

**“Art as Social Action is an essential guide to deepening social art practices and teaching them to students.”**

**—Laura Raicovich, former president and executive director, Queens Museum**

**“It’s no small thing to educate at the intersection of art and social justice.**

**This contribution is valuable to educators in its insight, pragmatism, and breadth.”**

**—Nato Thompson, artistic director, Creative Time**

*Art as Social Action* is a comprehensive manual for teachers about how to teach art as social practice with content arranged thematically around such topics as direct action, alternative organizing, urban imaginaries, antibias work, and collective learning, among others. Along with a series of introductions by leading social practice artists in the field, valuable lesson plans offer examples of pedagogical projects for instructors at both college and high school levels with contributions written by prominent social practice artists, teachers, and thinkers, including:

Mary Jane Jacob • Maureen Connor • Brian Rosa • Pablo Helguera  
Bo Zheng • Chto Delat • Jeanne van Heeswijk • Jaishri Abichandani  
Lorraine Leeson • Ala Plástica • Daniel Tucker • Fiona Whelan  
Jen Delos Reyes • Dipti Desai • Noah Fischer

Lesson plans also reflect the ongoing pedagogical and art action work of Social Practice Queens (SPQ), a unique partnership between Queens College CUNY and the Queens Museum.

**DR. GREGORY SHOLETTE** is an artist, writer, and activist focused on excavating the history and theory of socially engaged art. His books include *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* and *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture*. He teaches at Social Practice Queens, Queens College, CUNY, which he cofounded with Maureen Connor and the Queens Museum in 2010. He resides in New York City.

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SHOLETTE, BASS, AND  
SOCIAL PRACTICE QUEENS

ART AS SOCIAL ACTION

# ART AS SOCIAL ACTION

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

GREGORY SHOLETTE, CHLOË BASS,  
AND SOCIAL PRACTICE QUEENS



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*Art as Social Action* is dedicated to Ted Purves and Tim Rollins, two artists, mentors, teachers, and dynamic advocates of socially engaged art education. Their vision and generosity remain a vital presence throughout this volume.



**1.2 Tim Rollins SPQ.**

**tiff**




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# Art as Social Action

(a preface)

*We continue to talk about “new forms” because the new has been the fertilizing fetish of the avant-garde since it detached itself from the infantry. But it may be that these new forms are only to be found buried in social energies not yet recognized as art.*

—Lucy R. Lippard (1984)<sup>1</sup>

Social practice art is an emerging, interdisciplinary field of research and practice that pivots on the arts and the humanities while embracing such eternal disciplines as urban, environmental, or labor studies; public architecture; and political organizing, among others. Its overall objective is not merely to make art that represents instances of sociopolitical injustice (consider Picasso’s *Guernica*), but to employ the varied forms offered by the expanded field of contemporary art as a collaborative, collective, and participatory social method for bringing about real-world instances of progressive justice, community building, and transformation.

With this in mind, *Art as Social Action* (ASA) hopes to benefit teachers of contemporary art in two distinct ways. First, ASA offers a general introduction to the concept of socially engaged art by noted practitioners in the field. Second, the book presents a series of illustrated lesson plans for practical use in the classroom, designed by educators at both the college and high school levels. With contributions by leading social practice artists, researchers, and educators, the book’s content is arranged thematically and addresses real-world issues like labor rights, environmental justice, urban policy, women’s rights, migrants’ rights, racism, prisoners’ rights, and the global nexus of art/labor/capital, among other areas of topical concern. *Art as Social Action* also represents the logical growth of the Social Practice Queens (SPQ) program:

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, “Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980,” in *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: Dutton Press, 1984), 172.

an ongoing educational experiment that pairs the resources of a noted academic research institution, Queens College, City University of New York (CUNY), together with an innovative, community-oriented art institution, the Queens Museum.

It was during an art opening in 2010 that the Queens Museum's then director, Tom Finkelpearl, first proposed that the Queens College MFA program work with the museum to establish a working collaboration and residency program focused on the developing field known as "social practice art" in the United States. Along with Finkelpearl, whose publications, such as *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, have helped to establish socially engaged art as a dynamic field of practice, the Queens Museum team included educator Prerana Reddy, curator Larissa Harris, and community activist José Serrano-McClaine. Their collective labor committed museum resources to merging contemporary art with concrete community concerns, especially those of the nearby Latina/Latino neighborhood of Corona and the Asian neighborhood of Flushing (though other locations in New York City and beyond also became part of this unique institutional outreach).

The academic cofounders of the program contributed years of artistic and pedagogical commitment to the practice and study of socially engaged art. For decades Queens College CUNY professor Maureen Connor's art-based pedagogy focused on feminism and social justice, while professor Gregory Sholette's research and writing about art, theory, and politics was rooted in his prior work with PAD/D and REPOhistory, two noted artists' collectives he cofounded in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. Eight years into the experiment, SPQ proudly reports the successful graduation of ten MFA students concentrating in socially engaged art, as well as the launch of a two-semester Advanced Studies Certificate in Critical Social Practice. With Professor Connor now retired, SPQ was also privileged to welcome as a new faculty member conceptual and performance artist Chloë Bass, whose investigations of interpersonal relations explore the rich intersection between performance and social engagement. And we have been fortunate to add to this existing expertise the insights of such practitioners as Ted Purves, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Mariam Ghani, Adeola Enigbokan, Heng-gil Han, the *Yes Men*, Chemi Rosado-Seijo, Alicia Grullón, Tomie Arai, Sal Randolph, Deanna Bowen, Nato Thompson, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Pepon Osorio, Sarah Fritch, Liz Park, *in-CUBATE*, Fran Ilich Morales, Amin Husain (*Decolonize This Place/MTL*), Alfredo Jaar, Dread Scott, Larry Bogard, Sean Starowitz, Yevgeniy Fiks, Marco Baravalle, and Saul Ostrow, among others.

As social practice education grows in popularity and scope we continue to learn and evolve, not only from our own efforts, but also from our students and

the practices of numerous kindred colleagues across the globe. The aim of this book is to offer a series of critical reflections about this emerging discipline, with practical lesson plans documenting specific pedagogical experiments. But as we endeavor to present a representational cross section of voices and views about socially engaged art pedagogy we recognize that limitations of time and resources prevent this project from being a truly comprehensive collection. Within a short time even this selection will be dwarfed by the activities of others.

As we go to print we witness unprecedented levels of social *injustice* that have become a new normal, even in developed nations, where such civil corruption was considered an exception punishable by law. It is therefore to the future of all our students, and to the freedom of thought and expression that education ideally provides, that we dedicate this volume. This coming struggle is simultaneously their burden and all of our hope for both another art world and a more egalitarian society.

—Gregory Sholette and Chloë Bass,  
Social Practice Queens,  
August 2017

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# **INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS**



# Where Who We Are Matters

## Through Art to Our More Social Selves

Chloë Bass (New York, New York)

### I. REALIZATION

Over the course of the fall 2016 semester, I began to see how little school works for, or fits into, the majority of my students' schedules. Students were late for or missed class consistently because of work, gaps in childcare, and health issues that seemed overly challenging for a college-age population. My students were not necessarily robust late teenagers and early twentysomethings for whom college is the most fun time in their lives. For them, college is an obligation alongside a string of other commitments and struggles. In this context, what is the use of a socially engaged art elective?

I've grown weary of and disinterested in the *art class is the only place for self-expression* narrative. Although I believe there's some validity in it, what I really want to know is whether teaching socially engaged art provides some ability to think critically about the interpersonal environments we find ourselves in. How can teaching differently, both in terms of subject matter and style, help us to live better outside the realm of art school? My students at Queens College are already fundamentally and inescapably in the world. To give them better tools for navigating that world, rather than simply the tools for succeeding at the business of school, feels essential. It might be different if I were a rogue activist, giving cold-water reality baths to students in the Ivory Tower. But I'm not.

In the same way that sculpture departments historically became the first place within art schools to explore interdisciplinary, time-based, or nontraditional creative fields, it is my hope that socially engaged programs can be the space where art impacts our actual lives: the exploding out of the university into the streets. We need to step beyond the rigorous and uninteresting *life-as-art* phenomenon. When I asked my students, after we visited the Mierle Laderman Ukeles retrospective at the Queens Museum, if they thought their jobs are art, the answer was, almost unanimously, no. This is not because they don't understand the question. It's because calling something

art contextualized their struggles as special—a Pollyannaish attitude that, for them, deeply missed the point. What they appreciated about Ukeles’s work was not that she allowed sanitation workers a moment of glory in a radically different context. They appreciated, instead, the time she took, how hard she worked, even for something they weren’t totally sure was art. They saw, in that commitment, something worthy of recognition.

My goal is to harness the power of my students’ everyday(s) and give them better ways to connect through and around that. My classroom is socially engaged because I am teaching people to be social. I use the relative safety of school to demonstrate the ways in which the world can go better if you bring your whole self to the table.

## II. ARRIVAL

In one of my recent classrooms (undergraduate students from various majors, ethnically “majority-minority,” and ranging in age from nineteen to thirty-one), it often took at least forty-five minutes for a good discussion to develop. There are a number of reasons for this: students are afraid of being wrong. They are, perhaps, more comfortable in, or familiar with, the type of classes where answers are concrete rather than interpretive. Fields of study with standardized textbooks and testing. Classrooms where power dynamics, both between the students and the teachers, and between different student groups, are more based on traditional forms of success: good grades, quick answers, extroversion. Outside of our time together, I learned that my students were not asked to be present. They were expected to be well behaved, and asked to be right. I was asking, instead, scarier and more honest questions like, “What do you see?”

The development of discussion as a practice required a very different set of behaviors that are perhaps more akin to team building than to school. The best days we had were not necessarily artistic. They were days when we argued for two hours about soccer as choreography, or shared stories about the impact of debt on our lives. Of their own volition, one group of students investigated the funding streams of our college, and why public universities in New York State are no longer free. Sharing the affective and intellectual labor of four hours between sixteen committed people made time pass quickly. We were socially engaged because we understood the value of our own lives. We wanted to know more about where we were because we cared about who we are.

Thirteen weeks into my first semester at Social Practice Queens, I asked my undergraduate students how the course was going for them. An outgoing, athletic business major raised his hand, and said to all of us, directly, “This is the only class I have where who I am as a person actually matters.”

### III. OUTCOMES

What does it mean to engage in intimate education? I believe intimacy offers possibilities for expansion. I tell my students—and in some ways, even force them to acknowledge—that they are each other’s primary resources because I will not always be there with them. I want them to know that the power we have in the room, even if each individual person feels quite small, usually gives us almost everything that we need to know. At the very worst, a strong knowledge of our group can reveal the essential gaps of who we need to invite to join us.

I have centered my own teaching, as well as my understanding for the potential of social practice as a field, around the following thought questions:

- What happens if we take the same care with our relationships as we invest in our practice?
- What happens if we take the same care with our practice that we demonstrate in our relationships?

As artists and educators, development of the practice and of the person are unavoidable: we do/make our work, and we also exist as people in a world with fundamental connections to other human beings. Yet somehow we most often address personhood only in the moment of critique (this produces its own negative side effects, for example: only discussing the racial lens when evaluating the work of students of color, rather than also interrogating normative Whiteness as providing its own specific aesthetics). I am interested in an evaluation of how personhood impact aspects of process, not just of product. How does the way that we are in the world affect the craft of how we do things?

I believe that lessons focusing on personal difference, background, preferences, belief, and modes of function have application at every level, and find it odd that they’re most likely to be implemented only during primary education. It’s as if our development of self as a fundamental tenet of our intellectual understanding stops at puberty. I refuse a world that so limits my ability to grow.

Centering on the sociality of social practice provides the space that we need to better understand ourselves and others. Whether the goal is harmony, antagonism, or any of the myriad outcomes that fall outside of those two somewhat unrealistic poles, the labor of self-discovery is worthy of both our time and our brainpower. This is work that asks us to interrogate *who we are* as an essential element of progress: intellectual, pragmatic, political, and aesthetic.

### IV. WORK

Lesson plans in this volume address many concepts related to social practice art, but also essential to navigating the world as a whole person. BFAMFAPhD

focuses on *support*: the other people, places, and practices we need in order to produce the kind of work that matters in the world. Fiona Whelan discusses *listening*: the relational skills required for social practitioners, and an acknowledgment of the deep time labor required for both learning and engaging in those relational practices productively. Gretchen Coombs and the Black School address *language*: from developing a better sense of our internal narratives (where else do we have space to understand rant, or obsession, as educationally productive?) to unpacking how we write about others. Brian Rosa and Dillon De Give explore *sharing*, and the undeniably social aspects of making a place together, whether by accident or intent.

In the excellent essay that follows, Mary Jane Jacob reminds us that art is always social. The lessons in this book, then, allow us to expand our sense of what that sociality means, how we engage it, and the best practices for its use. In a field that allows us to be our whole selves, we can embrace complexity, remain responsive, and continue to learn from our own mistakes as we work to repair the world.

# Pedagogy as Art

Mary Jane Jacob (Chicago, Illinois)

In this essay I take a look back to John Dewey as a complement to the practices envisioned in this book. Dewey's identity and ideas are built into this book's very title. Art: as a proponent of the transformative power of art, Dewey viewed the aesthetic experience as fundamental to cultivating and maintaining our very humanity. Social: at once a spokesperson for and critic of American democracy, Dewey participated in the cofounding of the American Civil Liberties Union (to name just one of scores of organizations he helped launch), for his support of the cause of social justice was as unbounded as it was lifelong. Action: as a philosopher for whom theory was meaningless if uncoupled from practical application, he acted upon his beliefs, while knowing that action needed to be guided by democratic principles. Thus, Dewey turned to education to build a democratic and just society, and it is in that arena that he is well remembered as the father of modern, progressive, and public education in America.

To Dewey, education is always socially engaged, an essential component of democracy, and the way democratic values are communicated. He knew this does not happen by rote allegiance or blind patriotism, but by living and practicing these principles as we make them a way of life. Importantly, an education that includes the arts, he realized, promotes critical thinking. It is the arts that can create among a wider population a discriminating mind—which he characterized as possessing “the habit of suspended judgment, of skepticism, of desire for evidence, of appeal to observation rather than sentiment, discussion rather than bias, inquiry rather than conventional idealizations.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 John Dewey, “Education as Politics,” in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Middle Works Volume 13: 1921-1922, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 335. First published in *The New Republic* (October 4, 1922): 141.

Therein he saw the potential to change society. He wrote: “When this happens, schools will be dangerous outposts of a humane civilization. But they will also begin to be supremely interesting places. For it will then come about that education and politics are one and the same thing, because politics will have to be in fact what it now pretends to be, the intelligent management of social affairs.”<sup>2</sup>

With socially engaged art practice, learning transfers from the classroom to the street and, with books like this one, back to the classroom so that it can do its work in the world. And here it is significant, and not just a turn of phrase, that Dewey also thought education was an art. All things done consciously and with care he dubbed so, but he added: “I believe that the art of thus giving shape to human powers and adapting them to social service, is the supreme art; one calling into its service the best of artists; that no insight, sympathy, tact, executive power, is too great for such service.”<sup>3</sup> Pedagogy is an art when it becomes a life’s work. Social practice, too, is that kind of holistic practice, not a style taken on, but a way of working that emerges from one’s life’s interests and needs, one’s observations and actions. There is a knowingness that it is not a method learned and then applied, but a way of being, always in motion, subject to change and reconsideration. Social practice demands a discriminating mind. And it gives rise to the same in others touched by this work.

On a personal note, I am a product of Dewey’s pedagogy, having come up through public schools in and around Queens at a time when art was well supported and seemed a human right. It was a foundational subject within a well-rounded curriculum. Over time I became cognizant of the origins and the real mission of those who fought for quality and equality in education. Dewey saw it this way: “Do we want to build up and strengthen a class division by means of schools for the masses that confine education to a few simple and mechanical skills, while the well-to-do send their children to schools where they get exactly the things that are branded as frills when they are given at public expense to the children of the masses?”<sup>4</sup> I thank Dewey for the “frills” that made all the difference in my public school education—like regular visits to museums—and the valuable lessons learned with intrinsic social values.

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2 John Dewey, *Ibid.*

3 John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Early Works Volume 5: 1895–1898, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 95. First published in *School Journal* LIV, (January 1897): 80.

4 Dewey, “Shall We Abolish School ‘Frills’? No,” 145. First published in *Rotarian* 42 (May 1933): 49.

Those elements enabled me to imagine a natural and necessary connection between art and social justice.

Decades later, when I walked away from working in museums seeking a more participatory engagement, I was propelled by a belief in the potential of art as experience, not out of some Deweyan read (that came later still), but out of my own experience shaped by those offered by the artists and audiences with whom I had shared my work. The question that lay at the threshold at that time was, could the transformative power of aesthetic experience be made available to those from the lesser ranks of society who cared and not just be reserved for individuals privileged by wealth, reputation, or art knowledge? It took full expression in a program in the early nineties called Culture in Action (a title suggested by one of the participating artists, Daniel J. Martinez, with an affinity to that of this volume), which brought together artists whose social interests aligned with the life issues of a segment of the public in order to undertake an invested, shared process focused on concerns vital to them both.

When values are held in common, could collective hope spark problem solving? And, if solutions did not proceed in linear fashion, might they unfold circuitously like life itself? But bafflement ensued. As funders sought demonstrable outcomes and replicable models, I relied on organic processes. While making positive change was posited, likewise was whether art mattered in everyday experience. But critics worried about where the art was. Dewey had his answer: *in the experience*. His understanding of art as lived experience—embodied so that it becomes part of our own being—allows us to appreciate just what social practice works do. Like all art for Dewey, they allow us to breathe in life's experiences fully, making meaning for ourselves and gaining a deeper sense of the consequences of our actions on others and on the planet. Then, breathing out, to act more consciously in the world.

To Dewey art is always social. "In it a body of matters and meanings, not in themselves aesthetic, *become* aesthetic as they enter into an ordered rhythmic movement toward communication. The material of aesthetic experience is widely human . . . [and] in being human . . . is social," he wrote.<sup>5</sup> So art is a likely medium for pressing the case of justice that itself defines and defends human relations, while it strikes at the core of Dewey's definition of democracy. "The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy," was how the philosopher put it. And if democracy is grounded in beloved democratic principles of equality and fairness, then diversity must also be valued and tolerance advocated. Moreover, if we are privileged to possess liberty as well as pursue happiness, then

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5 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 339.

Dewey knew we must understand that freedom is a collective and not just an individual right.

While we think and feel these times as exceptional (“unprecedented” is a word that crops up daily these days in regard to the Trump administration), it might be prudent to remember that Dewey saw and felt the tides of vast cultural change and upheaval, as he was on this earth from before the American Civil War to after World War II. And as this nation contended with a changed world, all the while Dewey stayed the course. He helped move it from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, never forgetting that what we make is not whole cloth but accrues onto the social intelligence we have inherited. On one occasion, looking back, he recalled Thomas Jefferson’s concept of democracy as a great “practical experiment,”<sup>6</sup> understanding that the social justices it claims are not accomplished once and for all but must be continually renewed, for democracy is never done. It is a process in which we all participate.

Social practice projects prime that process. Thus, we can be grateful for the past three decades of assertive and committed community-based, new genre public art, dialogic, and other-named practical experiments by artists that have readied us for the challenges we face today. These works are part of an even longer lineage that has brought us to a place where pedagogy can be written and offered as a road map for the future. In addition, I’d suggest reading Dewey, too.

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6 John Dewey, “Presenting Thomas Jefferson,” in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Later Works Volume 14: 1939–1941, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 213. First published in *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), 15.

LESSON PLANS I

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**ART AS SOCIAL RESEARCH /  
LISTENING / SELF-CARE**



# Transactions, Roles, and Research

Marilyn Lennon, Julie Griffiths,  
and Maeve Collins (Limerick, Ireland)

## **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

In this module ten visiting lecturers from different disciplines are invited to the Masters in Art and Design, Social Practice, and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE) at the Limerick Institute of Technology. Once the assignment (below) is handed out, the entire postgraduate group thoroughly questions, and reflects upon the scope of their response.

## **THE ASSIGNMENT**

Each week a guest speaker delivers a one-hour lecture about their current work, a topic of interest, their research field, modes of research, or elements of their field of practice. But the visiting lecturer is not typically a visual arts specialist. The following week students create three-element collaborative responses to the lecture, academic, practical, and reflective, working in pairs to develop a research focus related to the content of the lecture or inspired by the topic presented. Each pair has a three-hour time slot to present their response.

## **ELEMENTS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE RESPONSES**

### **1. Academic**

Students prepare a fifteen-minute presentation tracking their research paths. Remembering that everyone has attended the visiting lecturer's talk, they must use this event as a point of departure. They should perform research on the lecturer's topic showing a clear line of inquiry that develops their own particular focus. They should also research artistic, contextual, and historic practices informing the participatory activity or workshop they propose and include an academic paper, piece of writing, or article relevant to the lecturer's influence and student response.

## 2. Practical

The Creative Turn: pairs create practical, active, or artistic responses that engage their fellow program members in participatory activities or workshops to experiment, reflect upon, critique, or explore the lecture topic.

## 3. Documentation and Reflection

Each team member documents their own response, while those attending gather all materials presented for printing and storing in a folder. For assessment, postgraduates must also present a reflective diary specifically for the module.

### ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

#### Visiting Lecturer: Dr. Pauline Conroy

Dr. Pauline Conroy researches and publishes on social policy related to gender, equality, and the labor market within the Council of Europe, the International Labor Organization, and the European Commission. Her lecture examined Countess Markievicz, a seminal nineteenth-century Irish artist and politician, who was also a revolutionary nationalist, a suffragette, and a socialist.<sup>1</sup>

#### Reading and Action

In his paper “Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thoughts,” Steven Connor presents a nonlinear view of time in which chronologically distant moments can speak to each other. Connor compares time to the folding of dough, an image that became an *action* element in our response. We invited participants to engage in the act of bread making as a way of thinking with the hands while listening to the content of the text. This offered a way to think about historical figures and events across time in a new and dynamic way, introducing history as present and relevant, rather than distant and one dimensional.

#### Testimony of Julie and Maeve, Students and Participants in the Experience

“As respondents, we were particularly interested in the duality of Countess Markievicz’s role as both an artist and a politician.” Julie and Maeve responded to the lecture and reading as follows.

#### RESEARCH

We researched Markievicz’s biography as a student in London and Paris, but focused on her political engagement in Ireland, including the 1916 Irish Easter

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1 A shortened version of Dr. Conroy’s talk is available at the Countess Markievicz School website, see <http://vimeo.com/66601118>.



Preparing dough.



Participants knead as Julie reads.

Rising with the Irish Citizen Army, and her political life in the first Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann, to become the first female cabinet minister elected in Europe. We asked how Markievicz might position herself if she were alive today, believing she has much to offer artists, women, and politics in contemporary **SOC**ety. **Employing Connor's idea that unlikely adjacencies emerge for discussion in folded time structures.** Later, we selected several politically and socially motivated artist practitioners to present in the workshop.

We selected several examples. The Kurdish Women's Movement and Kurdistan Women's Liberation Movement for a Universal Women's Struggle, organizations where women's freedom is key to solving many problems. Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International, an artist-initiated sociopolitical organizing practice. Pussy Riot's use of social media as a tool to rebrand Russian President Putin in public; Birgitta Jónsdóttir, the poet, activist, and former Member of the Althing (parliament) of Reykjavík, Iceland; and Jonas Staal's New World Summit, involving artist-created new states that we felt paralleled the political imagination of the 1916 revolution that Markievicz played a vital role within.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

We placed materials in the room prior to the workshop (bowls, flour, water, yeast, salt, oil, etc.). Participants were given a recipe and invited to weigh out their own ingredients. They were also provided with a copy of the text extract and a glossary of terms.

We introduced the subject, the questions, and the elements that would be guiding the workshop. Next, we invited participants to make dough (mixing,

handling, and kneading), while we simultaneously all read Connor's paper "Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought."

While the dough was rising we presented our research and our selection of contemporary social art practices. In turn, we addressed specific sections from the "Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought" text, in relation to the life of Countess Markievicz, to the work of contemporary practitioners, and to how art practice contributes to different sociopolitical debates. This presentation also provided a backdrop to group discussion, which we guided with questions such as "Who would Countess Markievicz be today?" "Does the artist need something to resist against?" and "Can art liberate democracy from the state?"

### **THE DISCUSSION**

We discussed art practitioners who propose the creation of new states and contemporary artists working as advisers in government administration. We debated how dialogical processes involved in art can agitate, imagine, and propose alternative democracies. We discussed the contribution of women in culture and politics, now and historically. We reflected on the impact of actions by those with a privileged social position versus the risks undertaken by contemporary artists.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION / EVALUATION PROCESS**

Part of our discussion regarding this assignment concerned the practical steps required to run a workshop: preparing clear goals, defining intentions and roles for the responding team members, allocating responsibilities during the workshop, rehearsing material, and so forth. We debated how to prepare an introduction for participants, how to manage time and expectations, and how to plan for clear instruction, goals, and desired outcomes.

We allocated time for group feedback that focused on the structure of responses and their practical application, on the participant experience, understanding instructions, and contributing to the concepts and ideas in use.

Responses to this assignment were diverse. Reflecting very briefly, Julie and Maeve's response aligned action and text very closely. They found a way to make written theory accessible through embodiment, while drawing historical political and contemporary art practitioners together to discuss social art practice. The action of making the dough as a metaphor for folding time proved very effective: as we kneaded we could see the striations of dough layering and stacking in the material. Julie read aloud from the text, "In the folding and refolding dough of history, what matters is not the spreading out of points of time in a temporal continuum, but the contractions and attenuations that

ceaselessly disperse neighboring points and bring far distant points into proximity with one another.”

Assessment criteria for this module have three core parts: *Collaboration*, *Participation*, and *Reflection*. At the end of the module all postgraduates present a folder where they track, collate, and document their own involvement, research, and contributions throughout the time frame of the module. For the assessment, participants present this folder and a reflective diary documenting their personal reflections on learning, both as respondents and participants across the full module.

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# Luxury to Low-End Link

## An Economic Inequity Experiment for the Age of Brand Temples

Noah Fischer (New York, New York)

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

This multistage, hands-on art investigation aims to facilitate direct encounters with the complexities of economic inequity. The project revolves around two sites: a luxury or ultraluxury retail store, and a store that sells similar but much cheaper products. Students work in groups to engage a process of observation, interview, and design that investigates how class division is built into retail experience, while reflecting on their relationship to this picture. The assignment concludes by attempting to create a social link between retail sites across opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. Here is one description of luxury buying as a class separator:

Mass brands define groups or segments of consumers and push products towards them. For luxury brands the roles are reversed: consumers are pulled towards the brand with the promise of belonging to the exclusive community. . . . In addition to using pricing or distribution to naturally segment customers, luxury brands create other artificial barriers or initiation rituals to select which consumers gain admittance.<sup>1</sup>

*Luxury Low-End Link* reimagines these “artificial barriers” and casts the design process as a potential tool for investigating over them, beginning with a personal interaction. The key themes for this lesson plan include mapping cities, contrasting the economic and social realities they contain, observing how the presentation and display of retail products shapes notions of luxury and authen-

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1 Vadim Grigorian and Francine Espinoza Petersen, “Designing Luxury Experience,” *The European Business Review* (May 21, 2014), <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/designing-luxury-experience/>.

ticity that are central to both retail and fine art, and problematizes our contemporary notions of citizenship in hypercapitalist nations and cities centered on consumers, while decentering labor and targeting immigrants and other precarious populations. Engaging with design means imagining alternative social and economic pathways at a small but practical scale.

#### **ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

We began with a common definition of terms. Students brought five images to class that they thought defined high-end and low-end products. Pinning these to a wall, we initiated a group discussion about the larger economic picture of the city seen through the lens of consumption. On a large map, we collectively plotted out zones of contrasting economic realities, supplementing gaps in knowledge with research. Breaking into groups, students reflected on their journals by writing about their personal economic reality in relation to shopping, which kinds of stores they felt more comfortable in, where they and/or their family could afford shopping, and so on. In preparation for fieldwork, the class divided into teams of three to five as each group member took on a role: visual documenter, note taker, interviewer, map maker, and so on. Locations were instructor assigned or chosen by students, time and knowledge permitting. Finally, students prepared participatory action research interview questions.<sup>2</sup>

Later, we visited both zones. On the first site visit, instructors demonstrated techniques of observation, respectfully taking pictures in public, conducting short interviews with strangers, and so on. Students then split up into smaller groups, visiting specific stores and retail sites. If wristwatches were the focus of product research, then locations in New York would be discount venues on Canal Street in Manhattan or Fulton Street in Brooklyn versus luxury shops on Fifth Avenue. Paying attention to contrasts in store design, students noticed that some stores hang watches in tight clumps, while high-end shop displays use eloquent minimalist cases. They also noticed contrasts in surveillance systems and the approach used by salespeople. Where do the workers and shoppers come from in each store? At which location do students feel more comfortable and why?

After that, students picked locations to speak with workers and shoppers, finding people willing to become short-term *partners* in the project and meet

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2 Mary Brydon-Miller, Davydd Greenwood, and Patricia Maguire, "Why Action Research?" *Action Research* 9, no. 1 (2003): 9–28, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/14767503030011002>.

students again on a second site visit. Students drew sketches, took notes, and made photographs and audio recordings.

After these initial steps research was refined. Observations processed in class discussion, store designs compared to demographics, technological and social systems used to attract some customers and repel others.

Groups were given a week to create a redesign proposal for each store—or to display an element within a store—in which embedded “invisible barriers” were broken down. They were then asked to merge elements from both stores at opposite ends of the spectrum.

After this stage, groups revisited stores on their own, showing their redesigns to their *on-site partners*, and asked for feedback using printouts for marking up. They also informed *partners* they were creating redesigns for a store on the opposite economic end of the retail spectrum, showing these plans as well.

Taking this feedback into account, students finished their redesign modeling using a variety of media depending on their skill set. On their final site visit they brought copies of their collaborative design as gifts to their partners, discussed process with them, and showed how elements of the other store design was incorporated into the model in order to break down social barriers pre-designed into store architecture.

In our final class discussion, the entire class broke out in new groups, sharing successes, challenges, and discoveries, and considered how their work could be further developed.

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## IMAGES



Surveillance footage in luxury retail.



Protest against race/class profiling at Barneys, New York City, in 2014.



Student research sketches of store layout with contrast lists.



First-year display model.



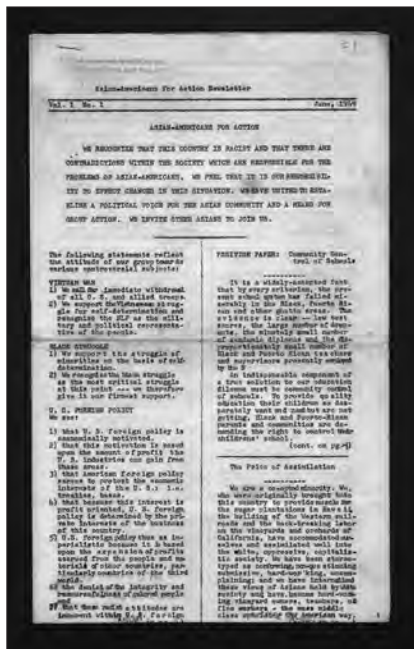
Detail.

# Activating the Archive

Ryan Lee Wong (New York, New York)

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Before *Asian American* was used on census forms and in newspapers, it was a radical, intentional identity. In 1968, students in the Third World strikes at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley dropped the problematic *oriental* for this new term. *Asian American*. It caught on quickly, and over the next de-



Gathering materials, such as this newsletter published by the group Asian Americans for Action in 1969, with the group's mission statement at the top, and the back of *Getting Together*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1970), a newspaper published by the radical group I Work Kuen.

cade, an outburst of radical groups, arts collectives, service centers, and political struggles defined what we now call the Asian American Movement. This history is very rarely taught. It is illegible to media outlets and historians who insist on the narrative of Asian America as assimilative and apolitical. Through archiving and exhibiting these radical Asian American movements, we discover evidence of the intense political struggles that formed this identity.

With the help of Josh MacPhee and several other artists, I organized the exhibition *Serve the People: The Asian American Movement in New York* at Interference Archive, a space dedicated to circulating and preserving social movement culture. It was the ideal home for newspapers, flyers, buttons, photographs, and posters generated by the Asian American Movement. Interference Archive is itself modeled after such movements: a visit there does not require white gloves or an appointment, objects are meant to be looked at and handled (their motto is “preservation through usage”), and the space is run collectively by volunteers.

Movements are shaped by interpersonal relations, direct actions, and culture. Of these, culture is often the most enduring primary document. Whether intentional artworks or ephemera produced to circulate a message, cultural objects allow us a window into the world of a social movement that are in turn fertile generators of new cultural forms and paradigms.

In order to properly unpack the rich, varied, creative, and sometimes contentious history of the Asian American Movement, we used the objects themselves as a basis for public programming. The following related teaching assignment is adaptable for classrooms or as public programming. This exercise can also be applied to other political histories besides the Asian American Movement; however, facilitators must possess knowledge of the movement and access to relevant archival objects.

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

Begin with an introduction to the movement, such as the following:

“Asian American” was coined around 1968 during a Third World student strike, and developed over a long decade of art, community work, struggle, and study. The Asian American Movement was, in fact, many movements: fighting displacement, serving their communities, agitating for revolution, and analyzing the intersections of gender, race, and class. The movement was one of the first times Asian Americans collectively produced their own culture—literary, visual, and musical—infusing it with their newfound politics.

Hand each participant an object produced during the movement, and ask them to read or study it, paying attention to certain questions: “Who made this object?” “Who was the audience?” “What are its concerns, political, aesthetic, social?” “What part of it resonates or disagrees with you?” Questions specific to the Asian American Movement might include, “How is this understanding of Asian America different from or linked to the present moment?” “How does this movement tie into other movements of the day, for example the anti-war movement, Black liberation, feminism, and so on?”

Have each participant present the object to the group. If it is a word document read part of it aloud. If a visual work, hold it up and describe what you see. Ask participants to share their responses to the study questions. When appropriate, offer historical context or ask follow-up questions, but note: while some historical context is helpful, the main goal here is to generate critical responses from each participant, rather than the facilitator delivering a lecture.

End with a full group discussion on which pieces stood out, what responses people had to the objects and their politics, and what strategies and struggles from those movements might apply to political movements today.

#### ORGANIZING THE MATERIAL

I studied the Asian American Movement through several books (Daryl Maeda’s *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* is a great primer) and by conducting a series of oral histories with people active in the movement. Those conversations allowed me a vital insight into the lived experiences and goals of those activists.

In preparation for the assignment, I identified and gathered several pieces representing a range of political and cultural concerns from the movement, including a personal essay about being raised in a Japanese American internment camp in *Bridge* magazine, a manifesto from the revolutionary group I Wor Kuen (modeled after the Black Panthers’ Ten-Point Program), and a poem on gender and internalized racism from the artist book *Yellow Pearl*.



A view of the audience at Interference Archive, surrounded by objects from the Asian American Movement.

These objects are accessible at Interference Archive, Museum of Chinese in America, the Kearny Street Workshop archives online at CEMA

at UCSB, and the Rocky Chin Collection at NYU's Fales Library, among other places. The books *Legacy to Liberation*, edited by Fred Ho, and *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, edited by Steve Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu, also compile manifestos, poetry, and ephemera from the Asian American Movement.

### OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

I have found that participants are excited to come into contact with these materials—for many it will be the first time engaging with historical movement materials, and the first time encountering radical Asian American history.

Particularly for Asian Americans, the exercise can be very powerful. When I ran this exercise at an Asian American student conference, one Japanese American student was assigned to a group that read the personal essay on internment. Though his family had survived the camps, it was among the first such reflections that he had read, and he was deeply moved by it. He wanted to find more literature on that experience.

At another conference, I worked with a group of mostly Black high school students who responded strongly to a comparison between the manifestos of I Wor Kuen, the Black Panthers, and the Young Lords (a Puerto Rican revolutionary group in New York and Chicago). The conference was in part a response to Black Lives Matter, and the students were excited by the idea of militants of color actively taking on police brutality, poverty, and racial injustice.

Sometimes, the assignment brings up critical responses. At one workshop, I presented a flyer circulated by the mainstream anti-war movement in the 1970s. The war in Vietnam was a major politicization moment for young Asian Americans, who saw how little regard the government had for Asian lives. One participant, whose parents were refugees from Vietnam, noted that the flyer was full of romanticized portrayals of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh, as well as factual errors (e.g., it stated that Vietnam had been a unified country for thousands of years). She questioned who the flyer was for, and why the piece lacked nuance. Moments like this are equally generative, as they allow us to think critically about the blind spots within social movements.

With this assignment I wanted participants first to develop a deeper understanding of this particular movement's political and artistic strategies; second, to seek out their own radical histories; and, third, to connect those histories with contemporary movement organizing. I have found that whether or not participants had a direct connection to the Asian American Movement (the vast majority do not) the urgency and materiality of objects spark associations. For some, the lens of racial justice brings something to the surface;

for others, it is the idea of arts collectives, or radical politics, or reconnecting with history, or intersectional identities. And while my particular focus is Asian American radical politics from the 1960s through the 1980s, a similar lesson plan could be adapted to any number of movements and struggles.

Archives are living bodies that grow and contract in response to the times, and the archives of social movements offer proof of histories that have been erased or silenced through political shifts and narrowed historical writing. Each of us, whether or not we identify as artists or activists, has some connection to the hopes driving social movement culture that can remake our identities and societies by coming together with intention. Breathing life into the movement archive is itself a radical act.



Adapting the exercise as a public program in 2014. We asked individuals to read work from the movement alongside contemporary pieces, and invited the public to listen. Here, poet Luis Francia reads his own work at Interference Archive.

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# What Will Your Work Organize?

Ashley Hunt (Los Angeles, California)

This assignment was developed with students at Cal Arts (Los Angeles) in 2012, in a course that set out to bridge students' individual studio practices through a social practice discourse, while reflecting critically about that discourse. What are the purposes of distinguishing art called "social practice" from other art-making practices? For what does it open new space? How does it reflect upon, affect, or bring to light existing notions of art making and practice? If in political philosophy social practice is the action of world making, why attach that to one form or genre of art production over another? We began by taking apart conventional, disciplinary limits that constrict the social practices of contemporary Western art in general: the individuation of authorship; the separation of audience from the object of the work; sites of production and reception limited to the studio and gallery; subject matter, materials, and purposes of art limited to those already sanctioned as related to art.

The goal of this assignment was not to enlist students in a specific project, a manner of working, nor a particular social engagement, but to stage a *seed bomb* of an event that could inspire multiple interests, issues, and desires. I aimed to broaden students' understanding of *the social* so they could recognize it coursing through their work and world already, and so they could push beyond the limited socialities that Western art conventions so often prescribe. This was especially important because the students, as students, experience themselves inscribed into those limitations.

We chose to focus on the Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area in Van Nuys, California, an area defined by a flood control basin. The basin receives surrounding flood channels, also known as the Los Angeles River. It filters them through a water reclamation plant and leads into the iconic Sepulveda Dam. The basin features protected natural areas and developed park areas, including golf courses, cricket fields, artificial lakes, an archery range, a model aircraft field, a Japanese Garden, and an armory. The users of these areas include

picnickers, exercisers, and bird-watchers, as well as workers on lunch breaks, school skippers smoking weed, houseless people finding temporary homes, couples cheating on spouses, men cruising for encounters, participants of weddings, *quinceañeras*, and even an occasional afternoon rave.

The space is shaped discursively by signs announcing what can and cannot be done there, who can be there, where human and nonhuman animals cannot go, and didactic displays about flood control. Other signs warn of plainclothes police patrolling against lewd acts. But the least visible yet most defining aspect of the area are the abandoned US Army and Air National Guard bases made up of fossilized bunkers and Cold War nuclear missile silos below.

#### THE STEPS WE TOOK:

1. With each person bringing things for a picnic, we met at an entrance to the Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area. From there, we would commence the route of a *silent walk* between the natural and urban parts of the area, arriving at the dam.
2. The point of the walk was observation: sensing, moving and listening, exercising an awareness of and *reading* the many ways things are touched, built, used, and left by people along the way. No talking, no photographing.
3. We began by asking the participants to close their eyes as someone read aloud Bertolt Brecht's poem "A Worker Reads History." The poem recalls the workers whose hands and lives are forgotten, written out of history's monuments and narratives. When finished, we started walking in silence.
4. Arriving at the base of the dam, we set up our picnic. We reflected on the experience of the walk, cataloging the social things we observed along the way: traces and marks, social gestures, architectures, and the ad hoc making of space, things that choreograph, enable, restrict, surveil or police social life. What forms of social organization and collectivity does the space encourage through its physical and discursive structuring? For or among whom? What forms does it seem to discourage, and for or among whom? Finally, we considered the registers of the social found throughout the day's activity: the socialities that we observed, encountered, or read in signs; those we as a group formed through our interactions; and, after the day, those that could be called into being through the discursive practice we initiated.
5. Following our day together, we charted out the major themes and points of interest that emerged. We formed working groups and

used these themes and points of interest as starting points for research and a public project.

6. We considered the following questionnaire:
  - a. What aspect of the world is *organized* within your project?
  - b. How does this organization resemble or differ from that aspect of the world's *typical organization*?
  - c. What *social forms* do your work's contents or strategies employ or refer to?
  - d. What aspects of time, rhythm, and pattern does your project organize?
  - e. What aspects of space, its choreography and utilization, does it organize, produce or interrupt?
  - f. What does this project make *visible* or *invisible*?
  - g. What will the role of *other people* be in the project? (Participants, viewers, audience, coauthors, a public, counter public, conversationalists, interpreters, witnesses, actors.)
  - h. In a–g, what is the role of composition, perception, authorship, audience, ethics and social relation, collective experience, activity or meaning, and of private, individual understanding?
  - i. How might the work's presentation, reception, and interpretation loop back onto and shape its meaning?

## OUTCOMES

The outcomes of this assignment included four separate projects. The first project was *Waiting for the Drone*, led by Rosalyn Cohen, Emma Iocavozzi, Vidisha Saini, and Katrin Winkler. It consisted of a public tour that reenacted our initial walk with an invited public and recounted what took place on the walk. Organizers hoped this reenactment would conjure the appearance of the same drone aircraft that had *greeted* us, unsettlingly, during our picnic at the dam, watching us for fifteen minutes. Although the drone did not come, we took photographs with the cast of a student zombie film that was being shot there. The second project, *What You Bring to the Table*, was led by Christopher Hahn, Natalie Hon, Nebras Hoveizavi, and Taylor Lovio. In this dinner party/happening, guests were invited to bring a dish that captured their family's migration or other aspects of their history. Recipes were solicited in advance and published into a zine for guests to take away. The third project, *Why Make a Labyrinth When Life is Already a Maze?*, was designed by Heather M. O'Brien, Ho Yan Pun, and Kevin Smith. These artists carried out an architectural intervention at Cal Arts, hanging a curtain in the doorway of the most commonly used classroom at the school. This space holds weekly visiting artist lectures and thus could be argued

to be where the definitions and criteria of art are most solidified and contested within the school. On the wall adjacent to the doorway, they placed a vinyl text that read, “We feel every participant who uses this curtain to enter or leave to be a coauthor,” highlighting the collaborative and mutual character of our educational experience. The fourth project was *Signs: Tools of Solidarity and Expression*, by Yaron Guerrero, Adriana Baltazar, Nicholas Johnston, Andres Payan, and Weng San Sit. This group organized a sign-making workshop on a Saturday morning in MacArthur Park, east of downtown Los Angeles, and a site of recent anti-immigrant police violence and protest. Students offered blank protest signs, mark-making tools, and any assistance wanted to park visitors throughout the morning, inviting them to write whatever they had to say. Signs were then staked into the grass, forming an accumulative chorus of statements. Finally, we compiled alternate iterations of each project into an artist book, which included a booklet and ephemera from each project. Held together in a silk-screened box and titled *Episodes of Shared Purpose*, it gave the works a life beyond their initial enactment. Rather than merely documenting the project, the box was a new artwork, and onto it was written the words, “We consider every person who opens this box to be a coauthor.”

### REFLECTION

We held multiple discussions about how our work together would fold back into our practices outside the class, discussing whether they would remain individual practices only, and what other social practices of world making we now saw our work being in relation to. Instead of asking “Is this work *social practice*?” we found ourselves asking “What social practice is our work a part of, or will it be committed to?” Or put in Walter Benjamin’s terms: *What will your work organize?*

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IMAGES



Participants arriving for *Waiting for the Drone*.



Child with sign, from *Signs: Tools of Solidarity and Expression*.



Silk-screened box made for *Episodes of Shared Purpose*.



“Chorus of signs” in MacArthur Park, from *Signs: Tools of Solidarity and Expression*.



A conversation map from the first day of class, charting participants' interests and questions.

# *The Listening Workshop*

## A Two-Hour Relational Encounter That Exposes the Politics of Voice and Listening

Fiona Whelan (Dublin, Ireland)

### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

For many practitioners engaging in collaborative and socially engaged art practices means a lot of time spent sitting with others negotiating highly complex issues. This is how I spend my time as an artist, along with teaching intersubjective awareness and relational skills, together forming my practice as an artist educator. *The listening workshop* is a two-hour, self-contained educational space that immediately brings to the surface some of the complexities emerging in the intersubjective spaces of relational practice. Positioning participants both as individuals and as members of a group, the workshop highlights important components of meaningful engagement, including trust, risk, group dynamic, attention to power relationships, self-reflexivity, and facilitation skills, while bringing to the fore the politics of voice and listening. To date, I have led the workshop six times, in three different European countries, as a formal workshop with postgraduate students in different institutions and as a conference breakout option with professional practitioners.

### **ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

Ten to fifteen chairs were arranged in a circle within a private room. In front of each chair is a page with an anonymous personal story on it (I used stories from previous projects that I have sought permission for, but stories could also be taken from the Internet, literature, etc.) Entering the room people are asked to take a seat and wait for others. Once everyone is seated, participants are asked to silently read the story in front them (figure 1). Each person is then given an identical pen and piece of paper and invited to find a space in the room to spend fifteen minutes writing about a moment in their life when they experienced feelings of power or powerlessness. The facilitator also participates in the exercise (figure 2). After fifteen minutes passes the circle reforms and participants are asked to place their stories face down in front of them (figure 3).

I facilitate a conversation asking, “How did it feel to write down a story just now?” It is important people not reference the content of the story, but only speak about the experience of writing. We discuss people’s responses, moving through a range of themes and issues leading to the second question: “What should we do with the stories?” The group negotiates a decision around the fate of the collection of pages in front of them, and once a decision is reached, I pose a final question: “How are you feeling now in relation to what we have just done together?”



Illustration by Orla Whelan.



Illustration by Orla Whelan.

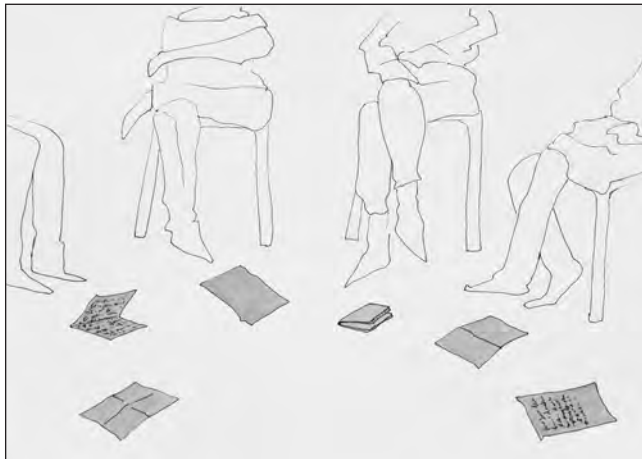


Illustration by Orla Whelan.

**DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

In each case the workshop has unfolded differently, influenced by many significant components of a relational experience. Firstly, the specific cultural context sets the scene through its own complexities related to class, gender, and race relations, as well as levels of comfort and association with acts of storytelling. Another significant contributing factor is the setting and the relationship between individuals in the workshop, including the facilitator. The facilitation style is also a major contributing factor to the workshop. Despite the multiple differences in the six workshops to date, in every case two core discussions emerged. With respect to the privacy of all those who have participated, I will speak generally in my descriptions.

**STORYTELLING AS INTERSUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE**

When asked how it feels to have written down their stories, workshop participants typically reflect how they were influenced by the stories they read at the start. Some describe feeling brave, their own writing inspired by the risk that the previous writer may have taken in sharing his or her story. Others describe feelings of privilege elicited through reading another's struggle, causing them to edit how they write their own specific lived experiences. Participants also describe the influence of others in the workshop, some speaking of how they censored their writing in anticipation of it being read by another. Oftentimes people allude to a mistrust of the space, opting to write a *safe* story, while others share how they disclosed something deeply personal. This first part of the conversation highlights the intersubjective nature of storytelling, and the power relations in the room are identified and in some cases amplified.

There is no simple cue to judge the appropriate time to pose the second question. On some occasions, participants have moved through the first part of the conversation quickly. In such instances, by way of leading to the next question, I would generally refer back to particular responses and stimulate a specific discussion to draw out issues and tensions in what has been said. Other times, an interesting rapport has developed, and the conversation naturally results in a participant posing the question about the fate of the written stories. It is essential at all times to listen and observe the verbal and nonverbal communication in the group and not to overly identify with any position being stated. Finding a healthy balance between the agency of the participants and one's responsibility as the convener of the workshop becomes the facilitator's task.

### VOICE AND LISTENING AS INTERDEPENDENT ACTS

When asked what we should do with the stories, there are usually people present who feel motivated to have a group sharing, which draws reactions from others who are less inclined, highlighting potential risks in being exposed or perceived differently. Often, someone suggests that if the full group were to engage in a collective reading, everyone would be taking a shared risk. However, upon revisiting the conversation regarding the different levels of risk taken when approaching the task, the potential act of sharing the stories as a group is often declared not to be an equal one. Anonymity is typically proposed as a mechanism to protect people. Pages can be swapped around, each page looking the same—to which I would usually point out the differences I have observed

as some people have folded their page or scribbled on the back, in addition to subject position being potentially identifiable in the story's content. As the conversation on *voice* dominates for a while, as people consider the fate of their own individual stories, there is a shift (sometimes naturally, sometimes introduced by me) to its counterpart, *listening*. I recall in one workshop a man was standing up in frustration with the labored conversation and declaring that he had no concerns and was happy to read his story. Just as he took his breath to begin, a woman on the opposite side of the circle intervened asking, "But what if I don't want to hear it?" (figure 4). A vibrant conversation ensued, examining the burden and responsibility attached to the act of listening. In many workshops, it is during the conversation on listening that previously enthusiastic participants begin to reconsider the act of a group sharing, recognizing their position as a listener as well as a speaker. The final part of the conversation, in response to the third question, typically includes individuals imagining single acts that they will engage in with their stories when they leave—burning them, rewriting them, developing them into a piece of work, posting them to someone, and so on.



Illustration by Orla Whelan.

As the conversation on listening that previously enthusiastic participants begin to reconsider the act of a group sharing, recognizing their position as a listener as well as a speaker. The final part of the conversation, in response to the third question, typically includes individuals imagining single acts that they will engage in with their stories when they leave—burning them, rewriting them, developing them into a piece of work, posting them to someone, and so on.

### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

In all iterations of *the listening workshop* to date, the stories have not been shared with the group. Instead, a decision emerged from the conversation: that each

would take their own story and decide its individual fate (figure 5). It is important this conclusion has occurred in the presence of the stories as the intensity is fueled by the consideration of them being spoken aloud. As a facilitator, that tension is heightened by the responsibility to take the participants on a journey for two hours and close the session at the end.



Illustration by Orla Whelan.

The potential learning from *the listening workshop* is multilayered for participants and facilitator. In many cases, participants described how the exercise led to a heightened awareness of their personality, their comfort (or lack of) with emotional and conflictual spaces, their level of interest or disinterest in practices of negotiation and their personal power and influence in a group context. Further learning is available as one reflects upon the structure and detail of the workshop and facilitation, the ethical challenges it unearths, and the time that would be needed to generate a meaningful collective experience. All of this can influence people as they identify themselves as artists, educators, and researchers involved in complex processes.

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#### CREDITS

Illustrations by Orla Whelan (<http://www.whaledust.com>).

# Social Practice Studio

Katie Bachler and Scott Berzofsky (Baltimore, Maryland)

This lesson plan is from Social Practice Studio, a course that was cotaught by Katie Bachler and Scott Berzofsky in the Interdisciplinary Sculpture Department at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore in the fall of 2014 and 2015.

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Students were asked to perform an act of self-care, based on the understanding that in order to sustain our work as socially engaged artists and activists, we must develop ongoing practices of self-care. The assignment was simple: “Make something for yourself, to nourish yourself. This can take the form of an object, ritual, or performance to share in class.”

We drew inspiration from a quote by Audre Lorde, who wrote: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” For homework, students were given two readings to provide a political and theoretical context for understanding self-care: bell hooks’s “Homeplace (a site of resistance)”<sup>1</sup> and Sandor Katz’s introduction to *Wild Fermentation* (2003).<sup>2</sup>

## THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

The following week we attended a fermentation workshop with Sandor Katz hosted by Hex Ferments at Whitelock Community Farm in West Baltimore. The students participated in a collective sauerkraut-making activity, massaging

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- 1 bell hooks, “Homeplace (a site of resistance),” in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).
  - 2 Sandor Katz, “Cultural Context: The Making of a Fermentation Fetish,” in *Wild Fermentation* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2003), 1–4.

cabbage together in large metal bowls while Sandor walked around sprinkling salt into the mixtures. Sandor spoke about how the practice of making and eating fermented foods has been central to his own healing process as a long-term HIV/AIDS survivor.

Back in the classroom, we discussed bell hooks's "Homeplace (a site of resistance)," which describes how African American women have traditionally resisted white supremacy by constructing homeplace as a site of renewal, self-recovery, and healing. Under the oppressive conditions of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the home becomes a safe space to nurture the self and build communities of resistance. This notion informed many responses to the assignment, in which students took their own domestic life practices as a point of departure.

We used the remaining class time to meet individually with each participant to discuss their ideas for the project. Students were given three weeks to complete the assignment, which would be presented in class.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

Following are descriptions of some of the projects.

- Lyda mended old pieces of clothing brought in by other participants, as an act of self-care, embellishing the ripped places with her sewing techniques.
- Tori made a video of a performance/ritual in which she burned the rope that a housemate had used to commit suicide the previous year.
- Hana created a platform in her studio to rest and read, a place both a part of and separate from the surrounding studios, connected to another need, to rest, and to curl.
- Anuj gave himself a massage.
- John built a lamp for reading in his bedroom.
- Olwyn sewed secret pockets into the inside of her jacket with words of inspiration on them.
- Stephanie made a playlist of music for self-care.
- Kiki did a burlesque performance as an act of self-expression and empowerment.
- Will built a new stool for his kitchen, which he used in everyday life to make a space for sitting and eating where there had been none.
- Joey created a wobbly chair, problematizing the idea of purely utilitarian objects, as a chair can be tender and shaky. This project was a reminder that art is often a way to heal, creating objects/

realities that dominant society does not provide; perhaps all art is self-care in some way.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS**

As a result of this lesson, students began to think about how self-care could be incorporated into our weekly meetings, expressing a common desire to cook dinner together. The class took place on Monday nights from four to ten (a six-hour studio), and students would typically break for dinner at six. Participants talked about being tired of eating alone in the cafeteria, or having to purchase food out in the world. We all decided that cooking a communal dinner would become an ongoing part of the class process, a collective act of care. Each week, a different individual or small group took responsibility for planning and cooking the meal. We used our class budget to fund the dinners, reimbursing up to twenty dollars in receipts for ingredients. Our kitchen consisted of a hot plate, frying pan, and large metal pot. Over the course of the semester we cooked various vegetarian soups, fried rice, sweet potatoes, roti, sushi, pasta, chili, and curry.

We also began to reconfigure the space of the classroom each week, creating tents and experimenting with lighting, bringing in brightly colored fabric and pillows to sit on the floor. This produced a different kind of atmosphere and facilitated other ways of being together in a collectively created space where new forms of learning and sociality could emerge. The students began to self-organize and decided to plan a sleepover occupation for the final night of class as a way of enacting the idea of homeplace. Everyone brought in sleeping bags and fabric to construct a large tent, we cooked “stone soup” (each person contributed one vegetable), and spent the evening reading political texts and poetry, singing, dancing, listening, sharing food, cleaning up, and learning hands on about care, cooperation, and mutual aid. Eventually the teachers left, leaving the students to inhabit the space on their own.

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**IMAGES**

# ***Ways of Being (Support)***

(a contribution to BFAMFAPhD.com)

Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard (New York, New York)

We believe that lesson plans are living documents. For this reason, this document is written in the present tense.

This lesson plan can be used in undergraduate and graduate classrooms, exhibitions, and public workshop contexts.

## **OVERVIEW**

This lesson plan provides an exploration of practices and structures of support. We define “support” as the ways in which your needs for well-being are met in order to dream, practice, and work on any project. Support extends beyond the life of the project, often shaping the ways in which you navigate the contradictions of living and working.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion you will be able to define social reproduction and structures of support, understand why artists and designers speak openly about the politics of social reproduction, name types of support based on contemplative practices, and identify and think critically about the people, places, and practices that allow each person to create projects.

## **ASSESSMENT**

We know you have met the objectives above when you:

- use the vocabulary of support in reviews, discussions, and collaborations
- speak openly about the politics of social reproduction in your own life
- utilize support practices that are aligned with your projects and intentions

**WORDS OF CAUTION**

Support is one of the most vulnerable phases that we have identified in the life cycle of each project. Taking place midpoint in the semester the plan is preceded by readings and conversations about race and class processes,<sup>1</sup> collaborative practices within in-class exercises, and the exchange of resources and skills.<sup>2</sup>

Space and equipment needs for this lesson plan include movable chairs, paper and writing implements, and a timing device.

**CONTEXT**

This lesson plan comes from *Ways of Being*, an open-source book, website, workbook, and card game that we have written for undergraduate and graduate classes in art and design.<sup>3</sup> *Ways of Being* provides a framework for thinking about the production of projects that looks at the whole life cycle of any given project.<sup>4</sup> We have identified ten components of each project's life cycle; we call these components phases. We encourage you to focus on one phase of the life cycle of your project as an entry point into a new way of working. This workshop focuses on the phase of the life cycle that we call support.

**Source:** Where materials for projects are obtained.

**Labor:** How work is organized in a project.

**Tool:** The device or implement used in your project.

**Copyright:** How authors' exclusive legal rights over their work are used.

**Narrate:** How a project is represented.

**Encounter:** Where a finished project is presented.

**Acquire:** The storage, maintenance, and stewardship of a project.

**Depart:** Where materials go when the project is no longer of use, value, or interest.

**Transfer:** The exchange of resources for goods or labor.

**Support:** The care and maintenance this is provided.

We are focused not on the support practices that we utilize for short-term projects, but on the ongoing support necessary for livelihood and social reproduction.<sup>5</sup>

1 See full text at BFAMFAPhd.com for a list of readings.

2 See Susan Jahoda and The Pedagogy Group, "Participatory Asset Mapping: A Semester-Long Engagement," in *Art as Social Action*, eds. Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (New York: Allworth Press, 2018), 60–65.

3 Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, *Ways of Being* (Goleta: Punctum Books, 2017).

4 See additional resources online at <http://bfamfaphd.com/>.

5 Fulvia Serra, "Reproducing the Struggle: A New Feminist Perspective on the Concept of Social Reproduction," *Viewpoint Magazine* 5 (October 31, 2015).

Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner write that

feminists use social reproduction to refer to activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and the elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kind [*sic*] of work—mental, manual, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain the existing life and to reproduce the next generation.<sup>6</sup>

Social reproduction is often enabled through practices of movement, healing, ritual, stillness, and listening. We believe that forms of “contemplative practices”<sup>7</sup> provide the strength and energy to continue projects and maintain a sense of well-being individually and collectively. In this workshop, we look at a wide range of contemplative practices to offer new forms of support for ourselves and for you. Some of you will be familiar with these, but it is unlikely that you have had regular conversations about them in the classroom.

Types of support include practices of *stillness* (meditation, silence, centering, etc.), *movement* (yoga, walking, dance, aikido, etc.), *listening* (deep listening, dialogue, circle council, etc.), *ritual* (ceremony, sacred space, retreat, etc.), *creation* (journaling, singing, dancing, improvisation, contemplative arts, etc.), *healing* (acupuncture, massage, physical therapy, aromatherapy, etc.), and *generative practices* (visualization, tarot, beholding, etc.).

In addition to caring for yourselves and your community through non-monetary support practices, you are likely finding monetary support. We are all born into the world with privileges and oppressions based upon our class, or socioeconomic status, and this cannot be ignored. In this workshop, however, we are focused on contemplative practices of support rather than monetary

6 Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 383–384.

7 D. Barbezat and M Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014). For more information, please see the Tree of Contemplative Practices: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>.

forms of support, because many contemplative practices are available to everyone, whereas many financial forms of support are not.

Artists who make their own structures of support visible often do so in order to speak openly about the politics of social reproduction. Just as 90 percent of mothers in Iceland went on strike for a day in 1975, taking to the streets and refusing to work, cook, and look after children to demonstrate that housework is essential for all productivity in society,<sup>8</sup> many artists wish to reveal the support structures that make livelihood possible. Artists often direct attention to overlooked practices that enable people to return to work the next day as healthy and capable workers.

#### **STEP 1. TIMING: FIFTEEN MINUTES**

Write about how you currently support making your projects and how you envision supporting your projects in the future. Support encompasses how you financially support your projects (cash gifts, debt, past sales/grants, day jobs, investments, mutual aid) aided by (you, friends/family, community/collective, public or commons).

#### **STEP 2. TIMING: FIFTEEN MINUTES**

Refer to the project that you're currently working on and write about the challenges you're facing in bringing it to completion. Using the phases in *Ways of Being* you are asked to identify and write about where these challenges/solutions lie and how you are/have navigated working through these challenges.

#### **STEP 3. TIMING: TEN MINUTES**

Organize what you have written about in step 1 and 2 into a five-minute narrative. This is in preparation for Intergroup Dialogue.

#### **STEP 4. TIMING: THIRTY-SIX MINUTES**

Instructions for Intergroup Dialogue:<sup>9</sup>

This is a deep-listening exercise, so try to remain focused on your partner and what they are narrating. The facilitator will keep time and guide you through the following steps.

8 Kirstie Brewer, "The Day Iceland's Women Went on Strike," *BBC News* (October 23, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34602822>.

9 Ximena Zúñiga, "Bridging Differences through Dialogue," *About Campus* January/February (2003): 8–16.

1. Find a partner and sit facing one another.
2. Choose who will be partner A and who will be partner B.
3. Your knees will remain in contact throughout the whole practice. You will also maintain eye contact and an affirming expression.
4. Partner A has five minutes to narrate the challenges they have faced in bringing a project to completion.
5. Partner B has two minutes to recall what they heard Partner A say.
6. Partner A has two minutes to adjust/add to Partner B's recollection if they feel something important was not heard and repeated back.
7. Reverse roles. Partner B narrates the challenges they have faced in bringing a project to completion.
8. Partner A has two minutes to recall what they heard Partner B say.
9. Partner B has two minutes to adjust/add to Partner A's recollection if they feel something important was not heard and repeated back.

After the listening practice is complete take ten minutes to reflect together on the themes that emerged from your narratives. Reconvene as a large group. What did you hear? Without necessarily sharing the details of your stories, pull the themes and concerns that arose and bring them into the larger discussion.

Write these down.

**STEP 5. TIMING: THIRTY MINUTES OR WHEN THE CONVERSATION HAS REACHED A NATURAL CONCLUSION**

Reflection: We reconvene as a large group in a circle and ask, "What did you hear?"

We share what emerged from the practice.

**STEP 6. TIMING: FOUR MINUTES**

Closing: You are invited to say one word that resonates with you after this shared experience.

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**IMAGE**

# SexEd + PPNYC + Parsons

Norene Leddy and Liz Slagus (New York, New York)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

SexEd (Norene Leddy/Liz Slagus) worked with students at New School and Parsons together with Planned Parenthood NYC (PPNYC), to build mobile mechanisms for engaging and informing people of ages eleven to twenty-five about PPNYC and its services.

A series of initial considerations drove the project's development. Each mobile unit needed to be lightweight and portable, for both inside and outside use and placement. Its target audience involved individuals of all genders, between eleven and twenty-five years old. We considered possible outcomes such as what would participants do, make, and learn? How would they be made comfortable and invited to engage? Was it age and community appropriate? And we were interested in including creative ideas and protocols for the documentation of prototypes to use in critiques, presentations, and other final outcomes. All this on a total budget of four hundred dollars!

The project was required to be interactive or collaborative in some way, taking the form of performances, games, interactive exercises, installations, or collaborative project and making stations. It also needed to be portable and easy to install.

Following are the steps we took to fulfill the assignment. Initially, SexEd invited students to be collaborators for the semester and introduced sex education as a social justice issue to be addressed via individual and collaborative art projects, with classmates and PPNYC. We created a safe space for honest, relevant, and sometimes personal conversations about sexual health. We set basic rules for engagement, which the class had the opportunity to edit and then consent to. First, class introductions were made via personal sex ed histories. We began with the following prompt: "In your sketchbook: Write/draw your personal sex education experience, including what worked and didn't." This led to an in-depth discussion about our pathways to knowledge about

sexual health, and an exploration of different mechanisms for sharing, but not exploiting, these stories and those telling them.

One of the most essential components of the course was our five-week sex ed boot camp, in which students received a comprehensive sex education covering birth control and sexually transmitted infections (STI) prevention, gender, healthy relationships, consent, and rape culture via in-depth demos, readings, discussion, and workshops with local sex educators, health-care providers, and artists. This boot camp ensured that all students began their collaborative work with the same medically accurate, inclusive, consent-driven and not shame-based baseline information. This period included art assignments designed to generate creative responses to sexual health topics and different forms of information sharing. Some cases included gender maps, detailing personal relationships to gender during specific periods. Next, SexEd selected teams of three to four students based on their skill sets, looking at their capacity to produce strong content and visual components, and documentation.

We later spent ten weeks on research and development. We conducted interviews with our PPNYC partners, developed working prototypes for the mobile mechanisms, and tested models in the New School and students' peers (a target audience of PPNYC) engaging in rigorous internal critiques, and externally with Teen Advocates, and invited guests, including artist Jody Wood and curator Lydia Matthews. We documented each critique, sharing notes with student teams to ensure the salient points offered by PPNYC staff and our guest critics. After the critiques we held regular team meetings to track progress, follow up on feedback, and deal with the inevitable interpersonal team issues that arose.

We spent time discussing and demonstrating the importance of good documentation for the sustainability of these projects. Final assignments were presented via a twelve- to fifteen-minute final presentation that included a demo of a prototype, and a single PDF file of the proposal for PPNYC that documented the concepts behind the street-level engagement strategy. Project documentation included team process via photographs, videos, written/journal responses, and audio; facilitation scripts and an assessment of how the action or activity worked; installation details, including an annotated materials and supplies list; and other specifically designed elements (i.e., signage, handouts, stickers, games, info graphics, zines, etc.).

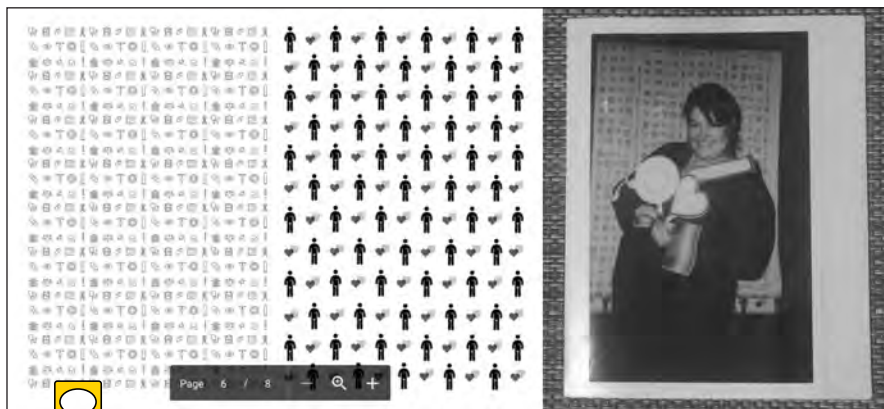
#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

The assignment started with a question-and-answer session involving PPNYC outreach staff. They shared their current setup and approach to target audiences,

talking frankly about challenges, goals, and their key concerns including project mobility (it needed to be transportable throughout New York City via subway by two educators); ease of setup in different contexts (under five minutes in schools or parks); and its approachability and adaptability (different information for different age groups). Afterward, students shared their four final proposals. One proposal was *Come Play With Us*: a game called *Flash It!* (inspired by games such as *Heads Up* and *Celebrity*). In it, one participant holds a card with a sexual health–related term and hand-drawn illustration to their forehead, while others give clues for that person to guess the word. Cards also included information about PPNYC and a medically accurate definition. The game was adaptable, with different cards designed for younger and older players. PPNYC staff could play along and/or contribute relevant information about card topics from the sidelines. This project also included a revamping of PPNYC’s kiosk with chalkboard paper with tailored messages or questions for different groups. PPNYC felt *Flash It!* could serve as an enticing online resource and giveaway.

Another proposal was *Sweet & Sexy Treats*, a faux ice cream cart stocked with a buffet of sex-positive goodies (stickers, internal and external condoms, lube, PPNYC swag, coloring pages, and crayons) to be taken away in paper ice cream cones. The cones served as PPNYC brochures and unique visuals advertising the organization and its services. The first prototype had confusing messaging and stark signage, but through critique the students honed the ice cream concept and completely redid the cart and branding. Some PPNYC staff were excited to see the cart as a kitschy and fun way to engage multiple publics, while others were concerned that there was no actual ice cream and could be too juvenile for some audiences. The next proposal was *Photo Booth*, featuring PPNYC step-and-repeat banners and sexual health–themed props for Polaroid photo shoots. The act of choosing a background and props, posing, taking the Polaroids, and waiting for them to dry, provided a platform for discussions about PPNYC and reproductive health. This team also worked on a table setup, with stickers and PPNYC-branded swag. The PPNYC educators and teen advocates, in particular, felt that this was the most successful engagement strategy in spite of the cost of the Polaroids. The PPNYC teen advocates were thrilled to get a unique physical object instead of a digital image. As stated during one of the critiques, “No one our age prints photos or has printed photographs of themselves.” The last proposal was *Sex Ed Ink*, a temporary tattoo booth featuring a range of sexual health and body positivity–themed designs to appeal to all genders, races, and socioeconomic standings. Participants could have conversations about sexual health while tattoos were being applied, or take tattoos away along with PPNYC information. PPNYC staff loved the range

of tattoo designs, and felt that anyone who came up to the booth would be able to find something that worked for them. This team transformed PPNYC's generic store-bought kiosk by applying signage with stereotypical tattoo parlor colors and fonts. They also worked on a PPNYC fanny pack popular with PPNYC staff.



### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

Critique and evaluation were an integral part of the entire course. At each stage of the design process, there were designated times for reflection. These took the form of prototyping events, class critiques, team meetings, and feedback sessions. We held three formal critiques during the research and development stage, in addition to the final critique with all stakeholders.

During our second-to-last class, we took time out to reflect and evaluate. Participants were assigned the reading “ACTION STRATEGY: A How-to Guide,” by the Ruckus Society.<sup>1</sup> The reading was meant to spark and frame our conversation about the assignment and the proposals for PPNYC. We discussed the importance of evaluation, celebrating successes, acceptance, and understanding of failures, and how rare reflection time can be during a project. This meeting was also an opportunity to consider the PPNYC collaboration in the context of the course, as well as in relation to our personal and artistic goals and roles in civil and civic action. The 2016 presidential election had just taken place and, as a group of individuals and collaborators concerned with women’s and human rights, it was imperative to discuss our work in the greater context of the US and in relation to other actions necessary to further reproductive rights.

The final critique with PPNYC and Parsons faculty was the celebration of a semester of learning, listening, researching, prototyping, instigating, and making. Student teams presented their working mechanisms for engagement, telling the stories of each group’s process, ideas, prototypes, failures, and successes. PPNYC and Parsons staff tested the models for engagement, and provided informed feedback and critique. It was also a time to recognize all of the partners involved, the complexity and particular needs of the experience, and the importance of accessibility, flexibility, listening, and reflection.



1 The Ruckus Society, “Action Strategy: A How-to Guide,” <http://ruckus.org/downloads/RuckusActionStrategyGuide.pdf>.



# Sounding Place

## MA SPACE Acouscenic Listening Workshop

Sean Taylor (Limerick, Ireland)

Since 2012 I have embarked upon a series of experiential creative workshops related to my own practice of Acouscenic Listening—a sonically engaged collaborative art practice within the Softday art/science collaboration.<sup>1</sup> These workshops are undertaken in collaboration with postgraduate students of the Masters in Social Practice and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE) at Limerick School of Art and Design.

In these workshops MA SPACE postgraduates are introduced to the theoretical contextual and practical frameworks for the use of Acouscenic Listening as both a creative deep mapping exercise and a holistic sound art practice. A typical workshop may be broken down into these learning outcomes:

- theoretical context and practical frameworks for the use of Acouscenic Listening;
- participation in and understanding of the Creative Soundwalk;<sup>2</sup>
- introduction to psychogeography and deep mapping;
- introduction to collaborative, coauthored sound art practice;
- critical reflection on sound's relational condition and creative outcomes;
- introduction to Eastern thought, pedagogical theory, and practices;
- introduction of group sonic meditations work;
- introduction to graphic scores and the application of a *creative turn* to the completed sound map; and

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1 Softday is the art/science collaboration of artist Sean Taylor and computer scientist Mikael Fernström, see: [www.softday.ie/acouscenic](http://www.softday.ie/acouscenic).

2 Mikael Fernström and Sean Taylor, "The Creative Soundwalk" (unpublished manuscript, 2015), Microsoft Word file, [https://www.academia.edu/12560305/The\\_Creative\\_Soundwalk](https://www.academia.edu/12560305/The_Creative_Soundwalk).

- performance, recording, and dissemination of the completed sound work.

A key element of the workshop, derived through consensus between the participants and the artist/educator, is to collectively develop, document, and track the evolution of the proposed work, from its original “pitch” by the artist/educator as a workshop concept; to its collective mapping, movement meditation, and improvisations; to end with the final performance and public dissemination of any creative work.

It is important to seek agreement on how work in progress may be documented (audio/video/photographically). Consent forms are used from the outset. Moreover, continuous critical reflection on the delivery of workshop elements assists both the participants and the artist/educator to reflect upon the learning experience, and helps inform all participants’ steering development of the work towards a potentially shared vision. Reflection also highlighted any emergent misunderstandings or antagonisms within the shared group experience as the workshop evolved. The role of artist/educators in this process is both socially communicative and creatively pedagogic, working with participants to share *expert* and *lay* knowledge, and allowing them to find a voice or form of expression of their own that can coexist with those of others in a communal discourse.<sup>3</sup>

### CONTEXT

Auditory engagement further challenges the dominance of the pragmatic visual object and counteracts prevailing bias or dependencies upon a predominantly ocularcentric focus of reading environments through visual metaphors.

The city, as an incessant inundation and movement of sonic action, may be experienced through the listening body as sound incorporates and mediates the connection between space and narrative. Sound is also related to phenomenology, memory, imagery, and associations, which may be referred to as sound’s specific relational condition. The Acouscenic Listening approach to the Creative Soundwalk may be considered closer to the *dérive* or drift, defined by Guy Debord and the Situationists as “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances—*Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”<sup>4</sup>

3 Mikael Fernström and Sean Taylor, “Socially Engaged Sound Art Practice” (paper presented at Irish Sound, Science & Technology Association Convocation, Cork, Ireland, July 31–August 2, 2012).

4 Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” *Internationale Situationniste* 2 (1958), <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>.

Auditory engagement with space and place is the result of a reciprocal process between the listener and the sonic environment, which suggests distinctions and relations that enable the listener to select, organize, and transform the meaning of what is heard. A complex soundscape also reveals localized histories and memories that may lead to the creation of fresh narratives for further creative development.

All participants agreed to take on the Acouscenic Listening Creative Soundwalk in silence. Interrupting the cycle of incessant communication affords the participant to temporarily *switch off* from the demands of technology and *switch on* the listening body. In this state, the mediating participant engages in or is aware of transient and situated sounds of place that occur within the moment. This action creates a temporary social bond within the group, even though each participant may articulate a unique listening experience upon completion of the walk. Acouscenic listeners should therefore accept that they are immersed in incomplete positions of uncertainty and “not-knowing,” continuously searching for the value of sounds in their essential form in order to determine the sound object, as well as establishing themselves.

Upon completion of the Creative Soundwalk participants were invited to collectively create a sound map of the experience. This map was not necessarily an accurate graphic representation of sonic features that appeared in the sound environment, as is the case with detailed topographic maps. The sound map was at this juncture a visual representation (a graphic art work in itself), with no limitations as to how it might be further represented or transformed. It is a subjective truth, insofar as a sound map is an abstraction derived from the territory of the sound environment but is not the thing itself. Like scientist and philosopher Alfred Korzybski suggests, “the map is not the territory.”<sup>5</sup>



MA SPACE postgraduates mapping the Limerick City Creative Soundwalk, October 2016.

## PERFORMANCE

Participants were later encouraged to consider the coauthored sound map as a graphic score for a potential live group performance. Experimental composers

5 Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (New York: Institute of General Semantics, 1995), 58.

developed the concept of the graphic or “aural score” as a methodology in the 1950s (John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, Karlheinz Stockhausen, etc.). Graphic instructions were considered as an alternative means of contemporary music composition and functioned as a map of the musical territory, democratizing both music composition and improvised performance. In this part of the workshop all aspects of the potential interpretation of the graphic score were discussed with and agreed by the participants. To this end, all participants undertook preparatory work for the collaborative performance through adapted tai chi and qigong movement exercises and group sonic meditations, mindful methodologies or *meditations in motion* that assisted practitioners in quieting their minds in order to consciously bring attention to the task of performing. This conscious training of our “listening attention” leads to realizing that creativity is disclosed in moments. Being fully present in these moments nurtures an awareness of the transformative possibility of creative encounters, and institutes a mode of listening that French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy describes as “the homology of sound to self as a structure of referral.”<sup>6</sup>

A statement such as “everybody can sing but it sounds different” may seem humorous, but herein lies an acceptance that everything that can make sound may also be listened to. This is why the concept of *sounding*, as opposed to *singing*, the graphic score allowed for a more democratic performance of the work.



MA SPACE postgraduates Limerick City graphic score, October 2016.

From a creative perspective, it was interesting to note that the first iteration of the sound map composition generally led to the majority of performers attempting to imitate the mapped sounds of the environment from the graphic score. After further work, this narrow visual literal reading of the score was abandoned in favor of a more improvised rendition that incorporated movement elements and listening. This approach significantly changed the nature of the performance and opened up a far more meaningful and emotive rendition of the score.

6 Brian Kane. “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject,” *Contemporary Music Review* 31, nos. 5–6 (2012): 439–447. doi: 10.1080/07494467.2012.759413.

We debated whether to record all of the preparations of the live improvisations. If so, the recordings would be played back to the participants for further commentaries on the aesthetic of the work. In this respect, the composition would always be in a state of flux or incompleteness. Both the coauthored sound map/graphic score and the audio recordings were shared between all participants, as they agreed to undertake additional work on the graphic score if they so wished. Participants were also asked if they would like to share the workshop results on social media platforms. Without consensus, the recordings and documentation would stay with the authors.

Upon completion of the workshop all participants engaged in a qualitative evaluation of the workshop. Its results were shared and discussed by the participants in a follow-up session.

### CONCLUSION

Participants collectively drew upon immersive research methodologies, translating listening, empirical, and soundscape material through different modes of storytelling, sound making, and performance. They employed a rich selection of field material and analyses evoking a synthesis of economic, political, and social associations in the process. The resulting aural manifestations sat at the intersection of cultural anthropology and conceptual sound art practice, while drawing on a range of creative languages.

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# Participatory Asset Mapping

## A Semester-Long Engagement

Susan Jahoda, the Pedagogy Group (New York, New York)

Asset Mapping played a central role in Art in the Expanded Field, a seminar focused on Solidarity Art Economies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (2014–16). The lesson plan describes the introduction to the practice, the use of the tool, the map, and the integration of the practice into the weekly structure.

### **HISTORY OF THE PRACTICE**

Participatory Asset Mapping enables communities to build political power through self-reliance and shared resources. It entails the self-identification of community assets, meaning that the community is not the object of external research.

The process involves community members collectively mapping information about what they understand to be their community's tangible and intangible strengths, sources, and resources, including individual and collective knowledges and skills. Community assets might also include both formal institutions (libraries, schools, and health-care clinics) and informal institutions (block associations, community gardens and food co-ops). Intangible resources might include offering emotional labor such as friendship and care.

John Kretzmann and John McKnight are acknowledged as the developers of Asset-Based Community Development. Central to their work is the shift away from a social services framework that represents communities as deficient, to a community-building model. The act of collectively identifying abundance brings a shared awareness to communities, enabling an energetic focus on what is present rather than what is often characterized as being scarce or lacking. At the same time the process can provide an analysis and dialogue about the conditions that act to prevent community members from accessing what is needed. Subsequently, such analysis can lead to collective involvement in research, decision-making, and action. Kretzmann and McKnight's model is foundational to the work of J. K. Gibson Graham and the Community

Economies Project. Exemplifying a feminist critique of political economy, they counter the view of the economy as predominantly capitalist, foregrounding instead what they call hidden and alternative economies. Examples include producer cooperatives, gifts, and informal lending—economies that become evident through the practice of Participatory Asset Mapping.

### LESSON PLAN

How do we operate from a place of abundance rather than scarcity? Can we utilize the skills, strengths, and resources that already exist in our classrooms to respect and support each other's work? Could this process of exchange lead to a more vibrant cultural ecology that results in everyone ending up with more than they started with? Will our exchanges create opportunities for the unsettling of institutional norms that shape what it means to be an artist?

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand how Asset Mapping efficiently identifies an inventory of resources and strengths in a learning and making environment.
- Understand how Asset Mapping promotes healthy community involvement.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of race, gender, and class processes.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of authorship and attribution.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of time management, slowing down, maintenance, and embodiment.

### ASSESSMENT

Students will have met the learning objectives when they have done the following:

- completed eight exchanges,
- created a blog with detailed descriptions and visual documentation of each exchange, and
- demonstrated an understanding of what solidarity art economies are and how they can be applicable to their own practices and projects.

### WEEK 1

Duration: 2.35 hours

- A. Twenty minutes: introductions/class check-in
- B. Twenty minutes: embodying the principles of Asset Mapping
- C. Thirty minutes: introduction to Asset Mapping: reading “Tool Kit: What is Asset-Based Community Development?”
- D. Fifteen minutes: writing exercise: listing of skills and needs
- E. Twenty minutes: creating list of assets, needs, and contact information
- F. Fifteen minutes: dialogue in pairs
- G. Twenty minutes: reflection
- H. Five minutes: identifying Asset Mapping pocket
- I. Ten minutes: description of required blog containing documentation of exchanges

### **The Space of Learning**

Remove as many vernacular objects of learning from the classroom as possible (whiteboards, extra tables and chairs, portable equipment). Open the blinds to let light into the room and check thermostat to ensure a comfortable temperature. Place Asset Mapping tool, sixteen mugs, an electric kettle, a variety of teas, honey, spoons, and a dish of trail mix on tables also off to the side. Place fifteen chairs in a circle in the center of the room.

#### *A. Introductions / Check-in (Timing: Twenty Minutes)*

Making space for a check-in each class is an important component of the course. This is not about solving problems but about attending to/making transparent what is present in the room—that which conditions our learning on any given day.

Introductions/check-in today includes providing name, preferred gender pronoun, and naming one thing that is urgent in our lives.

#### *B. Embodying the Principles of Asset Mapping (Timing: Twenty Minutes)*

Materials:

- chairs for participants
- two tablespoons
- water in a cup

Protocol:

1. Chairs remain in a circle.
2. Invite everyone to sit elbow to elbow.

3. The facilitator demonstrates the exercise by pouring water onto one of the spoons and then transferring it to the second spoon.
4. She then gives the empty spoon to the person on her left and pours the water from the other spoon into the one they are holding. She then transfers the empty spoon into their left hand.
5. They repeat what she has done, passing the spoons and the water to the person on their left until everyone has participated.
6. Take some time for discussion and reflection.

Prompts and questions for discussion might include:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages in engaging collectively?
- How can differences be managed within collective activity?

### *C. Introduce Asset Mapping (Timing: Thirty Minutes)*

This part of the lesson plan draws upon three texts:

- Kretzmann, John P. and J. L. McKnight, "A Guide to Mapping and Mobilizing the Economic Capacities of Local Residents: A Community Building Workbook." ACTA Publications, 1996.
- Cameron, Jenny and K. Gibson, "Shifting Focus: Alternative Pathways for Communities and Economies, A Resource Kit." University of Newcastle and University of Western Sydney, Australia, 2001.

Read together out loud and discuss "Tool Kit: What Is Asset-Based Community Development?" Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation, Glendale, Arizona.

### *D. Writing Exercise: Listing of Skills and Needs (Timing: Fifteen Minutes)*

Make a list in response to the following questions:

- What do you have to offer the group (gifts/skills)?
- What do you want from the group (needs)?

Some examples:

- Skills: Technological knowledge and expertise (fabrication, Creative Suite, video editing), writing skills, and cooking

- Gifts: transportation, friendship, materials, and support

*E. Creating the List of Assets, Needs, and Contact Information for Each Class Member (Timing: Twenty Minutes)*

1. Form a circle with other members of the group.
2. Identify a note taker who will record and make a PDF of identified resources (skills and gifts), a list of identified wants, and contact information for each person listed. A color-coded PDF will be created matching each person to their pocket on the Asset Mapping Tool.

*F. Dialogue in Pairs (Timing: Fifteen Minutes)*

- What are the benefits of identifying community assets?
- What suggestions do you have for practical applications of your assets and how do you imagine integrating them into your work in this class?

*G. Reflection (Timing: Twenty Minutes)*

Form a circle with other members of the group and share findings based on dialogue.

*H. Identifying Your Asset Mapping Pocket and Labeling It with Your Name (Timing: Five Minutes)*



Maureen Connor and Susan Jahoda, Asset Mapping Tool held by Maureen Connor and Laurel Ptak, 5' x 3' Neoprene, Felt, Card, and Buttons, 2015.

*I. Brief Description of Required Blog Containing Documentation of Exchanges  
(Timing: Ten Minutes)*

Your blog will contain more detailed documentation of your exchanges.

**WEEKS 2-13**

Duration: 30 minutes once a week

- A. Five minutes: cards, objects, and links to documentation placed in pockets
- B. Twenty-five minutes: sharing the process of exchanging

Use your blog entry to support your narration.

**Instructions for Exchanges and Use of the Asset Mapping Tool**

Each person is responsible for eight exchanges. These include providing others with four offers of skills and gifts and receiving four offers of skills and gifts. You can exchange with the same person or different people. It is up to you and the person you are exchanging with to determine the “value” of your exchanges. For example, is one hour of labor on a project equivalent to a cooked meal or a ride to the lumberyard? Please include the process for determining the value of your exchanges in your blog.

Each pocket contains eight cards. When you have determined a date for an exchange remove one of the eight cards from the tool. When the exchange is complete return it to your pocket.

1. Note on your card the date of your exchange (complete outside class time).
2. Note the name of the person you exchanged with (complete outside class time).
3. Provide a brief description of the exchange and the URL address of your blog entry (complete outside class time).
4. When you come to class after making an exchange return the card to your pocket (timing: five minutes).
5. Narrate the process of exchanging through blog entries (timing: twenty-five minutes).

# Calling in Sick

Taraneh Fazeli, the Pedagogy Group (New York, New York)

This is a bodily communication workshop oriented around storytelling about illness. Participants recollect experiences of feeling unwell or calling in sick to work within a set of linguistic, gestural, and haptic exercises, thereby considering how the language we tend to use around illness in various contexts (medical, professional, etc.) shapes our experience of it. By experimenting with how to structure a ground for intimate and caring communication, new language can emerge that makes illness a collective matter rather than a private experience.

The workshop's partnered exercises can be adapted to address other issues that benefit from a move away from mind-centered epistemologies. Critical theory, a now essential part of art education, grounds studio practice in critical analysis but it also dislodges us from our bodies in the classroom rather than focusing on sensorial ways of knowing once emphasized in the arts.<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT

This workshop was developed as part of *Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism's Temporal Bullying*, a curatorial project that addresses how the body is articulated in various health discourses. It proposes that care for the body in states of debility and disability could provide possibilities for rethinking collectivity. The workshop is rooted in *Notes for the Waiting Room*, a publication produced with Canaries, a network of women, femmes, and gender nonconforming people living and working with autoimmune conditions.

## STRUCTURE

- Introductions (twenty minutes)

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1 Riyad A. Shahjahan, "Being 'Lazy' and Slowing Down: Toward Decolonizing Time, Our Body, and Pedagogy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 5 (2015): 488–501, doi: 10.1080/00131857.2014.880645.

- Exercise 1: Speaking and Listening (25 minutes)
- Exercise 2: Gesture (twenty to twenty-five minutes)
- Exercise 3: Transfer drawings (twenty-five minutes)
- Break (twenty minutes)
- Group Discussion/Reflection (twenty to forty minutes)

## MATERIALS

- Printouts
- Fabric
- Safety pins
- Paper
- Tape
- Markers

## DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENTS

Note on constituting a *we* in advance: some steps should have occurred before the workshop to create a shared learning environment. For example, in public workshops, this happens via invitational prompts, registration, group correspondence introducing participants, and inquiries about access support—such as wheelchair ramps or language translation.

### 1: INTRODUCTIONS (TWENTY MINUTES)

Participants gather. The group is capped at sixteen, facilitating intimacy.

Each person introduces themselves by name, gender pronouns, and what brought them here. Participants consider whom they might like to pair with considering each person's stated concerns.

Facilitator briefly discusses the project and the context of the workshop.

House rules are determined by the group. Some suggestions: “Step up, Step back”—i.e., if our voice is dominant, be aware and make room for others. “Stories stay, lessons go”—i.e., keep personal stories confidential.

Listen to Jesse Cohen's sound piece, *I Is Another*, 2014.

Review workshop structure: First pair off, then do three exercises, break, and, finally, end with a group conversation. Return to the group between each exercise to read texts and/or discuss the next exercise.

Break into pairs. The pairs will stay the same through all exercises. Partners should agree on what part of their private dialogue can be shared with the larger group.

## 2: EXERCISE 1—SPEAKING AND LISTENING (TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES)

Introduce Intergroup Dialogue: it is a deep listening exercise that promotes engagement across social and cultural divides. Intergroup Education (1940s–50s) aimed to highlight similarities among different groups so as to reduce conflicts when addressing contentious issues.<sup>2</sup> It's used for antibias communication in higher education, community organizing, and international conflict resolution and is named for the different social and cultural groups present in any set of people.

Review prompt: *Recall a time you felt unwell or out of sorts in your body. Perhaps you had to ask for help, cancel or reconfigure a commitment, or tell someone else—friend, boss, doctor, whomever—what was going on before you knew how to. Tell your partner about this while paying attention to how you felt and how you communicated to get what you needed.*

Introduce format of speaking/listening exercise:

- Identify Person A and Person B.
- Person A will respond first to the prompt. They have five minutes to speak uninterrupted to Person B and should speak as openly as possible. Person B should try to respond with positive affect. If they finish early, please sit in silence together.
- Person B then has three minutes to reflect back what they heard from Person A. They should minimize any additions or analysis.
- Person A has one and a half minutes to amend/add.
- Swap roles and repeat with Person B responding to the prompt.

Answer any further questions about structure and ask participants to keep in mind that speaking like this can be uncomfortable.

Perform Intergroup Dialogue.



*Calling in Sick* workshop at Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, May 22, 2016.

2 Members of the Pedagogy Group, which I am a member of, have implemented this technique in their classrooms to augment seminar discussions and critique structures, aiming to achieve understanding but not necessarily agreement across differences.

**3: EXERCISE 2—GESTURE (TWENTY MINUTES)**

Ask the group to consider differing conceptions of empathy:

1. One that problematically erases difference in its assumption that one can relate to another's experience.
2. Another that recognizes that incommensurable difference is at its core: it is the continual process of trying to relate despite difference.

Introduce Leslie Jamison's *Empathy Exams* and pass out excerpts from the first chapter, asking the group to read them aloud.

Introduce Gestural Mirroring exercise:

- Person A will perform a series of gestures (including nonlinguistic sound) that communicate the feeling that the instance they recalled in the first exercise brought up. Person A can readjust the posture according to Person B's reflection so as to represent their feelings more accurately. They will have five minutes and are free to move through the space or stay seated.
- Person B mirrors these movements.
- Switch and repeat.

Gestural prompt: *Communicate the feelings that came up around that instance of illness you recalled in the first exercise.*



*Calling in Sick* workshop at Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, May 22, 2016.

Perform Gestural Mirroring exercise.

**4: EXERCISE 3—TRANSFER WITH EMPATHY (TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES)**

Introduce and view Dennis Oppenheim's *Two Stage Transfer Drawing*, 1971: in this two-channel video, Oppenheim's son draws on his back as Oppenheim duplicates the drawing on the wall through touch. In another view they switch roles.

Introduce Transfer Drawing exercise:

1. Prepare the drawing surfaces. Each person attaches a large piece of paper to the wall and gets a piece of fabric pinned across their back, like a cape. Each person has at least one washable marker.
2. Person A positions themselves at the wall. Person B is seated or standing behind them. Slowly, Person B sketches on the fabric starting at Person A's shoulders and moving downward. Person A senses what is being traced on their back and mirrors the feeling of the drawing on the wall-hung paper. The pair has five minutes for this drawing.
3. Switch and repeat on new paper.



*Calling in Sick* workshop at Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, May 22, 2016.

*Drawing Prompt: The person initiating the drawing should express the feelings they communicated in the previous two exercises, but through drawing. The drawing can be representational or abstract, but many find the latter easier to mirror.*

Perform Transfer Drawing. Facilitator can suggest that the pairs play with speed and stroke.

#### **BREAK (TWENTY MINUTES)**

Hang drawings side by side. Remind pairs to discuss what can be brought back to larger group discussion from experience within exercises.

#### **5: GROUP DISCUSSION (TWENTY TO FORTY MINUTES)**

A group discussion can start with a simple prompt such as, "How did these exercises make you feel?"

Form:

- How did the exercises impact your ability to understand your own and another's positions?
- How did sharing in these structures (in this particular order) make you think about the different ways we communicate, and how they may be hierarchized in our culture?

- Did hearing and reflecting back on your partner's story make you think about yours differently?

Content:

- How has illness affected the way you work or care for yourself and/or others?
- How might you communicate to get your needs met?
- How have spaces and processes of art intersected (or not) with care and healing?
- What did the structure illuminate about the ways we tend to communicate about this particular issue? Did it differ from how we might normally communicate in the pursuit of wellness, with a medical doctor, boss, or friend?



Excerpt from Lynne McCabe's announcement of the closing of She Works Flexible.

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# ESSAY



# Toward a Social Practice Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

The Pedagogy Group (New York, New York)

After carefully discussing our contribution to this textbook, we, the Pedagogy Group,<sup>2</sup> provide reflections on pedagogical principles that educators with commitments similar to our own might find useful. We emphasize the importance of artistic practices that make *with* rather than *about*.<sup>3</sup> Approaches that assume one can be interested in a struggle and make work about it differ greatly from being imbricated in that struggle due to one's societal position. The former reinforces structures of privilege and exclusion while the later contributes to social transformation.

## **STEP ONE: IDENTIFY HOW PEDAGOGY AND “SOCIAL PRACTICE” CAN BE RESONANT WITH OR IN CONTRADICTION WITH EACH OTHER**

We do not use the neologism “Social Practice” (SP) to describe our work because this term doesn't distinguish between practices that engage the social as a medium or form and those that unfold within specific constituencies and struggles.<sup>4</sup> SP seldom addresses the political realities that condition social exchange, nor does it undertake systemic analyses of power or investigate models of sustainability.

The institutionalizing of SP prompts us to wonder whether we are witnessing another phase of the Modernist appropriation and domestication of

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1 A longer version of this essay was published in the Museum of Fine Art Houston's Core residency program 2016-17.

2 See Pedagogy Group bio on page 301.

3 Chapters 1 and 2 of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000) asserts the foundational distinction that pedagogy be undertaken “with not for” the oppressed.

4 We abbreviate these practices “SP” to help distinguish it from our use of the term “social” to describe process unfolding within specific constituencies and struggles.

political art movements.<sup>5</sup> Most concerning is the manner in which the institutional contradictions of the art sphere are outsourced to artists who safely and temporarily bring the *political* into art spaces.<sup>6</sup> We are concerned that SP-oriented educational programs, curatorial initiatives, and publications are defining a new autonomous sphere of practice within art and politics. Once again the *artist* and *art* stand apart from social practices created in everyday community and movement making. In this vision, art does not operate in a political world but creates a place for politics within the world of art.

Those teaching in BFA/MFA programs that house SP courses and concentrations are witnessing these contradictions play out. It seems nearly impossible to positively influence or reconfigure social relations from within these settings as institutionalized imperatives contradict the core values that socially engaged artists claim to espouse. While aiming to position themselves as benefactors of specific communities in need, their host colleges, even when public entities, are not accessible to (or created for) members of those communities.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing this, we wonder: how might the principles and practices of radical pedagogy, a highly developed social practice in its own right, be brought into debates around SP pedagogy?

## **STEP TWO: DESCRIBE SPECIFIC TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

Following practices used in politically engaged pedagogy, popular education, and community organizing we draw extensively from our experiences as educators, exchanging stories around the material conditions and experiences of our learning environments. By doing so, we aim to identify the contradictions, central struggles, and joys that we each encounter.

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5 Evidenced by, for example, the incorporation of Social Realist photography and painting into the art canon. This process shifts art's value from the political economic sphere to the regimes of scholarship and auctions; technical skill, abstract aesthetic analyses, and the artist's biography and influences eclipse the ideological struggles these works aimed to support.

6 See *People's Assembly's Overview: The Jackson People's Assembly Model*, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://mxgm.org/2014/11/28/peoples-assemblys-overview-the-jackson-peoples-assembly-model/>.

7 Jodi Rios, "Reconsidering the Margin: Relationships of Difference and Transformative Education," in *Service-Learning in Design and Planning: Educating at the Boundaries*, eds. Tom Agnotti, Cheryl Doble, and Paula Horriگان (New York: New Village Press, 2011), 39–55.

We write and share stories that mirror our process as a group. They show awareness of how our pedagogical work is nested within collective struggle or political vision, and how it makes social contradictions visible.

### **STEP THREE: GENERATE A SET OF THEMES AND QUESTIONS**

Each case study inspires questions requiring authors to reflect deeply and share insights. We identify links aligning our practices with collective learning processes, building political literacy. This analytic process enables the move from concrete events to general propositions.

### **STEP FOUR: DISCUSS THE PRACTICES AND METHODS WE USE TO ADDRESS THESE THEMES**

As educators we must respond to social practices that threaten the freedoms of learning, such as managerialism, surveillance, the increasing commodification of desire, and governance of vital social functions, from relations of affection and friendship to efforts of self-care.<sup>8</sup> These intrusions might be resisted by fostering other ways of being, such as finding ways to slow down and cultivate practices of listening and knowing that are unabashedly “out of sync.”<sup>9</sup>

We have introduced models for commoning, such as care collectives, free schools, and worker cooperatives. Sometimes, we involve students in discussions of economic relations inside universities that systematically produce forms of precarity, such as student debt and increased adjunct labor. We must prepare students to ethically navigate the arts sphere beyond school. Artists need to anticipate the benefits of and expectations around any socially engaged work for themselves, their constituencies, and the institutions with which they are involved.<sup>10</sup>

In classes structured around experimentation and collaboration with community partners, students have only one semester to develop projects, leaving little time for listening and speculation before action is expected.<sup>11</sup> As teachers,

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8 See Annette Fuentes, *Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse* (New York: Verso, 2013); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Franco Bifo Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).

9 For tools we’ve developed for the classroom, see The Pedagogy Group, “Listening, Thinking and Acting Together,” *Rethinking Marxism* 26, no. 3 (2014): 414–426. Also see The Pedagogy Group, “Some Tools for Radical Pedagogy,” *Art Journal* 73, no 3. (2015): 89–91.

10 We encourage students to ask about project funding, consider heir relation to place, the role of the press, divisions of labor, institutional hierarchies, intellectual property, and the long-term stewardship of a project.

11 Rios, “Reconsidering the Margin,” 39–55.

we equally feel this weight, struggling to maintain structures that emphasize duration (in long-term partnerships) or intentional ephemerality (in conscious but tentative experiments). We do, however, encourage collaborative work within our classrooms utilizing methods of evaluation that counter ranking and competition.

### **PEDAGOGICAL METHODS**

Fostering ethical community economies and alternative epistemologies through dialogue and experimentation.

**Q: How do we negotiate the contradictions between teaching studio art practices and addressing the urgent needs that arise within our classrooms?**

*Susan Jaboda*

Tuesday morning, 8:30 a.m. Class begins. We go around the room, checking in with each other. I want to know what every person in our shared space is experiencing because how we *are* individually affects how we will *be* together for the next three hours and, ultimately, how *we will be together* for the rest of the semester. The check-in provides a context for discussion, looking at two projects and a class exercise.

In my studio practice courses it is a priority to make space for caring about whose and what urgencies are in the room. These are the conditions that we bring to the work and, with facilitation, can provide an opening for dialogue. A woman with a chronic illness asks for help fabricating a sculpture, the only person of color in the classroom is able to say that the silence in the room when they share an account of a racist incident is really difficult, and a young man juggling two jobs and school says he is projecting his work because he couldn't afford to print it.

Today disability, racism, and debt are what we bring to our discussion of Jack Halberstam's essay "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons," in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*.<sup>12</sup> After our discussion we reboil our class kettle and drink tea while thinking through the logistics and implications of collective labor on projects and how to be resourceful when it comes to sourcing materials. I

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12 Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, eds. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 2–12.

had prepared a prompt for our Intergroup Dialogue exercise as an entry into our next class project: *Practice as Maintenance*. I abandon the prompt and replace it with the topic of *silence*.

**Q: How can we model different ways of being together within settings grounded in Eurocentric views of culture, emphasizing critique, and governed by neoliberal logics? How can we make visible the mechanics of power relationships and cultivate care and horizontality, while still allowing for contestation, difficulty, and difference?**

*Taraneh Fazeli*

I like to do a dialogical exercise based on the techniques of intergroup dialogue asking participants, “When has time been a regulatory force in your life?”<sup>13</sup> One student said there’s simply too much reading in all her classes to complete, and that she realized that she was not really expected to absorb all the content but, rather, learn to manage time around this impossibility. Another, who aligned her work with Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s “Maintenance Art,” discussed how living and making work with limited energy as a result of chronic illness became an asset. Yet another told us about the temporal dissonance that occurred while working with a group of mothers of the Black Lives Matter movement (including her own), and asked for feedback on how to move between their time of mourning and collective organizing, and the time defined by a school semester’s deliverables. This discussion about temporalities in our own lives alongside recent art and theories that queer time provides the ground for considering time as an artistic medium.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Emerging from the philosophies of democratic and popular education movements and useful for communicating across different groups, intergroup dialogue is so named for the different social and cultural formations that are often present in any set of people (class, organization, movement, etc.) Participants are paired and asked to speak on a topic within a structure that prioritizes uninterrupted speaking and listening, before coming back and reflecting as a larger group.

14 We look at artworks that employ nonlinear temporalities: the work of a collective of artists with autoimmune conditions called *Canaries* addresses the flexible work and support structures that a group operating on crip time requires; Elisabeth Subrin’s *Schulie* (1997), a film about radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (a woman described as “out of time and out of joint”) ~~that reanimates lesbian~~ which reanimates lesbian

*(Continued on next page)*

Students learn to negotiate the temporal shape of the classroom, their projects, and their lives together throughout the semester.

In his article “Being ‘Lazy’ and Slowing Down,” Riyad A. Shahjahan suggests moving away from mind-centered epistemologies in the classroom that dislodge us from our bodies.<sup>15</sup> Reinscribing the colonial project’s separation of nature from culture, a Eurocentric conception of linear time based in forward motion as progress finds its corollary in current higher education logics that compel all towards neoliberal subjectivity. By emphasizing time that is different we can foster other ways of being. Haptic play, practices of listening, cultivation of silence or rituals as simple as sharing food and weekly check-ins become potential sites of emancipation.

*Robert Sember*

I travel with two longtime collaborators from New York to São Paulo to participate in three weeks of workshops. Most of us have never met before, so we begin with the usual pro forma introductions—name, city, affiliation, etc. Translating between Portuguese and English is really slow. We try simultaneous translation, but it’s as if we’re not in the same room. Going slow is preferable. We settle in, get comfortable, grab food and coffee, and commit to holding a long, still focus. Hearing our introductions translated and revoiced is our first collaborative work. We are here to discuss gender identity, queerness, the intersection between race and class. Translation becomes the metaphor and protocol for this collaboration. It also inscribes a global North-global South divide and makes even more relevant the *decolonization* framework that will be repeatedly invoked in the days ahead.

This slow listening carries through to our first workshop designed around the question “Why are *we* gathered *here* and at *this time*?” We begin by walking silently in small groups through the local

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history’s disavowed pasts by resurrecting an earlier documentary; and pop cultural examples including comedian Maria Bamford’s sitcom *Lady Dynamite* constructed through the author’s mental illnesses; Elizabeth Freeman’s *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), and disability theorist Alison Kafer’s “Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips” in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 25–46.

15 Riyad A. Shahjahan, “Being ‘Lazy’ and Slowing Down: Toward Decolonizing Time, Our Body, and Pedagogy,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 5 (2015): 488–501, doi: 10.1080/00131857.2014.880645.

neighborhood. Back in the workshop space, we share our observations and organize the responses into themes and questions that are brought to the full group. The space is translated into terms that are specific to the group: transwomen share the indications they found of threat or safety while others point to the neighborhood's working-class character. A resident describes growing up gay and mixed race in this area and hearing the echoes of these memories. His story invites others to share comparable histories and a new round of introductions is made that translates our preferred pronouns and other identifiers into nuanced, contradictory biographies. The intersectionality we will discuss is no longer abstract or pro forma. It is embodied. Here. Now.

### **PRACTICING CULTURAL EQUITY**

Exclusion from and difference within the classroom/institution as a site of investigation.

**Q: Who is *not* in the classroom or other institutional space of learning and why? How can we structure our learning environments to address the exclusion of various students and communities from them?**

*Sasha Sumner*

A day in the life of a semester:

“What is the relationship between the structural racism of slavery and the racism that is inscribed in the very processes that create trajectories that lead inevitably toward incarceration or higher education?”—Angela Davis.<sup>16</sup>

We gather in the classroom having read Angela Davis's “The Meaning of Freedom,” a searing critique of incarceration and institutional injustice. In preparation for working within a local community, across lines of race, gender, and class, we use her text as a jumping off point.

Students pair up and answer a question posed by artist Rick Lowe: “What is my moment of race?” They reflect on Davis's text and recount a personal experience. We regroup, and, to gain perspective, each retells their partner's story to our group. Everyone has experience with race. The discussion prompts an

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16 Angela Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2012), 141.

acknowledgment of the denial of the role race plays in our lives. Many of the students' stories have never been told before.

A student of color asks, "What is the difference between public and private, especially in terms of education?" After some discussion, he says how grateful he is to be in the university we are in, and that, if not for financial aid, he would be "on the streets." His words produce an epiphany: this is how economic injustice, class, race, and entitlement manifest in someone's life.

The privilege of higher education is perhaps less visible than the structural racism of judicial punishment. Despite gains in diversifying enrollment, as articulated by Davis, educational freedom, in addition to political and economic freedom, still carries a legacy of unspoken racist ideology. While we remain in a school that encourages competition and ranking, our process at this moment shifts towards mutual understanding and collective empowerment.

**Q: How can we avoid reinscribing the colonial practice of embedding oneself as an artist into the social relations of *the other*? Instead, how might we foster relationships of genuine solidarity by recognizing students' various constituencies or existing social relations?**

*Mark Read*

Leshane recounts the devastating impacts of *permanent exclusion* on residents of public housing in New York City: any person living in public housing who is arrested and charged with a crime—even if *not* convicted—is permanently banned from their home, under threat of eviction for their entire family. He narrates how sixteen-year-old boys are cut off from their families for carrying weed and how elderly parents are left without the support of their children.

Leshane and his colleague Monica are our contacts at Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), an organization dedicated to tenants' rights, homelessness prevention, economic development, and community revitalization. They're here to discuss their campaign against this policy of displacement. As my students listen I see traces of discomfort and disbelief on their faces. The disbelief is understandable considering the students' own class backgrounds, which, while not monolithic, probably wouldn't have exposed them to the harsh realities of policing policies within oppressed

communities. The divide is real and felt. We are just beginning the effort to communicate across that divide.

The group in attendance is being offered an opportunity to collaborate with GOLES, as part of a class that they are taking on collective practice. Over the course of the coming weeks, some of the initial wariness will wane. It won't be perfect or miraculous. The students arrive with their own struggles, and collaborative work is never simple. But consistency of engagement and sincere interest will go a long way towards bridging the distances between us.

There are awkward silences in this first encounter. I, as teacher, try to be quietly present to this discomfort without seeking to resolve it, confident that there will be time for people to become familiar. Monica eventually breaks things down: "So, is this something you guys want to do or not, 'cause we could use the help, to be honest." "Definitely, definitely," my students respond almost in unison, clearly relieved to have been invited in. And so begins this relationship, fraught but tender and open.

My own hope is grounded in my confidence in our partners, and bolstered by the knowledge that the school has committed to working with GOLES in a multiyear partnership rather than semester by semester. Most of all, I am confident that GOLES's fierce urgency and clarity around this issue can guide us all to move to a place where our interdependence becomes tangibly felt, and we more fully understand that our own personal freedom is not fully realized until our friends and neighbors are equally free.

**Q: In what other spaces besides the classroom or institution are people experiencing pedagogical processes? What can be learned from what unfolds there? Why is this happening outside?**

*James Andrews*

Moving Beyond the Classroom:

In 2014 I found myself planning a popular education workshop, *The U.S. Student Movement: Organizing for the 21st-Century Strike*, with student and teacher organizers in New York's Union Square for the upcoming Montreal Student Movement Convention. I was invited to propose a session with student unionists around the growing education crisis. I wanted to share insights from my recent

participation in OWS, where I witnessed occupiers unwittingly reproducing the same oppressions we were fighting against in the streets. Blind spots among organizers led to confusion between activists working within these spaces, destabilizing equitable power relations.

I had recently left a teaching position at a NYC private high school where I taught socially engaged and media art to some of society's most privileged students. This was followed by two years of teaching in rust belt public schools, struggling under austerity budget cuts. At the private school I witnessed white students learning the master's tools (law, international relations, even conceptual art); at the public schools I saw mostly Black and Brown students, just as gifted and deserving, lining up outside their school building for long periods, soaked in freezing rain, waiting quietly to pass through police checkpoints.

Back in Union Square, we discuss how neoliberalism and white supremacy not only corrupt our schools, but also distort the thinking and planning capacities of movement organizers, especially those with social, academic, race, and class privilege. Through small-scale workshops combined with analytical planning models, we are learning how to detect and expose the hidden hierarchies within movement spaces and collectives. This is one example of how radical pedagogy can make a powerful impact beyond the classroom.

#### REVISITING ART'S ROLE

Undervalued or revisionist cultural histories as a site of investigation.

**Q: If the social is merely one site to explore the fundamental problematics of society, do aesthetics, making, and other forms of creative imaginings play a particular role in processes of emancipatory transformation?**

**Q: How might we revisit the distinctions drawn between artist and artisan to address the role of cultural production in relation to social relations and political struggle?**

*Barrie Cline*

I teach art to apprentice construction workers in a Labor Studies program.<sup>17</sup> When I look to find common ground among us, I discover it lies in the social practice of NYC subway graffiti. Studying its history provides an opening for understanding how structural racism plays out in urban planning and how the collective actions of the working class can build a different world.

Scotty Demel, an electrician, contributes *MACHINE*, a poem that is emblematic of what came up in the classroom. “When Moses ran his highs out to Long Island so that Levittown can be reached with ease, he aided the machine. . . .”

“Working all day and seeing your family briefly before you must go to bed and repeat this insane cycle. . . . However, life always has a way of breaking through the machine. The rebellious nature of graffiti, is a sign of life poking through . . . your machine will not prevail.” (He emphasizes Taylorism’s bottom line and affirms graffiti’s pushback.)

“Much like the pride taken from graffiti work is the pride in a good conduit run . . . it’s as anonymous as graffiti on a bridge. But like graffiti, there are ways of running conduit so certain people will know who ran it. In the heart of the machine, life still prevails.” Scotty connects the collective artisanal labor of electricians to the “sign of life” created by graffiti artists. Though hidden, these collectivities cheer him.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing from my own experience with communities organized around graffiti writing in NYC during the 1980s and Joe Austin’s *Taking the Train*, we discuss how the artistic form forged a system for liberatory self-creation through an “economy of prestige” based in aesthetic innovation.<sup>19</sup> Far from the street art that was a pathway to the gallery system, other forms of graffiti were not easily commodified. Pioneered by poor youth of color (chiefly young

17 Some assume my class comprised primarily white men, but half of the students are people of color, a quarter are women.

18 We read excerpts from Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), who argues art and artisanship before the eighteenth century were not divided and art’s valuation was contingent on its relationship to daily life. Asked to consider their personal experience, the tradespeople reframed their work to become a more anonymous, collective artisanal process.

19 Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

men), multiethnic crews formed around aesthetic guidelines. They developed communication systems to navigate around gangs and city authorities. In constant dialogue with the city, this art form worked against racist representational systems and was a fleeting, but profound, instance of poor and working-class creativity.

Through this conversation we also found a way to engage (sometimes uncomfortable) parallels to organizing across difference in their unions, as well as students' own role as builders in uneven development.

LESSON PLANS II

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**TEACHING AND  
PERFORMING DIRECT  
ACTION**



# The Arts for Social Change

## Development of a Strategic Plan for Direct Action

Christopher Robbins, Ghana ThinkTank (New York, New York)

Taught at SUNY Purchase College.

This is a seven-week assignment to produce a strategic plan for an arts-based collaborative action. The rest of the semester is then spent working to implement this action with community collaborators. This course takes place in a storefront in Yonkers, New York, with the requirement that all assignments engage the Yonkers residents and that the final project depends on the participation of Yonkers residents to succeed.

The assignment is broken into two parts: part one consists of warm-up activities that focus on participation. Their aim is to provide context, change perspectives, and study social scenes. They help students get comfortable with working with strangers and familiar with direct action techniques.

In part two we look at techniques and strategies for research and preparation of the projects. Groups learn about the community they wish to work with, cross-cultural concerns, mapping the area, how to conduct interviews and produce visualizations. We also learn different tactics for community action, including campaign strategy, evaluating participants, and so on. At the completion of this assignment, students are prepared to work in earnest on their final projects: direct actions in collaboration with Yonkers residents.

### STEPS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

#### Part 1: Warm-Ups

**Week 1:** Students pursue participation with a stranger, creating a piece that requires a stranger's engagement to succeed. The reading for this step is *The White-Savior Industrial Complex*, by Teju Cole (Cole, 2012). Students are asked to watch *6 Rules for Allies*, by Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones (Jones, 2010).

**Week 2:** Students work to design an encounter that changes someone's perspective about the purpose of a specific place in Yonkers. This week, students build a structure or create a scene in everyday life that changes the use of that place. The reading for this week is Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces* (Kester 2013, 1–14).

**Week 3:** The group plans an intervention. Students study a scene, lay out rules, and then chose one to break. Here, we understand rules to be social conventions, and scenes as social scenes, that is a group of people who seem to be following patterns. The reading for this week is Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (Goffman 1966, 3, 4, 35–42, 55–59).

## Part 2: Skills

**Week 4:** Students engage in mapping their work area. During this time, they complete a transect walk of their group's section of the neighborhood, assigning each team member a different role, such as photographer, note taker, interviewer, transcriber, sketcher, collector, and so on.

**Week 5:** The group learns how to conduct interviews. Students interview their selected partner on issues and observations discovered in the mapping activity and the warm-ups. Readings for this week are *American Values* (Kohls, 1984) and *Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook* (Storti 1998, 13–17, 20–24, 29, 37, 44–53, 56–61, 64, 78–82, 88–90, 96–97).

**Week 6:** Group decision-making. Groups select key points and goals raised in the sessions devoted to interview and mapping. We will use these as starting points for decision-making exercises in class.<sup>1</sup> Readings for this sixth week are excerpts from Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1989).

**Week 7:** Finally, we develop the strategic action plan. Groups map out a community action plan, including strategies for specific populations, actions, and audience. The reading for this last week is the manual *Tactical Technology Collective*.<sup>2</sup>

1 See the “Ranking” section of *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer's Guide*, eds. Jules N. Pretty, Irene Guijt, John Thompson, and Ian Scoones (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 1995), <http://grographics.com/purchase/ArtSocChange/readings/PRA-MANUAL.pdf>. See also Christopher Robbins, “Participatory Rapid Appraisal” (presentation, February 26, 2013), <http://grographics.com/purchase/ArtSocChange/presentations/PRA-Purchase.pdf>.

2 Christopher Robbins, “Assignment: Identify Focuses and Allies” (unpublished lesson plan, 2016), <http://www.grographics.com/purchase/ArtSocChange/assignments/5-FocusesAndAllies.docx>.

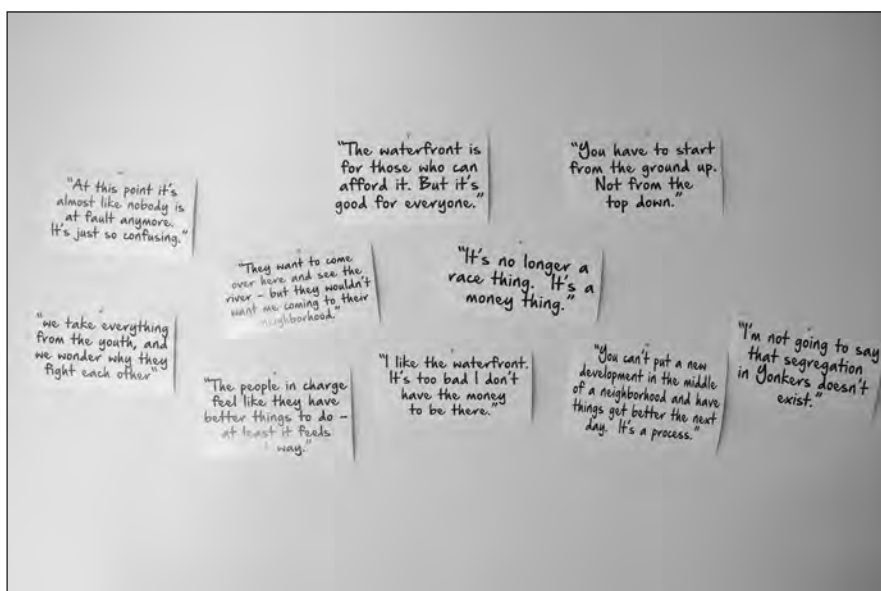
### An Example—What Took Place?

The first few weeks of the assignment are incredibly diverse and unpredictable, as students from a variety of backgrounds apply very different understandings of the assignments in Yonkers. The goal of these warm-ups is to get students more comfortable with working with strangers, and to understand the neighborhood better in a physical and social way. I encourage people to be light-hearted with the warm-ups. Since the course gets serious later, it is important that students feel free to explore at this stage.

Projects that students proposed in the warm-up phase ranged from pretending to be pregnant and smoking on the street, to building an enormous set of Jacks and Balls to play with commuters, to wearing Trump, Sanders, and Clinton masks during the 2016 election primaries and handing out cream pies in a busy town square.

We then moved into skill building, focusing on participatory action research techniques to identify project ideas with Yonkers residents. In the mapping assignment, students formed groups of four. They were assigned a particular segment of the neighborhood to explore and implemented a grid or transect walk to identify variables important to people in different Yonkers locations.

For the interviews, students identified people they had either met through their projects or through a list of neighborhood organizations and individuals who had agreed to work with us. During class I trained them in interview



Quotes from interviews with Yonkers residents while completing the mapping assignment with students.

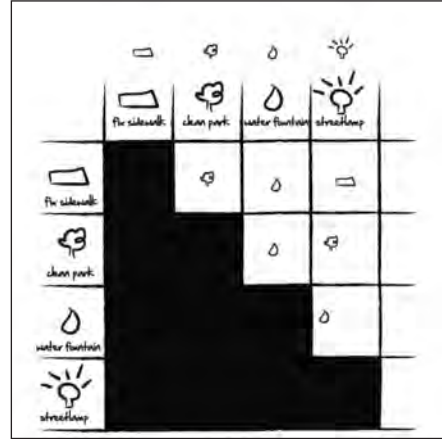
techniques, and they received a worksheet discussing cultural difference and assumptions.

At this point, students came back with stories. Some were fun or funny, others uncomfortable or unpleasant. They also listed cultural assumptions that they found were prevalent in Yonkers, as well as hopes, fears, goals, and ideas about social change they gathered from interviews in the area.

These quotes and ideas were then used as the basis for the final skill-building exercise, before developing their strategic plan. We used the following participatory action research methods in the group decision-making process:

*Preference Ranking.* First, students broke into groups of three or four people, and agreed on four different ideas to compare. These ideas were written out on a grid, so that each could be compared with the rest, one by one. Each student went through the grid, choosing their favorite between each pair. They also noted what was good about the *winner* and bad about the *loser*.

In the second phase, each idea was ranked according to the attributes students identified as either good or bad. This allowed us to overcome a simple up or down vote, identifying reasons behind each decision. In many cases a group was not able to agree on a specific project idea, but were able to find they actually shared a goal. That common goal could then be the beginning of a conversation leading to new ideas. Voting in this stage was done with beans,



Example of a Preference Ranking grid, in this case choosing between four hypothetical neighborhood projects.



Second phase of Preference Ranking, in which participants choose between attributes shared among the different project proposals.

coins, rocks, or any other small object. Each student was given a set number of beans and distributed them however they liked. They could choose to put all ten in one square, identifying one project and one reason as most important, or, instead, to spread their votes among several reasons or project ideas.<sup>3</sup>

### STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

To complete this seven-week assignment, students mapped out a strategic action plan, including strategies for specific populations, actions and audience, which they could use to work towards a collaborative direct action with Yonkers residents.<sup>4</sup> The projects needed to include as participants those community members the work was most likely to impact. The biggest failure for a project would be imposing the students' wills on someone else. Following is a series of steps to guide students in the design of their activity. All of these steps were taken from the manual *Tactical Technology Collective*.

#### Step 1: Answer the Following Seven Questions about Your Idea

1. *What is the problem you want to address?*
2. *What is your vision of how the world will be?*
3. *What change is needed?*
4. *Who is affected, + or -, by the problem?*
5. *How are these people related to the problem and each other?*
6. *Who are you trying to reach?*
7. *Who will be affected by your change?*

#### Step 2: Identify Allies

Put together a list of allies and participants for the project. Who could help advise? Who could benefit from your project? Who could be hurt? Who is supportive? Who is against it? Be as specific as possible. Draw this chart out on a large piece of paper, and identify where on this scale different people fit in relation to the project idea.

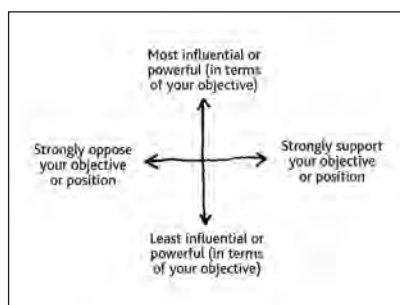


Image from the manual *Tactical Technology Collective*.

3 More details about these techniques can be found in Robbins, "Participatory Rapid Appraisal."

4 It is based largely on the Campaign Strategy segment of Information Activism's 10 Tactics series. See <https://archive.informationactivism.org/basic1.html>.

Now, draw out this chart on a large piece of paper, and place people or organizations into these categories, ranging from active allies to active opponents. The goal is to begin to identify different strategies and tactics for different people.

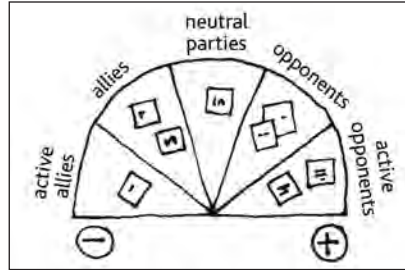


Image from the manual *Tactical Technology Collective*.

An active opponent is someone who strongly opposes your objective and is influential or powerful. As power or influence recedes, they start to become less active opponents. Run through the same process for your allies.

And don't forget neutral! In many cases you will find people who don't care, don't think about, or don't think they are affected by the issue or idea you are addressing (climate change is the easy example).

Now, start to identify tactics to achieve your goals for each of the categories of people we identified.

Here are some vague examples to get you started:

- Supportive: mobilization tactics;
- Neutral: educational, visualization tactics;
- Opposing: use disruption, interference.

The goal here is not only to figure out how you can best work with people to achieve the project's goals, but also to identify who may be hurt by your work, and who may be powerless to stop it.

To complete this assignment, compile all of this information into an action plan, including strategies for specific populations, actions, and audience.

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# Assignment

## Displace an Object or Everyday Action

Pedro Lasch (Durham, North Carolina)

This lesson plan was originally designed and used in the following courses by Pedro Lasch:

ART of the MOOC: Public Art & Pedagogy (Duke / Creative Time  
/ Coursera)

Social Art Practice & Socially Engaged Humanities (Duke  
Grad-Undergraduate)

Originally designed for ART of the MOOC, a free online course on social practice offered by Duke University, Creative Time, and Coursera (2015–ongoing), this assignment was intentionally created for a massive and very diverse group of learners, ranging broadly in age and background, as well as levels of experience and exposure to practices and theories of socially engaged art. More than 19,000 learners in over 134 countries have enrolled in these courses since they launched in English and Spanish versions. Advanced learners produce more elaborate interventions, without preventing introductory learners from engaging in this kind of work in an accessible and simple manner. Inside the MOOC platform, evaluation centers on peer critique based on rubrics designed by the instructor, as well as forum and online hangout discussions. In an intimate class setting, evaluation centers on sharing experiences in person with or without the rubrics, discussing the outcomes, and then returning to produce similar work with the newly gained experiential, social, and intellectual insights.

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

Learners were asked to displace an object or daily action so that its new and unlikely placement may bring about interesting social responses or insights. Since learning how to judge this kind of work is as important as producing it, part of the week's assignment consists of each learner evaluating three other projects.

Learners were asked to document their process through at least two photographs. One that showed the original context of the object or activity, another that showed the way in which the object or activity was transformed by their displacement. Participants could submit up to, but no more than, ten images if they felt they would help capture the complexity of their displacement.

Next, learners were asked to write a text for the project not exceeding 750 words, and it had to include at least the following three parts: (1) a description of the social response caused by this displacement as shown in the images; (2) a description of their efforts to conduct the event, including any relevant efforts that did not produce a result; and (3) a brief highlight and explanation of how at least three topics, artists, or projects mentioned in the lecture were directly related to their project.

**THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

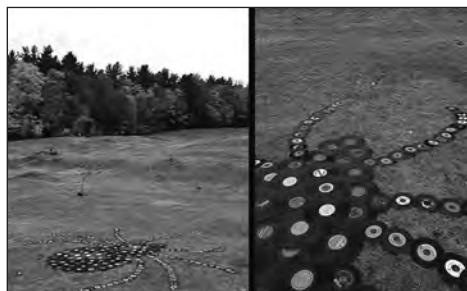
Before staging their displacements, students were exposed to a broad range of historical and contemporary theories, examples, and case studies through



Shahrzad Malekian: Creating Personal Space on the Tehran Metro. Tehran, Iran (2015).



Amber Keller: Public Parking, Private Space (2015).



Patrick Stacey: Vinyl Spider. Bolton Landing, New York, USA (2015).



Saba Aghababaei: Employee displaces herself throughout the day at the office. Boss disgruntled as she sits atop bookshelf. Tehran, Iran (2015).

video lectures by Pedro Lasch and Nato Thompson. Guest presentations by artists, scholars, and activists also engaged with such ideas and practices. These videos are all permanently available for free at Coursera's ART of the MOOC: Public Art & Pedagogy (Week 2–3).<sup>1</sup> We also discussed evaluation rubrics before students started working, giving them a clear sense of relevant aspects and things to prepare for. Optional readings were provided for those wanting to do more advanced work.<sup>2</sup>

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

Because more learners keep enrolling every week, at this point it is hard to determine how many people have done

this exercise inside and outside of our MOOC. In fall 2015, when there were two possible activities to do one week, over a thousand learners chose the assignment. This means that in just one week, we had groups of three students around the world evaluating projects and discussing results in online forums and public hangouts. Of course, the depth of the works ranged a great deal, but seen as a global experimental process, the results were fantastic.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/EVALUATION PROCESS**

These are the rubrics provided for peer evaluation inside our MOOC platform. The same criteria are used for initial discussion in intimate classroom settings, expanded through more spontaneous conversation and reference to more advanced readings and materials from the video or in person lectures. Evaluation criteria consist of the following:

- 1 See <http://creativetime.org/projects/art-mooc/> and <https://www.coursera.org/learn/public-art-pedagogy>.
- 2 See suggested bibliography at the end of this chapter.

1. Were the required technical elements of the assignment satisfied? Did the author submit at least two photographs of the object or activity and a text describing the project?
2. Was significant effort put into this assignment? This may be obvious from the scope of the completed project, or may be inferred from the description provided by the author of their efforts as part of their submitted text. The evaluator should accept the author's description of their efforts at face value!
3. Did the work involve at least two people, including the author, in its production? This should be determined either from the photographs or the text description of the project.
4. Does the work relate to issues discussed in this week's lesson? This should mostly be apparent from the explanation provided by the author about the three connections to the lecture included in their text.
5. Is there a strong relationship between the idea and the social interactions?
6. Is the author's concept for their project clear and well articulated?
7. In your experience, is the gesture original, unusual, and creative? Original in this context means that the displacement is unusual, defies expectations, or surprises the viewer or participants.



Ryan Kauffman: All Day Breakfast Sign  
Turned into Museum Wall Label (2015).

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Additional resources available at the learner-generated content ART of the MOOC wiki: <http://artofthemooc.org/wiki/>.

# Socratic Mapping

Daniel Tucker (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)<sup>1</sup>

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

What constitutes socially engaged art? Establishing criteria to answer such a query is a recurring and often circular discussion in courses dealing with the relationship between art and society. What is in, what is out, what is relevant, collaborative, political enough to be counted? What does that mean for artworks and artists that fall on the other side of the line? But what looks like a problem for arguing the validity, inclusiveness, formal diversity, relevance, and multiple historical lineages of this field should not be a problem.

In my course at Moore College of Art and Design, I attempted to resolve this issue by creating a lesson drawing from the analytical tool proposed by Pascal Gielen in his essay “Mapping Community Art,”<sup>2</sup> a required reading for my introductory seminar *Art & The Social: Foundations in Socially Engaged Art*. Based on the premise that all art is relational, Gielen proposes an axis to interpret a range of positions an artwork may take and reveal the precise manner in which the work is relational (either *auto* or *allo* relational), as well as if its aim is subversive or digressive. Using Gielen’s axis, my students were asked to plot out the artworks introduced in subsequent readings, lectures, and discussions throughout the term. Their final assignment was to produce an alternative axis, or to utilize Gielen’s axis to delve deeper into a specific subgenre or artist of particular interest.

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- 1 Particular thanks to my seminar students from 2015 and 2016: Omenihu Amachi, Carrie Breschi, Sarah Chavez, Alex Conner, Gretchen Phoebe Durst, Christianna Fail, Debbie Gibson, Emily Johnson, Jacqueline Lang, Preeti Pathak, Sara Pottenger, Veronica Scarpellino, Candice Smith, Rachel Wallis, and Huewayne Watson.
  - 2 Pascal Gielen, “Mapping Community Art,” in *Community Art* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 16–33.

Overall, the course's impact has been twofold: it has inspired our students both to think critically about the intentions and outcomes of projects we study, and it has strengthened their understanding of the porosity of the field of socially engaged art. This is particularly important in facilitating conversation with other graduate degree programs in our small school setting, such as art education, fine arts, design, and curatorial practice. Building on the model set forth here, other instructors throughout the program have incorporated new iterations of the axis that support their own teaching.<sup>3</sup>

#### **ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

First, we drew the axis on a sheet of butcher-block paper and discussed the terms “auto/allo relational” and “digestive/subversive.” We added some additional paper for further note taking. We provided note cards on which students wrote examples of projects that had resonated with them in the discussion or reading. Later, we asked a student to volunteer to be the “plotter” who would place the note cards on the axis. The students began to debate their understandings of a particular work. Projects that took longer than five minutes to be agreed upon could be placed in a holding area known as “the parking lot.” As disagreements occurred, it was helpful for the instructor to step in as a note taker, to record and identify patterns in the conversation. In the past I have recorded this debate through a number of categories of notes: “issues” identify sticking points for how the axis works and either need to be addressed immediately, or identified and discussed further (e.g., time, scale, intent, result, context, object versus process, or “thingification,” and emotional response); and “constraints and guidelines” record the agreements made between the students about what assumptions are accepted and determined when placing a project on the axis (e.g., the point of view is the present, even for historical work; “plotters” are the audience, rather than speculating about other audience experiences). As the project unfolds the notes begin to inform plot location changes. This leads to greater clarity of the overall axis image, with cards moving from students' hands and the parking lot onto the axis faster. In the end, a discussion can be held about what was learned from the tool itself, though we had to emphasize the process of plotting as the objective over the outcome. This embodiment of collaborative practice and deliberation served as a model for socially engaged art practice. It was also a practical way to generate discussion that involves all students more easily than a traditional close reading. A follow-up project can be developed here to allow students to plot their specific research interests on the axis, or to create new maps based on specific issues or constraints. This can help to

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3 Thank you to Moore's faculty including Jess Garz, Paul Farber, Anthony Romero, Shira Walinsky, and Jonathan Wallis for their work in this area.

balance out group processes that may privilege those with collaborative experience over those who work more individually or privately.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

The discussions of readings that structured each week were led by students. They could both emphasize particular works that they were compelled by and introduce additional projects that they felt were missing from the readings. At the end of the day, the students were invited to reflect on the readings and artists that had been introduced. After, they were asked to write down on note cards the names of the projects that resonated with them most. A student plotter (volunteer) posted those cards on the axis. This process required at least half an hour to progress. It benefited greatly from being revisited at least once, because the students would often debate among themselves about the qualities a certain project represented, and wanted to come back and revise its location on the axis. At times, while deliberating over a plot point, we revisited a project, a website, or a reading to discuss in detail, or to be reminded about what information we were able to access through available sources. This limited speculation about what audiences or participants may or may not have experienced.

Because the project was flexible, it could be skipped over if there was not enough time, and revisited the following week with examples of projects from the two subsequent class meetings combined. It did not need to be rigid and could be concluded at any stage, though for my purposes it served as the starting and completion activity for the six-week seminar. This could also be spread throughout a semester, or compressed to two or three weeks.

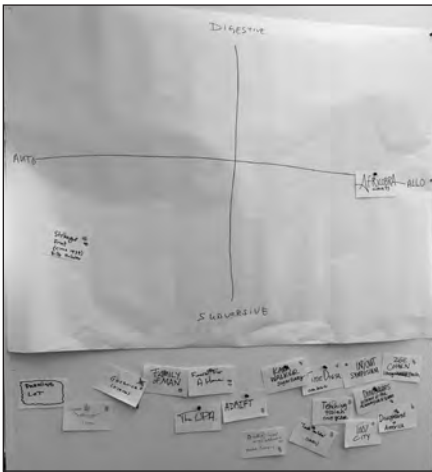
Course participants were able to demonstrate their awareness of readings' specific contents, to engage in debate about project outcomes and assessments from both the artist and the audience perspective, and to identify the strengths and limitations of analytical tools like the axis. Most notably, all students demonstrated high levels of participation. The repetition of certain projects and artists through the plotting process engraved a diverse range of artistic references into their memories, which have resurfaced in subsequent courses and thesis papers. Finally, the other faculty in the program were able to build on the analytical tool of the axis, and incorporate it into their own courses with these and other students.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION / EVALUATION PROCESS**

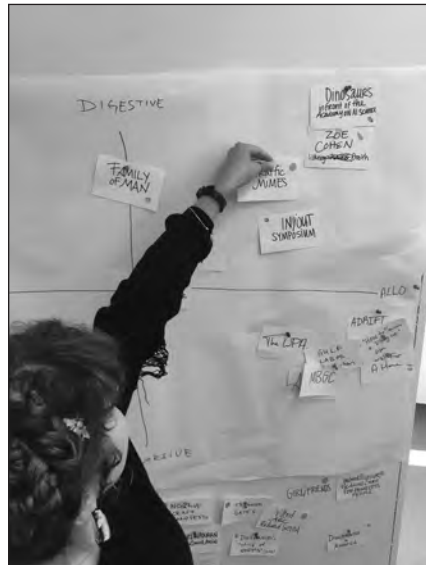
Throughout the process students were invited to comment on the mapping activity and to propose adjustments. This often led to suggestions about issues or

constraints that needed to be named, and occasionally influenced how students approached their own independent maps as final projects. Additionally, students offered input by introducing their own artists and projects to be plotted, based on their research and concerns.

Students consistently commented that they found this process enjoyable, and that over time they understood it as a means to instigate conversation that may not occur during close readings or lectures. Some students with a stronger preference or need for concrete outcomes felt some frustration in the beginning and middle parts of the process, but expressed satisfaction at the final stage. Students who were not as interested in horizontal processes of discussion and decision-making felt frustrated, and channeled their energy into their independently defined final map project. Overall, the process was an embodiment of the kind of group processes required to produce deliberately collaborative art. This experience was also concomitant with graduate students' acclimation to school in general, as an accompaniment to their foundations seminar.



Week 1: Africobra and Strange Fruit were the first to be plotted and set the field for other projects and artworks to be positioned subsequently. We started out with the first group of projects in the parking lot and gradually moved them onto the field (June 2016).



Week Four: Jackie Lang plotting (July 2016).



Finished axis with students plotting themselves (August 2015).

Week Four: Group plotting by Alex Conner, Sarah Chavez, and Carrie Breshi (July, 2016).

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# Graphic Responses to the Northwest Detention Center

Work by Art and Global Justice Students

Beverly Naidus (Tacoma, Washington)

## WHO WE TEACH

To define the context for our socially engaged, interdisciplinary studio art curriculum and the project I will share, it's important to describe our unique student body. The University of Washington, Tacoma, Washington is an urban-serving, state university, a satellite of the Seattle UW campus, created twenty-seven years ago, for place-based, nontraditional students. The curriculum is innovative and the class size is more like that of a small liberal arts college than a typical state university. Our students are mostly working class and the first in their families to go to college. They range in age from sixteen-year-olds to senior citizens. Many are immigrants or children of immigrants. There are some veterans, and many students have grown up in military families; some are still living on base. Our campus is located close to two military bases. Many of our students have never been to a museum or gallery, and know very little about contemporary art. We have been waiting for the administration to fund our Arts in Community major for over ten years; in the meantime, our courses service all the majors on campus. In one studio art class you can find majors in criminal justice, psychology, computer science, nursing, environmental science, communications, business, marketing, social work, accounting, and several hybrid majors including Arts/Media/Culture, Global Studies, Urban Studies, and Ethnic/Labor/Gender Studies.

While not all of our students are beginners to art, the majority have significant anxieties about making art, so along with teaching media literacy and how to think critically about the topic of the class, we try to bolster their confidence to take creative risks, while developing their skills with visual grammar and various media (from Photoshop to site-specific installations) and their ability to think conceptually. The challenge of these tasks in a ten-week quarter can sometimes seem daunting, but we witness enormous shifts when the students commit to the process.

**WHAT WE TEACH**

Our curriculum is unique in that we only offer a few traditional medium-based classes, like drawing. This is both from our desire to work with thematic content and the limitations of an underfunded arts program. We have very little equipment, other than a small digital lab, tables and chairs, and a shop for sawing and welding. My contributions to the curriculum include courses like Art in a Time of War, Body Image and Art, Eco-Art, Cultural Identity and Art, The Artist as Visionary and Dreamer, Art and Global Justice and Labor, Globalization and Art. In each class students learn about the topic, see art about it, and make their own art in relation to it.

**FACILITATION STRATEGY**

Students were prompted to begin their work with a series of questions: *How have you been an immigrant, or displaced by economics or other factors? When have you felt without power and authority? How do we develop empathy for those who are struggling to transition to a new life? What does punishing undocumented people serve? What are the popular myths that the mainstream media has about undocumented people and refugees?* After discussing those questions, students were asked to create a photo collage about their own feelings of displacement, from their own experience or that of others.

After sharing their work with each other, they were asked to do some research about the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) run by GEO, a for-profit prison company located in the Port of Tacoma, only five minutes from our campus. None of the students had been there before, so during the third week of class, we went to visit the physical site and met with members of the resistance movement, camped out outside the prison. Students took photos of the exterior of the prison, listened carefully to the stories being told and visited the NW Immigrant Rights website and the NWDC Resistance website. They learned that the prison charges the government one hundred dollars per day for each prisoner they house, and that the prisoners work in the facility earning one dollar per day. There is inadequate health care and nutrition, and communication with the outside world is very costly. Food in the commissary costs twice the amount as in supermarkets, and the prisoners depend on family and friends so that they can get enough to eat and pay for their phone and email costs. There is no incentive to deport the inmates since the prison makes so much money off their presence. The students were horrified and moved by what they learned.

As part of their research for their digital photo collages, the students were encouraged to interview fellow students, friends, coworkers, or neighbors who are immigrants, and to start brainstorming ideas for a poster.

We looked at a slide show that focused on posters about immigrant rights and students began to draw their ideas in their journals and brought them to class to share. Most of the students had never worked with digital imaging software before, so they had to jump that hurdle with a short tutorial in class, the patient help of lab technicians, and online videos.

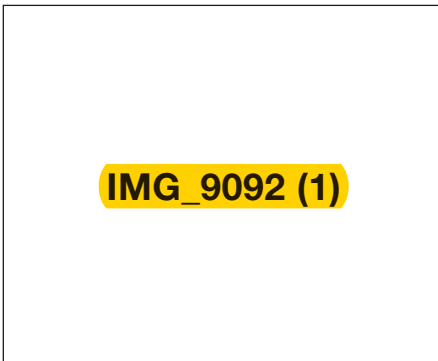
During our feedback sessions, students discussed formal issues and how certain theories of visual grammar made an image more compelling or more readable than others. They learned about layering for depth, and how to make texts read more poetically and less like labels. After looking at first drafts, we did a media literacy exploration so that students could examine how advertising expresses the values of dominant culture. We talked about strategies for both deconstructing and subverting that language. We discussed the ethics of image appropriation and investigated memes, culture jams, and more.

After sharing many drafts of their digital versions, the students printed out final copies and hung them in the campus library. Inspired by the work created by the Art and Global Justice students, my other class, Cultural Identity and Art, will create a very animated public dialogue to look at how racism and xenophobia function in the creation and perpetuation of detention centers.

### ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Assessment for this project was quite simple. Students gave each other feedback throughout the image-creation process. Once the work was on display, there was a discussion about how to make it more visible. Many students shared their work online and two students decided to make an installation on campus so as to give the community a sense of what it feels like to be detained indefinitely. This is yet to happen, so we are unable to assess that experience at this time. The public dialogue will also be assessed once it is initiated in two weeks.

### EXAMPLES OF STUDENT POSTERS



Most of the global honors Art and Global Justice class, as well as one of the leaders of the NWDC Resistance group, Tomas A. Madrigal, PhD (in the orange jacket). Photo taken by Erika Merz, right outside the NW Detention Center in the Port of Tacoma (WA), April 2017. Missing from this photo are two Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals students who did not want to be anywhere near the NWDC. **[CHI]**



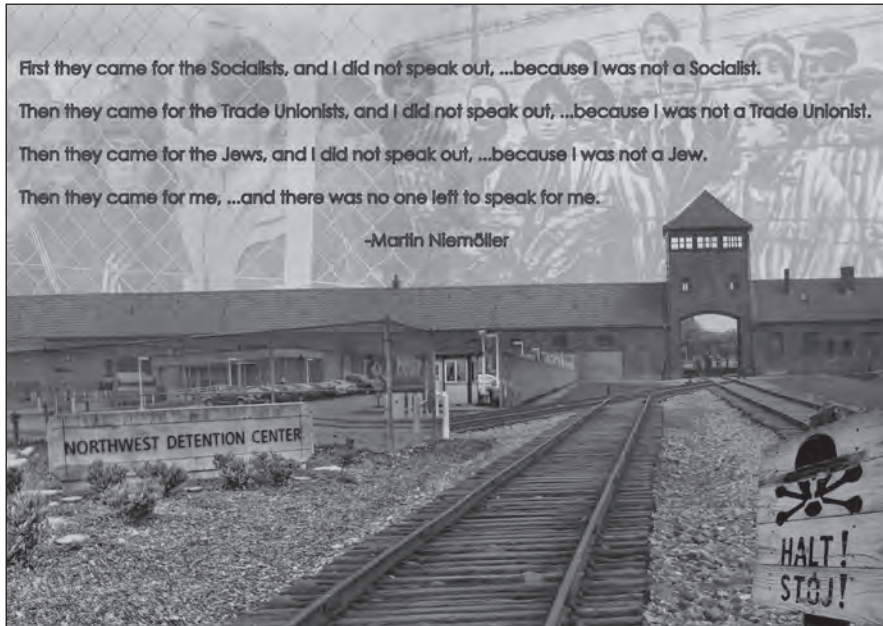
Karla Gonzales (accounting major), *La Jaula de Oro*, digital collage, 17" x 22", 2017.



Krystal Hedrick (environmental science major), "Cultivate Resistance," digital collage, 17" x 22", 2017.



Natalie Lawrence (psychology major), "DO NOT ENTER," digital collage, 17" x 22", 2017.



James Christian Flores Da (social welfare major), “Through the Eyes of Ignorance,” digital collage, 17" x 22", 2017. [CH2]

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Additional resources for more research on activist art: [http://culturalpolitics.net/social\\_movements/art](http://culturalpolitics.net/social_movements/art).

# Interventionist Art

## Strategy and Tactics


Todd Ayoung (Ithaca, New York)

Graduate course for Art and Public Policy, NYU Tisch School of Arts

The true avant-garde of our time . . . fulfill in this way the cognitive function of Art (which is its inherent radical, political function), that is to name the Unnameable, to confront man with the dreams he betrays and the crimes he forgets.”

—“Art as Form of Reality,” Herbert Marcuse

My students were generally from middle-class backgrounds, various cultures, races, and nationalities. Our course pivoted on Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s brief but relevant remarks from “Art as Form of Reality,” a 1969 Guggenheim lecture about artistic Form and the social and political global upheavals in the late 1960s and 1970s. Its relevancy reveals similarities to our post-9/11 *society of control*. Marcuse lays out the struggles young artists identified to combat conformist notions of Form, the illusions of the then anti-art tendency, and the general global social uprisings on all registers to “confront man with the dreams he betrays and crimes he forgets.”<sup>1</sup> He weighs whether or not what we call *socially engaged* art is really a continuation of the avant-garde given the context of “the end of art,” an anti-art rallying cry identified as both ahistorical and simplistically melting art into life.

This course also mined other readings, images, performances, videos, and exhibitions, all with the goal of understanding the many paths avant-garde art movements have taken in the late twentieth century. How have artists, or artist collectives, reconciled historical aesthetics with the drive to merge art and life as defined by the Russian Constructivists, Dada, Dutch *Provos*, Situationists, but also more recently with Relational Aesthetics and  intervention-

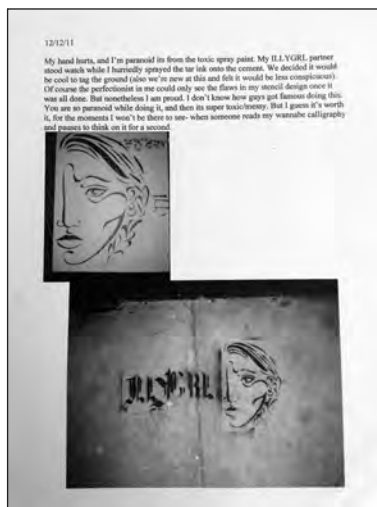
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1 Herbert Marcuse, “Art as Form of Reality,” (lecture, Guggenheim Museum, New York City, 1969).



“I believe in people. I believe in freedom of expression, freedom of choice, freedom of action”: Subway platform interaction with strangers.

ists Art? How have aesthetic notions changed, from a politics of revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century to one of confrontation between the 1960s and the 1990s, and now under post-9/11 notions of interventionism? How have approaches to aesthetics and politics varied, say, for sexually, racially, culturally, and ethnically different socially *marginal* groups? How do notions of the private and public sphere relate to artists’ understandings of art and politics in an age of *terrorism* and government surveillance? How do our current notions of art and politics engage with the *alienated nomad* who drifts through a multitude of social frameworks? Students researched a range of tactics used by such groups as the Surveillance Camera Players, Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, Critical Art Ensemble, Interim Sites, BLO, Yes Men, PAD/D, ACT UP, Group Material, Guerrilla Girls, REPO-history, Godzilla, Retort, Critical Mass,



Illy Girl stencil, text and image.

WOCHENKLAUSUR, and YOMANGO. They also learned about a diverse group of artists working with the many faces of political activism, like Adrian Piper, Hans Haacke, Joseph Beuys, Martha Rosler, Conrad Atkinson, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kuger, David Hammonds, Alfredo Jaar, Felix Gonzalez Torres, William Pope, Gregory Sholette, Aaron Burr Society, Johan Grimont, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Mel Chin, Santiago Sierra, Thomas Hirshhorn, DJ Spooky, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles. During the first half of the term students researched, critiqued, and formulated their own ontology of art and politics based on such themes as *revolution*, *confrontation*, and *intervention*. During the second half of the term students developed a model articulating this way of being in the world in the form of a performance, a speech, a website, a piece of music, a video, an action, pamphlets, street stencil, fashion, bumper stickers, a manifesto, a demonstration, a teach-in, and so on.

#### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

Interventionist art was defined as an act *not* involving traditional (gallery, museum, performance space) venues or individual recognition for artistic acts. In most cases, Interventionist art was done in *public spaces*, without permission and sometimes without proclaimed individual authorship. Examples, based on artists' collectives we studied, follow:

1. Creating an action in public space that disrupts/reflects on everyday life routines.
2. Inserting socially critical material clandestinely in an otherwise "conformist" context.
3. Guerilla day/night tactics inserting signage on surfaces not sanctioned for visual art.
4. Using recent technological platforms to present alternative artistic, social, and political views.
5. Assembling an art and politics collective identity to challenge individual artistic authorship.
6. Enacting tactics, with or without permission, about overlooked/forgotten histories in urban contexts.
7. Actions questioning our "society of control" manifested as increasing surveillance culture.

#### **THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

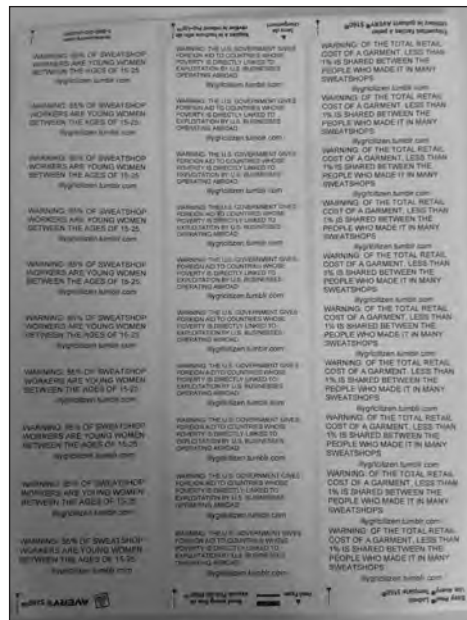
Students selected and researched movements using the framework of revolution, confrontation, or intervention. Each week they took turns presenting

their findings to the class. Students learned the photo montage techniques of John Heartfield, Hannah Hoch, and Romare Bearden in order to create a visualization of their convictions about art and politics. Materials included rubber cement, scissors, magazines, and an 18" x 24" form core board. Ultimately they produced an interventionist art project and a written manifesto articulating their political convictions.

**DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

Student projects took many forms: signage inserted into in-store magazines that questioned the fashion world’s lack of racial diversity; spray-painted street stencils about being both illegal and proud; websites and stickers about the importance of dreaming before you can act to change the world. Other projects tagged fashion labels in department stores in order to bring attention to unfair labor practices in poor, clothing-producing countries. One student planned a street action discussing student debt, then asked for donations towards her NYU tuition. Another created a photo montage about a politician they supported, one performed visual interventions in a subway station referencing police stop-and-frisk, still another wore a white shirt on a subway station platform offering strangers to tag him with permanent markers as he discussed this same open-ended encounter with them.

Student finals varied in investigative quality, but most were experimental and thoughtful actions referencing class debate and readings that provided a scaffolding necessary for interventionist art tactics and strategy. Given that most of the students were generally not familiar with, and often cautious about, public space interventions, the outcomes were more or less successful. Unfortunately, the class was only one semester. Ideally, a two-semester course would let students digest the readings and presentations properly, with the second semester serving

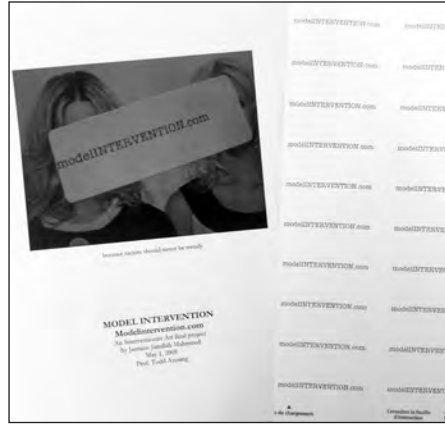


Stickers for tagging clothing labels about sweatshops.

as a practical laboratory for experiments affording a more complex, multifaceted approach to public art action.

**OVERVIEW OF THE  
DISCUSSION AND  
REFLECTION/EVALUATION  
PROCESS**

Each student delivered a short lecture with a round of questions and answers that followed. Evaluation focused on, first, how their presentation articulated the clarity of theoretical concepts from class readings and presentations; second, the coherence of their work; and, third, how their lecture related to their individual photo montage, final action, and manifesto. To add outside critical feedback, I invited to the final class artists, activists, and critics Heather Davis, Jim Costanzo, and Elaine Angelopoulos.



Stickers for inserting in fashion magazines about racism in the fashion world with manifesto.

**EXCERPT FROM A STUDENT-GENERATED MANIFESTO**

The rights of democratic citizenship come with certain civic responsibilities. In our everyday lives, we consent to certain measures of societal control and for the most part we abide by them through policing ourselves. (Everyday life's) tractability does the work of the hegemonic state. But if the state is watching and policing us, who in fact is watching and policing them?

One of the greatest tools of the democratic struggle is not just the ability to vote, but the opportunity for political criticality that the voting process affords. The process of conscious listening to agonistic debates produces the materiality of democratic practice. It also gives people the power to make conscious cultural, environmental, social and consumer decisions. In addition, it frees us, if only momentarily, from a psychology of containment, oppression, and voicelessness.

Criticism is remodeled in the televisual and print media as treason, terrorism, or socialism. These reflexive arguments disable the possibility of an agonistic space for debate as anyone who articulates disjunctive politics is designated an enemy target. The ritual of the secret ballot is a great antidote to increased government surveillance, the naturalization of a militaristic state, and the public ridicule that opposition now attracts.

Despite the skewed nature of proportional voting, the symbolism of “one vote per person” is powerful and should be aligned to a process of universal registration as well as political education. Whether or not people choose to commit themselves to participative democracy, electoral inclusion based on citizenship should be the norm. A higher voter turnout would theoretically force government representatives to engage more closely with their constituents and feel the very real threat of being voted out as much as the grave responsibilities of being voted in. In turn, civic engagement could be reactivated by the responsiveness of government to its constituents. While it is difficult to govern those who don’t want to be governed, the government should ensure that the mechanics of voting foster greater interactivity with and accountability to its citizenry. Twenty-first-century technology could be the conduit to make voting more relevant for the people and address the malaise of electoral passivity.

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# March of Solidarity

## Cultural Workers of St. Petersburg, Russia

School of Engaged Art, Rosa's House of Culture, Chto Delat/What is to be done? (St. Petersburg, Russia)

### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

The assignment consisted of joining the traditional May 1 demonstration in St. Petersburg, on May 1, 2016, as an organized carnivalesque group of cultural workers in solidarity with other political groups: workers' unions, feminists, queer, and more. Students had to come up with new and actual slogans that would address specific political and socioeconomic circumstances. In addition to the participants of the School of Engaged Art, the idea was to include, involve, and coorganize with other groups of artists and cultural workers and intellectuals in the city.

### **THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

The first step took place one month before. During the previous session of the School of Engaged Art, tutors delivered homework to the participants of the school, in which they were invited to come up with a sketch of a costume, a slogan, and a prop that would critically, ironically, or otherwise refer to the actual situation of precarity of artists, art education, and other fields of knowledge and culture in St. Petersburg particularly, or more broadly in Russia or beyond.

In the second step, tutors and participants of the school invited other entities of Rosa's House of Culture to join the pre-May Day practical workshop at our school (which is based in Rosa's House of Culture) to make props, costumes, to rehearse, and to organize. Projects included flags and banners as *She-roles of Labor*, featuring the portrait of three women who ended up in prison in Kazakhstan after the oilworkers' uprising in Zhanaozen in 2011; *The Artist as Queer*; *Our Dead Are Dancing and Singing Along with Us*; *Un-Traspassability of the Black Square*; and *Non-Workeress of Culture* (referring to the feminized cultural worker, and transforming the *worker* into the *unemployed*).

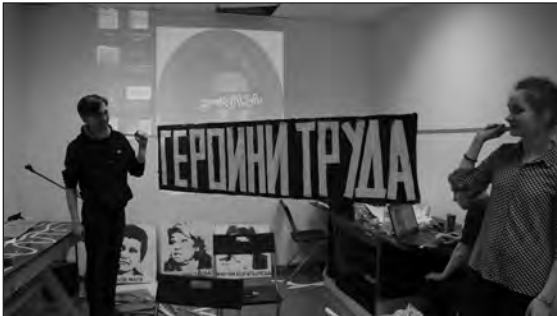
Step three took place on May 1. We infiltrated the parade between processions of Queer Affinity Group, Samba Band *Rhythm of Resistance*, and a body of Anarcho-Feminist Parade group.

### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES

We successfully went all the way through the city center with about one hundred people who joined the body organized by the participants of the School of Engaged Art. We shouted slogans mocking official parades from Soviet times. In Putin's time, these slogans are also being appropriated by official demonstrations, but we added some sarcastic antihomophobic rhymes, like *MIR TRUD MAI GOMOFOB PROVALIVAI* [May, Labor, Peace, Piss Off You Homophobe] or more poetic ones referring to LEF-like agitprop poetry of the early 1920s, such as *PISHI LEVOI, RISUI LEVOI, LYUBI LEVOI, SHAGAI LEVOI, SMOTRI LEVOI, DYSHI LEVOI* [march march—left, write write—left, love love—left, fight fight—left, watch your left, breath breath—left].

### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION / EVALUATION PROCESS

After the parade we continued with a series of outside lectures in the park next to the Academy of Art in St. Petersburg, and practiced a parody performative march around it. We occupied a stage installing our props and slogans for



Participants of the School of Engaged Art at Rosa's House of Culture in the process of preparation. Pavel Khailo and Natalia Pankina: She-roles of Labour.



Tutors of the School Tsaplya Egorova and Nina Gasteva: Artist Is Also Queer.



Bandiera: Our Dead . . .

around four or five hours, having lectures and debates about the problems of the official education system of higher education in art in Russia and other post-Soviet countries, as well as about the conditions in the art system. We communicated with flaneurs in the park, we drank, we had fun, we sang.

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Group photo after the march.

# A Training Ground for the Future

## Taking On Campus Issues with Art

Sheryl Oring (Greensboro, North Carolina)

While much of my own creative work can be classified as socially engaged art, I have been hesitant about teaching a class on the subject. I have a hard time wrapping my head around how to overcome some of the challenges inherent in fitting this type of work into a semester format. Is sixteen weeks long enough to create meaningful work? What happens when the class ends? How can we establish and nurture relationships with our community with students who are only around for a few months? Then, in the fall of 2015, I was invited to do a yearlong residency at the Lloyd International Honors College at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, developing and teaching courses that relate to my own research. As part of this residency I taught a class called Introduction to Socially Engaged Art. Some twenty students from across the university signed up; among their majors were biology, nursing, theater, music, art, art history, and business. The course was structured around one major project in which students were asked to work in small groups to create a project inspired by their research.



Choosing a meeting location that allowed the students to feel comfortable was an important first step for the class.

### **THE STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

First, the students and I selected a comfortable place to meet. I then asked students to make a list of ten things they cared about (and why). They were expected to share a few items with the class. After this, students were required to give a short presentation on an artist who works in the field of socially engaged

art. They were also required to interview someone whose own work addressed one of their topics of interest. Later, I asked students to form small groups based on common interests and spend two class sessions brainstorming ideas. After these initial steps, they were required to write a one-page project proposal that they would present in class for discussion. Next, they shared some of their individual skills, and I invited them to share skills with each other. We allowed for a period of four to six weeks for project development, during which time I asked students to document their work with photos and/or video. At the end of each meeting we closed with a class discussion on each project.

### **A DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

We met once a week for three hours, primarily in the lounge area of the freshman honors dorm. Choosing a meeting location that fostered dialogue was an important first step for the class. Because of the way classroom elements are organized, many university classrooms shut down communication rather than fostering it.

In the first exercise, students were asked to write about ten things they care about and explain why. The conversation helped identify a number of campus issues that students wanted to address. In turn, this provided an answer to one of the nagging questions I had about teaching this class: if we defined our community as the campus, then we were all already part of this community. And this community to which we all belonged had a plethora of pressing issues. Student involvement in tackling these issues is sometimes lacking, in part because they are on campus for a relatively short period of time. But student critiques are taken seriously by campus administrators. Hence, it seemed that focusing the class on campus issues would be a good first step towards establishing a working framework for the class.

Our first class meeting helped create a sense of trust among students that carried forth through the semester, playing a big role in their ability to work closely together. Emphasizing research's role in the creation of art was a priority throughout the class, and students' interviews played a significant role in this. Among those interviewed were the assistant chief of police for the campus and a therapist at the campus health center. These interviews helped inform students' thinking as they began developing their work.

After several rounds of discussions students formed groups around four issues of shared concern: university's response to sexual assaults on campus, mental health issues among students and university's response, the concept of "home" as it relates to students who are moving away from their childhood homes to create homes of their own, and the issue of language as a commodity.

For the purpose of this essay, I will focus mainly on the project addressing sexual assaults on campus. This case study was possible in part through

ongoing discussions with one of the students involved, Yasmeen Mjalli, an art history major who graduated in spring 2016. That semester, Mjalli said, there had been a troubling number of sexual assaults on campus, and this “instilled an unsettling sense of fear among students.” Each sexual assault was reported to students, staff, and faculty via emails from the university titled “Timely Warning” featuring sterilized descriptions of the assault.



Students were asked to collaborate and share resources across groups. When the weather was good, we sometimes met outdoors.

“It felt to many of us as if each case was treated as a number rather than the extremely sensitive and life-changing event that it was,” said Mjalli. As she explained, “Four other classmates and I structured our project to tackle this issue of impassive responses to horrendous events on our campus, which we called *Timely Warning* after the original emails. Our choice to title our project after the emails arose from our issue with the practicality and irony of the words *timely* and *warning*. Quite often reports would be emailed to students several days after the initial assault had actually taken place. To students, this did not feel very timely and even more so contributed to the fear on campus that such a disturbance had occurred without notice. This, then, negated the *warning* aspect of the email as the warning could not possibly serve any purpose several days after an assault had occurred. We did not feel safe on our own campus and these *timely warnings* only mocked that.”

Mjalli and her partners printed out each *Timely Warning* email that was sent over the previous year, filed them chronologically, and wheeled their filing cabinet around to various locations on campus. At each stop, students were invited to choose one of the emails and write a note or draw a picture for the victim. “The aim was to humanize each and every assault, acknowledging them as the deeply sensitive and life-changing events that they were to the victims, our peers,” Mjalli said.

“Our project disrupted the *business-as-usual* mode of being and created a platform for discussion. This project forged a space for students to express frustrations, fears, and ideas. Students cried and hugged us for acknowledging assault for what it was. We even had students compelled to share their own personal stories of assault and recovery, thanking us for bringing to light something so commonly brushed under a rug.”



Five students worked together on the *Timely Warning* project.



The group was surprised by the tremendous response they received from students and even the dean of students, who happened to pass by one of the events.

The question of what to do with the materials gathered through these campus events presented the group with a challenge: should notes and drawings be displayed on campus? One group member thought this could potentially objectify someone's tragedy. Should the notes be sent to the victims? Should they be compiled into a book? "The questions kept coming, and not many answers felt satisfactory enough," Mjalli recalled.

#### OTHER PROJECTS DEVELOPED IN THE CLASS:



*Mental Note* asked students to share advice and/or words of encouragement to those whose lives were impacted by mental illness. Members of the UNCG community were invited to write letters to those dealing with mental illness, and place them in a mobile mailbox that was set up at different locations around campus. Letters were later shared via Facebook.



*Home Is Where the Truck Is* asked students to examine their evolving definition of home as they enter adulthood, move away from home and create their own homes. The project took place in the UNCG's Art Department's Art Truck.



*Word Market* examined the interchange of different languages and commerce through the construction of a *Word Market*. Participants could *sample* a word in a different language and *buy* it at checkout with a word of their own.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

At multiple times throughout the semester each group was asked to give project updates to the class, as well as to share problems and concerns about the work. In turn, the class was asked to provide feedback while projects were being developed. Both at the midterm point and at the end of the semester, students were asked to provide written feedback about the course. During our final class meeting, we looked at documentation of the projects and critiqued each one.

#### CONCLUSION

The semester ended just as it seemed the projects were taking off. Several students said they wanted to continue working on their projects in the following semester, but they ultimately dropped these plans as demands from new classes took priority. Even an attempt to organize a public discussion highlighting the work done in the class proved impossible to organize with students no longer taking the class.

Nonetheless, more than a year after the course ended, and well after graduation, Mjalli is still drawing on the experience for her own work in her new home in Ramallah. “Social interaction—something as simple as a hug or writing a note to a stranger—is the conduit for creating awareness and dialogue about issues pervading our societies. I have just moved to Palestine after graduating from college. Already, I am brainstorming ways to create a peaceful dialogue via socially engaged art, the only space within society to create outside of the bounds of conformity and silence,” Mjalli said.

What I learned from this experience was that classes like this cannot be judged simply by the resulting work. Rather, they must be seen as training grounds for future work, the results of which may not be seen for years or decades.

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# Misplaced Women?

One-Day-Long Intense Performance Art Workshop  
on Migration in the Public Spaces of Belgrade,  
Serbia, October 29, 2015

Tanja Ostojić (Belgrade, Serbia)

## ORIGIN OF THE MISPLACED WOMEN? WORKSHOP

*Misplaced Women?* (2009–17) is an art project by Tanja Ostojić, both an Internet platform and a platform organized in public spaces in cities across the globe to discuss the issues of migration, displacement, security, privacy, and exposure. It manifests in a series of performances by the author herself and group and individual performances predominantly by women and performance workshops conducted by Tanja Ostojić. Essentially, the performance score might include unpacking, rummaging, and detailed searching of pockets, purses, wallets, personal suitcases, and bags on sites that are relevant to migration, such as airports, train stations, Western Union Money Transfer services, shopping malls, and police stations for foreigners who want to obtain residence permits. Performers might repeat similar actions that build upon the basic proposal of the *Misplaced Women?* concept, dealing with positions and experiences of people in transit, migration, and exile. This project addresses the everyday displacements common to transients, migrants, refugees, and the itinerant artists traveling the world to earn their living. Performances engage with themes of migration, desired mobility, and relations of power and vulnerability in relation to movement, foregrounding the female body.

Participants get an opportunity to develop sensibilities for related issues and processes; it is at this point where important questions start to open up. Workshop results are as important as the processes documented, archived, and written about by participants. Sometimes, valuable contributions occur, such as “coming out” by Marta Nitecka Barche, a student from the University of Aberdeen of Polish origin who had spent three weeks in prison in the US because her visa had expired. As a follow-up to our workshop, she wrote about the feelings of humiliation and shame she experienced while being handcuffed and anklecuffed.

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Participants for the workshop were selected by an open call via the Remont independent artists association in Belgrade, receiving applications from a wide range of artists, activists, and people of diverse backgrounds, including women and girls of diverse generations. Among them were two seventeen-year-old schoolgirls, several art students, feminists, activists, and cultural workers, and one unemployed nurse. Nela Antonović, art director of Mimart Theatre and experienced performance artist, also participated. From early morning to late evening fifteen participants created a new community, conducted research and discussions, and two group public performances. These showed to be introspective and communicative experiences for participants and passersby, including refugees and volunteers who gathered by the Info Park benches and the park across the Faculty of Economy, near Belgrade's Central Bus Station, where refugees following the Balkan route rest. Artistic process and the experience of migration can only be understood if "on their own skin." In this sense, most participants reported that during the workshop they experienced a particular kind of initiation that arose in those most experienced strong flashes of forgotten past traumatic memories.

### THE ACTUAL STEPS WE TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

Regardless of their experience with performance art and migration, workshop participants were invited to bring a bag or purse of their own. We gathered in Remont, in order to get to know each other and democratically discuss the project over a cup of tea.

Participants were invited to perform *Misplaced Women?* and share their experiences on the web blog and a public discussion. Contributions to the blog included images, notes, stories, and videos. We

discussed and researched, and tried out different practical and performative interventions at three migration specific places near the Central Bus Station, where between three and five hundred refugees stop daily for medical help, food, warm clothes, information, and to charge their mobile phones. Some refugees going through this area are offered to be transferred to free hostels to rest for up to three days. Others are sent to an asylum in the Krnjača suburb.



Tanja Ostojić: *Misplaced Women?* workshop. Introduction talk with workshop participants at Remont artists association, Belgrade, October 2015. Photo: Srdjan Veljović.

Most refugees in the area wait for the next ten-euro bus towards the Croatian border. In the late afternoon we returned to Remont so as to warm up, share a meal, sort out impressions and recorded material, discuss, prepare, and conduct the workshop's public presentation that extended through the evening.

#### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES

First we went to a Refugee Help Center in the Miksalište's storage area, where we gave our donations and established contact with several refugees and volunteers. Some refugees told us about their journeys and their experiences of violence on the road, as well as their plans for future destinations. In such difficult situations, refugees' optimism left a good impression on participants. Many were young male Afghan refugees who had walked over Bulgaria to Serbia. There were so few women and children because they were avoiding crossing Bulgaria in order to avoid brutality by Bulgarian police and organized hooligans. Families go mainly via Macedonia from where, as soon as they enter Serbia, they are registered and directly transported to the Croatian border in free buses organized by Serbian police. Many immigrants had been beaten up, robbed, and imprisoned for up to twenty days in Bulgaria. Their cell phones, money, and passports had been taken away. We also met a fifteen-year-old Kurdish Syrian girl who came over Bulgaria and had to leave her parents behind in Turkey, since they did not have enough money to travel along. She suffered from severe foot injuries and exhaustion. Inside the Miksalište there is a tent where refugee children play and draw with volunteers and social workers. We took several pictures of drawings where kids expressed their impressions from the journey. On



Tanja Ostojić: *Misplaced Women?* workshop. Getting acquainted at Miksalište, a Refugee Help Center for the Balkan Route, Belgrade, October 2015. Photo: Srdjan Veljović.



Tanja Ostojić: *Misplaced Women?* workshop. Group performance including Tanja Ostojić, Sunčica Šido and Nela Antonović, Info-Park, Central Bus Station Belgrade, October 2015. Photo: Lidija Antonović.



Tanja Ostojić: *Misplaced Women?* workshop. Group performance, Info-Park, Central Bus Station Belgrade, October 2015. Photo: Lidija Antonović.



*Misplaced Women?* workshop. Group performance in the park across from the Faculty of Economy, Belgrade, October 2015. Photo: Srdjan Veljović.

one of the drawings a refugee child depicted explicit violence against his/her family members while on the road in Bulgaria and in Iran.

Inside the Info Park and the park in front of the School of Economy we did a total of two group performances that consisted of emptying all contents from our bags and pockets and turning each single item inside out. In them, we took each item apart and removed batteries and cards from our phones and cameras. We then reversed it, packing it all again. Nazer, an asylum seeker, joined us and showed us the content of his refugee bag, which contained a bordeaux Robe-di-Kappa wool scarf that had been part of my father's closet since my school years.



Tanja Ostojić: *Misplaced Women?* workshop in Info-Park, Central Bus Station Belgrade, Where Balkan Route Refugees Used to Rest, October 2015. Tanja Ostojić with Nazer and his fellow travelers. Photo: Srdjan Veljović.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

After the workshop, most of the participants wrote valuable and extensive reports. I share here only the following excerpts:

*“During the workshop I felt compassion, solidarity and the need for more solidarity.”* —Bojana Radenović, master student, theory of art and media, University of Arts, Belgrade

*“My motivation to take part in this workshop was that I had had ample opportunities during my life to develop strong friendships with war refugees from former Yugoslavia. I have witnessed scenes of verbal and physical violence against refugees by ordinary people and police. . . . Participation in the Misplaced Women? performance workshop overwhelmed me with feelings of revolt and sadness. The change of perspective produced by the artist’s intelligent maneuver evoked memories of the scenes I witnessed on a Bar-Belgrade train a number of years ago. That day, policemen were checking a women traveling with two of her kids in a brutal way, while baby stuff were flaying all over the corridor. Being involved in the Misplaced Women? performance myself, from an observer I transformed into the victim. I felt naked, attacked, exposed to any passerby who might decide to approach me. I thought about all possible complications that could arise if my documents, bank cards or mobile phone would go missing. All those paper and plastic things that allow for our communication and consumption, without which it seems I would not be an homo sapiens but rather an alien. A word that could best describe my experience regarding the luggage searchings that I witnessed and the one I performed myself would be rape. I think this performance workshop should be an obligatory educational tool for those in positions of power. At the end, I was left with more questions than answers which, as our artist claims, is the role of art.”* —Jelena Dinić, unemployed medical worker from Belgrade

#### **SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Selections from the *Misplaced Women?* blog by Michelle Lacombe, Bojana Videkanić, Sigrid Pawelke, Elena Marchevska, Teresa Albor, and Dagmara Bilon. <https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/>.

# Documents of Resistance

## Artists of Color Protest (1960–Present), Collective Timelines

Antonio Serna (New York, New York)

### **BACKGROUND**

Documents of Resistance is an art, research, and educational project created for the Free University, Interference Archive and Triangle Arts Association that presents an intersectional view of art history via the art and the activism of people of color from the 1960s to the present. In this reexamination of history there is no separation between politics and culture. Protests and studio time are seen as two paths towards the same goal of achieving social justice. Only through this lens can we see the emergence of a truly American avant-garde that continues to transform cultural institutions. This lesson aims to give form to this avant-garde, by putting forward the collective struggle and individual transformation of artists and communities of color.

### **COLLECTIVE TIMELINES**

Collective Timelines sessions were developed in order to facilitate a visual exploration of the context around this period (1960 to the present). During each session, participants were encouraged to collaboratively research and share knowledge and personal stories related to this history, as well as to consider the importance of collective archives, personal memory, and exploring historical narratives through art making. By collaboratively mapping out the historical context in which artists of color lived and worked, we can get a better understanding of the sociopolitical forces that affected their studio production and organizing activities.

### **ACTIVITIES**

Each Collective Timelines session covered two decades and began with an introduction of important events and themes culled from assigned readings or from a live presentation by an invited guest artist, historian, or researcher (see Session Information below). After the introduction, participants were encour-

aged to add graphics, images, and text chronologically across blank timelines, each spanning one decade. Additional geographic information could be embedded into the timeline by arranging items on both the left and right of the timelines, so as to indicate East and West Coast activities. In addition to a precompiled binder with visuals from each decade, participants were asked to bring additional visual reference material of their choosing, along with art materials of their choice. A networked printer was available for additional graphics found online during each session. Each of the timeline-making sessions produced two large horizontal mixed-media and collage panels, visually highlighting a decade of increased art-making efforts and activism across racial and ethnic groups, geographic areas and themes, that we have come to understand as the turbulent history of artists of color and their struggle towards cultural self-determination, freedom of expression, and a place within the canon of American art.

#### **IMMEDIATE GOALS OF COLLECTIVE TIMELINES**

First, to make apparent that history is a collective effort. Second, by inviting participants to combine these related histories—beginning with the Civil Rights Movement—they were able to visually locate concerns shared by the Black Power Movement, Chicano Movement, Native American Movement and other movements during this period. Threads of anti-imperialism, feminism, welfare, and labor struggles also became visible. Additionally, visual relations on the timeline might have guided questions such as, “What effect did the ‘March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom’ in 1963 have on African American artists in New York? How did the birth of Black Feminism plant the seeds for the intersectional analysis that emerged within the ‘Third World Women’s Alliance’ and consequently influence artists like Ana Mendieta? What was the political climate during Adrian Piper’s formative years and how did it influence her work?” By giving form and relevance to this immense history of self-determination and resistance to cultural hegemony, the long-term goal of these sessions was to inspire a new generation of artists, curators, historians, archivists, museum, and gallery workers of color to continue to expand this history.

#### **COLLECTIVE TIMELINES SESSIONS**

The first session, *From Civil Rights to Artists Rights*, covered the years between 1960 and 1979. The second session, *The Culture Wars*, focused on events between 1980 and 1999. The third session, *Artists of Color and Global Issues*, set the stage for an examination of the years from 2000 to the present.

**1960–1979: From Civil Rights to Artists Rights**

In this first session we mapped out the events and activities by civil rights groups like Black Panthers, Brown Berets/Chicano Movement, and the Young Lords alongside the emergence of art activist groups like Spiral, Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation, the Combahee River Collective, and others. Participants were asked to find visual connections between civil rights activities and art activism.

**1980–1999: The Culture Wars**

In this second session we created a visual timeline to map the wave of multiculturalism that hit the art world. After the protests against racism in cultural institutions during the 1960s and 1970s, more artists of color were included in museums and galleries, and covered in the media. We discussed the following points: “Is this increase in visibility a sincere sign of change and dedication to diversity or an extension of tokenism? Additionally, censorship in the arts and the consequential battle for government funding gave rise to the cultural wars, but who’s really at war and who does it affect the most? How do artists of color handle being in the spotlight? And how is cultural power shifted within these new relationships?”

**2000–2010s: Artists of Color and Global Issues**

Our final session was more fluid than the previous sessions, given that this history is still being written. We kept an open framework for discussion pertinent to global and local issues concerning artists of color: “What are some of the recent activities marking the past decades? How are local and international networks of artist and workers of color organizing in the new global landscape of international exhibitions and activities in the art world? What incidents compare to the events in previous decades? How are they the same and how are they different?”

**OUTCOMES, EVALUATION, AND REFLECTION**

Participants’ experiences varied between sessions. Some participants opted to jump right in with sketching and collaging, while others took up research and fact-checking roles. Familiarity with major events of the 1960s and 1970s was more noticeable compared to the familiarity with the 1980s, when the introduction of conceptualism and postmodernism began to complicate arguments and arguments concerning power and representation. The question remains: can the project of art history ever be complete? Especially since much of this history remains obscured and unwritten.

## IMAGES



**1. 1\_IMG\_7046\_med.  
png**

View of blank timelines before sessions.  
Top and bottom indicate decade.

**2\_IMG\_7897-  
composite.jpg**

Collective Timelines at Interference  
Archives, June 27, 2015. 1980s and 1990s  
session with contributions by Todd Ayoung,  
Elaine Angelopoulos, and Kara Lynch.

**CollectiveTimelines\_  
TriangleArts\_  
IMG\_7056-large.jpg**

Collective Timelines at Triangle Arts,  
January 24, 2015. 1960s and 1970s session  
with contributions by Maureen Connor,  
Susan Jahoda, Fran Ilich, and Gabriela Ceja.

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745\_72\_dpi.jpg**

Indexed template by Antonio Serna.

**5\_DSC3120\_Raw-to-  
PSD-11.5x15.5.jpg**

Detail of indexed template by Antonio  
Serna showing a close-up of West Coast  
activities at the start of the 1970s.

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# INTERVIEWS



# What We Produce

## Social Models That Can Be Repurposed and Reapplied, an Interview of Pablo Helguera

Jeff Kasper and Alix Camacho Vargas,  
Social Practice Queens (New York, New York)

**Jeff Kasper:** Let me start by introducing myself: I am Jeff Kasper, artist, educator, and MFA student at Queens College studying Social Practice.

**Alix Camacho Vargas:** And my name is Alix Camacho Vargas, I am also an MFA student at Queens College concentrating in Social Practice Art.

**Pablo Helguera:** Well, thank you so much. It is such a pleasure to be here, I am Pablo Helguera, artist and educator, and happy to be in this conversation.

**JK:** Right now we are at Museum of Modern Art in New York City on October 2016. Pablo, I am interested to know what you think about the different types of spaces within which we learn about social practice—and what that means to you.

**PH:** You know social practice as a genre or discipline shares a similar relationship to other process-based practices, most specifically performance art. Because in contrast to, let's say the more established art disciplines like painting, sculpture or printmaking, which have hundreds if not thousands of years of history, as well as a very established genealogy of forms of teaching, social practice and socially engaged art are the inheritors of a post-minimalist rebellion that questioned traditional artistic aesthetics at the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of this century. This puts these practices in unscripted territory. Performance art is maybe the closest to social practice because while it comes from the visual arts it also borrows from the theater without really becoming theater. And, at the same time, it is not really the traditional visual art we see in galleries.

With that in mind, it's interesting to know how, for example, performance art has been developed as a practice and taught in schools because initially it was a way of liberating yourself from the constraints of the gallery space, the white wall, and the time constraints of experiencing art. Sometime in the late 1950s and early 1960s, what became known as performance could be almost

anything such as one gesture, or something that lasts for one hundred years, or just one pose, or a word, or something else altogether. It did not fit any of the traditional art categories. I would say that socially engaged art emerged from this revolutionary break of performance art.

Admittedly, the problem with performance art is that the moment it became a known and identified discipline, it also posed the challenge of how does one teach such rebellion. How do you teach a revolutionary attitude that seeks to break with every pattern? What we have seen is that while performance art remains a very liberating outlet for many artists, it has also become academic in many ways. I am from Mexico City, where there was an important performance art movement that nonetheless became very fossilized.

I feel very lucky to be one of the artists who started making socially engaged art before it really had a name. Which I believe is really the best place to be: when you are exploring this terra incognita where you don't really know where you are, where you identify and feel that there is a problem out there that you want to solve, and you know that the solutions out there are insufficient and that you are trying to think about something else, all the while responding to the ways that other people around you are doing something similar. But what I think has happened over the last few years has been precisely this process of academicization similar to what I described in terms of performance art and artists' books. So we are now entering into the social practice academic world. Even museums understand what that means right now, even if they are not able to fully embrace it yet. Ten years from now it will be impossible for museums to ignore this tendency.

So these are the problems that we are about to face, or that we are facing currently. What I have done as an instructor of these practices is to primarily think of it as a pedagogical exercise that uses elements of listening, discussion, conversation, evaluation, etc. Much of this is described in my book *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, which is essentially what I like to call a Materials and Techniques Handbook. By way of illustration, if you are learning photography you need to learn about the techniques and materials of photographic processes including what film is, and what different kinds of lenses do, and what setting the exposure is about, and so on. My thinking at the time I wrote the book was to similarly try to pull apart or deconstruct the elements of socially engaged art, in order to understand its components so as to teach how to incorporate them successfully into one's practice, or to consciously modify or truly transform them going forwards.

**AC:** How is the academy preparing social practice artists for the challenges that s/he is going to face in the real world? For instance: learning how to obtain

grants. Because in order to impact audiences and transform society, some essential values are not coming from the artistic field, they come from other fields. How is the academy preparing artists for this type of challenge?

**PH:** That is a good question, and honestly I don't run a program that teaches social practice, but I do think we are terrible in our schools by failing to help artists navigate the systems of support that can assist social practice projects. Art schools generally have been very detached from the art market. The greatest trauma of an artist after you graduate is that you are screwed financially. Not only do you owe a lot of money to the school, but at the same time you don't really have a clear path as to how to make it professionally speaking. You need a gallery, but getting a gallery doesn't mean anything. Why? Because you can still have a gallery and be completely broke. The reason why it's helpful to look at all of this is because in a way the social practice artist is not dissimilar from that anthropologist and sociologist, that urban planner, who joins government, who starts working on other people's projects to start supporting themselves. So that is one thing.

The other thing is that the art market does not know how to make sense of socially engaged art. For the art market, art is only art inasmuch as it is something you can acquire, that you can collect, and that you can sell to others. But the art market right now is very much unable to support the experience industry. So what social practice provides is more of a program, or an experience involving a group of people. A collector can't help you with this, or a collector does not see the value of helping you. Yes, the world of philanthropy supports things that are intangible. What I think is missing in social practice programs is supporting the possibility to conduct research work that is fundable. Consider a project like Marisa Jahn's *Nanny Van*, which supports and defends the rights of caretakers. She gets money and support from arts organizations, but she can also go to other agencies that support her social justice agenda. So the advantage social practice has is that we don't necessarily need to fund our projects exclusively through the art world; we can actually go to city councils and social service organizations that protect and advocate for the types of social justice issues we are interested in. Does that make sense?

**AC:** Yes, but I feel that there is a tension, and I don't know how you perceive this, but: is this practice ethical, or not, or it is good for society, or is it not?

**JK:** And I also am curious about how this work is measured by us, as artists, and by funders.

**PH:** I think the issue of ethics at this particular moment is not particularly useful when you speak about value because it goes without saying that a project

that is socially engaged in general is focused on the betterment of society, even if it is a confrontational project and has an antagonistic aesthetic as Claire Bishop likes to describe it. When I think such art becomes more of an ethical issue, and this is really a problem involving funders, is when we try to evaluate the quantitative value of a given project. In other words, for foundations, as well as museums, there is a clear bottom line: how many people came to the event? How much revenue did you achieve?

To shift this to academia: sure, I can teach a class to three people, and this may change their lives; these three people can go on to become really meaningful artists or whatever, but it was only three people. So was it a bad class or was it a good class? It only affected three people's lives, but it was a profound and meaningful experience. Or I create a website and three million people saw it; yet, well: who cares? The quantitative issue becomes very important and also very misleading when you place a lot of emphasis on just numbers. This is also where the artistic nature of the social practice projects come into play. Because art, whether we like it or not, is a symbolic activity. And in social practice we are very adamant to stress that we are not about representation, that we are not about simply talking about an issue, but what we are doing is something that is in the world. The break therefore with conventional art thinking is that we are not making a piece about politics, we are instead doing politics within the piece itself. This brings value to an issue. But at the same time we are still engaged in symbolic representation.

I have a bookstore project in Spanish that has traveled around the country. You can easily look at the bookstore and ask: how many books have you sold? But I have no idea how many books I have sold. I am sure that in comparison to Barnes & Noble it's like nothing. However, we are not about selling books. I mean, the sales process is important, but we are really about being a type of social space. And yet, how do you quantify that? Well, it's very difficult. Still, one way you can do it is to interview individuals who have visited the bookstore, and who have had an experience. Or find people who have donated books. This is the qualitative dimension of the work that nonetheless connects with the symbolic dimension of the project.

In other words: what we produce are models, social models that can be reapplied. One of the things that is very gratifying to me is that the bookstore actually first existed in Phoenix, Arizona, and when it moved on to San Francisco, it inspired a group of people to open their own bookstore in Phoenix. Now there is a bookstore in Phoenix called *Palabras*, which is actually directly inspired on the *Radio Gonzales* in Phoenix. And to me that is already a huge wonderful outcome of an object like this one.

# Fail Better

## An Interview with the Center for Artistic Activism

Alix Camacho Interviews Steve Duncombe  
and Steve Lambert (New York, New York)

**Alix Camacho:** I'm Alix Camacho, an MFA student in Social Practice at Queens College. Today we are at the Queens Museum with Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, the founders and directors for the Center for Artistic Activism. To start I would like to ask you to introduce yourselves and describe what Center for Artistic Activism is.

**Steve Duncombe:** Hi, we're "The Steves." I am Steve Duncombe, and my background is as an activist and an academic.

**Steve Lambert:** And I'm Steve Lambert, and I have degrees in Fine Art stuff, but also had an activism background. I came to Steve because I thought he might know more than me about sociology and how I could measure whether or not the stuff I was doing was actually doing anything.

**SD:** And I found the other Steve because I was seeing diminishing returns in the type of regular activism that I was doing, and was really interested in the power of culture and the arts in bringing about social change. I was convinced that the other Steve had the answer.

**SL:** And neither of us did.

**SD:** So we started interviewing artists and activists, folks who combined the practices that we were really interested in. And through those interviews we built a body of knowledge about practices of artistic activists. Once we had that, we figured, well this is really interesting, and we did more reading and research, into cognitive science, social marketing, cultural theory, and put it all together so we could share it with other folks. At this point we have been doing it for about seven years, we have trained more than one thousand activists and artists across the US and in twelve or thirteen countries on four continents. We worked on everything from the legalization of sex work in South Africa, to

working with undocumented youth in South Texas on immigration issues, to anti-war organizing with U.S. Iraq and Afghanistan war vets, to working with Scottish pro-democracy activists.

**AC:** So what are your ideas about academic programs focused on social practice, socially engaged art, or art and activism?

**SL:** We are for them, because we made one . . . just not in a college. My experience was not taught in art school. I had to get out of the art department in order to learn that stuff, so I am glad that this is being acknowledged as a way of making art, but I think it is still underrepresented. Steve and I, the program we have made, is uncompromised. We do it exactly how we want to do it. It's based on both firsthand interviews, but also a lot of research, and it's designed for pretty specific kind of practice that I think social practice would overlap with, but it doesn't encompass it entirely. The goals of this work are affecting power, and thinking in terms of real outcomes, instead of *raising awareness* or *starting a conversation*. That is an important difference, and I don't see that taught in schools as much.

**SD:** I've been a university professor now for about twenty-five years, and the type of teaching I do in the university is very different than the teaching that I do in the Center for Artistic Activism. Steve put his finger on it: *what is the outcome?* In a college classroom my objective is to do things like start discussions, raise awareness, get people to think critically about a series of texts and answer the questions. My role is to facilitate the discussion, make sure it is rigorous, and is as expansive as possible. When we work in the Center, our goal is to change the world.

**SL:** We also don't work with students that often. We work with professional activists and artists, and it really changes the tone and ambition, and what happens as a result. They are immediately applying those ideas to an organization or institution that they go back to, and the ideas are getting integrated into how they do things. That has an impact on how successful they are. This changes how we teach and how we think about how effective the workshop is.

**SD:** We do a lot of research on a very direct question: does the practice work? And how can it work better? A lot of writing on artistic activism, you know, Boris Groys, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, all of whom I have an immense amount of respect for, is theoretical. I am trained as a social scientist. We do empirical research, which means going out and interviewing people, artists and practitioners: *how are you measuring the success of your work?* Going out and talking to audiences and figuring out: *how are you affected?*

**SL:** I got into the politics part because I was trying to defend my house from an illegal eviction. I had two different illegal evictions when I was in college, so I would go to art school, and then I would leave and go to San Francisco Superior Court to file papers to defend myself against these two awful landlords. I felt this huge disconnect between what was presented to me as art and the ideas that informed art, and the harsh reality that I would be homeless in a few days if I didn't win this case. If you want to make artwork about it, that is, like, fascinating to look at, great—but it's not helping fight illegal evictions.

**SD:** We have a derogatory term for that: *political expressionism*. It's art which is *about* politics, but doesn't actually do any political work. We cribbed that distinction from Walter Benjamin. There is a way that the university operates; it takes the most critical and radical ideas, and it turns them into sort of a commodity of knowledge to be consumed, perhaps displayed, but thoroughly contained. I am very cynical about the university as a site for radical struggle. It has amazing recuperative powers—the university can take almost anything radical: feminism, class analysis, critical race theory, and just turn it into a seminar.

**AC:** So are you saying that universities neutralize political actions or ways of thinking?

**SD:** That is probably too strong, but let's just argue that point. Radical academics would like to think in terms of, you know, they tell me I can't teach that but I'm gonna teach it anyway. I'm a rebel! But it's actually repressive tolerance, where radicalism is accepted on this equal plane with English and Biology. "Oh, it's 3 o'clock, I'm going to my Overthrow the State class. See you at the pub later." Knowledge becomes an exchangeable, universalized commodity. I got four credits in this, four credits in that, it's all going towards a degree, boom.

**SL:** I think that maybe I am less skeptical, because to me this should be taught in schools, and when I have control over it, I teach it the way I want to, and it's nice spreading it out over thirteen weeks and having students leave the university with these ideas, and this perspective, although it is by no means where I focus this kind of work.

**SD:** You're right. And there is this one course I teach to academic-track graduate students on activist art and artistic activism. One of the things I do is have the students come together in groups and stage a creative action on their own. And it has been really transformative for some of them, and I think that what is transformative has nothing to do with me or what I am teaching in the classroom, it has everything to do with them getting out of the classroom, working together, creating an action, seeing the impact that it has in the community, and

then reflecting upon that impact, and thinking about what they would do next. It's the one time the knowledge they are learning actually escapes the classroom and goes into the world and runs about causing mayhem.

**SL:** Yes, that's just how I run a class, mayhem.

**AC:** My question now is about social practice and ethics and how you find that relationship between what we try to do as artists and what we accomplish.

**SL:** This is a pet peeve of mine. I hate talking about social practice and ethics.

**SD:** You're gonna wind Steve up and let him go now.

**SL:** Yeah, because it is often brought up by people who don't do the practice. They are outsiders, or critics, or funders, or people who want to start doing it and actually don't have a lot of experience doing the work. "Oh you're trying to do these good things" (this is my critic voice), "you're trying to do these good things, but look, maybe you're not, and I see it and you don't right, and maybe you're hurting people, have you ever thought of that?" And it's like, yeah, there are those problems to consider, and also I am trying to get something done. By all means you should interrogate that, you should if people are unethical and they don't know it, it needs to be called out, but the way it affects the people that are making the work is they then they begin to doubt themselves, especially newcomers. You have to take some kind of risk in order to get the great benefit you can out of artistic activism. If you wanted to have a practice where you were sure that every single time you hurt no one and you were of the maximum benefit, you can go and feed children. You can work with Doctors Without Borders, and give them vaccines. You will know in each of those cases that that person doesn't have a disease, that person is fed. But you're not going to end hunger, you're not going to end disease. Anyone who makes art as a way to change the world is a risk-taker. In order to take risks you have to think about ethics, but you also need to make those decisions as part of the practice. There is no *right* answer . . . you are probably going to screw up a few times in order to figure out how to do it well.

**SD:** The power of art is actually its unpredictability. The fact that it has consequences which are often unintended. It moves us in ways we are not quite sure of, and that means the practice can't be boiled down to a simple series of, as Steve said, steps of ethical behavior. That takes away the magic of art, takes away the power of art, and if we are going to do that, then why are we engaged in artistic activism in the first place? An unintended consequence of dwelling on the problem of ethics is that it makes us so cautious that in the end the only ethical act one can do is to do nothing.

**SL:** And that has ethical consequences too . . .

**SD:** You need to be self-reflective about what you are doing, you need to know why you're doing what you're doing, you need to think "what is your ethical code?" and "are the practices that you are engaged in actually adhering to a set of ethics which you have?"

**SL:** But our approach to it is really individual and project based. I mean there are really vague and unsatisfying sort of general guidelines, like: "don't do anything that your grandmother would be upset about." That's a guideline, you know? It might be true unless your grandmother is an awful person, but it's a way of checking in. We have things like that. But it's really much more about within each project, within your practice, a constant practice of self-reflection, checking in with yourself and figuring out if you are conscious about what you are doing and why.

**SD:** The problem with abstract ethical principles is that there's really no such thing. Ethical principles always relate back to a project, a philosophy, a worldview. What the Nazis did was absolutely ethical according to their own set of ethics.

**SL:** They believed they were a superior race that were meant to take over Europe. And so everything that they did was within those ethics.

**SD:** Advertisers believe that what they do is ethical because they believe in a world where the market should rule, and that choice is something which can be expressed best through consuming products. According to this, it's ethical what they do. What we have to think about is what's important to the values that you hold dear, your way of understanding the world, and then actually make work which conforms to that set of principles.

**SL:** Again, there is not *an* answer to the ethics of artistic activism. It's like you just have to go out and take risks and do the best thing you can and be self-reflective on a kind of regular basis, and then even then it's not a guarantee, you might get caught up in something where you're cover, or where you actually accidentally harmed another community without realizing it. Reflect upon it, make corrections, and do another project.

**SD:** To quote Samuel Beckett, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."



LESSON PLANS III

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**ART AND SOCIAL  
INJUSTICE**



# NYU Flash Collective

## An Art Intervention in the Public Sphere

Dipti Desai and Avram Finkelstein (New York, New York)

### DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT

In this lesson, my students and I designed and implement a tactical art intervention based on a current social issue in the public realm. Our group, called the NYU Flash Collective, was part of the Flash Collective social practice project by artist Avram Finkelstein, a new paradigm for rethinking activist art and social engagement within the public sphere. This exercise is based on collaborative decision-making processes mirroring the experiences encountered when forming and working within art and political collectives: a surgical and fast-paced format intended to break through the overwhelming nature of communicating complex ideas. It employs result-oriented exercises aimed at the core of social engagement: collective action.

### STEPS WE TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

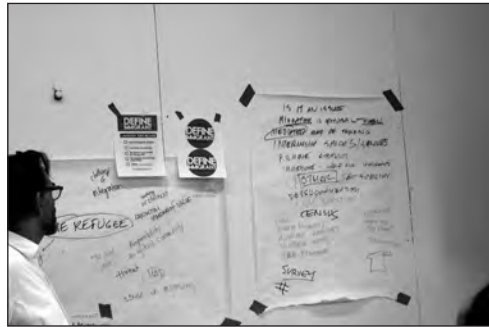
Prior to a four-hour-long workshop facilitated by Avram, we worked on issues of immigration and displacement. Avram emailed us several aspects and documents to consider. We were asked to read the United Nations 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, to understand the legal parameters of displacement from a historical perspective and the social intricacies immigrants face when they relocate, seek asylum, are displaced, or are forced to flee. We were also given the following preparatory questions to answer collectively: “What are the commonalities and contrasts between how Germany approached the Syrian refugee crisis and debates about immigration in America, particularly during our election cycles?” “Can we draw parallels between these types of conversations and the economic displacement we see happening right here in New York’s Lower East Side?” “Are the social realities of immigration and displacement grounded in cultural *othering*, or are they simply about economic opportunity?” Also, given time constraints, we followed a decisive voting process rather than an informal, *family-style* content negotiation frequent in grassroots organizing.

### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND OUTCOMES

The workshop began with a history of collective art practices that informed Avram's work as an artist and activist during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s: first, the Silence=Death collective; later, Gran Fury. Avram addressed the need to identify our audience, offering guidelines for effective communication in mixed-use public spaces and strategies for collective cultural production. An initial exercise helped map out the larger questions of immigration and displacement, identifying key areas of concern for participants. Using markers on a paper scroll, each of us wrote responses to prompts by Avram, plus each other's reactions to them. He then drew arrows to connect concepts and ideas while asking probative questions to further draw out ideas, stimulate collaboration, and highlight bridges between our points of view, thus promoting a collective environment. With big themes identified, we worked through a questioning process aimed at segueing from brainstorming into editing, prioritizing and narrowing down messages, and combining these with images. The main title for the poster became "Define Immigrant." Below that, we added "I am in New York Because," followed by four survey-like questions, each representing an unique aspect of displacement we agreed was significant or commonly shared during our brainstorming sessions: "I am chasing my dreams"; "I am here to colonize"; "My home burnt to the ground"; "My people have always been here"; "Other \_\_\_."

Working together we created a poster with a link to a Tumblr site to provide information about this project and other relevant resources. We also planned a performative intervention in a public space. Breaking into subgroups helped carry out these tasks. Of the multiple alternatives offered by the poster design group, the collective selected an image that superimposed the text over a ghosted background mimicking the *official* look of US Census Bureau. Posters would be printed on crack and peel paper. For our social media presence we would photograph the posters in the public sphere, and return a few weeks later to rephotograph them if people commented on them with graffiti.

Subgroups continued meeting on the website and public performance as we reconvened all together to share what they had done and make suggestions,



Brainstorming session with Avram Finkelstein as part of NYU Flash Collective, 2015.

edit texts, and/or endorse what subgroup proposals. The Tumblr went live when students spread through the city to post the stickers. For many this was their first time posting in public space; therefore, we needed to establish a stickering protocol, since it is not technically a legal activity in New York. We urged them to go in groups of three with two students scouting for police in order to alert one another if it became necessary to leave a site fast. Because we live in a racialized world, this protocol was particularly important for students of color. A discussion



arose from those uneasy with the plan. We discussed tactical interventions and relationships between socially engaged art and activist practices, both of which frequently involve putting one’s body on the line. Not all were convinced by these alleged commonalities, and not all felt comfortable navigating their own privilege (or lack thereof), nonetheless all agreed to explore the challenge collectively.

Define Immigrant Posters on the street of NYC.

Following this phase we discussed their feelings about stickering the street, as well as the locations they chose to poster. Many expressed feeling simultaneously anxious, fearful, and exhilarated. They also shared the dilemmas faced while surveying spaces to determine what constituted a compelling public site for capturing audiences’ attention in a visually saturated environment.

The performance component took place in Washington Square Park, replicating the poster questions. A group of students held red boxes with openings for responses, each with a survey question posted on it. A few of us walked around carrying clipboards with the questions. Passersby filled out our survey, defining what the word “immigrant” meant to them. Although the questions were atypical, people were still reluctant to participate, and most walked away. Then, one of our students discovered that explaining this was an



Define Immigrant Performative Intervention at Washington Square Park, 2015.

art project provoked a positive response. Following her lead, the rest of the collective succeeded with the survey. People dropped responses into the corresponding box held by some collective members as others marked the number of responses each question received with chalk in front of the person holding the box.

#### OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

After the public performance, we met to discuss what had just happened. The collective considered it noteworthy that no one was willing to answer the survey until we called it an art project. This raised the question of whether referring to it as art defanged our chosen strategy for addressing immigration from a political perspective, or if it was indeed useful. We questioned whether calling it art because we were near an academic setting (NYU), and whether we would have to change this performance completely to stage it in an immigrant community, especially given the *official* look of the materials, or in contexts where art practices are a less common feature of everyday life. From our perspective, the success of the performance was dependent on helping our students think through the issues presented by their collective direct action, and their evaluation. The collective's original concept of the performance—opening a dialogue with the audience and participating in a political consciousness raising opportunity—appeared to be neutralized by the survey approach. But in fact, political consciousness raising simply shifted back to the collective: it became clear that we needed to examine why and how to get the public to address the issue of immigration and the role of dialogue in this kind of tactical intervention. The intervention left us with valid ques-

#### 4. Desai pic

Caption TK.

tions about how can tactical interventions effectively create dialogue aimed at social change in public spaces. Still, we developed a concrete understanding of collective work, and of how to design and enact a tactical intervention. As a consequence, we learned as much about ourselves as we did about the spaces that surround us. We believe that developing a dynamic pedagogy based on collectivity is critical to helping translate cultural activism into ways of thinking and being, into social engagement and political agency. This has the potential to also activate social spaces within academia in much the same way as outside its walls.

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# Future IDs

## Reframing the Narrative of Reentry

Gregory Sale with Aaron Mercado, Dominique Bell, Dr. Luis García, José González, Ryan Lo, and Kirn Kim with Anti-Recidivism Coalition (Phoenix, Arizona, and Los Angeles, California)



Aaron Mercado. Photo by Gregory Sale.

“Listen, you don’t have a lot of time. I just want to show you something.’ And I reached into my pocket and pulled out my old prison ID. He looked at it, and then I went in my other pocket and showed him this college ID. And I said, ‘This is the different side. That is the difference.’ And [the senator] responded, ‘Enough said.’”

—Dominique Bell, core project participant

*Future IDs* Art Workshop combined future planning, art making, and writing exercises for individuals with conviction histories. It was an essential component in a developing collaborative art project about individual stories of transformation and how to collectively reframe the narrative of reentry.

The workshop provided a structured environment for participants to engage in a creative process. The central idea was to artistically re-create past or current inmate IDs, and to imagine and make new identification cards for future selves—perhaps for a dream job, a role in society, or a continuing role with family, such as father or mother. Participants wrote a simple message to themselves and others about their future self.

This assignment was collaboratively designed with members of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC)—Aaron Mercado, Dominique Bell, Dr. Luis García, José González, Ryan Lo, and Kirn Kim. Founded by Hollywood producer Scott Budnick, ARC is a movement of system-involved members, community advocates, and allies committed to transforming the justice system. ARC members share their turnaround stories with elected officials to convince them that rehabilitation is possible, leading to laws for more humane sentencing for juveniles and restored budgets for prison college programs.

The conceptual framework of *Future IDs* was introduced at the ARC annual retreat, during project development sessions, and with an exhibition at the ARC offices. ARC members saw what participants could expect and what to prepare beforehand.

Throughout an eight-hour day, nineteen ARC members and four allies participated in this inaugural workshop. Five core participants helped cofacilitate, along with guest artists, a life coach, and a writer. The event was held at the ARC offices in downtown Los Angeles.

#### THE WORKSHOP: LEARNING MODULES

“Every child is asked, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ For many of us, we lost the opportunity to fulfill that childhood dream. But that doesn’t mean we still don’t have the desire to become something that redefines who we are. So I ask, what do you want to be when you grow up? What ID do you want to be carrying in the future?”

— Kirn Kim, core project participant



Writing session with Matthew Mizel. Photo by Ryan Lo.

We began with introductions and a discussion with Sara Daleiden, social practice artist and codirector of the Bunny House. Core project collaborators explained our conceptual framework and how would the individual components form a successful project.

We studied public campaigns dealing with mass incarceration, stigma, race, and inequity, and discussed cultural scripts around those who have been incarcerated. We created an opportunity to consider visual components that correspond to incarceration in the public eye, as well as the cultural, social, and political impacts of those visual components. We noted that someone had designed the prison ID, and devoted time to discuss the power of that image and the meaning of taking ownership of it by making one's own.

Later, we created context around images through a range of portrait strategies from contemporary art. Several ARC members who self-identified as artists led a discussion on how artistic production is valued differently inside prison culture than in the art world.

#### **FUTURE PLANNING**

“Writing a clear picture of your life goals will help you clarify your priorities and enable you to create strategies for realizing your dreams.”

—Colleen Keegan, Strategic Planning Training,  
Creative Capital Foundation

The second module began with a listening session that worked in part as an icebreaker. We learned that the participants came from diverse life experiences. I introduced an exercise to help them uncover the center of their art practice: identifying early childhood passions and favorite play, we considered what was modeled at home or in life while growing up. Thirdly, we utilized a life-planning and goal-setting exercise that helps with setting short-term and long-term goals, their core values, and basic action plans.<sup>1</sup>

Participants discussed the bravery required of formerly incarcerated persons to aspire to professions that some might consider impossible to achieve. Others, with expansive lists of possibilities for their future selves, focused on one revenue-earning job. Some, whose future goals had not crystallized yet,

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1 There are many publications aimed at helping individuals develop strong goal setting habits, the classic study is Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, *Goal Setting: A Motivational Technique That Works* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984).

but who planned to get job training or go to college, settled on making student IDs.

### ART MAKING

For the third module, participants drew, painted, collaged, or reproduced their ID images, texts, and design elements in an

artistic way of their choice. They received four large sheets of paper with generic ID card templates in architect blueprint pencil. Each sheet folded to fit into a 9" x 12" envelope, so it could be easily transported both in prison mail rooms and on the outside.

Before drawing, we discussed the structure of identification cards and the types of information that are regularly included: images, job titles, company names, icons, logos, and bar codes. We provided a book of examples from various professional fields and participants researched online.

Visual artists Rojelio Cabral, Aaron Mercado, and I assisted participants with technical and conceptual aspects. Rather than teaching collage, drawing, or painting skills, these artists led conversations about learning how to solve problems creatively, and how to express the process of critical thinking. This increased conceptual understanding set the course for their individual projects.

### WRITING

The fourth module, led by Matthew Mizel, asked everyone to write a simple message to themselves and others about their future intentions. Participants included that job title or life role in their central personal messages. Mizel grounded the exercise by asking them to provide a basic dictionary definition of that job title or role. He then continued with a series of prompts that invited participants to envision themselves in various scenarios as that future self, talking and engaging with others. One project collaborator wrote: "Pray for me



Christopher Battle and Aaron Mercado. Photo by Ryan Lo.



Collin Taylor. Photo Ryan Lo.

to be the father I can be,” and another, “Learning from my past has taught me how to be a teacher.”

### WRAP UP

Participants continued working on their individual artworks after the workshop ended. They had follow-up opportunities for support and feedback, for contributing from their individual artistic and writing output to the overall project, and were encouraged to make some for themselves. Over the next year, core project participants and I will collect finished artwork, building several events, including an exhibition with public programs.

### REFLECTION/EVALUATION

“What made this project real for me was when I read ‘Pray for me to be the father I can be.’ As a future intention, that statement humanizes us. A lot of us grew up without a father. It was at that moment that I realized how essential this project could be to our community and to our growth and to the growth of ARC as a whole.”

— José González, core project participant

Participants noted that the day provided them a chance to reflect on the future in ways they had not anticipated, challenging them and giving them strategies to connect with themselves at a deeper level. They found the art-making process affirming and validating, and appreciated the possibilities for experimentation that art opened up for them.

We all made suggestions to improve the workshop for a range of contexts, both inside prisons and in other community settings. Some participants offered to help produce a videotape of the workshop content to program on closed-circuit TV channels inside prisons. Others proposed extending the workshop process over several sessions to have greater impact.

At the same time, they acknowledged the difficulty of regularly attending training sessions, given the challenges and limitations they face in their day-to-day lives. They identified a kind of “nomadic fickleness” that accompanies postincarceration life. We are now developing a more elaborate workshop to unfold over a three-week period, taking these issues into consideration.

After the workshop, we feel confident about our goal of generating a dynamic visualization of individual transformations in a collective art project. The group discussion confirmed our sense that project participants creating images

and representations of their lived experiences will add an essential cultural component to their personal and professional work to facilitate successful reentry.

“Just wanted to share how grateful I am to have participated in the workshop. Little bit of lecture, some sharing, and practical application with the beginning of our individual projects. The initial life story exercise was a great icebreaker. Also, bringing up old memories did allow for dormant feelings to emerge from my past experiences. The process really allowed us to be vulnerable. I recognized how much I still battle with my own self-perceptions, and how I can underestimate my creativity. We are all creative in our own way!”

—Dr. Luis García, project participant

This project is designed to expand ARC’s capacity to communicate the value of criminal justice reform to the general public and thereby generate the critical community support necessary to advance justice reform.

Society does not always think of people in prison as having a future. By creating connections to bring forth the humanity of those incarcerated, the project will interject this connectivity into the collective cultural space, thereby raising public awareness and changing social perceptions.

The project has received support in part from Creative Capital Foundation, SPART (social practice art), and the Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts, Arizona State University.

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# Due Time

Sarah Ross, Damon Locks, and Fereshteh Toosi (Chicago, Illinois)

## CONTEXT

In 2013–14 artists Damon Locks, Sarah Ross, and Fereshteh Toosi offered a yearlong class at Stateville Prison in Illinois through the Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP), a visual arts and humanities project. PNAP connects teaching artists and scholars to people at Stateville Prison through classes, workshops, and guest lectures. Classes are held once a week on a semester schedule. Courses result in finished projects—visual art, creative writing, and critical essays—with the goals of forging public discourse about the contexts and conditions of criminalization and incarceration.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASS

The class was prompted by a collaboration with the Jane Addams Hull House Museum’s exhibition *Unfinished Business: Rec Room*. The exhibition explored contemporary ideas and iterations of early-twentieth-century Progressive Era reforms around time, freedom, and play. “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what you will” was the slogan for the controversial movement, which asserted that all people deserved free time to participate fully in democracy. We thought that undertaking such a project with incarcerated artists might bring attention to the contexts of freedom and time, in the twenty-first century, and consider the fact that so many people—the 2.2 million locked up today—have lots of time: months, years, and decades of time, but no freedom to control it, act upon it, or use it in the way that reform-era activists imagined.

## THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

The class was divided into two traditional college semesters. In the first semester, Sarah Ross and Fereshteh Toosi led artists through a study of time by

reading and doing time-based exercises. We read from a variety of sources, including Georges Perec, Lynda Barry, Etheridge Knight, Nelson Mandela, and Nazim Hikmet.<sup>1</sup> Our friend James Kilgore, a formerly incarcerated person, author, and activist, wrote a piece about time specifically for our students. We did several exercises that consisted of tracking one's activities and time throughout a day. For instance, the first assignment looked like this:

*Choose 3 consecutive hours from your day today. Using gridded paper mark the hours on the top or side of the paper in 30 minutes increments. Write out your activities (including thoughts and feelings if you like) during each of the 30 minute increments. You can make smaller time increments if you choose.*

The next assignment expanded upon the first:

*For this experiment, use graph paper and a similar method to what we have started in class. Track your activities for five days. This will serve as both a diary and a timeline of your day-to-day activities. Track all activities in your life (physical activity, eating, sleeping, reading, counts, laundry, commissary, visits, prayer, etc.). Even mundane or “boring” activities are worth tracking and adding to your timeline. IMPORTANT: when you track your activities, be specific. For instance, if you are reading a book, what are you reading? If you are eating, what is your meal? If you are talking on the phone, what are you talking about? To whom? The more detail you can provide, the more informative your timeline will be. Also note aspects like sounds, smells, the quality of light in the space you are in, etc. Use the gridded paper and create a chart of days of the week and times of the day. Use colors, patterns or shapes to define each specific activity. Create a legend or key for your timeline.*

We then turned to the book *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* by Daniel Rosenberg<sup>2</sup> to develop a deeper aesthetic language for what would become a series of visual and personal timelines. In addition, we played the surrealist game “the exquisite corpse,” with prompts around ideas of time. Finally, we recorded audio interviews with the artists talking about their experience of time in prison.

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1 See bibliography at the end of this chapter.

2 Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013).



Over the winter break between semesters, the artists read Robin D. G. Kelley's book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*<sup>3</sup> as a starting point for a second semester in which we thought about the concepts of freedom and time together. In this portion of the class the artists worked with Damon Locks to develop an animation. They created narratives and each of the eleven artists in the class produced 100 frames, making 1,100 drawings for the animation. Animator Rob Shaw, working from Portland, Oregon, created a tutorial for the artists at Stateville to create the animation cels, and he scanned and animated the work once the drawings were completed. Here, time was part of the content and process of making the work.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

The projects that emerged from this yearlong inquiry into time and freedom included a series of works on paper in the form of timelines; a video animation; recordings of audio interviews; a glossary of time developed with scholar and author Erica Meiners and made into a zine by the art group Temporary Services;<sup>4</sup> a series of prints of "exquisite corpse" poems, and a parallel community-engagement module that Fereshteh designed for students at Columbia College Chicago.

What unfolded over the year was a series of deep conversations about how people experience time in and out of prison. Several artists said that the timelines were a way to show their families some details of their lives inside. For instance, someone said that his family thought that prison was only oppressive

3 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002). This assignment was prompted by Hull House staff Heather Radke.

4 Zine can be accessed online at [https://www.temporaryservices.org/served/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Due\\_Time\\_72.pdf](https://www.temporaryservices.org/served/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Due_Time_72.pdf).

and monotonous—and it absolutely is—but even in this context he had crafted a life with habits, routines, and friends that were particular. Over the course of the year we became quite interested in how time, in this contemporary moment, shapes both inside and outside worlds. We looked at how time was so slow and punishing inside, while for many of us in the free world, time felt accelerated with deadlines, work, and overbooked schedules. We imagined how inside and outside time connects us through the logics of a carceral state. We became more aware of categories of time, understanding that time is an undertheorized and underinterrogated part of both work and punishment.

### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

One of the more profound things we learned from incarcerated artists are the sentencing structures that lock up people for longer and longer time. For instance, during the course of Damon's class, we found out that the eleven artists in the class were collectively serving over 260 years and nine life sentences. Their convictions or crimes are not different from convictions and crimes of twenty or thirty years ago, but state and federal sentencing is. One student told us that the judge said that he could be rehabilitated and then sentenced him to eighty years, which is essentially death by incarceration. Artists inside articulated that they wanted people on the outside to know more about time and the ways people are procedurally and legally locked away for life.

Once the class at Stateville concluded, we continued to work with artists incarcerated there and, as a mission of PNAP, we showed the work around the city, in museums and classrooms, as a way to ask questions about time in prison, sentencing structures, and more. This project has sparked a new series of projects and inquiry that we are calling *The Long Term*. They reflect on long-term sentencing and the other long terms it produces: like long-term relationships in prison, long-term loss in neighborhoods, and long-term struggles for justice. The project is intended to dovetail with local and state policies around long-term sentencing, and to articulate the lives that are confined by these policies. The initial project about time has also produced a method by which we can take up a subject that is important to both artists and writers in



prison and those of us teaching inside. It has helped us think about how that subject impacts us in both free and unfree worlds.

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# Balloon Mapping the Calumet River Industrial Corridor in Chicago

Laurie Palmer, Sarah Ross, and Lindsey French (Chicago, Illinois)

This balloon mapping project was a collaboration between three classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC): “Experimental Geographies,” “Site/Installation/Environment,” and “Fundamentals of Art with Technology”; three teachers: Sarah Ross, Lindsey French, and myself; and Peggy Salazar, Tom Shepherd, and Olga Bautista, three members of the Southeast Environmental Task Force, a grassroots environmental justice organization working for sustainable development on Chicago’s Southeast side. It is not necessarily a repeatable lesson plan, as contemporaneous events and remarkable people contributed to its development and realization at a particular moment in time, but certain elements might be useful to borrow and manifest in other contexts.

Balloon mapping is a DIY tool for gathering up-to-date and reliable visual information about a site that is difficult to access physically, whether the site be toxic, watery, fenced, or patrolled. Public Lab has a user-friendly tutorial on their website.<sup>1</sup>

With balloon mapping, the high-flying Go-Pro camera or other artificial eye dangling from the balloon remains tethered to the mapper’s body by a string. This results in physical connection with the camera—you feel (and often see) yourself as part of the territory being photographed. For the sculpture class I was teaching, feeling the connection between one’s bodily, multisensory experience of a place, and the visual information that a camera captures from above was a crucial convergence that I also saw as central to understanding environmental justice. I wanted the students to feel how our vulnerable bodies are inextricable from the land so often objectified from above or administered from afar; how we are a part of here, subject to conditions, though differently subject, depending on privileges of movement and position afforded by class,

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1 For more information on the tutorial, visit Public Labs’ website, <https://publiclab.org/wiki/balloon-mapping>.

race, and ability. Balloon mapping combines embodied experience with a dis-embodied, doubled vision, and offers opportunities for reflection about one's position *in* the world. It also provides reliable and time-sensitive information for empowered citizen research.

In 2014 the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF) was engaged in a prominent battle with the Koch Brothers' shipping business to remove uncovered piles of petcoke, an oil refinery by-product, that they were storing on the banks of the Calumet River in Southeast Chicago. Already polluted by a history of industrial use, the banks of the river and surrounding communities were further contaminated by the fine toxic black dust that blew into the lungs of local residents. Sarah, Lindsey, and I arranged with Peggy and Tom to take students down the Calumet River on a boat to balloon map the petcoke piles, as well as other industrial sites on the river that were invisible from the road. We persuaded upper administrators at our school to fund a chartered boat for sixty students. This kind of funding (three thousand dollars) is unusual, even in a private institution, and especially for a project with political implications. There could be other ways to fund such a project, but this was an unusual and unexpected break, and we were grateful for the vision of the administrators to offer it. The total cost of the weather balloon and the helium was three hundred dollars.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

Each of the three teachers incorporated the balloon mapping project into our syllabus differently. My undergraduate sculpture class focused on mapping and spatial research. In preparation, we read Hito Steyerl's essay "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," which, among other things, prepared us for the multiple dizzying perspectives that a wind-blown balloon-driven camera creates. We also read articles about the history of aerial bombing, histories of the region, and recent journalism about the petcoke problem. The assignment itself was simply to create a current, collectively authored balloon map of a section of the river that we would give to SETF, as well as to document the site in as many other ways as we could think of.

#### **THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

Student Research Tasks in my class were as follows:

1. Identify Property Identification Numbers (PINs) and property owners for specific sites on our expected route; research what each

company does on that property, as well as any past histories of use and ownership that we can find.

2. What is the history of the Calumet River region?
3. What is the mission, history, and current strategies for the antipet-coke campaign of the Southeast Environmental Task Force?
4. Where does helium come from, how much will we need to fill the balloon twice (once for a test run), and how much will it cost?
5. How do you take a water sample, and where can you get samples tested?
6. Where did the oil come from, how and where was it processed to become petcoke, and where was it going? How do these piles on the Calumet riverbanks tie Chicago to larger systems of global oil production and consumption?

We reviewed all the steps for setting up the balloon and camera from the Public Lab website. Lindsey French's class designed and built a structure to hold the camera using 3-D printing. We ran a test flight in the courtyard of our school a week before the planned trip. Individual students took responsibility for specific media tasks, equipment, and documentation. We compiled an itinerary, how to get to the boat launch by public transport, insurance waivers, and cell phone lists. And we began to discuss what to do with the research that would result from the trip, in addition to making a map for SETF.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

The group spent four hours traveling down and up the river. It was cold. At first the camera on the balloon was not functioning properly, but we replaced it with a small video camera that worked fine. The wind and the movement of the boat pulled the balloon back instead of up, so we got a lot of images of water, and lots of beautifully twisted views, but also many clear ones. Only some of the students wanted to actively work with the balloon, the camera, and the sensing equipment, and only a few could, practically, at any given time. Some created their own documentary projects with video and audio recordings and photography, and students from the beginning classes watched the view through the windows from inside and listened to Tom's narrations by loudspeaker.

After the trip, we created still images from the video files, selecting shots and uploading them to a shared hard drive. We had too many images to make a single map. Instead we created individual maps of different sections of the river. Each student in my class prepared an individual project in addition. Sarah Ross printed out and gave SETF selected maps from our collection.

We presented two exhibitions the following year: one at the student galleries, and the other at a nonprofit gallery at the headwaters of the Calumet River system, not far from the Whiting oil refinery over the border in Indiana where the petcoke was processed from tar sands oil.

Student Participants in the exhibition at SAIC were Chen Chen Yu, Samantha Yiyao Chao, Alix Anne Shaw, Nathan Braunfeld, Gulsah Mursaloglu, Dasol Hong, Jorge Andres De La Torre, Andrew Vo, and other members of Experimental Geographies 2014 who made video stills in class.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS**

Reflective discussions in my class focused on how and why we responded so strongly to both the experience and the images we collected as beautiful,



Andrew Vo interviewing Olga Bautista.



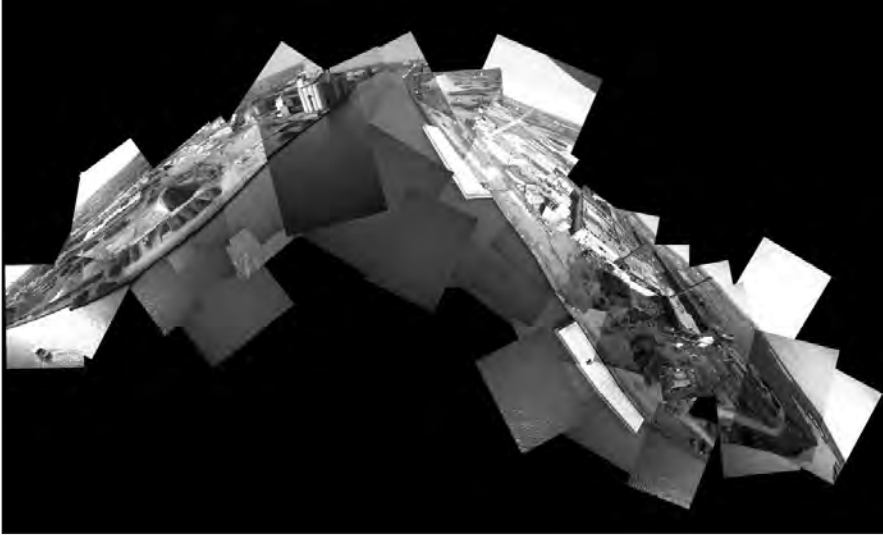
Petcoke piles on Calumet River.



Balloon view on its return to the boat.



“Balloon Map of the Calumet River (detail),” collectively authored by students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Fall Semester 2014.



Balloon map (detail) of Calumet River created by Chenyu Chen and students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Fall Semester 2014.

while simultaneously holding more complex understandings we had built from researching industrial material flows and histories, as well as from engaging with SETF members whose lives were directly threatened by some of these industries. Some students engaged quite deeply with the interconnected questions about toxic waste, low-income communities, unemployment, globalized petrochemical pathways, and city politics in relation to powerful corporate interests. Others may have simplified the issues as “bad petcoke/good neighborhood activists/good people never win,” although in fact they did win, and the petcoke piles were eventually removed. We discussed the position of being on a moving, chartered boat—yes, on the river, but only temporarily in the place: what permissions or privileges are opened up by being able to look at something without also feeling a part of it? And, what can artists contribute to understanding and supporting environmental justice that activists, scientists, geographers, urban planners, and others might use and even learn from?

Many activists and artists participated in the campaign that contributed to the victory of the petcoke piles removal in June 2016. Our work did not play a role in the public aspect of this campaign, though it might have if we had focused more on media attention at the time. However, I believe it provided SETF with solidarity and encouragement at an early point in their campaign. On other fronts the project was successful: collaborating among colleagues to pool resources and skills across institutional divisions, in order to provide

students with a role to play in an out-of-classroom experience that connected them with local activists working on urgent environmental justice issues with global implications.

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# SPURSE Lesson Plan

## Designing a Multispecies Commons

Matthew Friday and Iain Kerr (New Paltz, New York)

SPURSE<sup>1</sup> is a collective of ecosystem artists, designers, and consultants. In fall of 2013, Pitzer College invited us to participate in the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation–funded Art + Environment Visiting Artist program. Over two years SPURSE codeveloped an innovative ecological pedagogy for the college’s thirty-four-acre campus entitled *Multi-Species Commons*. It consisted of developing new ways to sense, understand, and interact with urban ecosystems as multispecies commons, as well as rethinking the capacities of landscape design, commons practices, subsistence practices, urbanism, public art, and the ecology of public space.<sup>2</sup> An integral part of this project was a class we taught in the spring of 2015 in collaboration with Pitzer professor Tim Berg. Together with students we created new ways for them to take leadership roles in the transformation of their own campus.<sup>3</sup>

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

We began without set outcomes for the experience, hoping for a framework that was open, experimental, multidisciplinary, and research driven. Instead of classifying practices as artistic or not, we followed questions via experimentation to wherever they led. Students were seen as coproducers; there would be no passive participants in the class. This led to a novel collective construction

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1 SPURSE consists of Nathaniel Corum, Brian DeRosia, Matthew Friday, Patrick Gillespie, David Jensenius, Iain Kerr, Petia Morozov, Jean Pike, Stan Pipkin, Martha Farwell Pipkin.

2 For more details on the project, visit its website, <http://pitzer.spurse.org/>.

3 We are deeply indebted to our class which included: Laura Ball, Claire Bartlett, Adin Bonapart, Amanda Chang, Karina Faulstich, Marie Fleming, David Gunnison-Wiserman, Emily Marantz, Vivian Ponte-Fritz, Neeka Salmasi, Leonard Schloer, Nicholas Weaver-Weinberg.

and both physical and conceptual challenges transforming everyone involved in the process.

### **THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

Project outcomes were entirely driven by consultation with multiple human and nonhuman constituencies. This implied discarding the assumption that we knew in advance whom we would speak with. We allowed our questions and probes to engender new social and ecological aggregates. Our procedures required that we provisionally test the potentials and affordances of new assemblages. First, we mapped the existing social and ecological systems via attunement exercises that revealed deep-seated logics shaping our engagements with our environment of the Western nature/culture paradigm. This paradigm operates via a process of division and purification where humans and their practices (culture) are understood to be fundamentally distinct from the practices of nonhumans (nature). Thus, the first step towards an alternative model of *place* is to begin with an understanding of humans as fully collective beings always part of an environment. Working with the students, we employed an iterative design and testing process that both resisted the Western nature/culture paradigm and allowed for new associations and assemblages to emerge. This process moved from attunement and diagrammatic mapping exercises to actual proposals.

### **CODESIGN PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT**

We gave students the following guidelines to follow:

1. **Observation and documentation:** start by walking around campus looking for where specific entanglements of nature and culture meet the points outlined in the design brief. Begin with a minimum of ten sites. Note in your field book the ways each site embodies these elements. Be sensitive to scale, as these elements can show up both on a macrosystemic level and in small, discrete areas. If you are not entirely certain how a process is working, consider engaging in some additional research and consultation.
2. **Extrapolation:** using the sites you have noted compose a unique proposal. Make sketches, diagrams, and detailed notes about how your design proposal will function. Consider how your proposal can catalyze and expand the forces that you noted in the first step. Keep in mind the key concepts of the project.
3. **Hybridization:** carefully examine your proposal and, using the design rubric, note where it does and does not meet the criteria. Isolate

the three strongest aspects of your proposal and think about how these might be pushed further. Drop the three weakest components. This will require considerably redefining your proposal. By the end it should not resemble its original form. Consider how elements can be merged, reorganized, or rescaled to accommodate criteria. It is crucial that you think as broadly and creatively as possible; don't overly concern yourselves with whether or not something is possible!

4. **Emergence:** allow the emerging logic of the proposal to direct the design. This may require completely dropping your initial idea. You should develop a minimum of ten different proposals using this method. Return to the campus and accumulate another ten sites. Follow steps one through three using the new sites or systems you have found. Using the design rubric identify your top ten proposals and creatively merge aspects of them to arrive at five final proposals.
5. **Exaptation:** make a copy of your notes, sketches, completed design rubrics, and proposals and pass them on to another person in the class. Using the ones that you received from classmates add in to yours what you find to be the most relevant. Repeat this process at least five times until you have received five different sets of proposals that are integrated into your designs.

Proposals were tested using provisional constructions, experiments, and performances. For example, a group of students moved from cataloging the edible and medicinal plants in a particular area to working with dining hall staff, grounds crew, and environmental science faculty to serve a foraged meal during a public forum on water usage. Experiments were modified and evaluated based upon closely monitored feedback loops before being revised into a final proposal.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

The project unfolded as a campus-wide strategy of ecological engagement and reinscription, activated at six key nodes.<sup>4</sup> The first node was the Multi-Species Negotiation Center. Made from rammed earth, upcycled building materials, local logs and rocks, this hub featured a gathering area designed to encourage usage by multiple species. It included a large map, a chalkboard, and an experimental irrigation and planting area using ollas (buried porous ceramic vessels used by First Nation peoples) designed to help propagate spontaneous migrant plant growth.

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4 For a full description of the project including lesson plans, documentation, and resources, please see <http://pitzer.spurse.org/>.



The second node was the Material Propagation Site, which used a water remediation zone to highlight the diversity of plants useful for making everything (paper, dyes, baskets, etc.). Following this was a general planting strategy to support the spontaneous growth of plant communities, with new irrigation methods and plant-human engagement practices. The fourth node consisted of a campus map that showcased the area as a complex urban ecosystem, designating zones for ongoing community driven experimentation. Next, was the Foraging Kitchen, with a provisional library to encourage cooking and experimental uses of local plants. In it, several planters filter gray water from dormitories. The last node was an interactive smartphone-accessible website with detailed notes about campus ecology, foraging recipes, and a reading list. The website allowed users to tag edible campus plants on a map and add notes on them.

Our research uncovered several key insights. First, everything is part of a dynamic evolving ecosystem, the divide between the “natural” and the “artificial” (or “cultural,” human made) is not a divide between two actual discrete systems. Likewise, we should be highly circumspect when dealing with notions like “native” or “invasive.” Second, that ecosystems are dynamic and unstable. Systems are open and changing, with multiple stable states (e.g., nature is not “in balance”; any “restoration” of nature should be suspect). Third, we learned that foraging, the practice of gathering edibles or materials from your immediate environment, is a way to feel existing dependencies. When you pick and eat what grows directly under your feet, anything happening to it now happens to you. You have a new form of responsibility to this plant and its





critical for the project; its longevity and success relied on the stewardship it engendered through daily use. Overall, we now feel that our project could provide some valuable insights for the emerging field of social practice.

Social practice could be more vital if it did not begin by assuming it is an art practice, but simply a social practice of coconstructing a world worth having. This shift would require a radical reconsideration of its institutional situation.

Just as social practice should exceed and challenge disciplinary frames, it also needs to move beyond the symbolic and representational levels. Ideas are never separate from everyday life pragmatics, and changing behaviors entails developing not just new stories, but new embodied practices as well. This requires the making of *things*, in particular convivial tools that engender new practices. All these questions are best seized if departing from the composition of actual concrete local dependencies that can be felt and have meaningful real repercussions.

As our world is in constant production and reproduction, we should be cautious and pragmatic cocreators striving to learn the new artistry of cocomposing the real in all its forms. All life involves questions of composition and crafting which are necessarily aesthetic questions about the sensible, seeable, sayable, and doable. These should be considered as multispecies questions to be pursued with passion, abundance, and curiosity.

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# Contact Zones

## Understanding Art in Processes of Territorial Research

Alejandro Meitin (Ala Plástica, La Plata, Argentina)

In 2016 I was invited to Santiago de Chile by Red Mediación Artística (RMA) (Cultural Mediation Network)<sup>1</sup> to generate a joint proposal for coformation in artistic mediation, in the framework of a first laboratory called Zonas de Contacto (Contact Zones). RMA is a collective founded in Santiago in 2012 and is an association of individuals from the arts, the social sciences, and education who research, promote, and publicize artistic mediation in Chile. RMA is also a platform for community-led cultural appropriation and the production of collective knowledge.

Given that Chile is the only country in the world with privatized rivers,<sup>2</sup> I based the laboratory on a critical analysis of Río Mapocho's situation. Before my arrival, organizers selected Parque Fluvial Renato Poblete as emplacement for the workshop, a project that diverged the Mapocho River from a urban area to create a public park.

### **THE CASE OF THE PARQUE FLUVIAL RENATO POBLETE**

The Contact Zones laboratory lasted two days and had around forty participants from different places in the nation and various disciplines. The first day we met at Centro Cultural Matucana 100,<sup>3</sup> in Santiago's Estación Central district. *Understanding Art in Processes of Territorial Research* was the initial laboratory organized around discussions about the construction of the Parque Fluvial Renato Poblete and the development of a research as action process to disclose the project's economic, political, and social factors. The team explored some of

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1 See <http://www.redmediacionartistica.cl/>.

2 The privatization of Chilean waters over-passed former water rights, resulting in a monopoly of which over 90% of non consumptive rights now belong to foreign companies. Chile's water is the most expensive of Latin America.

3 See <http://www.m100.cl/>.

the area's problems, crafting a research and intervention strategy to reveal the macro political and economic implications invisible in our quotidian relation with territory.

#### RESEARCH: "EL MAPOCHO, SANTIAGO'S SEINE"

After brief introductions about river privatization in Chile, we analyzed the Mapocho River and the fluvial park using data gathered by me and members of RMA.

In our media analysis we found that Parque Fluvial Renato Poblete belonged to a master plan to canalize the Mapocho river in its urban section. In the words of architect Christian Boza Díaz of the Navigable Mapocho project this would, "return its soul to Santiago." Boza Díaz used the motto "transforming the Mapocho into Santiago's Seine" to plan promotion and secure the attention of Chilean presidential candidate Sebastián Piñera.<sup>4</sup> Boza and Piñera argued that the Mapocho could become navigable building dams, river pools, docks, and tourism and sport infrastructures. When Piñera ran for president he made "Navigable Mapocho" his campaign slogan. Once elected, the candidate's urban whim became a bicentennial project.<sup>5</sup> Considering the natural environment's structural and dynamic characteristics, transforming the Mapocho into a navigable watercourse was not a feasible project. However, the proposal was carried through. Looking to advance the plan, Boza Díaz and Piñera traveled to Barcelona to meet city mayor Pasqual Maragall and executives at AgBar—owners of Aguas Andinas<sup>6</sup>—who encouraged them to develop the Parque Fluvial project in Chile. Architect Boza Díaz thus becomes *the Expert*, the first character in our story.<sup>7</sup>

During research we discovered that the fluvial park development of Chile's Water Law Code was under reform. This significant reform demanded that water, gifted in perpetuity to the private sector in 1981 during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, be recognized as an essential human right.

It became evident that this campaign had been designed by Aguas Andinas to generate public acceptance of the project, renew their contract, and weaken

4 Piñera (president between 2010 and 2014) was the first president from the right to be democratically elected since 1958, and the first one to fill in the seat since dictator Augusto Pinochet left it in 1990.

5 The government sponsored Bicentennial Project was part of the celebrations of the two-hundred anniversary of its independence from Spain.

6 Aguas de Barcelona, owner of Aguas Andinas, landed in Chile in 1999.

7 It is important to understand that because water is a private good, it could not be retained nor re-purposed. Hence, opening a new river branch was the only possibility, as a lake or reservoir would not have allowed for its reemergence later in the river's course.

discussions on the monopoly over water use in Chile.<sup>8</sup> Further, the park's initial estimated cost of 35 million dollars ultimately translated into over 1,500 million dollars for involved businesses. Uncovering this changed our focus: these methods manipulate cognitive processes by combining several elements that influence public awareness and trust. They distract attention through subtle strategies, changing the spectator's perceptions and opinions. This is how we came across our second character, *the Magician*: President Piñera.

In this session we defined several commissions to begin work at Parque Fluvial Renato Poblete the following day: five work groups using different art languages as practices of territorial research.

Later, we hiked towards the park to familiarize ourselves with the site for next day's activities. Security guards, cameras, and a huge iron sculpture of priest Renato Poblete welcomed us into this charmless park. In this predominantly Catholic country, the connection between the Church and Chilean elites is emblematic. While the image of a priest at the park entrance may welcome people from different districts in Santiago—a similar role as that supposedly undertaken by father Renato Poblete—this choice helped maintain the psychological and social structures of capitalism's well-ingrained wit.

#### FROM DISCOVERING THE TRICK TO ACTION

We worked at Perrera Arte<sup>9</sup> the second day, an independent culture center in Parque de los Reyes, near Parque Fluvial. Our goals were to continue finalizing details for our action plan, agreeing on a collective intervention at the Parque Renato Poblete for that same afternoon.



Photo by Miguel Hidalgo.

8 "The river was set inside the city of Santiago and became an important point of reference for legal, health, moral, geographic, social, economic, and symbolic parameters by those 'civilized' city residents that look over their shoulders to the river and everything it represents: a wild space, order-less, in a permanent chaos, flowing as if an accomplice of 'wild men.' It welcomes in its shores beings as non-desirable as the river when it grows, when it becomes an uncontrollable manifestation of an autonomous power, beyond the laws of the city and its administrators." (Translated by Alejandro Meitin.) Cecilia Muñoz Zuñiga, "Memoria y Fronteras Urbanas: El Caso del Río Mapocho," *Revista Diseño Urbano y Paisaje* 2, no. 6 (2005).

9 See <http://www.perrerarte.cl>.

Our teams were as follows:

- *the Visibilizers* produced visuals around *the Expert* and *the Magician*, crafting signs about the park's rules and bans, and publicizing data on Mapocho River water rights and concessions to Aguas Andinas in Spain;
- *the Cartographers* drew maps based on a water flow chart posted at the entrance of the compound, renamed places, and set up a simple iconography for each;
- *the Transgressors* carried out performative actions identifying Parque Fluvial Renato Poblete's sanctioning;
- *the Chronists* interviewed neighbors, employees (guards, paramedics, etc.), and visitors with questions about territorial transformation, community participation, and water rights.

Inspired by the questions *Who designs territory?* and *For whom?*, each team wielded strategies for the collective production of a communicative piece, hoping to open critical discussions about Chile's water privatization. *The Visibilizers* held a graphics production workshop as the three remaining teams gathered information and engaged in actions sent through mobile phones to the fifth team, *the Base*, in charge of receiving audio, images, and texts, editing them, and reporting into a blog.<sup>10</sup> The outcome was a communicative piece providing live updates.

The teams later reconvened at La Perrera, finalizing last touches and attending a presentation by social anthropologist Cecilia Muñoz Zúñiga, who had carried out ethnographic research on the Mapocho River area. Everyone shared a meal cooked by *the Savages*, our sixth team.

#### **COLLECTIVE INTERVENTION AT PARQUE RENATO POBLETE**

Once all details were finished, we discussed how to collectively intervene in the park. Due to tensions with security guards we entered the space separately. Once inside, we gathered again and performed the action without risking confrontation. The groups toured the park forming an undulating line, breaking the rigidity of its architectural design, while carrying signs displaying *the Expert's* silhouette and his best-known phrases. These were placed in the park's most absurd places, while we distributed rabbit-shaped paper cutouts among people, referencing the figure of *the Magician* and his trick. These cutouts featured raw data about water rights in the Mapocho River and how these had been gifted to Aguas Andinas.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.redmediacionartistica.cl/blog](http://www.redmediacionartistica.cl/blog).



Photo by Miguel Hidalgo.



Photo by Antonia Isaacson.



Photo by Antonia Isaacson.

Heading the march, Mapocho River's sounds, amplified by a portable speaker, led the way as security guards followed using walkie-talkies to communicate with their superiors.

The action concluded with a river water collection, filling bottles with different phrases, words, and questions written on them by participants: "A right or a privilege?," "Property," "Free rivers," "Life is water," and so on. Crossing fences to access and recover stolen water was an emotive event, setting us up in a very special way. We later continued marching towards an amphitheater made up of white blocks arranged as benches. There, each of us stood with a raised arm holding bottles with recovered water. We brought the bottles back with us, as an act of ownership of this common and vital good.

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# Sensing Social Space

Bo Zheng (School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong)

The goal of this activity is to help students become more sensitive to how social spaces are constructed. It is a warm-up exercise, usually done in the first or second week of an introduction to a socially engaged art course. No props are needed. The duration is two to three hours. The workshop's basic idea is to pick a street and visit several spaces on this street: a café, a bank, a subway station, an ethnic restaurant, a government building, a military base, a museum, and so on. We ask students to perform actions that deviate from the usual behaviors in these spaces. This renders social mechanisms visible.

An example follows:



Map of Nanshan Road, showing the six spaces we visited.

When I taught at China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, China, from 2010 to 2013, we conducted this activity on Nanshan Road, where the art school is located. This street offers a range of social spaces. Although students had some familiarity with these spaces, they had not paid close attention to them.

Our first stop was at a bakery and café called Puliou, right in front of the art school. Most students had been to Puliou. I asked them to go in and spend five minutes observing how the physical space was organized, an easy task for art students. Afterwards, we gathered outside to discuss what we saw. I then asked them to go in again, this time to observe how people behaved. I also asked them to each perform an action deviating from the norm, not something dramatically disruptive. For example, one student noticed that here people paid first and then consumed, whereas in restaurants people eat first and pay later, so she ate a small tart before paying. Once outside students compiled sets of rules that people follow when they enter the space. We discussed where these rules come from and what purposes they serve.

Our second stop was a high-end car dealership, across the street. Although this dealership is next to the art school, students had never gone inside. We went in. Our mere presence rattled the staff. Clearly we were not the type of people normally visiting this shop. Students enjoyed provoking the staff. They touched the cars and sat in them. Later we discussed the issue of class in Chinese society, and how different social spaces cater to different classes.

Our third stop was at a twenty-four-hour self-service banking center down the street. We crammed into the small space. After one minute, we heard a voice via a speaker. Someone on the other end of the video surveillance system



Discussing in front of the café Puliou.



Entering the car dealership.



Cramming into a twenty-four-hour self-service banking center.

was monitoring us. They asked what were we doing, telling us to leave. We stayed for a while and discussed what was visible and invisible in a bank.

Our fourth stop was a noodle shop run by Muslims who migrated to Hangzhou from Northwestern China. We compared this noodle shop with the café we visited earlier. One student pointed out that while we were fascinated by the café's "European-ness," we showed little interest in the noodle shop's "Muslim-ness." The owner of the noodle shop talked to us and gave us a printed sheet instructing on how to eat noodles according to Muslim practice. We followed the instructions: washing our hands, saying a prayer, and eating slowly, not picking up the next bite until we had fully finished eating the food in our mouth.

Our fifth stop was in front of a military base. In previous stops, people working in the café, the car dealership, the bank, and the noodle shop had all tolerated our provocation. But the soldiers guarding the military base showed no tolerance, telling us

that we could not even stand there to observe the base from outside. We moved away, not willing to challenge the paramount state-party-military power. We discussed how it is usually easier for socially engaged artists to work with disempowered communities than to confront power directly.

The last stop was the Zhejiang Art Museum, the provincial art museum at the end of Nanshan Road. I asked students to observe how artworks were framed, lit, and labeled, and how visitors and museum guards behaved. Having



Discussing in front of a Muslim noodle shop.



Facing the entrance of a military base.



Sitting in the main hall of Zhejiang Art Museum.

studied other social spaces along the way, students could now recognize the museum also as a social space, similarly structured by and in turn structuring class and power. They each devised a small action to break away from the usual social practice.

This activity was inspired by Henri Lefebvre's writings (see bibliography). It was essential to pick a street considered ordinary by students, ideally a street they visit often. Through a combination of observation, performance, and discussion, students developed skills to perceive some basic social structures. Students, being young, usually take enjoyment in being "troublemakers." In this activity, the instructor was able to push them to articulate the deeper social structures that their actions upset.

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# Becoming Zoya

Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya (Gluklya), Jon Platt, and Sonya Akimova, Chto Delat School of Engaged Art (St. Petersburg, Russia)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Zoya Kosmodemianskaya was an eighteen-year-old schoolgirl who fought as a *diversionist* (saboteur infiltrator) during the Battle of Moscow in 1941. A central figure in the pantheon of Soviet war heroes, she is famous for her heroic exploits, or *podvig*: enduring capture, torture, and impending execution, while remaining silent. In reply to her captors' derisory question, "And where is Stalin?," she responded, "Stalin is at his post, just like any other Soviet citizen." In the morning, Zoya exchanged her silence for heroic speech, urging the villagers gathered to watch her own hanging and to resist the invaders as well as avenge her death. Her call for vengeance generated an intense motivational effect after being reported on by *Pravda* in early 1942.

In April 2014 we led students of the Chto Delat School of Engaged Art in a performance at the monument to Zoya in St. Petersburg's Victory Park. The performance and preceding seminar grew out of our research. It included research trips to Zoya's birthplace and execution. But soon, the original context in which we began the project drastically shifted. Russia was now at war with Ukraine, and its propaganda machine in overdrive, deploying World War II symbols to frame current hostilities as allegedly anti-fascist struggles. As a result, our proposed engagement with Zoya's image developed additional ambivalence and risk.

We shared our research with students, asking them to stage their own performances before Zoya's monument and tasking them with defining his or her own position regarding the possibility of using this national heroine to discuss the concept of the *podvig*. The method of "becoming Zoya" became the theme of the collective performance whereby participants reflected on a principal assignment: from a position of weakness or fear, how does one overcome oneself for the sake of some greater, higher ideal?

### STEPS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

In the discussions preceding the performance, the central focus fell on the urgencies of the present. Several students almost rejected the assignment, calling the theme of heroism reactionary, and deeming all patriotic symbols repulsive. Many denied Zoya's *podvig* exhibited any fidelity to the 1917 Russian Revolution, arguing instead that she was a brainwashed fanatic and closer to today's suicide bombers than to nineteenth-century militants such as Vera Zasulich, who fought for universal emancipation. A good part of the discussion weighed the dubiousness of Zoya's actions, particularly her role in Stalin's scorched-earth policy, burning villages in the occupied territories west of Moscow.

Despite these tense debates, we continued with the performance. Gluklya asked the students to make dolls of Zoya to offer to the monument. Although many disliked this idea, the gesture's significance was clear: shifting the public monument towards more "archaic" fetishisms: voodoo, child's play, ritual, and theater. This way we would soften the statue's hard phallic authority by introducing sympathetic magic and the horizontal quotidian authority of matriarchy to invert the power asymmetry between the memorial's sublimity and our own weakness.

The assignment also actualized existing tensions in the site. Artist Matvei Manizer's statue depicts Zoya in a heroic pose: clenched fist, striding boot, rifle slung over her shoulder, eyes steely and determined. It eschews her alternative representation as the feminine victim of Nazi atrocities. Beside a pond, hidden from the bustling Moscow



Sonya Akimova, performance. Still from *Looking for Zoya* (2014).

Avenue by tree-lined alleys and playgrounds, the statue is not a meeting place for fiery demonstrations and speeches. Instead, the site is a contemplative one, suited mostly for individual encounters.

### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES

The performance revolved around the tension between Manizer's monument and what it veils and domesticates in Victory Park: the conceptually unwieldy (and, for many of the students, emotionally irredeemable) realities of exterminatory war. The statue marked a place of fixity, order, and consummation in death and memory, but also silence and the shadow cast by power over the living, forcing them into subaltern positions of chaos and precarity. One of the

Chto Delat students, Anna Isidis, offered a “doll” that brutally illustrated this: a paper cutout of a zombie Zoya, disemboweled to reveal the Young Pioneer children she has devoured.

Overall, students presented individual performances impossible to subsume into a single utterance. Nonetheless, taken together, these gestures traversed a continuum of possible reactions to Zoya’s statue in the specificity of its spatial and temporal context, thus answering the assignment’s core question: what does this Soviet militant mean to us today?

While Isidis addressed the statue from a position of total alienation, Ilya Yakovenko aggressively faced the statue, shouting at it, and linked Manizer’s sculpture with Russia’s current patriotic fervor. Ironically thanking Zoya for Russia’s current “anti-fascist” expansionary campaign, he clarified that appeals to great-power nostalgia typically run roughshod over history. Contrarily, leaving a small bundle of notes about Zoya’s “union with the Absolute,” Marina Maraeva asserted that the bronze militant’s life in the “kingdom of order” is incompatible with the false starts, rough drafts, sketches, and revisions of artistic processes. Viktoria Kalinina made an uncanny doll: a faceless, footless female corpse, adorned with a mock crucifix and a screw tied to a noose made by Anna Tereshkina, a symbol of Zoya as a mere cog in a totalitarian machine. Kalinina accompanied her doll with a poem questioning the black-and-white simplicity of historical myths, a particularly compelling gesture in the spring of 2014, when Putin was warning of a “fifth column” of “national traitors.”



Viktoria Kalinina, performance. Still from *Looking for Zoya* (2014).

Each of these three performances problematized the interpretative matrix reducing the complexities of war to simple oppositions: conviction and doubt, hero and traitor, friend and foe. However, none disturbed the power differential between monument and man; rather, each confirmed it from a position of alienated pessimism.

Another group of alienated responses worked less as a challenge to the statue than as a revelation about present-day problems. Natalia Tseluba built a rough bed on the grass facing the monument, her head resting on a stack of books about Zoya and the war. Responding to the statue’s indifference with her sleeping, she transformed the asymmetrical relation into a comment on human resilience and spaces of comfort at the edges of power. Olga Kuracheva

positioned two “Zoya-believers”—Jon Platt and Nikolai Oleynikov—across from one another in front of the statue, each holding a card that undermined their fidelity. On one side appeared Zoya’s ecstatic corpse, a relentless militant hero, on the other, a fragmentary collage of Zoya as a schoolgirl before the war. Here she is a tool of Stalinist cruelty who should have thought twice before following orders to burn villages driving Soviet citizens into the cold along with the occupying forces. Kuracheva’s oscillation between the two positions as we rotated the cards culminated in a silent, tearful gaze up towards the statue.



Olga Kuracheva, prop from performance.



Liya Gusein-Zade, performance. Still from *Looking for Zoya* (2014).

These two performances appropriated the stasis of the memorial and suppressed human action. Liya Gusein-Zade expressed her own ambivalence by bringing movement into dialectical tension with monumental fixity. As she vainly lit match after match in the wind, hoping to feel the hot cinders on her fingers in a reference to Zoya’s mission, a crowd began to gather, not around the statue, but clumped informally in front of it. Gusein-Zade abandoned the matches and began pushing the inert collective towards the pond behind the monument, as if obliging us to embrace militant self-abnegation. The gesture dramatically realized the metaphorical semantics of the word *podvig* (etymologically related to the verb “to move”), while the desperate shuffling

These two performances appropriated the stasis of the memorial and suppressed human action. Liya Gusein-Zade expressed her own ambivalence by bringing movement into dialectical tension with monumental fixity.

and strenuous movement contrasted with the stillness and poise of Manizer's image.

A final group of performances abandoned the position of alienation for identification, reducing the tension between motion and fixity until each complemented the other. Natalia Nikulenkova interpolated Zoya's *podvig* into a biographical narrative, retelling her great-grandmother's sacrifice of a beloved shirt, the only possession saved from a burning house, to bind a soldier's wounded leg. As Nikulenkova laboriously made a rag doll from her own shirt, embroidered with the word "Antifa," she forged a link between Zoya's militant violence and the life-preserving acts of self-sacrifice performed by so many other participants in the war. Karina Shcherbakova scattered sugar around the pedestal and offered a bag full of this commodity, coveted in wartime, as her Zoya doll. The white sugar transformed the snow of Zoya's tormented barefoot march into an image of "the sweet life"



Natalia Nikulenkova, prop from performance. Still from *Looking for Zoya* (2014).

promised to victors. Finally, Sonya Akimova marked out Zoya's eighty agonized steps to the gallows from the peasant's hut where she was interrogated. Dropping a piece of black bread for each step, the antipode of Karina's refined sugar, Akimova produced an emotional supplement to the statue's fixity that disappeared as pigeons erased her markers.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

In the end our seminar turned out to be dangerous. The assignment—to find Zoya Kosmodemianskaya inside oneself and express one's attitude to the themes of heroism and the *podvig* in the form of a performance—divided the group into two camps. One group of students clearly accepted Zoya, while another either leaned towards 1990s critical positions against Soviet heroism, or rejected the figure of the national hero in the context of Russia's present-day barbarism and violation of international law. The "evaluation" of the assignment became Gluklya's film, *Looking for Zoya* (first screened at the Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, 2014), which featured several of the performances alongside footage from our research trips.

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# Freedom. Safety. Now!

Jaishri Abichandani (New York, New York)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

*Freedom. Safety. Now!* was an arts and activism movement organized by myself and members of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC) to raise awareness of sexual and gender based violence. And although it began as a response to the rape and death of Jyoti Singh Pandey in India, *Freedom. Safety. Now!* evolved to address global issues of safety for girls and women through public dance and music performances, plus a workshop with Asian American survivors of sexual violence in New York City.

## CONTEXT

Given SAWCC's long history of artistic community engagement, the gang rape and subsequent killing of Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi in December 2012 elicited a deep and powerful response from the collective. Members of SAWCC were bombarded on social media with images of people taking to streets in India to protest her death and others like her. Many of us were in conversation with feminist social media groups in South Asia who were creating public actions including *Why Loiter?*, *Blank Noise*, and *Girls at Dhaaba's*. Conversations among survivors, previously private, exploded into the public realm.

## ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

In response to a post on the SAWCC Facebook page from dancer Parijat Desai inquiring about our official position, several former board members gathered to develop a response. Parijat met us with her ideas for choreographed actions but came to the realization that only a collaborative reaction was appropriate. Participants included artists, writers, and activists who continue to carry trauma in their bodies and have spent much time trying to escape the confines of their anatomy, while collaborative movements would give new meaning to our history of brutalization. Developing a means of resistance became a necessity and

we had to find enough courage to put our bodies on the streets and make public declarations of our rage. Together we developed a series of simple movements forming a routine that we, the participants, as well as nondancers would be capable of executing. The action was recorded and posted on every social media outlet we could find, allowing women to practice the action at home before the scheduled public protest without attending physical rehearsals.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AND THE OUTCOMES**

At the first meeting we decided that for maximum impact our goals would include disrupting the official celebration of the Indian Republic Day on Saturday, January 26, 2013, outside the Indian Consul in Manhattan, with a visible and cacophonous protest performance by community members. We chose the colors red and black to print in letterpress signs made by Swati Khurana, a resident artist at the Center for Book Arts, the colors were echoed by our protest apparel. Writer Roohi Chaudhry wrote a press release, Alka Dev checked if police clearances were needed, and we informed the consulate about our intended protest with no reply. SAWCC funded the rental of a rehearsal space where we were joined by volunteers and musicians.

Using all social media tools available, we, the survivors, organized a four-hour-long protest including nearly a hundred people. The protest led the consulate to call the counterterrorism unit of our local police precinct. We achieved our goal by disrupting official celebrations that in turn incited media coverage and elicited varied responses from attendees and passersby. For those of us who were able to overcome fear and voice rage, it felt like an emotional transformation within our bodies: vulnerability, fear, and rage turned into transcendent joy.



Performers at *Freedom. Safety. Now!*

#### **FREEDOM SAFETY NOW 2.0/MOVEMENT TO POWER**

Not all the participants in the development of the project felt safe enough to protest on January 26, 2013. Freedom Safety Now 2.0 included fifteen participants, of which most were trained dancers, who performed with Parijat Desai for International Women's Day on March 8, 2013, outside the United Nations Building.

As we discussed taking the project further, participants felt that it was crucial for there to be a safe space of dialogue within the creative process with professionals trained in working with survivors healing from violence. As the sponsoring organization, SAWCC received funds to conduct a workshop geared towards meeting these needs in our community. The workshop was held in New York City over the course of six weeks, and was led by Deesha Narichania, Parul Shah, and Purvi Shah.



Participants at *Freedom. Safety. Now!*

### EVALUATION OF PROJECT

For the evaluation of this project, I will refer to definitions from Pablo Helguera's handbook *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, published by Jorge Pinto Books in 2011. Italics are my own. In his book, Helguera devotes an entire section to community "consider(ing) some of the defining elements around group relationships created through Socially Engaged Art." They include the following:

- the construction of a community or temporary social group through a collective experience (*in this case, all the original respondents to Parijat's call were SAWCC board members*);
- the construction of multi layered participatory structures (*evident not just with the project Freedom. Safety. Now! but within the organization SAWCC itself*);
- the role of social media in the construction of community (*although SAWCC predates social media, we extensively used it during Freedom. Safety. Now! to broadcast the dance routine, engage participants, and publicize the protest itself*);
- the role of time (*we had the advantage of years of collective community activism, which helped identify goals, roles, tasks, strategies, and outcome of the project. We were able to follow up the first intervention with a refined and considered workshop for other Asian American Women*);
- assumptions about the audience (*we knew who was our audience—officials and attendees to the Indian Republic Day celebrations*).<sup>1</sup>

1 Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011). Italics are by the author.

To further use the categories outlined by Helguera, during *Freedom. Safety. Now!* we drew upon a large community of volunteers who acted within varying degrees of agency—including musicians, volunteer performers, and sign makers. They were all physically at the event, involved as *collaborative participants* and *creative participants*. Pro-



Caption TK.

testers who joined us that day met Helguera's definition of *directed participants*, while we had an army of virtual participants. Finally, members of the audience who encountered the documentation of the project can be classified as nominal participants.

What had begun as a response to a discrete event by feminist artists evolved over time into various groups of women coming together to create public actions and spaces for healing that continue to exist. However, the initial group of participants lost ownership through the process of collaboration and there remained no overlap between the original collaborators and Movement to Power workshop participants. Our idea had been refined and honed into an entirely different experience owned by the last group of participants. We were able to unfold what we had learned with *Freedom. Safety. Now!* and produce Movement to Power. What was challenging to manage were ideas of authorship and communication between collaborators and between the sponsoring organization (SAWCC). We had gone from a tightly coordinated action, self-organized by artist survivors, to a process-based structure where the outcome was not defined by external parameters laid out by the art world.

As Helguera says,

*Currently, perhaps the most accepted description of the community Socially Engaged Art creates is “emancipated”; that is, to use Jacques Ranciere’s oft quoted words, “a community of narrators and translators.” This means that its participants willingly engage a dialogue from which they extract enough critical and experiential wealth to walk away feeling enriched, perhaps even claiming some ownership of the experience or ability to reproduce it with others.*

#### ASSIGNMENT

Sexual assault and gender-based violence have varied manifestations across the globe that do not always intersect. Not all countries have the same rates of female

genital mutilation or child marriage; some may have higher incidents of marital rape than others. The workshop began with an introduction to sexual violence by presenting national statistics on rape and sexual assault in the United States and asking participants to share the most reported or unreported incident of sexual violence within their communities.



Caption TK.

Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, providing a safe space to participants was crucial. Being able to answer the following three questions anonymously allowed participants to share their experiences without being identified as a survivor. It was helpful to list local professional services available for participants who might be affected and in need of additional support. It was also important to create space for members of the group who had not experienced sexual violence, so that they could feel agency and be able to intervene. The three questions were as follows:

1. *Have you experienced gender based or sexual violence?*
2. *What strategies do you employ in your daily life to feel safe and avoid potentially dangerous situations? For example, taking a longer route home via a crowded street to feel safer.*
3. *Have you made a successful intervention in a situation where you felt the safety of a woman was compromised? What was it?*

Participants gathered the answers and read and processed each other's responses. We asked participants to identify public spaces where they had felt the most vulnerable. The group discussed the new information and strategies that arose through the process. How could participants implement these strategies to move through those spaces safely?

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# ESSAY



# Why Socially Engaged Art Can't Be Taught

Jen Delos Reyes (Chicago, Illinois)

What should an education for socially engaged art do? How are we educating? What is the goal? What should artists who get this kind of training go on to do? Can this way of working be taught?

James Elkins in his seminal book *Why Art Can't Be Taught* wrote that “art cannot be taught, but it can be fostered and helped along.”<sup>1</sup> Early in my career as an educator I returned often to my heavily read, and thoroughly flagged and underlined, copy of this text. It truly was a handbook for me on the ground as someone new to the academy, trying to navigate what it meant to be a teacher, and figuring out how I wanted to teach and why. His text provided much needed historical perspective on art education, personal experience, and knowledge, as well as tips and strategies. I don't say that socially engaged art can't be taught lightly—I say it with a continued commitment and belief that it needs to be done, and that we can do it better. This short essay is intended to be a brief cursory overview of ideas for teaching for socially engaged art inspired by Elkins's text.

## EDUCATION FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

Currently in the US there are at least five well-established MFA programs that either are identified as social practice, public practice, or community-based art—the Social Practice MFA concentration at the California College of the Arts (currently transitioning into an MA program), the Public Practice MFA at OTIS, the Art and Social practice MFA at Portland State University, the Community Arts MFA at the Maryland Institute of Contemporary Art, and the Social Practice MFA at Queens College in New York. Education for socially engaged art has its roots in a variety of pedagogical approaches ranging from

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1 James Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

grassroots community education, challenging structures of existing art academies, theater, and experimental living.

Other examples that have clearly influenced some of the current approaches to teaching socially engaged art include Joseph Beuys's time at the Düsseldorf Academy, during which he challenged institutional conventions by directly incorporating his practice into his teaching and attempting to make art education more accessible to all by finding ways to creatively expand the enrollment in his classes—in some instances having hundreds of students in one class. The pedagogical echoes of Black Mountain College are present in programs that emphasize all things experiential, egalitarian, and transdisciplinary. Traces of the Highlander Folk School founded by activist Myles Horton, educator Don West, and Methodist minister James A. Dombrowski, are seen in programs that emphasize social justice, community engagement, and activism. The legacy of Augusto Boal and *Theater of the Oppressed*, as well as that of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian pedagogue who inspired the approach, are specters when education is fused with a belief that through art and creativity, social and political change that bring equality and autonomy are possible.

In addition to all of these historical markers, it is important to note that in a parallel development to the formalized programs for socially engaged art, there existed an equal if not greater amount of informal, often artist-led approaches to art education that emerged simultaneously. Some notable examples include Jon Rubin's Independent School of Art in the Bay Area, Bruce High Quality Foundation University in New York, Caroline Woolard's Trade School, and most recently a reboot inspired by Black Mountain College, Black Mountain School.

### TROPES

An education for socially engaged art can try to foster critical and transformative ways of being in the world, but mostly what I have seen from these programs are dinner parties, projects on bicycles, pirate radio, anything involving a typewriter, or creative gestures that point to how interesting people in a neighborhood are. Why do so many projects take on these forms? This is in large part because these types are able to teach valuable and necessary skills, though in the end how one obtains that knowledge and ability does not need to be framed as the art itself.

Here are examples of popular tropes and forms of socially engaged art and what I would reframe as their learning outcomes:

#### The "Interesting Person" Project

An artist finds an everyday, regular person and espouses the values of their traits, quirks, habits, or output. I became especially familiar with this form working

with Harrell Fletcher between 2006 and 2015. When teaching together at Portland State University I witnessed many students adopt this form, finding an interesting café owner and making him and his interests the subject of their thesis exhibition, for example. I feel comfortable admitting that I never found much of this to be captivating or challenging work, but for me the value of this approach lies in the skills of appreciation and acknowledgment it develops. To be able to find the extraordinary in the ordinary is partly what this form can teach students.

### **Food-Based Projects**

Dinner parties, soup collectives, pop-up restaurants, you name it—food is bringing people together in some way in the name of art. These projects are a staple of socially engaged art. For good reason, food can create situations of sharing, community, and literal nourishment. I am not attempting to detract from the value of artwork that implements food. There are so many incredible and beautiful projects on a variety of levels: from work by Michael Rakowitz (*Enemy Kitchen*, 2003–ongoing; *Spoils*, 2011), to the everyday acts of Alison Knowles's *Identical Lunch* (1968), to alternative granting platforms like the *INCUBATE*-originated Sunday Soup (2007–9). Often, though, when food-based projects are done during the course of an education in socially engaged art they rarely contain the depth, context, or space for a practice around food to emerge. Not to speak of the problem of documentation of these kinds of projects: not everything needs to be framed as an artwork, sometimes you can just have people over for dinner and not take pictures of their dirty dishes. The value of the food-based project as an assignment or exercise to be taken on by students is to learn in a small way how to bring together a group, how to create a social experience, and gain conversational abilities. All of these are valuable skills that are needed in work that claims the social as its medium.

### **The Skillshare**

A staple of community-based projects, the skillshare creates a platform that equalizes knowledge and creates a space for educational exchange. The *each one=teach one* model can be the primary part of the project (an artist-led school) or a supplemental activity (programming related to a larger project). The take away lesson from a skillshare-based project is the organization of situations that can enable pedagogical agency and egalitarian approaches to the production of knowledge.

### **Radio Reboot**

The revival of analogue forms is perhaps to be expected in a mode of creative production that some have seen as a direct reaction to the proliferation of digital

social platforms. Returning to forms of communication that feel nostalgic, scalable, and easily constructed signals a desire for the distribution of information within human control and constraints. Pirate radio projects are usually limited to the broadcast radius of the transmitter at hand, or are deliberately neighborhood focused (Neighborhood Public Radio, NPR). The importance of these kinds of projects is that students and emerging artists develop agency and learn to create alternate forms of distribution for content, bypassing gatekeepers and dominating channels of communication. Depending on the programming structure the ability to organize and create a platform for others to engage with might also be developed.

### **The Travelogue**

The structure of these projects is determined by one key factor—an artist's journey to a destination and context other than their own, followed by a project reporting back. This is not dissimilar from Hal Foster's notion of artist as ethnographer, or Susan Lacy's description of artist operating as journalist. Although they need not follow journalism standards, these kinds of projects tend to be didactic in nature, and with very straight-ahead delivery. What is gained from this kind of project as assignment is honing in on observation, as well as the ability to distill and convey information and experience, typically in an exhibition or publication style.

### **The Drinking Project**

Alcohol is a social lubricant and socially engaged art projects that use libations as their base are not uncommon. Examples include the artist re-creating the social space of a bar in a gallery, like *The Candabar* (Theo Sims, 2010); using the already existing space of a bar to engage the discourse of art (Mountain School in L.A., 2005–ongoing); or projects that simply engage people in the act of drinking—typically with artists (*Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art*, Tom Marioni, 1970–ongoing; *Shout, Recount, Get Drunk*, M. K. Guth, 2016). What is obtained from the drinking project is a certain set of social abilities like conversation and the creation of convivial space, with the additional challenge of potential intoxication.

### **Neighborhood-Based Projects**

This can take many forms, from skill share, to mapping, to interesting person project. The only qualifier is that the project takes place in the artist's own neighborhood and serves as a way to connect the artist and other residents to where they live and the people around them. Depending on the shape and scope of the project, a variety of things could be gleaned from a neighborhood-based

assignment, but the most significant is that there is the potential to create work in one's own backyard.

### **Mapping Projects**

Mapping projects can be neighborhood specific, they can create alternative maps of cities, they can map resources, or they can challenge how the viewer sees or experiences space. Influenced often by the Situationist International and psychogeography, these approaches allow for the transformation or reclaiming of space, in particular of public space.

### **Project + Bicycle**

Any of the above project styles, transported by a bicycle.

### **Anything with a ewriter**

Self-explanatory.

To outline these project tropes is not to discount or undermine the validity of these forms, but to help understand their prevalence and to emphasize the value of creating pedagogical approaches and assignments that could foster and cultivate many of these skills and approaches in emerging and developing artists, so that they can then be applied to doing the larger work of transforming the world through creativity and radical acts of imagination.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

*Embeddedness.* Not moving for an MFA. Instead, having artists work in their communities.

*Foundations.* Less focus on the MFA for socially engaged art. Instead, reimagine what a foundational education for artists should be in the twenty-first century. This education might include community organizing for social change, nonviolent resistance, restorative justice.

*Artists in Residence.* Taking inspiration from the work of the Artist Placement Group and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the insertion of artists into social contexts can be both the education and the work.

*Rethinking Timeline.* As with much of the work in social practice it is difficult to place a set time frame for development, execution, and duration. The education for socially engaged art is no different. The quarter and semester systems often prove to be hindrances in assignments and projects. We need a more flexible timeline, which might be in part determined by the work of the artist.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Art schools need to consider what their relationship and role will be in training the next generation of artists and what skills and foundations will they require to make the revolutionary changes we need in order to achieve a more just and equitable world. The return to models like the Black Mountain College is happening in the form of the new reboot inspired by the original. Self-organized approaches to art education are also abundant, but we must not lose sight of the importance of formalized art training. Rethinking these structures is to reimagine and reinvest in the myriad ways in which artists can shape the worlds we want to see.

LESSON PLANS IV

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**COLLECTIVE LEARNING  
AND URBAN IMAGINARIES**



# Poetry Workshop

Joseph Cuillier (The Black School, New York, New York)

Taught at City-As-School and the Nelson Mandela School for Social Justice.

## **OBJECTIVE**

Collective poetry is a collaborative writing technique where several authors work in solidarity to form one voice while still maintaining individual creativity. Collective poetry exercises are designed to encourage students to join diverse voices in rhythm. Using pattern as a theme this creative writing exercise builds community among participants by reflecting on the social structures and cooperation connecting people in everyday life. This activity created opportunities for students to write poetry, investigate history, explore self in a community setting, and participate in the dramatic reading of a collective poem.

The duration of this activity is two hours.

## **CLASS SIZE**

This workshop is ideal for a class of ten to fifteen students, ages thirteen and up. At least one other educator or assistant should be in the room to monitor students through the process and ensure satisfactory learning outcome.

## **MATERIALS**

Materials needed for this workshop are a video or audio recorder, a music playing device and speaker or an instrument such as a hand drum, a pencil or a pen, and paper.

## **LESSON PLAN**

The first step of the lesson plan was devoted to discussing the platform and completing the community survey. We first held a fifteen-minute discussion about the organization of the workshop using the Black School's Six Point Platform with Images as a guide. Next, we spent fifteen minutes administering

the Black School's Community Survey to students, the first ten minutes focused on filling out the survey; the remaining five minutes we discussed a few of the student responses together.

During this open group discussion, we all reflected on questions such as, "What is poetry?" "What are the elements of a poem?" "What is a collective poem?" Some comments included poetry is "words, rhymes, thoughts, emotions," and that "collective poetry is a poem written by more than one person."

Copies of sample poems were distributed and recited aloud twice. While listening

and following along, students considered the following listening questions: "What words or lines *stand out* to you?" "What did you notice or remember?"

Students shared those words that made them see, taste, feel, or hear something. They spoke about repetition in the poems and how did this appeared. We asked them if they could identify clusters of similar images in the poems and what did they think could make the poem stronger. We also explained that poets revise their poems many times before considering them complete, cutting lines out, rewriting them, and rearranging them to make the poem flow.

After the discussion, students responded to a prewriting prompt, "What are the lyrics of your favorite song?" followed by four more writing prompts: "Black is \_\_\_\_\_. What is Black? What does it look, taste, feel, and sound like?" The second one was "I am \_\_\_\_\_. What do I believe in? What do I love? What do I live for? Who am I?" The third was "My community is \_\_\_\_\_. What does my community (family, school, neighborhood, city) mean to me? (Context: What do you love/want to change about your community?)" The last prompt asked them, "The Black School is \_\_\_\_\_. What is the Black School? What does it mean to you? What should it teach? (Context: What do you love/want to change about your community?)" Students then made a list of their responses and altered them to fit in the sentence "We are . . ." using the

<b>THE BLACK SCHOOL</b>	<b>COMMUNITY SURVEY</b>	
	Neighborhood _____	Age _____ Gender _____
What are some things you love about your community?		What are some things you would like to change in your community?
Draw a picture below of what you love or would like to change about your community:		



**The Blacker the Berry**

by Kendrick Lamar

Verse 3:

*I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015*  
*When I finish this if you listenin' then sure you will agree*  
*This plot is bigger than me, it's generational hatred*  
*It's genocism, it's grimy, little justification*  
*I'm African-American, I'm African*  
*I'm black as the heart of a fuckin' Aryan*  
*I'm black as the name of Tyrone and Darius*  
*Excuse my French but fuck you — no, fuck y'all*  
*That's as blunt as it gets, I know you hate me, don't you?*  
*You hate my people, I can tell cause it's threats when I see you*  
*I can tell cause your ways deceitful*  
*Know I can tell because you're in love with that Desert Eagle*  
*Thinkin' maliciously, he get a chain then you gone bleed him*  
*It's funny how Zulu and Xhosa might go to war*  
*Two tribal armies that want to build and destroy*  
*Remind me of these Compton Crip gangs that live next door*  
*Beefin' with Pirus, only death settle the score*  
*So don't matter how much I say I like to preach with the Panthers*  
*Or tell Georgia State "Marcus Garvey got all the answers"*  
*Or try to celebrate February like it's my B-Day*  
*Or eat watermelon, chicken, and Kool-Aid on weekdays*  
*Or jump high enough to get Michael Jordan endorsements*  
*Or watch BET cause urban support is important*  
*So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street when gang banging make*  
*me kill a nigga blacker than me?*  
*Hypocrite!*

**Revolutionary Dreams**

by Nikki Giovanni

*I used to dream militant dreams  
of taking over america to show  
these white folks  
how it should be done*

*I used to dream radical dreams  
of blowing everyone away  
with my perceptive powers  
of correct analysis*

*I even used to think I'd be the one  
to stop the riot and  
negotiate the peace*

*then I awoke and dug  
that if I dreamed natural  
dreams of being a natural  
woman doing what a woman  
does when she's natural  
I would have a revolution.*



# Ask the Tarot

## From Personal Belief to Collective Reflection

Alpha Elena Escobedo (Ciudad Juárez, Mexico)

This activity was originally designed for History of Art Theories, a compulsory freshman year course in the Art program at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. In this class we study the main theories that influenced the production, use, and consumption of art in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the main axes of the course is art's subjective dimension, where we analyze different subjectivist art expressions and forms with the purpose of understanding the positions and principles postulated by the original authors. Other lines within the course include the link between art and political thought and action. The goal is to highlight political action as a political, subjective, and intersubjective matter, which is a fundamental antecedent for understanding contemporary artistic activity.

Several years of experience helped me structure the learning activity as one topic linking to another through the works, interests, and practices of the artists studied. The relationship between the personal and the social becomes evident. This learning activity is pursued not only through a specific artistic stance but via a deeper and wider understanding about the relationship between individuals and society. Put differently, the process of intersubjective knowledge construction is performed only through the presence and recognition of the other. As such, it was very important to note students' reactions from the beginning of the course. Tarot reading can be a culturally controversial activity, generating an unfavorable environment if not properly introduced to the student group. It may not be possible in all contexts. The group must be sensitized to the importance of individual interests, before being linked to social subjects as a whole.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY

The goal of this activity is to build meaningful, collaborative knowledge based on a process of discovery. In doing so, we traveled from subjectivity to

intersubjectivity, and learned to ask specific questions on which we collectively reflected on later.

### **CLASS CONTEXT**

The class should be aimed at understanding the factors influencing contemporary society, as well as interested in the causes and effects of human action in their cultural and natural environment. Students went from examining the particular to the general and then back again, developing questions of personal interest that are equally social matters.

### **STEPS**

The teacher worked as a guide; she advised, warned, and persuaded the students regarding each step of the activity. She introduced the subject through an exposition and explanation of Carl G. Jung's psychoanalytic theory in which subjectivist positions in the arts and the millennial tradition of tarot cards are juxtaposed. Salvador Dalí's tarot painting exemplified the notion of Jung's theory of archetypes, placing students before a process of deep reflection on the "I," far away from the mystical and/or magical conceptions of the tarot tradition. We then formed work teams of ideally no more than four participants per team. After which the teacher gave students time to carry out the following activities: search for references about symbology, archetypes, tarot reading, and rituals. Each team also needed to decide which tarot and which reading system or ritual to use, as well as define what questions they wished to answer. After completing these steps, they threw down their roll, reading the cards that appeared based on the references collected, their beliefs, traditions, and knowledge. With this, they prepared an exhibition to share their questions and reflections with the rest of the teams. After they presented their results, the whole group discussed similarities and differences about their processes, the importance of each of the questions asked, and their personal relationship with the questions asked by others. This activity has been carried out with groups of between twenty and twenty-five members. In general, six hours is enough to complete the activity. It is important for the teacher to remain close to and attentive to students' actions, in order to resolve doubts or conflicts during teamwork, as well as to direct and redirect the activity if necessary.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY AS IT WAS IMPLEMENTED IN THE ART THEORY COURSE IN JANUARY 2017**

This year we formed five teams. Team number five decided to ask a different question for each member. As one asked the question, the others formulated their answers choosing cards. Four questions were posed: "Will false friendships



be revealed?” “Should I get married?” “Will I have Alzheimer’s?” “Will I die alone?”

For team number four, the discussion between them ended up being much more important than the analysis of the images and symbols. From the beginning of the activity they had difficulties agreeing on the question and the tarot reading process. This led them to ask questions around the issue of leadership. Each member asked questions: “Why cannot I be a leader?” “What does this have to do with leadership?” “What are the characteristics of a good leader?” “Why is a leader needed?” and “Should I strive to be a good leader?”

Team number three used a reading of traditional symbols, but they also drew from personal symbolologies and beliefs. For this team the analysis of the image was very important. Each member asked a question for which he or she chose three cards. The questions were “When should I leave my current job?” “How will my path be within the approach I want to give to my career?” “Do I want to be a legitimate artist?” and “Am I looking for stability or am I running away from it?”



Team number two worked on a single roll for the whole team, and chose three cards in a more ritualized way. They decided to use Sartre's theoretical framework of existentialism to interpret the meaning of each card.

This team tried to maintain a balance between the meaning traditionally assigned to the card and the image represented by Dalí, taking both equally into consideration.

Their question was "What does he/she think of me beyond appearances?"

Each member of team number one asked his own question, choosing three cards from Dalí's tarot. The interpretation was based primarily on definitions found on the cards and the symbols, characters, and numbers that they contained. The questions included "Should I return to home?" "Will our current project be completed?" "Can unconscious decisions lead me anywhere?" "Should I give up work and start a business?" "Why do decisions seem to be ephemeral and no longer have meaning?"

Their final reflection of this lesson was as follows:

*This exercise should be seen merely as an exercise, a series of coincidences of which we ourselves as subjects are predisposed to participate in, and that the environment in which we develop our work (the academy) puts us in the perfect position to face. Perhaps it can be seen as a sort of introspection in which, by appropriating the signifiers, we give them a meaning that is impregnated with lived situations that are related to our questions*



*and with the same symbols that we interpret from the letters. We would have to see it as a cure, an object of a comforting character that has to cut out fragments of temporal space to give us an answer to phenomena that otherwise would take a long time to be solved.*

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# Social Practice and Community Engagement Seminar

## Trust Exercises

Justin Langlois (Vancouver, Canada)

### CONTEXT

At Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada, we offer a minor in Social Practice and Community Engagement. Its aim is to develop a baseline of theory and practice around socially engaged art and design. This minor, made up of nine required credits and nine elective credits, is open to all students across the university, and attracts students from visual arts, design, critical studies, animation, illustration, and filmmaking. The required courses are Social Practice Seminar, the Ethics of Representation, and a Community Projects studio. Each class explores a lineage and context of practice, a foundation of sociological and theoretical underpinnings for working in and with communities, and a semester-long public project involving a community partner. The assignment below involved twenty-eight students in the Social Practice Seminar.

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

This project began with a simple prompt: let's assume that trust is a fundamental requirement to build a sustainable social life together. Students were asked to develop a modest activity to develop trust between one another, or in the institutions around us, or in society at large. For example, what would a trust school look like? How could a social infrastructure build deeper trust among strangers? What sorts of public spaces could be temporarily cultivated to make people feel more trusting? In response, students completed an intervention or participatory project that fostered trust, presenting documentation of their social engagement in class.

### THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT

Despite its reputation for aesthetic beauty, Vancouver has a notorious reputation for being a socially lonely place. An often-cited report commissioned

by the Vancouver Foundation in 2011 found that the city's most pressing issue was human isolation and disconnection. Increasing rates of poverty, a lack of affordable housing, serious environmental concerns, but above all, city residents were most concerned about not being able to make friends or develop deep social ties. This is a constant undercurrent of many discussions taken up in class. Unpacking what is at stake in pushing for social engagement is not just part of our artistic practice, but a larger element of everyday life experience.

To begin this assignment the class met with the Museum of Vancouver's director of curatorial and engagement, Greg Dreicer, with whom I had already been working on a project looking at the role that trust plays in building social connection. Dreicer and I began to explore the notion of trust as the thing that makes social connectivity possible. Students were assigned reading excerpts from *Right to the City* by David Harvey and examined projects such as Jeanne van Oudeswijk's *Bluehouse*, Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International*, and Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed's *Big Rock Candy Mountain* that set up a small-scale kid-run candy factory in an East-Vancouver elementary school. Introducing these reference points allowed the class to explore the complexity of longer-term projects wrestling trust building in small, diverse, and unexpected communities.

After introducing the parameters of the assignment and working through adjustments and details about final deliverables, students paired up at their own discretion. As this was midway through the semester, they were familiar enough with one another to have this go the right away. Some students relied heavily on the project description to get started; others tried to engage with the idea of trust. The project brief also presented a bit of a foil; it looked at the positive outcomes of trust, but did not directly suggest all of the ways in which trust can go wrong. In some instances, students found their way into that discussion so that it became a recurring conversation in critiques and moments of debrief.

The overall sequence of the project unfolded as follows. First, students were asked to set a local context for the issue at hand. Second, they needed to find some expertise outside of the immediate artistic community to add detail to their projects. Finally, they would discuss their idea within a lineage of artistic practices and, working together, redefine the boundaries of the project. After this they had time and space to complete the project within and beyond the class. Ultimately, we set up a framework for understanding and discussing project submissions. Whenever possible they were required to link the local context and outside expertise back into the project at its completion.

### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES

The outcomes ranged from symbolic actions and performative gestures, to DIY interactive installations. Some were created with an exhibition setting in mind; others assumed the class was the immediate audience. In one project, students created small social games or icebreakers to build trust. In another, they set up a performance wherein some part of the student's body or well-being was at stake. In particular, one student's hair was cut in class and someone ate a dinner cooked by a friend of a friend. Another group generated a temporary installation with oversized envelopes in which you could deposit information you could no longer be trusted with. Others designed public furniture that would have people sit in ways that highlighted interpersonal social alienation, for example, public seating that only allows one to sit back-to-back at all times. Some students hosted a short-run podcast asking people to share their secrets; others created an "eye contact" workshop, or designed public signage printed with questions about trust to spur public dialogue. One group came up with an instructional sound artwork for two participants that ended with listening to one another's heartbeats, and another hosted a temporary confessional booth on Vancouver's seawall. Still other projects revolved around publishing an artist book featuring aggregated imagery from social media with the hashtag *#trust*, and a wall-mounted box where students were encouraged to leave their addresses to begin an anonymous exchange of mail art.

### OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS

Running studio projects within seminar courses can be difficult because of time limitations. Instead I often asked students to gather into groups of seven to eight people and critique the projects themselves. This helps them shape the conversation towards their own interests and concerns, drawing links between projects that might not otherwise be visible.

Although the student projects did not generally approach a critical perspective of trust, in our larger group conversation it did become clear that there was an interest in complicating our understanding of trust. As we carried our discussion into the next class, projects that looked into sharing secrets led to



Students interviewing one another around issues and experience of trust in social life.

conversations about surveillance, and ideas of public confessions opened up questions about interrogations. A class-wide debate about how and when to trust the institutions around us became one highlight of the entire semester.

In all, the project created an opportunity to look at socially engaged art as a practice rich with the potential for critical investigation, though one contingent on pushing past expectations of conviviality and amelioration that so often surround this work.

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# Experience as Art

## Fine Art Social Practice at Middlesex University

Lorraine Leeson and Alberto Duman (London, United Kingdom)

### CONTEXT

The *Fine Art Social Practice* modules at Middlesex University are aimed at fostering dialogue, communing, and change in cultural process and production through experiential learning and social inquiry. The modules take place over an academic year as part of the Fine Art BA Honours course, with second- and third-year students taught together to maximize opportunities for peer learning. Students develop a project with a community or group of their choosing; this can be realized as an actual placement of a number of weeks in an institution such as a hospital, support group or school, or interpreted through a collective initiative with their peers, a virtual network, or via collaboration with an action group. For third-year students the work carried out in the module constitutes their major project, culminating in the degree show. From 2018 on, students will graduate with a BA degree in Fine Art Social Practice, from where they can apply for the one-year full-time or two-year part-time MA Art and Social Practice. Practical work for both undergraduate modules is supported by a program of biweekly seminars and visits that alternate with one-to-one tutorials. In addition, two thirty-credit modules offer support for professional practice and essay writing.

Below is an example of one of these seminars, followed by an outline of an external visit through which students encounter other socially engaged practices. These trips draw on the opportunities presented by the capital's urban environment for students to witness the use of art in urban regeneration and question the way in which artists, consciously or unwittingly, become part of that process.

### PART 1—TEMPORARY ART PARLIAMENT

The *Temporary Art Parliament* is a way of doing active research on artistic practices using existing platforms of reward in prizes and competition. The name

was borrowed from the VISIBLE<sup>1</sup> award jury event of 2015, a biannual international event that confers a prize to a socially engaged art project from a nominated shortlist. The art world constantly reasserts the institutional hold on its own field through a system of award, prizes, and competitions financed by museums, foundations, and other various sponsors and partners. Think, for example, the Turner Prize, the Artes Mundi prize, the Hugo Boss Prize, the Golden Lion in Venice, the Art Prize, the Duchamp Prize, the Leonore Anneberg prize for Art and Social Change . . . the list gets longer every year!

In this event we turned the tables around: we presented the 2016 selection of shortlisted artists or collectives of a prestigious award for art and politics in 2016 to our students for judgment. In other words, taking a real award structure, the students would vote, discuss criteria, and choose their own winner.

Students introduce each of the six finalists and, through conversation and exchange, they familiarize themselves with the candidates, until their *Temporary Art Parliament* is ready to exercise its powers and deliberate through the vote who should receive the award. The actual winner is revealed at the end of the event so that students can see how their judgment squares with the actual decision, and whether that in fact matters.



Temporary Art Parliament. Photo © Middlesex University, 2017.

This year, the *Temporary Art Parliament* took as study case the finalists of the Vera List Prize for Art and Politics 2016, awarded to Maria Theresa Alvez. In this instance, the student parliament concurred with the jury decision.

## PART 2—LISTENING EXERCISE

Many skills are required to work with others on creative projects, either collaboratively or through participation, particularly when that engagement encompasses different experiences and disciplines. One of the most effective means of facilitating this process is that of listening—not just hearing what others say, but also developing understanding of one another’s needs, desires, and vision. An

1 VISIBLE is an award offered by the Cittadellarte cultural institution based in Biella, Italy to support “artistic actions which have a real capacity to experiment and produce visions that can have impact on the social and cultural imagination of our contemporary world.” See <http://www.visibleproject.org/blog/about/>.

exercise that we regularly employ is one of *active listening*, where students think through the practice of listening and participate in small-group work to experience listening, being listened to, and to observe the dynamics of this process.

#### WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

As a group we discussed the importance of listening and the difference between listening and hearing. Students were asked if they had ever engaged in a conversation where they wondered if the other person was actually listening to what they were saying, whether their message was getting across, if it was worthwhile to continue speaking, or they felt as if they were talking to a *brick wall*.

An interesting fact: people generally remember between 25 and 50 percent of what they hear—less than half of a conversation. Later, the group discussed what made a good listener, in reference to our own experiences. We introduced the concept of *active listening* as the conscious effort to hear not only the words, but also to understand the complete message. Following this, we brainstormed some of the advantages of good listening, as well as devices that can be employed.

Some of the advantages of good listening that came up during group discussion were “opening up,” “avoiding misunderstandings,” “resolving conflict,” “building trust,” “facilitating cross-cultural communication.” Furthermore, among the devices the group thought could be employed in good listening were “Acknowledgment—could be just a nod of the head or a simple ‘uh huh,’” “without necessarily agreeing with the person, indicating that you are listening,” “body language and other signs that acknowledge you are listening, and enable you to pay attention and not let your mind wander,” “trying to respond to the speaker in a way that will encourage them to continue speaking, so that you can better understand what they need/want/think,” “occasional questions or comments to recap or summarize what has been said, communicating that you understand the message as well.”

All the above help the processes of opening up, avoiding misunderstandings, resolving conflict, building trust and facilitating cross-cultural communication. We considered the following checklist:

- seating/body language/eye contact,
- not interrupting,
- respect,
- suspending judgment,
- responding appropriately (nod/smile/posture/verbal responses),
- not agreeing or disagreeing,
- deferring judgment—allowing the speaker to finish each point before asking questions/not interrupting with counter arguments,

- clarification—“What I’m hearing is . . .”/“Sounds like you are saying . . .,” and
- occasional paraphrasing/feedback.

### **PRACTICAL EXERCISE (IN GROUPS OF TWO OR THREE)**

Person one spoke for five minutes about a problem or issue they were experiencing with their practice. Person two listened, bearing in mind the *active listening* approach. Person three observed the interaction, noting use of the devices discussed. Each of them took a turn playing the different roles, for a total of fifteen minutes. After the conversation they reported to the main group on how it felt and what they observed.

After the practical exercise, the group rejoined and held a discussion as to where this might apply in social practice, particularly in situations of collaboration with partners, engaging with participants, setting up a placement, finding out interests and requirements of co-workers such as teachers and health workers, as well as hosting organizations and funders.

Students received a paper exercise to complete in their own time. This was a self-evaluation checklist designed to help them become more aware of their current listening habits.



*The Common* at Events Day. Photo © Loraine Leeson, 2014.

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING—STUDENT VISIT**

In the *Fine Art Social Practice* modules at Middlesex we emphasize experiential learning, often curating visits conceived as itinerant discursive spaces where different approaches to a theme are cut together dialectically. Below is an example of this collage technique.

#### **VISIT AND SEMINAR: “PROTEST AND PROTEST”**

We visited the *Protest* exhibition at Victoria Miro, a private gallery showing activist art, and *Camesquat*, the occupation of the offices of Camelot, the company that started property guardianship in the UK. Camelot has since come under criticism for their role in the London housing crisis and its exploitative practices, most often at the expense of creative practice students.

Within the same day, we saw several cases of visual representation of protest through artworks exhibited in both a private gallery and an actual space

of protest, a few minutes away from each other. We interrogated both spaces, the work exhibited, the people living and working in them, and the reasons behind their positions.

The following week, research fellow Valeria Graziano helped students think through the politics of activism in art, the artistic techniques of activists, and the aesthetics of protest as art that the group encountered on the double-bill visits of the previous session.

### OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS' PRACTICAL PROJECTS

In the academic year 2016–17 students are developing the following projects: a film about the Armenian/Syrian diaspora, a collective “portrait” of the older residents of a Camden housing estate, a project connecting graffiti artists and homeless people, work with refugees through an art charity, an installation to highlight domestic spaces across global differences, work with young people with learning disabilities at a day center, a documentary of an activist group from within, an animated oral history project of a community in transition whose housing is demolished through regeneration, a photographic project on the diversity of the year three student cohort, and a project with a group of volunteers working at a socially oriented London gallery.



Documentary of an activist group. © Helen Mandley, 2017.



Setting our own rules: a view from the elderly residents of a central London village. © Hilary Barnes, 2017.



Photography Project for Young Children with Learning Disabilities. © Katharine Gill, 2017.



Refugee Project. © Elif Aydemir, 2017.

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# Writing the Social

## A Participatory Workshop

Gretchen Coombs (Brisbane, Australia)

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

How can we write about the individuals and communities we encounter in our practice? How can writing about these social exchanges inform our work and provide documentation and evaluation of the work? Using writing prompts and dialogue with each other we can consider these questions and develop techniques to better express our encounters and to be ethically informed in our approach.

The workshop ran from one to two hours. Students were not required to prepare anything in advance, but needed to bring paper and pen for this lesson. No computers or tablets were allowed. Students received a series of brief writing prompts to which they needed to respond. They then undertook mock interviews, and discussed ethnographic qualitative research methods. Each prompt was themed and had a strict time limit. Discussions continued after each prompt and after the mock interviews.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

At the beginning of the workshop, we responded to two writing prompts that worked as warm-ups for the rest of the workshop. The first prompt consisted on writing a rant about something, anything, that bothered students at that moment. This exercise should not last longer than five minutes. The second prompt was called chair perspectives. Although it takes a bit more time, it is effective with large groups. I organized the class chairs so that students sat in tight rows progressing towards the back of the class. Once they sat they were asked to write about anything they wanted: the environment, what they saw, what they heard, and so forth. After three minutes, they turned their chairs around facing the other way. They did the same exercise for three minutes. Later, they stood up and moved to somewhere else in the room, anywhere, as long as they were standing. They wrote again about what was around them—

who, what they saw, what they heard, smelled, what they thought of the space. They had another three minutes to write after they settled. Students reported back on how the three different positions offered contrasting experiences of the room and those in it. The goal was to consider perspective, and how that shifts and is provisional depending on where you sit, who you see, and so forth.

After these warm-ups we did directed writing prompts for a total of seven minutes. Students wrote about the time when they first realized they had power, or the first time a foreign place felt like home to them. Next, we carried out a series of mock interviews. Students paired up, preferably with someone they did not know well. As this exercise was designed to simulate a real-world interview with a community member, artist, politician, and so forth, the more unfamiliar they are with each other, the better. No note taking was allowed. Students interviewed their partner and practiced listening. Students asked each other open-ended questions, and were asked to be attentive to body language and other sensory elements, and to use the other student's response to ask related follow-up questions. After ten minutes, they switched. They could ask about any of the following topics, keeping in mind the goal is not to get through the questions but to use one question to enter into a deeper conversation about that person, their work, their views, and so forth. Possible topics included their work (artistic practice, activist or otherwise), what they hoped their work did in the world, and how could they know this had happened, or they could discuss the rant or the exercise about power and place. If necessary, the instructor can direct workshop participants to discuss a topic that relates directly to the class context or other relevant theme.

Next, students were asked to write about their interviews with their partners from three different perspectives. Students had five minutes for each of these points. It was important to write from all three. First, they wrote about their interview partner. This perspective is highly descriptive, like an encyclopedia entry. In this step, conclusions and assumptions were informed by what had been seen or said. Oftentimes this puts a heavy emphasis on physical attributes as well. Second, they reflected on them intersubjectively, with a more journalistic approach, taking NPR stories as reference, particularly how they situate the interviewer and interviewee, and how they provide a sense of the context in which they are happening (for example, in a diner where you can hear plates, low murmur of voices). They positioned themselves after the following questions: "How do they know this person? Why are you interested in speaking with this person/community? How do you have access? What is your involvement? Consider what can and should be said—and any other ethical considerations. Who can be named, not named? Who is at risk in this situation?" Last, they took a fictional approach. Traditional ethnography has at times been writ-

ten as fiction to protect the anonymity of the subject or to deal with some of the sensitive issues that arise. Sometimes, this approach also allows for a more complicated story to emerge. Some genres or devices they could consider were sci-fi, comic book story, an obituary, a superhero, or a historical figure. Here, Chris Kraus's brief statement on fiction has been helpful to understand that fiction is not about lying per se, but about how things are framed:

*It's all fiction. As soon as you write something down, it's fiction. I don't think fiction is necessarily about inventing fake stories. The process of fictionalization is selection—why this and not that? If we look at any moment, what's in it is practically infinite. Why do I pick up on your eyes and how they set on your face instead of what's outside of the window? And what do I think when I look at your eyes, what does this moment make me remember? What we select from all this—all these digressions—that's the process of fictionalization, that's what we create. As soon as something gets written down, it's no longer "true," because there are always 100 other things that are equally "true." And then everything changes as soon as something gets written down.<sup>1</sup>*

#### **THEORY AND REPORTING BACK**

After this exercise, we held a brief discussion about ethnography, its history, the critique, and some contemporary examples. The level of the discussion has varied in different contexts, depending on the class level and their interest. We discussed the goals of ethnography: to get a glimpse into/of the sociocultural ecosystem in which they and their work function. A successful ethnography encompasses some or all of the following: multiple viewpoints, intertextuality (visual, kinetic, aural, or written), mixed-media representations of outcomes; it positions the researcher within the research, yet avoiding taking a central position in it; it provides results that are often contingent, ambivalent, or in which representation is unclear; it creates a messy or rich text. The goal is for students to produce a rhizomatic bricolage, a patchwork data gathering with fellow artists about their own work, or about the people with which they worked in their projects.

#### **SHARING**

Partners shared their writing with each other. If they were comfortable, they read aloud one of their encounters. Questions that I asked included "What do

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1 "Chris Kraus in Conversation with Denise Frimer" by Denise Frimer, *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 10, 2006, <http://brooklynrail.org/2006/04/art/chris-kraus-in-conversation-with-denise-frimer>.

you think of how your partner represented you? How has your perspective of that person changed? Can you identify any of your biases?” As a wrap-up, participants reported back on their experience, which perspective had been the most difficult one to write, which they had found the easiest, and why. Finally, we discussed how this process could help identify any bias.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS**

### **1. Pedagogical Strategies**

One pedagogical strategy involved letting the workshop unfold without prior explanation. This can be a bit unnerving when, often, students want to know what is going on, or at least have an outline of the workshop. At the beginning, students tend to be a bit unsure of the direction and purpose of my prompts. I have found it best to explain as we move through the workshop. The initial rant was a space-clearing gesture. It was not meant to do anything else. The directed exercises about power and place were supposed to be reflective and allow participants to write without self-censoring. This writing helped with the mock interviews.

Time constraints have also proven frustrating, although they provoke certain ways of dealing with the material. These were not open-ended and free-flowing workshops; purposefully, they were tightly controlled. Sometimes, time constraints have kept some students from writing all three perspectives. While it has generally not been a problem, they can limit the efficacy of the lesson. Each different perspective engenders a particular frame and interpretation of that person, and understanding what we choose to include in the description helped reveal some of our biases, and ultimately how this was conveyed in writing. Anecdotal feedback suggested that both time constraints and the direction I imposed helped them avoid falling into much self-censorship.

### **2. Writing**

The focused time and directed writing exercises allowed students to explore their own writing processes and importantly, to use writing as one element of their overall art practice. In the context of teaching socially engaged art, this might have several outcomes. How a student writes is determined by the outcome requested of them: a curatorial tag, a catalog essay, a grant application, a grant report, or a class assignment.

As an anthropologist I am keenly aware of how writing can construct and represent cultural groups. As a consequence of this, groups and individuals can be objectified, stigmatized, stereotyped by race, gender, geographic location,

and the like. Thus I always return to the original questions posed at the beginning: “How and why do we write about other people, to what effect? Are there tools that might make this process a bit more ethical, or at least ethically informed and approached with informed consent before and after the encounter?” The interviews and listening exercises, as well as the subsequent writing from three different perspectives, were designed to shape conceptual frameworks and to help students identify bias. With such consideration, they may have developed a more ethical approach to real-world encounters and their representations of that person or community.



**NOTES**

“Rant” and other writing prompts adapted from a writing workshop with author Cheryl Strayed at the Mount Blanc Writing Workshop, June 2016.

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# Up Against the Wall

## Public Art, Precarity, and Witness (Occupied Palestine 2003–2011)<sup>1</sup>

Susan R. Greene (Palestine and San Francisco, California)

“Steadfastness (*Sumud*) and resistance against the physical, and even more so the systemic, institutionalized violence, is the core sentence in the inner syntax of Palestinians in this land. . . . [The] levels of distress, suffocation, bitterness, anxiety, and wrath are continually on the rise, as is the astonishment at Israelis’ blindness in believing that their violence can remain in control forever.”

—Amira Hass, *Haaretz*, 2015

### 1989: BEFORE THE WALL

In 1989, I visited Palestine for the first time, living in a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank for three months.<sup>2</sup> There were few foreigners, and I was an obvious tourist. People often stopped me in the street, sometimes weeping, beseeching me to take their story back to the American people.



### 2003: UP AGAINST THE WALL

On March 24, 2003, Israel began to extend the Wall using names ranging from “apartheid wall” to “security fence,” depending on one’s location. It snaked

1 This project was supported by Left Tilt Foundation, the Palestinian American Research Center, and the Middle East Children’s Alliance.

2 Information on this project: <http://bit.ly/2uDQgJD>.

through Mas'ha village in the West Bank.<sup>3</sup> The Wall had a severe impact on life in Mas'ha, significantly disrupting movement, commerce, and all other forms of access, including to health care, while 90 percent of local farmland was confiscated to host the divisive project.

The Aamer family<sup>4</sup>—refugees who have lived in Mas'ha since 1948<sup>5</sup>—and other farmers, organized a demonstration that grew into the Mas'ha Peace Camp.<sup>6</sup> For four months, Palestinians, Jewish Israelis, and international activists lived together on land that Israel was confiscating to build the *Wall*. Palestinian organizers said, “We knew that we could not stop the Wall. . . . We wanted to show that the Israeli people are not our enemies . . . and that the Wall is not for security but about confiscating land.”

Israeli bulldozers followed the Mas'ha Peace Camp, ultimately winding up outside Hani Aamer's house. Hani reports the Israelis offered him a blank check to move, telling him that the route of the Wall would go through the center of his house. He refused, saying, “We fled our land in 1948. We will never leave again.” Ever since, the family has lived surrounded by the Wall on four sides, their home bizarrely incorporated into the Jewish-only settlement called Elkana just behind the Aamer's house. Between their home and Elkana is a ten-foot-high cyclone fence with closed-circuit cameras, electric sensors, and razor wire. The fence extends to the two sides of the Aamer property. A twenty-four-foot-high section of the Wall was built in front of the Aamer house, filling the family's field of vision with concrete. A Jewish-settler-only road cuts through what is left of their property. Hani



Credit: Hilary Hacker.

stated, “The soldiers and settlers told us that as long as we live here, we are considered enemies. I feel threatened and in danger all the time, but this is my home, so I focus on how to stay.” Hani Aamer recalls when his three-year-old son slipped under the fence into Elkana and the soldiers refused to bring him back to the family, despite Munira Aamer's pleas: “We were scared that he would be kidnapped and taken away from us by the Israelis.” Local Palestinian workers finally brought him back that evening.

3 See <https://www.stopthewall.org>.

4 To learn more about the Aamer family: <http://bit.ly/2tC9hTv>.

5 History of 1948 refugees: <http://bit.ly/2u1uM25>.

6 Tanya Reinhart provides additional information: <http://bit.ly/2tZhOlq>

**2004–2005: ON THE WALL**

In July 2004, the International Women’s Peace Service (IWPS),<sup>7</sup> an organization that reports on human rights violations, invited Art Forces<sup>8</sup>—an organization I founded and still direct—and artist Eric Drooker<sup>9</sup> to meet the Aamer family. Hani and Munira Aamer were very excited by the idea of painting a community mural on the Wall; they felt it might help their children by giving them an opportunity to transform their prison-like environment. The Aamers had no hesitation, despite a sign on the Wall in three languages that says: “Anyone who passes or damages the fence endangers his life.”

We met with Hani and Munira Aamer to plan the mural and hear more about their lives. They told us that their children were depressed and afraid to play outside. It was summer and they wanted the children to have fun. We brought two large suitcases of paint and, after convincing the Israeli soldiers to let us proceed through the gate, the Aamers and their five children, their community, local grassroots Palestinian and Israeli organizations,<sup>10</sup> US-based somatic therapists,<sup>11</sup> and Jewish-American and other international activists and artists<sup>12</sup> covered two-thirds of the Wall with rolling hills full of giant flowers, several bright-yellow suns, animals, people, and houses. The mural was bookended on one side by a ten-foot bird with a snake in its mouth and on the other side by an enormous golden phoenix taking flight against a brilliant blue sky. Each day, we painted until the early afternoon, at which point the Israeli army forced us to leave. Munira Aamer, who never leaves the property for fear that the settlers will try to occupy her house, explained, “I wish I could open this cage and fly with my children—like the bird in the mural.”<sup>13</sup>

**OFF THE WALL: TANGLED UP IN BLUE**

On our last day in 2005, the Israeli soldiers made us leave earlier than usual. Hani Aamer stated, “The soldier is telling me that the visitors should leave. But they are my guests. . . . I cannot throw them out.” Nevertheless he had to ask us

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7 IWPS: [www.iwps.info](http://www.iwps.info).

8 Art Forces: [www.artforces.org](http://www.artforces.org).

9 Eric Drooker: [www.drooker.com](http://www.drooker.com).

10 Flowers Against the Occupation: <http://bit.ly/2tXBU05> and <https://www.afsc.org/story/fatima-khaldi>. Black Laundry: <http://bit.ly/1Ud1sMt>. Anarchists Against the Wall: <http://www.awalls.org> and <http://bit.ly/2u78dtF>.

11 Generative Somatics: <http://www.generativesomatics.org>. International Trauma Treatment Program: <http://www.ittp.org/>.

12 John Halaka: [www.johnhalaka.org](http://www.johnhalaka.org).

13 Information about the Wall: <http://bit.ly/2sEbEUs> and <http://bit.ly/2tC9hTv>.

to leave, in part because the Israelis were threatening to take back his hard-won key to the enclosure.<sup>14</sup>

We left the remaining paint behind and returned the next day to interview Hani Aamer outside the large gate.<sup>15</sup> Someone excitedly said that Munira Aamer wanted to see me. I ran back to the small gate. Munira let me in. As I stood in the front room, my peripheral vision took in both the blue from the mural outside to my left and the blue of the newly painted walls and ceiling in the bedroom to my right. The morning light was strong, and I was tangled up in luminous blues. Munira had refused to stop painting; her shoes were covered in blue paint and she was beaming. The solidarity project of resignifying the Wall had moved from outside to inside the house. I never saw her look so happy.



Credit: Eric Drooker.

#### **THROUGH THE WALL: SOLIDARITY AND WITNESSING**

All the participants in the project—the occupied and the occupiers—suffer significant losses and are trying to maintain their humanity in the face of the occupation. For Hani Aamer, seeing others witness Israel’s deadly disregard was very meaningful. He explained: “When the Israeli government started building the Wall, many people from all over the world came to support us. The government arrested or deported all of them. They said, ‘You are now alone. You should give up. Who is going to help you?’ But our allies, including our Israeli allies, came back to help us again. It lifted my spirits when our allies came back to paint on the Wall.” Hani Aamer went on to say that after his children painted the mural, they played outside for the first time in a year.

For Munira Aamer, the mural gave her a sense of connection to the world beyond the Wall. She explained, “When we look at the Wall, we remember who painted each section and how it felt to paint together. The mural is like opening a window to the world.”

The mural transformed the Wall by marking it with joyful defiance. It acknowledged the Aamers’ experience of abandonment and supported their

14 For a year the Aamers did not have a key. The army relented after intervention by the UN and media exposure.

15 Hear interview: “Confronting the Wall” by Alan Greig, <https://vimeo.com/14074606>.

resilience, as well as, for a time, engendering in them a sense of hope and possibility.

The invitation from the Palestinians to join their resistance helped the American and Jewish-Israeli participants in their struggle to face their role as occupiers. They felt their loss of a moral existence witnessed and, in turn, they had an opportunity to witness the occupation in a way that reinstated a sense of morality.<sup>16</sup> Nazeeh Sha'alabi, a Palestinian farmer from Mas'ha, said, "We wanted to provide an opportunity for Israelis to support our struggle."

#### **2011: BACK TO THE WALL**

In 2011, I returned to occupied Palestine with eleven artists, activists, and therapists from Maia Mural Brigade.<sup>17</sup> Hani and Munira refused my offer to restore the currently faded mural, saying they now see it as an attempt to beautify something horrible. The Aamers elected to whitewash the mural and invite people to write poetry instead. The only image they kept was the phoenix, knowing it will someday rise from the ashes of the Wall.

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16 Jessica Benjamin, "Beyond Doer and Done to: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2004): 546.

17 Maia Mural Brigade: <http://maiamuralproject.org/>. Middle East Children's Alliance: [www.mecaforpeace.org](http://www.mecaforpeace.org). Estria Foundation: <http://www.estria.org/water-writes/>.

# Framing Neighborhood Decisions

Dillon de Give (New York, New York)

This assignment took place in the context of a course on local government offered to students at the International Community High School, a progressive public high school in the South Bronx for English language learners. All participants arrived in the United States within the last three years. I served as a teaching artist with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), and the structure of local government we sought to investigate was the community board system of New York City. We were guided by the question, “What can you do with a community board?” Students collaborated with CUP and me to produce a short film on this topic designed for an audience of other young people. The following assignment was performed early in this course.

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

**Materials:** Digital cameras, premade frames (discussed below), paper, markers.

**Time:** Approximately three hours, with additional fifteen minutes follow-up on a later date.

The purpose of the assignment was to identify features of the local built environment that shaped the lives of the people living and working there, as well as to imagine these features as manifestations of a larger social process. Although after completion participants may have been left with more questions than answers, the goal was to enable discussion about a variety of forces at work in the neighborhood. Walking with cameras clicking was our method of undertaking



Student depiction of decision, “I took a picture [of] a building because I think that was a decision from someone to make and get money from people living there.”

an embodied survey of the locale. Students experimented with different compositions and angles, and the assignment also provided technical photographic training.

**PART 1: CAMERA TECH AND COMPOSITION BACKGROUND  
(TIMING: TWENTY TO THIRTY MINUTES)**

First, students were provided with a general overview of camera functions, laying their hands on the equipment and experimenting with shutter release, zoom, and so forth. Next, we held an open-ended discussion addressing the question, “What are the different choices a photographer makes when framing subject matter?” In our class we used the language of “shots,” since we would be filmmaking at a later date. I showed students photographic examples of variance in focal length (close-up, medium shot, long shot), angle (high angle and low angle), and foreground/background, among other choices. The group later discussed these typologies, debating how a photographer’s body is positioned to achieve each shot and how composition affects our perception of the message, meaning, and feeling of an image.

**PART 2: INTRODUCING FRAMES (TIMING: TEN TO FIFTEEN MINUTES)**

We first prefaced our assignment goal: walking in a neighborhood and photographing things that have changed, either as result of a decision or not. We discussed the terms *decision* and *change*, emphasizing that changes may or may not be results of decisions, as some things may seem to *happen on their own*. The idea of *change* may also have a relationship to the participants’ memory of the area. Examples included a *decision* to photograph a small fence built around a tree (someone decided to protect the tree), or a *change* might be to capture a broken streetlight (it used to work, but something changed). For students ready to address the subject on a subtler level, I proposed labor as a possible photographic subject. Picture a crossing guard standing where no crossing guard was before, or a shopkeeper putting a sign in a window. For participants who spoke other languages, translating the terms *change* and *decision* provided an expanded sense of their meaning.

Later, we prepared frames made of stiff paper and labeled them with



Students using camera and frame device in Mott Haven neighborhood of the Bronx.

the terms previously discussed. In our execution of the assignment we used two labels and colors for frames. However, other terms and colors could also be used. For example, a more binary approach involved frames labeled “Decision” and “No Decision.” We discussed photographic methods as participants began working in pairs. Each pair received one frame to carry with them. They had to photograph at least one example of each. The intention was that the frames should be visually present in each photograph as elements placed between the camera and the subject. This required participants to position their bodies communicatively. Two participants gladly modeled this approach before the class.

**PART 3: NEIGHBORHOOD TOUR (TIMING: THIRTY TO FORTY MINUTES; IF LESS TIME IS AVAILABLE, THIS STEP COULD BE EXCLUDED)**

Before taking photographs the class took a short walk scouting through the area. Approached casually, students were nevertheless asked to be on the lookout for specific photographic subjects. Yet we used no cameras. Observation and discussion was the main focus. I asked students to “give me a tour” of the street because they now knew it better than I did. Some began to discuss why some of what they observed was the result of decisions, reflecting different processes of change.

**PART 4: TAKING PICTURES (TIMING: FORTY-FIVE TO SIXTY MINUTES)**

Students and accompanying instructors returned to the neighborhood to capture images.

**PART 5: CAPTIONING (TIMING: TEN MINUTES)**

First, participants returned to the classroom and gathered as a group. A short reflection on the process was facilitated. Photographs were shared. Participants chose their favorite subjects, writing explanations about *why* they felt this image represented either a decision or an unavoidable change. Finally, in order to visually reflect on the compositions as individual choices, I photographed students holding their writing samples.

**PART 6: DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION (TIMING: FIFTEEN TO TWENTY MINUTES)**

Participants read their writings out loud and addressed the following questions:

- What is the difference between a *change* and a *decision*? (Include concrete examples from assignment, and debate on what process they represent. Different interpretations should be valued.)
- Why do you think the decisions you witnessed were made?
- Who do you think makes decisions about things in this neighborhood?
- What part do we think government, individuals, and businesses play?
- Do places like this change over time or stay the same?

**PART 7: GALLERY VIEWING (TIMING: TEN TO FIFTEEN MINUTES ON A DIFFERENT DAY)**

Printed photographs, with and without student writings, were posted on a gallery wall for the following class meeting. This was an opportunity to casually discuss effective composition choices, the act of photography as art (or not), the potential relationship between visual art and *decisions* and/or *changes* in the built environment, and the ethics of representing a neighborhood as outside participants. In relation to the last point, we discussed what showing these photographs would achieve in different circumstances.

**WHAT UNFOLDED?**

The assignment raised questions about relations of power in the neighborhood. The framing device worked to formalize the composition process and visualize



Student depiction of change, “I took a picture of scaffolding because I notice its presence changed the area. The reason why the scaffolding is there is probably because of the building’s construction.”



Student depiction of decision, “One decision taken by the government is that everybody is supposed to clean the hallway. I’m not sure if it’s the people that are supposed to clean the halls or the super of the building.”

the extending view of the camera lens. Walking slowly in a specific geographic area forged a renewed relationship with place. Despite our group working in an area immediately surrounding the school, one student exclaimed, "I had never noticed these things before." I considered this a success.

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# Lesson Plan for Public Faculty No. 11

## Imagining a Curriculum for Sunset Park

Jeanne van Heeswijk and Gabriela Rendón (The Netherlands)

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Graduate students from Studio 1 fall 2016, MS Design and Urban Ecologies Program, Parsons School of Design: Maha Aslam, Eduarda Aun, Jason Azar, Zara Farooq, Sarath Ramanan, Angelica Jackson, Lyric Kelkar, Dongyao Li, Caroline Macfarlane, Burak Sancakdar, Emily Sloss, Andrew Strong, and Selamawit Yemeru.

### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

The idea of the *Public Faculty* derives from Jeanne van Heeswijk's ongoing interest in the meaning of publicness and its relation to active citizenship. Public space in most of our contemporary cities is highly regulated, managed, and controlled. It is a source of conflict between individuals, communities, developers, and different levels of government. More and more people feel left out in often clinical understandings of public domain. In this context, cultural interventions are often the only path by which to actively create the public domain. They can generate understandings of place and its dynamics by identifying certain questions capable of creating a *performative action* and supplying the tools for people to develop perceptions and set processes of change.

*Public Faculty* uses strategies to rethink, redefine, and reenter the public space through collective action. The impetus behind *Public Faculty* is to engage in collective learning through a process of knowledge exchange within specific place-bound contexts. It also promotes the learning of how to listen to people describe their daily conditions, which they often feel incapable of changing. Its purpose is not so much to identify answers, as it is to listen to people phrase their grievances. Because people carry the specificities of place in their emotional tissues, *Public Faculty* participants listen for *nuance* that can reveal the *emotional texture of place*. This practice determines how existing conflicts can become productive by speaking and thinking together about concrete situations in public.

*Public Faculty No 11: Imagining a Curriculum for Sunset Park* was envisioned as a tool to unearth the voices of residents, parents, students, and teachers from an immigrant neighborhood where, due to lack of public investment and attention, basic services have not satisfied some needs of its growing population. This action belonged to a wider research focused particularly on understanding the agents and outcomes of school overcrowding in Brooklyn's Sunset Park. The assignment aimed to democratize the narratives that students had gathered by interviewing community leaders and experts in the previous weeks. For two months before the *Public Faculty*, students investigated aspects and agents affecting public schools and student performance using different methodologies. On average, public schools in this community near 147 percent of their capacity. As population grows, numbers are expected to increase. The problem is acute. However, producing knowledge around this matter represented a challenge, particularly accessing school staff, teachers, parents, students, and school facilities. Thus, through this experience of collective learning students were exposed to alternative ways to delve with community members into well known but unspoken issues related to schools' overpopulation.

#### **THE ACTUAL STEPS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TOOK TO FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT**

A *Public Faculty* has a set format: it takes four days, four hours each day. It involves standing at a city location where there are pressures or burdens affecting the local community and speaking to members of the public willing to discuss them. Usually, members of the community participate in the canvassing. In this specific case, students were the active listeners. As in other *Public Faculty* sessions, preparation time was set to facilitate public conversations and formulate questions that would enable participants to speak out about specific issues and reveal the site's emotional fabric. Two classroom meetings took place before *Public Faculty No. 11*.

##### **1. Planning for the Not Yet**

The first session was organized by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk in a lecture format delving into the following questions: "How do we train ourselves to work within a collective body towards a shared desire of how to live when we cannot identify the collective body yet? How do we preenact our learning into the future?" According to van Heeswijk, this is a process of becoming, a balancing act between individual and collective needs. If we think of agency only as a collective undertaking, we must look at how two or more people become a collective. During this lecture van Heeswijk spoke of her experience addressing these questions and provided some answers to students. As part of the session,

we discussed challenges and uncertainties that arise in collective work and the different levels and forms of engagement characteristic of this type of work. The group acknowledged that a *Public Faculty* entails mapping out local pressures and urgencies through casual conversations and active collective listening before attempting to get involved in long-term dialogues or engagements.

## **2. Building Agency for *Public Faculty***

During the second session, organized in the format of a workshop, we aimed to collectively identify the main inquiry to explore. After a number of discussions, and while trying to find out ways to avoid biased responses, the group formulated an open-ended question: “What makes a good school?” which we all agreed to reframe as “what is a good school for you?” The question’s generic character offered a wide range of responses. Possible follow-up subquestions also surfaced in this stage, including “What makes a good space for learning?” and “What is your favorite thing/aspect about school/learning?”

We discussed locations for these public conversations. After the research from previous weeks, students identified strategic locations for the multisession, which took place from Thursday to Sunday. The group selected places where the local Chinese, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern communities congregate. For Thursday and Friday, we chose a street connecting a number of public schools, so as to engage school staff, parents, and students in the conversations. For Saturday we chose a busy intersection in a local commercial corridor, and for Sunday, the northwestern edge of Sunset Park, the largest public space which the neighborhood is named after (fig. 1). During the *Public Faculty*, responses were documented on a large wheeled whiteboard that we moved across the neighborhood. As the board filled with thoughts and quotes, we took photos and archived them. This white object, reminiscent of school activities, served as a sketchbook to document the different voices of the local communities and as a space for knowledge exchange. Passersby stopped to see the responses and eventually engaged by discussing their different point of views.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WHAT ACTUALLY UNFOLDED AND THE OUTCOMES**

Generally speaking we can identify two major learning outcomes. First, participants gained new abilities and experiences during the canvassing process. Second, engagement with community generated an invaluable collective knowledge. Students learned how to position themselves in a contested site and listen to strangers who, at the same time, happened to be victims of the issues we were interested in discussing, but also, experts and potential agents

of change. The intense task of diligently listening for four days in a row, four hours each day, became a radical act, particularly in a time where governments, politicians, local officials and urban managers, with corporate backing, neglect those who make the city: citizens. Students were confronted with the challenge of approaching people and initiating informal talks, but as the first interactions happened they discovered that residents were engaged and they felt respected by being asked about issues directly affecting them and their communities.

Contributing to the collective knowledge produced during the conversations were discussions about the participants' individual experiences at the end of each session. We all gathered to share the highlights of the day, including recurrent aspects that had been brought up, hidden tales unearthed, community struggles, and collective priorities and visions. Interestingly enough, these narratives repeated over the days as *Public Faculty* moved from the predominantly Hispanic area to the predominantly Chinese one, from north to south and west to east in the neighborhood, concluding later at an area currently experiencing gentrification. Recurring topics addressed collaboration between schools and families, higher budgets for enrichment programs, cultural and language differences, the need of after school programs to assist immigrant and working parents, as well as other issues related to the lack of quality spaces for regular instruction, enrichment classes, recesses and other learning environments capable to facilitate education improvement. Issues directly addressing public schools overcrowding converged in many ways but were perceived differently by the diverse local communities.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION/ EVALUATION PROCESS**

Highlights from informal conversations were discussed in the classroom with the assistance of the photo archive. Students categorized recurrent narratives and cross-referenced the material with their previous research, which was divided in five main sections: people, livelihoods, city, housing, and knowledge. Interestingly, even when conversations were meant to discuss schools and education, most of the community narratives addressed at least one of these topics. *Public Faculty* exposed how education is entangled in many other social, economic, and spatial aspects. During these four days we produced highly valuable knowledge that confirmed many assumptions that we had from analyzing secondary sources, looking at statistics, working on spatial analysis and interviewing community leaders. Most importantly, we exposed the emotional texture of the place, an element that is impossible to discern but through collective, radical, and diligent listening.

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**IMAGES**



# Embracing Ambiguity

## Reappropriation and the Making of Public Spaces

Brian Rosa (New York, New York)

### ORIGIN STORY

While working on my PhD in human geography at the University of Manchester, I was invited to lead a workshop in Rome, Italy, hosted by Urban Transcripts and the Department of Urban Studies at Roma Tre University (December 2011). We were tasked with developing creative urban research projects loosely based on the theme of the cardinal sins (or “seven deadly sins”) of the Christian religion. Rome-based urbanist Claudia Meschiari and I chose to focus on sloth, perhaps the most difficult to define of these transgressions. I developed a lesson plan for *sloth space* that focused on the temporary reappropriation of *leftover* urban spaces in the largely immigrant, peripheral neighborhood of Torpignattara.

Students used a variety of creative approaches to interpret, map, and document the reappropriation of neighborhood space through photography and video recordings, architectural rendering, collage, and visual and sonic mapping. All were paired with theoretical, speculative, and reflective readings on undefined urban regions.

Rather than suggesting participants adopt a particular method or form of engagement, we focused on discussing the concepts behind theoretical readings about the meaning of ambiguous urban spaces, encouraging them to work individually or in groups to engage in psychogeographic exploration of Torpignattara. The use of visual and auditory media was an important element of the assignment, although no limits were placed on whether these creative media pursuits would primarily be methodological, documentary, or generative in nature. Participants were encouraged to engage with the users of these spaces and produce work that was collaborative in nature.

Participants’ final projects were posted on a collaborative blog,<sup>1</sup> which is still live, and their work exhibited at a local community center in Rome at the workshop’s end. The content of the exercise follows.

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1 For more information on the project, please visit <https://slothspaces.wordpress.com>.

## INTRODUCTION

Sloth is a deadly sin defined by an aversion to work, laziness, talkativeness, and the fulfillment of desire, including dangerous activities such as *daydreaming*.

Through a loose interpretation of the idea of sloth, we examined spaces in Rome that are underdefined and ambiguous, calling into question the binary differentiation of public and private space. These *unkempt*, everyday spaces with unclear meanings are often appropriated for leisure, relaxing, game playing, as well as more transgressive or contraband activities. Curiously, through practices of reappropriation, these places may be performed as actual public spaces, though they are not officially sanctioned to serve this purpose. Are these public spaces created by accident?

Together, we considered sloth as a twofold concept: (1) the absence of interest and governmental care in communal spaces; and (2) a process of social reappropriation, produced by actions redefining *empty* spaces as sites of possibility, but also open to the subversion of doing nothing, enjoying, and loitering.

## THEMATICS

*Loose Space* is understood as a “space appropriated by citizens to pursue activities not set by a predetermined program. Appropriation is therefore a defining feature of all loose space.”<sup>2</sup> Feelings, impressions, perspectives, interpretation of spaces not clearly defined constitute a question much more than an answer to specific social and urban needs. Who uses these spaces and why? What potentialities might they express? What kind of emptiness do they represent? Is there such a thing as empty space in a city?

*Space as a social process:* draws on the theories of Henri Lefebvre<sup>3</sup> to examine the way that the built (and unbuilt) environment is an artifact of social, economic and cultural relations, constantly reinscribed over time.

*Reappropriation:* What does it mean to change the use, meaning, and configuration of urban spaces without official sanctioning? Participants and tutors explored the ways in which people give meaning to “loose spaces” through observation, interaction, and multimedia documentation.

*Blurred boundaries:* What makes a space public? The workshop stimulated a reflection concerning the nature of “publicness” in urban space, and the role of everyday social practices in opening new spatial possibilities and potentialities.

2 K. A. Franck and Q. Stevens, “Tying Down Loose Space,” in *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, eds. K. A. Franck and Q. Stevens (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2006), 1–34.

3 H. Lefebvre, “The Everyday of Everydayness,” in *Architecture of the Everyday*, eds. S. Harris and D. Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 32–38.

**AIMS**

Through direct experience in *loose spaces*, participants encourage the exploration of their own perception of these spaces' potentiality by investigating perspectives and perceptions of spatial users.

The main goal is to interrogate the idea of *loose space* in relation to the nature of *publicness*, particularly through investigating the role of social and spatial reappropriation. In other words, the aims of the workshop seek to challenge the idea of public space as functional and full of meaning, to explore the rise of possibilities in emptiness, and to explore the possibilities of *daydreaming*.

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**IMAGES**

**SOCIAL PRACTICE QUEENS ALUMNI:**

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**TEACHING SEMINARS  
AND ART AS SOCIAL  
ACTION PROJECTS**



# Transforming Corona Plaza/ Corona Studio

A Seminar Developed by Queens Museum, Queens  
College Art/Social Practice Queens, and the Urban  
Studies Departments

Professor Tarry Hum, Maureen Connor, Gregory Sholette,  
and Queens Museum staff members Prerana Reddy and José  
Serrano-McClain, Social Practice Queens (New York, New York)

“Intricate minglings of different uses in cities are not a form of  
chaos. On the contrary, they represent a complex and highly  
developed form of order.”

—Jane Jacobs<sup>1</sup>



Pablo Alvarez identifies the area to be  
transformed.

## **MEET CORONA PLAZA QUEENS: A COMPLEX INFORMAL SPACE**

Initially, Corona Plaza seemed little more than a crumbling triangular patch  
of broken concrete, an abandoned city park now home to hordes of rodents  
and flocks of pigeons. Below the clamorous elevated tracks of the number

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House,  
1961), 340.

seven train in the outer borough of Queens, New York, our initial impression was only superficially correct. On closer inspection Corona Plaza revealed itself to be one of those curious liminal zones that locals imaginatively repurpose to suit their unmet needs. Despite a shortage of city dollars the Plaza served the surrounding low-income, pan-Latino neighborhood, including many undocumented people. It was a spontaneous meeting place, playground, sales space for gray market goods, and an unofficial parking lot for Mendoza trucks: short-distance retail haulers. The challenge in our seminar was how to propose improving Corona Plaza's environment to gain needed municipal maintenance and cultural programming dollars without disturbing the myriad ways residents were already transforming this space into an informal commons for enhancing their lives and community.



Bird's-eye view of Corona Plaza.

### THE SEMINAR

Transforming Corona Plaza was a four-hour weekly intensive seminar that took place off campus at Immigrant Movement International (IMI), an ongoing community space founded by artist Tania Bruguera and located seven blocks from Corona Plaza. The course brought together graduate and undergraduate students from the Queens College Urban Studies Program and the Art Department. Throughout the semester, it hosted an assortment of guest speakers who added a variety of perspectives into the mix. Among them were Tom Agnotti (professor, Hunter College Graduate Urban Planning Studio), Tania Bruguera (artist and founder IMI), Ricardi Calixte (neighborhood development director, Queens Economic Development Corporation), Julissa Ferreras (Corona City Council member, District 21, Queens, NY), Tom Finkelppearl (then director of the Queens Museum), Dylan House (Hester Street Collaborative), Aarsh Khawarзад (Project for Public Spaces & DoTank, Brooklyn, NY), Vaidila Kungys (NYC Department of Transportation, Plaza Program coordinator), Ruben Peña (director, Corona Community Action Network, Corona Business Alliance), Quilian Riano (DSGN AGNC), Arturo Sánchez (Community Board 3 member, professor of Urban Planning, Cornell University), Carl Skelton (project director of Betaville), Valeria Treves (director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment).



Tania Bruguera, Prerana Reddy, and Seth Aylmer discuss the design presented by Team Kansas.



Kristie Hirten examines background information about the plaza.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

Corona Plaza and its surrounding environs became a living laboratory for researching, debating, and reimagining knotty issues of class, culture, ethnicity and social autonomy particular to the fractured city infrastructure of deregulated urban environments. The workshop generated neighborhood stakeholder profiles, followed by the design and modeling of four proposals and programming ideas for enhancing public experience in and around the plaza. Following the seminar the Queens Museum played a key role in the city-sponsored restoration of the plaza incorporating some visual and architectural elements from our classroom designs.

#### **ACTUAL STEPS WE TOOK TO REALIZE THE SEMINAR'S GOALS**

Each class began with a presentation by an instructor or visiting guest. Lectures addressed topics on the history and demographics of Corona, various waves of immigration, forms of entrepreneurship within Corona's informal economy, and the theory and politics of community generated, semiautonomous spaces. In preparation students were assigned weekly readings.

After each week's formal presentation students split into smaller project teams of four groups with five to six students each. During the second half of each class teams debated ideas raised by presenters and then left IMI to make firsthand observations at Corona Plaza, meeting community leaders and developing new relationships with other local stakeholders.

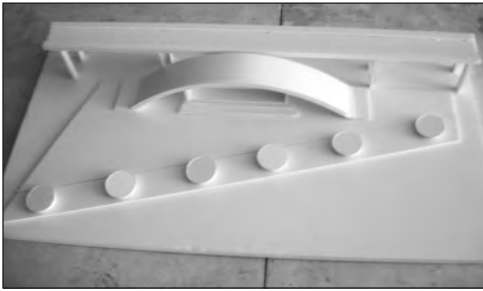
Students from social science partnered with artists as faculty mentors guided both cohorts' research and facilitated communications between students, community, and participants, including Mexicanos Unidos, the Louis

Armstrong Historical House, Casa Ecuatoriana, Make the Road, and the Corona Senior Center, among others.

By week six the seminar addressed the similarities and differences between research methods developed by social scientists and by socially engaged artists. Students built on this information and that gathered from their particular stakeholder interviews, developing a specific design focus pivoting on these concerns.

The last three weeks of the course teams presented their projects using a scripted PowerPoint talk and a scale architectural model of their transformed plaza concept. The class critiqued final presentations along with some previous guests, including community members, scholars, and artists.

Throughout the semester students were encouraged to think critically and weigh the community merits and deficits of proposals from a social science and art aesthetic perspective. In other words, our motto was *take nothing for granted*.



Model presented by Team Kansas.



Map of existing structures in Corona Plaza.



Walter Sinche of Alianza Ecuatoriana and Monica Aviles, second and third from left, discuss the Corona Plaza Design with Aurash Khawarзад, last on right.

**METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS****Stakeholder Interview General Questions**

(Adapt to your specific stakeholders)

General Questions:

- How long have you lived/worked in Corona?
- How often do you pass by Corona Plaza? Do you use it?
- Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located?
- Any animals or plants present (be specific)?
- What types of trash are found in the space? Does it tell you about the space and surrounding community?

Spatial Politics:

- Does the arrangement of spaces, entrances and exits, allow access for some, while denying it to others?
- What games do children play in the area and are games adjusted to fit within the actual limitations of the space?
- Is there a space that teens gather, and is it different from other spaces?
- Are there unused spaces? Can you get lost in the space?
- Are there more women than men, and people of different ages?

Spatial Memory:

- Is there a perceptible sense of memory or history present in the space?
- What kind of fantasies does the space invoke or perhaps make unthinkable?
- Who are you in this space?

**REFLECTIONS**

Transforming Corona Plaza was an experiment in transdisciplinary pedagogy that brought urban studies students together with art students to research and design spatial solutions for the target space. It was a new experience for everyone involved and provided a de facto crash course in the dynamics of community outreach for both disciplines.

Summaries of students' interviews with stakeholders showed each team discovered a broad range of potential community uses for the plaza. Most

stakeholders agreed that the plaza could be a catalyst uniting local businesses, organizations, and citizens around their mutual needs, including green spaces and educational and recreational opportunities for children and seniors. There was also consensus about existing risk factors concerning upkeep and misuse, such as the plaza's dirty, unpleasant conditions; the dangerous volume of automobile traffic; noise; and the presence of homeless people, sex workers, and drug dealers in the evenings.

In retrospect, Corona Plaza confronted students with poverty levels many had never seen. And while student proposals addressed community needs and risk factors, more time should have been taken to discuss the causes of this deeply institutionalized poverty.

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Seth Pollack explains his team's plan while Seth Aylmer, Emily Mintz, and José Serrano-McClaine listen.

# Protecting Our Nature and Our Sacred Land

Floor Grootenhuis and Erin Turner, Social Practice Queens  
(Oak Flat, Arizona, and New York, New York)

“I was brought up in this area of Arizona where all things Apache were created. Looking out at the landscape I know where I was created, what family was created there, what type of Apache was created over there, what spiritual being was created there, who is from the earth, the canes, the river, the lake, under the lake, on top of that mountain over there.”

—Standing Fox

Oak Flat Campground is located in the Tonto National Forest outside Superior, Arizona. It is considered sacred by the San Carlos Apache. Declared protected space in 1955 by Dwight D. Eisenhower, the area contains more than 2,400 acres of land, wildlife, petroglyphs, sacred spaces, and water resources. Beneath the surface lies a valuable copper deposit thought to be the largest in the Northern Hemisphere. A controversial land swap presented in an unrelated 2015 National Defense Bill by John McCain allows Resolution Copper (a joint venture by Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton) to develop a block-cave mine that is projected to create a two-mile-wide crater with estimated surface disturbance of 6,951 acres (approximately eleven square miles). Currently, the development of this mine is locked in court as Resolution Copper struggles to find a location to deposit the mine tailings waste, the fine particulate aftermath of mining operations. These tailings become toxic once exposed to the surface, encompassing a projected area approximately 6,400 acres in size and hundreds of feet in height.

The impulse for us to examine Oak Flat came from the widely televised demolition by ISIS of archaeological treasures in Palmyra, Syria, in April 2015. We asked, “What cultural heritage sites are at risk in the US? Why is there no mainstream media coverage of these locations?” Deeper research revealed that

issues surrounding extraction methods and sacred Native American sites were overlooked by mass media in North America.

In October 2016 we received support for a Social Practice Queens (SPQ) Action Art Proposal funded by the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. Traveling to Arizona, we visited Oak Flat to document the threatened landscape and the community's perception of the proposed Resolution Copper mine. Camping for one week on-site and gathering ephemera, including samples of the landscape, videos, photographs, and audio recordings of local sounds and interviews with the community, we begin to tell the story of this controversial environmental and cultural confrontation. Oak Flat Campground is frequented for recreational activities, as well as by the San Carlos Apache; nonetheless, the community is divided regarding topics that range from job creation, environmental contamination, public health and safety, and religious freedom and sacred spaces to preservation and public land use.

Our initial objective was to create a framework around perceptions of loss for all concerned. But in practice this morphed into an active and collaborative process that ignited conversations about the sacred site of Oak Flat itself. We immersed ourselves in the landscape, listened to people in the surrounding communities, and discovered discrepancies between the information provided to the community by Resolution Copper, among other official sources. We uncovered existing controversies between environmentalists, multigenerational mining families, Resolution Copper, and the San Carlos Apache. The project soon became more about communication, conservation, and preservation and less about Oak Flat as a site of loss. We wanted to generate direct action and create awareness. However, nearby white residents of Oak Flat are viciously contemptuous of Apache people, and racial tensions run high. Misinformation and mistrust further divide the region.

During our visit to Oak Flat, we met and partnered with the Apache Stronghold, the activist group fighting to save the region. Essential to this collaboration was realizing that any step forward called for communication and approval from elder and former San Carlos Apache Chairman Wendsler Nosie Sr., head of the Apache Stronghold movement. Ultimately, we hoped to support the tribe's mission of protecting the traditional Apache way of life through "creating environments that ensure the greatest opportunity to succeed, and to become self-sufficient for Indigenous and all communities."

In January 2017, Social Practice Queens was invited to host a Peace Talk in New York titled *Protecting Our Nature and Our Sacred Land* as part of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Peace Table project and career retrospective exhibition at the Queens Museum. Mr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. shared his vision and story of

sacred spaces, conservation, and Native American activism with the Queens community. That same weekend Mr. Nosie also spoke at Quimby's Bookstore in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, together with Standing Fox, an Apache Stronghold member, and Bedonkohe Apache, a photographer and artist, who also painted a mural permanently on view in the bookstore. Two weeks later, at the Community Partnership Gallery at the Queens Museum, an accompanying photography exhibition under the same title featured cultural portraits by Standing Fox, his dramatic photographic black-and-white portraits providing a close look at contemporary life within the San Carlos Reservation. The exhibition included landscape imagery by Grootenhuis and Turner, maps, ephemera, and a short documentary. Prestamped postcards were made available to be signed by the public and addressed to New York senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, a Queens College graduate, requesting that they help repeal the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange Section 3003 of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act that traded away public land to a foreign mining company.

We experienced the idea of the sacred as it relates to the physical, cultural, and emotional landscape of a particular place, and believe shared spaces and histories should be embraced as such. We hope to fortify memory as an act of resistance against loss through collaborative, living archival/social art engagement fostering future iterations of intervention, performance, installation, and object making essential to this cause.

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## IMAGES



Erin Turner, Protect Oak Flat banner that flanks Oak Flat Campground in the area occupied by the Apache Stronghold since 2015. Banner design by Standing Fox.



Uno Nam and Wendsler Nosie Sr. speaking at Mierle Laderman Ukeles Peace Table at the Queens Museum, January 2017.



Zaid Islam, visitors of the exhibition sign postcards to New York senators in opposition to Resolution Copper.



Erin Turner and Floor Grootenhuis, images of the landscape and the old Magma Mine present near Oak Flat Campground.

# The Beacon of Pluralism

Nancy Bruno and Gina Minielli,  
Social Practice Queens (New York, New York)

The Beacon of Pluralism is a collaboration between ceramist Nancy Bruno and photographer Gina Minielli. The project incorporates Flushing's history of religious freedom with its modern-day, diverse community.

The Quaker Meeting House, built in 1695, reflects the history of the Flushing Remonstrance signed by John Bowne and the Flushing community on December 27, 1657. This historic document declared the right of religious freedom to the mayor of the time, Peter Stuyvesant. Five years later, Bowne was arrested for continuing to practice Quakerism. When he was brought to the Netherlands, his successful defense in the Dutch courts was based on the Union of Utrecht, signed in 1579, which called for a "freedom of consciousness."

Flushing's history of freedom and tolerance can still be seen today, as over one hundred languages are spoken and over two hundred different houses of worship call Flushing home. Beacon of Pluralism connects Flushing's past to its present, as congregations from the greater Flushing area were invited to the Quaker meeting house to celebrate and discuss religious freedom. In remembrance, and as a symbolic object, a ceramic candlestick holder was designed for the project, which reflected Delft pottery and the ripples of energy through dialogue. The project also included a photographic collection featuring the myriad religious leaders, congregations, and houses of worship of the Flushing community, visually celebrating the diversity and commonality of people from all lands and faiths.

On January 30, 2017, the Beacon of Pluralism was hosted by the Flushing Quaker Meeting House. Local congregation leaders attended, along with parishioners and community members. The event began with a welcome by John Choe of the Flushing Quaker Meeting House. This was followed by an introduction to the Beacon of Pluralism by Gina Minielli and Nancy Bruno. Religious leaders and congregation members were invited to speak about the importance of religious freedom and its impact on their lives and faith. Each person who spoke concluded by lighting a candle to symbolize the unity of

all people. Images of the diverse congregations and houses of worship were projected throughout the ceremony. A reception followed the formal presentations, providing an opportunity to continue the dialogue. Television and print media covered the Beacon of Pluralism event, drawn by topical national events related to religious freedom, immigration, and diversity.

The energy of the Flushing community and the historic foundation of the Beacon of Pluralism were significant to its success. During the beginning stages of the project, we found strong public interest and immediate acknowledgment that the theme of the project would underscore the importance of tolerance in society. However, when we initially approached the Bowne House Historical Society, they declined to host the event, citing concerns over past economic strife and the possibility that the event might be politically charged.

Disappointed that the venue named for the founder of religious freedom in America had denied our request, we approached the Flushing Quaker Meeting House, since it too was historically connected to the birth of religious tolerance. It was there that we were introduced to the Greater Flushing Chamber of Commerce, the Flushing Interfaith Council, and the Peace and Social Justice Committee, all of whom were eager to welcome and support our vision for the Beacon of Pluralism.

Once a host venue and community support had been established, the project began to move quickly. We began meeting regularly with the Greater Flushing Chamber of Commerce and Flushing Interfaith Council. The Beacon of Pluralism created a dedicated email account to communicate, conduct community outreach, establish an invitation list, and schedule appointments for the photographic series. Press releases were sent to local newspapers and television and radio stations, as well as reminders to community organizations. The Beacon of Pluralism had become a reality. Throughout the development of the project, the interest level and response from the Flushing community energized our efforts and reassured us that the event would be a success. Their enthusiasm also helped us establish a network of community resources for the participants who wanted to continue to communicate about the issues raised by the Beacon of Pluralism.

Our initial idea and central theme was to honor the history and diversity of the greater Flushing area. Our project aimed to celebrate the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and understanding. We explored the question of whether freedom of religion is a necessity for freedom to exist. Beacon of Pluralism connected with the community and generated an interactive dialogue that highlighted the importance of diversity to our society and the strong link between peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance. The significance and public profile of the project was elevated by current events involving President Trump's

executive order for a travel ban on Muslim-majority countries. Community leaders and citizens came to seek comfort from these headlines in a setting where people of all faiths were welcome and religious freedom was being celebrated.

This project could not have been created or sustained without the Flushing community's active engagement and support. Beacon of Pluralism thrives on social interaction, introducing diverse community members and linking them through their commitment to freedom and tolerance. Beacon of Pluralism embraces an interfaith setting as a norm within society and "as an interfaith setting—which is shaped not just by individual actors' religious beliefs, but by their collective goals, organizational constraints, and relationships to religious institutions—shapes the inter religious practices that emerge from interfaith political work." It is the social interaction of art in society to focus attention on the undeniable importance of social justice and religious freedom to our society.

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## IMAGES



Handmade candlestick holder designed and created for Beacon of Pluralism by collaborating artist Nancy Bruno, January 30, 2017, Flushing Quaker Meeting House.



Adam Carroll speaking during the Beacon of Pluralism on January 30, 2017.



Rev. Gerard Sauer, pastor of St. Mels Church, speaking during the Beacon of Pluralism candle lighting ceremony on January 30, 2017.



Rev. Blaine D. Crawford from Church on the Hill during the Beacon of Pluralism on January 30, 2017.



Gina Minielli introducing the Beacon of Pluralism project and collaborating artist Nancy Bruno.

# Towards a Workers Pavilion

## The Forming of the Workers Art Coalition

Barrie Cline, Social Practice Queens (New York, New York)

“The identity of the worker has been stolen from our lives. . . .”

—Jaime López<sup>1</sup>

I had been teaching a public art class to union building tradespeople at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies (HVAC) for about six years when I met union sheet metal worker Bobby Andrew during the first few days of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). His counsel on labor history, fair wages, and other rank-and-file labor issues conjured an image of worker solidarity within the complex social movement that was OWS. I told him that OWS subgroups Arts and Labor and Occupy Museums were actively combating Sotheby’s lock-out of the Teamster art handlers by coordinating well-attended—and well-reported—public actions. We discussed how this kind of art and activist work might continue.

The conversation deepened when Bobby’s wife Holly became involved, and his former student electrician Jaime López produced a powerful book of images about his OWS experiences for my class. Frequently we met in street actions, and meanwhile, I enrolled in the Social Practice Queens (SPQ) program. This allowed us to meet in my ample Queens College studio space. Fellow SPQ student Sol Aramendi from Argentina, who was developing *PROJECT LUZ*, created a printed publication of photographic images and texts focusing on safety conditions to help build common ground with workers too often pitted against each other in a *race to the bottom*.

Shortly thereafter Jaime and I organized a workshop at Queens Museum’s Immigrant Movement International space with New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) and HVAC students focused on how to create

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1 From *Project Luz*: <http://www.projectluz.org/>.

illuminated LED messaging boxes. This led to the creation of a low-cost modular light sculpture made of ductwork and light panels that we dubbed the Workers Pavilion. Installed at Corona Plaza (see photo on [page 271](#)) the pavilion was the collaborative outcome of some ten tradespeople, including two more former trade union students—Stephanie Lawal and Paul Vance—and also Queens College MFA student Setare Arashloo. We began meeting weekly in my graduate studio and soon formed the Workers Art Coalition (WAC).<sup>2</sup>

In April 2014 WAC created a collective gallery installation at Queens College Klapper Hall that was also my SPQ thesis exhibition. Jaime's ambitious rewiring of the entire electrical system and the suspension of light boxes and other light sculptures explored a range of construction materials as art. Some elements had explicit political content dealing with wage theft among day laborers, while Hana Georg continued to collaborate with NICE, narrowing the artisan/artist divide, but also gender normativity, union pride, and worker self-representation. This is when the group began planning the second iteration of a Workers Pavilion for the Open Engagement conference at the Queens Museum in May of 2014.



*I Speak but I am Never Heard* (2014),  
by Paul Vance.

“For the past few decades, Labor’s been devalued, to the point where it’s almost become invisible . . . sometimes disdained. . . . So what’s the form of communication to share the experiences? The idea was to have public art be that form of communication . . . In public you are more open to receiving an idea through art than through conversation. . . . When they see workers building something that’s not a wall . . . they stop, they engage . . . . And it’s that dialogue we’d like people to take home with them.”

—Bobby Andrew<sup>3</sup>

2 For more information, watch *Workers Art Coalition NYC*, a short documentary about WAC: <https://vimeo.com/121489923>.

3 Bobby Andrew speaking in Setare Arashloo’s film, *Workers Art Coalition*.

We learned that the planning committee of the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows Park had requested that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) create a Temple to Labor, but it was never realized. With this thwarted attempt in mind, WAC and several NICE members took up the concept some seventy-five years later. The second, more elaborate Workers Pavilion was born.



Bobby and Holly Andrew. *What Were Their Names* (2014). Immigrant workers of labor's past.



WAC and NICE members building Workers Pavilion.



Workers Pavilion at night.

Writing about the Patterson Silk Strike and Pageant Nicholas Lampert laments the lack of workers' cultural traditions in which workers and artists collaborated.<sup>4</sup> WAC continues to meet and create just such projects<sup>5</sup> that offer needed counternarratives to the way blue-collar workers are portrayed by mainstream media within Trump's America. And because the current administration seeks to roll back workers' rights through right-to-work laws and

4 Nicholas Lampert, "Blurring the Boundaries between Art and Life," in *A People's Art History of the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 98.

5 For more information, please visit <http://theworkersartcoalition.com>.

other protections for starters, we feel foregrounding these narratives is especially urgent. WAC strives to generate art in coordination with horizontal labor movement building borrowed from “the very fabric of worker identity.”<sup>6</sup> History (for example, the Paris Commune, and Paris in May 1968) has shown when artists, workers, and student movements come together they produce a very particular and potent common ground involving economic justice, but also access to art and culture for everyone.

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Workers Pavilion: carpenter Noel Modica created these letters of cheap and recycled metal stud and the idea for using the material to create low-cost light boxes.

<sup>6</sup> Jaime López’s words from a recent conversation.

# Participatory Decision-Making in Diverse Groups

Sol Aramendi (New York, New York, and Argentina)

## DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT

This introductory lesson for cooperation/participation is inspired in part by decision-making strategies drawn from the legacies of immigrant labor. I learned this method through storytelling forms drawn from ancient decision-making processes, passed on by word of mouth between labor organizers, workers, and their communities. This methodology is based on the idea that collective action can be achieved through physical participation and used to reach a mutual agreement through corporeal negotiation with another person or group who may have different values.

This lesson has been implemented both as a stand-alone workshop and as the introduction to an eight-week course. It works best for teens and adults (both artists and nonartists), in settings like workers' centers, community organizations, and more traditional classrooms. The lesson guides people towards discovering a common issue, question, or theme, then coming to consensus to form a plan of action to develop a collective project around that theme. It can also work as a strategy for artists exploring social practice who are interested to use one of their own projects as a testing ground to examine power dynamics, community participation, and authorship. I tested and refined this lesson through Project Luz, a nomadic space for immigrant communities to empower themselves with art and photography that I founded in 2011. In 2015, I used this lesson to teach artists and community members in the Queens Museum's New New Yorkers program, held at Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International (IMI) in Corona, Queens. As we explored basic concepts of participation and different models of collaboration, the participants agreed to collaborate on one public project and a publication: creating an engagement strategy for families at Corona Plaza. After this successful workshop, I added one additional component to the lesson: a short exercise bridging lecture and activity. In this process, participants are invited to think

through a proposal for an art action/project in their own community in relation to the issues they have discussed.

### **LEARNING GOALS**

Participants will be able to move from personal, opinion-based, individual art making towards more collaborative processes. Participants will design their own collaboration format, with instruments and tools provided by the instructor (or ideally, developed in tandem with the instructor). With the overarching goal of planting a small seed to encourage participants to think about the ongoing power of collaboration, this process includes the following:

- engaging in self-analysis through a quick personal exercise;
- thinking through collaborative steps from sharing several ideas to agreeing upon a single project addressing social issues and needs in their own communities;
- imagining and implementing art strategies or experiences to collect community knowledge, answering a question or raising awareness; and
- developing proposals for an art action/project in their own community.

### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **1. Engaging with Participation through Actions, Words, and Thought**

As an introduction, we explore the different names and meanings of participatory practices, and the meanings of socially engaged art according to different authors. I introduce the concept of participation based on texts by Pablo Helguera, Caroline Woolard, and the ladder of Arnstein as mentioned by Tom Finkelpearl. We analyze these examples considering artist and community dynamics, emphasizing that the distribution of power is visible through the decision-making involved in each project. In the eight-week workshop version, as we visit artists' studios, read texts, and experience the work of arts-based community organizations, participants analyze who makes the decisions in the working process, and who is visible/invisible as author, participant, creator, or audience.

#### **2. Visioning A: Personal Opinion and Identity**

Using the same examples from section 1, participants analyze and synthesize basic concepts about participation and the dynamics of power by cutting and pasting text from the articles. They then apply these concepts to their everyday lives through storytelling.

### **3. Visioning B: Collective Understanding and Engagement with Social Themes**

On Post-it notes, participants write down social justice issues in their immediate community: something affecting them and their peers, or issues they have already identified as part of their practice. In small groups, participants choose a single issue and community to focus on collectively. Previous examples have included issues such as accessibility on a college campus, gentrification in Chinatown, and defamation of character. Other groups have decided to think about access to arts with people who are usually left out of these conversations.

Together, each group examines the relationships and contradictions inherent to their chosen issue and community. After each visioning session, participants come together to share and discuss their progress as part of the communal process of reaching consensus. Together, we reach a group understanding of the concept of social justice as it relates to community projects that can affect change.

### **4. Arts-Based Research Methodologies**

Building upon the consensus reached via selecting a shared theme, interest, and approach, participants are given access to art materials to help engage in visual thinking: painting, poster making, printmaking, or sculpture. Each group uses the consensus-building format they developed in their visioning sessions to decide how they will use art strategies to engage their chosen community through research, planning, and visibility. Some decide to ask their neighbors a question, look for testimonies relating to their issue, conduct a survey, or collect data through a method of their own design.

As a layer of deeper investigation into their topic, each group also designs an engaging public participatory action to generate a greater sense of their chosen community's ideas. Some chose to visually represent a campaign slogan, or design an installation. Sharing and reflecting through class presentations is integrated throughout the process.

### **NOTES ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES**

In the case that the participants are artists already working on projects, they can analyze participation, authorship, and power relationships within their current practice. These exercises can work both to kickstart a project and to function as a brainstorm to generate new ideas.

### **OUTCOMES**

Since the work processes and content are largely generated by the participants, the outcomes of this workshop are diverse. After the initial visioning and testing

phases, some participants created a draft of a poster campaign. Others drafted plans to implement art installations in their community, or host community interventions.

One group created a public installation titled YO PARTICIPO in Corona Plaza, with paper banners displaying wishes, local sayings, and descriptions of positive aspects of their neighborhood. In a public ceremony, the community members made promises to address and respect the shared needs written on the banners, reading them out loud to amplify their desires, and sealing the pact by planting seeds in a public garden to symbolize their commitment to nurturing the sometimes slow process of growth and change.

Another group, domestic workers who took this class as a monthlong workshop, used the collective processes to envision how they would like to be treated and viewed by their employers: to be respected and treated with the dignity of reliable, trustworthy professionals; and give voice to the messages they would like to give their fellow workers: to stand up for their rights, and be proud of their work.

Other groups have used these processes to explore their own inability to see social need, identifying the blind spots created by their own privilege. This has been especially powerful, as it enables participants to increase their understanding of the social world by moving from self-expression to collective expression.

### REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Project reflection happens on-site throughout the different phases of the lesson. Evaluation of the final product/action is conducted mainly by the peers who have designed it, and the communities who are the subject. The outcome is always different and has sparked a wide variety of work.



# **CONCLUDING ESSAY**



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

Gregory Sholette (New York, New York)

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.”<sup>1</sup>

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



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

“The performance [*Becoming Zoya*] served as the process of reflection on the preceding discussions and the controversial nature of the assignment.”<sup>4</sup>

“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.”<sup>5</sup>

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,

- 1 Dipti Desai and Avram Finkelstein, “NYU Flash Collective,” in *Art as Social Action*, eds. Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (New York: Allworth Press, 2018), 149–153.
- 2 Jeanne van Heeswijk and Gabriela Rendón, “Lesson Plan for Public Faculty No. 11,” in *ibid*, 245–249.
- 3 The Pedagogy Group, “essay title TK” in *ibid*, TK.
- 4 Chto Delat, “March of Solidarity,” in *ibid*, 116–118.
- 5 Matthew Friday and Iain Kerr, “SPURSE Lesson Plan,” in *ibid*, 171–176.

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, nonmarket 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 coteacher Tom Finkelppearl. 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 performance. (More on this below.)

“Intimate education” is how Chloë Bass describes such encounters,<sup>6</sup> while Grant Kester applies the term “vulnerable receptivity,” believing this affect to be fundamental to all SEA practices, and not just academic study.<sup>7</sup> Exam-

6 Chloë Bass, “Where Who We Are Matters,” in *ibid.*, 5.

7 Kester in fact makes a fairly complex argument in *Conversation Pieces* by first observing that critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried advocated that serious art must distance itself from mass culture, including kitsch and advertising. The solution was an embrace of frequently inscrutable artistic practices. But in doing so, all forms of accessible cultural production including community art were grouped into the same category as mass culture and condemned as simplistic, or even complicit, with the manipulative spectacle of consumer society. Kester writes that “this paradigm (in its various permutations) has made it difficult to recognize the potential aesthetic significance of collaborative and dialogical art practices that are accessible without necessarily being simplistic.” Nevertheless, he contends that formalist works do seek to establish an “openness to the natural world” as well as to artistic materials. In this respect, “dialogical artists adopt a similar attitude of vulnerable receptivity in their interactions with collaborators and audience members.” Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 13.

ples abound. Consider Mierle Laderman Ukeles's exemplary late-1970s Touch Sanitation project that brought her into direct physical contact with all 8,500 New York City sanitation workers, or Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn's collaborative poster campaign fending off gentrification in London's Docklands neighborhood at the same time, 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 *Project Row Houses* in Houston, and his recent Victoria Square Project at Documenta 14 in Athens, Greece, that Lowe says will ultimately become "what people make of it."<sup>8</sup> In each case, these works embody Kester's "openness to the specificity of the external world."<sup>9</sup>

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 to 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 vulnerable receptivity through collaboration. They also intimately share something else: a fundamental relationship to the theory and practice of *radical pedagogy*.

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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 counterculture.<sup>10,11</sup> And while this volume references a wide range of challenging, even revolution-

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

9 Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).



10 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

11 Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

ary, 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 undercommons, like some scholarly Robin Hood or Leonarda Emilia.<sup>12</sup>

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 redesign of the study module itself. Put differently, SEAE is inherently Socratic and heuristic insofar 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 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*.<sup>13</sup>

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 class-

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

13 John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Early Works Volume 5: 1895–1898, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 86. First published in *School Journal* LIV, (January 1897).

room. How is this any different from, say, the hard sciences, where fieldwork is essential for gathering data or testing hypotheses? 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).<sup>14</sup> 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 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.<sup>15</sup> 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

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

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

mandatory white papers and diagnostics all institutions lust after, and social practice students are 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.

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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 Rivers<sup>16</sup>), 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.<sup>17</sup>

As Jacob puts it, teachers and practitioners of SEAE should come to recognize a similar pedagogy has a longer genealogy than typically assumed. She proposes rereading 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.”<sup>18</sup> (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

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16 Cited from a 1955 review entitled “Introduction to an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 240.

17 Carol G. Duncan, *A Matter of Class: John Cotton Dana, Progressive Reform, and the Newark Museum* (Pittsburgh: Periscope Publishers, 2010).

18 Dewey, 86.

ideals flowed into the educational philosophy of the Freedom Schools in the segregated US South, and another decade later, they reemerged in transfigured form when Joseph Beuys cofounded 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 like Beuys when he insists that all students should be trained through "a process of living and not a preparation for future living."<sup>19</sup> 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."<sup>20</sup> 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 cofounding 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,"<sup>21</sup> or, as Bishop confirms, Beuys asserted that being a teacher "is my greatest work of art."<sup>22</sup>

This all fits neatly into the anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian zeitgeist of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the status quo, including

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19 Dewey, 87.

20 Ibid.

21 Jen Delos Reyes, "Why Socially Engaged Art Can't Be Taught," in *Art as Social Action*, eds. Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (New York: Allworth Press, 2018), 200.

22 Bishop, 243.

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 communist inspiration and orientation in the failed revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s.”<sup>23</sup> 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!”<sup>24</sup> 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”<sup>25</sup> that simultaneously exploits and gratifies basic biopolitical 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.”<sup>26</sup>

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 anarchoeducational 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

23 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (MIT Press, 2004), 110–111.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 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>.

within SEAE, but also in a range of twenty-first-century 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 Arte de Conducta in Havana or Marina Naprushkina's multipurpose refugee center New Neighborhood Moabit in Berlin that she has explicitly labeled an "artificial institution."<sup>27</sup> 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.

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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."<sup>28</sup> 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 many unrelated events scattered throughout the performance space."<sup>29</sup> The result was *Theater Piece no. 1*, or simply the *Happening*, in which solitary overlapping actions unfolded,

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

28 Eva Díaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

29 Díaz, 7.

seemingly without order or logic, much as we encounter contemporary life as a fragmented, even alienating experience. Whether this was neo-Dadaism or ultrarealism, the composer nevertheless cast doubt on Albers's Deweyan 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?"<sup>30</sup>

The discomfort generated by Cage's intentionally interventionist educational aesthetic echoed through a seminar I cotaught with Tom Finkelpearl for Social Practice Queens in fall 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.<sup>31</sup> 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 the following:

- "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?"
- "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 Finkelpearl 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

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30 Cited in Edward Morris, "Three Thousand Seven Hundred Forty-Seven Words about John Cage," *Notes*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1967): 472. doi: 10.2307/895075.

31 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/>.

moving truck adorned with a logo indicating that it is an art project, operate social services like babysitting or assisting with predatory landlords; 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?<sup>32</sup>

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.



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

32 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.

Traditional education fails, Dewey contended, because it neglects the “fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life,”<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> As important as it is to heed this warning, I sense that this apprehension is itself a symptom of the broader sociopolitical, 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.

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33 “I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparation. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative.” John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Early Works Volume 5: 1895–1898, Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 95. First published in *School Journal* LIV, (January 1897): 80.

34 The Pedagogy Group, “Toward a Social Practice Pedagogy,” in *Art as Social Action*, eds. Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (New York: Allworth Press, 2018), 75–86.

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 neighborhoods and fight against this.<sup>35</sup>

We have entered the time and space of the “uncanny present,” writes political scientist Rebecca Bryant, a present unfamiliar in its very *presentness*,<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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 postwar artist remains simply “the best-known point of reference for contemporary artists’ engagement with experimental pedagogy.”<sup>38, 39</sup> It is also fair to say that Beuys’s

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

36 Rebecca Bryant, “On Critical Times: Return, Repetition, and the Uncanny Present,” *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2016): 27.

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

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

39 “For all of these artists, education was—or continues to be—a central concern in their work. It is Joseph Beuys, however, who remains the best-known point of reference for contemporary artists’ engagement with experimental pedagogy; in 1969 he claimed that ‘to be a teacher is my greatest work of art.’” Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 343.

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 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.<sup>40</sup> 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 twenty-first-century reality in a singular fashion, call it a pedagogical uncanny, 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.

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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 it, perhaps using them to build barricades, or maybe exchanging them

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40 "What if this surfeit of invisible producers demanded economic justice? This appears to be the tactic of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (WAGE) and others seeking exhibition fees for artists. Or, contrarily, what if the majority of artists simply decided not to participate in the art world, perhaps following Stephen Wright's sardonic suggestion that contemporary art is seeking to break away from itself, a process that even generates a new area of study he calls escapology. Who would be left in that case to teach art, fabricate projects, subsidize museums and conferences and industry journals? Where would the art world's hierarchies and value production be in that situation? Even more terrifying, to echo a question raised by Carol Duncan some three decades ago, what if the majority of those whose creative potential has never even been tapped by the system were to suddenly be illuminated within it as a bare art world sweeps into view that vast surplus army of dark matter creativity? What was previously (and perhaps in some cases as we shall see, thankfully) hidden from sight now becomes painfully manifest in the bare art world." Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 76.

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.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Viking Press, 1985).

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## Contributor Bios

**Jaishri Abichandani** received her MFA from Goldsmiths College, University of London, and founded the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (New York, London). She has exhibited her work and curated exhibitions internationally, and was founding director of public events and projects between 2003 and 2006 at the Queens Museum of Art and is a graduate of the Queens College CUNY MFA program.

**Sol Aramendi** is a New York-based Argentinean artist and graduate of SPQ CUNY, working in new media, photography, and video, as well as the founder of the Project Luz Photography Program for New Immigrants, and the Apps for Power wage theft app (Jornalero), providing a digitally networked platform for day laborers to share information, identify harmful employers, and seek legal aid.

**Todd Ayong** is a multimedial/media visual artist originally from Trinidad and Tobago. His practice focuses on political and autobiographical themes, and his work and research has been exhibited, performed, and presented in Latin America, Europe, and throughout the US. A graduate of the Whitney Program, he lives with his family in Ithaca, New York. He is an adjunct assistant professor at Pratt Institute, and lecturer at Parsons, the New School.

**Katie Bachler** and **Scott Berzofsky** are artists, organizers, and educators. In 2014 and 2015, they cotaught Social Practice Studio in the Interdisciplinary Sculpture department at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Baltimore. The course was an experiment in self-organized learning, care, and collaboration. Currently they live in Brattleboro, Vermont, where they own and operate Avenue Grocery.

**Chloë Bass** is a multiform conceptual artist working in performance, situation, publication, and installation. Her work addresses scales of intimacy (where patterns hold and break as group sizes expand) and daily life as a site of deep research. Her recent project, *The Book of Everyday Instruction*, was an eight-chapter investigation into one-on-one social interaction. She is currently working on a study of immediate family units. A graduate of Yale University (BA, Theater Studies) and Brooklyn College (MFA, Performance and Interactive Media Arts), she teaches art and social practice at Queens College, CUNY.

**BFAMFAPhD** is a collective working at the intersection of art, technology, and political economy that advocates for cultural equity through researched reports, pedagogical tools, and creative practice. Their work has been exhibited at the Museum of Art and Design, Cleveland Art Institute, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Cue Foundation. Current BFAMFAPhD core members are **Susan Jahoda**, **Emilio Martinez Poppe**, **Agnes Szanyi**, **Vicky Virgin**, and **Caroline Woolard**.

Ceramicist **Nancy Bruno** and photographer **Gina Minielli** are Flushing natives. With a goal to educate and involve both the local residents and religious community, Beacon of Pluralism was born. Nancy and Gina both earned an MFA from Queens College and received the Rubin Foundation–funded Social Practice Queens (SPQ) Action Art: SPQ 2016 grant.

**Alix Camacho** is an artist based in Bogotá, Colombia. Her practice situates art as a tool to explore and question everyday social interactions. **Jeff Kasper** is an artist, educator, and arts administrator based in Queens, New York, where he is currently the associate coordinator of Social Practice Queens (SPQ). Both hold an MFA in Social Practice from Queens College CUNY.

**Chto delat/What is to be done?** is a collective of artists, critics, philosophers, and writers founded in 2003 St. Petersburg, Russia. Their School of Engaged Art seeks to “modestly continue the good old tradition of artists of one generation trying to inspire younger generations with their own beliefs, fears, hopes, love and poetics.”

**Barrie Cline** is faculty at SUNY Empire State College Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, a graduate of SPQ, and, with union electrician Jaime López, a founding member of the Workers Art Coalition. She also is a scholar of the New York City Subway Graffiti, and a 2016 Apexart /Movement Fellow resident artist in the Middle Eastern city of Jerusalem.

**Gretchen Coombs** writes about socially engaged art and design practices in the US, the UK, and Australia. With a PhD in social and cultural anthropology and an MA in visual criticism, her writing incorporates ethnographic methods that offer insight into the complexity of projects that engage diverse communities. She is the assistant editor for *Art & the Public Sphere* and teaches visual arts at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia.

**Corona Studio Team** included **Dr. Tarry Hum**, associate professor of urban planning, immigration and Asian American issues at Queens College, CUNY; **Prerana Reddy**, director of public programs and community engagement, Queens Museum; **Maureen Connor**, SPQ cofounder and professor emeritus; **Dr. Gregory Sholette**, codirector SPQ; and **José Serrano-McClaine**, artist and SPQ MFA alumnus.

**Joseph Cuillier/The Black School** is a designer, artist, poet, and educator, dedicated to art and design's capacity to connect individuals, communities, and causes. A graduate of Pratt Institute, he is adjunct professor at Purchase College School of Art+Design.

**Dillon de Give** is an artist and educator acting in a spirit of humane experimentalism. He stages subtle alterations to everyday performances aiming to distribute art in public experience, organizes the annual Coyote Itinerancy, and cofounded Walk Exchange, a cooperative walking group, a retreat tracing footpaths between New York City and the wild. He holds an MFA in Art and Social Practice from Portland State University.

**Jen Delos Reyes** is a creative laborer, educator, writer, and radical community arts organizer. Her practice entails working with institutions and creating and supporting sustainable artist-led culture. She worked within Portland State University from 2008 to 2014 to create the first flexible residency Art and Social Practice MFA program in the United States and cofounded Open Engagement, an international annual conference on socially engaged art active since 2007.

**Dipti Desai** is associate professor and director of the Graduate Art + Education Programs at New York University. A scholar and artist/educator, her work addresses the intersection between visual art, activism, and critical pedagogy. She is coeditor of *Social Justice and the Arts* (Taylor and Francis). She coauthored *History as Art, Art as History: Contemporary Art and Social Studies Education*.

**Avram Finkelstein** is a founding member of collectives Silence=Death and Gran Fury. His work is present at the collections of MoMA, Whitney Museum, the New Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum, and is featured in the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art artist oral history.

**Noah Fischer** is an artist working in the studio, streets, museums, and on stage, bridging art making with organizing, manifesto writing, and theater design through collaborations with Berlin-based andcompany&Co. and Occupy Museums, and is a core member of GULF with work appearing at the MoMA, Guggenheim, Brooklyn Museum, ZKM, Zamek Ujazdowski, and the fifty-sixth Venice Biennale, the seventh Berlin Biennale, and the 2017 Whitney Biennial.

**Matthew Friday** and **Iain Kerr** are members of SPURSE, a collective of ecosystem artists and designers working to meet complex environmental and social challenges. SPURSE has designed programming for the BMW Guggenheim Lab, and has been the Andrew W. Mellon Art and Environment Visiting Artist for Pitzer College. In 2017 they published the cookbook *Eat Your Sidewalk*.

**Susan Greene** is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and clinical psychologist. Greene conducts research on the intersections of trauma, creativity, resilience, and resistance through multimedia projects she directs with Art Forces, which she founded in 2001. Art Forces aims to use community public art and technology to reveal hidden histories, inspire critical thinking, and spark action.

**Pablo Helguera** is an artist, performer, author, and director of adult and academic programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Helguera has been the recipient of numerous awards for his art and his ideas concerning social practice art, including the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation/Fideicomiso para la Cultura Mexico, the Creative Capital Foundation, a Franklin Furnace Fellowship, and most recently a Blade of Grass Fellowship.

**Ashley Hunt** uses image, object, word, and body to engage social movements, historical narratives, and the relationships between our multiple art worlds and the larger worlds in which they sit. His primary subject is the US prison system, interrogating questions of race, class, capitalism, and power, as well as pedagogical and social sculpture works. He lives in Los Angeles and directs the Photo and Media Program at Cal Arts.

**Mary Jane Jacob** is a pioneer curator of public, site-specific, and socially engaged art in the US with projects like *Places with a Past and Places with a Future*, *Culture in Action*, and *Conversations at the Castle*. Her anthologies include *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* and the Chicago Social Practice History Series. Forthcoming is her book *Dewey for Artists* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). She is a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and directs its Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice.

**Steve Lambert's** work has been shown in museums and protest marches nationally and internationally, featured in over fourteen books, four documentary films, and the collections of museums and the Library of Congress. **Stephen Duncombe** is a professor of media and culture at New York University and author and editor of six books on the intersection of culture and politics. Steve and Stephen are cofounders and codirectors of the Center for Artistic Activism.

**Justin Langlois** is an artist, educator, and organizer. He is the cofounder and research director of Broken City Lab, the founder of the School for Eventual Vacancy, and curator of the Neighborhood Time Exchange. He is currently an associate professor and assistant dean of integrated learning in the Faculty of Culture and Community at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada.

**Pedro Lasch** is an artist, 16 Beaver St. organizer, professor, and director of the FHI Social Practice Lab at Duke. Solo projects include *Open Routines* (QMA), *Black Mirror* (Nasher), *Abstract Nationalism* (Phillips Collection), and *Art of the MOOC* (Creative Time); group exhibitions include MoMA PS1, MASS MoCA, RCA, Hayward Gallery, MUAC, Mexico's National Palace; *Prospect 4 New Orleans* (2017), *Gwangju Biennial* (2006), *Havana Biennial* (2015), *Documenta 13* (ANDANDAND, 2012), and the fifty-sixth Venice Biennale (CTS, 2015).

**Norene Leddy and Liz Slagus** are artists/curators and codirectors of *SexEd*. Slagus is director of public programs and residencies for the New York Hall of Science, as well as a Fulbright Fellow and a Blade of Grass, and a Vera List Center funding recipient. Slagus directed Eyebeam's education and public programs between 1998 and 2008, exploring models for teaching, learning, and public engagement.

**Dr. Loraine Leeson** is a visual artist known for her 1980s cultural campaigning in support of the communities of London's Docklands and her socially

engaged work in East London. She teaches undergraduate modules in Fine Art Social Practice and the MA in Art and Social Practice at Middlesex University and is also senior research fellow at University of Westminster, London. **Alberto Duman's** work is located at the intersection of art practice, regeneration, and urban studies. In 2016 he was Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at University of East London and is lecturer in fine art at Middlesex University, London.

**Dr. Marilyn Lennon** cowrote, codirects, and teaches in the Masters in Social Practice in the Creative Environment (MA SPACE), Limerick School of Art and Design, Ireland, as well as having presented, published, and taught internationally. **Maeve Collins** employs emplacement as a political and poetic strategy to address forms of social and environmental alienation. **Julie Griffiths** is an educator and social practitioner, whose recent project *Till/Until* involves planting and weaving an acre of flax as an investigation of our relationship with place and belonging.

**Alejandro Meitin** is an artist, lawyer, and founding member of art collective Ala Plástica in La Plata, Argentina. He has researched, developed, and implemented collaborative art projects, working with residents, youth, farmers, artists, activists, architects, landscape architects, local authorities, and pollution control experts. Alejandro collaborates with regional and national agents crafting proposals on international water resources, and curates, teaches, publishes, and lectures in Latin America, North America, and Europe.

**Beverly Naidus** is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, networker, and educator. Her work has been exhibited internationally and discussed in journals and books. Her book *Arts for Change: Teaching Outside the Frame* describes her socially engaged studio arts curriculum at the University of Washington, Tacoma.

**Sheryl Oring** has typed thousands of postcards to the president from locations across the US since launching her "I Wish to Say" project in 2004. Her second book, *Activating Democracy: The I Wish to Say Project*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2016. Oring is an associate professor of art at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; she divides her time between North Carolina, New York, and Berlin.

**Tanja Ostojić** is an interdisciplinary artist and cultural activist who has studied art in Belgrade, in France, and at the University of Arts Berlin, with work included in Global Feminisms, Brooklyn Museum; Feminism is Politics!, Pratt Manhattan Gallery; Performa NY; Venice Biennale 2001 and 2011; Busan

Biennale South Korea; ICA London; Manifesta 2; and the Ludwig Museum Budapest. Her books include *Integration Impossible?*, *The Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić*; and the forthcoming *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*.

**Laurie Palmer** is an artist, writer, and professor in the Art Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her work is concerned, most immediately, with resistance to privatization, and more generally, with material explorations of matter's active nature. She also collaborates on strategic actions in the context of social and environmental justice, as she did for this book, with artists **Sarah Ross** and **Lindsey French**.

**The Pedagogy Group** resists the individualist, market-driven subjectivities produced by mainstream art education by developing collective skills and values, sharing syllabi, investigating political economies of education, and connecting classrooms to social movements. Members include: James Andrews, educator, member, Nsumi Collective; Barrie Cline, Art faculty, The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, member, Workers Art Coalition; Maureen Connor, Emerita Professor, Queens College, Co-founder, Social Practice Queens; Taraneh Fazeli, curator-in-residence, Jan van Eyck Academie, Adjunct Professor, DIAP Program, City College, CUNY; Susan Jahoda, UMASS, Amherst; member, BFAMFAPhD; Mark Read, NYU; member, The Illuminator Collective; Robert Sember, The New School, member, Ultra-red sound art collective; Sasha Sumner, Adjunct Professor, Social Justice/Social Practice Program, Pratt Institute, Certified producer, BRIC Media Arts, Brooklyn.

**Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya (Gluklya)** works in St. Petersburg and Amsterdam and is considered one of the pioneers of Russian Performance art. She is cofounder of the Factor of Found Clothes artist collective. **Jonathan Brooks Platt** is a scholar who has written on topics including the actionist tradition in Russian contemporary art, the Stalin-era cult of Alexander Pushkin, and representations of reading in late Russian Romanticism.

**Christopher Robbins** cofounded Ghana ThinkTank to show his *own US culture* what it feels like to have another culture impose their goodwill on you. With the mission "Developing the First World," Ghana ThinkTank collects problems from the so-called developed world to be solved by think tanks in Cuba, Ghana, Iran, Mexico, El Salvador, and the US prison system.

**Brian Rosa** is assistant professor of urban studies, Queens College (QC) and Geography (Graduate Center: CUNY), is affiliated SPQ faculty and

codirector of QC City Lab. Coeditor of *Deconstructing the High Line: Postindustrial Urbanism and the Rise of the Elevated Park* (Rutgers University Press), his research explores postindustrial urban sites of interwoven social, cultural, political, and economic (re)development and heritage overlapping with visual arts practice.

**Gregory Sale** is an artist who engages stakeholders spanning political positions from the far right—Arizona’s infamous Sheriff Joe Arpaio—to the far left—Angela Davis with support from Creative Capital and the Andy Warhol Foundation. He teaches public practice at Arizona State University.

**Antonio Serna** is a New York City–based artist with both a studio and collective practice. His current studio focus is “Documents of Resistance: Artists of Color Protest (1960s–2010s).” Antonio Serna has taught art and design at Brooklyn College CUNY and Parsons School of Design. He is also a member of Artists of Color Bloc, Arts & Labor, and the People’s Cultural Plan, through which he promotes self-organized cultural events, research, education, and artist-as-activist interventions.

**Dr. Gregory Sholette** is an artist, writer, and activist who focuses on excavating the history and theory of socially engaged art through such books as *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* and *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture*. Cofounder of SPQ, and core member of Gulf Labor, he is a graduate of the Whitney Independent Studies Program, University of California San Diego, and the Cooper Union, and holds a PhD from the University of Amsterdam.

**Sean Taylor** explores the cracks between sound art, social art practice, performance art, and choreography. He is part of the Softday art/science collaboration, and currently is joint program leader, MA Social Practice and the Creative Environment (MA SPACE), and lecturer in the Sculpture and Combined Media Department at Limerick School of Art and Design.

**Daniel Tucker** is an artist, writer, and organizer developing documentaries, publications, exhibitions, and events inspired by his interest in social movements and the people and places from which they emerge. His writings and lectures on the intersections of art and politics and his collaborative art projects have been published and presented widely. He is an assistant professor and graduate program director in Socially Engaged Art at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia.

**Erin Turner** (born Tulsa, Oklahoma) and **Floor Grootenhuis** (born Nairobi, Kenya) are contemporary artists who collaborate using a variety of material to engage in conversation between the landscape and people associated with it. Their recent collaborative work was shown at the Queens Museum, Quimby's Bookstore, New York City, and Franklin Street Works, Connecticut. They are MFA candidates in SPQ at Queens College, currently living in New York City.

**Jeanne van Heeswijk** is a visual artist and curator whose social practice art has been featured in numerous publications worldwide, as well as in internationally renowned biennials and art institutions. **Gabriela Rendón** is an assistant professor of urban planning at Parsons School of Design and cofounder of Cohabitation Strategies, a nonprofit for sociospatial research, design, and development.

**Alpha Elena Escobedo Vargas** holds degrees in advanced philosophical studies from the Complutense University, Madrid, and a Master in Social Sciences in public policy from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. Her practice explores curriculum design, art education program management, and the socioeconomic dynamics of sustainable artistic ecosystems. She lives in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, is a member of the city's Curatorial Council, and is the Art Department head at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez.

**Fiona Whelan** is a Dublin-based artist, writer, and educator whose twelve-year-long artist residency with Rialto Youth Project involves two extensive collaborative projects exploring contemporary equality issues. Fiona is joint coordinator of the MA Socially Engaged Art, NCAD, and a PhD candidate at CTMP, DIT, Dublin.

**Ryan Lee Wong** is a writer and cultural organizer based in Brooklyn, and a Visiting Scholar at the A/P/A Institute at New York University. He writes on the arts for the *Village Voice* and *Hyperallergic*. He organized the exhibition *Roots: Asian American Movements in Los Angeles, 1968–80s* at Chinese American Museum, *Serve the People* at Interference Archive, and *June 4, 1989* at Museum of Chinese in America, and has presented talks or taught at RISD, Brooklyn Museum, the Boston MFA, and New York University.

**Bo Zheng**, China-based artist, writer, and teacher, is committed to socially and ecologically engaged art. He investigates the past and imagines the future

from the perspectives of marginalized communities and marginalized plants. For more information please visit <http://seachina.net> (online archive and MOOC on socially engaged art in China) and <http://zhengbo.org>.

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# ART AS SOCIAL ACTION

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

GREGORY SHOLETTE, CHLOË BASS,  
AND SOCIAL PRACTICE QUEENS