

Labor should not be sold like merchandise but offered as a gift to the community.
Che Guevara

The gift must always move.
Lewis Hyde

Gifts of Resistance

Gregory SHOLETTE

The reader is free to copy, quote, and redistribute this text but must follow the same rights of free-reuse and provide attribution to the author

I

"Can art be regarded as a gift?" asks Dóra Hegyi, framing the exhibition she has curated for Periferic 8 while raising more than one paradox for the exhibition's participants to grapple with. Answer yes, that art can be a gift, and does that mean the "work" must be given away without the expectation of reciprocity as George Bataille famously insisted, with no interest paid to the giver; no recovery of value? In which case what then becomes of the representational or informational content of art in a system of pure expenditure? Is it blind to the "gifts" distributed by necessity and indifferent to the transmission of meaning? Is the gift in other words, inherently a-political? Or is it possible that the very act of generosity is itself a form of resistance in so far as absolute expenditure appears to contradict the very basis of a market economy: the buying and selling of commodities (including labor) using money as the medium of exchange? The concept of a post-scarcity economy of expenditure appears contrary to the logic of capitalism, and especially any system of exchange based on luxury merchandise (such as art). And yet art as gift has become increasingly popular in recent years. How then do we reconcile this fact with the simultaneous rise of the multi-million dollar, global art market?

II

Félix González-Torres "Untitled" (Public Opinion), 1991 is one of several pieces by the late artist that have become emblematic of art as gift. The work consists of foil-wrapped hard candies piled by assistants into the corner of an art gallery. Visitors can walk away with some of these small lustrous "gifts." This depletion forces the exhibitor to constantly replenish the ever-diminishing work of art with new candies. An economy of endless expenditure is the apparent result. González-Torres died of AIDS in 1996 and his "candy" installations are sometimes described an allusion to the process of dying, or a wry commentary on 1960's minimalist art. Nevertheless, these projects function as temporary economies of generosity in which scarcity seems to no longer exist, at least not for the viewer. Effectively González-Torres has set up an apparatus for dispensing value (as opposed to merely representing it). As long as there is cooperation from the art world these candy machines will go on disbursing themselves indefinitely. Needless to say, it is in the interest of the art establishment to do just that, to keep the work visible and therefore, operational. Any prolonged absence of the artist's work from the space of high culture could be perceived as an implicit devaluation. Even one such reduction in value—whether it was the work of González-Torres or some other canonized artist—might endanger the entire market by casting doubt on the "portfolio" of contemporary art's carefully assembled symbolic and financial meaning. The maintenance and reproduction of this narrative in other words, which appears sophisticated, and urbane to insiders, but inscrutable and self-indulgent to interlopers, is crucial for the art world's monopolistic capitalization of "high" culture. But what if every work of art functioned like one of González-Torres's candy-machines, as a continuous process of expenditure?

III

French sociologist Marcel Mauss observed that during "Potlatch" ceremonies in the Pacific Northwest of Canada property was redistributed in the form of a gift from those well off to those less so. In return, the status of the most generous gift-giver was raised within the community. Potlatch revealed an ever-present reciprocity in the act of giving observed Mauss, and what initially appeared to be a pure, non-market economy of simple generosity was in fact not so far removed from modern commercial transactions. Mauss's reading of the Potlatch ceremony also influenced the concept of General Economy Georges Bataille counterposed to what he called the Restricted Economy of capitalism. Bataille goes one step beyond Mauss, however, to describe an economy rooted in the "principle of loss" as opposed to reciprocity, profit, calculation, and scarcity. His concept of the gift is based on a principle of loss—a pathological economy of expenditure without precise utility. Derrida comments, this is a gift that (impossibly) "forgets itself." The Dadaists, Surrealists, and Situationists all sought to make gratuitous "work" without it being recuperated by society or art history. But how could such work be regarded as a gift and still remain art? It cannot. True to form their fate was precisely the reverse. According to theorist Scott Cutler Shershow gifts offered by the artistic avant-garde suffer from an internal paradox,

[1] A number of exhibitions involving art and gift economies appeared in New York City soon after the turn of the century including *The Gift*, *Generous Offerings*, *Threatening Hospitality*, at the Bronx Museum from November 27-March 2, 2002/2003 organized by Independent Curators International in collaboration with the Centro Arte Contemporanea Palazzo delle Papesse, Sienna, Italy, (catalog by Charta, Sienna); and Mexico City. An Exhibition about the Exchange Rate of Bodies and Values, June 30 – September 2, 2002 at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Lone Island City (catalog by Distributed Art Publishers, New York). More recently, Ted Purves has produced a compendium of ideas about art as a gift entitled *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, (New York, SUNY Press, 2005).

[2] Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (New York, London: Norton, 1967).

[3] Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-1939*. Minneapolis (University of Minnesota Press) 1985.

[4] Jacques Derrida from page 47 of *Given Time*, (University Of Chicago Press: 1994), quoted by Scott Cutler Shershow in his book *The Work & the Gift*, (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2005) p 184.

[5] *Ibid*, p 183.

“the all-too-obvious recuperation of every conceivable trace of Dada by an academic history of art must therefore be understood to spring from a certain double necessity inscribed in the very gesture of avant-garde negation itself, which in this case evidently both insists upon and refuses that gratuitousness on which its very definition depends.”

[6] I am aware that my own writing has contributed to this process. See Yates McKee, “Suspicious Packages,” October, (Cambridge Mass: MIT, Summer 2006) pp 99-121. See also Karen Kurczynski, “Leveraging Situationism?” in “Whither Tactical Media?,” a special issue of Third Text edited by Gene Ray and Gregory Sholette, forthcoming Fall 2008.

[7] “What beautiful and priceless potlatches the affluent society will see – whether it likes it or not! – when the exuberance of the younger generation discovers the pure gift; a growing passion for stealing books, clothes, food, weapons or jewelry simply for the pleasure of giving them away.” Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/33>

[8] Jacques Ranciere, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth Century France* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991).

[9] This helps explain the interest in Relational Aesthetic since its logic depends upon neoliberalism's illumination of a collective, social production that was previously dismissed by the art world (and mainstream economists). See: *Relational Aesthetics* by Nicolas Bourriaud (Paris: Les presses du réel, 1998).

[10] According to the Nationwide Craft & Hobby Consumer Usage and Purchase Study, 2000, seventy percent of US households reports that at least one member participates in a craft or hobby. Meanwhile, the total sales hobby supplies was twenty three billion dollars in 2000. Hobby Industry Association: www.hobby.org. And for an enlightening report detailing the massive “cultural capital” of amateur arts in the US see: Research Report to the Chicago Center for Arts Policy at Columbia College entitled, “Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capacity and other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places” by Alaka Wali, Rebecca Severson, and Mario Tongoni (June 2002).

It seems even anti-art anticipates some form of reciprocity: public outrage, official censorship, imprisonment, even a slap in the face returned in acrimony or mere jest. Meanwhile, a similar recuperation is underway with regard to the legacy of the Situationists today. Urban interventions, academic conferences, participatory websites, and exhibitions including Periferic 8, make reference, either directly or indirectly, to the practices of psychogeography, detournement, derive, and Potlatch. And yet the unrestricted, “general” economy envisioned by Bataille and Derrida —and dreamt of by Situationists such as Raoul Vaneigem— is fundamentally at odds with the restricted economy of the contemporary art market. Therefore, if the work produced by autonomous labor (as art) can never be fully spent, or “gifted” into a world of heteronymous productive labor without a rupture in the broader economic system, then does that mean the reverse is also true, that life cannot merge with art?

The documentation Jacques Ranciere has made of 19th Century working class Parisians who sought to create poetry, novels, and paintings on par with their bourgeois counterparts comes immediately to mind. But, there is something far more extensive taking place today involving the intrusion of a formerly dark or hidden mass of imaginative social activity that interests me. This other “creative” production, and anti-production, is far more extensive, and yet has always operated just beneath, or to the side of the normative cultural economy. Do-It-Yourself (DIY) subcultures, street writers fantasy role-play gamers (LARPs), amateur garage-kit sculptors, zinesters, knitting activists, home crafters, a host of online geeks, bloggers, and digital artists (both trained in art and self-taught), even crop circle designers, and white-power enthusiasts are materializing today like some previously missing cultural mass or “creative” dark matter. In the past this informal social productivity carried out an asymmetrical tango with normative culture, a dance of invisibility and sacrifice worthy of Bataille's contempt. But something has taken place that threatens this perverse thralldom. First, and most clearly, the global networking requirements of neoliberalism have presented the means for this other social productivity to represent itself, to link up, and thicken its connectivity, even to imagine the possibility of asserting autonomy from not only high art but also mainstream market culture. In addition, the re-introduction of precarious forms of labor not seen since the late 19th and early 20th centuries has refocused attention on how, why, and for whom value is produced, including of course intellectual, affective, and artistic values. For better and for worse in other words, this missing cultural mass or dark matter is no longer as dark as it once was.

IV

Astrophysicists describe dark matter (and dark energy), as an unknown gravitational force, which can only be perceived indirectly through otherwise inexplicable changes in the motion of visible, astronomical objects such as stars and galaxies. Nevertheless without the weight of this “missing mass” —which makes up as much as ninety-five percent of the known universe— the visible cosmos would have long ago dispersed into space. Like its astronomical namesake creative dark matter can be said to makes up the bulk of the artistic activity that is produced in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, this type of dark matter is invisible primarily to those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture – the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators and arts administrators. The form this missing cultural mass takes includes makeshift, amateur, informal, and other self-organized practices, but by default it also encompasses the majority of professionally trained artists who simply fail to achieve visibility within the art market. And yet, just as the astrophysical universe is dependent on its dark matter, so too is the art world dependent on its missing mass. Contemplate the destabilizing impact on high art were hobbyists and amateurs to stop purchasing art supplies, or if the glut of invisible artists stopped subscribing to magazines, attending lectures, or teaching part-time classes? The maintenance and reproduction of the art world is secretly dependent on an

army of unremunerated producers whose allegedly lesser talents also serve as contrast for the few successful artists who gain visibility. At the same time, the increasing materialization of this dark matter has not gone without notice in the art world. A somewhat stiff and typically ironic response can be seen in the work of those professionally trained artists who seek to emulate the de-skilled production of informal dark matter.

V

Aimless doodles, slap-dash cartoons, and non-descript sketches randomly pinned to pristine white walls; piles of ephemera or manufactured goods spread haphazardly over gallery floors; three-dimensional forms fabricated out of recycled cardboard and cheap packing tape; paintings rendered as if to appear painted by an amateur or Sunday painter, such de-skilled, “slack art,” and “clutterfuck” have recently swept across the art world implying that the look and feel of dark matter—rather than its non-art centered systems of production, circulation, and generosity— can be represented as a fixed consumable, (ostensibly contradicting the very definition of an unknown missing mass in the process). By contrast, in order to recognize the presence/absence of social production something far more extensive in scope than exhibiting ephemeral materials, or serving up food in an art gallery must take place. The art world's restricted economy of obligatory reciprocity, managed scarcity, and arbitrary aesthetic valorization would need to be replaced with an unrestricted economy of shared generosity that no longer made distinctions between inside and outside, expert and layperson. And yet as utopian as that sounds most artists already work in a shared economy, often depending on non-artists as much as colleagues. As art historian Alan Moore explains, “mutual aid is as important as competition...the process of production is continuously or intermittently collective as artists come together in teaching situations and workshops, sharing ideas, techniques and processes.” If we include the colleagues, friends, parents, and partners who provide a meal, watch the baby or pet, help with rent, or offer some useful idea or bit of gossip, then the image of artistic production becomes more “collectivized,” and more entangled with the everyday world. Curiously, this networked mutual production may already be developing the seeds of a P2P (Peer to Peer), or even commons-based “parallel” art world thanks in part to the internet and to artists like Sal Randolph who organized two notable experiments in artistic gift economies: the “Free Manifesta,” and the “Free Biennial,”

“I believe that the idea of art as a luxury object is one such consensual social structure, and that we might bring into question whether or not this existing and powerful consensus is in our best interests as artists, and as people who want to experience art.”

Nevertheless an economy of expenditure would need to involve more an experiment in generosity staged here and there if it is to avoid serving as little more than research and development for some yet to emerge “art world 2.0.”

VI

Shortly before the cot.com crash in 2000 a leading oracle of networked culture prophesized that an initial “protocommercial stage” was necessary before profits could be realized from the new economy. According to Wired magazine's founding editor Kevin Kelly,

“The early Internet and the early Web sported amazingly robust gift economies; goods and services were swapped, shared generously, or donated outright - actually, this was the sole way to acquire things online. Idealistic as this attitude was, it was the only sane way to launch a commercial economy in the emerging space. The flaw that science fiction ace William Gibson found in the Web - its capacity to waste tremendous amounts of time - was in fact, as Gibson further noted, its saving grace...In the Network Economy, follow the free.”

[11] “Political Economy as Subject and Form in Contemporary Art,” by Alan W. Moore in the Review of Radical Political Economics, 36: 4 (2004) p 472.

[12] Sal Randolph, “Free Words to Free Manifesta: Some Experiments in Art as Gift,” in the journal Ethics & the Environment 8:1 (2003) p 61-73.

[13] “New Rules for the New Economy: Twelve Dependable Principles For Thriving In A Turbulent World,” by Kevin Kelly, Wired, Issue 5.09 - Sep 1997 p. 10 http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.09/newrules_pr.html

[14] Michel De Certeau Scott, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (California, University of California Press, 2002); James C. Scott, *Weapons Of The Weak : Everyday Forms Of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[15] Miriam Hansen in the Foreword to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's book *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. p. xxxii.

[16] John Hurst, "Civil Rights Movement Origins at Highlander Educational Sessions," at Urban Habitat
<http://www.urbanhabitat.org/node/1172>

But these "amazingly robust gift economies" have also frequently distributed far less commercially desirable presents. Hacktivists produced a mirror-images of the World Trade Organization website that "corrected" its institutional identity; open-source programmers developed free software to compete with privately copyrighted commercial programs, and culture-jammers built a self-detonating "Google bomb," so that someone searching for the phrase "more evil than Satan himself" would be directed to the website of Microsoft corporation. What I am calling dark matter is swarming with just such populist contempt for authority and for those perceived to benefit excessively from globalization or the market. Cyberspace is not the only place "'creative" rebellion takes place. A convenience store clerk adjusts his pricing gun to create spontaneous discounts for customers; a disgruntled cartoonist inserts pornographic imagery into mass-produced animations; a temporary cubicle worker produces zines and blogs about the misery of being a "temp slave;" and an assembly line date pitter inserted her own messages into the fruit proclaiming such things as, "Hi, I'm your pitter" or simply "stuff it" and "Aaagghhh!!! Michel De Certeau describes such day-by-day resistance as the practice of everyday life, while theorist James C. Scott defines them as the "weapons of the weak." Still more troubling for any hoped-for "new economy" or sustainable "green capitalism" involving the gift is that some of this dark matter "generosity" is really dark. Racism, gynophobia, nationalist xenophobia, even working class hostility to immigrant workers: the videos, blogs, and websites are peppered with odious rants and poisonous "gifts" of resentment. Can the networked economy really follow this "free"? Or must the "new spirit of capitalism" continuously filter the free that it follows?

VIII

Isolated flashes of defiance carried out by "cubicle slaves," discontented retail clerks, minutemen border patrollers, and culture-jamming cyber-geeks are, at best, disjointed acts of insubordination. They do not necessarily knit together as sustained politics, and they are not inherently progressive or democratic. By and large these are gifts that "forget themselves" in so far as they are generally not perceived as gifts either given or received. Still, in so far as this creative dark activity refuses to be productive for the market it remains linked, however diffusely and ambiguously, to an archive of resistant practices —past, present, and to come— that Fredric Jameson called a "political unconscious," and that theorists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge described in more literal terms as a counter-public sphere made up of "imaginative strategies grounded in the experience of production— protest energies, psychic balancing acts, a penchant for personalization, individual and collective fantasy, and creative re-appropriations." To realize such a "history from below," to construct it out of the dense archive of dark matter social production, means producing filters contrary to those of the market, while simultaneously recognizing that any move towards self-valORIZED institutionalization is not without the risk of failure or worse, Paris 1871 and 1968 two cases in point. If the humble practice of art is to be regarded as a gift therefore, and if this art-gift is to avoid merely serving as a "proto-commercial" experiment for some new iteration of the market, then until a broader socio-economic change takes place the gift will have to do more than remain in motion as Hyde insists, it will need to be a gift of resistance aesthetically, as well as pedagogically. In other words, it is a gift that imparts an expectation.

IX Gifts of resistance

A. The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 is often cited as the first successful battle of the Civil Rights Movement. Following the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white person hundreds of African-Americans stopped riding busses, choosing instead to walk, cycle, or ride horse-drawn carriages to their jobs. After years of tension the politically disempowered descendants of slaves refused to obey the laws of the segregated "Jim Crow" State of Alabama. Within a year this "passive resistance" crippled the local economy, forcing a landmark Supreme Court decision that declared the State's race-based laws unconstitutional. However, Rosa Parks's remarkable refusal was more than a spontaneous act of defiance. Prior to her arrest she had attended training at a non-violent civil disobedience center in nearby Tennessee called the Highlander Folk School. The Highlander program was run by a group of progressive ministers and seasoned labor activists with ties to the radical socialist politics of depression-era America. Commenting on the school's gift-like approach to pedagogy co-founder Myles Horton states "you can accomplish a lot of good in the world if you don't care who gets the credit for it." The effectiveness of Highlander's mission can



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
**HIGHLANDER FOLK
SCHOOL**

PART 1 OF 7

FILE NUMBER: 61-7511

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

FORM NO. 1 THIS CASE ORIGINATED AT Memphis, Tennessee		Serial	FILE NO. 61-43
REPORT MADE AT Lodiaville, Kentucky	DATE WHEN MADE 7/10/41	REPORT MADE BY [REDACTED]	INDEXED BY [REDACTED]
TITLE HIGHLAND FOLK SCHOOL, Monticello, Crumby County, Tennessee		SUBJECTIVE ACTIVITIES (COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES)	
SYNOPSIS OF FACTS: Investigation relative to [REDACTED] 49c Silbertsville, Kentucky, fails to reveal that she is an active member of the Communist Party.			
- P - 49c			
REFERENCE: Report of Special Agent [REDACTED] 1/19/40, Memphis, Tennessee.			
DETAILS: [REDACTED] 49c [REDACTED] 49c [REDACTED] 49c [REDACTED] 49c			
ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED DATE 2/24/84 BY SP8 BTW/BJ			
APPROVED AND FORWARDED [REDACTED]		SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	
[REDACTED]		61-7511-31	
[REDACTED]		JUL 14 1941	
[REDACTED]		[REDACTED]	

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE May 20, 1940.

Mr J. Edgar Hoover,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr Hoover,

Recently I sent you some clippings about the Highlander Folk School and I am herewith sending you another.

It seems to me that this Gothe should be investigated-- I suggest that he might be "asked" to return to Germany---

Could you not cooperate with Mr Dies in having some trusted young people attend these camps?

We need to clean out our country from within more than we need battle ships.

Best wishes to you and for your work

Most sincerely,

[REDACTED] etc.

RECORDED & INDEXED
61-7511-3
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
1 MAY 24 1940
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 2/24/84 BY SP8 BTW/BJ

61-7511-31

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover
P.O. Box 1
Washington
D.C.

Dear Mr. Hoover:

I have just learned of the existence in Tennessee of a school called "Highlander's Falls School", has been in operation for about 18 years, and is reported to teach Communist doctrine while endeavoring to influence the local elections; in fact they have made themselves quite obnoxious.

This information is passed on to you only because of the report that certain well-known people in Government circles are helping to support the school and are sending boys to the school.

I am sorry not to be able to give you the exact location of the school but I know your organization will spot the place in a hurry.

May I as just an ordinary American offer to you and your grand organization a hearty word of real appreciation.

Respectfully submitted

[REDACTED] etc.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 2/24/84 BY SP8 BTW/BJ

SEP 5 1960

[17] Websites for these projects can be found at:

<http://www.shadowprojecthome.org/>,

the project's handbook is available as a PDF here:

<http://www.shadowprojecthome.org/Portland/Portland1985.html> For the Ghost Bike

project see: <http://www.ghostbikes.org/new-york-city>

[18] Marc Fischer in an email to the author, Subject: Re: ffa missing info, Date: Tue, 15 Jul 2008 16:38:03 -0500, for more on Free For All and Temporary Services, see:

<http://www.temporaryservices.org/2000.html>
><http://www.temporaryservices.org/2000.html>

also be measured by the response of the government. Five years after Montgomery's triumphant bus boycott the FBI accused Highlander's directors of conducting "subversive activities," ultimately forcing the program to close and then reorganize under a revised name.

B. When survivors returned to the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, they discovered the ghostly presence of citizens vaporized by the atomic blasts. Burnt into streets, sidewalks, and ruined city walls were sooty silhouettes where the bodies of men and women briefly blocked a wave of intense heat and light. Thirty-seven years later, and a year prior to Ronald Regan's 1982 deployment of Pershing missiles in West Germany, the artist Alan Gussow began spray-painting ghostly body traces on the streets of New York City. The Shadow Project emerged in conjunction with what was arguably the last mass-protest movement related to the cultural rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s: the international call to end the manufacture and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. In Portland Oregon artist Donna Slepach worked with Gussow to produce a DIY handbook that "gifted" the project forwards. Now known as the International Shadow Project it has been replicated in cities around the globe. A similarly structured memorial project focused on bicyclists killed by automobile traffic is also being virally transmitted today. Used bicycles coated in white paint are chained to city furniture (sign and lamp posts) to mark the site of a fatal crash. Since 2005, members of the groups Visual Resistance and The Street Memorial Project have installed some three-dozen of these Ghost Bike monuments around the city. The first New York Ghost Bike was itself inspired by similar whitewashed memorials erected in St. Louis and Pittsburgh. Ghost Bike are visible today in cities across the United States and Canada, as well as in Austria, Brazil, Australia, the UK, Hungary and the Check Republic among other nations.





PREFACE: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Donna Grand Sepack

The purpose of this handbook is to help you learn how to use the Shadow Project in your own community. To that end, we have included information on how to use the book in your community. We have also included information on how to use the book in your community. We have also included information on how to use the book in your community.

During the project in 1985, a group of artists and community members in Chicago organized a series of events. The book is a collection of these events, including a list of phone numbers for free sample products, an inventory of what was in the boxes, and a pamphlet outlining strategies for reproducing the project.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Although the book is designed as a handbook, it is also a collection of events. The book is a collection of these events, including a list of phone numbers for free sample products, an inventory of what was in the boxes, and a pamphlet outlining strategies for reproducing the project.

The Shadow Project was the subject of a book and most events were held in Chicago. The book is a collection of these events, including a list of phone numbers for free sample products, an inventory of what was in the boxes, and a pamphlet outlining strategies for reproducing the project.



C. In the winter of 2000 a crowd of visitors entered a storefront in Chicago's mostly residential Humboldt Park neighborhood to find a space filled with dozens of folding tables. Piled on the tables were one hundred identical cardboard boxes. Printed on the boxes was "Temporary Services / Free For All / Portable Exhibition." Inside each Free For All box was an assortment of items. Depending on which was opened these might include a small work of art, shoe-shine mittens stolen from a hotel, stickers, modified stamped coins, video tapes, cassettes, reprints of various found texts, or even a selection of published religious tracts. The only common element in every box was a booklet listing 1-800 phone numbers useful for obtaining free sample products, an inventory of what was in the boxes (essentially the exhibition "catalog"), and a pamphlet outlining strategies for reproducing the project. Free For All was organized by Temporary Services – an artists' group founded in 1998 with the mission of blurring the line separating art and everyday life. According to group member Marc Fischer the boxes "were designed to be small enough to fit in a backpack or easily carried."

There was no distinction made between what was or wasn't art. We blended it all together - each thing in its own neat pile. It was an early articulation of Temporary Services absolutely not giving a shit about the distinction between art and other creative work."

Typical of Temporary Services projects was the DIY instruction booklet. It tasked recipients to organize more Free For All exhibitions. "If you obtained a variety of free materials from this show, you probably have enough things to mount a small exhibit of this work on your own." What followed was a gift of consecration via print, "You a collector now." Like the distributed candy projects of González-Torres, Free For All (FFA) was based on a delimited notion of expenditure within the broader restricted economy of day-to-day relations. And perhaps because Temporary Services worked collectively as González-Torres once did when he was a member of Group Material, FFA was gift not only consumed collectively, it was also collectively produced. Such acts of resistance disallow self-forgetting, at least not without violating the very nature of what the gift has to offer.

[19] C. George Caffentzis "On the Notion of a Crisis of Social Reproduction: A Theoretical Review," in the book Women, Development, and Labor of Reproduction: Struggles and Movements, edited by Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Giovanna Franca Dalla (Africa World Press, 1999) p 154.

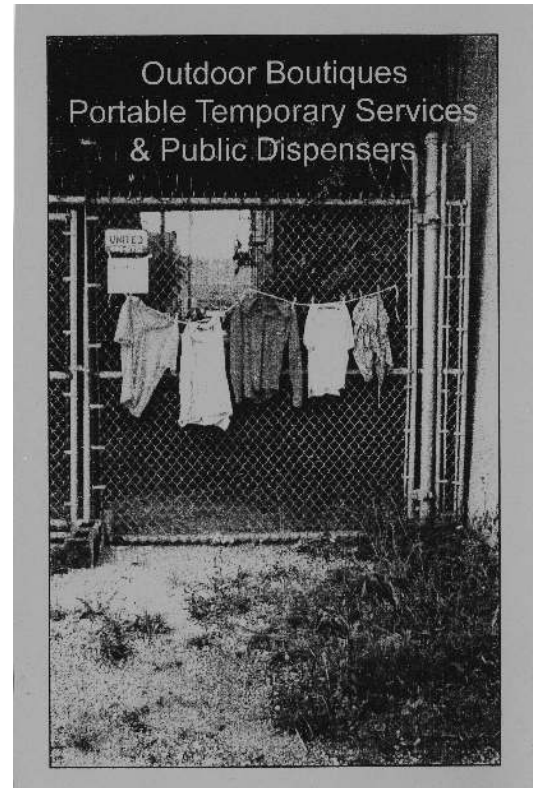
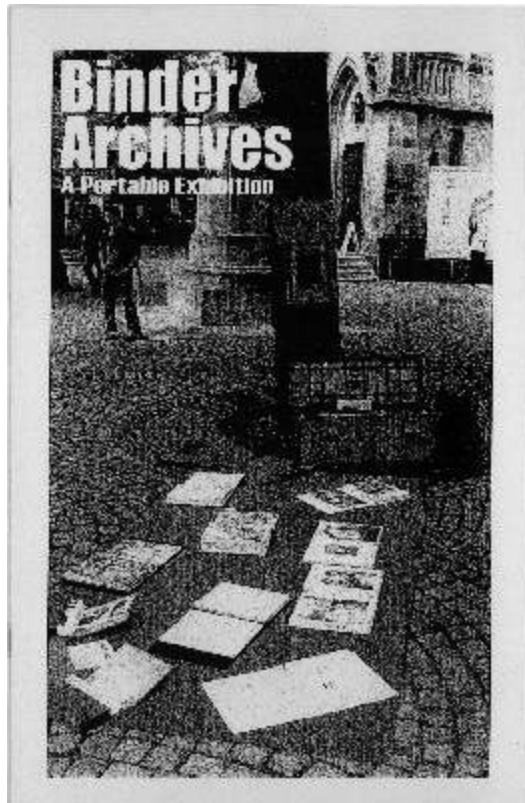
[20] Walter Benjamin "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations, (New York, Schocken Books, 1987).

X

Ghost bikes, shadow memorials, DIY booklets, resistant pedagogies, such informal social production was no doubt easier to manage when mainstream policy wonks, old-school economists, and arts administrators simply ignored the absence/presence of dark matter, insisting it was without value. Now, as philosopher C. George Caffentzis maintains, there is today a “growing realization that non-market exchanges can challenge and disrupt the formal economy, and yet are essential to its existence.” The materialization of this other productivity represents both opportunities and dangers for social change and for artists. The arbitrary lines that previously demarcated what is productive and non-productive labor; between who is permitted to “create” culture and who is not, and just what separates value freely produced, and value compulsively extracted, are being laid bare, in some cases overturned. But this “illumination” is not free of ideology or immune to private interest as early theories regarding Free-Cooperation and Tactical Media once imagined. Instead the door is now opened to acts of re-appropriation, commercialization, and creative destruction. Some artists, and non-art activists, recognize the radical political potential of this missing mass as it collides with mainstream culture. The gifts of resistance they attempt to circulate come with instructions: “study this, use this, and then please “re-gift” its munificence forwards.” They tend to gravitate towards forms of collective, self-institutionalization and do not 'give a shit' about the art world's restricted economy (except in so far as its resources are available for expenditure “elsewhere,” in schools, union halls, streets, among activists, educators, prisoners, and pedestrians, not to mention of course for sheer existential survival). At the same time, identifying with select aspects of this informal social production has become an increasingly commonplace form of re-appropriation, and not only for the relatively negligible world of contemporary art. Neoliberal enterprise culture itself is actively looking to artists and other creative “cognitariat” to “green things up,” even as it tightens its grip on the world's resources. Perhaps Walter Benjamin most clearly recognized the stakes of our collective quandary when he warned, “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.” Art as gift is a symptom of this predicament.

Gregory Sholette,

July 2008



TEMPORARY SERVICES

Free For All Portable Exhibit Guide

Free For All was a one day only event presented by Temporary Services on Saturday February 5, 2000 from 1:00 - 5:00 PM. It was held in an empty storefront on the southwest corner of Augusta and Washtenaw. On this date, we gave away over 10,000 items donated by the following individuals and organizations:

American Civil Liberties Union, Tony Alamo, Matti Allison, Anonymous, María José Barandiarán & Michael Bulka, Baur Au Lac Zürich, Bible Helps, Shawn Calvert, Charm School Industries, Coalition for Positive Sexuality, Credit Suisse, Wilfrid Désir, Jim Duignan, Anthony Elms & Joel Score, Ending the Begin Tract League, Evangelical Tract Distributors, Fellowship Tract League, F.T.L., Nicolas Floc'h, Elisabeth Goldschmidt, Grace & Truth, Highwater Books, Emily Jacir, Jews For Jesus, Kevin Kaempf, Kim and Mike, Nance Klehm, Liberation Rock, Lora Lode, Josh MacPhee, Ryan McGinness, Adam Mikos, Mr. Nash, Ralph Nielsen, Leah Oates, Old Paths Tract Society Inc., Krista Peel, Michael Piazza, Pilgrim Tract Society, Inc., The Renaissance Society & The Art Institute of Chicago, Ben Rubin, Bob Shaw, David Shrigley, Shy Girl, Owen Smith, Dana Sperry, Jocelyn Superstar 2000, Temporary Services, Threadculture, Vladlen Voronin, & Oli Watt.

Free For All began at 1:00 PM on a Saturday. At the entry of the borrowed storefront, 100 silkscreened "Free For All Portable Exhibit" boxes were neatly stacked for people to use. These free boxes were provided so that people could collect any work from the show that they wanted to take with them. No restrictions were placed on what or how much work people could take, nor was anything held over for late-comers. There were nine tables of free items. Two tables of individually wrapped food items were provided as well. At 1:00 PM visitors began to arrive, take boxes, and collect objects from the various tables. To their credit, most people did not hoard the work, but rather seemed to take only what looked interesting, promising, or obviously desirable. There was little need for close scrutiny however - you could inspect the work when you got home. By 2:00 the show resembled a bit of a feeding frenzy. The FFA collection boxes soon ran out and a few people were seen using empty boxes from the snack foods to hold work. Extra Free For All Exhibition Guides were gone by around 3:30. While people continued to arrive up until the end, only scattered works that were provided in the greatest quantities remained when the show was over. At least 200 people attended Free For All, and while some Portable Exhibit boxes are undoubtedly more complete than others, many miniature collections of work from this show exist and continue to be exhibited both publicly and privately by those who took things with them. This free booklet does not inventory the many works that were included in the show. It does duplicate certain writings from the Exhibition Guide that are critical to FFA. They offer ways to extend the ideas behind the project without necessarily having the objects that were given away.