

ART AS SOCIAL ACTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF
TEACHING SOCIAL PRACTICE ART

GREGORY SHOLETTE, CHLOË BASS
AND SOCIAL PRACTICE QUEENS

ART AS SOCIAL ACTION:
An Introduction to the Principles & Practices of
Teaching Social Practice Art

Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens
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Concluding Essay

Dewey, Beuys, Cage and the Vulnerable, yet Utterly Unremarkable Heresy of Socially Engaged Art Education (SEAE)

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Concluding essays are never conclusive, and this is no exception, I will however, venture some general observations and more specific questions about teaching socially engaged art, beginning with a few excerpts from *Art as Social Action* (ASA):

“Students and myself as their teacher became an art collective for a semester in order to design and implement a tactical art intervention”.¹

“*Public Faculty* uses strategies to rethink, redefine and re-enter public space through collective cultural action”.²

“We aim to form and facilitate learning experiences that model socially equitable ways of being”.³

“The performance [*Becoming Zoya*] served as the process of reflection on the preceding

1

Dipti Desai and Avram Finkelstein, *Art as Social Action*, p. xx.

2

Jeanne van Heeswijk, *ibid*, p xxx.

3

The Pedagogy Group, *ibid*, p xxx.

discussions and the controversial nature of the assignment”.⁴

“Start by not assuming what the outcome will be, or who all the participants will be. Have a framework that is open, experimental, multidisciplinary and research driven”.⁵

These snippets of curricular advice by Dipti Desai and Avram Finkelstein, Jeanne van Heeswijk and her collaborators, The Pedagogy Group, Chto Delat/What is to be Done?, and SPURSE could be applied to most, if not all lesson plans in *ASA*. But for some readers—as well as students, artists, educators, and members of the public—socially engaged art (SEA) will still remain puzzling. Cooperative self-care projects, participatory community activism, urban and environmental mapping, even political protests performed in public spaces... when did these become art? And how can acts of listening, walking, conversing, cooking, and gardening be related to, or even equated with, the well-established history of painting, drawing, sculpture, installation and other recognized art forms?

For the record, simply assuring someone that this is 'social sculpture' does not relieve unease. If we remove the word 'art' from the equation bewilderment subsides for some. After all, who would dismiss the sensual pleasure of everyday, non-market pursuits, and what scholar would cast doubt on the aesthetic dimension of scientific fieldwork, critical analysis, or academic debate? But for others, it is more effective to do the opposite as Desai and her students discovered in Washington Square Park, calling something art in a cosmopolitan setting adds both clarity and allure. But it is precisely this ontological and epistemological uncertainty that, I will argue, sooner or later catches up with everyone involved in this field of SEA, especially teachers. It can be a strange and even humbling experience as I discovered in 2013 while standing before a room of skeptical art students with my co-teacher Tom Finkelpearl. Using an open-discussion format we endeavored to impress upon the class that even though SEA looks like a social service activity it is art and worthy of their study. Ultimately they rebelled, generating an imaginative social sculpture all their own that assimilated the two of us 'learned pedagogues' into its central

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Chto Delat, *ibid*, p xxx.

5

SPURSE, *ibid*, p xxx.

performance. (More on this below.)

“Intimate education” is how Chloë Bass describes such encounters,⁶ while Grant Kester applies the term “vulnerable receptivity,” believing this affect to be fundamental to all SEA practices, and not just academic study.⁷ Examples abound. Consider Mierle Laderman Ukeles well-known Touch Sanitation project that brought her into direct physical contact with all 8500 NYC sanitation workers, or Mel Chin’s *Operation Paydirt* in which a typically passive art audience transforms into an investigative team to research and visualize the spread of lead poisoning; and there is Suzanne Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street* in which she facilitates the gathering of community organizers to publicly reflect on their approaches to organizing, as well as Rick Lowe’s recent Victoria Square Project at Documenta 14 in Athens, an SEA place making project whose form will become “what people make of it”.⁸ In each case these works embody “an openness to the specificity of the external world”.⁹

This same vulnerable receptivity carries over into the educational examples in this book including Bo Zheng’s instructions to his 'creative media' class in China to, “deviate from the norm,” and do so in public, after which his students compared these digressive acts to normative rules of social conduct, or Jaishri Abichandani’s South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC) who collectively denounced male sexual violence and femicide towards women and girls in India by staging a choreographed protest piece in which individual artistic preferences were dissolved into a larger act of solidarity. ASA offers these and other lesson plans in which a given group of stakeholders –artists, students, instructors, community members– are transformed into participatory agents actively shaping and analyzing both the nature and outcome of the learning experience itself. In short, SEAE and SEA share a vulnerably receptivity through collaboration. They also intimately share something else: a fundamental relationship to the theory and practice of *radical pedagogy*.

6

Chloë Bass, *ibid* p. xxx

7

Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces*: op. cit. p 13.

8

Rick Lowe, the Victor Square Project website: <http://victoriasquareproject.gr/>

9

Kester, op cit.

Claire Bishop and Tom Finkelpearl's research convincingly demonstrate that SEA's public practices are grounded in the legacy of radical pedagogy, an unconventional approach to critical learning associated with 1960's counter-culture.¹⁰ And while this volume references a wide range of challenging, even revolutionary influences, prominent among them is the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey and the artistic pedagogy of Joseph Beuys, two key figures about whom I will have more to say below. ASA contributors also acknowledged directly or indirectly Bertolt Brecht's learning plays (*Lehrstücke*), Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, Augusto Boal's liberatory theater, the Situationist International's urban interventionism, Alan Kaprow's art-life fusion, bell hooks's transgressive teaching methodologies, Henry A. Giroux's performative classroom insurgency, Michel De Certeau's tactics of everyday life, SNCC's freedom curriculum in the Jim Crow South, Black Mountain College's experimental aesthetics, and Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's figure of the subversive intellectual who pilfers knowledge from the academy in order to give it back to the under-commons, like some scholarly Robin Hood or Leonarda Emilia.¹¹

If I were to devise a shortlist of SEAE pedagogical operations it would include five steps: participatory curriculum planning, performative research (or art-based research), horizontal classroom discussion, and critical group reflection leading to the re-design of the study module itself. Put differently, SEAE is inherently Socratic and heuristic in so far as a given student, or participant, is encouraged to *learn how to learn*, as opposed to mechanically memorizing facts or artistic techniques. Yet notably, as Jane Jacob points out in her introductory essay, this is an approach Dewey proposed over a hundred years ago. And this also means SEAE appears opposite medium-specific studio art instruction focused primarily on teaching skills such as

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Bishop, *Artificial Hells*: op. cit.; Finkelpearl, *What We Made*: op. cit.

¹¹

Also known as La Carambada, legendary folk here Leonarda Emilia was a young female *bandida* from the Mexican state of Querétaro who allegedly dressed as a man, killed corrupt government and distributed stolen money to impoverished campesinos in the 1870s, see Pascale Baker *Revolutionaries, Rebels and Robbers...*, University of Wales, 2016.

drawing, painting, sculpting, video and so forth. But appearances can deceive. As this volume reveals, many SEAE instructors incorporate object oriented craft techniques into their broader pedagogical objectives, even if these remain subordinated to Dewey's maxim that preparing a student for the future means readying "all his capacities," rather than turning him *necessarily* into an *artist*".¹²

As different as SEAE appears to be from classic forms of artistic education there is actually a sixth tendency that truly separates this approach to learning from other pedagogical models. Conspicuously demonstrated throughout the preceding lesson plans is student activity that occurs fully outside the classroom. How is this any different from, say, the hard sciences where fieldwork is essential for gathering data or testing hypothesis? I will argue that the difference is more than just a matter of degree, and represents something profound and far-reaching, and very much linked with the puzzling ontological status of SEA and SEAE described above. Before elaborating on this let me first say something about the long-standing conflict involving the very presence of art instruction within a university setting.

Those of us teaching art in academia know the drill well: *making* art objects is either too technical to fall under the rubric of liberal studies, or too subjective to be considered a rigorous category of empirically driven inquiry (this remains true whether students produce socially engaged art or paintings, drawings, video, sculpture and so on). SEAE is no less burdened with this skepticism, yet it still insists on framing its already suspect creative practice within the language of scientific analysis using terms such as *research*, *experimentation*, *testing*, *self-assessment*, *learning metrics*, and so forth. In this regard, SEAE finds itself in the same storm-tossed pedagogical waters as its European kindred, *Art Practice-as-Research* (APR).¹³ And, not surprisingly, there is a level of institutional suspicion directed at both SEAE and APR, so much so that it can make acquiring research monies, or sometimes even gaining academic promotion, challenging (to be diplomatic).

But SEAE's pedagogical misdeeds go further. Not only does it frequently formulate

¹²

John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, ReInk Books, 2017 (originally published in 1897), p 6.

¹³

Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*, Leiden University Press, 2016.

research methods *in collaboration with the very same subjects who constitute its alleged field of investigation*, thus violating traditional notions of scholarly objectivity, but SEAE simultaneously, and some would say, seditiously, shares actual material assets –university research funds, technical resources, the enthusiastic labor of students and faculty– with the communities, inmates, single-mothers, homeless people and activist campaigns that it is supposed to be treating as its object of inquiry.¹⁴ Ultimately therefore, what most differentiates SEAE from other modes of artistic learning, and most other forms of pedagogy, is the degree to which normative boundaries separating the type of learning that takes place in a school, and that which happens outside, in the *real world*, are not merely blurred, but aggressively, even gleefully, deconstructed (though of course SEAE softens its heresy some by generating the mandatory white papers and diagnostics all institutions lust after, and social practice students no less obliged to leap through bureaucratic hoops in order to graduate).

It's almost as if no meaningful distinction were any longer possible between pedagogical spaces and life spaces, between art and life, and this sentiment also rings weirdly true across our entire culture today, bottom to top, an impression I will return to and try to clarify in my conclusion. Now, however, let me look at this question of SEAE's odd superimposition of everydayness and heterodoxy from a more historical perspective.

From a certain historical perspective, SEAE could be described as simply the latest iteration of a much older academic dispute between those who teach art as a medium-specific process of individual expression (think of Hans Hoffman, christened by Clement Greenberg as “the fountainhead” of abstract expressionism, and mentor to such painters as Lee Krasner and Larry

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Within academia, SEAE is not unlike the anthropological approach of Michael T. Taussig who even calls his research methods *fictocriticism* in so far as they blend “fiction, ethnographic observation, archival history, literary theory and memoir.” See: Emily Eakin, *Anthropology's Alternative Radical* The New York Times, April 21, 2001: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/21/arts/anthropology-s-alternative-radical.html>

Rivers¹⁵), versus those who believe artistic learning is rooted in experimentation, transdisciplinarity, and self-reflexive design (consider the German Bauhaus and Russian Vkhutemas in the 1920s, or Mountain College in North Carolina between 1933 and 1957). Closely related to this second type of cultural pedagogy is the conviction that studying art is integral to developing a well-rounded, democratic citizenry, a conviction that dates back to American progressives like John Cotton Dana who established the populist education-oriented Newark Museum, and of course Dewey, founder of the Laboratory School in Chicago.¹⁶

As Jacob points out, teachers and practitioners of SEAE should come to recognize a similar pedagogy has a longer genealogy than typically assumed. She proposes re-reading Dewey, who, as early as 1897, asserted that “school is primarily a social institution” and “education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies [powers, interests, and habits] are concentrated”.¹⁷ (Notably, this integration of the social and cultural with other areas of education is at odds with the compartmentalized academic world many of us teach in today as described above.) In the 1960s, Dewey’s pragmatic ideals flowed into the educational philosophy of the Freedom Schools in the segregated U.S. South, and another decade later, they reemerged in transfigured form when Joseph Beuys co-founded the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research (FIU) in Düsseldorf in 1974 as a protest against the official local art academy, which had just fired him. And it is here I will argue where SEAE’s uncanny ontological status first takes shape.

Though not a scholar of either Dewey or Beuys, I believe something shifted in the 1970s, especially towards decade’s end as the radical energy of May 1968 began to falter, something that transformed the idea of aesthetic pedagogy conceived as an essential ingredient for a healthy democratic society, into a constituent of individual emancipation. Yes, certainly, Dewey sounds

15

Cited from a 1955 review entitled “Introduction to an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann,” reproduced in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3*, Clement Greenberg, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p.240.

16

Duncan, Carol. *A matter of class: John Cotton Dana, progressive reform, and the Newark Museum*. Periscope Publishers, 2009.

17

Jane Jacobs, *Art as Social Action* page xxx.

like Beuys when he insists that all students should be trained through “a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”¹⁸ But Dewey the pragmatist philosopher also maintained that the institution known as school “should simplify existing social life; should reduce it, as it were, to an embryonic form”.¹⁹ This may seem like splitting hairs, but Dewey’s version of academia as a protected micro-society –one in which educational guidance is provided by dedicated pedagogues (such as Dewey himself)– still is organized around a concrete institution complete with faculty, students, and rules.

By contrast, Beuys wryly appropriated established pedagogical tools and practices, treating blackboards, didactic lectures, educational symposia and other classroom accessories as artistic material and media for his installations and performances. The resulting collapse of art and education is like a Surrealist collage conjoining Beuys the artist and Beuys the teacher, much as he also montaged Beuys the artist with shaman, and Beuys the artist with political activist by co-founding both the German Student and Green Parties in 1967 and 1980 respectively. Despite these multiple ironic *détournements*, however, the FIU aimed to transform “students” into true artistic beings. After all, Beuys was himself the program’s very archetype who, as Jen Delos Reyes tells us, “challenged institutional conventions by directly incorporating his practice into his teaching”,²⁰ or as Bishop confirms, Beuys asserted that being a teacher “is my greatest work of art”.²¹

This all fits neatly into the anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian *zeitgeist* of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the status quo, including traditional trade unions and prevailing Left parties, came face-to-face with an unprecedented historical revolt. Students and workers went on wildcat strikes and carried out increasingly militant confrontations with police, authorities, and government institutions in hopes of not simply reforming a broken liberal welfare state, but sweeping it away. As theorist Paolo Virno argues “it is not difficult to recognize

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Dewey, p. 7.

19

Ibid.

20

Reyes, *Art as Social Action*, page XXX.

21

Bishop p. 243.

communist inspiration and orientation in the failed revolution of the 1960's and 1970's".²²

Virno's reference to a mass communist imaginary is exactly opposite the centralized state model of Lenin, drawing instead on Italy's autonomist Marxist tradition and upon Situationist slogans as "never work"; "live without dead time"; and "be realistic, demand the impossible!".²³ But then the uprising ended. Instead of realizing its radical emancipatory aspirations at the level of the state or society, the historical failure of 1968 led to our consumption-driven, "creative economy"²⁴ that simultaneously exploits and gratifies basic bio-political desires as long as one has the necessary cash or, more precisely, credit ready at hand. As McKenzie Wark puts it with regard to 'Bifo' Berardi's theories "before 1977, desire was located outside of capital; after, desire means self-realization through work."²⁵

In short, while Beuys's educational approach sought to free individuals from every oppressive authority, including the state, but also the academy; Dewey's theory pivoted on the belief that the state must take responsibility for education if democracy is to thrive. Now, I am not implying that Beuys was either a communist provocateur or an agent of neoliberalism *avant la lettre*, any more than Dewey was a closet conservative. Rather, both men's pedagogical ideas set out to liberate our imagination, as much as our being in the world. What I am focusing on instead is the degree to which larger social, political, and economic forces mold the contour of even the most progressive intentions. In the gap between Dewey's pragmatist defense of education as collective self-representation, and Beuys's idea of education as autonomous self-realization, a significant political ramification emerges for SEA, SEAE, and contemporary art and society more broadly.

Nonetheless, it is Beuys's anarcho-educational pastiche whose influence persists, but for better and worse assimilated today through the lens of enterprise culture and its society of highly individualized risk. Its impact is visible within SEAE, but also in a range of 21st Century

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Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, MIT Press 2004, pp 110-111.

²³

Ibid.

²⁴

Ibid.

²⁵ Wark is discussing the ideas of 'Bifo' Berardi on the website Public Seminar, June 5, 2015: <http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/06/franco-bifo-berardi/#.WabX-tN96rx>

informal educational experiments including Charles Esche's former *Proto-Academy* in Edinburgh, *Bruce High's Quality Foundation* in Brooklyn, Jim Duignan's *Stockyard Institute* in Chicago, *Home Workspace* in Beirut, and even Tania Bruguera's former *Cátedra De Conducta* in Havana or Marina Naprushkina's multipurpose refugee center *New Neighborhood Moabit* in Berlin that she has explicitly labeled an "artificial institution."²⁶ These community building and alternative learning projects celebrate a high degree of autonomy from state support structures, which is not a criticism because these endeavors are important and often necessary at a local level. Still, there is a catch, and one that we must grapple with now that the very concept of the democratic state is in radical free-fall.

Drilling down into history a bit further I see a noteworthy and illuminating precedent to these pedagogical differences in the conflict between Joseph Albers and John Cage at Black Mountain College in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it is worth a short detour to consider this. Albers was a strong proponent of Dewey who understood art to be the experimental arm of culture. As historian Eva Díaz tells us, for Albers's art served society by developing "better forms" as "the precondition of cultural production and progress".²⁷ Studying art is like doing research and development that is later incorporated into actual real world experience. Cage, on the other hand, understood creative experimentation quite differently by championing not contemplative design, but uncertainty, disorder and disruption. He introduced chance operations into music by rolling a pair of dice or casting *I Ching* sticks and letting the outcome guide his compositions. Before long Cage antagonized Albers and other Black Mountain College faculty when in 1952 he recruited "faculty and students to perform short, timed scripts, resulting in

²⁶ These projects are further discussed in Sholette, "From Proto-Academy to Home Workspace Beirut," in the book *Future Imperfect: Contemporary Art Practices and Cultural Institutions in the Middle East*. Anthony Downey, ed., (Sternberg Press, 2016) pp 190-204.

²⁷

Eva Díaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College*, U. of Chicago P., 2014

many unrelated events scattered throughout the performance space”.²⁸ The result was *Theater Piece no. 1*, or simply the *Happening*, in which solitary overlapping actions unfolded, seemingly without order or logic, much as we encounter contemporary life as a fragmented, even alienating experience. Whether this was neo-Dadaism or ultra-realism, the composer nevertheless cast doubt on Albers’ Deweyian faith that art is a testable medium for improving society through aesthetic research and design. Cage later undermined the very notion of the academy itself when he famously goaded an audience in Germany with the Zen like query “which is more musical, a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?”²⁹

The discomfort generated by Cage’s intentionally interventionist educational aesthetic echoed through a seminar I co-taught with Tom Finkelpearl for Social Practice Queens in Fall of 2013 called *Participatory Art and Social Action*. The premise was simple: an increasing numbers of artists, curators, and critics are turning their energies towards a new type of participatory art activism, and therefore students should engage in research about this phenomenon. Graduate and undergraduate participants were read work by or about Rick Lowe, Tania Bruguera, Martha Rosler, Teddy Cruz, Marisa Jahn, Stephen Wright, Claire Bishop and Nato Thompson, as well as excerpts from our own writings.³⁰ However, it soon became apparent that for most of these studio-based art students, SEA was an entirely new paradigm, and after a few weeks of presentations, readings, and discussions the class broke into smaller research groups focusing on such questions as:

. “Is there a social practice art aesthetic or form or repertoire of forms specific to this kind of work?”

. “Is social practice art radically opposed to mainstream art and culture?”

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Díaz, p. 7.

²⁹

Cited in Edward Morris, “Three Thousand Seven Hundred-Seven Words about John Cage,” *Notes*, vol. 23, no. 3, March 1967, p. 472.

³⁰

Also included were a few of our own writings and the full bibliography can be found here: <http://www.sholetteseminars.com/new-forms-2013-readings-and-resources/>

. “How does social practice art differentiate itself from social services?”

It was this last question that most vexed and amused the class, ultimately leading them to stage a mock trial at the end of the fifteen-week semester in which Finkelppearl and I were respectfully cross-examined. At one point the *prosecutors* presented us with the following thought experiment:

“Explain to the jury exactly what significant difference exists between, on one hand, a project in which artists, working out of a moving truck adorned with an logo indicating that it is an art project, operate social services like baby sitting or assisting with predatory landlords, on one hand; and, on the other, the very same service that is run by a group of community activist volunteers? Does it come down to a question of which institution provides funding: an arts agency or some municipal social service organization?”³¹

Our expert testimony began to derail as us *learned* instructors scrambled for logical clarification. Meanwhile, our students rejoiced in their intoxicating self-emancipation from the authority of experts as our prayers to Dewey went unanswered. I could almost hear Joseph Beuys and John Cage chortling from the shadows.

[Figure 1: GS image 1.jpg]

[Figure 1: The *Nanny Van* is a mobile design lab and sound studio designed by artist Marisa Jahn to promote domestic workers labor rights nationwide.]

Traditional education fails, Dewey contended, because it neglects the “fundamental

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I am paraphrasing from memory here, and also wish to note that the class discussed Marisa Jahn’s *Nanny Van* (2014-ongoing), and the Austrian collective *WochenKlausur*’s mobile medical clinic for homeless people (1993), thus providing two SEA examples that may have inspired their prosecutorial rebellion.

principle of the school as a form of community life”.³² Though, I doubt that the pragmatist philosopher envisioned circumstances quite like the present day world of contemporary art in which the relationship between school and society, between reality and fiction, between culture and politics have more or less become a single continuous surface, not unlike a Möbius strip. To recognize the degree to which an ambient aesthetic spectacularity now deliriously saturates all aspects of our experience we need only mention “fake news,” or refer to the weird mimicry between the current White House administration and certain television shows including *House of Cards* or *Saturday Night Live*; or we can point to the protest art organized by the *1,000 Gestalten* collective in Hamburg, Germany, who choreographed hordes of ashen-covered zombies in a cinematic public pageant to protest the 2017 G20 summit.

It is this strange state of looping and doubling that contemporary art, including SAE, operates within, though not necessarily by choice, but by circumstance. Which may be why the *Pedagogy Group* astutely cautions about the danger of SEAE programs defining a “new autonomous sphere” as socially engaged artists “stand apart from social practices created in everyday community and movement making,” thus substituting cultural activism for political work in the real world.³³ As important as it is to heed this warning, I sense that this apprehension is itself a symptom of the broader socio-political, historical, and pedagogical subsumption whereby art conceived as a reflection upon reality is taken as that reality, *tout court*. One can hear the strain of this entangled conundrum in a statement made by several young artists from Los Angeles struggling with their role in gentrification.

“We write in hopes that more artists will finally break with their sense of exceptionalism and consider their roles in gentrification. We recognize that art is an industry with a structural reality that must be acknowledged in order for artists to challenge their complicity in the displacement of long-term residents in low-income and working class

32

Dewey, op cit, p. 8.

33

The Pedagogy Group, “Toward a Social Practice Pedagogy,” SAS p xxx.]

neighborhoods and fight against this”.³⁴

We have entered the time and space of the “uncanny present,” writes political scientist Rebecca Bryant: a present unfamiliar in its very *presentness*³⁵ or as Wark summarizes with reference to Jodi Dean’s theory of “Communicative Capitalism,”

“Communicative capitalism relies on repetition, on suspending narrative, identity, and norms. Framed in those terms, the problem then is to create the possibility of breaking out of the endless short loops of drive. But if anything the tendency is in the other direction. After blogging came Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, driving even further into repetition. The culture industries gave way to what I call the vulture industries.”³⁶

Of course, Beuys was correct, everyone *is* an artist, though I suspect the current materialization of his proposition within the so-called creative economy has much more to do with the needs of neoliberal capital than with those of an artist in a felt suit and hat. Still, as Bishop asserts, the German post-war artist remains simply “the best-known point of reference for contemporary artists’ engagement with experimental pedagogy”.³⁷ It is also fair to say that Beuys artistic patrimony above all now provides the groundwork for the growing appeal of SEA and SEAE within both mainstream art and academic circles, with all of the resources and complications that brings with it.

Nonetheless, what is missing from the experience of the uncanny present in general is

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An Artists’ Guide to Not Being Complicit with Gentrification <https://hyperallergic.com/385176/an-artists-guide-to-not-being-complicit-with-gentrification/>

35

Rebecca Bryant, “On Critical Times: Return, Repetition, and the Uncanny Present,” *History and Anthropology*, No. 27, 2016. p.27.

³⁶ McKenzie Wark, “Communicative Capitalism,” Public Seminar, March 23, 2015: <http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/03/communicative-capitalism/#.WabfL9N96rw>

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May 1968 Graffiti from the Bureau of Public Secrets website: <http://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/graffiti.htm>. Bishop, op cit.

that discernible moment of alienation between subject and object, learning and doing, metaphor and thing, the very ground of both artistic study and social critique. The only point of rupture visible today is that flash of recognition when we discover which tiny minority of artists truly succeeds, and which remains structurally locked within the dark matter of our bare art world.³⁸ And finally a response to my initial question is glimpsed: SEAE is simultaneously heretical and humble, strange and utterly familiar because it embodies the asymmetrical uncanny present of our 21st century reality in a singular fashion, leaving us with one, Dewey-inspired question left to pose: how do we go about learning how to live, make art, and engage in social action and community building when the world around us is in free-fall? However preliminary and partial, I believe the preceding pages offer readers an impressive compendium of imaginative endeavors and practical experiments that take the vulnerable, yet utterly unremarkable heresy of socially engaged art education as their point of departure.

As if in a dream, I hear John Cage's noisy truck rumbling over and over; only, by now the music school's oboists, sax players and drummers have stolen the tires off of it, perhaps using them to build barricades, or maybe exchanging them for weed off campus, who knows, and yet either way, the truck strangely keeps idling, its engine refusing to give up, so that its clamor, the very same din that once interrupted student rehearsals, is now fully part and parcel of the academy's basic educational experience, disappearing within the architecture of the campus, like the ambient unnerving white noise in Don DeLillo's novel of the same name.³⁹

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Finkelpearl, T. op. cit. (See especially the chapter "Education Art" with Tania Bruguera about *Cátedra De Conducta*.)

³⁸ For more about dark matter and bare art see Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance*, op. cit.

³⁹

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