic period of world economic challenge, and at the WTO especially, a frustrating period of failure to complete the longstanding (since 2001) Doha Round of global trade agreement among its 159 member nations. The results of these research projects were published as an edited volume, *Des Anthropologues á l'OMC*, edited by Marc Abélès (Paris: CNRS Press, 2011).

5. For a chronicle of this second act project, see George E. Marcus, "A Chronicle of an Intervention at the World Trade Organization in Five Not So Easy Pieces" (2014, submitted to *FIELD*).

6. See www.tradeissublime.org. Luke Cantarella and Christine Hegel, "Trade is Sublime: Rethinking the Field through Multi-modality, Visual Metaphor, and Circulation," presented at *The (Troubled) Field* Conference, New School for Social Research, April 26, 2014.

7. Justin Richland, *Arguing With Tradition: The Language of Law in Hopi Tribal Court* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

8. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

9. Keith M. Murphy and George E. Marcus, "Epilogue: Ethnography and Design, Ethnography in Design . . . Ethnography by Design," in *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*, edited by Wendy Gunn, Ton Otto, and Rachel Charlotte Smith (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), pp. 25-68.

10. Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

11. A useful example of the conversation object from Chin's studio can be seen in the work of Barb Natali. In the course of her work at the studio's fieldsite in Kampala, Uganda, Natali became interested in the discourse surrounding the control of the female body specifically in response to a new set of modesty laws introduced in the Ugandan legislature in 2011, popularly known as the "anti-mini-skirt law". Natali crafted a response in the form of a speculative object: a pair of shorts wrapped in barbed wire, which she proposed selling in the Owino market, the large marketplace in central Kampala. Created with local tailors, the prototype was then used to provoke conversations centering on the female body and sexual violence. This ingenious materialization of a social condition provided a means of exposing tacit knowledge and generating new engagements with a complex theme. For more on this project, see http://barbaranatali.com/#thesis.

12. George E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick & Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

13. James Faubion and George E. Marcus, *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used To Be* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

14. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998) and Kester, *Conversation Pieces* (op. cit.)

15. It should be noted that strategies in art production have a robust history of exploring methods of subverting the limits of individual subjectivity. The so-called "Wrecking" projects of choreographer Susan Rethorst are a good example. She invites artists into her rehearsals mid-way through the development of a dance to "wreck" the work. The choreographer or director takes over the rehearsal and begin to re-make the dance based upon his or her own concerns without complete disregard for Rethorst's a priori intentions. Rethorst developed this strategy in response to her long-standing concern about the tyranny of control. In her pedagogy, she identified a primary artistic challenge not in, as is commonly asserted, finding one's true voice, but conversely in silencing the dominance of that voice. She writes, "the self is a constraint from which there is no escape, that unique inner world which never quits." Susan Rethorst, "Stealing, Influence and Identity," in *Movement Research Journal*, no. 21 (2000).

16. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (London: Polity Press, 2007).

17. See Marcus, 2014, op. cit.

18. Additionally, important secondary effects are created around the site of the research. Jae Chung, a member of the original CNRS-funded WTO research team, adviser and interlocutor in the creation of *Trade is Sublime*, joined us at the CWR for the two-week exhibition of the piece. She found that our intervention and presence created an atmosphere of heightened dialogue in her interview-based process, that continued throughout the period of installation. Chung's research during a return trip to the WTO was markedly enhanced in its own trajectory by the context and presence of our parallel 'second act' project.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

Delirium and Resistance after the Social Turn

Gregory Sholette

> *To a degree unprecedented in any other social system, capitalism both feeds on and reproduces the moods of populations. Without delirium and confidence, capital could not function.*
>
> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009)[1]

> *Art and art-related practices that are oriented toward* usership *rather than spectatorship are characterized more than anything else by their scale of operations: they operate on the 1:1 scale… They don't look like anything other than what they also are; nor are they something to be looked at and they certainly don't look like art.*
>
> Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (2013)[2]

In just a few short years the emerging field of social practice has gained a considerable following thanks to the way it successfully links an ever-expanding definition of visual art to a broad array of disciplines and procedures, including sustainable design, urban studies, environmental research, performance art, and community advocacy, but also such commonplace activities as walking, talking and even cooking.[3] Not just another cultural field or artistic genre, social practice is evolving into a comprehensive sphere of life encompassing over a half dozen academic programs, concentrations, or minors at the graduate and undergraduate levels already dedicated to turning out engaged artists, and

still more programs in the pipeline (and full disclosure I am part of this pedagogical trend evolving at the City University of New York). Philanthropic foundations, meanwhile, are hurriedly adding community arts related grants to their programming, and major museums are setting aside part of their budgets (primarily from education departments although that seems about to change) in order to produce ephemeral, participatory projects that have the added benefit in a crash-strapped financial environment of being relatively low in cost, of not requiring storage or maintenance, and of generating audience interest in ways that static exhibitions no longer seem to provide.[4] "Art," writes Peter Weibel, "is emerging as a public space in which the individual can claim the promises of constitutional and state democracy. Activism may be the first new art form of the twenty-first century."[5]

And yet all of this ferment is also taking place at a moment when basic human rights are considered a state security risk, when sweeping economic restructuring converts the global majority into a precarious surplus, and when a widespread hostility to the very notion of society has become commonplace rhetoric within mainstream politics. In truth, the public sphere, as both concept and reality, lies in tatters. It is as much a casualty of unchecked economic privatization, as it is of anti-government sentiments and failed states. Counter-intuitively, the rise in the number of Non-Governmental Agencies (NGO) does not reveal a healthy social sphere, but more of a desperate attempt at triage aimed at resolving such complex issues as global labor exploitation, environmental pollution, and political misconduct all of which no longer seem manageable within the framework of democratically elected state governance. The contrast and similarity between socially engaged art collectives and NGOs has been noted by Grant Kester, who cites criticisms by the Dutch architectural collective BAVO regarding "accomodationist" practices that only aim to fix local social problems without questioning the system that gave rise to these problems in the first place.[6] My concerns fall along similar lines, except that here in the United States the situation is less easy to parse. A lack of public

March 25, 2014 interventionist street projection by Gulf Labor Coalition, Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.), and OWS Illuminator "rebranding" the façade of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City to protest appalling migrant labor conditions in Abu Dhabi where the museum is planning to build a new facility designed by Frank Gehry. Image courtesy of Noah Fischer.

funding for art, as well as the absence of an actual Left discourse or parties makes it difficult to avoid some level of dependency on the institutional art world.

That a relationship exists therefore between the rise of social practice art and the fall of social infrastructures there can be no doubt. And it begs the question, why art has taken a so-called "social turn," as Claire Bishop proposes, just at this particular historical juncture?[7] I raise this paradox now, as engaged art practices appear poised to exit the periphery of the mainstream art world where it has resided for decades, often in the nascent form of "community arts," in order to be embraced today by a degree of institutional legitimacy. The stakes are becoming significantly elevated, and not only for artists, but also for political activists. This is not a simple

matter of good intentions being coopted by evil institutions. We are well beyond that point. The co-dependence of periphery and center, along with the widespread reliance on social networks, and the near-global hegemony of capitalist markets makes fantasies of compartmentalizing social practice from the mainstream as dubious as any blanket vilification of the art world. As Fischer puts it, a delirious confidence permeates our reality under Capitalism 2.0, and I would add that contemporary art is simultaneously its avant-garde and its social realism. My response is to propose a *détournement* of this state affairs by rerouting capital's deranged affectivity in order to counter its very interests. I would like to say that this is the goal of my re-examination here, which aims to make trouble for the increasingly normalized theory, history and practice of socially engaged art and its political horizon, or lack thereof. I would like to insist that this is an attempt to bring about a system-wide reboot. Realistically though, I hope to at least present an outline for future research, discussion and debate regarding the paradoxical ascent of social practice art in a socially bankrupt world.

Capital and art, two seemingly discrete, even antithetical categories, appear to be converging everywhere we look, from the barren sands of Abu Dhabi where western museum's help brand patriarchal monarchies propped up by a surplus of petrodollars and impoverished migrant workers, to online subscriber-driven services like the Mei Moses Fine Art Index, which promotes itself as the "Beautiful Assets Advisor" faithfully keeping track of financial returns on art for the .01% super-rich, much as the Stock Exchange does for other types of investors.[8] Perhaps it is no coincidence then that both the Mei Moses Index and the future Louvre Abu Dhabi were rolled out in 2007, just as key economic indicators were falling like dominos across the world banking system. It was also the year Apple announced the iPhone, so that by the end of 2007 some 700 Billion SMS text messages had been sent, setting the stage some would argue for a series of "twitter revolutions," starting in Iran and Moldavia in 2009, and then later across the Arab world.[9] Books such as Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster*

Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.) poster "What Would an Ethical Museum Look Like?" in a NYC subway station nearby the Guggenheim Museum, 2014. Image courtesy of Noah Fischer.

Capitalism (2007) launched a salvo against Milton Friedman style laissez-faire capitalism, while Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's re-theorization of imperialism in their best-selling volume *Empire* (2001), followed by *Multitude* (2005), continued to inspire anti-globalization activists in the Global Justice Movement.[10] Still, at this very same moment a combination of dark derivatives, toxic assets, and subprime mortgage tainted hedge-funds were beginning to tank as virtually the entire planet was about learn to speak the "grammar of finance."[11] "The financialization of capitalism—the shift

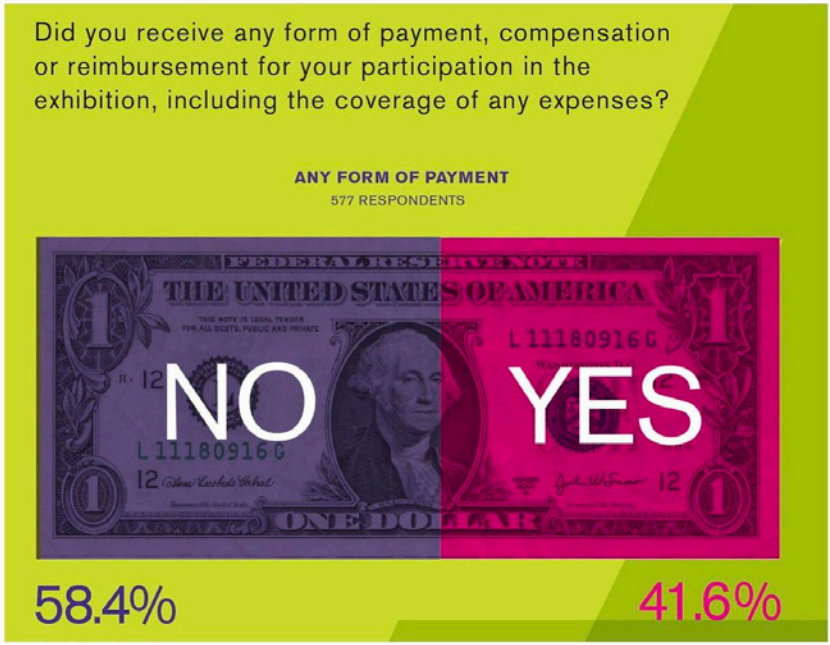
in gravity of economic activity from production (and even from much of the growing service sector) to finance—is thus one of the key issues of our time," wrote John Bellamy Foster in a 2007 *Monthly Review* article, adding prophetically "rather than advancing in a fundamental way, capital is trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of stagnation and financial explosion."[12] As the journal containing his essay went to print the entire global economy began plunging into a massive, prolonged contraction that is still crippling indebted nations and individual workers today.

Astonishingly, one of the few markets to not only weather the crisis, but which also subsequently exploded in aggregate value, even as the rest of the economy remained in deep recession, was that of fine art. On May 9th, 2008 Sotheby's sold 362 million dollars worth of modern and contemporary painting including a record breaking Francis Bacon painting triptych. And the sales have not weakened since.[13] It was the same day Fitch Ratings announced they were awarding a subsidiary of Lehman Brothers Holding Inc. an 'A,' for a positive financial outlook. Four months later Lehman initiated the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history, sending the stock market into a sustained sequence of unprecedented capital loses.[14] Expectations were high that the art market would follow this downward trend, just as it did after the 1987 "Black Monday" crash. And initially, the art market did indeed take a hit, with prices for such seemingly stable assets as Impressionist and post-Impressionist painting dropping as much as much as 30% in value by the end of 2008.[15] Then something unexpected took place. Sales of art stabilized and began to rise again, so that by 2013 the global art market grossed €47.42 billion in sales, the second most prosperous year on record since 2007.[16] Since then art sales have continued their dramatic and unprecedented boom even as the economic crisis continues to plague most of the world's nations. One result of art's cultural potency has been the mutation of works of art themselves, a process in which a relatively fixed capital asset such as a Jackson Pollock painting owned by a well-heeled society elite a few decades ago has today morphed into an investment

instrument capable of being bundled together with other assets by clever hedge fund managers. This goes well beyond the merely entrepreneurial marriage between art and commerce exemplified by, say, Jeff Koons who has licensed his metallic, balloon dog brand for use on H&M handbags. This fnancialization zeitgeist is shifting art all the way down to what might be thought of as its ontological level. Artist and theorist Melanie Gilligan goes so far as to suggest that even the production of artistic work is beginning to resemble a type of finance derivative, which rather than seeking to generate new forms or new values instead depends "on the reorganization of something already existing."[17]

Pervasive financialization has also led to the *un-concealing* of art's political economy. Eyes wide open, the legions of largely invisible artists and cultural workers so fundamental to reproducing what Julian Stallabrass sardonically dubbed Art Incorporated as far back as 2004 are starting to doubt their professional allegiances. We now see in high relief what has always been right in front of us all along: the thousands of invisible, yet professionally trained artist service workers –fabricators, assistants, registrars, shippers, handlers, installers, subscribers, adjunct instructors– who are necessary for reproducing the established hierarchies of the art world. This socialized dark matter is now impossible to *unsee*, as criticism of the top-heavy distribution of compensation endemic to the field of artistic production intensifies. Some artists are even beginning to organize.

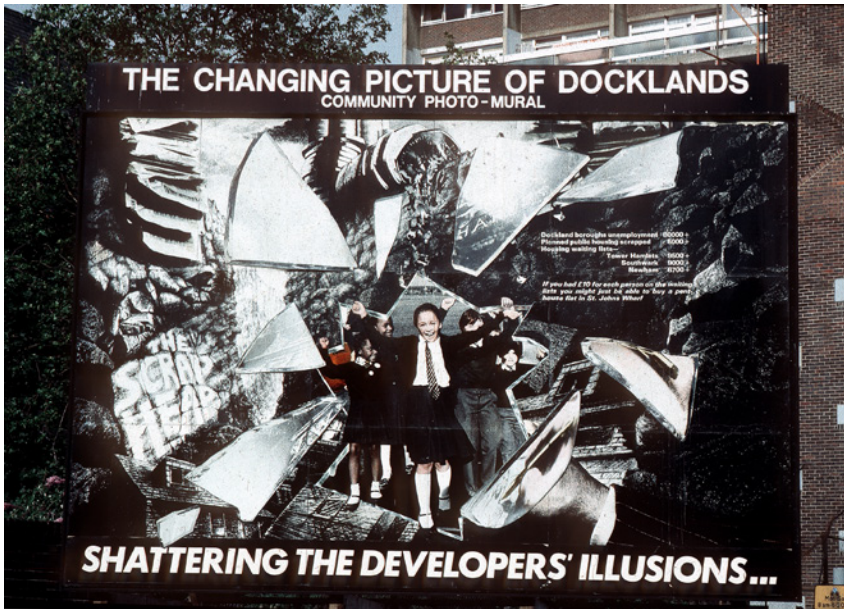
The business-as-usual art world is now facing not one, but two mutinous tendencies. The first involves demands that the art industry be regulated in order to assure a more equitable allocation of resources for all concerned. The other involves escape. Examples of the first tendency include recently formed artists' organizations such as Working Artists for the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), BFAMFAPHD, ArtLeaks, Gulf Labor Coalition, Debtfair, Art & Labor (both offshoots of Occupy Wall Street), and a new Artist's Union being organized in Newcastle, England. These micro-institutions collectively assert moral and sometimes also legal pressure on the



Downloadable graphic visualization of a 2011 survey focused on the working conditions of artists by W.A.G.E. (Working Artists & The Greater Economy). Available on the website: www.wageforwork.com/.

art industry demanding that it become an all around better citizen.[18] Redressing economic injustice in the art world, including the 52,035 average dollars of debt owed by art school graduates has also been the topic of recent conferences including "Artist as Debtor," the 2015 College Art Association panel entitled "Public Art Dialogue Student Debt, Real Estate, and the Arts, and "Art Field As Social Factory" sponsored by the Free/Slow University in Warsaw Poland in order to address the "division of labor, forms of capital and systems of exploitation in the contemporary cultural production."[19]

The second reaction by artists to the current crisis involves exiting the art world altogether, or at least attempting to put its hierarchical pecking order and cynical winner-takes-all tournament culture at a safe distance.[20] For many artists the primary means of



Shattering the Developers' Illusions, The seventh image from the first sequence of photo-murals each 18' x 12' (5.49m x 3.66m) from series "The Changing Picture of Docklands." exploring issues surrounding the re-development of the London Docklands from the viewpoint of local communities. © Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, Docklands Community Poster Project, 1982-5. Photograph courtesy of artist Loraine Leeson.

achieving this is withdrawal, or partial withdrawal, which sometimes involves turning to social and political engagement outside of art.[21] In theory, not only is it difficult to monetize acts of, say, artistic gift giving or dialogical conversation, two commonly practiced operations that typify socially engaged art, but also by forming links to non-art professionals in the "real" world one establishes a sense of embodied community quite apart from and affectively far richer than anything possible within the hopelessly compromised relations of the mainstream art world.

In truth, collectively produced art and community-based art have been around for decades. Beginning in the 1970s the British Arts Council began to funnel support to muralists, photographers, theatre troupes and other cultural and media workers operating

outside the studio in urban and rural public settings. A similar dissemination of government resources took place in the US under the US Department of Labor's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) as well as through National Endowment for the Arts funding. Some of this public support gave rise to artist's run alternative spaces. It also helped establish artists working within labor unions, impoverished inner city neighborhoods, prisons, geriatric facilities and other non-art settings. Exactly what makes current, more celebrated forms of social practice art distinct from these previous incarnations of community art is hard to pinpoint, although two things do stand out.

One difference is the move away from producing an artistic "work," such as a mural, exhibition, book, video, or some tangible outcome or object, and towards the choreographing of social experiences itself as a form of socially engaged art practice. In other words, activities such as collaborative programming, performance, documentation, protest, publishing, shopping, mutual learning, discussion, as well as walking, eating, or some other typically ephemeral pursuit is all that social practice sometimes results in. It's not that traditional community-based art generated no social relations, but rather that social practice *treats the social itself as a medium and material of expression*. Blake Stimson and I put began to intuit this shift in 2004. Writing about what we then perceived to be an emerging form of post-war collectivism after modernism,

> *This [new collectivism] means neither picturing social form, nor doing battle in the realm of representation but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression. This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realized fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism.*[22]

Theorist Stephen Wright similarly insists in his recent book *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* that contemporary art is moving beyond the realm of representation altogether and into a 1:1 correspondence with the world that both we, and it, occupy.[23] Before returning to these provocative claims, let me offer one other, less sensational

contrast between social practice art and community-based arts. The mainstream critical establishment of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s treated community-based art either with indifference or derision. It was a level of scorn that community artists returned in spades. Driven by populist ideals as much as contempt for art world glitterati, community artists frequently turned their backs to the established art world, and still do. On those rare occasions when a "serious" critic did "stoop" to address this "unsophisticated" art four issues typically arose.

First, while community artists who were, as often as not, white, middle-class and college educated, might collaborate with inmates to make "prison art,' or choreograph dances with geriatric patients, or train inner-city kids to make paintings and sculpture, thereby bringing pleasure and culture to the underserved, they were also, it was argued, undermining art's historically established autonomy from the everyday world. As far as "highbrow" art historians go, this is akin to wearing a large target on your back at a shooting range. Art's allegedly unique state of independence from life has, at least since the time of Schiller and Kant, permitted artists a singular type of freedom from useful labor. It is this *purposeless purpose* that allows artists to operate in opposition to the banality of the everyday as well as what Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse later designated as monopoly capitalism's "totally administered society." That is to say, artistic work retains an ability to withdraw from the everyday world's profaned, degraded routines only by keeping a measured, critical distance from it. By attempting to narrow the gap between art and society, community artists do exactly the opposite. Sin number one.

Second, community arts appear to substitute artist-generated services for genuine public services, thus reforming rather than fundamentally transforming offensive political inequalities that have only grown more extreme over the past thirty years, thanks to the anti-government policies of neoliberal, deregulated capitalism. Following the collapse of the world financial market this "replacement strategy" of artist service providers for actual social

services seems to have accelerated in the US and UK in particular as governments look for ways to cut public spending. As we well know, artists work cheap. Unionized social workers, educators, therapists do not. In addition, point three, community-based art practices run the risk of ensconcing the contemporary artist as some sort of profound, revelatory change agent, or as Grant Kester perceptively wrote, an aesthetic evangelical.[24] And finally, who says community is a good thing? Of course this depends on your definition of community but the world is full of tyrannical "communities," where difference, mental, physical, sexual, leads to expulsion or worse. *Profano Numerus Quattuor*. Nevertheless, all of these charges can just as easily be applied to social practice art today, and yet it seems to be the unconfirmed major contender for an *avant-garde redux*. What has changed?

Maybe it was Nicholas Bourriaud's promotion of Relational Aesthetics in the 1990s that began the rehabilitation of community art? Recall that the celebrity curator insisted artist Rirkit Tirivanija's gallery-centered meal sharing established a new, socially participatory paradigm for post-studio artistic practices. It was a claim the art world uncritically devoured. Or perhaps it was the expanding network of artists developing ephemeral actions, research-based public projects, and impermanent installations as a response to an ever-shrinking stock of large urban studio spaces? There is still a third possibility: the loss of no-strings-attached public funding for art institutions after the 1980s may have ironically brought about a popularization of museum programming by forcing institutions to seek out more interactive, spectacular public events. None of these scenarios disregards the sincerity of artists who seek communal experiences or socially useful applications for their work. The question here is what accounts for the positive reception of social practice art today, as opposed to the negative reception of its close kin, community art, only a decade or so ago? One way or the other, it seems that by the early 2000s we find previously widespread art world resistance to socially engaged art practices eroding, though

always selectively, so that now in 2015 the social turn is spinning full-throttle.

It is an inversion of artistic taste so abrupt that it reminds me of the late 1970s when painters still earnestly grappling with Greenbergian "flatness" discovered a decade later that it was an artistic "problem" that had simply vanished as a jubilant, and often juvenile 1980s art scene embraced figurative painting, decorative crafts, and even low-brow kitsch, all of which were the bane of most modernist aestheticians. Likewise, drawbacks once dismissively associated with community-based art are just as fugitive today, vanishing in a puff of smoke like the undead at sunrise. Aside from an occasional critic like Ben Davis who insists that "the genre of "social practice" art raises questions that it cannot by itself answer," most graduating MFA students today feel obliged to join an art collective and attempt to connect themselves to communities which are not traditionally part of the fine art world. [25] If anything, the focus on socially engaged art by the mainstream art world has actually eclipsed, rather than illuminated the many individuals still active in community arts, turning long simmering resentments once directed at the art world establishment into charges of appropriation and colonization. [26]

Davis may be right about the blindness of social practice art to its own preconceptions. Still, the fact that so many young people today are desperately seeking to redefine the way they live from the point of view of both environmental and social justice adds an impressive robustness to this cultural phenomenon. Art seems to be the one field of recognized, professional activity where a multitude of interests ranging from the aesthetic to the pragmatically everyday co-exist, a state of exception that led to artist Chris Kraus's musings on what she calls the ambiguous virtues of art school,

> *Why would young people enter a studio art program to become teachers and translators, novelists, archivists, and small business owners? Clearly, it's because these activities have become so degraded and negligible within the culture that the only chance*

> *for them to* appear *is within contemporary art's coded yet infinitely malleable discourse.*[27]

Socially engaged art practice is becoming such an attractive and paradigmatic model for younger artists that it seems to fulfil Fredric Jameson proposition that particular historical art forms express a social narrative that paradoxically, "brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction."[28] At first glance, this seems like the answer to my initial question: why is socially engaged art advancing at a moment when society is bankrupted? Because, with due respect to Jameson, it resolves intolerable contradictions in the actual world. But while this explanation may have been applicable to Relational Aesthetics, it seems inadequate just a decade or so later with regard to social practice. For Jameson, the work of art remains a categorically discrete entity, a novel, building, performance or film framed within a specific historic, cultural and institutional context. It is, in other words, the privileged site where the work of hermeneutic textual interpretation takes place. What if social practice art has already successfully inverted normative representational framing as art, flipping inside out our spectator-based distance from the world so that now *everything* is outside the frame and nothing remains inside?

In Wright's 1:1 thesis, the practice of socially engaged art would then simply constitute the social itself, emerging into the everyday world as a set of actual social relations or commonplace activities, and not as a deep critical reflection or aesthetic representation of society or its flaws. This is different from a Kaprow/Beuys/Fluxus tactic of inserting anti-art into the everyday world. 1:1 art just becomes redundant by providing "a function already fulfilled by something else."[29] Neither does Wright's model conform to Shannon Jackson's notion that such heteronomous social activities might be folded into a neat, academic framework via performance studies.[30] If these emerging practices interact with social life by producing the social itself, then they are neither an experimental trial, nor a

performance, nor even a rehearsal for some ideal society. In fact the term practice would be a misnomer. Leading to several complicated consequences.[31] First, redundant, 1:1 social practices are subject to all of the legal, economic, and practical consequences of any other real-world activity. Take Pittsburgh-based Conflict Kitchen that specializes in serving food from countries that the United States is in conflict with including North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela. When they presented a Palestinian menu last year someone sent the artists a death threat, forcing them to shut down under police protection for several days. Yes, paintings and other artistic projects have drawn hostility to themselves or their authors due to what or how they represent someone or some nation or idea, but in this instance, does it really make sense to defend Conflict Kitchen as an art project with a guaranteed first amendment right to free speech when the laws protecting commercial business, which is from a legal perspective CK is, are already enough? Conversely, first amendment rights would not prevent this culinary art project from becoming liable for, say, a food born illness, should one be accidentally transmitted to a customer.[32] Operating in the real world also presents learning challenges for socially engaged practitioners trained by artists who paint, and draw, and make installation art in the isolation of their studio. Commenting on the challenge of this autodidactic learning curve, artist Theaster Gates explains with genuine surprise that while working on his Dorchester housing restoration projects in Chicago "I never learned so much about zoning law in my life." To anyone other than an artist trained to deal with the representations of things, but not things themselves, gaining practical knowledge about zoning laws would have been self-evident.[33]

Second, by working with human affect and experience as an artistic medium social practice draws directly upon the state of society that we actually find ourselves in today: fragmented and alienated by decades of privatization, monetization, and ultra-deregulation. In the absence of any truly democratic governance, works of socially engaged art seem to be filling in a lost social by enacting community participation and horizontal collaboration, and

by seeking to create micro-collectives and intentional communities. On the surface, it's as if they were making a performative proposition about a truant social sphere they hope will return once the grown-ups notice it's gone missing. If however they are instead incarnating the remains of society as I am suggesting, then the stakes are radically different, for better and for worse. It is for better when social practice and community-based artists engage with the political, fantastic, or even resentful impulses of people, a process that can lead to class awareness or even utopian imaginings much as we saw with Occupy Wall Street. It is for the worse when the social body becomes prime quarry for mainstream cultural institutions and their corporate benefactors who thrive on deep-mining networks of "prosumers" bristling with profitable data.[34] Even the normally optimistic theorist Brian Holmes gloomily warns us that "the myriad forms of contemporary electronic surveillance now constitute a proactive force, the irremediably multiple feedback loops of a cybernetic society, devoted to controlling the future.[35]

One way to grapple with the present paradox of social practice art's predicament is to turn to the archive of past projects and proposals –including those that succeeded and those that failed– in order to reappraise certain moments within the genealogy of socially engaged art that might have unfolded differently. To find vestiges and sparks suggesting unanticipated historical branches that may have sprouted off into directions that would possibly be less vulnerable to the pressures for normalization, institutionalization and administration. One of these significant junctures took place shortly before two world-altering historical occurrences–the global financial crash of 2007/2008 with its devastating economic effects and the widespread surveillance, even criminalization of the electronic commons. The year 2004-2005 sits at a point were the counter-globalization movement was invisibly beginning to falter, and immediately after unprecedented global peace demonstrations distressingly failed to stop the illegal, US-led invasion of Iraq. It precedes the full disclosure of the emerging national security state complex of today. Nevertheless, these realities had yet to fully

com_muni_port (2003) a mobile radio broadcasting unit, and "The Low Power to High Power Broadcast Media Tour," a 2004 tactical media project, both by neuroTansmitter (Valerie Tevere, Angel Nevarez). Image courtesy of neuroTansmitter.

sink in as artists, activists and intellectuals remained captivated by the utopian potential of new communications technologies and the "people-power" that seems to have led to the downfall of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European empire. Coming into focus was a group of tech-savvy, cultural activists who's bold hit and run interventions sought to undermine established authority by literally upending public spaces and turning the mainstream media's resources against itself.

Artists Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere of the group neuroTransmitter put it this way:

> *For us this a was moment of heightened media art and activism. Artist were extending the possibilities of new technologies and re-inscribing the use of old media forms. It was a time of innovations in technology and communications media,*

> *yet we were interacting in physical space rather than through social media... where we both interacted on the street level as well as in the air.*[36]

Decidedly non-ideological in outlook (other than an occasional nod of approval towards the Left-libertarian Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) of Chiapas Mexico) tactical media interventionists dismissed organized politics.[37] Some went so far as to castigate past efforts at achieving progressive political change describing the utopian aims of the New Left and May 68 as "vaporware"–a derogatory term used for a software product that while announced with much fanfare, never actually materializes. Geart Lovink and David Garcia argued that tactical media activism sought to hold no ground of its own; instead merely seeking to creatively interrupt the status quo with determined, short-terms acts of public sensationalism and cultural sabotage.

> *Our hybrid forms are always provisional. What counts are the temporary connections you are able to make. Here and now, not some vaporware promised for the future. But what we can do on the spot with the media we have access to.*[38]

In truth, Tactical Media benefitted from a particular historical opening, a quasi-legal loophole that existed before the heavily policed, privatized public sphere emerged full-blown, with its round-the-clock electronic surveillance closing down outlets for resistance, including the kind of critical gaps exploited by more militantly engaged political artists such as Critical Art Ensemble as I will discuss below. In other words, the illegal status of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks clandestinely carried out by hacktivist groups such as Anonymous in recent years were still in a gray zone into the early 2000s. In 1998 Ricardo Dominquez and Electronic Disturbance Theater designed a pro-Zapatista virtual sit-in platform aimed at overloading and crashing websites belonging to the Mexican Government.[39] But in 2010, University of California Campus Police investigated Dominquez for a tactical media type application he devised that would assist undocumented immigrants

The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere, interior installation view at MASS MoCA, Spring 2004.

crossing the Southern US border.[40] This was also before some forms of social practice art began to attract the attention of mainstream cultural institutions.

The second half of this essay focuses on this tactical media moment as it was presented in the 2004 exhibition *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, organized for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) by their recently hired curator Nato Thompson. The show was dedicated to artists or artists' collectives who explicitly conceived of art not as an object of contemplation for a passive spectator but as a sharable set of tools for bringing about actual social change. It also reflected a certain optimism that pivoted on the idea of tactics could be adopted by anyone, not just artists, to improve life conditions. What follows is not intended to serve as a diverting tale of speculative nostalgia. Instead, I hope to put this exhibition forward as one wrinkle in the archive of socially

engaged art worthy of re-reading, and possibly rebooting its history. Endeavoring to leverage the euphoric concoction of delirium and confidence Mark Fisher attributes to Capitalism 2.0 for a project of archival redemption, I am reminded of a phrase used by Russian Avant-Garde theorist Viktor Shklovsky. I proceed therefore with the "optimism of delusion."[41]

II. After the Interventionists

Conceived of and produced for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), curator Nato Thompson's 2004 exhibition *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, drew on two precedents: Mary Jane Jacob's 1992-1993 Chicago-based public art project *Culture in Action*, and the *Détournement* or creative "hijacking" of daily life proposed by the Situationist International in the 1960s. It also sought to make a self-conscious break with past attempts to exhibit politically charged contemporary art in a museum setting. Thompson's curatorial statement compares "the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s" with his selection of interventionist practitioners who he insists had begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hardheaded politics with a light-handed approach, while embracing anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing should never be separated from each other.[42]

This was no gray on gray presentation of "message art" intended to dutifully instruct its audience about political realities, any more than its content pointed to some romantic socialist *vaporworld*. Instead a visitor to MASS MoCA was confronted with a zoo-like menagerie of "magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers," packed into the museum's plaintive post-industrial expanse like a sideshow for activists. Rather than didactic lecturing these projects agitated for social change through ironic critiques, overt lampooning, and subtle co-optations of mainstream media and culture cunningly disguised as *the real thing*. Artist Alex Villar leaps over fences, scales

brick facades and squeezes himself into cracks between tenement buildings, temporarily occupying overlooked urban spaces while performing his own Situationist-inspired version of Parkour, the Spanish collective YOMANGO display fashion accessories for magically making "objects disappear," (i.e. shoplifting with style), and a member of the Danish group N55 rolls a mobile floating unit down a city street demonstrating the Snail Shell System, a low-cost mobile dwelling useful for transportation and providing "protection from violence during demonstrations."[43] Something subversive pervaded all of these varied works, though exactly what direction this dissidence pointed towards was fuzzy at best.

If the political identity of these *interventionist* activists was intentionally difficult to pin-down, the exhibition certainly proved something else, something that most previous displays of socially engaged art had not attempted: it returned a sense of wonder and surprise to oppositional culture. Subterfuge could be fun. Unfortunately, this aspect of the exhibition's message was easier to take-away as a sound bite than its critical intent. Despite being on view for over a year (May 2004 to March of 2005) *The Interventionists* received no in-depth reviews, though a one-sentence recommendation for holiday travelers did appear in the *New York Times*, in which the show was cheerfully described as full of "pranksters and fun politically motivated meddlers."[44] The absence of serious, critical response cannot be blamed entirely on the lack of familiarity with Nato Thompson, still an untested curator, or with the exhibition's off-the-grid location in rural New England. Nor was the carnivalesque enthusiasm that unapologetically permeated *The Interventionists* a reason for this dismissal. After all, a substantial theoretical discourse already existed for this kind of art, online and in Europe, but its authors, including Gene Ray, Brian Holmes, Rozalinda Borcila, Geert Lovink, Marcelo Exposito, Gerald Raunig, Marc James Léger and Stephen Wright among others, then, as now, have limited impact on cultural discourse in the US. The failure of any critic to develop a substantial political and aesthetic analysis of *The Interventionists* is unquestionably a lost opportunity, especially

when one considers the impoverished state of such criticism even up to today. Still, the exhibition managed to demonstrate two things above all. First that a thriving group of contemporary artists in 2004 considered social, political and environmental issues paramount to their practice, and second, that their critique could be delivered through the kind of stimulating visual format audiences of contemporary art had come to expect. Even so, there are two overlooked dimensions of *The Interventionists* more relevant to my argument still in need of excavation.

MASS MoCA's sprawling labyrinth of rooms and obsolete industrial apparatus appealed then, as it does today, to vacationers grown tired of Happy Meals and theme parks and searching for that off-beat family experience, but one that promised at least a modicum of educational nourishment. On the occasion of *The Interventionists* a trip to the museum delivered something extra, a spectacle of imaginative dissidence whose quintessential onlooker was not the art world elite, but instead these same "holiday travelers," whose demoralized collective *un*consciousness theorist

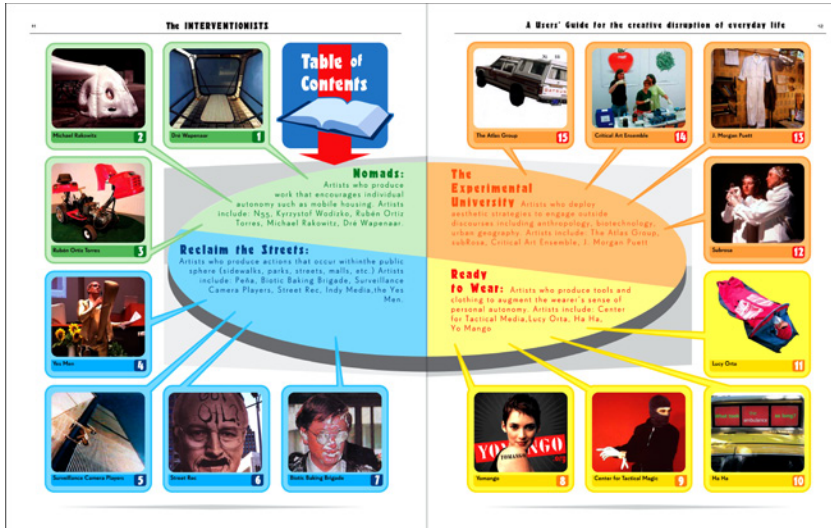
Detail of MASS MoCA exterior advertising The Interventionists including Ruben Ortiz's low-rider lawn mower and e-Xplo's local sight-seeing Art Trolley.

Michel De Certeau would call *the murmur of the everyday*. This was no coincidence. Thompson cut his curatorial teeth co-producing a weekend of guerilla-style street actions in Chicago under the rubric *The Department of Space and Land Reclamation* or DSLR. Gleefully bringing together graffiti, agit-prop posters, hip-hop, illegal street art and impromptu public actions, DSLR's bottom-up informality simultaneously paid homage to and deconstructed Mary Jane Jacob's landmark 1993 public exhibition *Culture in Action*, all the while turning a blind-eye towards the city's more art savvy neighborhoods. From gigantic balls of trash rolled down Michigan Avenue at lunch hour by men and women dressed up as sanitation workers to anonymous public sculptures attached to traffic signs and absurd performances including a sofa tagged "Please Loiter" plopped down casually on the sidewalk, DSLR was about as disconnected from the gaze of the art world as one could get in 2001.[45]

No one would argue that MASS MoCA was then or is now disconnected from the contemporary art world, though there is a definite allure generated, even perhaps cultivated, through the museum's measurable distance from the mainstream art world that is quite unlike that of Dia Beacon's manageable proximity to New York City.[46] This slightly offbeat appeal extends to the type of administered culture found within MASS MoCA, bringing me to my second point. *The Interventionists* and its venue benefitted from a symbiotic tension that drew on the exhibition's rebellious, Situationist-inspired references, as much as it did from the unusual institutional history of MASS MoCA itself. It was self-made cultural entrepreneur Thomas Krens who conceived of MASS MoCA during the economic upturn of 1984. By sidestepping traditional models of *noblesse oblige* in which those who "own" high culture generously lend their artistic property to public institutions in order to enlighten the masses, Krens developed a business model that linked a growing interest in contemporary art with the economic resuscitation of North Adams, a former manufacturing town that had fallen into economic decline along with other industrial centers

in North America. Strategically located in the bucolic border region where Massachusetts meets Vermont, but also relatively close to New York City with its surplus of sophisticated art consumers and art producers, Krens saw his vision as altogether win-win. Then came the collapse of the savings and loan bubble in 1987. Plans for MASS MoCA were put on hold for over a decade. In 1999, the museum finally opened its doors just one year before the next bubble, the so-called dot.com bubble, also exploded sending a pre-Occupy generation of creative workers into states of resentment and near-desperate panic.

At this point Krenns had been appointed director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York City, and soon became the architect of an expanding cultural franchise. Branch museums were established in Berlin, Spain, and Las Vegas, with the latest expansion planned for 2017 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, an undertaking that has generated substantial public controversy due to the poor labor conditions of the UAE. Krens was also the first director of a major art museum to hold a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) rather than a degree in art historical scholarship. This last detail becomes more interesting when one considers the nature of Mass MoCA. Lacking a substantial collection of officially sanctioned art objects the museum plays host to relatively long-term, temporary exhibitions and shorter-term performance events that situate it somewhere between a European Kunsthalle and a Cineplex. Given Krens's background it is not surprising that the orthodox concept of an art museum has been partially deconstructed at Mass MoCA. Nor is it unusual to find the traditional role of the curator as one who cares for the well being of cultural treasures reinterpreted as someone who selects, cultivates and produces projects that combine artistic seriousness with visual pageantry. Notably, Nato Thompson himself was hired by the museum without an advanced degree in art history, but instead with a Masters in Arts Administration from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Though, what would have proven a professional deficit for a curator at other large cultural institutions,



Page spread from the "User's Manual" for The Interventionists exhibition graphically emphasizing the usefulness of tactical art projects as publicly accessible tools for the "interruption of everyday life." Design by Arjen Noordeman, image courtesy Greg Sholette.

likely afforded Thompson certain tactical advantages within the hybridized institutional geography of MASS MoCA. There is also an amusing irony here when one considers the intersection of these two incongruous, though equally unorthodox, models of cultural programming: MASS MoCA's dedication to "deconstructing" the classical idea of the art museum so as to rebrand it a sensational destination for tourists, and *The Interventionists* unapologetic rejection of institutional critique in favor of an eye-popping primer showcasing the subversive possibilities of Tactical Media as "useful" art.

In the decade following *The Interventionists* numerous academic conferences, publications, and programs began to engage similar, Situationist-inspired themes, as debates about short-term tactics versus strategic sustainability and artistic instrumentality versus aesthetic value emerged, or rather re-emerged, often recapitulating similar or even identical artistic passions from key moments in

avant-garde art history. Meanwhile, the exuberantly designed exhibition catalog–which I co-edited with Thompson–rapidly went into multiple reprints, most likely keeping pace with a renewed interest in conceiving of art as an instrument for social change. And while the counter-globalization movement began to lose energy after 2004, the World Social Forum, an international policy initiative dedicated to countermanding neo-liberal hegemony, drew thousands of participants to Porto Alegre, Brazil and other locations in the "Global South." In 2004 the forum's host city was Mumbai, India, and those who gathered collectively asserted: "another world is possible." As if echoing back from a reconverted electronics plant in the winding hills of New England half a world away *The Interventionists* seemed to respond yes, and by the way, "another *art* world is also possible!"[47]

Viewed in this context *The Interventionists* coincided with a broader sea change already under way within contemporary art. Not only were many privileged cultural practitioners beginning to raise questions about the social purpose of their professional activities, but the mainstream art world itself was poised to embrace a more performative, participatory, and at times ephemeral artistic experience prefigured by watershed moments such as Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11 in 2002. Arguably it is this very shift away from displaying art objects towards generating experimental platforms for discourse and research-based practices that have opened up a legitimatizing space for social practice art today. Nevertheless, there was nothing predetermined about the path leading from an exhibition of tactical media troublemakers at MASS MoCA, into the white walls of MoMA or the Tate Modern.[48] Furthermore, if we construe Thompson's own tactics as being at least in part a pointed response to Nicolas Bourriaud's incipient concept of Relational Aesthetics, which similarly celebrated everyday social activity but explicitly rejected overt political content or any self-awareness of artistic privilege, then at least one alternative trajectory for social practice art suggests itself. In this scenario art would still engender social interaction, but it would do so without severing

Free Range Grain demonstration in Graz, Austria with Beatrice de Costa and Critical Art Ensemble's Steve Kurtz testing store bought food for genetically modified organism markers (2003).

such experimentation from a radical critique of either post-Fordism or the deregulated micro-economy of the contemporary art situated within it. But there is another, darker reason *The Interventionists* might be a significant nodal point for re-thinking the archive of social practice art and its genealogy.

Just prior to the exhibition opening and thanks to sweeping legislation made available by the post-911 Patriot Act, a Federal Grand Jury began delivering subpoenas to the friends, colleagues and members of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) as FBI agents confiscated materials the group planned to use for its MASS MoCA installation Free Range Grains. The project involved a DNA sampling apparatus that CAE hacked in such a way as to allow visitors to "home-test" for genetically mutated fruit and vegetable genes already circulating within the US food supply. Typical of CAE's practice the goal of Free Range Grains was to focus pubic attention on the intentionally inconspicuous proliferation of government and corporate control

over a commons fast disappearing thanks to unfettered privatization. Consider for example, a previous CAE installation in which the artists tried to deploy counter-biological agents against Monsanto's genetically modified Roundup Ready seed stock in an attempt—mostly symbolic—to deprive the agricultural giant of its near-total monopoly over US corn, flax, and soybean production.[49] When CAE co-founder Steve Kurtz was falsely accused by a secretive Grand Jury of bio-terrorism in the weeks leading up to the exhibition the groups MASS MoCA installation materials were seized by the FBI as evidence. Undaunted, curator Nato Thompson and museum director Joe Thompson (no relation) arranged for a facsimile of the project to be placed on display along with a set of informational text panels outlining both the events that had just taken place, as well as the sequestration of CAE's equipment by the government. In fact this incident and the subsequent pubic ordeal of Kurtz and his co-defendant Robert Farrell received more press attention from the art world and mainstream media than did the exhibition itself.[50]

CAE's predicament also provided a singular opportunity for socially engaged artists to reconsider what the stakes of their practice were within a broader conception of politics. Sometime around 9PM on May 29th, 2004, about fifty people, many of them engaged artists who were attending the opening of *The Interventionists*, gathered behind the museum's main entrance hall. Spread by word of mouth, the objective of the emergency meeting was to develop a coordinated, collective response in Kurtz's defense. Several of those present had already been issued subpoenas to testify before the Grand Jury, or face imprisonment. However, the discussion that ensued quickly divided into two camps: Kurtz supporters who argued for a pragmatic vindication of the artist based his defense on the artist's right to free speech under the first amendment, and those hoping to spotlight the investigation's underlying agenda, which, hinged it was asserted, on George W. Bush's government's efforts to stifle political criticism and criminalize "amateur" scientific research carried out by artists, activists, and environmentalists. The late and gifted Beatrice De Costa who was had already been

Critical Art Ensemble's mostly empty installation at MASS MoCA following the confiscation of their project by the FBI. An explanatory panel by the museum is visible to the right of the image (2004).

subpoenaed, articulated support for the second, long-range view pointing out that a collective response to accusations should focus on a broader set of rights. Nevertheless, the constitutional defense won out.[51] Four years later after much effort and expense Kurtz was finally exonerated when a federal judge refused to allow the government's case to go to trial for lack of evidence.

Which brings me to a final point regarding these archival musings. With so many practitioners of tactical media and activist art present for the opening of *The Interventionists* there was an exceptional organizational opportunity opened up for envisioning a broadly conceived and theoretically nuanced genus of socially engaged art. Ironically, CAE's misfortune might have jump-started a social practice future in which the proven effectiveness of tactical media complimented, rather than eclipsed, a strategic, long-range vision of political transformation. If another art world was possible in the Spring of 2004, ignition failed. Maybe that was inevitable. And yet, it begs the question. Did the CAE incident inadvertently

scrub clean more militant forms of art leaving a more manageable strain of socially engaged art behind?[52] Or was the very lack of a broader, strategic political view also to blame? To put this differently, is vaporware really such a bad thing? After all, some version of collectivism operates within even the most battered social terrain. The question is: what does that collective project look like. Stimson puts it this way,

> *there are only two root forms of collectivist practice—one based in political life and the state and another in economic life and the market—and our time is marked by a historical shift from a greater degree of predominance for the first to an increasingly influential role for the second.*[53]

How might our narrative about social practice art collectivism be imagined differently, or perhaps better yet, how can it be shifted away from the market-based notion of "community as consumer-based demographic" that often, surreptitiously dominates it? And yes, we are talking about conscious political resistance, which may ultimately come from any number of unlikely places. It might, for example, involve a process of engagement as disengagement, something akin to Wright's notion of escaping through a trap door.[54] Or perhaps it will emerge as John Roberts's proposes in the form of artistic communization?[55] The recent national demonstrations focusing on police violence against people of color and the unexpected success of the Leftwing Syriza party in Greece, also suggest possible pathways to politicized collectivism. But it could also involve less savory outcomes such as the mobilization of Nietzschian *ressentiment*, something that we can see already visible in Greece's far right wing party Golden Dawn, Ukraine's Svobada, France's National Front, or even some factions of the United State's Tea Party Patriots. It would also be a mistake to overlook the fact that these same political, technological, and economic shifts that gave rise to neoliberal enterprise culture also played midwife to numerous process-oriented, self-organized, collective art organizations as previously stalwart barriers between artist and

audience, artist and curator, and artist and administrator began to blur and blend.

A monumental tower constructed in Kieve's Maidan Square with posters from a range of Ukrainian political factions, including the ultra-right wing Svobada Party (April 2014). Photograph courtesy of Greg Sholette.

One result is that cultural institutions now resemble components of a "system" that swap and amplify cultural capital, rather than spaces where rare things are collected, guarded and cared for. It's no surprise therefore, that Thompson's approach to *The Interventionists* embodied many of these same unresolved contradictions, or that historical contingencies determined which of these threads would prevail and which would be suppressed. Writing about the Museums Quartier in Vienna at about the time as *The Interventionists* Brian Holmes observed that, "the welfare states may be shrinking, but certainly not the museum. The latter is rather fragmenting, penetrating ever more deeply and organically into the complex mesh of semiotic production [outside of its walls]." The stage was being set for the current phase of post-Fordist administration and the transformation of cultural institutions into modifiable platforms for staging temporary, project-based installations, spectacles and events. This administrative turn seems to keep pace with a modified neoliberalism in which both risk and regimentation operate side by side, or as Jan Rehmann summarizes "neoliberal ideology is continuously permuted by it opposite: its criticism of the state, which is in fact only directed against the welfare state, flows into an undemocratic despotism, its 'freedom' reveals to signify the virtue of submission to pre-given rules." Either way, the question remains: What loopholes of resistance were lost in and around 2004? Which might still remain? And how will we usefully uncover those that might still be present?[56]

• • •

In the decade that followed 2004/2005, the massive private appropriation of public capital by self-damaged investment corporations marked a return, already under way since the 1980s, to forms of worker exploitation and precarious inequality typical of capitalism prior to the banking reforms and collective pushback orchestrated by organized labor in the aftermath of the catastrophic 1929 stock market crash. Following the recent financial collapse an optimistic army of young "knowledge workers," including many

artists, probably experienced shock rivaling that of middle class homeowners with foreclosed property. These privileged "creatives" had been assured that Capitalism 2.0 needed their non-stop, 24/7 yield of "out-of-the-box" productivity. Well, apparently not. Then came the high-profile prosecutions of Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, the government targeting of WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange, and revelations about National Security Administration spying by whistleblower Edward Snowden. Even the realm of non-market, digital democracy was clearly becoming a target of government regulators, to which we can add the increasing move away from fair use World Wide Web content, and towards the private, corporatization of intellectual property in both physical and http-coded binary form. Nor did the art world provide a refuge for the most challenging forms of tactical media. CAE for example stopped experimenting with bio-art after 2007, and the group has found little purchase in the US art world, traveling to Europe for most of its ongoing research projects.

Today, social practice artists are busy planting herb gardens, mending clothes, repairing bicycles, and giving out assorted life-coaching advice free of charge. Groups of professional designers are improving the "quality and function of the built environment," in run-down inner-city corridors, categorizing what they do with the avant-garde*ish* rubric "Tactical Urbanism."[57] In the Bronx, working class tenants are asked to invite a couple of artists into their homes for dinner. In exchange the artists paint their hosts a still life. Sitting on a sofa everyone is photographed with the painting hanging in the background like a commentary on social values that are too often absent from the skeptical art world.[58] In New York City's East Village, a funky storefront installation of assembled, found materials highlights the street culture of a gentrifying neighborhood. One artist collaborates with passerby to turn used paper cups into art, as another encourages residents to engage in "critical dialogue" about their precarious future.[59] Artists distribute free beer, hand picked fruit, glasses of ice tea, and home-made waffles to participating members of the public. These gifts are offered up like a sacrifice to

some missing deity whose flock has been abandoned.[60] The absent god is of course society itself, defined as a project of collective good, from each according to her ability, to each according to his need. Instead, the community Capitalism 2.0 offers is based on the gospel of mutually shared selfishness, and certainly any attempt at countering such a credo is justified, even participatory waffle sharing, though it must be said here that hell is undoubtedly paved with many good interventions.

To be sure, the argument put forward here does not deny that artists earnestly struggle to change society, even if the art they produce frequently serves, for better and for worse, as a symbolic ameliorative to irresolvable social contradictions. And yet what has changed is the phenomenal aggregation of networked social productivity and cultural labor made available today as an artistic medium, and at a time when society is intellectually, culturally and constitutively destitute. Art, along with virtually everything else, has been sublated by capital, resulting in the socialization of all production.[61] One outcome is that artists are becoming social managers, curators are becoming arts administrators, and academics are becoming *tactical urbanistas*. Meanwhile, social practice artists collect the bits and pieces of what was once society like a drawer of mismatched socks. Is it any surprise that these social artifacts only seem to feel alive in a space dedicated to collecting and maintaining historical objects (and I am speaking, of course, of the museum)? But in a field that is weakly theorized even in the best of circumstances, art's "social turn" makes the passage of engaged art out of the margins and into some measure of legitimacy all the more compelling as a matter for urgent debate. Because if art has finally merged with life as the early 20th Century avant-garde once enthusiastically anticipated, it has done so *not* at a moment of triumphant communal utopia, but at a time when life, at least for the 99.1%, sucks.[62]

What is called for is imaginative, critical engagement aimed at distancing socially engaged art from both the turbo-charged, contemporary art world, as well as from what Fischer calls capitalist

Poster for "Waffle Fest," designed by Gil Martinez for The Center for Social Imagination, Toronto, CA. (October 5, 2011), https://www.behance.net/gallery/2400988/Centre-for-Social-Innovation-Waffle-Fest

realism in the post-Fordist, society of control, a world where "'Flexibility', 'nomadism' and 'spontaneity' are the hallmarks of management." As nearly impossible as that struggle seems today, if we do not strive for a broader conception of liberation, then we resign ourselves to nothing less than bad faith, while abandoning hopes of rescuing that *longue durée* of opposition from below that so many before us have endeavored to sustain. Once upon a time art mobilized its resources to resist becoming kitsch. Now it must avoid becoming a vector for data mining and social asset management. Delirium and resistance prevail today, forming an increasingly indissoluble unit, two cogent responses to current circumstances. But it is this same fever that drives us onwards: a persistent low-grade fever for social justice. What remains paramount is recognizing the actuality of our plight, including its paradoxes, while asking how we can be *more than* what the market says we are. The terrain thereafter is a delirious *terra incognita*. It is waiting to be mapped. We must get there first.

Gregory Sholette is a New York-based artist, writer and cultural activist whose recent art projects include "Our Barricades" at Station Independent Gallery, and "Imaginary Archive" at Institute of Contemporary Art U. Penn Philadelphia, and Las Kurbas Center, Kyiv, Ukraine, and whose recent publications include *It's The Political Economy, Stupid*, co-edited with Oliver Ressler (Pluto Press, 2013) and *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture* (Pluto Press, 2011). A graduate of the Whitney Independent Studies Program in Critical Theory (1996), he was a founding member of the artists' collectives Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D: 1980-1988), and REPOhistory (1989-2000), and remains active today with Gulf Labor Coalition. He teaches socially engaged art at Queens College CUNY and Home Work Space Beirut, Lebanon.

Notes

A special thanks to Alan Moore, Erika Biddle, Kim Charnley and Grant Kester for their insights and advice.

1. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Alresford, England: Zero Books 2009), p.35.

2. Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, published on the occasion of the Museum of Arte Útil at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2013. It is also available as a PDF online at: http://museumarteutil.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Toward-a-lexicon-of-usership.pdf

3. Throughout most of this essay I will use the term "social practice art" to describe the type of cultural production under discussion because this label seems to have gained the widest usage at this point in time. For an interesting hypothesis about the evolution of this terminology see: Larne Abse Gogarty, "Aesthetics and Social Practice," in *Keywords: A (Polemical) Vocabulary of Contemporary Art*, October 3, 2014, available online at: http://keywordscontemporary.com/aesthetics-social-practice/

4. In the past three or four years alone several East Coast institutions of higher education have added some level of social practice or community oriented arts curricula to their offerings. Along with Queens College CUNY this includes NYU, SVA, Pratt, Parsons and Moore College of Art in Philadelphia. Regarding the philanthropic turn towards social practices, in 2014 the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation announced what they describe as a "game changing" $100,000 grant category called Artist as Activist which is aimed at supporting individuals who address "important global challenges through their creative practice": http://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/grants/art-grants/artist-as-activist. There is also The Keith Haring Foundation which in the same year provided Bard College with $400,000 to support a teaching fellowship in Art and Activism at the school http://www.bard.edu/news/releases/pr/fstory.php?id=2516, and just a few years ago in 2012 an entirely new foundation calling itself A Blade of Grass tells us that it "nurtures socially engaged art" http://www.abladeofgrass.org/. And the Education Departments at the Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum sponsor socially engaged art projects with the latter hosting the think tank/community center known as BMW Guggenheim Lab both inside and outside its museums from 2011 to 2014. To this list one might add projects such as Martha Rosler's 1973 "Garage Sale" that was recently restaged at the MoMA in 2012 and clearly intended to signal the museum's interest in socially engaged art.

5. From the cover material of the book *Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, edited by Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

6. Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). p. 223. BAVO's webpage is: http://www.spatialagency.net/database/why/political/bavo

7. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participation Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (New York: Verso, 2012).

8. Regarding Abu Dhabi's high-priced investment in Western museum branding see: Who Builds Your Architecture http://whobuilds.org/ and Gulf Labor Coalition http://gulflabor.org/. On the relationship between art asset funds and ultra-wealth collectors see: Andrea Fraser, "There's No Place Like Home / L'1% C'est Moi," a downloadable pdf is available from *Continent* at: http://www.continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/108

9. Jared Keller, "Evaluating Iran's Twitter Revolution," *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2010: http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/06/evaluating-irans-twitter-revolution/58337/

10. David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (London: AK Press, 2009).

11. Greg Sholette and Oliver Ressler, "Unspeaking the Grammar of Finance," introduction to *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

12. The Financialization of Capitalism by John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review* (March 11, 2007): http://monthlyreview.org/2007/04/01/the-financialization-of-capitalism/

13. Carol Vogel, "Bacon Triptych Auctioned for Record $86 Million," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2008: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/15/arts/design/15auction.html. See also Tierney Sneed, "5 Art Auction Record Breakers That Prove the Industry Is Booming: Art history was made at auctions at Sotheby's and Christie's this week," *US News & World Report* (Nov. 14, 2013): http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/11/14/christies-142-million-francis-bacon-sale-and-this-weeks-other-art-auction-record-breakers

14. "Fitch Assigns 'A' to Lehman Brothers Holdings Capital Trust VII," *Business Wire*, May 9, 2007: http://www.businesswire.com/news/

home/20070509006056/en/Fitch-Assigns-Lehman-Brothers-Holdings-Capital-Trust#.VPtOVmTF_1g

15. Alexandra Peers, "The Fine Art of Surviving the Crash in Auction Prices," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 20th, 2008: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122713503996042291

16. Chinese capital, which was not affected by the crash, no doubt played a part in this stability, see: Alexander Forbes, "TEFAF Art Market Report Says 2013 Best Year on Record Since 2007, With Market Outlook Bullish," artnetnews, March 12, 2014: http://news.artnet.com/market/tefaf-art-market-report-says-2013-best-year-on-record-since-2007-with-market-outlook-bullish-5358/

17. Gilligan's examples include Richard Prince's endlessly recycled works, and Seth Price's reworking videos that bear "a striking similarity to financial derivatives in one particularly suggestive way: they derive their value from the value of something else." From Melanie Gilligan, "Derrivative Days," in Greg Sholette and Oliver Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid*, pp. 73-81.

18. W.A.G.E.: http://www.wageforwork.com/
BFAMFAPHD: http://bfamfaphd.com/
Debtfair: http://www.debtfair.org/
Art & Labor: http://artsandlabor.org/
ArtLeaks: http://art-leaks.org/
Gulf Labor: Coalition http://gulflabor.org/
Artist's Union: http://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/

19. See: The Artist as Debtor: http://artanddebt.org/; the CAA panel http://conference.collegeart.org/programs/public-art-dialogue-student-debt-real-estate-and-the-arts/; Free/Slow University: http://www.britishcouncil.pl/en/events/conference-freeslow-university-warsaw. Also see Erica Ho, "Study: Art School Graduates Rack Up the Most Debt," Feb. 21, 2013, *Time* online: http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/02/21/study-art-school-graduates-rack-up-the-most-debt/

20. Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

21. For a strong argument to this effect see Tom Finkelpearl's book *What We Made: Conversations on Art as Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

22. Blake Stimson and Greg Sholette, "Periodising Collectivism," in *Third Text*, vol. 18, no. 6 (2004), p. 583, revised and reprinted as

the introduction to *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after the War*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

23. Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, Op. cit.

24. Grant Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: The Rhetoric of Empowerment and Conversion in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage*, vol.22, no.6 (January, 1995), pp.5-11: https://www.academia.edu/2999826/Aesthetic_Evangelists_Conversion_and_Empowerment_in_Contemporary_Community_Art_1995_

25. See Ben Davis, "A critique of social practice art: What does it mean to be a political artist?" *International Socialist Review*, no. 90 (July 2013): http://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art. Naturally socially engaged art still has many critics, especially amongst more orthodox critics, but following the substantial research of historians such as Grant Kester and Clair Bishop even its doubters are obliged to treat this work seriously as art, a courtesy that was not extended to community-based art in the recent past.

26. "Is Social Practice Gentrifying Community Arts?," a conversation between Rick Lowe and Nato Thompson at the Creative Time Summit, October 2013, a transcript is available from Bad At Sports here: http://badatsports.com/2013/is-social-practice-gentrifying-community-arts/

27. Chris Kraus, "Ambiguous Virtues of Art School," *Artspace* (March 2, 2015), http://www.artspace.com/magazine/news_events/chris-kraus-akademie-x

28. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 80-81.

29. Stephen Wright, *Usership*. Op. cit., p. 4.

30. "It is my contention that some socially engaged artworks can be distinguished from others by the degree to which they provoke reflection on the contingent systems that support the management of life. An interest in such acts of support coincides with the project of performance," Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 29. Wright would likely respond that his idea of usership-driven art is work that is not performed as *art*, but literally and redundantly is action in the "real-world," quite unlike performative practices whose content is, first and foremost, art, and then only secondarily perhaps an action, useful or otherwise, in the real world. See Wright, *Usership*, p.16.

31. An obviously intriguing problem is how one might approach art that is detached from its artistic framing in critical, aesthetic terms. That, however, will require another essay in itself.

32. Martin Pengelly, "Pittsburgh restaurant receives death threats in 'anti-Israel messages' furor," *The Guardian*, Nov. 9, 2014: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/09/pittsburgh-restaurant-conflict-kitchen-death-threats-israel

33. Theaster Gates TED Talk, "How to revive a neighborhood: with imagination, beauty and art". Published March 26, 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9ry1M7JlyE

34. Consider for example Nike's elegantly designed fashion accessory Fuelband 3.0: an integrated cybernetic device in which the company monitors the muscular movements of the bracelet's wearer in real time via Blutooth. While Nike sends information about the customer's physical fitness, it also aggregates human data useful for developing future products that the company will market to these same individuals. It is not hard to imagine a social practice type project that would operate in a similar way substituting, say, the Guggenheim or Museum of Modern Art for Nike.

35. Brian Holmes, "Future Map, 2007," http://roundtable.kein.org/node/1332

36. Quoted in an email to me from Monday, March 23, 2015 at 10:04 AM.

37. Ricardo Dominquez and Electronic Disturbance Theater designed a pro-Zapatista virtual sit-in platform aimed at overloading and crashing the Mexican Government's website. This is a form of "hacktavism" still in use by the group Anonymous today.

38. David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media," from Nettime.org (May 16, 1997): http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html

39. A discussion of EDT's floodnet is found here: http://museumarteutil.net/projects/zapatista-tactical-floodnet/

40. The situation escalated when Dominquez organized a virtual sit-in of the UC President's website: http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2010/apr/06/activist-ucsd-professor-facing-unusual-scrutiny/

41. Viktor Shklovsky, *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007); Fisher op cit.

42. Nato Thompson, "Trespassing Toward Relevance," from Thompson and Sholette, *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p 17. The book that came out of the exhibition which Thompson, myself and MASS MoCA designer Arjen Noordeman produced, went on to be reprinted several times and used in numerous classroom curricula. It is not the topic of this paper however.

43. *The Interventionists*, p 60.

44. Choire Sicha, "The Guide," December 12, 2005, *The New York Times*. The only lengthier critical responses were by Carlos Basualdo, and T.J.Demos in *Artforum*, though these reviews largely recycled existing critical paradigms about site-specific art without successfully engaging in the concept of tactical media in relation to the counter-globalization movement or "the social turn" in art. http://www.mutualart.com/OpenArticle/-THE-INTERVENTIONISTS--ART-IN-THE-SOCIAL/9FE37A35791E22C3

45. See: Department of Space & Land Reclamation website: http://www.counterproductiveindustries.com/dslr/

46. Henry Moss, "The Climb to Oatman's Crash Site: Mass MoCA's Discontinued Boiler Plant," *Interventions/Adaptive Reuse*, vol. 2 (2011), p 6.

47. "Another Art World is Possible," happens to be the title of an essay by theorist Gene Ray from the same years as *The Interventionists* exhibition in *Third Text*, vol. 18, no. 6, (2004), pp. 565-572.

48. For example the Artists as House Guest program at the Museum of Modern Art in New York which is mentioned in Randy Kennedy's article, "Outside the Citidal, Social Practice Art Is Intended to Nurture," *The New York Times*, March 20, 3013: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/arts/design/outside-the-citadel-social-practice-art-is-intended-to-nurture.html?pagewanted=2&_r=2, and also "The politics of the social in contemporary art," at the Tate Modern Starr Auditorium, February 15, 2013: http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/conference/politics-social-contemporary-art

49. Fuzzy Biological Sabotage on CAE website: http://www.critical-art.net/MolecularInvasion.html

50. To read more about the investigation see the Critical Art Ensemble Defense Fund: http://www.caedefensefund.org/

51. The CAE Defense Fund emerged from this meeting, although members of The Yes Men were already involved in crafting a response to the government's allegations. And I also admit with regret that in retrospect I took the more pragmatic view. Caught up in the need to defend a fellow politically active artist from what appeared to be government railroading I endorsed the "free speech" defense myself.

52. This is certainly seems to be the position of artist Rubén Ortiz Torres who was an artist Thompson exhibited in *The Interventionsts*. Torres believes that the occasion of the 2004 show was "supposed to be the moment when the art world (or at least part of it) would recognize the practices that a lot of artists (if not most) do in art schools and, alternative spaces and other circuits outside commercial galleries and museums. However it seemed that the Steve Kurtz incident cancelled or was used to cancel that opportunity." Notably he adds "I see "social practice" as a very ineffective way to do politics trying to validate them and justify them as art. It seems a way more bureaucratic, moralistic, self righteous and pretentious notion than the more open, anarchist and situationist one of "Interventionism." Cited in an email to me from Monday, October 14, 2013 at 8:45 PM.

53. Blake Stimson, "The Form of the Informal," *Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 34 (Spring 2014), p. 36.

54. "The thing changes not one bit, yet once the trapdoor springs open and the 'dark agents' are on the loose, nothing could be more different." The dark agency is for Wright the allure of the thing that is both a proposition about art, and a completely redundant activity, object, practice of everyday life. *Usership*, p 7.

55. John Roberts, "The Political Economization of Art," in *It's The Political Economy, Stupid*, edited by Greg Sholette and Oliver Ressler (London: Pluto Press, 2013), pp. 63-71.

56. Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), p. 12.

57. Tactical Urbanism/The Street Plans Collaborative: http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative

58. A Painting for a Family Dinner, 2012, Alina and Jeff Bliumis: gerempty.org/nc/home/what-we-do/artists/artist/bliumis-alina-and-jeff/

59. No Longer Empty, Art in Empty Spaces: http://www.nolongerempty.org/nc/home/events/event/program-art-in-empty-spaces-with-community-board/

60. Examples of gift art are drawn from the Ted Purves book, *What We Want is Free* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004).

61. For a discussion regarding the Marxist concept of sublation in relation to art see a string of responses to my paper "Let's Talk About the Debt Due" available at The Artist As Debtor website: http://artanddebt.org/greg-sholette-lets-talk-about-the-debt-due-for/ with the feedback located here: http://artanddebt.org/lets-talk-about-the-debt-do-for-responses/

Futher Reading

Erika Biddle, "Re-Animating Joseph Beuys' 'Social Sculpture'': Artistic Interventions and the Occupy Movement," in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2014). Available online: https://www.academia.edu/5532769/Re-Animating_Joseph_Beuys_Social_Sculpture_Artistic_Interventions_and_the_Occupy_Movement

Brian Holmes, *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering*, (New York: Autonomedia Press, 2008).

Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Alresford, England: Zero Books 2012).

Alan W. Moore, ''A Brief Genealogy of Social Sculpture,'' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* (http://www.joaap.org/webonly/moore.htm)

Rebecca Zorach, *Art Against the Law* (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2015.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

From Freehouse to Neighborhood Co-op: The Birth of a New Organizational Form

Sue Bell Yank

One year ago I was invited to "Radicalizing the Local," a gathering in Rotterdam described as the "international closing symposium of the Freehouse art project on co-ops as an organizational form in order to combine value determination, local qualities, organization, art economy, initiative, and co partnership." This sounded great, if a little confusing, but once I understood that this symposium was connected to the twenty plus years of urban development and artistic research efforts initiated by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk in 1998 in her native Rotterdam, I was intrigued. The event marked the handover of Freehouse to a self-organized, resident-run Wijk (Neighborhood) Cooperative, which would continue the economic development and community organizing work of the art project and scale it up. Though often touted as a desired outcome in place-based social practice work, the actual birth of a truly self-run organization that is the outgrowth of artistic thinking around urban development is like a unicorn—a fairy tale creature that may not actually exist. The opportunity to witness the formalized "handover" to such an organization and my curiosity about the Co-op's development over time was the impetus for my original visit to Rotterdam, and for the research that follows.

Freehouse Origins

Much of the work of Freehouse predates the concept of "creative place-making" that is so ubiquitous in discussions around urban planning. A notion at once pursued by city planners and touted by the likes of Richard Florida, creative place-making has outcome problems (one such criticism being that neighborhood vibrancy indicators can rarely be proven to lead to economic growth or crime reduction).[1] Freehouse, however, was able to work on a small scale with collectives and individuals to achieve demonstrable success. This success related not to the instrumental value of art and artists as a means to catalyze profit or investment, nor to the idea of art as possessing an intrinsic value (art for art's sake). Rather, it was due to a process that enhanced the opportunities afforded to people in the neighborhood to improve their social well-being. In short, Freehouse was able to provide more choices to people about what lives they would like to lead and how. It is no accident that this effort was called Freehouse—the working process relied on individuals to autonomously determine their own economic priorities, while also aspiring to expand that choice in the long term for the community as a whole.

The name of the project derives from the historical free trade zones of the nineteenth-century Austro-Hungarian Empire, where informal economies flourished and diverse creative networks thrived. Some bars in England are still called "freehouses," and are so named because they are purveyors of multiple beers (rather than being beholden to a single brewery).[2] This kind of conceptual zone and its layered relationships to art, craft, culture and economy was the genesis of Freehouse, which was founded in 1998 as a Rotterdam-based art and research association. At the time of its formation, Rotterdam was well into its transition from a worker's city tied to its ports and industry, to a so-called "creative city." Increasingly it has become a city of festivals, of design and creative industry, and this new direction was solidified in the 2007 unveiling of a new Vision for the City 2030 by the City Council of Rotterdam, which

recommends that Rotterdam become less economically dependent on the port and invest in knowledge and cultural industries in order to promote a "more attractive residential city."[3] This trend mirrors similar developments in many post-industrial cities in the global North. Though its intention may not be explicitly regressive, without offering creative skills-based opportunities and a strong cultural infrastructure to the current residents of the city, rather than to an influx of new, upper middle class professionals, the notion of a creative city does little to catalyze economic growth for the vast majority of its residents (many of whom will instead face precarity and displacement).[4]

Rotterdam academic Henk Oosterling developed the idea of a Rotterdam Skillcity (Rotterdam Vakmanstad), which directly addresses this class bias and displacement as a result of gentrification by tapping into existing informal economies of craft and production.[5] By legitimizing the informal cultural activities of existing residents, Rotterdam Skillcity hopes to combat displacement by providing opportunities in the new creative economy. Freehouse worked in collaboration with Skillcity for a time, and shared values with this skill-based, capabilities-centered approach to the creative city. Freehouse began its work by studying informal cultural activities and production at the granular level, eventually conducting an exhaustive survey (called the 'Monsterboek') of the intercultural exchanges, economies, and networks of resilience on the Rotterdam West streets of Kruiskade/Nieuwe Binnenweg. They found several major challenges to skills development and cultural opportunities within the city. The first was a lack of infrastructure capable of supporting collective rather than individual activity (i.e. community kitchens for home cooks to produce and market together, shared studio spaces that promote the formation of sewing or crafting collectives, even shared zones for trading goods and knowledge). The second challenge involved the presence of regressive governmental policies and regulations that actively quashed creative skills development and small business opportunities.

Neighborhood Workshop, production for Paris based fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier icw Kunsthal Rotterdam (2013) Design: Neighborhood Workshop with Jean Paul Gaultier. Photograph by Bob Goedewaagen.

Freehouse Transition

With the advent of the 2008 global economic crisis, which exacerbated these already disturbing trends, Freehouse transitioned from research association to a practical lab focused on testing strategies in the Afrikaanderwijk, a low-income, multi-ethnic neighborhood in south Rotterdam bursting at its seams with vibrant cultural products and activities (and even boasting a huge weekly market). Unfortunately, many of these cultural products couldn't be sold or displayed at the market due to restrictive regulations and onerous permitting rules. Freehouse focused its efforts around the highly regulated Afrikaanderwijk Markt, in which a single stall owner could not perform two actions (like selling fresh fruit as well as juicing that fruit on site) because of a one-permit per-stall limit imposed by the city government. Over one hundred such conflicting policies limited the creative and economic activities of vendors,

so Freehouse organized over three hundred interventions (which artist van Heeswijk described as "acts of civil disobedience") that actively challenged such restrictions. They also went door-to-door in the neighborhood to research and identify the unrecognized skills and capabilities of its inhabitants—the jam-makers, the weavers, the designers, the painters, the writers, the poets, and the spoken word artists—and facilitated opportunities to both sell goods and showcase talent. Finally, they opened a series of collaborative workplaces that still run today: a collective kitchen, fashion atelier, and a neighborhood store.[6] By creating the conditions for collaborative production that allowed individual makers to pool their resources and legitimize their informal businesses, they were able to catalyze new forms of neighborhood organization that had the capacity to benefit from, and reinvest in, the local economy.

The Wijk Co-op

In 2014, at a moment marked by the January conference, Freehouse made the decision to hand over the bulk of these activities to a formalized Wijk (Neighborhood) Co-operative, a self-organized and self-run body that would continue the work of creating local, self-produced economic opportunities for the neighborhood, leveraging political power to shift policy and negotiate economic advantages, developing local skills and self-certifications, and strengthening resilient intercultural networks. One of the first neighborhoods in the Netherlands with a majority of immigrant residents, the Afrikaanderwijk sprung up around 1900 following construction of the docks in South Rotterdam. Housing mostly working-class dockworkers, its name derives from the South African-inspired street names in the district. The many residents consist primarily of Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans, many of whom immigrated in large numbers in the 1970s to work at the dockyard. In the 1970s and '80s, the Afrikaanderwijk experienced a series of tensions between native (white) Dutch and so-called "foreign" residents over scarce housing resources;

landlords were accused by some white Dutch residents of renting to migrant workers and excluding native Dutch. Residents clashed when native Dutch residents came into immigrant boarding houses and evicted them and their belongings forcibly. The city responded to these disturbances by instituting a short-lived policy that limited the number of "foreign" residents within neighborhood limits (it was later overturned by the national government), but many of the underlying tensions remain. The Afrikaanderwijk retains its international character today, displayed through the many Turkish restaurants, kabab places, and African goods and cultural items on sale at the weekly market, but many second-generation immigrants struggle with low education levels and the disappearance of working-class jobs.[7]

The needs of the Afrikaanderwijk and its cultural capacities necessitated a new organizational form (as well as new economic forms) on the scale of a neighborhood rather than that of an interest group. It is no accident that the foci of the symposium were "organizational" and "economic". As conference participants experienced a plethora of presentations by international academics, artists, and cultural innovators on organizational and economic forms as distinct as Bitcoin, the history of European co-operatives, transnational citizenship, and institutions of collective action, we smelled wafts of delicious Turkish and Moroccan cuisine prepared by women at the collective kitchen. By focusing on such generalized ideas about cooperative culture in a conference dedicated to the context-specific nature of the project, the organizers intended to situate Freehouse within a history of collective action without overtly telegraphing that connection. Conference participants were forced to apply this overarching framework to what they saw happening on the ground in the Afrikaanderwijk.

Local residents, students, and academics had ample opportunities for exchange throughout the conference, and their interactions supplied grist for the mill of critical conversation. We witnessed the formal inductions of neighborhood residents into the Wijk Co-op and its sub-organizations (the Workers' Co-op and the

Neighborhood Workshop, production dress for Rotterdam based fashion designer Marga Weimans (2009). Design: Marga Weimans. Photograph courtesy of Freehouse.

Service Co-op).[8] We toasted their good fortune, and danced to the music of local musicians. As such gatherings are intended to do, we left with a rush of good feeling, full of heady optimism for the future success and sustainability of the co-produced neighborhood. But in the year since the formal handover, how has the Wijk Co-op fared? What is the continuing role of Freehouse in its organization? Has this robust arts institute been able to take a backseat in a collective decision-making process that involves many class levels, cultures, economic agendas, skills and access points? And what success has the Co-op achieved in the past year to demonstrate the viability of a self-run collective on the scale of a neighborhood? This article attempts to analyze these questions through both quantitative and qualitative indicators gleaned from a series of interviews from fall of 2014 and related documents.

First, though a caveat: although I am a long-time follower of both Freehouse and Jeanne van Heeswijk's other work, my only personal on-site experience of Freehouse was at the closing symposium for three days last year, when I interviewed several newly inducted Co-op members and Freehouse staff. I spoke with Heeswijk several times since then about the project, and more recently to Annet van Otterloo, Radjesh Roepnarain, and Ramon Mosterd, who all work in varying capacities with both Freehouse and the Wijk Co-op. I am exceedingly aware of the gaps in my knowledge due to my inability to experience the day-to-day relationships and processes that form these organizations. This is one of the key challenges in investigating long-term, neighborhood level efforts like this. They are defined by so many constantly shifting, interlocking variables that a more complete accounting might even elude writers with

Urban Acupuncture Market Intervention, Tomorrows Market (2009). Test catwalk on the market. Photograph by Marcel van der Meijs.

unlimited resources and infinite social capital, neither of which I possess. So, rather than a strict evaluation of the project, this will be a sketch at best. What I do hope to uncover, however, are the most appropriate criteria through which to evaluate such an organization, as well as the kinds of methodologies that would be most effective or appropriate for such an evaluation.

A Capabilities Approach

More and more artist-initiated urban development and community advocacy projects in the public sphere live beyond the artist's day-to-day involvement (like Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International* and Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses*) or don't (Thomas Hirschhorn's dismantled *Gramsci Monument*, and the now-defunct *Watts House Project*). As these projects become more ambitious, it is more important than ever to understand what metrics of organizational success can lead to a self-sustaining, self-determining, collectively-run social good organization. We often get stuck in questions of whether something is or is not art, we argue about its aesthetic value, we interview its temporary participants about how it affected them, but we rarely analyze how these projects are handed over to other groups and made sustainable in the long-term. Is it practical for all the decision-making, fiscal responsibility, and goals of these projects to be taken over by the communities they engage without the direction and oversight of the initiating artist(s) or institution? Is it even possible?

In order to begin this analysis, however, we must consider each organization on its own terms. Not as "art" writ large, nor as revolutionary or activist bodies *per se*. Freehouse (and subsequently, the Wijk Co-op) is a specific product of Rotterdam, though its activities resonate more broadly, and it is not opposed to official desires for a "creative city." It is not overtly seeking to be a political adversary of the city government. Rather, the Wijk Co-op addresses gaps in governmental thinking about the well-being of the residents

of the Afrikaanderwijk, and adheres to a wider-ranging set of values. These values primarily concern quantifying the capabilities of its residents rather than the tiresome logic of using economic indicators to measure social well-being. The indicators typically used by government include income, employment levels, home ownership, and dependency on social welfare. By inventorying the marketable skills of its residents and providing the organizational infrastructure to monetize those skills locally, the Wijk Coop portrays the residents as productive cultural actors rather than parasites on the state. This infrastructure also offers an alternative to externally imposed forms of economic development, ensuring that the local economy reinvests in its own organic growth based on its inherent capabilities.

In his sociological studies, Amartya Sen equates educational and experiential skills development with freedom—he defines "capability" as a person's ability to translate the types of choices open to them into the kinds of lives they would ultimately like to lead.

Urban Acupuncture Market Intervention, Tomorrows Market (2009). Test intervention hanging fruits. Design: Buro LEF. Photograph by Jeanne van Heeswijk.

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher, came to similar conclusions in her description of a "capabilities approach," defined in collaboration with Sen. She makes a distinction between functionings, which are the real "beings" and "doings" of human well-being. For example, a person can "be healthy" or "be warm," and they can do certain things like "go to the doctor" and "consume energy." Capabilities are a person's "substantive," or real freedoms to achieve functionings, such as the freedom to live a long life, or participate in politics. These capabilities are opportunities that people have reason to value, and that allow them to live the lives they would like to lead, rather than those defined by utility or access to resources. Capability differs from capacity in that it is not inherent, but rather a combination of societal opportunity, and the ability to make choices around that opportunity in order to achieve desired outcomes of personal value.[9]

Philosopher Ingrid Robeyns (who teaches, interestingly enough, at Erasmus University in Rotterdam) argues for a more general approach, renaming the "capabilities approach" to "capabilitarianism," as she describes it. She wishes to expand the capabilities approach to a framework that applies broadly to society as a guiding political and moral philosophy, in contrast to utilitarianism She describes such a framework as entailing "two core normative claims: first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and second, that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value."[10] Though this humanist view may seem overly broad and unquantifiable, I argue that Freehouse interprets neighborhood well-being (including but not limited to the provision of an economic infrastructure necessary to achieve these opportunities) in a very similar framework, and that quantifiable metrics can be derived from its elements. Nussbaum's published series of elements that make up the capabilities-centered approach are described by Robeyns as: (1) To treat each person as an end, rather than looking at averages; (2) to focus on choice or freedom

rather than achievements; (3) to be pluralist about value, which implies that different capabilities are incommensurable; (4) to be deeply concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality; and (5) to give a clear task to government and public policy.[11]

These elements provide a helpful starting point in generating a set of criteria through which to evaluate the evolution from Freehouse to Wijk Coop, but any more developed evaluation must also include some analysis of the physical and political context for the Co-op's activities. In some ways the Wijk Coop is a reactive body—it has had to step in to compensate for the failures of the distributive, regulatory, and political systems of accountability that have not proven effective in enhancing the well-being of its members. So if the social well-being of the neighborhood's residents is the ultimate goal of the Wijk (as I am claiming it is and should be), and if well-being is defined in terms of people's capabilities, or "their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value," then the steps the Wijk Co-op has taken towards achieving this goal and the processes through which they operate are key sites of evaluation. I believe Nussbaum's five elements suggest four evaluative categories as they apply to the Co-op: (1) "to treat each person as an end, rather than looking at averages" and (3) "to focus on choice or freedom rather than achievements" both concern the self-organized nature of the co-op and its organizational form. Can this kind of neighborhood-scale organization become flexible and pluralistic enough in both its values and processes to stay relevant to each of its members and their individual needs? The third point, "to be pluralist about value, which implies that different capabilities are incommensurate" concerns the elasticity of what the Co-op considers "value" to its members. What is of value and appropriate for different members of the Co-op, when each might be coming to the organization with different levels of access to resources, both economic and cultural? Nussbaum has argued that different capabilities are incommensurable, meaning that each is an absolute entitlement and cannot be traded off against one another or overridden by other normative considerations. This makes it difficult

for an organizational body like the Co-op to weigh one capability as more valuable than another. In addition, the "capabilities approach" is meant to be holistic, so that opportunities are taken as a set rather than piecemeal.

In its entry on the "Capability Approach," the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy offers an example:

> *...suppose I am a low-skilled poor single parent who lives in a society without decent social provisions. Take the following functionings: (1) to hold a job, which will require me to spend many hours on working and commuting, but will generate the income needed to properly feed myself and my family; (2) to care for my children at home and give them all the attention, care and supervision they need. In a piecemeal analysis, both (1) and (2) are opportunities open to me, but they are not both together open to me. The point about the capability approach is precisely that we must take a comprehensive or holistic approach, and ask which sets of capabilities are open to me, that is: can I simultaneously provide for my family and properly care for and supervise my children? Or am I rather forced to make some hard, perhaps even tragic choices between two functionings which both reflect basic needs and basic moral duties?*[13]

Political philosopher Achin Chakraborty advocates using a "democratic or social choice" system to aggregate or weigh capabilities against one another in order to determine priorities for action, meaning that the relevant group of people would be encouraged to make these decisions.[14] The Co-op is clearly set up to accomplish just that, provided it can agree on a just working process for determining the value of the different capabilities to its members. The Co-op can play a role in Nussbaum's fourth element, "to be deeply concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality," by redistributing resources based on a notion of equity. In imagining a "just city," Justus Uitermark describes urban planning scholar Susan Fainstein's notion of equity as distinct from equality, in that it takes into account pre-existing circumstances and does not "favor those who are already better off at the beginning."[15] In Fainstein's estimation, equity can be understood in terms of a

contextual appropriateness, and what might be appropriate for one individual's well-being is less appropriate for another. Uitermark extrapolates from this position by arguing that a pre-condition of a just city is a fair distribution of scarcity (like housing in urban environments, for instance), and that scarce resources must be divorced from income distribution.

The Wijk Co-op is arguably a body designed to redistribute scarcity (in jobs, housing, and economic opportunity) through collective advocacy and organization. Nussbaum's fifth point, that government and public policy be given a clear task, is another metric with which to evaluate the Co-op's effectiveness. Freehouse has been both engaged with and subversive of existing systems of public policy and governmental regulatory agencies, and has proposed clear and specific improvements to policy. Finally, all of Nussbaum's elements hint at an additional factor, that of resiliency. The efforts of the Co-op hinge on the emergence of trusting relationships within the neighborhood, and these networks produce

Neighborhood Kitchen, The Gemaal (2013). The kitchen became an independent organization and obtained its own space. Photograph courtesy of Freehouse.

sustainable mutual support structures in the form of physical spaces, services, and economic funds that residents can turn to during periods of duress. Therefore, an overarching measure of the neighborhood's resiliency serves to provide evidence for its effective self-organization, promotion of equity and distribution of scarcity, and leverage in the realm of policy.

Self-Organization

Freehouse and the Wijk Co-op are in a period of transition during which one is setting up the infrastructure for the other to eventually become a self-sustaining organization with its own decision-making process, separate from Freehouse. Although the Co-op has the benefit of building on a five year foundation of relationships and activities developed by Freehouse, it currently faces the problem of getting more people to sign on to this new organizational form. The Co-op operates at the scale of a neighborhood, including all of its various demographics, businesses, and geographies, whereas Freehouse intervened at a smaller scale, in specific activities like the Market, and attracted a sub-strata of residents involved in those activities. A seeming shift in both name and purpose can be confusing to people in several ways. One distinction is that though Co-op, like Freehouse, is deployed strategically around specific issues, it is territorial by nature, and thus people must be motivated to join not simply because of a single issue, but because they are invested in the larger potential of the Co-op as a community organization. Issues of trust are also crucial: trust that this new organizing force will benefit them in the long-term, trust that individual needs will be met and voices will be heard, trust that the untested Co-op will actually be able to accomplish its goals of economic and cultural reinvestment in the community. According to Jeanne van Heeswijk, part of this trust-building involves encouraging new members to buy into the idea that the Co-op requires "durational, repetitive collaboration" –the building of a group in which individual members understand one another and act together.[16]

These collaborations are not always project-based and do not always lead to direct gain for all the members, but are necessary to create the infrastructure for a flexible, pluralistic organization. This generalized capacity can lead to compounding opportunities resulting from productive interactions between neighborhood stakeholders that will benefit members in unanticipated ways. Annet van Otterloo, part of Freehouse since 2008, says that integrating new people into the culture set up by Freehouse can be difficult—potential new Co-op members look for established models of neighborhood organizations that they are familiar with, and the Wijk Co-op is a new model that can seem overly complex, as an umbrella organization encompassing and coordinating the efforts and interrelationships of many smaller stakeholder co-ops. But, she argues, the Co-op must be complex so that its infrastructure can facilitate all the possibilities that might arise in the future. Whereas businesses are typically focused on short-term profits, the Co-op is thinking forward fifty years and building itself elastically to accommodate unknown futures.[17] The organization's desire for such a sweeping, multivalent reach combined with its need for many new members are interlinked; more members lead to more demonstrable benefit for each but likewise requires the Co-op to venture into many more areas of activity and growth. Combined, these aspects create a formidable barrier that discourages people from joining.

Freehouse has responded to this challenge by solidifying the formal structure of the Co-op—they are slowly hiring more local people to run the Co-op as part of its operational team, doubling their numbers in the last year and recently hiring an interim Director. They have board and team meetings once a week, and have hired operations members who literally go door-to-door to connect with the membership base. Jeanne van Heeswijk, a trustee of the Co-op, laments that she is more involved than she would like to be at this stage, but that going from a loose, informal group to a more structured organization is a "constant and necessary struggle."[18] The expansion of the operational base has led to a process that

Annet van Otterloo calls "doubling"—Freehouse representatives will shadow the Co-op leadership in business meetings and negotiations, but are slowly trying to extract themselves from the processes necessary to run the organization. She notes that strategic and savvy communication is key; many people still see Freehouse as an art project, and that is not always desirable. Having new team members who can speak as representatives of the Co-op rather than Freehouse is increasingly useful. Who do you bring to the front to deliver the message? "We know exactly what we are doing," she says, and part of that is "infusing the heritage of Freehouse into the Co-op," but she cautions, "It is important not to over-communicate." The Co-op's mission is not a secret, but effective communication can be a delicate balance. Because of its attempts to appeal to so many constituencies, it must carefully calibrate its language to different groups in order to remain legible.

This careful outreach has started to yield some rewards. Radjesh Roepnarain, one of the new operations team members and "business

Opening of Cooperative Value Store (2013). Design: Exyst, Peter Zuiderwijk with Wijkschool Afrikaanderwijk. Photograph by Peter Zuiderwijk.

experts" that recently came on board, has been liaising directly with the shopkeepers and the Shopkeepers' Association, which is a member of the Wijk Co-op. As of October, 28 of 70 total retail storeowners in the community signed up for the Wijk Co-op, but his goal is to sign up all of them. "If one shopkeeper goes along," he say, "they influence others that will eventually follow." Johan is a shopkeeper who helped found the Shopkeepers' Association, and I spoke with him at the January 2014 conference (he was one of the residents who participated in the formal handover). "The Wijk Co-op can address larger interests in the neighborhood," he said. "We all have to decide how the neighborhood as a whole can profit from the structure."[19] Communicating the sense of ownership and the holistic view that Johan expressed to more new members, as well as securing a series of small victories (like competitive collective purchase agreements for utilities, for example) to establish its effectiveness, is necessary for the Co-op to cohere organizationally into a truly self-run body.

Distribution and Value

One of the Wijk Co-ops' main goals is to re-invest money that is earned by local merchants into the local Afrikaanderwijk economy so that it is accessible to an increasing proportion of its membership. Currently, businesses use major banks and contract with non-local services and vendors, in part due to the lack of local supportive service infrastructure (like cleaning services, payroll systems, and community banks). Becoming a member for the Co-op involves signing an exchange agreement that encourages this; for example, storekeepers must agree to preferentially buy their products from other local shops (when possible) or to hire local contract workers. There is also a stipulation in the membership contract that states they must contribute one product or service to the Wijk Co-op. Any profit made by the Cooperative is divided among the members: 25% goes towards education (such as certification programs); 25% goes towards social and cultural programs; and 50% is divided

amongst the members in the ratio they contributed.[20] To be self-sustaining and to provide valuable opportunities to its members, the Co-op must generate its own income and provide educational and social programs of sufficient importance to compensate for potential losses. The non-profit Freehouse has been funded over the years from a mix of research grants and income (from the Neighborhood Kitchen or Workshop), which allowed it to stay politically independent. As a for-profit institution, the Co-op must now shift completely towards making its own money (it can no longer apply for grants nor receive charitable donations), but still manage to create opportunities and enhance the capabilities of its members. Ramon Mosterd, a financial and budget manager for both Freehouse and the Co-op, expects that within a few years the Co-op's main source of income will be commissions and fees from its products and services, but in the start up phase they need to secure investment monies to enable the development of the organization's operational base. This brings up the same chicken and the egg problem that impedes the recruitment of new members. As Mosterd describes:

> *Although there is the Freehouse history and network, the Co-op is a new organization. Therefore, the Co-op does not have its own track record yet. This makes it more difficult to convince new financiers, because we cannot show them figures and generated results yet. We need more time to prove ourselves, but in order to prove ourselves we do need budget and commissions first.*[21]

Recently, the Co-op has implemented a few initial services that they hope will serve as models for future activities as well as core businesses. The first is a Cleaning Cooperative that hires and trains local workers, paid through the Co-op's own payroll system, to clean the porches of 281 local houses. This is in contrast to the previous cleaning company, which brought in workers from outside of the neighborhood and spent locally apportioned city money on payroll and organizational overhead located outside of the Afrikaanderwijk. Successful Freehouse initiatives are also being sustained through the new Co-op structure; the Neighborhood Kitchen and Sewing

Workshop are both self-sustaining collective businesses started by Freehouse that have transitioned into Co-op members, part of the so-called "ground floor" services of the organization. A new opportunity involving a housing complex for the elderly in the Afrikaanderwijk demonstrates the potential for the Co-op and Freehouse to work side-by-side. The two were invited to re-envision the structure of the home in order to implement an array of services, but also to encourage community-building between the elderly and different neighborhood groups (like students and business owners.) In this scenario, Freehouse would act as a research institute, designing and rethinking the layout and activities of the home, whereas the Co-op could take on services such as the restaurant: teaching cooking, visual arts and sewing classes, and cleaning.[22]

This kind of core service can support the broader mission of the Co-op itself as well as a sliver of its membership, but it provides little direct benefit for members like the shopkeepers. In this context, the value proposition of the Co-op mirrors Uitermark's call for the equitable distribution of scarce resources through collective purchase models. By aiming to equitably provide resources (like insurance, energy, internet access, workspace and mobile phone service) that enhance business development but can be scarce and expensive, the Co-op attempts to divorce access to these resources from capital gain. This, in turn, increases the diversity of valuable opportunities available to individuals in the community. Though the organization is a long way from being able to provide these resources in a manner that is entirely independent of the wealth of specific Coop members, their collective purchasing power mitigates the inequality of access. A recent example is the formation of an energy collective, which negotiated a much cheaper rate for the businesses within the Wijk. Depending on their usage, shops will see a savings of between $100 and $1700 Euros per year. However, Radjesh Roepnarain, who has been a key player in these negotiations, feels that these benefits are not coming fast enough for some members. Since they do not see the direct personal gain yet, they do not understand the greater potential. He would like to

have five or six additional collective purchase agreements in place to undergird more broad-based activities.[23]

This may help shopkeepers realize that the profit of joint activities and services under the Co-op will not compete with their businesses, but rather reinvest in the Wijk infrastructurally or educationally. Exchanging joint services and products is a key factor in the overall profit loop, because simply socializing resources may do little more than help build more efficient capitalist businesses, increasing the amount of wealth in the hands of the few. The Co-op has also attempted to spur reinvestment in the community via membership fees, but the profit-sharing formula seems too feeble in these early days. The socialist exchange system used with collective purchase agreements, where businesses increase their capital only to reinvest that capital in the community rather than keeping it for themselves, makes it difficult to sign new members up—no small business owner wants to give up even the tiniest slice of often razor-thin margins. This is a key sticking point for the businesses and the Co-op moving forward. The question remains, will shopkeepers reinvest their savings locally to hire and expand their businesses, thus facilitating the emergence of new possibilities and talents inherent in the neighborhood?

A major tension arises when a resistant cultural form like Freehouse attempts to attract new active members in the formulation of the Wijk Co-op. Among the Co-op leadership, there seems to be an underlying acceptance that people will only support the Co-op insofar as it serves their self-interest, rather than because they have some commitment to a broader collective vision for the neighborhood. This puts the Co-op in the challenging position of having to compete with the private market, while convincing new members to invest in socialized forms of support available to the entire Co-op membership. The Co-op seems to be leveraging the long relationships built between neighborhood residents and Freehouse over the years to get people to sign on to a collective vision, as those residents are more willing to trust in the as-yet unseen benefits of such an organization. It is when new people who

Radicalizing the Local, Freehouse closing symposium, workshop day 1 (2014). Photograph by Johannes van Assem.

are unfamiliar with Freehouse become involved that the leadership is hitting a wall. They are attempting to satisfy some measure of members' individual self-interest while simultaneously convincing them of a broader vision: in other words, they are trying to radicalize their membership. This is a risky prospect that could backfire if the Co-op cannot entice enough of its members to articulate an actionable and compelling collective vision that induces members to sacrifice for a larger social good.

Political Power

Though the Co-op's primary focus in this initial phase has been setting up its internal infrastructure, it has already been plunged into politics, albeit somewhat reluctantly. The pushback it has begun to receive from other neighborhood organizations in South Rotterdam indicates the group's growing political leverage. As one

friendly governmental administrator warned Jeanne van Heeswijk in a recent phone call, "Apparently you are doing your job really well, because you are already considered a threat."[24] Some NGOs and other social organizations in the area see the Co-op as coming in strong because of its influence with neighborhood residents, and have expressed skepticism about the Co-op's agendas. According to van Heeswijk, one of these organizations began telling people in the neighborhood not to become involved because the Co-op endeavor was "not to be trusted". She believes that this might arise from the rightwing tendencies of the local government as they see the incubation of socialism as one of the Co-op's intentions. In these situations, the Co-op is forced to be politically savvy while striving to maintain its separation from any particular party ideology. This dilemma goes back to Annet van Otterloo's cautious note about message: to select the right messenger to deliver the right message to the right people at the appropriate time.

Freehouse was founded with a very clear goal, which was to lobby policy makers regarding changes in governmental policies around permits in the Afrikaanderwijk Market. The political goals of the Coop are less evident. As a point of contrast, the main housing corporation in the Afrikaanderwijk district (with which Freehouse works as well) started a redevelopment campaign for part of the main shopping district. Led by a classical "creative city" campaign using similar rhetoric to the Wijk Co-op, this group sought to set up collaborative pop-up work spaces in empty storefronts, like slow food labs and craft shops. This would involve, in van Heeswijk's estimation, inviting outside "creatives" to catalyze industry in the neighborhood, leading at worst to imbalanced precarious work, an outflow of money from the neighborhood, and potential displacement down the line; and at best, to goods and services that current residents don't really need or can't participate in. Whereas the Co-op seeks to facilitate the entry of the immigrant working-class into the market system, focusing on the skills already present in the neighborhood, this campaign seemed happy to focus on benefitting a predominantly white creative class largely external to

the neighborhood. They did not initially collaborate with the Wijk Co-op because they considered the Co-op "difficult to work with" and protective of its membership.

It is true that the Co-op protects the interests of its members, but that is its mission and purpose, rather than one of only creative or economic catalysis. The question remains how well it will be able to leverage its growing political power to positively affect policy changes that benefit residents (for example, routing public money towards low-income housing), and if it will be able to do so in the current political climate, defined by a rising right wing. Though the Wijk Co-op is already in the process of separating from Freehouse in its political leadership, it will become more necessary as it develops its own policy agendas moving forward to not be seen as the same kind of subversive institution.

Resilience

Creating resilient networks of people and their skills is the intangible benefit that undergirds all the activities of the Co-op, and to my mind, distinguishes it dramatically from problem-based social organizations and more akin to new urbanism projects. Jeanne van Heeswijk describes the difference between the Co-op's method of durational insertion and a project-based social good operation:

> *We are not a group that just drops out of the sky to do a project because there is a pot of money. We were here before, we will be here again, we are still here, and we will work with you again. It is the building of a group that understands that we do this together, but that we do not always sit together. It is just that we are there, that we share a common ground in having interest in creating forms of resilience that don't always have to do with direct gain, but our main argument is 'we are still there.' We don't have target groups; we have a durational collaboration on a repetitive basis. It never stops.*[25]

Though the true measure of resilience is difficult to quantify at this point, many of the Co-op's activities over time serve to strengthen intergenerational and intercultural relationships between immigrants and native working-class Dutch, provide collective gathering and workspaces, and enhance the collective power of social networks. For example, the Shopkeepers' Association organized a gift exchange for all the kids in the neighborhood over the holidays, and Co-op members and storeowners like Johan have begun to take on two or three teenagers each as interns (usually the children of Turkish immigrants, whereas Johan is white Dutch), thinking about the employment potential of future generations and creating cross-cultural relationships.[26] Every person I talked to cited the dramatic importance of building relationships, but how and when these relationships play out in a network of resilience must still be investigated. Do they result in a reduction in crime, recidivism rates, and youth dropout rates? Do they mitigate unemployment because strong social networks are better able to provide jobs? Do they result in increased economic investment in the neighborhood on the strength of the relations residents have with their local businesses and with each other? These are the questions that will be most relevant to the future development and survival of the Co-op.

Freehouse's Continuing Role

The dowry that Freehouse brings to this marriage of art project and Co-op is knowledge and heritage. The heritage of Freehouse's prior activities and relationships helped to launch the Co-op, and its knowledge helps to form the organization's values of exchange, reinvestment, and solidarity. Right now, Freehouse is more involved than it would like to be, overlapping the activities of the Co-op's management team and involved in hundreds of ongoing conversations with new members. Several of the Co-op's board members are key Freehouse organizers, including Jeanne van Heeswijk. "I initially didn't want to play that role," she said, "but people felt it was necessary for me to be actively involved in giving

advice."[27] Ideally, Freehouse will be able to extract itself from this central role, and simply function as the cultural and research arm of the Coop. It still sees itself as a laboratory for experiments, an institute that can create a self-sustaining Neighborhood Kitchen, and then move on to some new problem, some new capability. Its successes with seeding projects that are then taken over by local participants on a small scale (for example, the neighborhood's collaborative work spaces) have provided a model for a similar exit at the Wijk Co-op scale, but the question remains: how can the experimental activities of Freehouse continue to be supported within the future structure of the Co-op?

Marcel van der Meijs, an urban planner involved with Freehouse as a board member since 2008, describes this issue eloquently:

> *Freehouse is fragile, yet flexible. [We] are afraid that the Co-op will become paralyzed and fixed, without the possibility of adaptation. When you try to create resistance and real economic change, you risk fixity of the institution.*[28]

Freehouse is a necessary ingredient in the pliability and pluralism of the Co-op, so its exit strategy must be carefully considered. It continues to play an important role in experimenting with new projects and strategies to accomplish the goals set forth by the Co-op. Though it must part slowly from the Co-op to allow it to flourish and self-organize, it cannot go too far. It is a critical piece of the ecosystem, impossible to do away with and remain whole.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The question of how the Co-op can create a structure that is flexible enough to allow for disruptive experimentation is crucial, especially in light of its current difficulty in convincing potential constituents of its worth. Driving so intensely and with such focus towards demonstrable economic success (so as to convince more members to join, so as to leverage more power, so as to gain funding, so as to have more success) risks marginalizing the experimental,

interventionist power of Freehouse and its capabilities approach. Where do the values that Freehouse espouses stop and the embedded values of the Co-op begin? Right now they appear to be quite similar, one the outgrowth of the other, but it is unclear this will always be the case. The Co-op must be exceedingly aware of how it changes and why. It must always be questioning what agendas are driving it forward and whether it is living up to its values. And because it is self-produced, the vast diversity of cultures, education levels, economic classes, and individual agendas it encompasses must also be self-critical and reflective. This kind of culture, the culture of a neighborhood that is organized through cooperative methods, can only be built through millions of conversations, millions of interactions, crossing paths and working together millions of times. It is an intricate dance with no end, the prospect of a self-run organization that can be focused and reliable, flexible and expansive. This is a uniquely ambitious project, and the Coop has an enormous amount of work ahead of it. But it also has the potential for a unique kind of success.

Sue Bell Yank has a deepseated investment in socially and politically-engaged art that can be traced to her years as a public school teacher in Lynwood and South Fairfax. She is currently an advisor for the Asian Arts Initiative's Social Practice Lab and the granting organization SPArt, and was a curatorial advisor for the Creative *Time Living as Form* exhibition (2011). Her writing has been featured in exhibition catalogues, the Liverpool Biennial journal *Stages*, *n.paradoxa feminist journal*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, the Huffington Post, KCET Artbound, and various arts blogs including her ongoing essay blog entitled Social Practice: Writings about the social in contemporary art (www.suebellyank.com). She has been a lecturer at California College of the Arts, Otis College of Art and Design, UCLA, and USC.

Notes

1. Ian David Moss, "Creative Place-making Has an Outcomes Problem," Create Equity, posted May 9, 2012, http://createquity.com/2012/05/creative-placemaking-has-an-outcomes-problem/.

2. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014.

3. "Urban Vision 2030" by City of Rotterdam, January 2007, http://www.rotterdam.nl/DSV/Document/Stadsvisie/432312_Leaflet.pdf.

4. Margit Mayer, "The 'Right to the City' in Urban Social Movements," in *Cities for People, Not for Profit* edited by Neil Brenner et al. (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.68-69.

5. More about Henk Oosterling's Rotterdam Skillcity can be found on his website, http://www.vakmanstad.nl/page/english.

6. Freehouse's activities are extensively documented, but this summary comes from several sources: The handbook for the "Radicalizing the Local" conference held from January 15-17, 2014, edited by Ashraf Osman; Skype conversations with Jeanne van Heeswijk on 10/15/14 and Annet van Otterloo on 11/19/14; and the text "Radicalizing the Local: Inclusive Urban Strategies," available here http://issuu.com/ashrafosman/docs/eng_freehouse-send.

7. At Home in Europe Project, "Muslims in Rotterdam," Open Society Foundations, accessed February 25, 2015, http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/a-muslims-rotterdam-report-en-20101119.pdf.

8. The organizations co-op includes both businesses and social/cultural organizations.

9. Mark Stern, "Rethinking Social Impact: 'We Can't Talk About Social Well-being Without the Arts and Culture," ARTSBlog, Americans for the Arts, posted May 1, 2012, http://blog.artsusa.org/2012/05/01/rethinking-social-impact-we-cant-talk-about-social-well-being-without-the-arts-culture/.

10. Ingrid Robeyns, Review of *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach by Martha C. Nussbaum*, University of Notre Dame Philosophy Reviews, posted September 23, 2011, http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/26146-creating-capabilities-the-human-development-approach-2/.

11. Robeyns Review, http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/26146-creating-capabilities-the-human-development-approach-2/.

12. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach/#Bib

13. Achin Chakraborty, "On the Possibility of a Weighting System for Functionings," *Indian Economic Review*, 31 (1996), pp.241–50.

14. Justus Uitermark, quoting Susan Fainstein, "An Actually Existing Just City?" in *Cities for People, Not for Profit,* op. cit., p.200.

15. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014.

16. Annet van Otterloo, Skype conversation with the author, November 19, 2014.

17. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014.

18. Johan van Gool, conversation with author at "Radicalizing the Local" symposium, Stichting Freehouse, Rotterdam, January 17, 2014.

19. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014.

20. Ramon Mosterd, email responses to author's questions, November 21, 2014.

21. Radjesh Roepnarain, Skype conversation with the author, November 3, 2014.

22. Ibid.

23. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Johan van Gool, conversation with author at "Radicalizing the Local" symposium, Stichting Freehouse, Rotterdam, January 17, 2014.

27. Jeanne van Heeswijk, Skype conversation with the author, October 15, 2014

28. Marcel van der Meijs, conversation with the author at "Radicalizing the Local" symposium. Stichting Freehouse, Rotterdam, January 17, 2014.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

Thoughts On the Cultural Policy of a Failed State

Marc Herbst

As a co-editor of the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, I found out about my interest in "social practice" alongside the field's emergence. Our journal's conceptualization was concurrent with the globalization movement of the late 1990s and saw the convenient overlaps between art, 90's anarchism and new media culture as politically useful. Coming out of a D.I.Y. anarchist tradition whose key text was Hakim Bey's *T.A.Z.*, a book that romantically theorized moments of ahistorical carnivalesque—we had no methodology besides an eye to the times. Symptomatically, Nicholas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" floated in like an occasional friend who'd arrive with invites to exclusive parties. For the most part, the motivation for our merging of all sorts of social technologies in a manner favorable to a small section of the art world was purely political. "How can we describe the juncture of fine art and anti-authoritarian activism in order to make a more joyous, livable and equitable world?"[1]

In America, its not uncommon for either artists or activists to experience their journey as an act of self-creation; that's clearly how the Journal experienced it. Because socialization in both the worlds of activism and art are very generation-specific, they inhabit worlds that perhaps appear entirely self-made. Yet these "worlds" are structured from both outside and inside by larger historic and

material forces. Though the long-term success within the arts of an artist run space relates to how its participants arrange relationships with capitalism, this is a greater shibboleth than gentrification. Within activism, the post '68 trend of "culturally based"[2] organizing outside the traditional structures of unions and parties has only increased. Witness for example the success of the Occupy Movement, initiated in absentia by the subvertising journal, *Adbusters*. While histories and solidarity are always important to purposefully bohemian political artists and organizers, our event-oriented constitutional formations unevenly occlude and highlight things so that *whose* history and *which* solidarities are rarely settled facts.

For these reasons, I've been interested in the printed detritus of East German cultural policy. It struck me soon after moving to Leipzig, Germany, that I was living in the remains of a society that had made a conscious effort to order and structure life based on some of the intellectual legacies I'd originally learned about in poorly attended art history lectures; Kant, Hegel, Marx among others. At its best, East Germany appears as a state that intelligently prioritized the social formations of the working class, where an average factory worker could earn a better salary than an academic.

What follows is a photo essay gathered from a collection of East German books in order to reflect something on contemporary politically oriented social practice art. The reflection uses this near-foreign system as a mirror on the tensions between ideology, material reality and its social relations, creative autonomy and the bare life. This reflection relies on the imaginable malleability of the social sphere, that the specificity of human arrangements are just that—important specifics. As such, bare life is that which is irreducibly necessary for survival, the social practice is seen as the necessary and generous creativity of and beyond this.

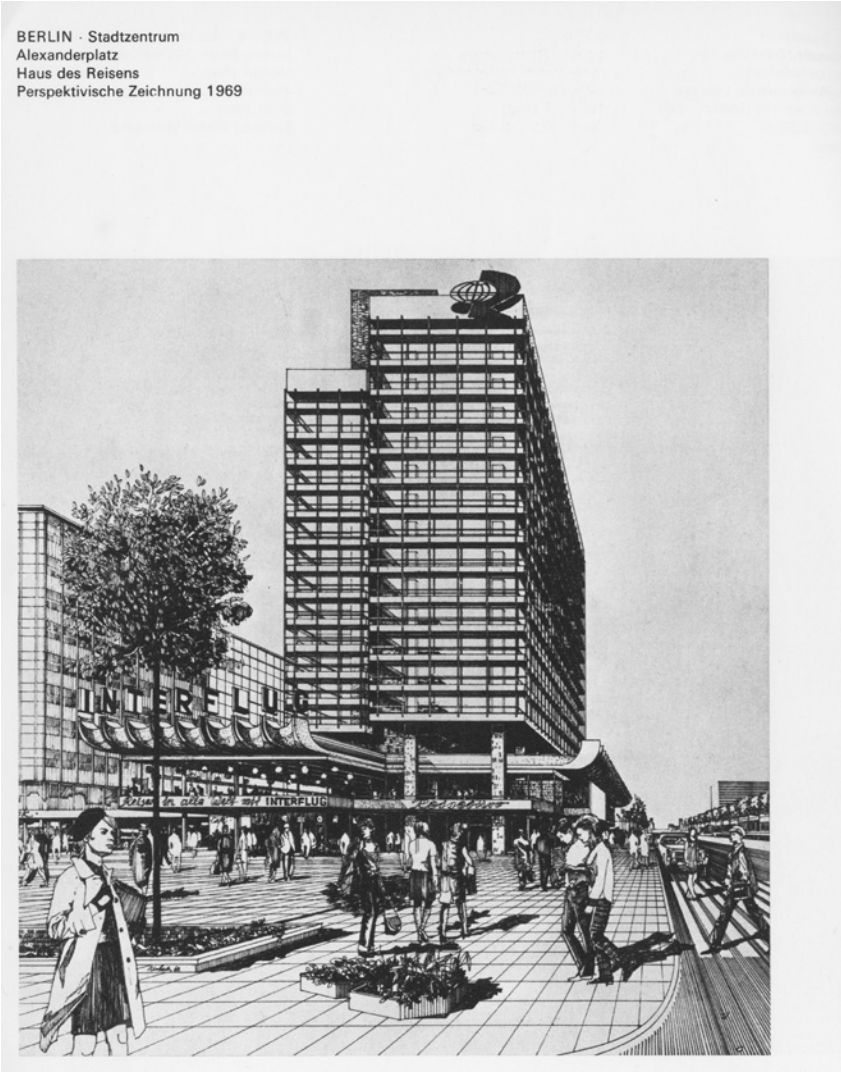
Social practice has two separate meanings; it is both the day-to-day practice of living (socially) and also a practice of engaging social techniques. The social is bound within this duality, between the necessity of day-to-day living and the teleologies of conscious

productions.[3] The ways in which societies exist within themselves while aiming to structure themselves inherently affect all forms of organized cultural relations. *Contemporary social practice art* is one conscious form of cultural production that plays with and/or attempts to institute alternatives and expansions on social existence. It falls within the inherent cultural policy of neoliberalism by, in effort if not goal, supporting the narrative of the autonomous subject.

Because social practice innately utilizes material and participants from its immediate contexts, social practice as itself and as an art has a high level of regional variation. The variations mirror each region's political economy, institutional support for socially creative innovation, and the strength of autonomous social movements that also utilize social practices in order to reorder life in a variety of manners.

East Germany (the DDR or Deutsche Demokratische Republik) forwarded a *socialist practice* as state policy that was utilized to produce certain effects. With limited means, the state produced a highly industrial society and labor force that heavily utilized the country's natural resources. It provided cradle to grave welfare that promised and delivered no unemployment or hunger. Its cultural and intellectual spheres were policed in a manner and atmosphere I can hardly imagine. In comparison, contemporary Western *social practice arts* emerge in an era with seemingly limitless cultural freedom but little economic safety.

Socialist policy of the East German state made clear its intentions by providing clean, modern and well-planned housing. The pre-fab panel-built "plattenbau" starkly contrasted the deteriorating pre-war urban constructions. Edge-city plattenbau towns were serviced with all the modern conveniences including the full range of childcare that was necessary for a state that assumed full employment for its citizens. Anecdotally, I've heard of one person whose family had economic troubles in the early East German era—soon after the war. After the mid-sixties, it's difficult to find examples of structural poverty within the system.



Christine Hoffmeister and Joachim Kadatz, eds. *Architektur Und Bildende Kunst Austellung zum 20*. Jahrestag der DDR. Berlin: Altes Museum, 1969.

By the 1970s East Germany's economy was the strongest of the Eastern Block. With political allegiance to the Soviet Union and its brand of Marxist-Leninism, East Germany was a multiparty state with the SED (Socialist Unity Party) made structurally dominant.

The SED ran a planned economy whose ideology was organized under the notion of an "actually existing socialism." This actual existence of socialism rested in and was dependent upon the social and economic practices of both the state and its citizenry. This *actuality* provided the allowance for the uneven distribution of social relations, ideological formations and material realities under the assumption that as socialists, the society as a whole was moving ever closer towards the utopia of socialism.

Within East Germany, though ring-city plattenbau developments were considered healthier because of access to sunshine and fresh air, historic urban cores were not completely abandoned. Architecture books discussed the need to preserve urban life and also build working monuments to culture (in the form of museums, opera houses, universities, and skyscrapers) as living monuments to the historic role played by Germany's revolutionary working class.

The above image is an architectural rendering of the East German Tourist Agency Building's main offices in Alexanderplatz, East Berlin. From this or other offices throughout the DDR, most citizens could afford to book holidays to the Black Sea, Bulgaria, and other travel destinations.

"Immer Bereit"—always ready for peace and socialism. This was the motto of the Young Pioneers, the SED's youth group also known as the FDJ (Free German Youth). Through the Young Pioneers and other extra-governmental organizations (though party-affiliated, there existed a division between the party and the government), socialism organized a rich array of cultural activities. To access after-school's rich social life, one often had to enroll in the Young Pioneers. Children's relative autonomy from their parents was afforded by the array of activities offered to them within a socialist living structure made safe for childhood. Kids had a lot of options; sports, music, travel, clubs. Even today a friend's child enjoys piloting ultralight airplanes made at an amateur airfield whose airplanes and runway are the legacy of state sponsored forms for popular recreation.

Karl Manthey und Rudolf Pakulla. *Künstlerische Erziehung ausserhalb des Unterrichts*. Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1970. Image of a group of Young Pioneers with older accordion player in an SED art teacher's manual. The book describes the route through which artistic education helps develop a socialist personality. The manual is a detailed, and from my perspective, a contradictory text, philosophically discussing both body-based practice and the necessary superiority of classical music over jazz. Images include child-crafted anti-Vietnam War woodblocks and naïve-looking space-race prints.

werden. Am darauffolgenden Tag schließt sich die Marathonfahrt an, die eine Streckenlänge von 27 bis 33 km umfassen kann. Sie stellt hohe Anforderungen an Pferde und Fahrer bezüglich Ausdauer, Kondition und Einteilung der Kräfte, sind doch fünf Teilphasen (Trab-, Schritt-, Trab-, Schritt-, Trabphase) zu durchfahren. In der vorletzten Trabphase müssen außer natürlichen auch künstlich angelegte Hindernisse durchquert werden. Den Abschluß dieser Vielseitigkeitsprüfung bildet das Hindernisfahren durch 15 bis 20 Hindernisse, wobei besonders der Gehorsam, die Wendigkeit, das Galoppiervermögen der Pferde, aber

Henry Heinig. *Urania Universum 1984*. Leipzig: Urania-Verlages, 1984. *Urania Universum* was an annual journal focusing on the global scientific and cultural developments, heavily featuring, as would be expected, the DDR. This image is of a youth equestrian acrobatic team. Athletics had a highly developed infrastructure throughout East Germany as the presentation of athletic prowess to the world was understood as an ultimate achievement of the human under Socialism. I imagine this troop wandering out to practice in the field after school with a neighbor's workhorse.

Many people describe the socialist world of their childhood as rich in time, safety, creativity, craft, and sport.

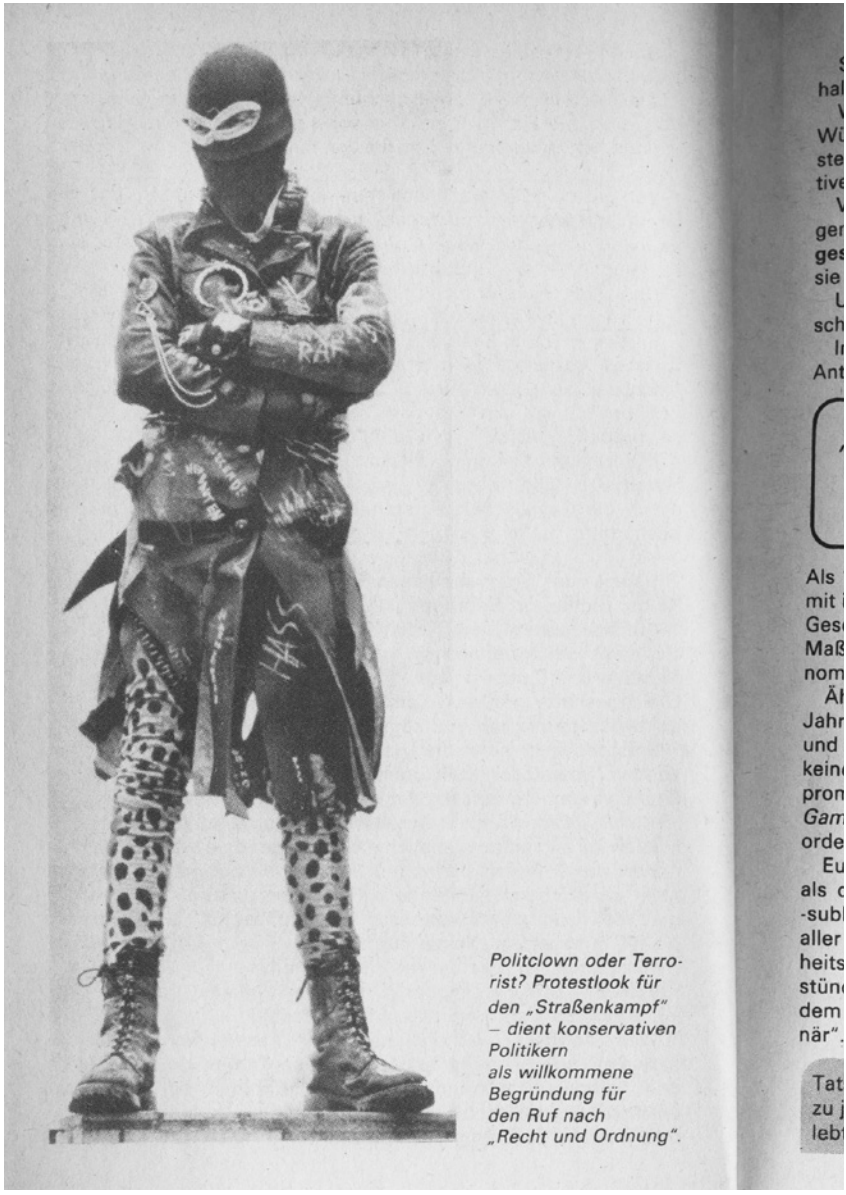
Gabriele Stötzer is a DDR era dissident performance artist and writer who responded to the inherent patriarchy of the state whose public space was functionalized for production. The governing regime's disinterest in the subconscious was made palpable for her in the industrial landscape of mass social formations the state created. As the state provided few methods of personal exploration (Freud and the subjective tools of the Western counterculture were

pedagogically shunned), her artwork first became a tool for self-exploration. Her performance videos have her tentatively exploring her own naked potential on the roof of a plattenbau.

Though Stötzer served one year in prison for signing a letter criticizing the government's expulsion of a folk singer to West Germany, she remained within the DDR with a dissident status. Unable to legally display artwork in sanctioned galleries, her work circulated in underground networks, though she primarily shared her projects with a tight-knit feminist circle. Ultimately, her extended collective was able to organize the first occupation of a State Security (Stassi) office at the time of The Wall's crumbling. The occupation and immediate preservation of this office's documents helped ensure the collapse of East Germany's pernicious Stassi. Stötzer has since become an author, journalist and occasional commentator.

This is an image from a popular book series *Konkret* published by the FDJ youth group. This particular issue looks at Western youth movements with a paternally empathic yet critical eye. The text makes an effort to empathize with and explain Western rebel youth; hippies, punks, fashionistas. Editorially, the text always falls on the side of governmentality. As the caption states, "Political clown or terrorist? Protest look for the street fighter—it provides Conservative Politicians with a welcome reason to call for 'law and order'."

When I showed the book to a friend who grew up in the DDR, he was incredulous. He couldn't believe that the book was published in East Germany. "If I'd seen this when I was a kid, I'd have been all over these pictures. The text would have meant absolutely nothing to me." Occasionally, the FDJ did act independently of the government; the Konkret issue on the environment was censored for having too strident a stance on pollution.



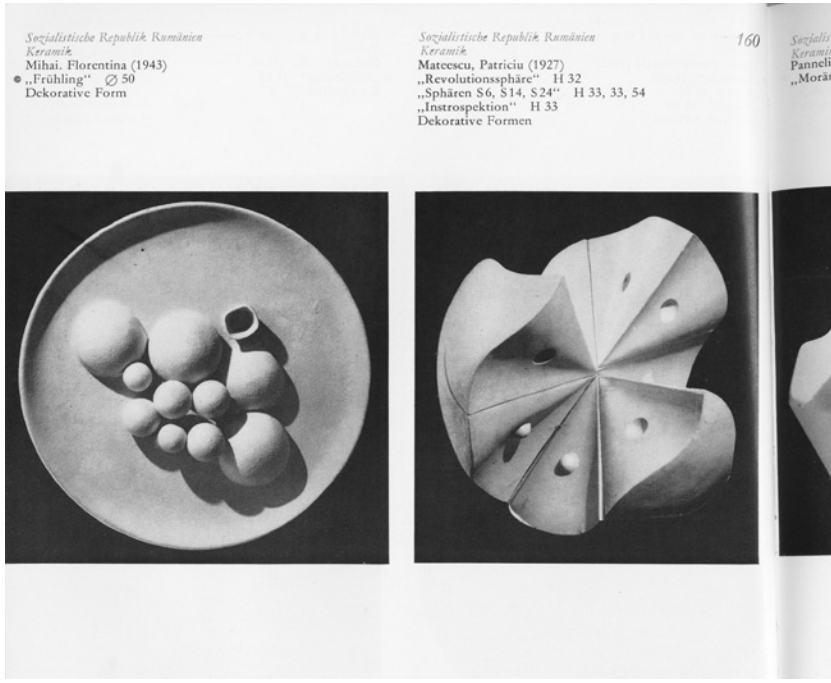
Politclown oder Terrorist? Protestlook für den „Straßenkampf" – dient konservativen Politikern als willkommene Begründung für den Ruf nach „Recht und Ordnung".

Thomas Heubner. NL Konkret 67, Die Rebellion der Betrogenen. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1985.A photograph of a punk, ready to defend their Hamburg, West German, squat.

Rolf Eckhardt. 1979 *Kulturangebot Des Kreises Bad Liebenwerda. Dresden:* VEB Buch, 1979.

This is the 1979 Cultural Calendar for the Bad Liebenwerda region. Bad Liebenwerda is a rural region with a small health spa. The first few pages of the *Kulturangebot* are dedicated to clarifying the role that cultural workers play in society, also explicating the rights of musicians, artists and the fees they will receive for services.

From my American perspective, the *Kulturangebot* has such provocative sounding offerings. It lists the schedule and meeting locations for the Soviet-German friendship club, the woman's club, the workman's club, the sewing club, the socialist farm worker's club, in addition to other highlighted offerings including the annual teen disco. Yet its content must have been and appears to be so incredibly mundane. I appreciate the booklet's high print quality and its Picasso-inspired modernist abstractions mixed with a disco era graphic sensibility. I'm assuming the people of Bad Liebenwerda appreciated the touch of style too.



Herbert Schönemann. *1. Quadriennale Des Kunsthandwerks Sozialistischer Länder*– Erfurt 1974. Erfurt; DEWAG, 1974. Image from the *First Quadrennial for Arts and Crafts of the Socialist Countries*.

From the *First Quadrennial for Arts and Crafts of the Socialist Countries*. What impresses me about this internationalist quadrennial (including Vietnam and the East Block) is how the formal artworks' titles flow between ideologically infused and the poetic. "Spring" and "Revolutionary Phase." Both are time-based names impressed upon uniquely formed objects—here ceramic plates.

If a territory's official policy is the granting of its citizens the social practice of enacting socialism over time, how does the formalization of the process square against reality? With the socialist norm set at the mass spectacle of the May Day parade, how might a more meaningful performance of socialism ingratiate itself over time?

As a non-disruptive object speaking in coded and symbolic language, these pieces serve as reminders and references for

possible becoming. Much dissident artwork (of which the above is not representative) also spoke in similarly coded language—for to directly critique the state in objective form would serve well in court as evidence. After reunification, much of Eastern Germany's newly emergent and popular antifascist youth scene took an apolitical turn. Like the West, creative activist culture more openly embraced the representational politics of inclusion without maintaining a concurrent focus on privatization and sudden income inequality.

Though consciously leftist, an acquaintance of mine found himself a young East German dissident by actively questioning in school the mass-society youth forms. As pastors in the Lutheran Church, his parents drew from disobedient practices that predated the East German State, and his behavior prioritized a community of consciousness and isolated him from his school peers. Socially isolated, his behavior got him on his teachers' watch lists. As he grew into a teenager, his small group of friends, in a creative punk spirit, began incorporating fabric artworks into their clothes. They détourned hats, shirts and pants with wildly colorful fabric swatches and superfluous threading. They were among a very small group of political disobedients in the town. They had a rough time.

East Germany collapsed when the protests of Leipzig's disobedient Left organized with the help of the church became general throughout the autumn of 1989. After reunification, a popular left expanded through electronic music and punk rock. My friend went another route, finding institutional support through previous dissident connections. He currently works as a teacher, with a radical pedagogy aimed at strengthening public commons by establishing more meaningful connections to a socialist imaginary that does not deny the individual subjectivity. No longer politically censored, he remains isolated from the general flows of the mainstream left because there exists little interest in the former East for re-imagining possible forms for the common management of human affairs. Rather, like elsewhere, the mainstream activist left in Germany is primarily interested in anti-racist activism that ultimately ensures access to the state's/capitalism's reproductive machinery.

East Germany forwarded a socialist ideology through particular, though broad infrastructures that produced the social practice it named "socialism." This practice of socialism re-enforced the state, until the moment it no longer did. What emerged afterwards, like elsewhere, is the social practice of neoliberalism. How do the conscious and secondary social productions of our current state work through the entirety of its social systems? What institutional structures allow for the development of this neoliberal personality? What material relations does this personality facilitate? What ideas and social practices exist that are truly or partially outside of state interests? How do these counter-formational practices circulate in our system? What are the time frames and social constitutions necessary for their meaningful circulation? That is, in what manner and in what time does any idea achieve actual results? How do those results vary depending on context and time frames?

Social practice can be understood as the continued effective constitutional movement of a coherent set of ideas that are indistinguishable from their practice (in other words, practices within the practice of living). What is the nature of the objective forms that are naturally produced from this practice of living; as stories, words, objects, images, scripts?

Art and activism's contemporary social practices are primarily based around the circulation of image/ideas intended as connections to better worlds. How operative are these image/ideas when removed from the context that forge them in practice? A comparison between East Germany and contemporary political practice has me considering the wiggle room between an ideology, its social practice and the burden of what that ideology disallows for. Ultimately Socialism was best expressed through infrastructure (in platters and plattenbau) for even today they continue the affirmative material legacy of the era. The individual, even the socialist individual, had a messy and unfulfilling experience in the social practice of the DDR. The proof for this is the fact of the events of "die wende"—the change from two Germanys to one, that was instigated

by individual participation in micro and macro-political acts such as occupations of offices and participation in mass protests.

Micro-histories within former regimes demonstrate the eventual affectivity of resistance but can hardly explain their general outcome because the difference in scale between the historical actor and a historic act is huge. Socialist social practice made that difference in scale obvious by actively marginalizing people. Contemporary social practice normatively suggests that everyone's abstracted creativity matters. Contemporary politically oriented social practitioners (in activism and art) would do well to consider the varied, unequal yet unpredictable capacity of differently constituted actors (as individuals, grassroots groups, conceptualizations, material structures, institutions) to work in a variety of ways between disobedience and deference to produce real effects.

Marc Herbst is co-editor of the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest* (Joaap), a journal and art collective founded in 2001 in Los Angeles, California. Joaap is described at times either as "a weirdo think-tank" or a "journal that meets at the intersection of fine art, media theory and the globalization movement." Herbst is an artist, writer, organizer and currently a PhD student at the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths. He used to trust the criminal element in his garden but now has no garden and is interested in listening at the space between senses and words, between finding a shelter, and playing cards. He enjoys drawing comic books and doing performance workshops. With the *Journal* or alone, he has taught, presented work and/or lectured at the Universities of California, Yale University, Malmö Kunstacademie, the New Museum (New York), KPFK radio, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, The Field, Electrodomestica, Medionauta, and elsewhere.

Notes

1. This quote is a play on how we occasionally describe the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*'s mission.

2. "Culturally based" organizing here is put in quotes to suggest the inorganic nature of the term. One should be reminded that all organizing

is ultimately "culturally based" in that the nature of human organizing involves collecting subjectivities via performative organizational models. Party and union politics, and to a lesser extent race-based politics are read as traditionally "political" and not "cultural" to the extent that the interests motivated through these forms have been rationalized into pre-existing political arrangements.

3. Conscious production here is defined as the purposeful and professional designing and making of things, whether they are objects (such as artworks or chairs) or the identified ideas and procedures that are understood to underlie or surround these things.

4. His parents were pastors involved in a historically disobedient tendency within the Lutheran Church.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

When Protest Becomes Art: The Contradictory Transformations of the Occupy Movement at Documenta 13 and Berlin Biennale 7

Sebastian Loewe

Introduction

Three years after the demise of Occupy Wall Street in New York in late 2011 and early 2012, it seems that the movement has come to an end, at least in the Western world. At first glance the situation couldn't be more depressing for the activists: all of the camps and sites are evicted, apart from a recent uprising in Hong Kong.[1] The occupations were systematically dismantled by state authorities, but the initial source of the protests, the worldwide economic crisis, has exacerbated problems and grievances in all parts of the world in admittedly very different degrees. Now a new level of economic and political escalation dawns, when the world powers fight for the vigor of their capitalist economy, the validity of their currencies and ruthlessly compete for declining business on their respective home turfs. With the implementation of austerity policies in Europe, entire countries continue to suffer from ongoing impoverishment and worsening social conditions for the sake of corporate profit.[2] It is evident that the problems addressed by the Occupy Movement didn't vanish, but have instead become even more pressing.

Occupy Berlin Biennale. April – July 2012, Berlin, Germany.

There are two watershed events that mark the decline of the movement, and involve collaborations with international art exhibitions in Germany. In 2012 Occupy activists gathered in Kassel, Germany to take part in Documenta 13 (June 9 to September 16) and in Berlin, Germany to participate in the Berlin Biennale 7 (April 27 to July 1). Both events endorsed the Occupy movement, but with rather diverse ramifications. In Kassel the occupants were approved by curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and the audience, both hailing the occupation a success. In Berlin the public considered the intervention to be kitschy, and it was referred to as a "human zoo"[3]. Although the responses to each show initially appear to be opposed, both exhibitions document the transformation of Occupy as a political phenomenon. The question then is, what happened to the Occupy movement when it became part of the art world and was perceived as art? Did the movement give up its political momentum for the sake of aesthetic quality? This is a perspective that some critics, including Claire Bishop, seek to preserve for socially engaged art, even as it moves outside traditional artistic boundaries.[4] Did the participations promote any of the goals of Occupy and hence serve the movement, as participants hoped for?

Finally, did the participations create a similar, and perhaps even stronger, "force of spirited intervention" that Gregory Sholette described in relation to the art practices within Occupy Wall Street?[5]

To answer these questions, I first want to take a closer look at what Occupy represented as a political movement; secondly look at the settings, goals and actions pursued by the occupants within the art context in contrast to the political movement; and thirdly discuss the outcome of the two art shows in light of their aesthetic and political implications.

Occupy as a political movement

Much has been written about the initial lack of political criticism of the occupants, their manifold and often conflicting ideas, their lack of a common list of demands, and the inefficient way in which the protests were organized. To reiterate these accusations is to miss the point of the movement. At no point was the activists' intention to form an effective, hierarchical, well-oiled movement that would come up with a cohesive critique. Instead, the movement has always been based on an abstract and heartfelt "feeling of mass injustice" and the conviction of being "wronged by the corporate forces", as stated in the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City.[6] This moral indignation to be in the right and to not have to suffer from global hardships translates into the world-view of the 99% and the call for "real" democracy. According to this world-view, a majority of the people, the 99%, serve without receiving any benefit, while the relentless 1% actually profits from the labor and struggles of the 99%. According to this logic, all kinds of grievances, including college debts, foreclosure, racism, environmental decay, declining wages, outsourced labor, federal bailouts, etc. become evidence of the illicit and corrupt power of the 1%. They maliciously influence courts, politicians and the media to cover up their machinations while killing people, destroying nature and gaining power over every single aspect of the lives of the 99%. With this world-view,

the movement didn't just occupy Zuccotti Park in New York City but also sought to construct a simplified and hermetic, moralistic explanation of their problems.

One of Occupy's major political goals was to encourage the 99% to "assert [their] power."[7] The claim at the very end of the New York declaration reads: "Join us and make our voices heard!"[8] Every single voiced critique of political, economic and social conditions was considered a valid contribution to Occupy's general world-view, a world-view which claimed to become increasingly effective as more people joined. Unfortunately, when subsumed under the creed of the 99%, individual grievances and interests are thus simultaneously important and insignificant. This almost methodical copy of the existing democratic pluralism is implemented in the organizational form of the protest which is meant to practically oppose existing democracy: the General Assembly. The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City states:

> *"What is a People's Assembly? It is a participatory decision-making body which works towards consensus. The Assembly looks for the best arguments to take a decision that reflects every opinion – not positions at odds with each other as what happens when votes are taken. It must be pacific, respecting all opinions: prejudice and ideology must left at home".*[9]

In the vision of the Declaration all personal political beliefs are sacred opinions, which are neither ideological nor really conflicting with each other. Occupy's process of forming a political will is a contradictory process which leaves individual perspectives untouched while making sure that they all coalesce in a consensual political belief. This necessarily calls for openness within a rigid and fixed framework of moral beliefs, observable in the methodological injunctions for assemblies:

> *"We use Positive Speech avoiding negative statements which close the door to constructive debate. It is a less aggressive and more conciliatory type of communication. It is useful to open a debate with the points that unite before dealing with the points that separate".*[10]

The People's Assembly employs a method of discussion, also known as 'horizontalidad' or horizontalism[11], that fundamentally assumes every opinion to be a well thought out and nonpartisan contribution to a collective will. A will that is, aside from the 1% evildoers, uttered in a potentially harmonious society without systemic antagonisms.

The Occupy world-view has a fundamental flaw: it misinterprets worldwide damages to good life as products of immoral behavior, albeit the damages can't be explained with personal viciousness. The fact that every modern capitalist society is regulated by a constitution and law, which is entirely irrespective of individual beliefs and behavior, should emphasize that. For example, the demeanor of a banker known as "greed" is indebted to a job description where he is obliged to risky financial investments and entitled to high bonuses. His actions are not prohibited by state law, but rather encouraged and endorsed. The moral perspective, instead of questioning the outcomes of systemic antagonisms, makes them a question of immoral misdemeanor: bankers are greedy, instead of being humble. It is therefore highly debatable that a critique of economy and sovereignty should be proclaimed in the mode of morality, as Occupy activists did. It is because of its idealized vision of a capitalist society, that Occupy could at the same time be considered a pro-capitalist movement wanting to restore age-old, reliable but forgotten principles of capitalism. For instance, Nicholas D. Kristof states that Occupy "highlights the need to restore basic capitalist principles like accountability", admittedly a very irritating judgment in regard to the goals of Occupy.[12] Political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who endorsed the movement, realized both the problem of "serious divergences within the 99%", and the problem that this "kind of reasoning could easily remain at the level of a moral condemnation of the rich, instead of a political analysis of the complex configuration of the power forces that need to be challenged."[13]

It has been argued that art helped foster the success of Occupy by acting as a hinge between the movement and the public, and by

Occupy Wall Street. September 2011, New York City.

"interrupting established perceptions and experiences of the city, politics and democracy itself."[14] Some even considered the entire movement to be art and believed that the camps were "permanent monuments to the injustice and inequality of America's society."[15] Regardless of the intertwined relation between art and activism and the participation of artists in the movement, which some consider minimal[16] and others to be crucial,[17] one thing is for sure, namely that the artistic practices within the movement reference the world-view of the 99%. The artistic practices are based on the morality of Occupy's tenets, illustrating the movement's validity and urgency. One of the most disseminated art works of that time, the flow-chart image of the New York City-based artist, educator and activist Rachel Schragis, illustrates this well. Schragis took the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City and turned it into a drawing that shows the central hypothesis of Occupy, namely that "all our grievances are connected" by the immoral machinations of the 1%.[18] In the drawing, bubbles containing the moral allegations from the

Declaration as well as other "unjust" conditions are interconnected like a spider's web, adding up to one giant visualization of the suffering and thus moral righteousness of the 99%.[19] The same goes for the posters depicting red fists, tamed Wall Street bulls and smiling Guy Fawkes masks, but also for corporate logos mimicking stars on the US-flag, re-appropriated public art or catchy Occupy-slogans on building facades at night - they express a longing for political morality through the means of art and artistic direct action.[20]

Occupy as an artistic practice of political commitment

The strategic approach that initially appears to characterize the Occupy movement involves subsuming diverse interests under the world-view of the 99%, and is both a necessity of the movement and the basis for the two collaborations within the art world discussed here. Occupy's preconception implies that any injustice that is voiced can be incorporated into the movement, regardless of the content of the complaint, which is vital to a movement that draws its strength and eligibility from the number of participants, grievances and topics. This overall image of a powerful and multifaceted movement was translated into socially engaged artistic practices and politically committed art by activists in Kassel and Berlin. In both Documenta and the Berlin Biennale, the intent of participants was to occupy for the just cause, in an attempt to demonstrate the openness, breadth, liveliness and righteousness of the movement. Both were equally interested in winning over new followers and in multiplying the strength of the movement.

It is necessary to discuss several key differences between the Occupy movement in the streets of New York City or Madrid and the occupations within the art context. The crucial point is that the occupants of New York's Wall Street were opposed to economic and political grievances which they believed should be eliminated. Therefore, they symbolically squatted some of the spaces most associated with their protest. The occupants in Kassel and Berlin, on

the other hand, considered the art exhibitions to be a worthy basis for a slightly different goal, one than could easily be overlooked because it seemed to share some of its features with Occupy Wall Street. Instead of protesting, in this case they wanted to promote and advertise the protest by becoming a valuable contribution to the art world. In order to achieve this goal, becoming subject to aesthetic pleasure was the necessary requirement for the protest. Since the original image of the protest was that of a creative movement, this requirement didn't seem to be much of an obstacle. But it turned out that the injunctions and unwritten laws of the art world were, in a way, just as prohibitive when it came to political expression as the police force was in New York.

If one considers art to be the appropriate instrument to promote political ideas, the next step is to declare the political action itself an art work. In Kassel, activists camped on the lawn of the Friedrichsplatz in front of the famous Museum Fridericianum. They considered themselves an "evolutionary art work"[21], adopting the slogan 'Everyone is an Artist' by famous German artist and former Documenta 7 participant Joseph Beuys. The activists in Kassel even considered themselves the "evolution of the Occupy Movement."[22] If one considers art to be the appropriate instrument to promote political ideas, it is unlikely that the target of one's protest will be the art institution or the art exhibition that one intends to use. In Kassel, the result was that the initially intransigent method of occupying Wall Street to oppose grievances associated with the financial system was then turned into a method that endorsed the international art event as a suitable public platform. This led to the contradictory outcome of a form of protest that didn't challenge the ideas connected to the space it occupied. An entry on Occupy Kassel's Facebook page from June 14, 2012 is dead-on in this regard, reflecting this peculiar situation: commenting on an official appeal to participate, an activist states that whatever the camp's purpose might be, one thing is for sure, that Occupy Kassel is not targeting Documenta 13.

Occupy Documenta. Documenta 13, June – September, 2012. Kassel, Germany.

To promote the Occupy movement by turning it into an art work also means to subsume the initial political world-view to a greater aesthetic experience. That means in particular that the camp itself, the arrangement of the tents, the tables, the small information shack, the political banners, the numerous cryptic art works within the camp as well as the people inhabiting it become a cultivated pictorial and poetic symbol of the Occupy protest. Once the camp is perceived as a work of art and not just a political occupation it is connected to a longing for sensuous perception and the "satisfaction to higher spiritual interests", as Hegel puts it.[23] All initially political aspects of the Occupy camp are then bound to aesthetic pleasure, which means they are bound to the personal taste and mental stimulation of the viewer. Potential political activists thus become an audience. By connecting their political arguments to the aesthetic appearance of the camp, the activists in Kassel also assume that tents, banners and people as installation actually militate for their protest, which

assumes that the aesthetic experience of the whole arrangement adds something to their political argument, that they otherwise couldn't express. Activists therefore assume that spectators would be politically 'awakened' by the aesthetic perception of the camp. Moreover, the protest camp becomes the object of a variety of aesthetic reflections on the "higher spiritual interests"[24], i.e. the question of values and meaningfulness art illustrates. Not surprisingly, the camp has been identified with higher values such as "anarchic creativity"[25], "political responsibility"[26] or the advocacy of morality, meaning that viewers understood the political world-view of the 99% as a way to bring beauty, sense, and meaning into the world. This perspective is apparently a severe shift compared to the initial political criticism, since Occupy art is now proving the world to be a place that is actually full of good reasons and ultimate substantiations to be exactly the way it is. Protest art is perceived as an example and evidence of plenty of good principles that already

Occupy Documenta. Documenta 13, June – September, 2012. Kassel, Germany.

govern this world; a world full of "anarchic creativity" can't be that bad. To look at Occupy art and find a deeper meaning or sense of the world would be to stop criticizing the world's miserable conditions. The Beuysian slogan 'Everyone is an Artist' illustrates these thoughts of justification very well: the slogan emphasizes the positive creative potential of every individual as a higher value, and shows how this expressed creativity produces a just society through social sculpture. But how can evildoers exist, if everybody is the epitome of good? Are greedy bankers excluded from that vision, and only 99% are actually 'artists'? To swear by 'inner creativity' as a value that governs the world and mystically emancipates it from distress is to avert one's eyes from the structural political and economic foundations of social inequalities.

The head curator of Documenta 13, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, understood this transformation of the Occupy movement very well when she first endorsed and then officially welcomed it as a valuable contribution to the exhibition. Praising Occupy and its activists because they demonstrated the "ability to care for the spaces they occupy"[27], Christov-Bakargiev confirmed that the camp did not serve the purpose of criticizing her exhibition, but fit perfectly into its context. She considered the camp to be art in "the spirit of Joseph Beuys"[28], claiming that she shared the activists' point of view, which was first of all to promote art and to add to the credibility of the exhibition. Christov-Bakargiev even reminded the activists to keep an overall 'cleanly' appearance of the camp.

The activists in Kassel kept holding on to their idea that positioning themselves in the context of the art world would add strength to the movement. Other than protesting against the resident arms manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, the protesters kept a peaceful relationship with their environment. They set up their own arty installation of 28 white tents, lined up in an orderly fashion, adorned with terms like 'greed','profit maximization', 'human capital', 'rebate' and 'anthropocentrism', apparently pointing to the world-view of the aggrieved. The activists condemned "profit maximization" as an immoral behavior, assuming that the installation

informs the viewer with the indignation they feel. But how can that function, if people already need to have a certain moralistic perspective in order to have an understanding of the criticism? The word "profit maximization" itself doesn't imply critique, after all it's every manager's mantra. Even if activists and audience do share the same moral perspective, enjoying their own moral world-view in an art work doesn't necessarily translate into political action.

At the end of dOCUMENTA 13 the activists performed their own eviction, reminiscent of the forceful eviction of Zuccotti Park in New York and final proof of how seriously they took the contradictory idea of an artistic practice of occupation in the service of the Occupy movement.[29]

In Berlin, the initial position was similar to the one in Kassel, as activists (comprised of members of Occupy Berlin and members of Occupy Museums New York) didn't oppose the exhibition itself, and even refrained from camping on site. The activists involved in the process of 'occupying' the Berlin Biennale primarily wanted to advertise the Occupy movement, win over new supporters and followers, and connect with activists internationally. They were also interested in training and educating themselves politically. Instead of considering themselves to be an art work, as the activists in Kassel did, the activists in Berlin understood their participation foremost as a political operation and as the creation of an exchange forum for the movement inside an art biennial. This intention illustrates the mindset of the activists, who considered the exhibition to be an impartial tool for the movement, simply providing a space which they intended to transform according to their needs.[30] In preparation for the event, the activists felt the "risk of co-optation"[31] and the risk of a certain "zoo-effect"[32] deriving from "a static movement on display"[33]. These issues were never resolved. Instead, the activists held on to the idea that the Berlin Biennale was a space that could be used for one's own political expression.

The notion of an autonomous white cube that is ready to be used by the Occupy movement was promoted by the curators of

Berlin Biennale 7: Artur Żmijewski, Igor Stokfiszewski, Sandra Teitge and Joanna Warsza, who believed the Occupy movement should neither be exhibited nor influenced by anyone but the activists themselves. They thought that the Berlin Biennale could bring public attention to the movement, and also that it could educate visitors on "alternative way[s] of dealing with social problems."[34] To fully comply with Occupy, the curators then declared the movement "independent and not obliged to follow the logic of the institution."[35] But what they had generously granted was not solely up to them. The "logic of the institution" was not suspended just because several authority figures said so. After all, it was an art exhibition that was being hosted in a state-sponsored art institution. Just because the curators abstained from curating the movement and asked Occupy to politicize the Biennale doesn't mean that Occupy wasn't transformed by the logic of the institution. This is especially true when one considers that the head curator Artur Żmijewski declared that Occupy's contribution was in fact an art

Occupy Berlin Biennale. April – July 2012, Berlin, Germany.

work, simply because its actions formed a Social Sculpture in the Beuysian sense[36], the same way the head curator of the Documenta considered Occupy an art work.

Even when Occupy activists did not intend to display a work of art, by being a valuable contribution to the biennial they turned their political activist practices into aesthetic ones. The transformation of political ideas within the Berlin Biennale was indebted to a perceptual shift which I already laid out in relation to the activist practices within Documenta. In both of the examples I have discussed, elements such as the arrangement of the occupants within the exhibition hall, the participation process, the educational program, the visual indignation and every last diagram and picture, were necessarily considered to be subject to aesthetic pleasure. Political peers became an audience, no longer engaged in arguments, but in shared aesthetic experiences linking political understanding to personal taste and stimulation. All of that was accompanied by the audience's search for higher values, meaning and sense hidden in the Occupy art[37].

Not surprisingly, the public considered the occupation a work of art. For example, Carolina, an activist from Spain, complained in an open letter that people who visited the site of the occupation expected something to happen. They didn't participate, but instead, gazed at the activists and their actions.[38] In other words, they behaved like spectators of an exhibition instead of politically engaged participants. This contemplative behavior was spurred by the vast range of topics, the picture puzzle of artistic practices and contributions, as well as the often poorly attended assemblies. Journalists and art critics condemned the exhibition because it didn't live up to their high expectations. Some considered it to be kitschy, while others described it as exactly what the movement feared turning into: a "human zoo."[39] Not surprisingly, some of the activists even described it as such. Noah Fisher, an activist from Occupy Museums, also referred to the exhibition set-up (the dispositif, in a Foucauldian sense) as a 'human zoo.'[40] In the end, the Berlin exhibition failed to promote the Occupy movement,

not because the activists didn't come up with enough creative slogans and politically committed art, but because they intended to make the art exhibition their instrument, without realizing that this instrument had its own set of rules that actively opposed the movement's goals.

In conclusion, the presence of the Occupy movement in Documenta and the Berlin Biennale turned out to be of little use for the movement's political goals. In fact, the aesthetic transformation of political content harmed Occupy more than it actually benefitted it. The "force of spirited intervention"[41] that Gregory Sholette discussed in relation to archival practices within OWS, and as a benchmark for art practice after OWS, turned out to be rather harmless and unproductive. It is exactly the art context that transforms the nature of the protest and diminishes what could be learned or at least be discussed. By intending to contribute positively to the biennial, the political judgment of the audience enters the aesthetic sphere. This operation mitigates the political arguments of the protest by dissolving them into questions of taste and sense, leaving almost no space for political agitation. Instead of migrating to the art world and partaking in international biennials, activists should put effort into the analysis of the systemic, antagonistic foundations of inequalities, damages and grievances, in order to prevent moralistic criticism.

Sebastian Loewe, born in 1978 in Potsdam, Germany, received a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in media and communication studies and a diploma in fine arts (M.F.A. equivalent). Loewe studied in Bochum and Halle, Germany as well as in Tokyo, Japan. He is currently writing his doctoral dissertation on a scholarship by a German research foundation. The working title is "Discourse On Kitsch", a foundational study of kitsch theories as well as a discourse analysis of kitsch judgments in print media after 1989. Loewe also works in the academic and artistic field of art and politics, gives talks and workshops on topics like cultural policy, political art, political theater, self-organization in the arts or artists' protest movements. He is the founder of the socially engaged art and

discourse platform ufo-University, published in several magazines and recently edited the book "Das Elend der Kritik" (The Affliction of Critique), published by The Green Box Art Editions, Berlin. Loewe is a visiting lecturer at the University of Art and Design Burg Giebichenstein, Halle, Germany. He lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Notes

1. David Graeber and Hui Yuk, "From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Central: The Case of Hong Kong," *Los Angeles Review of Books,* October 14, 2014, accessed March 2, 2015, http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/occupy-central-the-case-of-hong-kong.

2. Ian Traynor, "Austerity pushing Europe into social and economic decline, says Red Cross," *The Guardian*, October 10, 2013, accessed March 2, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/10/austerity-europe-debt-red-cross.

3. Niklas Maak, "Kritik der zynischen Vernunft," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 9, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.faz.net/berlin-biennale-kritik-der-zynischen-vernunft-11731589.html.

4. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art And The Politics Of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2011), 8.

5. Gregory Sholette,. "After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social," e-flux journal 31, January 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.e-flux.com/journal/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social.

6. "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City," NYC General Assembly, last modified September 29, 2011, www.nycga.net/resources/documents/declaration

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. "Quick guide on group dynamics in people's assemblies," *Take the Square,* last modified July 31, 2011, http://takethesquare.net/2011/07/31/quick-guide-on-group-dynamics-in-peoples-assemblies

10. "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City."

11. Marina Sitrin, "Horizontalism and the Occupy Movements," *Dissent Magazine* (Spring 2012), www.dissentmagazine.org/article/horizontalism-and-the-occupy-movements

12. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Crony Capitalism Comes Home," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/opinion/kristof-crony-capitalism-comes-homes.html?_r=2&.

13. Chantal Mouffe, "Constructing Unity Across Differences. The Fault Lines of the 99%," *Tidal Magazine: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 4 (2013): 5.

14. Yates McKee, "The Arts of Occupation," *The Nation Magazine,* December 11, 2011, www.thenation.com/article/165094/arts-occupation

15. Allison Kilkenny, "Occupy Wall Street and the Importance of Creative Protest," *The Nation Magazine,* November 21, 2011, http://www.thenation.com/blog/164729/occupy-wall-street-and-importance-creative-protest

16. Noah Fisher, "Then I entered into a people's movement where the word 'artist' meant very little because creativity was everywhere, shared and initiated by many," interview with Raimar Stange in "An Occupied Biennial," *Frieze Magazine,* June 26, 2012, blog.frieze-magazin.de/an-occupied-biennial

17. "After all, artists and cultural activists were *crucially* involved in the inception of OWS itself - from the *Adbusters* network (which circulated the original #occupywallstreet meme), to 16Beaver, an artist-run interdisciplinary space that issued the first call for a 'General Assembly' at the end of July." Yates McKee, "The Arts of Occupation."

18. JA Myerson, "How Do You Illustrate Corruption? Artist Rachel Schragis Explains," *Truthout*, November 5, 2011, accessed March 2, 2015, www.truth-out.org/news/item/4600:how-do-you-illustrate-corruption-artist-rachel-schragis-explains.

19. Note that the often praised blurring of the lines between art and activism, politics and aesthetics, praised as a fundamental contribution of artists to the overall political process of the movement is profoundly put into question, when Schragis herself declares she wouldn't want to contribute to the political process, but instead do her 'job' as an artist: "But my job in the movement is not to write the Declaration. I'm going to illustrate it as best I can." JA Myerson, "How Do You Illustrate Corruption?."

20. Linette Lopez, "In Case You Missed It: Occupy Wall Street Put A Bat Signal Message On The Verizon Building Last Night." *Business Insider*, November 18, 2011, accessed March 2, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/in-case-you-missed-it-occupy-wall-street-put-a-bat-signal-message-on-the-verizon-building-last-night-2011-11?IR=T

21. "Occupy-Zelte vor documenta errichtet," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 2012, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.fr-online.de/rhein-main/documenta-13-occupy-zelte-vor-documenta-errichtet,1472796,16392450.html.

22. "Occupy dOCUMENTA: The state of dOCCUPY," *In the Tent,* accessed January 6, 2015, www.inthetent.org/research/?p=496.

23. "In art, these sensuous shapes and sounds present themselves, not simply for their own sake and for that of their immediate structure, but with the purpose of affording in that shape satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, seeing that they are powerful to call forth a response and echo in the mind from all the depths of consciousness. It is thus that, in art, the sensuous is *spiritualized*, i.e. the *spiritual* appears in sensuous shape." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Arts*. (The Project Gutenberg), accessed March 2, 2015, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46330/46330-h/46330-h.htm#Page_72.

24. Hegel. *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Arts.*

25. Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes, "#Occupy Art," *Art Monthly Magazine* (September 2012), www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/occupy-art-by-maja-and-reuben-fowkes-september-2012.

26. "dOCUMENTA(13) Artistic Director welcomes the "occupy" movement," *dOCUMENTA 13,* accessed March 2, 2015, d13.documenta.de/de/#press/news-archive/press-single-view/tx_ttnews[tt_news]=159&cHash=e26d0c1a6f7cd3f67904003cbb2aeb33.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Momenta 100 | (092) Occupy-Räumung | documenta 13, YouTube video, September 8, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrcnyJF4nkQ&feature=colike.

30. "Indignadxs|Occupy: Declaration For the Start of BB7," *Berlin Biennale,* accessed March 2, 2015, www.berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/?p=25581.

31. "Occupation and Institutions," *Post Thing,* accessed March 2, 2015, http://post.thing.net/node/3679

32. Occupy Berlin Biennale, "Occupy Berlin - Berlin Biennale Concept," *Facebook,* April 10, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.facebook.com/notes/177792355674396.

33. "Indignadxs|Occupy: Declaration For the Start of BB7."

34. Occupy Berlin Biennale, "Letter from the Biennale staff to the participants in Indignadxs/Occupy Biennale," *Facebook,* April 13, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.facebook.com/notes/occupy-berlin-biennale/letter-from-the-biennale-staff-to-the-participants-in-indignadxsoccupy-biennale/179728402147458

35. Ibid.

36. "7th Berlin Biennale: Press Conference April 25, 2012 part 4," YouTube video, May 1, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8LQHEERKMo#t=142

37. Demonstrating the constant search for value in the arts, German journalist Hanno Rauterberg stated in the well-established German weekly *Die Zeit* that Occupy and the entire biennale managed to annihilate the higher value of freedom, to which he views art as naturally obligated. The journalist's elaboration on the question of whether or not Occupy's contribution is serving a higher value, and not looking into Occupy's political agenda, is the consequence of a protest movement becoming art. Hanno Rauterberg, "Die Ohnmacht der Parolenpinsler," *Die Zeit*, May 5, 2012, http://www.zeit.de/2012/19/Berlin-Biennale/komplettansicht

38. "An Open Letter to #OccupyBiennale," *Berlin Biennale,* accessed March 2, 2015, www.berlinbiennale.de/blog/en/comments/an-open-letter-to-occupybiennale-31367

39. Maak, "Kritik der zynischen Vernunft."

40. "Occupy Museums at the 7th Berlin Biennial," Noah Fisher, personal website, accessed March 2, 2015, www.noahfischer.org/project/ows/38428

41. Sholette, "After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social."

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

An Interview with Althea Thauberger

Noni Brynjolson

In 2005, Canadian artist Althea Thauberger was invited to make a public artwork for inSite, a biennial of collaborative and site-specific work that took place across the San Diego-Tijuana border region. The work she made was *Murphy Canyon Choir*, which involved collaborating with spouses of active-duty soldiers at one of the largest military housing complexes in the world. Thauberger often works with insular communities whose experiences reflect issues of broad societal importance, including teenage songwriters, tree planters and female soldiers in Afghanistan. Reflecting on *Murphy Canyon Choir*, Althea spoke to me about the site of the work, its emotional and affective qualities, and its public performance, which she views as having opened a space for dialogue between two disparate communities.

NB: I'm curious to hear about your first impressions of San Diego. Maybe you could begin by speaking about your sense of the city, and describe the research process that led to *Murphy Canyon Choir*.

AT: I was invited to come to San Diego by the inSite curatorial group, after they visited Vancouver and met with me and other artists there. My first visit to San Diego included a tour of the region facilitated by inSite curators, where we also met with local artists, architects and urban theorists. Over the next year I was there for a week or two at a time, and then longer visits and trips leading

up to the actual event. My first impressions were centered around these tours, which focused mainly on the border region. I was struck with San Diego as being quite alienating and very spread out, and I remember saying at that time that I thought of it as being the epicenter of everything that must fail: extreme car culture, extreme militarism, and this very corporate atmosphere - the city seemed to lack the kind of broader planning that makes a place reasonable and livable. Because of the way the city was planned, you have all of these residential developments that are right next to each other geographically, but are disconnected socially and economically. Also, it was interesting to me to see the amount of undeveloped land around the city. There are these vast areas of desert preserved in their natural state, which you quickly realize are military reserve lands. It was so striking, the amount of area that was not developed, it had a very iconic appearance that signified the importance of San Diego as a strategic military site.

NB: I think it's interesting that you didn't arrive in San Diego with a specific project in mind, which is the case with so many artists who make public art in a biennial or festival context. Instead, the project you developed was a response to the site, to the city, even to the landscape, and came out of experiencing a space and learning about the social relationships that shape that space. How did you initially get involved with military organizations in the city?

AT: Yes, and this was largely due to the way inSite structured our visits, which was quite generous. I started to speak with the curators and others about the military population in San Diego and I could see that there was a real disconnect. It's such a massive percentage of the city and it seemed strange to me that it wasn't of interest or importance to most people. It just seemed to be kind of an invisible group in the city. I started to meet people who were generous enough to come to the inSite office or allow me to come to their office and speak with them. The USO (United Service Organizations) was first. It's an organization that supports military families at home, especially families who have a deployed spouse. I went there, met with the director and started to get statistics: how many families

were there, what is their social and economic situation, where do they live, what is their life like? I realized that entry level military families were living in poverty and some were even living in Tijuana and commuting because they couldn't afford to live in San Diego. A lot of the people I met were in the military because they had a child with a medical condition, and it was the only way they could afford health care. I started volunteering at the USO and also visited the armed services YMCA near Murphy Canyon, which had after school programs for kids and activity groups for moms who were on their own because of deployment. So I started to attend all of these activity and support groups and I would explain, I'm here from Canada and I'm doing a project that involves the military, but I'm just trying to learn as much as I can right now.

NB: How did the idea of forming a choir come up? Was it something that you proposed, or was it suggested by someone you met while volunteering?

AT: There were a few ideas that I was floating around and testing out when I met with people, which involved theater and music, and the idea of forming a choir or musical group always got the best reception. People thought it would be filling in a kind of gap, and a choir would involve people coming together and working on a common goal. I also saw the potential for it to be an outlet for some form of resistance. We spoke about participation for military spouses, women and men, but it turned out that it was only women who were interested, and of course women are the vast majority of spouses in the military. There were eight participants in the end, more in the beginning, but many people lost interest when they realized how much of a commitment it would be, and I have to admit that most of the final participants were able to make the commitment because they were not in a position of complete struggle, meaning they had some external family or friendship relationships who could support their involvement. Our largest expense by far was childcare, we had to find certified childcare for all of the times when they were in rehearsals or meetings.

NB: What kinds of songs did they write?

AT: Part of the mandate of the choir was that they were going to perform original material, which meant that they had to learn how to write music. The idea was that this would be an opportunity to engage in a creative process, have discussions and debates and make decisions together as a group regarding content. I think it's important that when you're working with people and asking them to make a commitment to something, it has to be fulfilling on their terms, but also challenging. I also think it's important to encourage people to go outside their comfort zones and learn something new about themselves. I include myself as director and also contemporary art audiences in this. The women wrote the songs with a choral composer, Scott Wallingford, who came from a contemporary music background, and their musical interests were pop and country, so it was interesting to see this fusion of interests and the negotiations that took place. He worked with them very intensely for months on these compositions. I was sort of surprised, because I had many conversations with these women and I knew that they were not particularly interested in a stereotypical way of expressing themselves, but most of the songs they wrote turned out to be on the clichéd side. For example, one was titled "Wife of a Hero." I realized afterwards though, that of course they see this as a role they are supposed to play. They've already put themselves out of their comfort zone in terms of performing, learning to sing, learning to write music, they're not going to go so far that they're actually also challenging the dominant narrative of the military spouse. So of course that made sense afterwards, looking back on the project.

NB: Can you describe the final performance?

AT: It took place in a school auditorium in Murphy Canyon. There were two groups, one was friends and family who were locals of Murphy Canyon, and the other half was the inSite crowd who were coming from the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. It was one of the weekends when there were many projects going

On the bus to Murphy Canyon, 2005. Image courtesy of Althea Thauberger.

on around San Diego and Tijuana, and they had a bus that would depart from the museum and take audiences to these different locations. At the time I was thinking a lot about the experience of getting picked up on a tour bus at the museum, and getting dropped off at a destination to see a contemporary artwork - it was an extremely problematic and voyeuristic setup that I felt the need to confront. I invited a very articulate young woman from Murphy Canyon to be a tour guide on the bus. Her husband was deployed and she had three children, and she was working for a religious organization that collected and delivered food baskets to other military families.

She stood at the front of the bus and answered questions. You have to remember that this was in 2005, when tensions around the Iraq War and American foreign policy were running high. So at first, the questions were rather hostile, like "what is your position on George W. Bush's illegal war on terror?" And of course she's not in a position to make a public statement on that. But then the questions

started changing to, "What is it like to be you? Do you have guns in your house? When is he coming home?" So that was the first experience that the art audience had. Then they got off the bus and entered the auditorium and the audiences began to mix, you had a military family sitting next to a curator, sitting next to an artist. All of the performers were wearing lavalier microphones, so their voices were picked up in very close proximity and there was an intimacy to the sound. They sat in the last row of seats in the audience for the first song, behind everyone, then performed a second song from the sides of the room, singing to each other, and then finally for the third song they got onto the stage and performed the rest of the songs on the stage. Their singing was at times spot on and amazing and at other times kind of fell apart. It was their first performance so at times they kind of lost it, and then they would come together again, and this added to the feeling of anticipation and empathy somehow, of everyone coming together and really wanting it to work out.

NB: The performance happened in front of a diverse audience that included artists, curators and other cultural workers associated with inSite, as well as military families and local residents. What was it like seeing these different groups interact, and do you think they had different responses or reactions to the performance?

AT: I knew the songs and had been working a lot with the women in rehearsals, but I didn't know how art audiences were going to react. Were they going to find it pathetic, stereotypical, moving, uninteresting? I really didn't know, and it's really terrifying to bring these different groups of people together and ask these young women to put themselves in this situation where they're vulnerable, especially knowing that contemporary art audiences can be quite critical. But in fact, the response was very emotional. People were weeping during songs. Curators! I never would have thought. You could hear each of the individual singers' voices quite clearly, as opposed to the typical choral experience where voices blend together. In the performance they were individuals singing together, and it was very moving. Directly after the performance, a

Murphy Canyon Choir, 2005. Image courtesy of Althea Thauberger.

BBQ picnic was organized by inSite and myself, so everyone stayed and had some food, and people had a chance to meet and mix and talk about the performance.

NB: In retrospect, what do you think the impact of this project was? What did the participants get out of the experience?

AT: The question of impact is an important one, but I also take issue with it, in a way. In this case, as military spouses, the participants in the project have a rather nomadic life and they all have almost certainly moved several times since 2005 so I don't know if they continue to be in touch. For myself as director/instigator, I think it's very important to understand and be aware of the perspective of the participants you're working with, and for a project like this to be challenging, rewarding, and transformative on their terms, not just on your terms. But I also disagree with this notion of follow up and long term results of a project in some cases. I think that a work can be transformative at that moment and for the period of time of that event, not about a radical or long-term change in my life or your life.

Some projects, like this one are about a moment of togetherness and happen in a very particular moment, and because of that it can potentially change our way of thinking in some small way. It was not the goal of the project to make life better - the goal was to make a really great work of art and to enable discussion. That it has an impact on the world and people's thinking is part of it, but I don't think of it as akin to community art which uses art primarily as a tool to effect a certain change that we wish to see in participants or the world, and not so much as a work that can also stand on its own. I think that there is something of this kind of tension in this impulse and desire to do all this follow up, wanting to see someone's life change for having participated in something, and frankly that's probably not the case with this work.

NB: Do you see any relationship between your work and the historic avant-garde? Do you see it as questioning aesthetic boundaries, or testing out new strategies of collaboration or engagement?

AT: These are hard questions to answer as an artist. Of course I hope that my work does these things, but I'm not the person to map that out. Not speaking specifically about my work but speaking specifically about these ideas, I think the notion of the avant-garde is really problematic and defunct and is one that has been the paradigm of the twentieth century and has failed us miserably politically. But it's the paradigm we have, we haven't replaced it with anything yet. So it's one that is deeply fraught and problematic, but it's the one that we have. I also think it's critical that we don't continue to make work that only functions as an insider conversation, for a group of insiders. It can be that, but it must circulate among wider audiences, this is crucial for me.

NB: Many artists who create images of war or the military take an overtly critical stance. Your work is more ideologically ambiguous, since you have had to adopt a certain amount of complicity with institutions of warfare in order to build relationships with individuals and communities. How do you think your work then engages with,

or resists, the practice of institutional critique? And do you see your role as an artist as involving criticality or oppositionality?

AT: With regards to the military I don't see the work I've made as being easily taken up and used for their own purposes. In fact, I see it as being quite difficult to do that with. I see it as my job to make work that doesn't neatly fit into a specific category or context, and that includes when it's published in a military magazine and when it's shown in a contemporary art gallery. Obviously, as you say, there is a degree of complicity involved with my work, since I had to gain access somehow. I think my work absolutely comes through institutional critique, but I think that any artist who comes through the western canon who meaningfully thinks about their practice has to come through that. For me it's not just about the military, a huge institution that is very powerful and would be very easy to have your work subsumed by, but also facilitating art organizations who might have a history of deploying art in particular ways. For example, inSite is an institution as well and I would have a critical viewpoint about it even though I think their work has been very important. But any time I have an opportunity to make work, visit a place, work on a commission, there is some kind of organization or institution, and an imperative behind that invitation. Where is that money coming from? How do they see the value of an artwork that is going to emerge from that funding, and what is my relationship with that? It's always about looking at myself and who I'm working with, whether it's a gallery, funding body, psychiatric hospital or school. And in terms of criticality, I think that at this moment a lot of discussion in the art world relies on very pat notions of what it means to be critical. They're notions that we get really quickly and they're often not useful anymore. It's just an inside conversation, it's not upsetting or changing anything. As I see it, the only way to change this is to make work that is compelling enough for people to meaningfully want to engage with. And then to both deploy and upset the existing formulas of things like institutional critique.

Althea Thauberger is an artist based in Vancouver, Canada. Her internationally produced and exhibited work typically involves interactions with a group or community that result in performances, films, videos, audio recordings, and books. Her work has been presented at the 17th Biennale of Sydney; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Guangzhou Triennial; Manifesta 7, Trento; Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver; Vancouver Art Gallery; BAK, Utrecht; Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; Kunstverein Wolfsburg; Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax; Singapore History Museum; Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp; Berkeley Art Museum; Insite, San Diego/Tijuana; White Columns, New York; and Seattle Art Museum.

Noni Brynjolson is a PhD student in Art History, Theory and Criticism at the University of California, San Diego.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice

Francesca Polletta

This essay originally appeared in Mobilization, *volume 10, number 2 (June 2005).*

Activist groups have long wrestled with the dilemmas of operating as participatory democracies. Sustaining a decentralized, nonhierarchical, and consensus-based organization seems to mean sacrificing the quick decisions and clear lines of command necessary to winning concessions in a hostile political climate. Consensus decision making takes time, decentralization creates problems of coordination, and rotating leadership sacrifices the benefits of expertise (Freeman 1973; Polletta 2002; Mansbridge 1983; Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Staggenborg 1989). In spite of these difficulties, in recent years, participatory democracy has enjoyed renewed popularity among activists, especially in the anti-corporate globalization and social justice movements (Polletta 2002; Klein 2000). At the same time, however, critics have drawn attention to yet another liability of the form: that it risks alienating working class people and activists of color. For some critics, the problem is that consensus-based decision making requires a commitment of time that people with families, jobs, and other responsibilities simply do not have (Treloar 2003). For other critics, however, the problem is that consensus-

based decision making reflects a middle-class white culture that is unfamiliar and unappealing to people who are not middle-class and white. An organizer observes, "When labor people or African-American people have to organize within the consensus model they are uncomfortable with it and the culture that comes with it" (Tarleton 2001). Leadership within activist communities of color is different than leadership in white communities, another activist wrote in a 2000 critique of the student left: "the reality is that certain individuals play roles (whether by choice or not) that are similar to de facto traditional leadership roles" (Rajah 2000). And a participant in a national anti-sweatshop organizing conference described consensus-based decision making, along with veganism and "not raising your voice in meetings," as among the "white activist cultural norms" that alienated participants of color (Larimore-Hall 2000). For these and other critics, consensus-based decision making is one of the "cultural trappings" of middle class white progressive activism (Tarleton 2001); in a sense, it is white.

There is an irony. If these characterizations are right, a deliberative style that was appealing to white activists in the 1960s in part for its association with the militant wing of the black freedom movement—seen as black—is now unappealing to black activists because of its association with a white movement. At some point between 1962, when the term "participatory democracy" was coined by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and now, the term's symbolic associations shifted. What was "black" came to be "white." In this paper, I begin to account for that shift. I do so by tracing the rise and fall of participatory democracy in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In the early 1960s, SNCC organizers worked to register black voters and build political organizations in the most repressive areas of the south. For northern new leftists, SNCC activists were exemplary not only in the daring of their organizing but also in their determination to transcend hierarchies of all kinds within their own organization. In most accounts, their consensus-based decision making and decentralized organization inspired, first, SDS's concept of participatory democracy and then a decade's

worth of experiments pursued under its banner (Breines 1989; Lichterman 1996; Kazin 1998; Sirianni 1993). SNCC was also the first of the 1960s organizations to wrestle with the unwieldiness of participatory democracy, however. After an agonizing internal battle in 1964 and 1965, the group abandoned its commitment to decentralization and rule by consensus. Participatory democracy, in the standard account of SNCC's history, was ineffective in an organization grown in size and political stature, as well as out of kilter with a new black power agenda that was more focused on gaining power than on moral suasion (Carson 1981; Clecak 1981; McAdam 1988; Mills 1992; Stoper 1989; Gitlin 1987; Sellers 1990; King 1992; Morgen 1991; Matusow 1969).

I argue that neither the demands of environmental adaptation nor those of ideological consistency with a black power agenda can account for SNCC's abandonment of participatory democratic decision making. The first misses the fact that SNCC had grown dramatically in size in the previous year without jeopardizing its participatory democratic practices, that participatory democracy came under attack on local projects whose members often numbered less than a dozen, and that initially those who agued for retaining participatory democratic practices in the fall of 1964 did so on instrumental grounds. The argument that a Black Power agenda mandated a more centralized and hierarchical structure misses the fact that SNCC workers adopted such a structure before they embraced a Black Power agenda.

I make a different argument. What had once been seen as a politically effective organizational form came to be seen as the opposite when it was symbolically associated with both the organization's inability to formulate compelling programs and the dominance of whites in the organization. I say that participatory democracy was associated with those things because no one could say just how decentralized and consensus-based decision making stymied program development or how its abandonment would curb the role of whites. Rather, participatory democracy stood in for organizational problems that were difficult to confront, let

alone solve. As a result, however, participatory democracy came to be seen by SNCC workers as principled rather than pragmatic, aimed at personal self-liberation rather than political change, and white rather than black. Because SNCC was widely seen as the cutting edge of militant black protest, moreover, its recasting of participatory democracy may have contributed to fixing that incarnation of the form as what participatory democracy was-- for activists in the 1960s and after.

My purpose in rehearsing this story is not only to set the historical record straight, however, but to contribute to theorizing about why movement groups choose the organizational forms they do. Contrary to those arguments that conceptualize organizational choice in terms of activists' efforts either to adapt to objective environmental demands or to juggle those demands with the imperatives of ideological consistency, I emphasize rather the symbolic associations of particular organizational forms. Such associations shape what counts as strategic, as well as what counts as ideological. By studying how symbolic social associations shape tactical choice, and with what effect, we can gain a better understanding of particular movement trajectories as well as how movement-spanning tactical repertoires change. We can also gain purchase on the social construction of rationality in organizations more broadly, an area of growing concern to organizational theorists (Lounsbury and Ventresca 2003). Before I turn to SNCC's experiment with participatory democracy, let me develop this alternative perspective on tactical choice.

Culture and Organization

Why do groups choose the organizational forms that they do? And even more broadly, why do they adopt any strategy or tactic? The social movements literature on the topic has tended to emphasize either activists' instrumental adaptation to environmental exigencies or their efforts to reconcile instrumental concerns with

ideological commitments. So, researchers in the first vein have identified political structural conditions in which one organizational form rather than another is likely to be effective (Kitschelt 1986; Amenta, Halfmann, and Young 1999), and have drawn attention to the organizational features of movements that predispose them to more or less tactical innovation (McAdam 1983; Minkoff 199; McCammon 2003).

Researchers in the second vein have pointed out that activists are principled actors as well as instrumental ones. "Movement tactics are not solely a function of environmental constraints and adaptations, but are also constrained by anchoring master frames," Snow and Benford write (1992: 146). In other words, tactical choices are shaped not only by the strategic imperatives of retaining rank and file support, garnering steady funding, and avoiding repression, but also by activists' explicit normative political commitments. For example, many groups seek to prefigure the society they are striving to build in their own relationships and practices. So they may strive for consensus in decision making, avoid tactics that can be construed as violent in any way, and reject differentials in status and authority, even if those choices diminish their capacity to act effectively (Breines 1989; Epstein 1991; Downey 1986).

The latter perspective is a valuable corrective to a purely instrumentalist one. However, it risks reproducing a strategy/ideology divide whereby strategic decision making is represented as non-ideological. That misses the fact that what counts as an opportunity, what counts as an obstacle, what counts as strategic, and what counts as ideological are all ideological in the sense that they are informed by cultural values and assumptions. How can we get at those values and assumptions and their influence on strategic action? The concept of a "repertoire" of collective action (Tilly 1995) is useful here in capturing the fact that in any given era, activists make only limited use of the range of strategies available to them. As Charles Tilly puts it, "existing repertoires incorporate collectively-learned shared understandings concerning what forms of claim-making are possible, desirable, risky, expensive, or probable,

as well as what consequences different possible forms of claim-making are likely to produce. They greatly constrain the contentious claims political actors make on each other and on agents of the state" (1999). Elisabeth Clemens uses the repertoire concept to account for political actors' adoption of organizational forms: "[T]he distribution of repertoires is determined by a culture's rules or prescriptions about what actors may use what organizational models for what purposes. Organizational models may be categorized as 'appropriate for men,' 'appropriate for politics,' 'appropriate for rural communities,' and so forth" (1996: 208). In other words, tactical choices broadly, and the choice of organizational form more specifically, are governed not only by a logic of instrumental rationality (or one of ideological consistency) but also by a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1989).

Wary of treating repertoires as fixed, most scholars have concentrated either on the macropolitical shifts as a result of which repertoires have changed dramatically (Tilly 1995; Tarrow 1998) or on the dynamics by which activists are able to innovate within, and effectively move beyond, a particular repertoire. The insight behind the latter is that people can transpose modes of interaction from one setting to another, indeed from one institutional sphere to another, modifying those interactional modes in the process (Sewell 1992; Clemens and Cook 1999; Armstrong 2002). People can thus capitalize on the trust-generating familiarity of old associational forms as they use them for entirely different ends. So, for example, Clemens (1997) shows that women activists barred from formal politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century drew on alternative associational forms—the club, parlor meeting, and charitable society— to become a major force for social reform (see also Honig [1985] and Brodkin Sacks [1989] on how activists capitalized on the normative expectations characteristic of familiar nonpolitical forms, respectively, Chinese "sisterhoods," and family; and Minkoff [2002] on how hybrid organizational forms benefit from the legitimacy of—and resource flows associated with-- the parent form).

Scholars have devoted less attention to the dynamics by which repertoires constrain activists' ability to use organizational forms effectively. The result has been a view of actors as strategic choice-makers rather than as exercising choice within constraints (but see Conell and Voss 1990). Scholars have also tended to conceptualize repertoires as a set of familiar interactions between authorities and challengers (Tilly 1995), thus neglecting the fact that activists' notions of what is appropriate come from their interactions with opponents and allies as well as authorities. Activists' choice of organizational form may be influenced by the symbolic association of particular forms with particular social groups. Sometimes, activists are explicit about the symbolic associations that guide their choices. Radical feminists, for example, developed a full rationale for their repudiation of bureaucratic organizational forms that were associated with patriarchy. At other times, however, the social associations that guide organizational choice are not made explicit. For example, in studying an alternative health clinic that operated along firmly collectivist lines, Sherryl Kleinman was surprised by members' insistence that each meeting be recorded in "minutes that had a bureaucratic look—lengthy, well-typed, with lots of headings, subheadings and underlinings" (1996: 38-9). One staffer created an uproar when she submitted the minutes of a previous meeting in longhand and with illustrations, and staffers carefully rewrote the minutes line by line. Kleinman had never seen anyone actually refer to minutes from earlier meetings and there was no evidence that staffers believed that imitating mainstream organizational procedures would get them more clients or funding. Rather, Kleinman argues, minute-taking, in as conventional way as possible, was associated with "serious" organizations, which this organization wanted to be. Had she asked members about their ideological commitments, they likely would have denied any desire to model themselves on mainstream health organizations; to the contrary, ideologically, they were vested in their status as an alternative organization.

Just as the cultural associations that drive organizational choice may in fact run counter to the group's ideological commitments, they may also have instrumental liabilities. For the black Baptist ministers who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, organizing the group along the lines of the southern Baptist church (Fairclough 198; Morris 1984) provided the mutuality of expectations that made for stability. At the same time, the ministerial structure created persistent and destructive jockeying among SCLC officials for Dr. King's favor (Fairclough 1985). Another example: When anticorporate globalization activists today refer to styles of participatory democratic decision making, especially those that rely on hand signals and vibes watchers, as being "Californian," they mean not only that those techniques are common among Californian activists, but also that they are part of an ethos valuing self-liberation over political change and valuing how things "feel" over what they can accomplish. That cultural association sometimes leads activists to devalue practices like the use of hand signals that actually speed up decision making and thus can help them to accomplish the practical, externally focused change they want (Polletta 2002).

These examples call for systematic attention to the symbolic associations and oppositions that structure activists' choices of organizational forms, to the social sources of those associations and oppositions, and to their consequences for movement groups' trajectories and impacts. I do this in the following by tracing the rise and fall of decentralized and consensus-based decision making in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. To parse SNCC workers' changing assessment of participatory democracy, I studied tape recordings, transcripts, and minutes of meetings, along with internal memos and correspondence in which SNCC workers described the challenges facing their organization and commented on tactical options. Personal correspondence and journal entries proved especially valuable in elucidating gaps between what was said in staff meetings and what was said outside them. These materials help me to tease out the changing social associations that

were responsible for participatory democracy's characterization variously as effective or self-indulgent, political or personal.

SNCC, 1960-64

SNCC was established in April 1960 as a coalition of campus sit-in groups. Its founders were adamant that the organization, which at the time was a coordinating committee made up of campus representatives and a few adult advisors, should do nothing to jeopardize the autonomy of local groups. "In relation to local protest areas, SNCC's role is suggestive rather than directive," they agreed. Nationally, "SNCC may serve as a spokesman, but in a cautious manner in which it is made quite clear that SNCC does not control local groups" (SNCC 1960; see also Jones 1960). Student activists believed that the strength of the movement lay in its spontaneity, spontaneity that its local organization made possible.

In their deliberations as a group, students dispensed with parliamentary procedures and strove for consensus. In part, they wanted to discourage sophisticated northern students from dominating discussion with their ready command of parliamentary maneuver. But SNCC's participatory and consensus-oriented style also reflected a powerful ideological impulse. From the beginning, the group sought to operate as a beloved community that would transcend race as well as hierarchies of all kinds. To operate in radically democratic fashion was to prefigure the radically democratic society SNCC wanted to build on a grand scale, to make the means reflect the ends. The impulse was one familiar to Quaker pacifists and, in fact, pacifists played key roles in SNCC's founding (Polletta 2002).

Without discounting the influence of a broadly Quaker philosophy on SNCC's deliberative style, however, another set of influences proved equally important. For early SNCC mentors Ella Baker and Myles Horton, participatory decision making was a practical organizing tool. Trained in a tradition of radical labor

education that was Deweyan in inspiration, Baker and Horton saw participatory decision making on local projects as a means to build leadership among people who had been denied opportunities for regular political participation (Polletta 2002; Payne 1995). As SNCC evolved from a coalition of campus sit-in groups into a cadre of organizers in the deep South in 1962, that rationale for radical democracy became more important. On local projects in the next few years, SNCC workers sought to defer to local residents' agendas and aspirations. In project meetings, the organizer often introduced a problem for discussion and encouraged participants to discuss the issues involved and the options available. Collectivist decision making helped people without formal political experience to assess the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action and to link tactical decisions to longer-term visions. Mississippi project head Bob Moses explained later:

> *We were trying to give the people we were living and working with ownership of the movement…The meeting—that's your tool for building. So how do people take ownership of meetings? And there you get into what has come to be called participatory democracy...in which the people who are meeting really get more and more of a feeling that this is [their] meeting (interview with Bob Moses 1992).*

Decentralized organization allowed organizers to tailor movements to local conditions. Discussions on local projects about what counted as leadership chipped away at local residents' belief that only the properly credentialed could lead. And among SNCC staff, many of whom were political novices themselves, participatory decision making was a way to train a new generation of political activists. In SNCC's early years, then, the tension between principle and pragmatism that is supposedly at the heart of participatory democracy did not exist. That would change, but for reasons that are captured neither by historical accounts of SNCC nor by sociological models of tactical choice.

Atlanta SNCC Office Meeting in Danny Lyon, *Memories of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992)

Letting the People Decide, 1964

By the fall of 1964, SNCC had grown dramatically in size and national stature. The Mississippi Summer Project brought over eight hundred mainly white volunteers south for the summer, and after three civil rights workers disappeared early in the summer, the project was rarely out of the national spotlight. In August, SNCC helped organize a challenge to the seating of the segregationist Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention. While the challenge proved unsuccessful, with the Mississippi challengers rejecting a compromise offer of two seats, both it and the summer project demonstrated SNCC's ability to mobilize national support (Forman 1997; Gitlin 1987).

If SNCC had a new external profile, it was also a very different organization internally. A number of volunteers stayed on in the fall, doubling SNCC's staff (McAdam 1988; Carson 1981). SNCC now had projects across Mississippi as well as in Southwest Georgia

and Alabama, a sophisticated fundraising apparatus around the country, and a million dollar budget. For executive secretary James Forman, these changes called for a new organizational structure. Forman believed that SNCC should capitalize on its success by restyling itself a mass organization rather than a roving cadre of organizers (Forman 1997). At minimum, it should implement the kind of centralized structure that would allow it to compete with the other civil rights organizations for political influence. As Forman saw it, those in SNCC who opposed such a move were motivated by a middle class individualism that refused to sacrifice any measure of personal freedom for the good of the organization. "Freedom high," he and others began to call them.

Forman's account has been the basis for numerous scholarly characterizations of the organizational battle that emerged in SNCC in late 1964 as one pitting practical centralizers versus utopian decentralists, pragmatists versus ideologues, freedom highs versus "hardliners" (inter alia, Carson 1981; Mills 1992; Gitlin 1987; McAdam 1988). But, in fact, the objections to Forman's plan were initially made on practical grounds (SNCC 1964a). Organizers worried that centralizing authority in Atlanta headquarters would restrict their freedom of action in developing local movements. They were already concerned that funds sent to SNCC were benefiting Atlanta rather than Mississippi field projects. Project workers outside Mississippi, for their part, worried that centralization would continue to favor the Mississippi project over other states. Most organizers, middle-and working-class alike, believed that SNCC's strength was in its capacity to nurture indigenous movements. As one put it in a meeting in October, "Are we interested in building a political empire for SNCC, or in building local leadership?" (SNCC 1964b). No one bothered to answer a question that was perceived as rhetorical. For many organizers, centralized, bureaucratic, and parliamentary structure was not only impractical but was also unappealingly associated with northern whites. One field worker described, "white college-educated Northerners have a tendency to take command

of an assembly through rapid-fire parliamentary maneuvers which leave local people baffled and offended" (Nicolaus 1964).

To be sure, most staffers recognized that SNCC's formal structure, which still vested power in campus representatives, was obsolete. They complained bitterly about the administrative logjams that prevented desperately needed resources from reaching local projects (Miller 1964). But they were not convinced that a centralized bureaucracy was the answer. In response to Forman's proposal for a conventional structure, with an executive secretary hired by an executive committee and in charge of administrative staff, some SNCC organizers proposed a "loose structure," in which programmatic work groups would meet periodically to solve problems and coordinate common efforts (Hayden 1964). Loose structure proponents cited not the requirements of ideological consistency—of enacting a participatory democracy in the here and now—but Mississippi field organizers' need for organizational flexibility.

However, discussions of the alternate proposals, most intensively at a week- long retreat in Waveland, Mississippi, in November 1964, failed to yield any consensus. Instead, SNCC workers simply reaffirmed their commitment to letting local people set the course of the struggle (SNCC 1964c). They reminded each other that this was what distinguished them from the mainstream civil rights organizations and their erstwhile liberal allies. As a Shaw, Mississippi volunteer wrote to a northern supporter about her project's decision to picket a local merchant, "That is, the people, residents of Shaw, decided. This is important, because staff people don't make this kind of decisions. This is where we differ from M.L. King and his officers. In their work the staff people make the decisions, rather than letting the people in the town where they're working decide what they want to do, when and how." SNCC, by contrast, would "let the people decide" (Gellatly 1965).

Yet, in the following weeks and months, it became clear that letting the people decide was not yielding the radical programs

it was supposed to. There were several problems. In addition to activists' exhaustion, in some cases local residents seemed drawn to fairly moderate programs, putting young activists who saw themselves as the radical cutting edge of the movement in a difficult position. "Too damn many nursery schools, and milk programs," one organizer phrased a not infrequent complaint. "Question of whether we are a social service agency or a band of revolutionaries...It was decided we were the latter" (Schwartzbaum 1964). How that decision squared with a commitment to letting the people decide was unclear. As one organizer agonized, "How do we deal with poor people whose aspirations are justifiably middle class?" (Kelley 1964). But it was also unclear just what a band of revolutionaries should be doing. By the fall of 1964, the group faced thorny programmatic questions. Should they continue to appeal to a Democratic Party that had betrayed them in rejecting the Mississippi Challenge? Should they shift from political organizing to economic organizing? Should they try to galvanize local movements or build a mass organization? Questions like these threatened to bring up differences of long-term political vision among SNCC workers. Such differences had been obscured as long as SNCC was pursuing moderate programs with radical potential such as voter registration. Now, with no obvious program capable of connecting local claims with national ones and winnable issues with radical possibilities, SNCC workers became increasingly aggressive in their efforts to push local people to articulate their "real" interests and increasingly critical of each other for failing to draw out in black communities the radical interests they knew were there (Turvitz 1965a).

The endless injunctions to let the people decide thus reflected the group's programmatic uncertainty as much as they contributed to it. But the effects were destructive. In staff meetings, organizers began to attack each other for their failure to let the people decide. Exercises of initiative were increasingly seen as power-mongering and arguments for a particular line of action labeled manipulative. In field reports during this period, organizers complained about provisional decisions attacked for being imposed on staff and

strategy sessions halted to discuss "why people don't speak." "Who decided that?" became a familiar, dreaded rebuttal. A staffer described a Mississippi meeting: "I asked someone to deal with the two personnel problems...we sat there and nobody talked, and Stokely said he was the only one there who was willing to make decisions. He said people were afraid someone would ask them who gave them the right to make a decision" (Baker 1964).

For some staffers, centralizing decision making became appealing as a way to avoid seemingly endless, enervating discussions like these. But the ensuing debates over just how to restructure the organization also reflected the group's programmatic confusion. Some staffers recognized as much. "People here are incapable of dealing with the real problem, which is lack of programs," one staffer complained in a meeting in which people were battling over how to restructure the organization (SNCC 1965c). But drawing attention to the group's avoidance of the topic did not seem to remedy it. Minutes of meetings during this period show that when issues of agenda were introduced, the discussion often shifted, sometimes abruptly, to organizational structure. Why? "Sometimes it's more comfortable to talk about structure, because it's so concrete," staffer Judy Richardson explains now. "And goals were so much more difficult to talk about" (interview with Judy Richardson 1992). In other words, SNCC workers battled over how decisions were made and resources allocated because the real problem—generating the sense of radical purpose that would re-energize organizers and appeal to residents—was difficult to get a handle on. For all contenders, then, the preoccupation with structure, whether tight or loose, radically democratic or hierarchical, both substituted for and thwarted a discussion of goals. "If you're locked in this structural struggle," says staffer and hardliner Dorothy Zellner now, "then you're not thinking what are we going to do next" (interview with Dorothy Zellner 1992).

"Tight structure" increasingly seemed some solution. Forman's proposal for centralization had had few supporters in the fall of 1964. Southern black organizers, especially, had been wary of

an arrangement that would shift power from the field to Atlanta headquarters. By winter, however, many organizers were beginning to rally around proposals for more centralized structure as a way to get past the group's programmatic paralysis. "Southern staff workers favor strong leadership and structure," a staffer reported in February 1965 (SNCC 1965a). Hardliners' "guarantee" that they could move SNCC beyond its current crisis (Sellers 1990) was more hope than claim. Just as the endless injunctions to "let the people decide" were as much a product of SNCC's programmatic vacuum as they were responsible for it, so the centralized structure hardliners proposed was appealing more for its association with programmatic certainty than for any evidence of how it would actually provide such direction. Such a structure probably could keep better track of personnel and resources and shorten meetings. But its capacity to generate the programmatic initiatives that were desperately needed was by no means clear.

Why, then, was tight structure appealing? In part, it was simply the fact that it was an alternative to what SNCC had now and what so clearly seemed not to be working. Tight structure came to stand for programmatic direction. The relationship between the two was not specified. But through repetition, it became conventional, a matter of common sense. There was another reason for the increasing appeal of centralized and hierarchical structure: it had come to be seen as a bulwark against the dominance of whites in the organization. That perception represented a real shift. As I noted earlier, conventional organizational forms had long been associated with northern white activism. As late as 1965, someone described southern black "old guerrillas" in SNCC who "distrusted any and all kinds of organization, which they associate with white, bourgeois Northern culture" (SNCC 1965a). Consensus decision making, for its part, was seen as a way to prevent northern whites' domination through their command of parliamentary maneuver. In other words, it was seen as black and southern rather than northern and white. However, that view was losing currency, a shift evident in complaints that began to circulate in late 1964 about the freedom highs.

Freedom Highs and Hardliners, 1964-1965

The term freedom high denoted a preference for decentralized structure and consensus, but also a generalized animosity to organization and a penchant for personal freedom above organizational responsibility. Freedom highs were "against all forms of organization and regimentation, " staffer Cleve Sellers wrote later. "If a confrontation developed in Jackson, Mississippi, and a group of freedom high floaters was working in Southwest Georgia, they would pile into cars and head for Jackson. They might return to Georgia when the Jackson confrontation was over—and they might not...They loved to bring meetings to a screeching halt with open-ended, theoretical questions. In the midst of a crucial strategy session on the problems of community leaders in rural areas, one of them might get the floor and begin to hold forth on the true meaning of the word 'leader'" (Sellers 1990: 131). More concerned with their own liberation than with political power for black southerners, they were indulging their dislike for authority at the expense of any kind of concerted action, said critics. Their reverence for the untutored wisdom of the poor, a kind of "local people-itis," prohibited anyone from making any suggestions. And their preoccupation with democratic decision making was stymieing SNCC's ability to formulate new programs (Forman 1997).

Who were the freedom highs? Bourgeois sentimentalists, said Washington SNCC staffer Mike Thelwell in a widely circulated satire in the fall of 1964. "[T]he children of the middle class with the middle class intellectual penchant for nuance, metaphor and symbol, impelled one suspects by middle class neurosis and guilt" (Thelwell 1964). James Forman too later described their anti-authoritarianism as middle class—as well as an import from the white new left. New York SNCC staffer Elizabeth (Sutherland) Martinez says now, "I remember a long discussion, there must have three hundred people there, and after a whole day, no agreement on the program could be reached. And I remember some people attributing it to the fact that with the influx of white people had

come an influx of ideas about participatory democracy that required consensus before you could agree on anything. How could you have three hundred people reaching consensus on a program in all its details? And [people felt] that it was a northern white import, from SDS . . ." (interview with Elizabeth Martinez 1995).

Was there any basis to the characterizations? Some who were labeled freedom high were more interested in the philosophical underpinnings of their work than other SNCC workers, more willing to make bold statements in meetings about the virtues of a leaderless movement, and more sensitive to breaches of a radically democratic ethos. Some proponents of decentralized structure, especially Northern white ones, were in close contact with white new leftists who, at the time, were finding in SNCC's collectivist decision making a wholesale challenge to conventional notions of politics and organization. But loose structure proponents were now being held responsible for a variety of problems: the exhaustion and burnout that was leading some of the most effective organizers to abandon their projects, the confusion about just what "letting the people decide" should mean and, most important, the fact that no one knew what to do next.

The characterization of freedom highs as white was also questionable. "The 'freedom highs' are essentially white intellectuals, hung up in various ways," a staffer wrote in the spring of 1965. "Maybe these whites are trying to break free of the need to be like the strong people (which they can't ever be like cause they're not black) and their role as supplements to the work of the 'strong people'"(Cobb 1965). In fact, many of the proponents of decentralized loose structure were black, and some of the hardliners were white. When SNCC's executive committee went through a personnel list to root out unproductive workers in April, most of those identified as "floaters"--people also described as freedom high--were black (SNCC 1965c). Today, black SNCC staffers see the freedom high/hardliner debate as having class and regional dimensions, pitting Atlanta staff against Mississippi field organizers, and Northern student sophisticates (black and white)

against less well-educated Mississippians (interviews with Julian Bond 1992; Judy Richardson 1992; Betty Garman Robinson 1996). In SNCC workers' accounts at the time, however, those conflicts were gradually displaced by a black-white cleavage—but one that was mapped onto positions on organizational structure.

There was good reason for the sharpening racial tensions. Black staffers skeptical of the summer project to begin with had seen their fears materialize. White volunteers' inexperience and unfamiliarity with the intricacies of southern race relations created awkward and occasionally dangerous situations. Whites sometimes offended black southerners by flouting norms of dress and demeanor and they intimidated with their command of formal political skills (COFO 1964a). Black workers had also worried that their own roles in the movement would be overshadowed, and with a press corps focused almost exclusively on the white volunteers, this concern too seemed sadly realistic (interviews with Julian Bond 1992 and Betty Garman Robinson 1996). After the summer, far more volunteers stayed on than expected, and eighty-five of them were added to the staff in a decision that many longtime staffers perceived as simply handed down. No matter the benefits of more manpower, staffers lamented the erosion of what had been a tight-knit group of friends. "They didn't know who the hell you were; you didn't know who they were," said one staffer later. "It used to be a band of brothers, a circle of trust, but that's not true anymore," another SNCCer complained in a meeting (Wright interview with Fred Mangrum 1969).

White newcomers, for their part, came south awed by SNCC organizers and were taken aback by the barely concealed animosity they encountered. They were bombarded with rules—about not leaving the project, not using cars for their personal needs, not socializing with local young people—but exposed to SNCC workers ignoring the rules. They wanted guidance from project directors whose authority had been impressed on them but found them taciturn. In response, some white newcomers asserted the dictates of the model community against the antagonism they were encountering. Records show that an enormous amount of time

was spent in project meetings discussing the roles, responsibilities and prerogatives of project directors, with newcomers calling simultaneously for more guidance and more democracy. "Problem is that people can't trust project director," a worker complained in Gulfport. "Who decides who goes where and what to do if people don't work out?" Another questioned the "whole concept of a project director as a feudal lord." And a third plaintively, "There are people who are in positions of power and they are interested in retaining this power and then there are the have-nots" (COFO 1964a).

Comments like these, accusatory and often framed in an idiom of democracy and power, were understandably annoying to native southerners who had long ago proved their commitment to the struggle. One project's long and contentious battle with its project director prompted local black activist Annie Devine to intervene. "Unless you forget yourself and relate to the people, you'll go away without doing anything," she warned. A white project worker protested, "All here agree that our commitment is to the people . . . discussions of this sort are perfectly in order; they help us function better and work better for the people of Mississippi." Another put in: "How can I hope to get rid of authoritarianism in Miss. if I leave it in the Canton staff? . . . it's like the bossman telling his sharecropper to get off the land just because the sharecropper thinks differently from the owner." A northern white volunteer comparing her situation to that of a sharecropper sounds downright embarrassing. On the other hand, these statements were made after the black project director had announced that white volunteers would have to leave Mississippi permanently to go home and fundraise (COFO 1964b).

"If a white man were project director I wouldn't be in the movement," a black project worker declared in an interracial discussion in late 1964. "We have to organize something for ourselves" (COFO 1964b). By late 1964, many black activists were very interested in issues of racial identity and consciousness and some wondered whether these issues could be talked about in integrated gatherings. "Although it had always been an issue in the organization," black staffer Cleve Sellers wrote later, "the role of

whites had never really been openly discussed"—and was not, he says, until 1966 (Sellers 1990: 157). Other former staffers say that there was open discussion about the role of whites in the movement after the summer. But it tended to be about the liabilities of white organizers in black communities, not people's ambivalence about an essentially black movement becoming interracial. Bob Moses observes now, "There's a real need for black people to close the door and meet in their own group, and people were threatened by this. It was a need in the SNCC meetings. The SNCC meetings dragged on interminably partly because they could never do this. So people could never say what they felt" (Carson interview with Bob Moses n.d.). In one project's meeting, after a long debate about the nature of legitimate authority—just the kind of discussion that hardliners criticized—an older minister who was participating remarked, "The thing that bothers me is that there really is a basic black-white problem here which you don't say but which is at the bottom of a lot of what you're saying. Why don't you deal with your black-white problem?" (COFO 1964a).

The "black-white problem" was tough for an interracial group to confront, let alone resolve. And indeed field reports during this period make occasional but never more than passing reference to racial tensions on staff. With decision making the central organizational concern and racial antagonisms difficult to talk about, debates over organizational structure and decision making both engaged and stood in for those thornier antagonisms. Earlier tensions between northerners and southerners, newcomers and veterans, and field staff and office staff had been supplanted by a new one, between proponents of tight and loose structure and, less overtly, between blacks and whites. By the spring, a form of organization that black southerners had pioneered was becoming unappealing by its association with whites. "Whites tended to be for loose structure and southern Negroes were the ones most resentful of whites," staffer Julian Bond put it a few years later (quoted in Stoper 1989: 276).

The new formulation of the problem absorbed other organizational problems. "Floaters," for many people, had referred to people whose exhaustion and burnout had led them to abandon their assigned projects. But floating, along with other disciplinary infractions such as people misusing cars and drinking, were now subsumed under epithets of "anarchist" (King 1965c) and "obstructionist" (SNCC 1965f) and attached to the loose structure position. "Look at the people at Waveland who supported loose structure," one staffer paraphrased the now standard line. "Look what they've been doing since Waveland; don't you think it's strange that the very people who don't want structure are off doing whatever they like without anyone in a position to ask them for an account of their actions?" (King 1987: 484). By February, whites had come to be seen as insisting on participatory democratic practices to retain control of the organization. A white staffer reported that the drive for "looser structure" was being told in terms of "conspiracy theories about white intellectuals" (King 1965a).

Those promoting centralized and more hierarchical structure were not an organizational faction bent on gaining acceptance for a particular agenda or ridding the organization of whites. The appeal of top-down structure lay rather in its relationship to inchoate preferences and problems. A self-consciously strategic orientation and preference for centralized authority stood in for programmatic certainty and an organization not dominated by whites. But such an orientation did not offer any methods for achieving programmatic coherence or reducing whites' role. Indeed, since a decentralized structure would have vested personnel decisions in project directors, it would have enabled them to curb the role of whites on their projects if they proved a block to effective organizing. Moreover, SNCC's most successful projects in the past had been launched by individual organizers. Decentralized and informal structure here, as in other movements, had facilitated individual initiative and tactical innovation. The source of top-down structure's appeal was not its capacity to yield more efficient outcomes or its consistency with an existing ideology but its symbolic resonance.

Doug Harris, *Lowndes County Freedom Organization*, *Election Night* (1966)

Organizational Reform, Spring 1965

By early 1965, hardliners had organized to gain control. In the February staff meeting held to decide on a new organizational structure, hardliners were accused of intimidating local people and silencing opposition. But by the meeting's close they had gained the upper hand, winning a reformed executive committee and plans for firmer administrative structure (King 1965b). Of the nineteen members of the new executive committee, eleven were Mississippi fieldworkers and most were native Mississippians (King 1965b). Since proponents of decentralized organization had argued for giving field organizers more power, this might have been construed as a victory for them. But by the February meeting, Mississippi organizers were firmly on the side of tight structure. Shortly after the staff meeting, a new personnel committee conducted a systematic review of every SNCC staffer in order to root out those who were insufficiently productive (SNCC 1965c). Organizational hierarchy, not its absence, was now associated with political militancy. SNCC's

efforts at "tightening up" were being guided by an image of "how a tough militant organization is supposed to work," San Francisco office head Mike Miller complained (Miller 1965). But the tide had turned. "We're not individuals anymore—just 'screwed up' or 'freedom high,'" a white proponent of loose structure wrote to Jim Forman (SNCC 1965b).

What was the relationship between SNCC workers' bid for a more centralized structure and its new Black Power agenda? As I noted earlier, analysts have argued that when SNCC workers abandoned efforts at moral suasion in favor of gaining independent black political power, they also adopted the kind of top-down organization that could efficiently mobilize people for power. But SNCC's adoption of a more centralized and hierarchical organizational structure preceded rather than followed its espousal of Black Power. During the period of organizational reform that I have just described, staffers voiced in informal conversations some of the components of Black Power: skepticism of liberal alliances, an attraction to political organizing outside the Democratic Party, frustration with nonviolence, and a growing belief that the movement should be all-black. But these ideas were still tentative and difficult to express in an interracial group. In a sense, the progressive association of participatory democracy with whites made it easier for SNCC workers to take the first steps to becoming an all-black organization.

Consider again for a moment a memo that circulated in the spring of 1965. "Who goes off to do work? Who goes off to do personal freedom? Who goes off to do irresponsibility?" the memo asked, answering, "The 'strong people' who tend to fit the 'rugged ragged' black SNICK worker image are the ones who go off to do work . . . The 'freedom highs' are essentially white intellectuals, hung up in various ways. Maybe these whites are trying to break free of the need to be like the strong people (which they can't ever be like cause they're not black) and their role as supplements to the work of the 'strong people.' It sort of ties into the white-black question (which has simply taken another shape) and the need to have a

black run and controlled organization" (Cobb 1965). The memo, written by a black staffer who himself had been associated earlier with the freedom highs, now connected the loose structure position with discipline problems and with the dominance of whites—in order to ask explicitly whether whites should be excluded from SNCC.

References to whites' self-indulgent allergy to organizational structure helped to crystallize leanings toward racial separatism. This explains self-described hardliner Cleve Sellers's later observation that the hardliners "were primarily black. We were moving in a Black Nationalist direction" (1990: 132). There was actually no reason that top-down organizational structure would further a nationalist agenda. Rather, ideological positions and racial allegiances had been mapped onto organizational preferences. While a number of whites labeled freedom high drifted away from the group after the February 1965 meeting, most black staffers associated with that label remained. By November, SNCC's staff meeting included only one of the whites who had advocated loose structure. The few whites remaining were hardliners (Polletta 2002).

If the hardliners' victory began to solve the racial problem, however, it did not solve the programmatic questions the debate had also reflected. Clear lines of command and strict cost benefit analysis of strategic options could not by themselves supply the programmatic direction that was so desperately needed. One staffer reported that "People really have no ideas for programs...This is a reason that a lot of SNCC people have gone off to the frontiers of Alabama" (Turvitz 1965b). SNCC's Alabama head reported in April that dozens of Mississippi staffers were leaving their projects to come to Alabama, this in spite of efforts to dissuade them. "People came because of frustration on their projects" (SNCC 1965c). By November, SNCC's Mississippi staff had dropped to one third of what it had been the previous fall.

Could SNCC have weathered the programmatic crisis better by sticking with its original participatory democratic structure? Given the polarization around organizational structure, some change was

probably necessary. On the other hand, research suggests that decentralized organizational forms are better equipped to generate new programmatic and tactical ideas (Staggenborg 1989)—precisely what was needed at that point. The symbolic associations that were established during the debates over organizational structure also had more enduring effects. The recoding of participatory democracy—as principled but impractical, oriented to transforming selves rather than gaining power, and implicitly as white rather than black—went on to shape SNCC's tactical choices after the debates were over. Once a non-directive organizing style was associated with white freedom highs' penchant for endless, unproductive talk, it made sense to abandon that style. Their mistake, staffers agreed in 1966, was that they had "assumed that when we went into a community, we did not assume leadership." They referred to this as their misguided "Camus period" (SNCC 1966a; see also SNCC 1966b). They were determined not to make the same mistake again.

SNCC workers now were willing to forego time-consuming discussions about the proper relationship between organizer and community. Instead, a shared racial identity would make the relationship one exclusively of common interests. Stokely Carmichael, who had been clearly aligned with neither side in the structure debate, did reject what was seen now as a romantic refusal to exercise leadership. When he launched the organizing project in Lowndes County, Alabama, that would be the incubus for Black Power, he "got out of that bag of manipulation," he said shortly after. "I went in there with certain ideas. One idea was to organize people to get power. And if that is manipulation, so be it" (Carmichael 1966: 127).

In fact, the Lowndes County project proved to be a remarkable exercise in community-wide organizing, and its local leaders proved fully capable of running their own show. However, in public statements in late 1965 and into 1966, SNCC workers increasingly began to talk about their role as one of "awaking" (SNCC 1966c) or "educat[ing]" (SNCC 1967a) the "black community" to its own interests. Speaking in the "tone" of the community was a way to radicalize it, to "break

open the chains in the minds of people in black communities," some SNCCers argued (SNCC 1966c). James Forman, who had once been dismissive of what he called "local people-itis," in which organizers exercised no influence whatsoever, nevertheless found this new talk discomfiting. "The whole generalizing about 'the black community feels this' and 'the black community feels that' has to stop," he insisted. "It is presumptuous of us to feel that we know what all the black community is saying and doing" (SNCC 1967b). The danger of claiming radical spokesmanship for the black community—and of abandoning efforts to wrestle with the relations between organizers, leaders, and communities— was that it represented black people as a passive mass awaiting direction by leaders. Whether leaders were thought to lead on the basis of their mainstream political credentials or their racial authenticity, the model remained one in which leaders' accountability was a function of their individual characteristics rather than a result of institutionalized mechanisms for citizen input, scrutiny, and challenge. SNCC workers had begun to envision and experiment with just such mechanisms in their Mississippi projects. That experimentation was curtailed once it was viewed as impractical and apolitical. Under the mantle of radicalism, SNCC workers began to revert to a more traditional notion of leadership (see also Reed 1986 and Robnett 1997).

Participatory Democracy in a Changed Repertoire

What happened to SNCC's earlier conception of participatory democracy—as practical and political, a means of building leadership and the mechanisms that would keep leaders accountable to their followers? By the late 1960s, participatory democracy was flourishing among white progressive activists in the new left, antiwar, back-to-the-land, cooperative, and women's movements (Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Stoecker 1994; Mansbridge 1983; Case and Taylor 1979). Activists celebrated consensus-oriented and decentralized decision making not for its capacity to train leaders but for its congruence with a radically egalitarian and

Occupy Hand Signals by Ruben de Haas (2011) (http://occupydesign.org/7789), via Wikimedia Commons.

personalistic worldview. They celebrated it as a radical alternative to mainstream politics rather than as a means to gain access to mainstream politics for people who had been denied such access. Did the earlier version of participatory democracy drop out of activists' repertoires altogether?

In some ways, SNCC's brand of community organizing aimed at building political power continued strongest in the community organizing led by followers of organizer Saul Alinsky (Polletta 2002; Warren 2001). Today, Alinsky-styled organizing, much of it based in congregations, counts upward of three million participants, the vast majority of them low-income people of color. Alinsky-styled organizers put a premium on just the kind of leadership building that SNCC workers emphasized. Like SNCC, they see residents rather than organizers as leaders, and they often rely on consensus-based decision making to keep members committed to the group. However, critics have complained about Alinsky organizing's single minded-focus on defining immediate goals at the expense of discussing of how such goals fit into longer-term political visions. The result is not only difficulty in forging longer-term agendas but an impoverished form of political education. Moreover, with a leader defined in Alinsky's terms as someone with followers, there is little of the critical questioning of what should count as leadership that was so important a part of SNCC's conception of democratic organization. Alinsky organizers are proud of their success in promoting low-income women as leaders. However, a persistent tendency to view leadership training in terms of pushing people and challenging them, and a persistent view of the ideal organizer as blunt and confrontational has ignored the sometimes different ways in which women have led successfully (Polletta 2002; see also Katherine Sciacchitano's [1998] discussion of a similar gap in labor organizing).

So, even as community organizers today champion their commitment to radical democracy, their practice of it may lack some of the features that made SNCC's version so innovative. Does that mean that those features have been lost from contemporary activists'

repertoires altogether? Answering that question is impossible given the little we know about the ways in which movement organizations since the 1960s have enacted commitments to internal democracy, especially low-income organizations and those made up mainly of people of color. Paul Lichterman's (1996) study of organizational forms among anti-toxics activists in the 1980s suggests that participatory democracy is alive and well in middle-class suburban and working class black movement organizations, though in forms that are very unlike the participatory democracy practiced by an upper middle class white group of Green activists. This only calls for more research on the variety of forms that commitments to equality and democracy take in movement organizations. Such forms may reflect distinctive political traditions, but they may also reflect modes of religious engagement or professional styles that are familiar to organizations' members (Polletta 2002; Bordt 1997).

I want to conclude by highlighting the implications of this case for our understanding of activists' choice of organizational forms and their consequences for movement trajectories. The punchline of the paper in this respect is that separately or together, activists' commitments to instrumental effectiveness and ideological consistency do not adequately account for why they choose the organizational forms—and, more broadly, the strategies and tactics—they do. I have argued that some forms may be attractive mainly on account of the social groups with which they are symbolically associated. Such associations can be negative or positive and they can shift over time. In SNCC, over the course of five years, decentralized and participatory organizational forms first became appealing because of their perceived contrast to the organizational forms preferred by mainstream political organizations and civil rights groups, and then became unappealing by their association with northern whites.

The perceived effectiveness of particular organizational forms reflected their social symbolic associations. One implication is that groups may miss some of the strengths of particular forms on account of their associations. Another implication, more specific to

participatory democratic groups today, is that such groups may find it difficult to recruit members given a perception of participatory democracy as middle class and white. Coalition work is often held out as a promising supplement, if not alternative, to trying to create a diverse membership in any one organization. But this case suggests that forging coalitions may be difficult, not only on account of explicit ideological differences and competing resource needs (Staggenborg 1986), but on account of the symbolic valences of the working styles of the member groups. Coming up with a joint organizational structure may be especially difficult.

If activists' ratings of particular organizational and tactical options come in part from the groups with which those options are symbolically associated, which groups will they be? We can speculate that activists may see the practices of the group that was formed before they were—perhaps with whom they are often compared and with whom they compete for membership—as a negative model. Thus, strategies, tactics, and styles associated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were unappealing to SNCC members; those associated with old left groups were unappealing for SDS; those associated with SDS were unappealing for most women's liberation collectives; those associated with Californian antinuclear protest were unappealing for some contemporary anti-corporate globalization activists. This may be a similar dynamic to the "product differentiation" that Zald and McCarthy (1980) described with respect to movement goals and tactics. On the other hand, where the two groups are unlikely to compete for membership or support, one may be more likely to see the other as a positive model and to judge favorably the strategies, tactics, and ideas associated with them. Thus, SNCC was a model for SDS and third world revolutionary organizations were a model for SNCC. Of course, this is just the beginning of an answer to a question that is complex. It invites us to probe much more deeply the Durkheimian question of how social relations become the basis for conceptual categories—a question, of course, that goes well beyond the study of social movements.

Francesca Polletta is a Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine. She works in the areas of culture, politics, social movements, and law. Much of her work investigates how culture sets the terms of strategic action, but culture understood less as beliefs and worldviews than as familiar relationships, institutional routines, and conventions of self-expression. In her award-winning *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (2002), Polletta showed that activists over the course of a century have styled their radical democracies variously on friendship, religious fellowship, and tutelage—and fractured along the lines of those relationships. In her award-winning *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (2006), she investigated the political advantages and risks of telling stories, especially for disadvantaged groups. Popular conventions of storytelling have served to reproduce the status quo, she argues, less by limiting what disadvantaged groups can imagine than by limiting the occasions on which they can tell authoritative stories. Polletta's current research focuses on new modes of citizen participation, and aims both to account for the new enthusiasm for participatory democracy and to determine whether popular participation has become effectively detached from power.

References

Amenta, Edwin, Drew Halfmann, and Michael P. Young. 1999. "The Strategies and Contexts of Social Protest: Political Mediation and the Impact of the Townsend Movement in California." *Mobilization* 4: 1-24.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A. 2002. "Crisis, Collective Creativity, and the Generation of New Organizational Forms: The Transformation of Lesbian/Gay Organizations in San Francisco." Pp. 361-395 in *Social Structure and Organizations Revisited*, Marc Ventresca and Michael Lounsbury, eds. Elsevier Science.

Baker, Elaine Delott. 1964. "Minutes of Staff Meeting in Hattiesburg," 22 December. Elaine Baker DeLott Papers, private collection.

Bond, Julian. 1992. Personal interview conducted 23 March, Washington, D.C.

Bordt, Rebecca. 1997. *The Structure of Women's Nonprofit Organizations*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Breines, Wini. 1989. *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Brodkin Sacks, Karen. 1989. "Gender and Grassroots Leadership." Pp. 77-95 in *Women and the Politics of Empowerment*, Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen, editors Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Carmichael, Stokely. 1966. "Integration Is Completely Irrelevant to Us: What We Want Is Power for People Who Don't Have It." *The Movement*, June.

Carson, Clayborne. 1981. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Case, John and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, editors, 1979. *Co-Ops, Communes, and Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s*. New York: Pantheon.

Clecak, Peter. 1981. "The Movement and Its Legacy." *Social Research* 48: 521-556.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 1996. "Organizational Form as Frame." Pp. 205-225 in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1997. *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Clemens, Elisabeth S, and James M. Cook. 1999. "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25: 441-66.

Cobb, Charles. 1965."On Snick/Revolution/and Freedom," [April], Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Papers, 1959-1972 (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of American, 1982), reel 33, frames 269-272.

Conell, Carol, and Kim Voss. 1990. "Formal Organizations and the Fate of Social Movements: Craft Association and Class Alliance in the Knights of Labor." *American Sociological Review* 55: 255-69.

Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). 1964a. Minutes, Fifth District Meeting, November 25. Mary E. King Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW), Madison, Wisconsin.

_____. 1964b. Canton Valley View Staff Meeting, 2 December. Joann Robinson Papers, SHSW.

Downey, Gary L. 1986. "Ideology and the Clamshell Identity: Organizational Dilemmas in the Anti-Nuclear Power Movement." *Social Problems* 33: 357-371.

Epstein, Barbara. 1991. *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fairclough, Adam. 1985. "The Preachers and the People: The Origins and Early Years of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1959." *Journal of Southern History* 52: 403-440.

Forman, James. 1997 (1972). *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Freeman, Jo. 1973. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." In *Radical Feminism,* Ann Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, eds. New York: Quadrangle Books.

Gellatly, Mary Sue. 1965. Mary Sue Gellatly to Mrs. Franz, 6 April, COFO-Shaw Papers, SHSW.

Gitlin, Todd. 1987. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage.* New York: Bantam.

Hayden, Casey. 1964. "Memorandum on Structure," [November], Casey Hayden Papers, private collection.

Honig, Emily. 1985. "Burning Incense, Pledging Sisterhood." *Signs* 10: 700-714.

Jones, Charles. 1960. "For the Student Peace Union, Report on The Conference on Nonviolent Action and the Achievement of Desegregation, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," [October]. Fellowship of Reconciliation Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, series E, box 30.

Kazin, Michael. 1998. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kelley, Dick. 1964. "November 28—Dick Kelley." Samuel Walker Papers, SHSW.

King, Mary. 1965a. "Meeting Notes" [February]. Mary E. King Papers, SHSW.

_____. 1965b. Meeting fragment [February]. Mary E. King Papers, SHSW.

_____. 1965c. Mary King to Julian Bond [Spring], SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 36, frame 14.

_____. 1987. *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*. New York: W. Morrow.

King, Richard. 1992. *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kitschelt, Herbert. 1986. "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies." *British Journal of Political Science* 16: 57-85.

Klein, Naomi. 2000. "That Vision Thing." *The Nation*, July 10.

Kleinman, Sherryl. 1996. *Opposing Ambitions: Gender and Identity in an Alternative Organization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Larimore-Hall, Daraka. 2000. "Race, Structure and Vegan Food: A Look at the USAS Conference," *The Activist* (fall), http://www.theactivist.org/archives/FA00/opinion/usas_conference.html

Lichterman, Paul. 1996. *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lounsbury, Michael and Marc Ventresca. 2003. "The New Structuralism in Organizational Theory." *Organization* 10: 457-80.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1983. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. 1989. *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. New York: Free Press.

Martinez, Elizabeth (Sutherland). 1995. Personal telephone interview conducted 29 June.

Matusow, Allen J. 1969. "From Civil Rights to Black Power: The Case of SNCC: 1960-1966," in *Twentieth Century America: Recent Interpretations,* Barton J. Bernstein and Allen J. Matusow, eds. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48: 735-754.

_____1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McCammon, Holly J. 2003. "Out of the Parlors and Into the Streets': The Changing Tactical Repertoire of the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements." *Social Forces* 81: 787-818.

Miller, Mike. 1964. "Notes." SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 33, frame 124.

_____. 1965. Mike to Cyn, October. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 24, frames 116-117.

Mills, Nicolaus. 1992. *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi, 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Minkoff, Debra C. 1999. "Bending with the Wind: Strategic Change and Adaptation by Women's and Racial Minority Organizations. *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 1666-1703.

_____. 2002. "The Emergence of Hybrid Organizational Forms: Combining Identity-Based Service Provision and Political Action." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31: 377-401.

Morgen, Edward. 1991. *The 60's Experience: Hard Lessons About Modern America.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Morris, Aldon D. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change.* New York: Free Press.

Moses, Bob. 1992. Personal phone interview conducted 9 December.

_____. N.D. Interview conducted by Clayborne Carson, Clayborne Carson Papers, Martin Luther King Papers Project, Stanford University.

Nicolaus, Viki and Martin. 1964. Viki and Martin to Dear ____, 9 December. Martin and Viki Nicolaus Papers, SHSW.

Payne, Charles. 1995. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Polletta, Francesca. 2002. *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rajah, Colin. 2000. "Harsh Reality: Confronting Race on the Student Left," *The Activist*, fall 2000, http://www.theactivist.org/archives/FA00/special_section/harsh_reality.html.

Reed, Adolph, Jr. 1986. "The 'Black Revolution' and the Reconstitution of Domination" in *Race, Politics and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s,* Adolph Reed, Jr., ed. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Richardson, Judy. 1992. Personal interview conducted 10 December, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Robinson, Betty Garman. 1996. Personal interview conducted 19 June, Baltimore, Maryland.

Robnett, Belinda. 1997. *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rothschild, Joyce, and J. Allen Whitt. 1986. *The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy and Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rothschild-Whitt, Joyce. 1979. "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models." *American Sociological Review* 44: 509-27.

Sciacchitano, Katherine. 1998. "The Union is Forever," paper presented at the UCLEA/AFL-CIO Annual Conference, May 1, 1998.

Schwartzbaum, Barbara. 1964. "Hattiesburg Report from Barbara Schwartzbaum," November. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 66, frame 1270.

Sellers, Cleveland with Robert Terrell. 1990. *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Sewell, William H. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1-29.

Sirianni, Carmen. 1993. "Learning Pluralism: Democracy and Diversity in Feminist Organizations," Pp 283-312 in *NOMOS XXXV: Democratic Community,* John W. Chapman and Ian Shapiro, eds. New York: New York University Press.

Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford, 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1986. "Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles." *Social Problems* 33: 374-390.

_____1989. "Stability and Innovation in the Women's Movement: A Comparison of Two Movement Organizations." *Social Problems* 36: 75-92.

Stoecker, Randy. 1994. *Defending Community: The Struggle for Alternative Redevelopment in Cedar-Riverside*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Stoper, Emily. 1989. *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]. 1960. Minutes of SNCC Meeting, November 25-27. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 1, frame 780.

_____. 1964a. Minutes of Staff Meeting, 10 October, handwritten notes by Mary King.

Mary E. King Papers, SHSW.

_____. 1964b. Minutes of Staff Meeting, 11 October, Clayborne Carson Papers, private collection.

_____. 1964c. "Ivanhoe opened the session…" (Minutes of Staff Meeting, Waveland, Mississippi, 7-12 November). Betty Garman Robinson Papers, private collection.

_____. 1965a. Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 23 February. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 34, frames 395-6.

_____. 1965b. Personal M. to Jim Forman, [Spring]. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 12, frames 512-513.

_____. 1965c. Executive Committee Meeting minutes, April 12-14. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 3, frames 410-426.

_____. 1966a. Staff Conference, "Assumptions Made by SNCC", 11 May. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 3, frames 1053-1058.

_____. 1966b. Staff Conference, 8-13 May. James Forman Collection, audiotapes

no. 151, 153 and 180, King Library and Archives, Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia.

_____. 1966c. Motions, Recommendations, Mandates of Central Committee Meeting, 14-17 May. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 3, frames 585-588.

_____. 1967a. Report from the Chairman, Stokely Carmichael, 7 May. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 3, frames 1129-1132.

_____. 1967b. Central Committee Meeting Notes, 22 September, SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 72, frames 173-205.

Tarleton, John. 2001. "After Quebec, What Next," *New York Indypendent*, May 2001, reprinted in http://cybertraveler.org/after_quebec.html.

Tarrow, Sidney G. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thelwell, Mike. 1964. "Mississippi's Metaphysical Mystics—A Sect Wrapped Up in a Clique Within a Cult" [November]. Mary E. King Papers, SHSW.

Tilly, Charles. 1995. "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834." Pp. 15-40 in *Cycles and Repertoires of Collective Action,* Mark Traugott, ed. Durham: Duke University Press.

_____. 1999. "Now Where?" Pp. 407-420 in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, George Steinmetz, ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Treloar, M. 2003. "The Tyranny of Consensus." *Clamor* 20 (May/June): 38-40.

Turvitz, Nancy and Gene. 1965a. Nancy and Gene Turvitz to Dear Friends, 4 July. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 61, frames 1092-1094.

_____. 1965b. Nancy and Gene Turvitz to Dear Friends, 10-14 July. SNCC Papers (microfilm), reel 61, frames 1071-1072.

Warren, Mark R. 2001. *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zald, Mayer N. and John D. McCarthy. 1980. "Social Movement Industries: Competition and Cooperation among Movement Organizations." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 3: 1-20.

Zellner, Dorothy. 1992. Personal interview conducted on 4 March, New York City.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

New Rural Arts Seminar Report

Stephanie Sherman

New Rural Arts Seminar @ the Merz Barn, Elterwater, Cumbria, UK

July 25th 2014—In Cumbria, England, a four hour train-ride north of London, a group of 30-some-odd organizers, largely from rural UK, gathered by the Merz Barn on the Cylinders Estate for a one-day event entitled *The New Rural Arts Seminar*. Organized by community arts leaders Ian Hunter and Celia Larner, the Seminar was initiated primarily in response to an Arts Council England's (ACE) Position Report issued the month prior, but it also seized upon a confluence of international visitors to connect artists and leaders redefining contemporary rural practice in the UK and beyond.

Hunter and Larner are long leading figures of the community arts movement in England, and for years they've organized projects, advocacy and research that contribute to social change, focused particularly on rural areas. In recent years Hunter and Larner have been purveyors, homesteaders, keepers, and curators of the Cylinder's Estate, a lovely plot of land in the well-destined Lake District once a gun-manufacturing site that hosts a summer cottage and most exceptionally a barn that formerly served as a studio and installation site of the late dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters. After escape from Nazi Germany and political internment on the Isle of Man, Schwitters landed in North England's Ambleside, painting portraits and landscapes for income, and with a grant from MoMA, spent his final days through 1947 working in the rented barn on the Cylinder's

Merz Barn. Image Courtesy of Littoral Arts Trust.

Estate creating the Elterwater Merz Barn, the last in the series of four Merzbauten installations.[1]

The Estate property was later abandoned for some years, and in 1968 the artist Richard Hamilton rescued the decomposing Merzbau, removing the entire wall which contained Schwitter sculpture and permanently re-installing it in the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle. Hunter and Lerner purchased the property in 1998, and in the spirit of Schwitters have converted it into a seasonal venue for artists and students undertaking site-specific, conceptual and collaborative interpretations and investigations of the barn, grounds, and rural context. The fact that the barn no longer contains the actual project does not prevent it from being a destination of historical significance, drawing tourists and neighbors in the region and artists from the UK and beyond and attracting interest of British institutions such as the Tate invested in heritage and legacies of

WWII on the arts in the period. Instead of featuring works, the Merz Barn project activates the legacy of Schwitters as creative figure and political subject. This history predicates a platform for exploring contemporary forms for rural art practice and production, and provides the magnetism for a homely gathering space for artists, students, rural communities, tourists, and neighbors. The Merz Barn has been a passion of Hunter and Larner's for years, and they have extensive dreams for its future, but to truly become a destination and center for production and pedagogy, the barn and property houses require substantial maintenance and restoration, a blessing and burden for its visionaries.

The Merz Barn project is part of a Littoral Arts Trust, a creative consultancy of Hunter and Learner which focuses on art and culture in rural contexts. Littoral "promotes new creative strategies, artistic interventions and cultural partnerships in response to issues about social, cultural and environmental change."[2] Hunter and Larner define this work as a "deep practice" with an "immersive aesthetic" which mobilizes "art and the policy sphere." They see these terms as offering alternative terminology to concepts such as public art, relational aesthetics and community art, which have been co-opted by institutions beyond the constituencies they serve. Littoral's projects and research aim to promote cultural equity for marginalised rural communities and other underrepresented groups in society through a range of curatorial and organisational strategies including conferences, exhibitions, artists' commissions, publications, and research. Littoral sees art as a strategy for addressing the real-needs of rural communities, collaborating with community groups, trade unions, health care agencies, culturally diverse farmers, artists and rural organisations. Some broadly known Littoral initiatives include *Rural Shift*–an advocacy effort championing the creative work of artists in response to Foot and Mouth disease in the 1980s, *New Fields*–which develops frameworks for art and agricultural developments, and *Culture after Conflict*–which considers art and nationhood in the wake of violent conflict. After decades of projects, Littoral has developed a deep perspective on art and culture as

tools for social equity, a vast network of global practitioners and makers, and advanced know-how in the role of art and creativity in rural settings.

Between 2002 and 2013, Arts Council England commissioned the Littoral Arts Trust to undertake a series of regional and national studies that would develop new thinking around the future of arts and cultural policy and rural issues. The main outcome of this work was a series of research reports that recognized (1) the radical complexity and systemic nature of the changes (economic, social, cultural, and environmental) taking place within rural communities and the agriculture sector, and called for (2) the urgent need for some kind of a coordinated national cultural strategic response on the part of the arts and cultural sector–a Rural Cultural Strategy (RCS). These findings were published by Littoral in the New Rural Arts Report (2004), outlined in more detail in the Creative Rural Communities Report (March 2010), and later confirmed in the follow-up independent Holden Report (March 2012).[3] They were also synthesized in the ACE.[4] While ACE has long supported Littoral's research, they've recently repeatedly denied Merz Barn funding as part of austerity cuts in arts spending, making it difficult for Larner and Hunter to activate this knowledge or run any programming at the site. Because ACE's allocations happen every three years and in a sweeping all-or-nothing fashion (compared to the US system, ACE grants are quite sizable and supportive), ACE funding often makes or breaks arts organizations, since there are so few other sources of support and little private philanthropy. Hunter and Larner are smart and scrappy, and so they've found ways to keep their operation going through small grants, donations and art auctions. They've often felt that contemporary, socially-active work specific to rural issues and community practice has been relatively invisible to ACE panels, which they attribute to the Council's longstanding commitment to traditional arts forms and institutions and predispositions about contemporary art practice defined by urban settings. The current lack of financial support is increasingly unsustainable, as Hunter

and Learner expend energy beyond their years and means to keep growing and maintaining the estate.

In June 2014, ACE published a position report addressing and updating their rural arts policy.[5] This report triggered a strong response from Littoral and other independent rural arts groups and practitioners in England. Many of the smaller arts agencies and individual artists felt that the ACE Position Report reflected a lack of understanding of the conditions of rural practice, disregarded the extensive research that they themselves had commissioned, and ignored the new aesthetic, political and critical challenges facing rural communities. These groups were also frustrated by ACE's repeated mandate and rhetoric to public service, and the perceived consistent lack of support for constituencies of artists and rural communities on the ground.

The New Rural Arts Seminar thus provided a useful opportunity for political advocacy and alliance building in response to this ACE position report. With 30-some-odd artists, curators, and organizers from Northern England and across the world under an open air tent, the gathering was the first of its kind according to the memories of those in attendance. The agenda for the day set the following topics for discussion: 1) Consider the future of arts and rural communities in an effort to respond to the arts council's position via academic perspective, followed by an open discussion forum and 2) Consider what is New about Rural Arts through a series of possibilities for future developments including (a) a proposal to set up a new rural arts practitioner and researchers network for England, (b) to set a New Rural Arts pedagogy and academic research programme, (c) to consider a proposal put forward by the RCF for a Rural Biennale[6] and, (d) to consider a proposal from the League of Culture to host a rural cultural (new rural arts) summit conference in London in 2015.[7] The ACE report thus offered a catalyst to assess the concept of the "new" rural arts from the vantage of its practitioners, evaluate funding and support conditions, and discuss new ventures to strengthen the network and build allies.

The New Rural Arts Seminar, 25 July 2014, at the Merz Barn. Photo courtesy of Esther Anatolitis.

This was the first time in over a decade that any such coordinated forum of the contemporary crop of rural arts organizers had taken place. UK nationals included artists, curators, and organizers from the rural counties through to London. Participants included *Allenhead Arts, Beacon Arts, Grizedale Arts, Dumfries and Galloway, North Light Arts*, and *Visual Arts Southwest*. International guests included Esther Anatolitis from the *Regional Arts Victoria Australia*, Fernando Garcia-Dory of Inland, an arts, agriculture, and country initiative *Campo Adentro* in Spain, and myself who spoke on behalf of the US-based *FIELD Journal* as well as the *Common Field* initiative. The seminar was possible in part thanks to the collaborative work of Vicky Prior, an ambitious and spritely political arts organizer, who had partnered with Hunter to initiate the gathering on behalf of the *League of Culture*–an advocacy initiative she's founded to represent creative practitioners and organizers in the political sphere. Also

in attendance was two ACE delegates, sent to the meeting to represent the ACE perspective and hear the community's concerns. Hunter was a buoyant host, facilitator, and leader, offering incessant introductions and instigating creative banter between receptive guests, and Larner the quiet mastermind, who orchestrated the entire event behind the scenes–from concept to sustenance.

Two ACE representatives, David Gaffney and Marla Percival, opened the seminar by reiterating the ACE position report's conclusion that rural communities are already benefiting equally from ACE support, with no need for separate funding categories or specific allocations set aside for rural communities. Gaffney and Percival highlighted ACE's work in addressing rural issues through collaborations with rural agencies and iterated statistics that show attention to rural issues and participation in ACE funded projects by rural communities. The June 2014 report indicates more specifically that ACE funds serve people in areas urban (82.4%) and rural (17.6%), proportionate to population, and notes that data shows that arts engagement and library attendance is higher in rural areas, but only by 2% in each case. The report discloses the failings of its current survey data: "because ACE records grant awards by the location of the receiving organisation and not by the location deriving benefit, the Arts Council cannot give a full picture of the geographic extent and range of benefit. This is an issue that we are actively seeking to rectify."[8] The report concludes that since rural communities are already receiving fair benefit, there is no need for separate, additional, or specific strategic allocations to rural issues, and iterates that ACE expects to "see rural communities benefiting appropriately from the totality of our support." ACE argues that it intends to continue to identify ways that it can be of service to rural initiatives, and sites work with Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) as well as local trusts and enterprises as part of their strategy. The report then notes plans for future Arts Council funding rounds, and cites no plan for any policy or strategic change on the rural issue until further notice.

The first respondent was Wallace Heim, a scholar focusing on rural arts and ecology. Heim brought forward two major contradictions in the ACE statement and report. Firstly, Heim noted that while the report recognises that rural communities have particular needs and characteristics – including sparsity, deprivation and access, aging populations, economies of tourism and sports, and a proven capacity of arts impact in these sectors–ACE refuses the need for a specific strategy or investment program focused on these different needs and characteristics. When rural projects compete for funding with projects in London that have greater visibility, star-power, and resonance with ACE panels, any focus they have on these rural issues will be less identifiable to urban-oriented panels. Secondly, ACE pledges to take these factors into account, but the report's insistence on collaborations with bureaucracies suggests a world of remove between ACE ideas and realities for rural artists, practitioners, and communities on the ground. While ACE insists that it will continue work with rural entities, the report offers no plan for actual engagement with the constituencies who its services intend to directly support. This is complexified even further by disproportionate support for the ACE coming from rural communities, since the Heritage Lottery Fund, a category of ACE grants, is funded by lottery tickets more popular in rural communities.

Heim's most poignant insight is that the biggest challenge for ACE and the group sitting before her is an adequate working definition of rural arts. Heim notes that the ACE document comments on rural communities, without really defining what, who, or where the rural means: "The rural is described as a dynamic and vital part of the artistic, social, economic and corporate life of the country. The rural is described by disadvantage, by difficulty of access to urban culture, or as newly liberated by digital technologies, or as the place where people go for recreation in the tourism economies. Oddly – it's not described by ethnicity, gender, class and migration. Or by the environmental or ecological conditions which are increasingly relevant to cultural production." Without a new working definition

for the rural, Heim reflects, its very difficult to advocate for the rural or define it as a category or kind. Heim also points out that the very definition of the rural is rapidly changing. The ACE statistics do not acknowledge the mobility of artists and the public alike, who move flexibly through urban and rural environments as centers for home and work, labor and leisure, publicity and retreat. Without more extended information and a real understanding of these flows, it's almost impossible to assess practitioner needs, community demands, and "fair" distribution of funds. Heim insists that more evidence on the dynamics of art production, reception, exhibition, and involvement is required to understand the rural as a whole.

Hunter reframed the problem at hand, in the jovially evocative and provocative way he tends to do. Since ACE has argued that no separate funding categories or allocations are necessary, the question remains as to whether ACE will give the rural the respect and perspective it deserves. Hunter asks with a great dose of skepticism: will ACE have the capacity to see what is required to serve rural communities? Will it recognize art of quality for these communities when in competition with the overwhelming plurality of urban proposals? Will it manage to engage these differences in ways that accommodate its own ignorance and disposition towards urban forms of art? Both Hunter and Heim articulate the need for ACE to become less defensive about dealing with some of the more radical manifestations of rural art production and its effects, and most importantly, to try and grapple with the different constituencies of artists and publics served in rural areas. In later conversation, Hunter expresses concern over ACE's lack of connection with contemporary critical practice related to new post-agricultural rural agendas and aesthetics. Hunter sees ACE's report as a diversionary tactic to avoid dealing with their core constituencies and their own lack of information about rural practices. Hunter argues that ACE could easily be doing more to support all the artists (urban and rural) who are currently engaging with the complexities of the rural communities and cultures that the Arts Council are responsible for supporting.

Cylinder's Estate Entrance, 25 July 2014 at the Merz Barn. Photo courtesy of the author.

In the last five years (2009 – 2014), ACE has been the subject of a Government-sponsored inquiry for its lack of proper responsiveness to the constituent issues and its regular refusal of support for innovative rural cultural practices and other intellectual and creative developments emerging in the rural sector. The Arts Council's deficiencies in this context were highlighted again recently in several national reports, including a high level UK Government Parliamentary Inquiry (November 2014) and the 'Rebalancing our Cultural Capital' and 'A Hard Place' reports (2013/15) issued by the GPS group–an independent UK-based collective of arts and cultural policy researchers and academics. GPS criticised the Arts Council for its failure to act responsively to its constituencies and changes in the cultural landscape–instead receding to ideologies about heritage, legacy, and tradition instead of responding to data, constituency response, or organizational need. The GPS report concludes that

"Arts Council England has continued to demonstrate a systemic inability to reform itself without external intervention. The forces of custom, practice and vested interest [are] just too strong."[9]

Heim's and Hunter's request for a definition of the "new" rural elicited a few crucial points from the group at large. 1) The rural cannot be defined only in antitheses to the urban or metropolitan, but it must come to its own terms. 2) The term rural often incorporates assumptions generated by city people about country people–presumptions of simplicity, the delivery of the haves to the have-nots in terms of community arts, senses of slow progress and lack of development–but the alternative definition of the rural is unclear. 3) The rural must be understood in dynamic relation to the suburban and urban, regarding density and access, diversity and difference. 4) Since the rural communities disproportionately support the Lottery fund in the first place by purchasing more tickets, the arts heritage allocation should be higher for rural communities, s. 5) Rural art can be about location or home situated out of proximity, but this idea is increasingly challenged by artists who work in the city and retreat in the country, or create in the country and then show in the city, as well as by tourists, visitors, participants, where life and leisure offer a seamless permeability between these zones. 6) Rural art is best seen not as a genre of art, but as a context for addressing a set of issues more sensitive or embedded in the rural context, including, craft, agriculture, ecology, environment, or are specific to social problems in rural areas, such as Foot and Mouth. 7) Rural and folk art strategies–such as festivals and gatherings, simply don't fit into the fine art criteria that ACES uses to judge artistic merit 8) The highly problematic British romanticization of the rural as an idyllic pastime, as exemplified in the recent Tate Britain exhibition, turns the countryside into a place about a nostalgic image of itself without social challenges or real concerns. 9) The rural is a configuration of social questions, a place contending with problems of immigration, environment, transport and access to cultural and educational opportunities. 10) Art, in the context of the rural, is a real strategy for negotiating how we live. The "new" rural arts might be

understood as such. The "new" rural needs to be championed not by an aesthetic but social questions–considerations of how gender, class, ethnicity, and equity are shaped outside the city, how art is a tool for responding and invigorating social connection and debate around rural issues, and how art participates in an ecological model reflected and demonstrated in rural life itself.

The conversation evolved from positions and conclusions on the question of rural definition to ideas about formal hurdles to arts production that prevent meaningful change for communities. Rick Faulkner of *Chrysalis Arts* noted the problem of laborious outcome and economic-based measurement tools, which are deterrents for getting support into the hands of the practitioners and constituencies who need it. He recalled a simple grant scheme that unlike the laborious and extensive council applications asked for minimal administrative work and delivered broad support for community projects. Other attendees complained about the time consuming nature of project evaluations, while some members of the group defended them as outlets for reflection and response. The group concluded the problem of evaluation as a terminological one, mirroring the real problem in a psychology of assessment rather than learning. In sum, the group sought a balance of quantification and qualification in the funding process.

Lunch provisions supplied an informal opportunity to engage conversation over egg, potato, and tomato basil salads, breads and butter, cheeses, and stewed vegetables. A basket full of mugs provided service for copious rounds of tea, and juice was poured to deliver strength. I struck up a conversation with Danny Callagham, who spoke about his work with cultural trusts, where he engages workers and citizens around archived objects of the industrial revolution. We discussed art as a mode for learning, overcoming strangeness, for understanding the ways the arts transforms and extends industrial memories into cultural stories. In a flurry of post-lunch introductions, Hunter invited me into conversation with a man in a proper country hat whose name I never caught. He expressed that for him the lack of a category for the rural was not such a big

Merz Barn Hospitality, 25 July 2014. Photo courtesy of the author.

deal, but getting recognition for the rural in the council was certainly important. Eventually I got round to asking him how he became involved in all of this. "I was sent to work in a factory and then I ran away and joined the circus. That circus led me straight to the arts."

Gathering indoors after lunch, Sue Gill and John Fox opened an artist talk by celebrating Schwitter's commitment to making art from anything, from rubbish to a single pencil, and his wild spirit. Gill and Fox are producers of a 38-year theater troupe–*Welfare State International*–which has recently produced interventions that blend festival, performance, and installation in boat vessels and cemeteries, as well as authors of *Dead Good Guides*. Their presentation invoked a long history of community practice, sensitive to site, politics, and place, incessantly cultivating meaning from point to point. Ian then called upon three participants to sit on a panel in the front, offer a quick present their work, and provide a response to the idea of a rural biennale. Each panelist started

their introduction by insisting that they hadn't time to prepare, gave brief presentations of their projects and expressed their distaste for the idea of a rural biennale. Jon Plowman of *Beacon Arts* spoke of the unique nature of the rural curating, where lots of space and time between works allows for an unparalleled reflection and processing time. Janet Ross of *VARC (Visual Arts in Rural Communities)* discussed the importance of outsider artists and community insiders coming together to discover stories in new ways during year-long site-specific residencies. Documentary photographer Walter Lewis reflected on how his project on farmers used visual culture techniques to facilitate conversations and tell stories of and in a changing landscape.

While the premise of a Rural Biennale was met with vehemence, with alternative models receiving much more interest. The Cumbria Biennale printed artworks on 25,000 town parking tickets, distributing works through a highly accessible public medium. Artist Jill Rock proudly and passionately discussed the *London Biennale,* which invited artists across the city to choreograph their own events, was conceived and operated from a pub, with no money ever changing hands for the robust site-specific program. Esther Anatolitis of *Regional Arts Australia* spoke of her involvement with a series of Australian Biennales that attempted to revamp the model by supporting local artists and drawing outsiders into unusual places. The consensus was that if a Rural Biennale were to exist, it would need to look so unlike the traditional biennale model of big money and outsider investment that it might not even be termed a Biennale in the end.

The group migrated outside for the final stretch of the day's dialogue. The new rural, all agreed, is a context for engaging the world–a way of encountering the ecological, revealing the hidden, approaching the strange, calibrating the practical, and celebrating different modes of knowledge–social, intuitive, collective, and exchange-based. The new rural provides a premise for rethinking nature, global resources, and social action. The new rural celebrates the importance of "co-," which is a process of coming together–to

create, of "co-design" and "co-benefit" a collaboration between artists, leaders, city designers, and cultural organizers, and citizens. The new rural offers a place for broadening dialogues about art and constituency, and of understanding the important role that art spaces play in building and serving communities. Art in the new rural is as much about the remaking of culture as it is remaking a culture of art.

Hunter and Prior put forward the final suggestion of a Rural Arts Summit that would provide a platform for further discussion and visibility. The summit, they proposed, might assemble rural leaders to present rural issues, debate, and exchange to an array of political and arts leaders. Would this project be hosted in London, inviting the political leaders to a sounding board of rural issues? Or would a summit better take place in situ, servicing rural leaders but also communities? Confronting the old problems of convenience, transport, and visibility, it was clear that determining who the summit was for and what the objective would be required more deliberation.

Evening Light at the Merz Barn. Photo courtesy of Littoral Arts Trust.

The seminar seemed past the hour where conclusions are formed. What was clear from the seminar was the challenges and limits of the rural as a particular domain, given that the divides of artists working in the city and in the country are less solid and stable than ever, the issues rural artists face are less universally apparent, and a new set of needs is emerging for artists and communities alike. These needs include new categories for qualifying and quantifying work, new approaches to funding and support, new strategies for building and sustaining economic and racial diversity, and new visibility for the rural arts field in the arts landscape. Prior promised to follow up by assessing political need, re-engaging the political parties, and keeping contact with ACE.

In reflection Hunter is optimistic about the seminar (I suspect his glass is overflowing no matter what happens) and also of course aptly skeptical of any swift transformation. Hunter argues that in recent years ACE has "lost the plot" on their mandate of serving constituencies as required by law. In his view, ACE continues to service the upper class of British tradition, finding ways to delay, stall, and avoid problems instead of confronting the culture that they are responsible for supporting. In Hunter's mind, ACE has been evasive of recent issues–and like many bureaucracies challenged with change, delays, reviews, and assessments, they've stalled action and investment to the detriment of the program and its publics. While Hunter is critical of ACE, he also says that he still admires and supports the core principles and also the originating vision of cultural democracy that contributed to the founding of the Arts Council in the mid-60s, and is very grateful that the public funding it does provide continues to generously support many worthy artistic a cultural projects throughout the country. He acknowledges that when compared with the incredibly modest levels of arts funding provided in the US by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), it might appear that artists in England might be complaining unreasonably. The critical difference, he states, is that the UK seems to have have ironically accumulated a hopelessly out of date bureaucratic system that, in some areas of new work at least,

seems now seemingly intent on stifling artistic freedom and actively discouraging creative risk taking to its detriment. Hunter admires the NEA for its operational policy, the flexibility with organizations, and a transparency he views as missing from ACE. Hunter says: "Give me the NEA's grants system and just .1% of US $800 million that the Arts Council England here currently has to give away annually to the (mainly urban) arts here, and I guarantee that we (rural artists) could easily turn around our communities in rural England, and help them achieve their full cultural, artistic, and creative economic potentials." In many respects, ACE and the NEA share similar challenges, a slow bureaucracy requiring their own advocacy in the wake of large scale government cuts that also necessitates a slow turn-around that favors certain kind of practices and limits access of small-scale spaces to resources. Unlike the NEA's small annual funds, ACE's generous three-year allocation can be a blessing and a curse–long term support for organizations that receive funds, and debilitative lack of resources for those left out.

The New Rural Arts Seminar was an opportunity for defining a new emergent practice of rural contemporary art production, in which the Merz Barn is clearly an important leader in the UK movement. From the perspective of a generation of American art organizers who only know the NEA first-hand post-Piss Christ, the ideological and obligatory negotiation between ACE and its constituencies of artists is indeed inspiring. The very fact that ACE attended *The New Rural Arts Seminar*, that they feel propelled to issue a statement in response to rural issues, and the fact that one national body provides the full funding for its cultures gives these arts funding politics a sense of possibility, urgency, and power largely unfelt in the current US climate of support. The "New Rural," as an idea and as a moment, has the elements the best organizing movements of any scale are made of – genuine compassion, a capacity to listen, bridge, and synthesize diverse opinions, a diverse mix of generations and ethnicities, a predilection towards action, practical talents and persuasive leaders, an openness to change and service, and a focus on the possible in the here and now. Now,

Hunter and his rural compatriots are undergoing an incredibly sensitive political battle that will involve as much contestation against the ACE as it does support, as much public visibility and counteraction as it does handshakes, negotiation, compromise, and shared advocacy.

As it anticipated from the outset, *The New Rural Arts Seminar,* was simply a start. As a start, it was a very lively one. The political and policy change potential of the seminar remains to be seen. The seminar created a catalyst for bringing together practitioners, and established precedence for future action that might contribute to the rural arts field–whether it be a biennale, summit, or variant therein. The initial formulation of a new rural language might help the next generation of organizers like Vicky Prior and the author of this report carry on the project of dismantling, slowly, the long dynamic of attrition between culture keepers and makers. Indeed, Hunter and Larner's political work calling the council into question has come at the price of the security of regular council support. But change comes slowly and over time, and its leaders sacrifice personal cost for the dreams of a better world. Those happy stragglers gathered around the evening fire after The New Rural Arts Seminar felt the elated sense, like many artists and organizers around fires before them, that change was possible around the bend. And indeed, as of the publication of this report in April 2015, Hunter and Larner have gotten word that support for a Rural Biennale in 2018 is quite likely on the horizon.

Stephanie Sherman is an art organizer, curator, and writer. She is in the Art Practice Phd program at UCSD.

Notes

1. MerzBarn / http://www.merzbarn.net/
2. Littoral Arts Trust: http://www.littoral.org.uk/

3. Littoral Arts Trust: New Rural Reports, http://www.littoral.org.uk/Resources/New%20Rural%20Arts%20Report.%20%20(WP).pdf; Holden Report, http://www.ruralculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/ISRfinal_2012.pdf

4. The arts and rural England: Policy review stage 2 Summary of contributions to the consultation process. Compiled by François Matarasso, February 2005. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/artsandruralengland_phpMk1oSQ.pdf

5. Arts Council England Position Report April 2014 / http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Position_statement-The_Arts_Council_and_communities_living_in_rural_England_April_14.pdf

6. The Rural Cultural Forum / http://www.ruralculture.org.uk/projects/biennale/

7. The League of Culture / http://leagueofculture.org.uk/

8. The Rural Cultural Forum / www.ruralculture.org.uk

9. GPS Culture / http://www.gpsculture.co.uk/

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

On "A Lived Practice" Symposium, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Nov. 6-8, 2014

Megan Voeller

"A Lived Practice," was a program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago that included a symposium, an exhibition, and other events during the fall of 2014. It intended to claim a place for Chicago—and, specifically, for SAIC—in the emerging canon of social practice art. Chicago has promising ground on which to build such a narrative: it has a heritage of experimental education and social reform fused with aesthetics in the persons of Jane Addams and John Dewey, along with a spate of contemporary artists invested in projects intended to affect social change. However, attendees of the three-day symposium "A Lived Practice" (Nov. 6-8, 2014) would have walked away with little sense of either: in its attempt to address big and moralizing ideas surrounding the experience of working as a socially engaged artist (e.g., how to cultivate a life practice of "heightened consciousness and awareness," according to the program website), the symposium declined to provide more than a few concrete connections to actual, artist-led projects and altogether eschewed taking on questions of meaning, methodology, ethics, evaluation and sustainability that have been invoked by many as critical to the discipline.

The root of the problem seemed to be that key speakers had little understanding of what constitutes social practice, debates

Symposium A Lived Practice, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Nov. 6-8, 2014. Image source: http://blogs.saic.edu

surrounding how to define social practice within contemporary art, or the discipline's complex relationships to other 20th and 21st century approaches to art making. Lewis Hyde, the symposium's opening keynote and author of *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, issued an erudite call to consider "the common self" in the context of cultural production. He noted that luminaries such as Benjamin Franklin, Bob Dylan and Martin Luther King, Jr. had leaned heavily on predecessors, collaborators and cultural context—in effect discovering themselves and their creative insights in others, to varying degrees. Hyde took as his rhetorical target an American legal and philosophical tradition that asserts the rights, property and creativity of individuals. In contrast, he valorized a less bounded, more collaborative self, knowingly intertwined with others as well as a cultural and natural commons. As an artistic illustration of the concept, he pointed to his own collaboration with painter Max Gimblett, *Oxherding: A Buddhist Parable*, on view at SAIC's Sullivan Galleries. The project paired Gimblett's minimal ink-and-

brush paintings with Hyde's translation of a 12th century Chinese poem to depict the enlightenment of a wandering ox herder who gradually realizes the fundamental unity of all things.

Hyde's learned talk—a liberal arts chestnut—felt oddly matched with an audience immersed in social practice and its attendant concerns. At its most basic level, the idea he espoused of a self interwoven with others and context cannot have come as new information to anyone with prior exposure to the concept of a sociology of knowledge (embedded in much contemporary critical theory): that reality is co-constructed through communal participation is typically a jumping off point, even if a tacit one, for artistic endeavors that seek to effect social change and build solidarity. However, with varying degrees of intention, such projects operate on the basis of social difference more than commonality. They leverage the privilege of an artist and his or her access to capital of some kind—class, gender or racial privilege; cultural or reputation capital; funding or fundability—to extend resources to a community that does not have access to the same, frequently due to real and persistent inequity. (When artists are less privileged and have more in common with participants, their activities are more often framed as community arts than social practice, a more rarified and academic designation—this distinction is itself a hot topic of contention.) A troubling question about social practice is the extent up to which professional artists in an authorship role benefit from the unpaid and sometimes under-informed participants they putatively serve, collaborate with or engage with in their art, as the artist accumulates still further capital through exhibitions, reviews, awards, etc.: by doing the project that participants do not. In the context of this discussion, Hyde's rallying cry for a common self sounded utterly well meaning but surprisingly simplistic.

For the public, the second day of the symposium consisted only of a reception for the exhibition *A Proximity of Consciousness: Art and Social Action* at SAIC's Sullivan Galleries. But for a select group of about 90 artists, activists, curators and students chosen by the conference organizers, it entailed additional sessions. These

included a communal lunch—itself one of a series of meals conceived by Rirkrit Tiravanija as a piece for the exhibition—which took place inside Pablo Helguera's *Addams-Dewey Gymnasium*, a large room where visitors were later invited to take part in gentle physical exercises in a bland homage to the two namesakes. After lunch, half a dozen artists and curators, including Alistair Hudson (director of the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), Yasmil Raymond (curator at Dia Art Foundation), and Sarah Ross (core organizer of the Chicago area Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project), spoke about their own work or issues surrounding social practice in general. However, each was limited to five minutes with no visual aids, which made real discussion or sharing almost impossible. Daniel Joseph Martinez put his time to the best critical use: he called on the group to stop conflating social practice with doing good and to develop better means of evaluating work under this problematic label. "This is a back alley fight for history," he warned. After lunch, breakout sessions included one where participants were tasked with discussing empathy—specifically, "the choreography of empathy"—as related to social practice, a topic introduced with minimal explanation. I was not part of the invited group and attended this day of the conference by accident, ushered into lunch by a friendly SAIC staffer who seemed as confused as I was.

Day Three returned to a public forum. *A Lived Practice* organizer Mary Jane Jacob, a SAIC professor and well-known curator specializing in social practice, took to the auditorium stage to explain that the goal of the symposium was not to analyze or sum up social practice but to offer "insights from which we can feed the future", as if seeking to adjust expectations retroactively. Immediately after, Crispin Sartwell delivered an appeal to dissolve elitist barriers between fine art and commercial culture. His words came as a wild misfire to the crowd. As an example, he argued that Taylor Swift songs and performances have inspired grassroots forays into aesthetic experience, such as YouTube homages by young girls, thereby enriching everyday life in the vein of fine art, if not with greater influence. The banality of this point and the tired

dichotomy underlying it seemed to truly offend the audience, which heckled Sartwell. Like Hyde, but vastly more so, he seemed unaware of the complexity of the context in which he was speaking—for instance, of the historical dependence of forms of avant-garde art, now including social practice, on a golden umbilical cord of market and institution support. Especially in the work of its marquee practitioners, such as Theaster Gates (whose name was not invoked once during the symposium despite being Chicago's best known social practice artist), social practice has been deeply invested in creating a market for itself, or its byproducts, rather than eschewing commerce. A question faced by young social practice artists is not just how to bring aesthetic experience to bear on everyday life, i.e., how to do social practice, but how to navigate a market-institutional system in which bringing aesthetics to bear on everyday life is to some degree a desirable commodity.

Ken Dunn, founder of the Chicago nonprofit Resource Center and its programs in recycling and urban farming, offered an inspiring reflection on his career that hit neatly on the symposium's desired communication: find your passion to serve others and make a difference by living it every day. After Dunn, art historian Wolfgang Zumdick performed a virtuoso unpacking of the utopian symbolism behind a cryptic chalkboard drawing created by Joseph Beuys during a 1974 lecture at SAIC. While fascinating, this felt like an obligatory devotion to an object held in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection.

The exception to the symposium's reluctance to address social practice head-on was a remarkable concluding presentation by Ernesto Pujol. The artist gave a four-part monologue describing several of his spiritually inflected performance projects including *Speaking In Silence*. The work is a 2011 collaboration with eighteen Honolulu residents (accompanied by Pujol) who processed through historical sites in the city, mostly in monastic silence, to stimulate reflection and communion with the place. The format of Pujol's talk was itself languorously performative—he sat in the dark on a spotlighted chair and narrated a slideshow of arresting

color photographs of the projects, punctuating his speech with silence and using props in theatrical segues. Rather than seeming affected, these details eloquently conveyed Pujol's charismatic vulnerability, giving a sense of how interacting with him might be thought provoking, even transformative, for participants and observers. He peppered his narrative with searching questions and pronouncements on social practice, some of which veered into diva territory. "Please do not invite an artist if you don't have a social practice as a curator," he scolded suggesting that curators had sometimes under-supported his desire to build and maintain strong connections with project participants, which he described as a surrogate family. Other issues he raised felt vital and constructive: how much engagement with a community qualifies as engagement? How does social practice relate to social change? Are museums averse to contemporary art that "feels like faith"? What does it mean to conceive of one's life as a site of practice (the under-interrogated premise of the conference)? But after dramatically introducing these volatile questions, Pujol concluded his performance without a Q&A period—as had been announced in advance, marking the end of the symposium. The moment felt emblematic of the symposium as a whole, which seemed timid of raising difficult questions and adamantly, even perversely, opposed to discussing them.

FIELD
A JOURNAL OF SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART CRITICISM

On *The Return of a Lake*. MUAC, Mexico City, August – November 2014.

Paloma Checa-Gismero

On the white walls of a museum gallery, grey vinyl letters write the exhibition's title in two languages: *El retorno de un lago; The Return of a Lake*. Below, there are close to twenty framed color portraits of men and women from the Mexican town of Xico, southwest of Mexico City. Cutting across the room are three curvy tables with colorful miniature models. At MUAC (Museo Universitario de Arte

The Return of a Lake. Exhibition view, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico DF. Image author: Oliver Santana, source: http://muac.unam.mx/

Contemporáneo, México DF), *The Return of a Lake* features work by Maria Thereza Alves, Brazilian artist born in Sao Paulo in 1961. The project had already been seen in Documenta 13, Kassel, in the summer of 2012; this time, it returns close to its origins by the volcano, over dried ancient farmlands. In a problematic way, this exhibition links local and global narratives about a Mexican town's relationship with its land.

An activist as well as an artist, in the late seventies Alves began a years long collaboration with the International Indian Treaty Council, an organization active in the defense of indigenous rights across the globe. Later, Alves also helped founding Brazil's Green Party. In parallel to her political action, through time her artwork registers an ongoing defense of indigenous rights to own, manage, and exploit their natural and cultural resources. In the gallery, in addition to the photos I see a tubular papier mache sculpture representing a volcano. It refers to a legend present in the collective imagination of the Xico community: that of Mexica god Quetzalcoatl going into the mountain's fiery core in order to bring back to humans the gift of corn. In the scale models, a dry landscape of punished lands and faint crops, sparsely populated areas, and some paper index notes.

The community of Xico was once limited to the shores of lake Chalco around the volcano Teuhtli. After centuries of overexploitation by colonial and post-independence governments, the lake dried leaving the town thirsty and its inhabitants unable to farm the land. Íñigo Noriega Laso, a XIXth century Spanish landowner, was responsible for the displacement of hundreds of locals, expropriating their fields and disowning them of a centuries long relationship with the land. Protected by dictator Porfirio Diaz, Noriega Laso dried the lake to plant his crops. The landscape changed. Centuries after, due to the overuse of an aquifer under the now dry lakebed, the body of water begun to reemerge in the 1980s. Noriega Laso's story is mentioned in the catalog as a "myth of decay". The new reservoir is now focus of water rights disputes involving members of the expanded metropolitan area. In response to this phenomenon, Maria Thereza Alves's original drive was to engage

Lake Chalco. Image author: Oliver Santana, source: http://muac.unam.mx/

with the community in the construction in the area of a *chinampa*, "an artificial island of pre-Hispanic design used for hydro-agriculture". *Chinampas* integrate organic and recycled materials in rectangular indents into the lake, and were widely used by the Aztecs and other mesoamerican civilizations in agriculture. Alves's construction of a *chinampa* with members of the community is defended in the catalog as art since it "redefines the possibilities of environmental politics today, and does so contributing to [the region's] movement for environmental and social justice". Furthermore, in addition to the transformative potential of recovering traditional local agricultural techniques, T. J. Demos defends in his catalog essay that the project "operates to forward an agenda of positive social and environmental transformation, which Alves's work advances further".

Both stories, the legend of Quetzalcoatl and Noriega Laso's exhausting of the region, shape the community's shared narrative about the space they inhabit, according to Alves. In the exhibition catalog, the artist makes room for both: she tells how she and Genaro Amaro Altamirano, community member and founder of the Xico Community Museum, compiled them in a book and travelled first to Kassel's Documenta 13 in 2012, and later to the Northern

Spanish town of Colombres, from where Noriega Laso had once parted. In the later, the catalog tells, Genaro Amaro Altamirano and Maria Thereza Alvez offered the volume to local authorities, in a symbolic act of revision of the Spanish town's debt with the Mexican community of Xico.

Back from Europe, Genaro, director of the local museum, changed its programme in an attempt to include contemporary art in it. Genaro brought young artists and musicians to town, and hoped to expand the museum's pre-Hispanic collection of objects with works by active artists from the region. In the catalog, *The Return of a Lake* is presented by MUAC as a circular series of relations involving local communities, a global biennial, and a metropolitan Mexican museum, all together in the shared revision of the relations of exploitation of individuals and land through time. MUAC is a big university museum in Mexico City, directed by well-known curator Cuauhtemoc Medina, with a program focused on contemporary practices. The institution often partners up with avant-garde European centers in the production and touring of its shows. On the other hand, the Xico Community Museum is a local initiative founded, directed, and managed by Genaro and his assistant Mariana Huerta Páez, who has learned the art of archiving and classifying online. Its collection is made up of pre-Hispanic objects found and donated by locals in the area. The only contacts with the outside world are the visits Genaro and Mariana pay to local schools to promote the museum's role in keeping memory alive. Funds seldom come in. Moreover, the community of Xico comprises individuals of diverse racial backgrounds. Mostly dependent on the work of the land and a weak trade and service economy, a big part of its population lives in poverty. High rates of drug addiction, crime, and violence go hand in hand with a decades long rising unemployment. The communities around MUAC and Documenta, however, are very different: as groups of experts articulated around a shared knowledge on the specific category of art objects, curators, critics, and museum professionals make much higher wages, and participate of global codes and conversations.

Unlike Xico's inhabitants, they belong to their narrow community by choice. Furthermore, Documenta and MUAC act in this project as moments where Xico's two main foundational myths (Quetzacoatl's myth of abundance, and Noriega Laso's myth of decay) need be translated to fit into the type of art shown in biennials and contemporary art museums. These two dispositives activate an aesthetic and ideological torsion in that alienates publics from the real problematic originally addressed by Alves: an environmental and social crisis in a Mexican town.

Hanging from one of the big walls in the gallery is a sculpture of Quetzalcoatl made by Maria Thereza Alves. Next to it are a series of vitrines displaying pre-Hispanic objects borrowed from the Xico Community Museum. In a fish tank, one specimen of Mexican axolote, an albino amphibian endemic to the lakes and canals of Xico. The species is in high risk of extinction. On entering the gallery one is presented with a number of colorful elements directing our attention to Xico's centuries long environmental crisis. The show meets all conventions that have become the norm in translating socially engaged projects for the museum space: scale models, full body portraits, non-art objects, live evidence, ephemera, many of them taken from the field, some crafted by the artist. But in an interview I held with a member of the education department at MUAC, things acquired a different color. This artist-educator was in charge of designing and facilitating a series of activities connecting MUAC with the Xico Community Museum, and shared her impressions about the project with me. As mentioned in *The Return of a Lake*'s catalog, MUAC's declared intentions of partnering with the local context were materialized in a series of workshops held at the Xico museum plus a number of visits to the town by curators, critics, and artists from Mexico City. These events were seen by MUAC as extensions of the project's gallery set up, in an attempt to expand the curatorial scope by rethinking how neighbor institutions in disproportionate power positions can relate to each other.

Image taken during the first workshop held at the Xico Community Museum, facilitated by members of MUAC's Education Department.

After *The Return of a Lake* opened in August 2014, MUAC met most of its short-term commitments with the community of Xico: its education team designed two workshops and facilitated two roundtables. The educator I interviewed explained them as a "way to share with [the local community] the artistic processes being exhibited in MUAC, (…) and reinforce a relation that had already been established with this specific audience". The roundtables had a twofold goal: to learn about local environmental and economic problems, and to connect different community groups from Xico with experts on resource exploitation and management brought from the capital. The two workshops, however, were offered just to the local community. The first one consisted of a day long photographic tour around the town, the crater, and the lake. In the second workshop participants were invited to discuss and stage the legend of Quetzalcoatl. My informant and other educators from MUAC provided prompts and costumes. Community members of different ages and social groups joined in a shared revision of their

"present problematics" and "shared mythologies," which were brought back to the local museum as photographs, performances, and personal testimonies. In addition to these events, a last visit from MUAC had been planned in advance for some weeks after the show's closing date. However, as my informant explained, a very reduced number of people from MUAC stuck to their original commitment of joining to the further visits to Xico's Community Museum. This falling out was exacerbated by MUAC's failure to provide assistance to the Xico Community Museum after an unexpected notice of eviction. A group of workers at MUAC plus members of the Mexico City art community requested the university museum assist Xico's institution in this crisis. Having nowhere to store their collection, nor means to guarantee their objects were kept from deteriorating in the move to a new building, the two-person team behind Xico's Community Museum needed material

Image taken during the second workshop held at the Xico Community Museum, facilitated by members of MUAC's Education Department.

aid. My informant, part of the group of MUAC workers behind the call, said that the exhibition's curators denied all assistance and did not sponsor the fund collection workers had initiated. Part of the petitions that MUAC workers made included connecting MUAC's important conservation department with the team at Xico, donating part of MUAC's extensive assortment of discarded past exhibition props to the local museum, mediating with local authorities to find a new venue for the institution, and collecting funds to help them get out of the eviction notice. According to my informant's words, their objective was to start a real campaign to repair an institution's material debt, in an attempt to continue facilitating the revision of Xico's history of exploitation by external agents.

Though in the end, MUAC seemed only capable of restoring debts in the realm of the symbolic. The show closed; doors shut. I can't help but feel uncomfortable with MUAC's reaction. Why is it still prefered for an art institution to reproduce in the symbolic a community's history of colonial and neocolonial exploitation rather than to champion new relations between big and small museums in times of need? Is MUAC's intention to keep structural inequality untouched so that nobody mistakes experts with locals? Or is it about alienating a community enough from their land and resources through art so that we can all speak of the problem as a global cause? Looks like it is often in the museum that these alienations occur today.

Paloma Checa-Gismero is an art critic. She works towards her PhD in Art History, Theory and Criticism at UCSD.

Notes

Exhibition catalog: Maria Thereza Alves y T.J Demos, *Folio 019-Maria Thereza Alves. El retorno de un lago* (MUAC-UNAM: Mexico, 2014).