Socially Engaged Art in the Public Sphere

by

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A Thesis Submitted in
Fulfillment of Requirements for
Graduation with Distinction in the Department of
Art, Art History & Visual Studies

With a Major in Art History

Duke University, Trinity College
April 2017

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Introduction

Socially engaged art refers to works in which human interaction and social discourse are core elements of the creation, process, and presentation. Since people and their relationships form the medium of such works – rather than a particular process of production – social engagement is not only a part of a work's organization, execution or continuation, but also an aesthetic in itself: of human interaction and development. Due to the social nature of such works, each engages a different public. The first section of this paper will therefore concentrate on both broadening and refining our understanding of who the public is through the lenses of identity, inclusivity, and diversity. I argue that social practice artists and producers must consider the relationship between their work and the identities defined by existing social, political and economic systems, as well as those defined by social practice itself. Because every individual encompasses multiple identities, social practice work must be produced from an intersectional perspective that defines the intended public.

The second section identifies the building blocks of socially engaged art: the elements that maintain equal relevance across a range of projects. Artists and producers must consider the specific characteristics and needs of the community and environment in which they are working, and define the relationship between aesthetic and method in their work. These characteristics both shape and are shaped by the aim of the work, and its proposed timeline. Better documentation is also an ongoing need, which presents its own set of difficulties within the field of social practice.

The final section discusses the relationship between socially engaged art and contemporary institutions: the market, the museum and the university. Institutions play a crucial role in the support and development of social practice. Partnerships between the two can be mutually beneficial, as socially engaged art is able to occupy pedagogical roles and engage a broader public.

Socially engaged art, in its essence, is art that is keenly aware of its surroundings and enacts social change upon them. Author and social practice supporter Tom Finkelpearl said, "how often have I heard some version of the complaint, 'why can’t we just concentrate on the art of these projects instead of worrying about politics or history?’” “art” in this context means aesthetics divorced from social context.” It is precisely this complaint that necessitates an analysis of socially engaged art.

1. Defining Public: Identity, Inclusivity & Diversity

Like “social practice”, “public” is an umbrella term that can refer to both a general population, as well as the many identities within it which are both distinct from and co-existing with one another. In many instances, “public” has begun to feel tedious, calling forth ideas of bureaucracy and dullness. And without specificity, such an all-encompassing term runs the risk of remaining ambiguous and ineffective, excluding the same groups that are under-served in other areas of society. I have chosen to speak about publics in pluralistic terms to avoid ambiguity and to discuss the specific groups that engage with individual works. To effectively engage any specific public, we must first explore the concepts of identity, inclusivity and diversity to better understand who is present within or absent from a particular group, and how engagement and interactions should be initiated.

Identity

Identity determines how an individual or group perceives themselves and others. Any discussion of the public must begin with an understanding of identity, as we cannot consider ideas such as inclusivity and diversity fully without an understanding of who is or is not a part of a particular public. The complexity of identity within social practice should not be underestimated. Each individual has multiple identities, and self-identification often differs from external identification. The multiplicity of identity is one reason why it is essential for artists and producers to be specific and intentional about the public they wish to engage in a work. Every project makes an assumption regarding which identities it will involve. Social Practitioner Pablo Helguera writes, “we build because we seek to reach out to others, and they will come initially because they recognize themselves in what we have built.” If a person is unable to identify with a work, what will motivate them to participate? And how are the identities reflected by artists and producers perceived by other collaborators or participants?

When defining identity in the context of social practice, we must consider the influence that it has both within and beyond a project. Because the medium of socially engaged art is people and their relationships - rather than a particular process of production - the identity of those people becomes the medium of the work itself. In

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5 Pablo Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, 23
6 Pablo Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, 22
other words, projects are defined by the identities that they engage. Social practice therefore has an ability to influence the visibility and voice granted to particular identities both within and beyond a work. Such influence cannot be taken lightly; if poorly handled, greater visibility can result in greater vulnerability for certain populations. Furthermore, identity is quickly capitalized upon, which can be disadvantageous to a population. Sue Bell Yank writes, “The central role of the creative industry is to enthusiastically translate new social identities into new economies, monetizing our need to telegraph our lifestyles through our personalized self-branding vehicles. We proclaim: I am organic, gluten-free, non-GMO, I go to pop-up $40 dinners, I go to secret beer gardens in vacant lots, I garden, I live sustainably, I craft...”

Therefore artists and producers must seek to define identity with intentionality and an awareness of the impact that their work will have upon that identity. In turn, they will gain a greater understanding of both who the public is holistically, and the ways in which individuals interact with particular projects.

I will divide my discussion of identity into two main categories: identities that are defined by socially engaged art itself, and identities that are relevant to both social practice as well as many other areas of society. The first identity I will focus on is determined by how frequently an individual engages with art in their day-to-day life. For some members of the public, art is a part of almost every waking hour, while others perceive art as something of little relevance to their daily lives. I have designed a concentric model to depict how these identities relate to one another. On the outskirts are the unintentionally or involuntarily engaged: those who observe or participate in art very infrequently and have little familiarity with social practice.

Fig 1. Frequency of Engagement with Art.

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engagement is rarely self-motivated and will likely be a result of another person or a serendipitous encounter. The infrequently engaged are those who appreciate art but engage only occasionally due to financial, geographical or time constraints. Their engagement is a result of external limitations rather than a lack of appreciation and is also typically motivated by others – taking a family member to a museum, going to see a friend’s performance, or browsing online. The third category is students, who all engage with art to some degree through, classes, field trips, or performances offered through their educational institution. Arts students form a circle of their own since their education demonstrates voluntary engagement with art at a much higher frequency. Towards the center, we find art supporters: those who invest their time and/or energy because of their value of the arts. This could include volunteers, museum members, project donors or an organization’s board members. The sixth circle is the art amateurs – those who frequently engage with art, but do not define it as their primary use of time or source of income. They may be practicing artists or active members of local arts organizations, and many are likely to also identify as arts supporters. Near the center are the art professionals: critics, dealers, gallery owners, museum staff, editors, creative directors, producers, organizers – the many roles that include daily interaction with art, and require extensive knowledge typically gained from both higher education and job experience. The center is the artists - those who produce, organize and make art themselves.

The purpose of discussing these identities is to emphasize the need for artists and producers to think critically about whom they wish to engage in order to use appropriate methods of outreach and engagement to reach those individuals. After an extended period working within the inner circles, it is easy to overestimate how frequently a member of the general public engages with art, and thus overestimate the prior knowledge and understanding with which they approach a project. The interdisciplinary nature of socially engaged art renders it the perfect medium for reaching broader publics beyond the “art world”.

It is essential to acknowledge that individuals move fluidly between these categories depending on the particular work and their own preferences. For example, an art amateur with a specific interest in community theatre who is actively engaged in local productions may fall into the infrequently engaged category for a documentary photography exhibition focused on the South, simply because they have little interest in documentary photography and would rather concentrate on work they feel personally invested in. Similarly, an artist can shift from the most inner to most outer circle depending on their intention: if they were to pass a social practice project on the street and pause to observe or participate, they would be unintentionally or involuntarily engaged. By intentionally seeking to engage those in circles beyond
their own, artists and producers will create work that is inclusive of a much more diverse public.

In addition to how frequently an individual engages with art in their daily life, their involvement with any particular social practice work will also be defined by their relationship to the community in which the project takes place. Exploring this relationship is particularly important for two main reasons: firstly, it helps artists and producers to understand how an individual perceives themselves in relation to their fellow community members. Secondly, an individual’s relationship to a community typically indicates their localized knowledge – how well they understand the environment and its culture. For artists and producers, building a foundation of knowledge about a particular community is key to the success of any work.

I have designed a similar concentric model to illustrate different types of community relationships relative to one another. On the outskirts are tourists - those who visit a community temporarily, often arriving with little to no prior knowledge of the environment. Next are frequent visitors who do not live in the community but return with some regularity due to family, friends or work. Thirdly, there are new arrivals that have recently relocated to a community. Immigrants form a separate circle since their relationship to a community is complicated by the distance and cultural differences between their former and current communities. This group may also encompass refugees and individuals who had little to no choice in their arrival. The inner circles are made up of those who have been living in a place for several years or who grew up in a community and have formed a deeper sense of belonging. At the center are those who have had family in the community for several generations, a relationship exceeding their own memory or knowledge.

For artists and producers to work and communicate effectively in any community, they must develop an understanding of the range of different relationships between...
individuals and their community. How one perceives their own position and the position of their neighbors within the history and culture of a place plays a large part in determining how they will engage with a social practice project. Engaging individuals with varying relationships to their community allows artists to situate and refine the intended influence of their own work.

However, it is important to recognize that such categories are intended to illustrate existing knowledge of a place and should not be interpreted as indicators of how active or engaged an individual is in their community. For example, a newly settled immigrant individual may be far more active or connected in the community than another individual whose family has lived in the area for generations. However, the two will have very different understandings of the culture and history of the community, and will perceive their own belonging or connectedness very differently. To create projects that are inclusive of a diverse public, artists and producers must engage individuals from a variety of the above groups in any given community.

Thus far I have focused on two categories of identity that are defined in relation to socially engaged art itself: the first determined by how frequently an individual engages with art in their day-to-day life, and the second as their relationship to their community and its history. Building an understanding of these identities constitutes essential groundwork for any social practice project. However, these two categories are only the tip of the identity iceberg. Every individual is the product of many different identities that can be both overlapping and distinct from one another. The idea that such social categorizations are interwoven rather than mutually exclusive is referred to as intersectionality, which signals a more nuanced understanding of how we perceive both others and ourselves. Other forms of identity that I wish to explore are education level, age, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religion, and socio-economic status. These identities have been chosen because of their relevance across social, economic, political and cultural systems. Each may be individual and/or collective, and each can shift fluidly during engagement with a social practice project. A wider range of identity categories is an essential part of defining who is and is not included in our definition of the public, and situating the impact of social practice works in a broader societal context. For the purpose of this paper, I aim to briefly summarize each category in relation to socially engaged art. The complexities of each necessitate much more comprehensive explorations, thus I have included an “identity” section in the bibliography for further reading.

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Education level is typically measured by the qualifications gained through formal schooling and used as an indicator of both intelligence and skill, thus influencing an individual's job, social circle, and socio-economic status. Socially engaged art challenges the normative structure of education in several ways. Firstly, the central role of human interaction and relationships in social practice often values emotional intelligence over the cognitive intelligence measured by IQ and standardized testing. Secondly, artists and producers must become learners to gain knowledge specific to a community and environment, which may not be valued by a traditional education system but be invaluable to a particular place. Thirdly, many social practice projects have their own pedagogical component and offer participants access to knowledge and education outside of the formal schooling system. One such example is the Musée Précaire Albinet, established by Thomas Hirschhorn in Aubervilliers, an outer suburb of Paris. In 2004, Hirschhorn partnered with the local artist space Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, to create a series of seven weekly exhibitions displaying major works by Beuys, Duchamp, Malevich, Léger, Mondrian and Dali, borrowed from the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, and the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain. The daily programming of children’s classes, writing workshops, discussions, debates, and shared meals was designed to engage a wide range of education levels and did not assume prior knowledge. Young residents also had the opportunity to learn through participation in an intensive two-month job-training program in a variety of departments at the Centre Pompidou, including

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11 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship (New York: Verso Books), C.9
handling, installation, education and security.\textsuperscript{13} The skills learned during this period were then directly applied in practice at the \textit{Musée Précaire} in Aubervilliers, as the trainees were responsible for the installation and care of the exhibitions. Hirschhorn’s project not only embraces a range of educational identities, but is an excellent example of a work that takes individuals from the outer frequencies of art engagement – the unintentionally and infrequently engaged – and engages them with those from the center of the circle – the artist himself and the art professionals at the \textit{Centre Pompidou} and the \textit{Laboratoires}. Bishop writes, “[Hirschhorn’s] public projects juxtagpose different social classes, races and ages with a fearless defense of art and philosophy and pulsate with eccentric optimism…. these events stand \textit{in toto} as a form of artistic research and social experimentation.”\textsuperscript{14} Tania Bruegura’s \textit{Catedra Arte de Conducta}, and Pedro Lasch’s \textit{Art of the MOOC} are also excellent examples of social practice projects that employ education as the medium, which will be discussed with greater detail in further sections.

\textbf{Age} indicates the knowledge and experience that an individual will bring to a project, as well as their cognitive and physical ability to participate. People are typically most comfortable interacting with those of their own age, and artists and producers should not assume that individuals interact frequently with those outside of their own generation. While some works aim to engage a specific age group, artists who facilitate engagement across a variety of ages must consider questions such as: is the terminology used comprehensible for all participants; is digital proficiency assumed; is the location accessible? British artist Tino Seghal’s \textit{This Progress} is an example of intentional engagement with a wide range of ages. Produced at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Seghal hired individuals ranging from young children to elderly adults to act as “interpreters” and engage visitors in conversation relating to the idea of progress.\textsuperscript{15} The interpreters became progressively older as an individual wound their way up the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim, creating the impression of progressing through life while moving from conversation to conversation.\textsuperscript{16} Individuals of all ages experienced encounters outside of the norm through Seghal’s work. An elderly interpreter cited their battle with loneliness and a waning social life as a challenge that worsened with age, while a college student stated “there are great

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things in this world and one of them is talking to people, especially strangers. Rarely do you make eye contact with someone and try to figure out where they're coming from." 17 Personal testimonies of participants provide a rare insight into the lasting legacy of Seghal’s work since the artist has a strict policy against photography or recording of his works. I will return to this approach in a later section on documentation. It is the fleeting nature of Seghal’s work that renders the encounters of This Progress all the more unique for individuals of all ages.

**Race and ethnicity** refer to the common origin or ancestry of a group of people. Despite the lack of biological basis for race, the social construct remains deeply engrained and discrimination on the basis of appearance or ethnicity continues to be a daily experience for many. Social practice must acknowledge that throughout the canon of Western art history, it is white artists, styles, and aesthetics that have been most highly revered. Socially engaged art challenges such norms and stereotypes by encompassing individuals, aesthetics, and practices from a much greater range of racial/ethnic identities. As amplifiers, artists and producers must carefully consider who is and is not included and heard in a particular public.

In *Enemy Kitchen*, Michael Rakowitz seeks to reshape perceptions of Iraqi culture and identity by partnering with his Iraqi-Jewish mother to teach Baghdadi recipes to groups in community centers, schools and veteran organizations. 18 The project consists of compiling recipes, conducting workshops to prepare and consume the

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food, and engaging participants in conversation about Iraq, cultural stereotypes, and issues of conflict.\textsuperscript{19} Rakowitz writes, “Iraqi culture is virtually invisible in the US, beyond the daily news, and \textit{Enemy Kitchen} seizes the possibility of cultural visibility to produce an alternative discourse.”\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Conflict Kitchen}, a restaurant in Pittsburgh founded by John Rubin & Dawn Weleski, takes a similar approach of using food as a means to engaging the public in rethinking their perceptions of ethnicity and cultural identity.\textsuperscript{21} The restaurant serves food exclusively from countries with which the U.S. is engaged with conflict, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Cuba, North Korea, Palestine and Venezuela.\textsuperscript{22} The tension surrounding these works is evidence of their importance and relevance. Rubin & Weleski closed the restaurant temporarily in 2014 after receiving a death threat in the wake of controversy over their decision to serve Palestinian food.\textsuperscript{23} Creating open discussion about such deep-set conflicts and prejudices is a central aim of Rakowitz, Rubin & Weleski, and is evidence of the rippling impact social practice has on identity.

In social terms, \textit{gender} can be understood as a spectrum that encompasses many types of \textit{sexual orientation} such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and heterosexual. Those who do not subscribe to or support a binary view of gender and sexuality continue to face discrimination in many parts of society. Socially engaged art is able to foster dialogue that builds a more nuanced understanding of gender to deconstruct stereotypes, and also create safe spaces and allies in a

\textsuperscript{20}Michael Rakowitz, artistic statement, “Enemy Kitchen.”
\textsuperscript{22}“About,” \textit{Conflict Kitchen}, accessed February 18, 2017, \url{http://conflictkitchen.org/about/}
community. Some projects seek to develop their own sub-communities in order to create a system of support for a marginalized group, such as Lenka Clayton’s open source project Artist Residency in Motherhood. In 2012, Clayton wrote a manifesto, and applied for funding that allowed her to create An Artist Residency in Motherhood, in which she was the sole resident for three years. Clayton created physical objects to actualize the residency, such as business cards and signage, arranged 9 hours a week of childcare for her son, found mentors, and started a website to share her work. After three years, she opened the residency to the public, creating planning tools and an application for mentorship within the online community of mothers and artists that now consists of almost 300 women in 31 countries. The project engages an intersection of two identities – artist and mother – that remains problematic due to the continual undervaluing of both artistic and parental labor in our society. Clayton described the project as emerging “out of this feeling of trying to do two things at the same time that didn’t feel like they could fit,” a sentiment advocated for decades earlier by artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Judy Chicago and Suzanne Lacy. Clayton’s residency program has gone on to inspire others, such as Mothers in Arts, a residency based in Amsterdam founded by Dutch artist Csilla Kellyanszki offering studio space and communal daycare to three emerging women artists with children between 3 and 24 months old.

Religion refers to the set of beliefs and values pertaining to the existence of a divine being or power that an individual subscribes to. Religion is an important collective and individual identity that strongly emphasizes engagement with a community that shares common beliefs. Like other identities, religion functions as a lens through which an individual views the world. In seeking to understand a public, it is important for artists and producers to think about the ways in which those of differing belief systems may engage with their work. While the effect of religion on the public sphere depends upon the religious freedom of a society, religious practice can influence how time is structured, the spaces an individual does and does not go, and the ways in which they approach social interactions. Numerous social practice projects have borrowed the central concepts of ritual and repetition from religion to structure their own work. These characteristics demonstrate the intersection of performance and socially engaged art in works such as The Passion, a play produced

by the National Theatre of Wales and WildWorks in Port Talbot, Wales. The play borrowed a tradition from the town of Oberammergau, Germany that dates to 1634. Every decade, the residents of the town perform a play depicting the Passion of Jesus Christ that involves at least 2,000 people – half the population - and is known across the world.\textsuperscript{28} The Port Talbot production borrowed the narrative structure from the Gospel of Mark to tell the contemporary, fictitious story of a town at risk of being taken over by a large corporation, with one of the town’s most famous figures, actor Michael Sheen, as the savior figure. The play took place across 72 hours with the participation of over 1,000 locals, described by Claire Doherty as an “epic piece of immersive promenade theatre, experienced in real time and space.”\textsuperscript{29} *The Passion* takes the ritual and tradition central to religion to inform its production and challenge participants to think about the future of their community. A further example of religion as a medium can be found in *Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping*. Reverend Billy show the dangers of capitalism by emphasizing the ritualistic aspect of consumerism.

**Socio-economic status** is determined by a combination of factors that include wealth, income, and job status. A class hierarchy has historically stratified individuals of different socio-economic statuses in many societies, and continues to influence the way that wealth and status are perceived today. The United States in particular has traded the idea of a class hierarchy for that of the meritocracy, which operates on the belief that an individual is able to achieve wealth and success through hard work, regardless of their starting position. However, such ideology fails to account for the systematic discrimination and disadvantage that shapes socio-economic status in our


\textsuperscript{29} Claire Doherty, *Out of Time, Out of Place: Public Art (Now)*, 229.
society today. Art is typically most accessible to those of higher socio-economic status whose wealth affords them greater flexibility with time and money. Social practice therefore faces the challenge of creating alternative means of contribution or participation beyond wealth, such as through skills, knowledge or experience.

In 2001, British artist Jeremy Deller produced Battle of Orgreave, a reenactment project that focused upon the class conflict at the center of the National Union of Mineworkers strike held in the small Yorkshire town of Orgreave in 1984. Upon first learning about the strike as a teenager, Deller likened Orgreave to a civil war because of its emphasis on the stark stratification of social classes in British society. The reenactment involved over 800 people, approximately a third of who were former miners or police officers that had been involve in the original strike. The strike was a major conflict between police and union workers that today marks the overtaking of union power and working-class labor by the conservative Thatcher government that dismantled British industry and resulted in massive job loss. Deller’s work engaged individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and recognizes the lasting impact of class divisions.

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Inclusivity

To define any given public with precision, we must consider which of the above identities are or are not included. It is by engaging publics inclusive of a diverse range of identities that socially engaged art can have a lasting effect upon not only the art world, but also upon other social, political, and economic systems. The collaborative nature of social practice gives the medium a greater capacity for inclusivity than many other art forms. While I will argue for the importance and power of inclusivity, I also acknowledge the role of antagonistic practice within socially engaged art. By focusing on a deliberately narrow public, practices that disrupt or provoke can also have a powerful impact on current systems.

Regardless of whether a project is inclusive or exclusive, intentionality is a crucial characteristic. Artists and producers must deliberately find who is present within or absent from the publics with whom they work. Without consistent critical thought, it is very easy for projects to remain inaccessible to large portions of the public, including those that deliberately aim to break through the exclusivity and elitism of the art world.

The Situationist International and GRAV (the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel) are two movements from the 1960s that sought to integrate art and life through collective rather than individual dialogue and participation. GRAV focused on the role of the artist as organizer, creating kinetic environments that encouraged participation from a broader audience. The carnivalesque quality of their project *Une Journée dans la Rue* produced

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playful interactions that physically engaged participants with public space. The project took place on April 19, 1966 and consisted of small site-specific interventions placed around Paris, in spaces such as metro stations or parks, which aimed to disrupt the daily journey of Parisians. Although their occupation of public space increased the accessibility of their work, GRAV paid little attention to which identities were included in the participating public, or to who possessed the leisure time to engage.

The Situationist International (SI) fell into a similar trap. Their overarching aim was the integration of art and life, beginning with the creation of non-alienated “moments” and “situations”. The SI used the concept of spectacle to practice détournement (subversion) of current cultural practices in order to critique capitalism. However, as Bishop points out, the public that they drew to engage with their work did not extend beyond “their own community of artists and bohemian intelligentsia.” To return to the concentric circle diagram that maps the frequency of engagement with art, the SI included only those of the inner circles (the artists and art professionals), and GRAV paid little attention to those involved outside of these circles. The two groups demonstrate that inclusivity must therefore be both an action and a way of thinking. Artists and producers must ask critical questions such as: which publics do we want this work to engage? Who will be drawn to this project? And who might we be excluding from our work?

Historical absence is one of the primary arguments for inclusivity. In the art world, it is exclusivity rather than inclusivity that has been largely characteristic of modern artistic practice. The canon of art history shows a specific and selective approach to subject matter, patronage, education, and theory that has left many individuals and populations largely excluded. It was not until the twentieth century that a true diversification of art forms and movements began to include non-white and non-western aesthetics and methods, a shift that has continued to develop through the 21st century. However, such growth has far from solved the inclusivity issue. The exclusive and competitive nature of artistic work has only increased, and many parts of the contemporary art world remain largely inaccessible to the public. Social interactions are controlled by assumed cultural codes and passwords that are not widely understood outside of the inner circles of artists and art professionals. It is the collaborative and inclusive practices at the very core of socially engaged art that

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34 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship* (final c. 3)
36 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship* (final c. 3)
37 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship* (final c. 3)
often leave both the practice and its participants – particularly those from the outer circles of engagement - excluded from the art world.\(^{39}\)

Inclusivity in social practice becomes all the more urgent when we consider its absence not only from the art world, but from current economic, social and political systems. The capitalist nature of the art market creates an economy of exclusivity, and values the product of the individual artist over collective practice. In this environment, the value of a work is derived from the name [singular] associated with it. Thus, inclusivity becomes significantly harder to achieve when the public is defined as a domain of competing private interests.\(^{40}\) For many dealers and buyers, works produced by a collective or through collaboration are considered diluted or an insecure investment: the collective may dissolve, members may change, and the value may fluctuate more readily as a result. Much collaborative work therefore falls into the category of “creative dark matter”, a term Gregory Sholette uses to describe the bulk of the artistic labor undertaken in our post-industrial society that is denied recognition in either social or economic systems.\(^{41}\) This dark matter hides the false assumptions made regarding artistic labor: the true time required to create a work, who can undertake such work, and the value and frequency of collaborative production.

Social practice can offer a more inclusive economic model that promotes an exchange of resources rare amongst current capitalist systems. The most common resources needed to engage in some form of artistic experience – be it the creation of an artwork, tickets to a museum or performance, or the purchasing of a work - are time and money. Individuals must be able to afford to spend time engaging in such an activity, and have the money to do so. Furthermore, participation cost is often misleading: one study estimated admission fees account for only 17 percent of the total cost associated with a museum visit; the other 83 percent being travel and food related.\(^{42}\) Time and money are also essential for the production of socially engaged art, but many projects also invite participants to contribute skill and knowledge resources in exchange for engagement. To respond to the specific context of a community and environment, a single project may need individuals with a knowledge of community history, connecters to various subgroups within a community, organizers, producers, teachers, designers, planners, and documenters. While these

\(^{39}\) Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 4.  
roles may be undervalued dark matter in other economies, socially practice can be more inclusive through its engagement of individuals with knowledge or know-how outside of that valued in the traditional artistic realm.

There is also a great need for more inclusive practices within our social systems. Social exclusion is a relational issue that is concerned with an absence of ties between an individual and their community, its services, and institutions. Sandell categorizes social exclusion into three main categories: “access to social services, access to the labor market; and the opportunity for social participation and its effects on the social fabric.” Projects addressing each of these areas are already plentiful and can make considerable progress towards social integration and inclusion. Collaboration necessitates a trust in the Other, which is not necessary in individual work. Building trusting ties between those of different social identities therefore strengthens a social system and moves away from potential disintegration or polarization.

Paul Ramirez Jonas’ 2010 project Dictar y Recordar intentionally pursues social inclusion with the aim of integrating many voices into the social fabric. The project took place over a 24-hour period in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and aimed to create as complete a history as possible of Honduras. The artist posed the question, “What do we do with a country that has almost as many governments as years of independence?” The work aimed to simultaneously expose and fill gaps in public memory. Any member of the public was

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able to dictate their memories to one of the ten typists on duty, regardless of how much they remembered or the subjectivity of their memories - the work created an unspoken trust between the storyteller and the typist.47 The artist was deliberately inclusive of all who felt they had something to contribute: participation did not require money or skill, only a little time and the memories of an individual. Ramirez Jonas’ work creates an informal archive, and I will return to this idea in a later section on Documentation.

Socially engaged art is also a forum for political change. Shannon Jackson defines the term “social practice” as a combination of aesthetics and politics,48 and advocating for visibility or inclusion are political tasks.49 In the words of Yates McKee, “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”50 Social practice is able to recognize the marginalization of certain publics and challenge the normative hierarchies that maintain such exclusions and inclusions.51 The practice is, in part, born out of an awareness of and involvement in local politics.52 Successful advocacy cannot take place without a deep understanding of a particular community and environment: which bodies hold power, what work is in progress, what the needs of the community are, and who is being oppressed or excluded.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire shared his theory on the relationships between the marginalized and the powerful in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which he based upon his own teaching experience working with illiterate adults. His approach defines the relationship between teacher and student as reciprocal rather than hierarchical; one in which both individuals learn from and teach one another to create dialogue across social and political boundaries. Freire links the roots of oppression and exclusion not only to illiteracy and poverty, but to the “culture of silence” that is prevalent among the excluded.53 Tom Finkelpearl writes, “Freire’s work is hopeful because it offers us not a goal but a process, and it is achievable. We can initiate a dialogue, even if we cannot immediately dismantle the oppressive institutions that

51 Gregory Sholette, Dark matter: art and politics in the age of enterprise culture, 4.
53 Tom Finkelpearl, ed., What we Made: conversations on art and social cooperation, 277.
constitute contemporary politics.” In other words, Freire’s Pedagogy offers us a model for advocacy within political and social systems that lack inclusivity. This model puts great emphasis upon dialogue that amplifies the voices of the oppressed, rather than the visible or powerful speaking for the other. Instances of discursive violence are typically the result of the latter. Freire believed that “the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement.” The pedagogy of Freire therefore shows that the goal of bringing about social and political change - which lies at the core of socially engaged art – must be grounded in reciprocal dialogue between both the included and excluded in order to effectively advocate for change within existing social and political systems.

There are tremendous benefits to intentionally inclusive practices within socially engaged art: they can shift the canon of art history away from exclusivity, offer alternative economic models, and initiate change within our social and political systems. However, some artists prefer to achieve the above aims through antagonistic practices that deliberately exclude certain publics or deconstruct social relationships in order to challenge a system or norm. The aim of antagonistic practice is rarely total isolation – rather, it focuses conversation and action around a particular issue. Helguera makes a crucial point about antagonistic practice: “all art seeking to advance the dialogue on an issue features a degree of disagreement or a critical stance. It is wrong, therefore, to create a division between controversial or confrontational works and non-confrontational ones. Antagonism is not a genre but rather a quality of art-making.”

At the core of antagonistic practice is a critique of the assumed matching between social roles and individuals. One of the most consistently antagonistic artists is Santiago Sierra, who focuses on the politics of accessibility through labor and socio-economic status. His project for the Spanish Pavilion of the 2003 Venice Biennale, titled Wall Enclosing a Space, demonstrates his ongoing practice of obstruction and concealment. Covering the “España” sign with a black plastic bag and the main

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54 Tom Finkelpearl, ed., What we Made: conversations on art and social cooperation, 284.
58 Pablo Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2012), 64.
59 Pablo Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, 59.
entrance with cinderblocks, Sierra only allowed entry to those who came through the back door and showed a Spanish passport.\textsuperscript{61} The interior space was occupied by only a few remnants of the previous year’s installation. Sierra stated, “the piece was not the empty space but rather the situation.”\textsuperscript{62} By inverting the subject-position of the viewer, Sierra brings each individual face to face with nation imposed boundaries that formalize existing political and physical tensions.\textsuperscript{63} The construction of a wall as a means of creating a physical boundary between two identities, between the included and the excluded, has renewed potency in the era of the Trump administration. Sierra’s work and the proposed wall along the Mexico and United States border are both inherently anti-social and antagonistic in their nature. Like the artist’s broader body of work, \textit{Wall Enclosing a Space} exposes “the reductive operations of social inequity by mimicking their forms.”\textsuperscript{64} The many protests and calls to solidarity against Trump’s wall over the past six months also reflect the need for inclusivity. Sierra’s work demonstrates the influence antagonistic practice can have on issues of inclusivity and identity.

To create meaningful work within any given community and environment, artists and producers must understand who is and is not included in the publics with which they engage. Despite the collaborative practices characteristic of many socially engaged art projects, intentionality is crucial in the creation of truly inclusive works. Intentional inclusivity enables artists and producers to run against the historical grain of exclusivity perpetuated in not only the art world, but many of our existing economic, social, and political systems. Antagonistic practice offers an alternative approach that can initiate dialogue leading to advocacy.

\textsuperscript{62} Teresa Margolles, “Santiago Sierra.”
Diversity

An inclusive approach to the many identities within the public leads us to diversity. In recent years, diversity has become somewhat of a buzzword in discussions of inclusion in the classroom, workplace, and wider community. Within the context of socially engaged art, diversity is important for several reasons. Firstly, there is the need to understand the relationship between the many identities that make up a single individual, which I will explore through the theory of intersectionality. Secondly, we must move beyond interpretations of diversity that rely solely upon external, visible markers. While there is good reason that recent conversation has largely focused upon diversity within specific identities such as race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, social practice must also seek diversity within identities relating to beliefs, knowledge, and resources.

Since the identity of an individual is not singular, social patterns are formed by the interactions between multiple identities. French critic and writer Nicholas Bourriaud states, “today, after two centuries of struggle for singularity and against group impulses . . . we must [reintroduce] the idea of plurality.”65 Plurality lies at the core of intersectionality, a theory and term developed by critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw.66 The theory takes an analytical approach to the meaning and consequences of multiple identities, such as race and gender, for an individual or population. Intersectionality acknowledges that any one category derives its meaning from others, thus multiple categories must be considered in combination with one another.67 Crenshaw speaks of the danger of a “single-axis analysis”, in which identities are understood as independent of one another. This approach distorts the experience of many groups, and is particularly harmful for minority groups.68 From the lens of her own intersectional position as a Black woman, Crenshaw discusses the importance of understanding intersectionality in the context of discrimination – precisely what we aim to overcome in seeking both inclusivity and diversity. She writes,

“discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.”

For artists and producers, intersectionality offers an excellent framework for seeking a public that is diverse not in terms of external markers, but in terms of experience. To create projects that take an intersectional approach is to consider the ways in which the multiple identities of an individual affect the way that they engage with a work, and create pathways for engagement that align with the intended public.

The concepts of both intersectionality and diversity are complex and difficult to define due to their inexhaustible nature. There will never be a point at which a project reaches “maximum diversity”, nor should this be the aim. Visual tools such as the diagrams below can help to establish a firmer understanding of these concepts. I struggled to identify a clear and concise way to depict diversity, and the images included reflect the still evolving process of my own understanding. In the context of this work, I have chosen to focus on the specific categories from the earlier identity section because of their immediate relevance to socially engaged art. However, the last diagram begins to acknowledge that there are additional identities to think about.

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such as political affinity or ability/disability that should also be considered by artists and producers through a similar framework.

The first diagram illustrates the multiple identities that overlap to form the individual: Race/ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, religion, gender/sexuality, and education level. The larger external circles represent an individual’s relationship to their community, and the frequency of engagement with art, as illustrated by the diagram figures one and two at the beginning in the Identity section of chapter one. The first illustration is crowded and difficult to read, and also depicts the six general categories as roughly proportionate to one another, which suggests they are of equal importance to the individual. This is inaccurate since the social systems that define these identities create normative hierarchies within each, leading certain identities to be of greater or lesser relevance to a person. For example, someone who is agnostic may consider religion to play a much smaller part in their identity than a devout Buddhist. Similarly, a cisgender/heterosexual male may see their gender as a less significant part of their identity than a transgender female, because of the privilege that deems their identity the “norm.” The second diagram is the product of researching existing approaches to visualizing diversity. I divided identity categories into three sections – internal categories individuals may view as being inherent within themselves; external – those that a person can influence to some extent; and social practice – the identities specific to this discussion of socially engaged art. These diagrams aim to help artists visualize what an intersectional, diversity-focused approach towards identity and inclusion of the public looks like in social practice. It is important to note that none of these categories are fixed – even those categorized as ‘internal’ change depending on perspective. For example, an individual who ethnically identifies as Latino in the United States may find others identify them as white when in Latin America. Another person may view their own disability very differently than an outsider. An intersectional approach is therefore a reminder that we must seek personal perspectives, rather than make assumptions regarding identity.

With these images as a reference point, let us return to Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality versus single-axis analysis. A single-axis analysis considers diversity to be a linear concept that is explored within one identity at a time. Intersectionality points to the inaccuracy of a linear approach, and its tendency to further support the marginalization of some identities. Unfortunately, it is the single-axis approach to diversity that remains most prevalent in many fields, including museums and cultural institutions. Museum staff demographics are one example of the misleading representation of diversity that a single-axis analysis can create. An initial glance at the results of a survey sent to over 800 museums throughout the
United States studying the race and ethnicity of art museum staff may suggest that museum staff are relatively diverse overall. Using US Census categories, 72% of museum staff identified as White Non-Hispanic, while 28% identified as minority populations; relatively representative of the US population as a whole, which is 62% Non-Hispanic White, and 38% historically underrepresented minorities. However, when concentrating on upper level jobs – curators, conservators, educators and leadership – the ethnic diversity plummets. 84% of such positions are made up of White Non-Hispanic individuals. Only 6% of these position holders identify as Asian, 4% as Black, 3% as White Hispanic, and 3% as two or more races. In contrast, we find that individuals who identify with historically underrepresented minority groups are overrepresented and concentrated within facilities and security positions.

These results reflect the need for precision, transparency and intersectionality in representations of “diversity.” The report makes little attempt to consider the overlap between ethnicity, education level and socio-economic status, three identities that must be considered in combination, and does not acknowledge larger trends of social stratification and opportunity. Furthermore, the report tends to divide between white and “historically underrepresented minorities”. Such terminology can be interpreted as “white” and “other”, merging distinct and separate identities with individual characteristics that ought to be recognized when discussing diversity. Sholette points out that minority groups typically have “nothing so much in common as a mutual superfluousness to the mainstream public sphere: its electoral process, its history, but also its museums, cultural institutions, and official education curricula.” Understanding the individual characteristics and differences of each group is a key part of both finding common ground and overcoming their marginalization.

Fred Wilson’s work challenges the single-axis approach to diversity within the museum. Guarded View directly refers to the issue of the stratification of ethnicity within museum staff demographics. The work is made up of four black mannequins in museum security uniforms, and calls attention to the invisible position that many

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people of color play in museums. Wilson said, "Many of the museums on the East Coast pride themselves, and get...funds...for having such large minority employment. But actually, all the employment is in the guards, and the fact that they're in that level of the museum and not on the upper [management and governance] levels, affects the kind of artwork that's displayed and the kind of visitor that comes through the door." Wilson proved the potency of Guarded View during a later performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art. After being invited to the museum to give a tour to the staff and docents, Wilson greeted the staff at the entrance, then departed with plans to reconvene in the museum. He then changed into a guard's uniform and positioned himself in the room in which the team was waiting. From this position, he watched the docents whom he had met minutes earlier search the room looking for him, oblivious to the fact that he was, in fact, right in front of them. Upon revealing himself to the staff, Wilson's point was resoundingly clear: many museums currently approach diversity with blinders on, rendering many of their employees invisible, even to their fellow staff members. Furthermore, the hierarchical structures of museums can polarize staff to a point at which they are almost invisible to one another. Both Wilson's work and the data collected in the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Demographic Survey point to the difficult yet crucial nature of asking critical questions regarding diversity. These include: what identities are we referring to when we discuss diversity? How are these identities different from one another, and how are they similar? What other identities and categories intersect and affect these? What role do social systems of hierarchy or stratification play? There is a tendency to use diversity as an umbrella term to hide more nuanced problems, as staff demographics reflect. However, specificity is crucial in order to overcome the marginalization that

Fig. 12: A security guard standing next to Fred Wilson’s Guarded View at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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76 Lisa Corrin, “Mining the Museum” in Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts, 336.
ambiguity supports.

Because “maximum diversity” is a falsehood, a project can never be representational of the entire public. The goal is rather to intentionally build knowledge around the ways in which particular members of the public chosen by the artist interact, live, and think. From this position, artists and producers can create projects that allow individuals to share their experiences with others who may or may not share their identity. Creating space for diversity is particularly important in relation to polarization. Now, it is easier than ever before to choose an educational institution, news source, social circle, place of residence, workplace or type of entertainment that subscribes to an individual’s own views. There is an increasing ability to tune out people and beliefs that differ from our own. Polarization is dangerous: it leads to social disintegration and large portions of society losing the ability to see or accept views outside of their own. Furthermore, polarization is ruled by the same social, political and economic systems that restrict diversity. Some people have the autonomy to choose the options that reflect their individual identities, while others remain powerless and become polarized and thus further marginalized without choice.

*In Search of the Truth (The Truth Booth)* is one example of a project that intentionally seeks intersectionality and diversity while working against polarization. Organized by four artists that form the Cause Collective; Ryan Alexiev, Jim Ricks, Will Sylvester and Hank Willis Thomas, the project consists of a 14-foot inflatable sculpture in the shape of a speech bubble, which forms the “truth booth.” The project has thus far traveled throughout Afghanistan, Ireland and the United States, to install the booth in public spaces where individuals are free to enter the bubble and record a two-minute video beginning with the

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prompt, “The truth is...” The booth has now collected thousands of videos, which the Cause Collective have begun to share through their website and YouTube channel, allowing viewers to explore the truths told. The collective also plans to create a video installation to exhibit the project in museums, galleries, and other public settings. This project is also an excellent example of auto-ethnography, which I will return to in the later section on documentation. *In Search of the Truth* demonstrates the importance of true diversity. The intimate environment of the booth creates a safe space that has led many individuals to record profoundly personal interactions that deal with a plethora of topics. These truths reference all the identities I have outlined: race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, age, education level, religion, and socio-economic status. Sharing these truths with a large and public secondary audience allows individuals all over the world to engage with experiences from far beyond their own identity. The videos connect on a human-to-human level, which is arguable the most effective way to overcome polarization. Grant Kester writes, “A properly enlightened public functions as the court of appeal within which social conflict can be resolved and reconciled.” It is projects such as *In Search of the Truth* that offer such diversity of perspective that can work to overcome existing social systems of marginalization. Social practice must therefore seek diversity through regular and critical assessments of who is present and absent within our views of diversity, and through an intersectional approach to understanding social patterns.

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79 Katherine Brooks, “Inflatable ‘truth booth’ will let Americans vent about this crazy election.”

2. The Building Blocks of Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art differs from its art historical ancestors in that it is not a specific movement or style, but rather a way of defining a new social order: one shaped by collectivity rather than hierarchy. The thousands of existing projects across the world have taken vastly different approaches to their combination of publics, methodologies, aesthetics and environments. Social practice projects share an aesthetic of human interaction and development. The end products of such works are not commodities, but a process of constructive social change. The following section explores the foundational elements of socially engaged art, which identify as consistently relevant to a diverse range of works. For an artist or producer to create a successful social practice work, they must consider the unique context in which they are working, and identify specific characteristics of the community and environment. They must also understand the relationship between aesthetic and methodology to create harmony between the two in a way that enhances both the social action of the work, and its personal impact on the individuals it engages. The timeline of a project must align with a work’s purpose: a quick-impact ephemeral work, or the regularity of a longitudinal work. Finally, artists and producers must consider the vital role that documentation plays in the development of social practice, and find the methods of collecting information that best suit their work.

The Specificity of the Community + Environment

Since enacting social and political change is one of the primary goals of socially engaged art, artists and producers aim to affect their community and environment in a real, rather than symbolic, way. Every project must therefore be tailored to the community - or public - it wishes to engage and the environment in which it will take

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82 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship (New York: Verso Books), 12.
place. The idea that projects develop first and audiences come second is a common misconception in artistic practice. On the contrary, it is impossible to create a project founded upon engagement and collaboration without first making assumptions as to who will be involved. Therefore, whom the artist or producer wishes to engage and where they wish to engage are cornerstones of socially engaged art.

It is essential to recognize that the chosen environment will, in part, determine which publics engage with a project. Environment exists on two primary levels: the broader community, city, or region; and the immediate space being occupied – a street, museum, studio, or other area. To understand their community, artists and producers must develop relationships with individuals that intersect a wide range of the identity groups previously discussed. When dealing specifically with the environment, it is important to gather knowledge from those who differ in their relationship to the community and its historical context. This includes longtime residents as well as new arrivals; impermanent settlers as well as generational families. Those who have lived in the community for decades will have a greater familiarity with the changes and consistencies of the environment, and can likely offer historical knowledge that will be invaluable during the planning of a new project. Likewise, visitors or recent arrivals may offer a fresh perspective on strengths and weaknesses that have become accepted norms for longtime residents. Understanding the broader environment requires artists and producers to ask: what are the traditions and history that define this place? What work has preceded ours, and what is currently happening? How do we communicate within this space – are there technological, cultural, or language barriers to consider?

The immediate space of a project is situated within the broader environment and can be indoors or outdoors; public or private. This space is often defined by external factors, that the artist does not have complete control over, such as cost and availability. At this level, artists and producers must answer more specific questions: how do people access this space, and who might have difficulty doing so? How is this space typically used - is it a gathering space or a transitory space? Who does or does not feel welcome there? The magnitude of these open questions is a reminder of the time required to produce social practice work. One of the most common characteristics of unsuccessful projects is an unrealistic expectation of process and production time. While the answers to these questions will certainly become more nuanced over the course of a project, artists and producers have a responsibility to

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the community to invest time in building a substantial preliminary knowledge as a foundation for their work.

Artists and producers must also possess high levels of self and social awareness to understand their position in any community and environment. Due to the collaborative nature of socially engaged art, partnerships are a vital part of any project. An artist who has worked in a specific community for an extended period therefore possesses valuable social capital in the form of pre-existing relationships and an established reputation. When the artist is already known and trusted, they can engage in dialogue and action more efficiently as a result of having established much of the foundation for their work. Existing experience in a community is advantageous in terms of both relationships and knowledge of the public. Resident artists and producers typically have a more complex understanding of the specific identities present in their own community, and the strengths and weaknesses surrounding inclusivity and diversity. Pablo Helguera likens socially engaged art projects to exotic fruit, stating that both “usually travel poorly when “exported” to other locations to be replicated.” The community and environment are not merely external influencers on a specific project – they are inherent parts. Taken away, or replaced with others, the specific project cannot be expected to result in the same outcomes.

While resident artists and producers present unique assets to a community and environment, outside artists can also succeed in creating socially engaged works that connect to a specific place in a meaningful way. New York-based artist Paul Chan and his production of *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* is one such example. Chan first arrived in New Orleans in November 2006, a little more than a year after Hurricane Katrina. He was struck by the bleakness that characterized the Lower Ninth Ward, and saw “a terrible symmetry between the reality of New Orleans post-Katrina and the essence of this play, which expresses in stark eloquence the cruel and funny things people do waiting for food, for

![Fig. 14 A full audience watching a performance of Paul Chan's Waiting for Godot in New Orleans in the Lower Ninth Ward](image-url)
tomorrow.” His decision to situate *Waiting for Godot* in the specific environment of New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward was therefore not simply a matter of finding available space, but the recognition that allowing Godot and New Orleans to be viewed as one and the same could resonate deeply with the community’s residents. The play is based upon the two protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting at a crossroads for Godot, who never arrives. The two repeat the words ‘nothing to be done’ consistently – a phrase that was all too familiar to residents in near unlivable conditions, still waiting for support in the aftermath of Katrina. However, Chan was rightly wary of being perceived as creating spectacle out of disaster as a means of personal promotion, and sought to work closely with the community to understand its needs and context. Upon initial arrival, Chan stated, “they [the people of New Orleans] didn’t want art, but concrete help.” He quickly began teaching unpaid at New Orleans University and Xavier University, where the art departments were suffering from major staffing shortages. Through this work as faculty, he built relationships and established a known and trusted position in the community that enabled him to later execute the project. Students acted as volunteers, and most of the cast were local residents. Theatrical workshops involving the two universities were organized for the months preceding and following the performances. Chan also organized community meetings and potluck dinners as a means of soliciting feedback throughout the project. The artist had arrived in New Orleans with a specific project and methodology, only to find the community wanted support to sustain existing projects and institutions, rather than the addition of something new by an outsider. The artist took the advice he received to heart: “If you want to do this, you gotta spend the dime, and you gotta spend the time.” To ensure the project had lasting benefits to the community and environment, Chan worked with Creative Time to establish a ‘shadow fund’, which matched the costs of staging the performance to make grants available to organizations working on rebuilding efforts in the city.

Chan’s work touches on the importance of true collectivity in socially engaged art. When artists and producers engage with their community and environment, they

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create active environments that encourage others to do the same. The immersive and experiential nature of collectivity reject passivity, which has become an increasingly common characteristic of our public spaces.\textsuperscript{96} It is not enough to assume that public space will produce social interaction – in fact, it is often in public space that the “alienating effects of spectacle” become most clear.\textsuperscript{97} Without intentional engagement, these places can turn into sites of communal isolation.\textsuperscript{98} Collective engagement in these settings is not characterized by one or two figures making executive decisions, but by acting alongside community members in a role that is more ally than director. When outsiders bring a new approach without understanding the context in which they enter, their practice can take on a neo-colonial quality, as opposed to focusing upon empowerment. The active involvement of individuals in work that affects their community and environment ultimately ensures its longevity. Saul Alinsky states,

“We learn, when we respect the dignity of the people, that they cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems. Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving… and who are not helpless [or] passive.”\textsuperscript{99}

Rick Lowe is an artist who seeks to mobilize and empower community members towards the betterment of their own community. His urban regeneration project \textit{Row Houses} is located in the Third Ward of Houston, Texas - a historically black neighborhood which was suffering from high poverty rates and a ”brain drain.”\textsuperscript{100} The artist describes the project as engaging with two primary communities: the immediate community of those already living in the Third Ward, and an external community of people outside of the immediate area who he mobilized to contribute skills that were crucial for the project’s execution. Before \textit{Row Houses} began, Lowe was producing billboard-scale paintings and sculptures addressing social issues in his community. One day a student told him that while the work “reflected what was going on in his community, it wasn’t what the community needed. If I was

an artist, he said, why didn’t I come up with some kind of creative solution to issues instead of just telling people like him what they already knew. That was the defining moment that pushed me out of the studio.”¹⁰¹ Lowe’s work engaged with social issues within the immediate environment of his studio rather than the environments directly affected by these social issues. *Row Houses* applied his practice directly to a community, relying upon volunteers, artists, church groups, lawyers, and architects, among many others, to collectively work towards the revitalization of the neighborhood. *Row Houses* now encompasses affordable housing, gallery spaces, classrooms, and community meeting spaces, and housing for young mothers. These are spaces that are characterized by human dialogue and interaction, collaborative practice, and which continue to create social change in their community: a strong example of socially engaged art. Both Paul Chan and Rick Lowe demonstrate the importance of understanding the specificity of a given community and environment. The artists sought to understand their communities, listened to what was needed, and then worked to produce collective action - bringing about meaningful social change.

**Aesthetic vs. Methodology**

For much of art history, a work’s aesthetic has been upheld as the primary measure of its quality. Research, production, and process have all taken a backseat to the ‘final product’ and its appearance. The 20th century broadened the public understanding of art to consider concept and process alongside aesthetic. Concept was first elevated to the same level, before exceeding aesthetic in some cases. The recognition that an idea

could be more important than its representation paved the way for a greater emphasis on the process of artmaking. By the end of the 20th century, the tables had turned to emphasize process over product: one of the key defining characteristics of socially engaged art. Process is defined by method; thus social practice producers and artists are often more concerned with the methodology rather than the aesthetic of a project. Many argue that social practice has created a new aesthetic of its own: an aesthetic of human interaction and development that is based not on spectatorship but on participation. Such an aesthetic is capable of capturing the diverse methods employed by socially engaged art, and encompasses not only traditional methods of painting, photography, architecture and performance, but also nontraditional forms borrowed from other frameworks, such as festivals, conferences, schools, and protests.

Before discussing the relationship between aesthetic and method, it is necessary to define each independent of the other. Aesthetics are typically hierarchical, highly subjective, and greatly determined by external influencers, such as the imagery of a given culture, or the relationship between appearance and market value. To escape these external influencers, aesthetics can also be defined in terms of “aesthesis,” an autonomous realm of experience and judgment that cannot be reduced to logic, reason or morality but is of great importance to humankind. Theorists such as Bishop see aesthetic as overriding morality, and urge artists to maintain their independence through the realm of aesthetic. According to Shannon Jackson, “To take an artistic stance on the social is to exercise the relative autonomy of the aesthetic domain, using that distance to defamiliarize normative categories and modes of perception.” It is important to note the distinction between personal autonomy and aesthetic autonomy. Much social practice work rejects the idea of personal autonomy in favor of a collective and collaborative method. However, de-autonomizing a work is not a de-aestheticization. “Rather, the de-autonomizing of the artistic event is itself an artful gesture, more and less self-consciously creating an intermediate form that subtly challenges the lines that would demarcate where an art object ends and the world begins.” Aesthetics therefore have the capacity to critique our beliefs and values by restructuring our perception of the world. Their application can achieve one of the core aims of socially engaged art: the definition of a

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104 Jacques Rancière referenced in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship*, by Claire Bishop, c. 1.
new social order characterized by engagement and participation.

Methodology in socially engaged art refers to the set of practices used throughout the process and production of a project. The method is no longer a means to an end, but an end within itself: the experience of creation and experimentation is a central element of social practice. While aesthetics reframe ideas and beliefs outside of the disciplines in which we have accepted them, methodology takes the frameworks of those disciplines to produce new aesthetics. Socially engaged art has embraced conferences, urban regeneration projects, pedagogical projects, and protests, which are all frameworks borrowed from other disciplines. Some social practice theorists warn against an overemphasis on methodology, which they see as blurring the lines between social work and socially engaged art. Bishop and Jackson argue that aesthetic autonomy must always overrule the social mission in order to avoid neutralizing a work’s ability to disrupt. In other words, an overemphasis on the method as a behavioral rather than artistic process can negate the possibility of antagonism. Social work is value-based, and aims for the betterment of humanity through mechanisms of support, such as social justice and human relationships. “An artist, in contrast, may subscribe to the same values but make work that ironizes, problematizes, and even enhances tensions around those subjects, in order to provoke reflection.” However, Bishop’s insistence that aesthetic autonomy must come before social mission seems to presume that acting according to a moral and social mission often conflicts with artistic freedom. I would argue that Theaster Gates, Paul Chan, Kara Walker, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles all maintain artistic freedom within works that focus upon a moral outcome. However, each gives aesthetic and method different weights within their work: while Gates and Ukeles emphasize method, Walker and Chan maintain a strong aesthetic component.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ Sanitation Project is one example of both the artist’s emphasis on methodology, and her rejection of traditional aesthetic values. Beginning in 1977, Ukeles spent more than 36 years working as the unofficial, unpaid artist in residence at the New York Department of Sanitation. Throughout her time with the Department, Ukeles met with thousands of sanitation workers to not only to acknowledge their work, but also to document and share it through exhibitions and performance pieces. Ukeles’s interest in maintenance work was realized during

motherhood, when she experienced firsthand the difficulties of combining her ambitions as an artist with raising a child. She said,

“Nothing educated me for how to bring a wholeness to taking care not only creating life, but maintaining life. The creating, the originating, that’s the easy part...[But] I had no model, none, in my entire education to deal with repetitiveness, continuity... I was doing work that’s so common; yet there was no cultural language for this work. People would ask: “Do you do anything?” I had never worked so hard in my whole life as when I had a little baby. Ever... But there were no words in the culture that gave value to the work I was doing.”  

Both parenthood and sanitation subscribe to the specific methods of maintenance work; repetitive and invisible actions that focus upon preservation and sustenance. In 1969, Ukeles published *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, which explored the essential role of maintenance hidden from Western society. The invisibility of maintenance work had previously rendered it irrelevant to aesthetics. The first official work that Ukeles undertook at the Department of Sanitation was *Touch Sanitation*, a performance work that saw her meet with all 8,500 sanitation workers across the 59 community districts of New York City over an 11-month period. She shook hands with each member and repeated the words, “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.”  

Documenting and mapping the stories of individual workers culminated in the *Touch Sanitation Show*, which included exhibitions and performances at different locations across the city.

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114 Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*, 296.
Ukeles realized that Sanitation was not understood as being included in the public notion of culture, despite its omnipresence in the city. Her work aimed to engage not only people and materials, but also the bureaucracies that ensure the invisibility. The aesthetic presentation of her work thus had a dual effect: it uplifted maintenance work through its representation in sanctioned “cultural” spaces such as galleries and museums, while expanding the very idea of which spaces are considered “cultural”, creative or artistic. By undertaking maintenance and sanitation work herself and working in the Department for over three decades, Ukeles adopted a methodology of repetition, labor, dialogue and documentation to redefine a new social order that recognized the significance of sanitation for the survival of the city. The value that she recognized in the invisible labor being performed by thousands is characteristic of the aesthetic of human interaction and development created through social practice.

While aesthetics and methodology can have conflicting interests, there are important reasons why artists and producers should seek to integrate the two. Methodology will engage the public, but aesthetics will play a large role in determining how a project is interpreted. “[With] something like social justice art education, the priority is the people, the impact, and the potential for community change. But you can’t separate out the aesthetic value of the artwork form that, because... if you make bad art, it’s not going to have any impact. So you still need to have aesthetically and/or conceptually engaging work.” Ultimately, the two can work together to enhance each other: the aesthetic value of a project can increase its social function, while the method can heighten the aesthetic experience. The relationship between aesthetic and method also depends greatly upon the intended community and environment of a work. Those who have a desire to be recognized within the traditional art world must acknowledge the dominant position still held by aesthetics. This reality is not necessarily a limitation, if artists choose to see aesthetics as a necessary part of both interacting with the art world and increasing the social function and stretch of a given project. Above all, socially engaged art must continue to place aesthetics within the social context of a specific community and environment to encourage direct human interaction and engagement, rather than spectatorship.

115 Tom Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art, 315.
117 Tom Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art, 313.
In some cases, the community and environment seek works that create aesthetic change. The Dutch duo, Dre Urhahn and Jeroen Koolhas, known as Haas & Hahn, are known for their monumental murals works, which aim to revitalize urban areas. Much of their work has been carried out in Brazil, specifically within the Vila Cruzeiro and Santa Marta neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. Working from a small grant secured in the Netherlands, the two began working in 2007 with local teenagers from Vila Cruzeiro, to complete their first mural depicting a boy flying a kite. The imagery was intentionally chosen to create an aesthetic that diverged from the violence and exclusion that many associated with life in the slums. The mural was warmly received and quickly became a point of pride in the favela community, particularly among those who had contributed to its creation. In 2009 they returned to Vila Cruzeiro, this time painting a large draining ditch and stairs to look like a river, significantly increasing the scale of their work. Again, they partnered with local youth and teenagers, this time working over a period of 12 months to train participants before preparing and painting the area. Haas & Hahn’s largest project in Brazil to date is located in the Santa Marta favela, and encompassed over 34 houses and 700 square meters of mural. Working with an ambitious timeframe of one month, they again trained local youth to paint, and employed 25 residents to assist in its completion.

Each of the murals aims to give the neighborhood a renewed aesthetic that challenges the public perception of desirable or undesirable areas. Haas & Hahn are quick to recognize that the murals do not claim to solve issues of poverty, crime, or unemployment that remain rife in these communities. “Wages haven’t risen and the number of jobs hasn’t risen, but the attitude has risen, ever so slightly. People take a

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bit more pride and care in their street. It’s not just that it looks nicer, it’s also that they finally feel some attention has been given to their neighborhood,” Urhahn says.122 While the aesthetic of these works is undeniably impactful, the method used by the duo is also important. The pair approach social change from the ground up, and intentionally work with the residents of any given community to empower them to create their own social change. The aesthetic purpose of the murals is therefore not to camouflage, but rather to create a positive social effect on the surrounding community.123 While not all muralism or street art is socially engaged art, the two mediums have been largely left out of discussions of social practice. Projects such as Haas & Hahn’s demonstrate that muralism can put an emphasis on process (as well as finished product), favors a collaborative method based around dialogue and human interaction, and is able to create social and political change: the characteristics of socially engaged art.

**Longevity vs. Ephemeralty**

The intended timeline of a project greatly influences its process. Length determines the type of social and/or political change the artist aims to achieve, the types of dialogue created, and the ways in which an individual can engage with a work. The length of a project is also extremely situational. Some projects aim to have an immediate impact, while others prefer to build relationships that foster change over an extended period. Ephemeral projects are typically characterized by temporary gatherings and occupation of space. They create situations in which social interactions are momentary and not expected to become long-lasting. The immediate impact of ephemeral works often means they take place around a particular issue or concept. Protests, festivals, conferences, or pop-up performances have all been used as mediums for ephemeral social practice work. Longitudinal projects, on the other hand, are those built upon regular and reoccurring social interactions and dialogue, organized with the intention to be sustained over a longer period. They typically occupy the same space, and are characterized by deeper partnerships and relationships that are gradually built over the course of the work’s existence. These characteristics often mean long-term projects incorporate a pedagogical element in their work due to the sustained relationships and regularity. Classes, urban regeneration work, schools, or institutional partnerships are all examples of longitudinal projects.

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The timeline of a work can also be determined by external factors, such as support and funding. While a long-term project does not necessarily require more funding than an ephemeral work, it does require artists and producers to carefully plan the work's sustainability and establish a more robust support network. For those pursuing long-term works, institutional partnerships are likely not only necessary, but extremely beneficial. Often, it is the visibility and established position of institutions that privileges longevity.124 Partnering with a known and recognized museum or organization can thus assure the ongoing support that long-term works require.

Another external influencer is the outcome of a work. One artist may create a work for its immediate response to a specific moment. If the impact is greater than anticipated, the artist or producer may decide to continue the project over a longer term. On the other hand, an artist or producer may create a work with long-term intentions that ends quickly, due to situational changes or a misinformed understanding of the community and environment. This fluidity demonstrates that timeline is a spectrum: many projects fall somewhere between ephemeral and long-term, and others move freely between the two. However, to differentiate between the two, it is helpful to return to the core of socially engaged art: social interaction and dialogue.125 I will therefore define the length of a project in terms of the period during which engagement—social interaction and dialogue—are maintained.

Kara Walker’s A Subtlety was an intentionally ephemeral work, due to its specific environment and fixed timeline. The project was commissioned by Creative Time and opened to the public for nine weekends over the course of summer 2014.126 Walker’s monumental, sugarcoated sculpture in the form of a sphinxlike woman was designed specifically for the historic Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, NY. This environment was particularly salient for two reasons: firstly, Walker’s work investigates the effects and repercussions of slavery and discrimination on black culture throughout American history. Throughout the process of creating A Subtlety, the artist closely researched the sugar trade’s heavy reliance upon slavery, which spans more than a thousand years. Not only was the space in which she worked a contributor to the trade, it was an epicenter. By 1870, the Brooklyn Domino Sugar refinery was

responsible for over half of the sugar production in the United States. In keeping with her larger body of work, Walker’s sculpture takes imagery and silhouettes historically used to stereotype black culture – specifically black women in this case – and reframes the imagery within the particular context of the factory environment to create a space for dialogue about the relationships between the slave trade, the sugar trade, race, systems of consumption, and sexuality.

The second reason the refinery environment was of specific importance was its limited life span. From the beginning of the work, Walker and Creative Time were aware that the building was due to be demolished beginning October 2014 to make way for a new megaproject Domino is pursuing. The site has been redesigned to encompass office buildings, a waterfront park, and residential apartments on the Williamsburg site. A Subtlety was therefore never intended to last; the project was ephemeral from its inception. This situation allowed Walker’s work to have a unique effect on the public. Not only was she able to access a space to create a monumental work (no easy feat in New York), she also had the opportunity to make a lasting impact on public memory by drawing attention to the factory’s history and reframing sugar in relation to race and consumption. For the vast majority of visitors, A Subtlety was the last context in which they will have seen the factory, which further enhances the impact of Walker’s work. During the final stages of the project, multiple people voiced hopes that the sculpture’s construction might prevent demolition and have the factory returned to the city to further develop the collectivity fostered by A Subtlety. However, this was never Walker’s intention - for her, regardless of what happens to the building or the sculpture, "the feeling of the presence of this piece and

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127 Nato Thompson, “Curatorial Statement.”
the feeling that we all came together around it exists.” While the form of *A Subtlety* may have been ephemeral, the impact and presence of the piece have a longitudinal character.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lie projects in which the artist’s work continues over an extended period of time. One such project is Tania Bruguera’s *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, a school for artistic practice that operated from 2002-2009 in Havana, Cuba. Bruguera herself labels the work longitudinal, and defines her method as one that “tries to fall within social dynamics and, therefore, makes use of social tempo for production and for the implementation of the project.” The school was open to all participants, and consisted of a two year curriculum in which the groups would investigate ‘behavioral art’, and art as an instrument for change in the surrounding sociopolitical environment of Cuba. The school aimed to make up for an absence of discussion spaces on the role of art in contemporary Cuban society, and the political discourse that stems from art. Both members and guest professors came from a broad range of fields – Bruguera listed lawyers, architects, visual artists, art dealers, curators, writers, scientists, dancers, former convicts, theater directors, scriptwriters, actors, anthropologists, mathematicians among the workshop leaders. All workshops and activities were open to the public and free of charge.

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Bruguera’s desired outcomes for the project were “the production of a new generation of socially and politically engaged artists in Cuba, but also the exposure of visiting lecturers to new ways of thinking about teaching in context.” These goals were critiqued by social practice theorist Claire Bishop as too longitudinal and unrepresentable. Bishop argues, “For this to be a work of art, you have to finish it. It can’t be ongoing.” Bishop’s critique points to an issue frequently faced by longitudinal projects: how do we define “finished”? Social practice rarely follows a linear evolution: a project may be revived at a later time, or recreated in a new environment. It is never easy to define a clear end point in human relationships and interactions - the very essence of socially engaged art. The expectation that long-term projects should be complete before they are considered social practice is therefore not only unrealistic, but also a disservice to the project. Artists and participants need critical feedback during the process of the work, not afterwards. The process-focused approach of socially engaged art also means there is often no concrete end product. While a product has a point of completion, a process can be ongoing. In-process evaluation can be conducted by identifying the tangible outcomes and progress toward overarching goals. In the case of Bruguera’s work, Catedra Arte de Conducta laid the foundation for an archive of international contemporary art in Cuba, and initiated several international exchanges and residencies between schools and artists. While the archive is one step towards supporting a new generation of socially and politically engaged artists in Cuba, the international residencies and exchanges can expose others to new ways of thinking about teaching. These steps therefore provide representable evidence of outcome fulfillment during the process of a longitudinal work.

The question of an end point is further complicated by projects that fall near the center of the spectrum with both ephemeral and longitudinal characteristics. An annual weekend conference or festival, for example, is ephemeral in its temporary occupation of space, vast turnover of participants, and the short period of social engagement. However, the annual reoccurrence and a large base of returning participants are longitudinal. Timeline also depends on perspective: for participants, each festival is likely viewed as an independent and ephemeral event of its own. Yet for the artists and producers, each event carries on from the preceding year, and the

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133 Tania Bruguera, “Catedra Arte de Conducta.”
135 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship, c. 9.
production process takes place over an extended period that is anything but ephemeral. Documentation also blurs project timelines. Today, almost every socially engaged art work will be documented in some form: by artists, participants, passersby, the media, or most commonly a combination of all of the above. Documentation immediately increases the lifespan and reach of a project. New forms of communication offered through social media allow individuals to spread information further than ever before, in a way that is near impossible to track. In this sense, true ephemerality is becoming more and more difficult to achieve in the digital age. The intended length of a project is therefore most representative of the social change it wishes to bring about, be that immediate or long lasting. However, hybrid ephemeral-longitudinal projects, partnerships, external circumstances, and documentation are all evidence of the fluidity and lack of clear endpoint that is characteristic of many social practice works.

**Documentation**

One area that requires further research and development is the documentation and representation of socially engaged art works. Because social practice emphasizes process over product, there is often no fixed representation of a work. Rather, a project’s aesthetic changes constantly throughout the process. The need to document a work thus arises from several places: documentation allows socially engaged works to reach a secondary audience, it generates an archive and history of the work, it functions as a form of publicity, and it can produce the evidence frequently demanded by institutions and funders in order to quantify and qualify a work.

The methodology used in social practice can render reaching a secondary audience more difficult than in other mediums. Socially engaged art is focused on human interaction and direct engagement, however most secondary audiences are characterized by spectatorship. These audiences often come from outside of the specific community and environment in which a project is situated. Their direct interaction is therefore not with the project itself, but with the documentation of the project. For ephemeral works, documentation can become both the record and a replacement of the work’s existence. To bridge the gap between interaction and spectatorship that is characteristic of the primary and secondary audiences, artists must take a multimedia approach to documentation. Offering a variety of mediums not only accounts for the different ways in which individual audiences will engage,

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but also allows for a variety of interpretations.\textsuperscript{139} An individual will engage differently with a written description than they will with a photograph, video, audio, or audience account. This approach has already dominated disciplines such as storytelling, journalism, and education. Major publication such as the New York Times produce essays that interweave written text with images, graphics, audio, and video that activate as the reader navigates through a work. This results in the secondary audience achieving a far more visceral interaction with a situation. Projects focused upon education accessibility from other disciplines have taken a similar approach. While they are not necessarily socially engaged art, programs such as Code Academy, Kahn Academy, and Duolingo are all successful models of interactive learning communities that engage a wider public than their competitors through various mediums of interaction. Pedro Lasch’s Massive Online Open Course, produced in partnership with Creative Time, is an example of a multimedia pedagogical approach directly from the field of socially engaged art. *The Art of the MOOC* incorporates lecture videos, interviews, and an open source Wiki for participants to both interact with and contribute to the project.\textsuperscript{140} However, the extensive intersection of socially engaged art and pedagogy calls artists and producers to consider the implications of sharing pedagogical work with a secondary audience, which can result in “spectating” education. Bishop writes, “very few of these [pedagogical social practice] projects manage to overcome the gap between a ‘first audience’ of student-participants and a ‘second audience’ of subsequent viewers. Perhaps this is because, ultimately, education has no spectators.”\textsuperscript{141} Pedagogical projects therefore pose the question of whether all projects should have secondary audiences, or whether, for some works, documentation acts solely as a record and archive.

While a multimedia approach to documentation can certainly increase the audience’s ability to interact with a work, artists and producers will find that certain forms of documentation are more compatible with their works than others. For example, audio recordings may document community meetings and participant accounts, while photos and videos may document the setting and interactions of the work. Documentation methods also depend upon the intended secondary audience. Can the content be shared online, or does the artist need to be present to explain their work and interact with the public? Is the documentation intended for open public access, or will it be stored within an institutional archive? Answering these questions can help

\textsuperscript{139} Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2012), 76.
\textsuperscript{141} Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso Books), c. 9.
artists to determine who they will hold responsible for documenting their work. For some artists, the documentation becomes a work of art in itself. Santiago Sierra, for example, chooses to reprocess the contemporary color photographs of his works as grainy, under-exposed black and white images that evoke the experimental art of the 1970s. For the secondary audience, Sierra's images deliberately blur the line between art, archive, and time period. Many of the artist's works deliberately decontextualize the participants to shed light on a social issue from a new perspective. In one sense, Sierra’s manipulation of the images accentuates the timeless quality of these issues: poverty, homelessness, immigration, ownership, and labor. Though the works are contemporary, the would have been equally relevant – and even more provocative – amongst the art of the 70s, or earlier periods.

However, there is no denying that self-documentation, especially documentation that is manipulated – is highly subjective. For documentation to be perceived as objective and verifiable, a more neutral individual than the artist must undertake the work. Because I am discussing documentation as a public and social practice, objectivity is important. Compiling comprehensive and objective documentation therefore calls for closer partnerships between artists, documentarians, and institutions. While there are clear benefits to artists and producers taking an active role in their own

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143 Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, 163.

144 Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 75.
documentation processes, the responsibility to document should not fall on the artist alone. Working with individuals trained to record and capture is a crucial part of ensuring the legacy of a work, reducing subjectivity, and reaching secondary audiences effectively. The act of documenting also calls for artists and producers to think critically about who is crafting the narratives, and how this work should be conducted. While professionals can create a collective image of a project, participants may possess more specific or personal knowledge from their own experience. One response to this issue is to undertake collective documentation through autoethnography. This method uses individual narratives to create a broader, collective representation of a project. The Cause Collective’s Truth Booth is an example of autoethnography, and I will introduce another, Portland Art Museum’s Object Stories, in the final section of this paper. These works share several key similarities. Firstly, both use video to document individual stories that connect on a human-to-human level. Secondly, they integrate documentation throughout the work’s process, which enhances its objectivity. Leaving documentation until the end of a project relies upon memory and introduces greater possibility of subjectivity. Lastly, the documentation itself constitutes the end product for both works: The Cause Collective have compiled the videos on their website and YouTube channel, while Portland Art Museum have installed iPads throughout the galleries for visitors to navigate and listen to the recorded stories.

It is also essential to acknowledge the specific challenges associated with documenting socially engaged art. The aesthetic of human interaction and development that characterizes social practice can change rapidly and involves many people simultaneously. Consequently, images frequently fail to do justice to the engagement and interactions that take place during a project. Since people themselves are the medium, documenters must develop methods for capturing both individual and group engagement. The art world offers few solutions to the question of how to document human interactions. Contemporary art favors minimalism, and frequently erases people or crowding from documentation. Photographs of gallery exhibitions are almost always void of visitors (who only surface in the ‘education’ section of documentation), while murals, sculptures and other public art works are typically depicted with no more than one or two passersby carefully positioned so as not to obscure the aesthetics of the work. People cannot be erased from social practice without sacrificing the core of the work. Therefore, advanced planning and

deliberate preparation is needed to ensure that documentation is integrated into the process as a whole in ways that will capture interactions on both an individual and public level.

For some socially engaged artists, documentation may be perceived as an intrusion on the ephemeral nature of their work, or simply a tedious task. Tino Seghal dislikes the distracting nature of documentation to such an extent that he has banned it from his performances and works. The artist’s vendetta against documentation encompasses photographs, videos, catalogues and wall text. The only way to see a Seghal work is therefore to visit a museum in which a performance is held, or read a report written post-participation. While his approach is undeniably exclusive, it does challenge participants to engage and be intentional in the creation of memories, if they wish to do so. According to one visitor, “whatever it is, it is art during which you can’t check your e-mail.”

However even if a secondary audience is not desired, I wish to argue that documentation is a necessary and essential element of socially engaged art. The practice of recording and preserving ensures that socially engaged works will be considered for incorporation into the canon of art history, and provides the information necessary for securing supporting and funding for future projects. As an emerging area of art, social practice is still developing as both a practice and a theory. Without documentation of practice, theory cannot grow, as this evidence plays an essential role in the transferal of knowledge. Furthermore, documentation plays a central role in the transferal of artistic labor from dark matter to light matter. If a project is not documented, it will easily fade into dark matter. Documentation thus forms a lifeline for social practice between the present and the future. Some artists choose to generate archives through their practice, creating credible and consistent sources. Projects such as Paul Ramirez Jonas’ Dictar y Recordar and Literaturas Gris record the knowledge and stories of a specific community and environment to enhance and affirm the public identity. Theaster Gates’ Dorchester Projects incorporate archives into urban regeneration, housing and opening collections of specific importance to the local community.

Socially engaged art projects are not exempt from the pressure of quantifying and qualifying their projects – whether artists like it or not. Such a pressure may be

149 Lauren Collins, “The Question Artist.”
particularly strong among projects operating as or being run by nonprofits, where so many independent groups compete against one another for the same, limited support. Consequently, I will discuss alternative systems of support in the next section.

Funders want to see evidence of the impact that such projects are having, and tangible outcomes. These measures cannot be qualified without documentation. Artists and producers must therefore develop methods of documentation that are as intentional and creative as the projects themselves. Documentation can “show the ways in which archival documents, information gathering…the invention of counter-archives and thus counter-narratives... inform and infuse the practices of contemporary artists.” The interdisciplinary nature of much social practice ensures it is not only the practices of contemporary artists, but also the practices of intersecting disciplines that are influenced by documentation. An archive ensures that the sharing of knowledge can be beneficial to a broad range of communities and environments far into the future.

3. Institutional Relations

Thus far I have concentrated on the connection between socially engaged art and a specific community and environment. However institutions, such as museums, foundations, non-profit organizations, and universities also play a major role in the relationship between a work and its community. Much social practice has taken place in the gap between the public and cultural institutions, which has been identified and acted upon as a new site for artistic intervention. Yet by working with these institutions, artists and producers can use valuable resources to magnify the outcome of their work. Many institutions constitute an extension of the public sphere, regardless of whether they are public or private in their ownership and operation. To create effective and strong collaborations, public and private institutions must be viewed as codependent. Creating partnerships between socially engaged art and contemporary institutions is thus able to widen the public sphere, and provide mutual benefits to the institution, the community, those engaged in the project, and the producers. A spectrum is one approach to understanding the relationship between socially engaged art and various institutions. At one end, we have institutions that seek ephemeral, work by work relationships, that are often closely tied to the market, such as private galleries and dealers. At the other end, we have institutions who seek longitudinal relationships that value research and experimentation over marketability – universities and educational institutions. Understanding different parts of this spectrum allows artists and producers to identify the most effective collaborations for their work, since each institution offers a different means of support.

Social Practice and the Market

I will begin at the market end of the spectrum. Whether acting independently from, or in collaboration with, institutions, socially engaged art can produce economic change. The expansion of the art market has ushered in a more diverse group of support mechanisms, which are able to turn greater volumes of creative dark matter into light

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The interdisciplinary nature of socially engaged art can also create new, alternative economies beyond the art world. A few rare artists also use the marketability of their art to become institutions in themselves: figures with a celebrity-like status who meet the high demand for their work only by employing a full team of workers in the creation process.

The gallery and museum sectors are key mechanisms of support in the art world, but remain strongly market driven in the work they show, buy, and collect. Many of the contemporary mediums that feature strongly in social practice - such as performance, video, installation, or activist work, are overlooked in favor of traditional mediums, such as painting and photography, which are more desirable for their collectability. The market value and a work’s collectability are deeply intertwined, which has posed a challenge to socially engaged artists seeking museum and gallery support since many works go against the capitalist market to challenge traditional collecting practices. The museum and gallery sector therefore determine the value of social practice works according to questions such as: can it be added to a collection, or is it ephemeral? Is it a unique piece, or is edition number flexible? Can we easily share this with a secondary audience, or is it an experience? As a result, many socially engaged artists and producers must look elsewhere for support. As the art market continues to expand and diversify in the 21st century, alternative supports have emerged, such as non-profit organizations and the ever-growing biennale network. Other partners include art fairs, or commissions and residencies associated with universities, foundations, and urban regeneration. Artists and producers have also formed their own means of support, as artist-run exhibition spaces, journals and blogs demonstrate.

One institution of support – or rather, a network of many institutions – is the art fair. Outside of private galleries and auction houses, art fairs proliferate as generators of both economic and social support for art. These fairs have become a kind of one-stop-shop for the art world, bringing together dealers, professionals, collectors, artists and producers from across the world to create a small-world network of “mutual observation.” Many of these fairs, such as Art Basel, began as a formalization of existing, informal networks of galleries, dealers, and artists in a specific region, and

157 Grant Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context, 126.
extended to become international events.\textsuperscript{161} Today, there are hundreds of art fairs around the world that provide sites for building exchange and collaboration among the numbers they amass.\textsuperscript{162} Here, artists and producers are able to acquire space to show their works in an environment that has surpassed the ‘art as object’ mentality. However, the competitive nature of the major fairs such as FAIC Paris, Miami Basel, or the Armory Show can result in the selection of pre-legitimized artists and producers – those who will guarantee a crowd, rather than those emerging in the early stages of growth. Furthermore, art fairs are ephemeral: the only way to show work continuously is to move from fair to fair, a method fundamentally at odds with the specificity of community + environment in social practice. Art fairs are therefore best approached with the goal of visibility rather than stability; as a growth supplement, rather than a foundational support.

Another form of support is the biennale network. Typically coinciding with the original Venice Biennale, Documenta is one of the most highly respected large-scale exhibitions for contemporary work. Founded by the German artist and professor Arnold Bode, the first exhibition took place in 1955 in Kassel, Germany.\textsuperscript{163} Aiming to reconnect Germany with the rest of the world through modern art, Bode presented artists from the most prominent early 20th century movements alongside contemporaries of his own time. When visitor numbers exceeded 130,000, a second exhibition was planned for 1959. Today, Documenta is a non-profit organization funded primarily by the City of Kassel, the State of Hesse, and the German Federal Cultural Foundation.\textsuperscript{164} Since 1972, an international jury has appointed an artistic director to oversee each exhibition. 2017 marks the 14th edition, which is directed by Adam Szymczyk, and take place in both Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany with over 130 artists presenting works in partnership with 40 local institutions and organizations.\textsuperscript{165} Large scale exhibitions such as Documenta belong further along the spectrum, shifting away from the market-centered approach of dealers and galleries towards institutions that value engagement and experimentation. The exhibition allows socially engaged artists and producers to engage with new local communities and environments, as well as the larger international art world. However, biennials and periodic exhibitions have been critiqued for their attempt to “instrumentalize art as cultural capital to reinscribe the power of place,” creating centers for art-oriented

\textsuperscript{163} “About: Documenta gGmbH,” \textit{Documenta}, accessed April 4, 2017, \url{https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16_documenta_ggmbh}
\textsuperscript{164} “About: Documenta gGmbH,” \textit{Documenta}.
tourism.\textsuperscript{166} Artists and producers must therefore carefully consider between their work and the specific setting of both the city and the exhibition. From an artist’s perspective, participation can serve as an important source of recognition and legitimization. As much as such terms may be disliked by social practice artists, recognition remains vital for securing future support for the continuation of their work, and biennials offer this exposure.

Foundations and non-profit organizations can also be supporters, partners, or collaborators for social practice. They mark a further step away from marketability and towards experimentation on the spectrum of institutions. One of the most prominent examples is Creative Time, a non-profit arts organization specifically devoted to supporting socially engaged art. Creative Time was established in 1974, with the mission to “work with artists to contribute to the dialogues, debates and dreams of our times.”\textsuperscript{167} Since its inception, the organization has commissioned more than 350 socially engaged works within and beyond New York City.\textsuperscript{168} Kara Walker’s \textit{A Subtlety} and Paul Chan’s \textit{Waiting for Godot in New Orleans} are both the result of Creative Time partnerships, and other recently featured artists include Suzanne Lacy, Tania Bruguera, Nick Cave and Jeremy Deller.\textsuperscript{169} Creative Time has also partnered with other cultural institutions, such as the Lincoln Center, Dia Art Foundation, and the Queens Museum of Art.\textsuperscript{170} The organization is overseen by a board of advisors and supported by a combination of public and private sponsors, from the Ford Foundation to Bombay Sapphire. These partners enable the organization to commission large scale and long-term projects, as well as ephemeral works. Organizations with a similar structure include the NYC Public Art Fund and Blade of Grass. The art market, fairs, biennials, foundations, and non-profit organizations are all examples of support mechanisms and partnerships for the creation of socially engaged art. However, support can also be self-sufficient: socially engaged art can create alternative economies that change how frequently the public engage with art. Financial currency is not the only means of participation; the exchange of skills, knowledge, and resources can also create pathways to engagement. Artists and producers may find that those who would typically identify as infrequently engaged


\textsuperscript{167} “About,” \textit{Creative Time}, accessed April 4, 2017, \url{http://creativetime.org/about/}


\textsuperscript{169} The specific projects to which I am referring are Suzanne Lacy’s \textit{Between the Door and the Street}, Nick Cave’s \textit{Heard NY}, Tania Bruguera’s \textit{Immigrant Movement International}, and Jeremy Deller’s \textit{It is what it is: Conversations about Iraq}. “Projects,” \textit{Creative Time}, accessed April 29, 2017, \url{http://creativetime.org/projects/}

\textsuperscript{170} “Projects,” \textit{Creative Time}, accessed April 4, 2017, \url{http://creativetime.org/projects/}
due to financial, geographical, or time constraints may possess key skills that allow them to make a valuable contribution to a work and thus engage in ways other art forms cannot support. As a result, the infrequently engaged become art supporters or amateurs – those who use their time and skill to engage with art.

Museums offer a great point of comparison for these alternative economies. Most people engage with art at a museum by purchasing an admission ticket to gain access to the collection. Outside of employment (largely restricted to those with at least an undergraduate degree), the only alternative to money is time. Individuals can volunteer as docents, desk staff, or assistants. However, these options also impose heavy restrictions: Firstly, the roles that volunteers are filtered to, such as education and visitor services, typically require preexisting art literacy. While this knowledge can be acquired independently, it requires high levels of motivation that are most likely to be found within the inner circles of art engagement, rather than successfully reach the infrequently and involuntarily engaged. Secondly, both acquiring the knowledge and volunteering within the museum require an individual to conform to museum hours, which are typically standard 9-5 working hours. Other than weekends and, for some, one late night per week, the opportunities to volunteer are almost non-existent for those working a full-time job.

The alternative economies proposed by the highly interdisciplinary nature of socially engaged art are thus able to include a wider public and overcome some of the restrictions imposed by the time and money economies of traditional institutions. Working with any one community requires a deep contextual understanding of community and environment that can often be provided by those nearest the center of the second concentric illustration who have lived in a community for many years. Those who possess this knowledge may or may not have any frequent engagement with art – yet they become invaluable in the process of creating socially engaged art because of their accumulated experience. Their engagement with art therefore takes place when these individuals

Fig. 22 Local storytellers recording for Portland Art Museum’s Object Stories Initiative.
share their knowledge - whether through interviews, community meetings, calls or emails. Or, in the case of the Portland Art Museum’s Object Stories, through short videos. The project emerged as an attempt to overcome a single-axis narrative that was not inclusive of diverse perspectives. The initiative invites individual members of the public to record a story about an object of personal importance, creating an auto-ethnographical archive not unlike that of the Cause Collective’s Truth Booth. While the project did include a booth in the museum for visitors to both record their own story and browse the collection of hundreds of others, Portland Art Museum put a large emphasis on moving outside of the museum walls to engage a wider public. Object Stories partnered with local schools and organizations such as the Native American Youth and Family Center to be inclusive of a more diverse public than their current visitor base. As a result, the majority of the 1000 participants who took part in the project during the first 18 months had never entered the museum. Five years on, Object Stories has presented nine exhibitions that bring together a curated group of stories around a theme. The 2017 exhibitions are titled “Powerful Self: LGBTQIA2S+ Lives Today”, and “Sound Beyond the Auditory”, focusing on sexuality and gender identities, and artists who are deaf or hard of hearing. These collections are stored on iPads located throughout the galleries to allow visitors to listen to stories that relate to specific objects. Object Stories offers individuals the opportunity to engage in the creation of art simply through the exchange of their own experience and knowledge, without the need to purchase an admission ticket or possess any prior knowledge of art. In this sense, the project is an example of alternative means of exchange that looks beyond the financial focus of the traditional art economy. The experiences and stories therefore serve a dual purpose: they create a means of engagement, a work of art, and a knowledge bank to inform their future work in the community of Portland, and they also constitute a work of art in themselves, the archive of Object Stories.

Beyond knowledge exchange, social practice offers engagement through skill exchange. Every work requires vast amounts of knowledge and skill that take significant time to acquire – but are already possessed by others. In a discussion with Rick Lowe on Project Row Houses, Mark Stern divides engagement into two categories: “a community engagement that was about involving people who lived in that physical place, but also an engagement process that brought in folks with whom

172 Mike Murawski, “Object Stories: Rejecting the Single Story in Museums.”
you wouldn’t necessarily work as an artist, but whom you needed to actually make it happen.” The second group included church, corporate and museum groups, as well as architects, historians, attorneys, and builders. For these groups, engagement with Row Houses took place through individual contributions of resources, skills, and services. For some, the financial exchange was flipped: their participation produced payment made possible by existing institutional support – in the case of Row Houses, this initially came from the National Endowment of the Arts. While time remains the primary exchange, the key difference between engagement in Row Houses versus engagement as a voluntary museum staff member is the integration of time into an individual’s preexisting work hours. Furthermore, Row Houses engaged a much more diverse range of skillsets that did not rely upon existing art literacy. Object Stories and Row Houses both demonstrate the ways in which socially engaged art can create its own systems of support outside the art market. These alternative economies of exchange therefore extend the means of art engagement beyond time and money to include the contribution of knowledge, skills, and resources.

Working with institutions also provides new platforms for shifting the large proportion of creative labor associated with socially engaged art from dark matter to light matter. The validation and authority inherently associated with institutions immediately deems the work they present light matter: forms of culture and creativity that are recognized within the public sphere. Institutions therefore have the power to challenge the orthodoxy of the creative labor economy and the art market by choosing to support collaborative practice. The collaborative nature of socially engaged art is closely related to both its collectability and market value. In my discussion of inclusivity, I argued that the art world approaches artistic production according to a hierarchy in which the individual is valued over the desire to work as a group with the contributions of many. Works produced through collaboration are frequently regarded as an insecure investment that can be compromised by a group’s fluctuating membership, and potential instability. However, collaboration is a reality for the clear majority of artistic practice and labor – all artists rely upon others to produce their work. The cult of the individual is not only disadvantageous for socially engaged art, it is also highly inaccurate. With institutional support, social practice

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176 Rick Lowe, quoted in What we Made: conversations on art and social cooperation, ed. Tom Finkelpearl, 138.
178 Gregory Sholette, Dark matter: art and politics in the age of enterprise culture, 43.
increasingly becomes light matter, and the unrealistic assumptions made of artistic labor and collaboration are exposed. Socially engaged art rejects the concept of effortless genius – the singular mastermind behind works of exceptional creativity – in favor of exploring the time such work takes, who is capable of undertaking it, and the value of collaborative production. These ideas are not only explored conceptually – they are incorporated into the practice and the process of social practice itself.

Socially engaged art’s continual shift from dark matter to light matter, and the art market’s pervasive preference for individual authorship can also create the rare phenomenon of artist as institution. For some of the largest figures in the contemporary market, such as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, the demand for their work far exceeds the potential output of the individual. As a result, these artists must employ vast teams in the production process. This can include PR and communications, travel and administrative coordinators, photographers, builders, and laborers. One of the most widely recognized examples of the artist as institution in contemporary socially engaged art is Chinese artist and political activist Ai Weiwei. Despite insisting that an artist can make their studio in any city or hotel room, Weiwei has multiple studios and properties in Beijing, Berlin, and New York. In 2010, he participated in fifteen group shows and five solo shows, a trend that has only grown as the artist has continued to maintain many projects simultaneously.\(^{180}\) In 2016, Weiwei had four shows open in New York on the same day.\(^{181}\) One of the twenty 2010 shows was Ai Weiwei’s solo commission for the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern, which he chose to fill with 100 million sunflower seeds, individually sculpted and painted by workers in a series of small workshops in Jingdezhen, China.\(^{182}\) According to Vicente Todoli, the director of  

the Tate Modern, Weiwei’s pieces are “among the most socially engaged works of art being made today.” However, the scale of works such as *Sunflower Seeds* demonstrate that any vision of Ai Weiwei as an individual entity is utterly inaccurate: the execution of projects as extensive in number and scale as his requires teams of workers comparable to that of an institution. His works have crossed many mediums, including installations, photography, furniture, music, painting, books, film, jewelry, and sculpture. The intricacy of production is a common theme: in addition to *Sunflower Seeds*, his works include *Trees*, a series of life-size sculptures with as many as 100 individual pieces each, an installation constructed from 99 tons of steel, and a film with eight teams working at different locations across Europe and the Middle East. It is little surprise that Weiwei’s Beijing studio has been likened to Andy Warhol’s factory in the role it plays as a magnet for artists and creators within the larger Beijing cultural sphere.

However, such an approach calls into question whether the artist as institution is, in fact, socially engaged art. Many of the characteristics are consistent: the work is produced through collective labor and focuses on creating social and political change. The process is of greater importance than the product, and the works aim to create human interaction and dialogue. However, these work remains associated with a singular name: it is Ai Weiwei as the individual artist who receives the recognition and thus both the market and social capital. Is this truly collaborative practice? Projects such as *Sunflower Seeds* ask: what is the difference between collaborating and commissioning? Socially engaged art does not stipulate who must be acknowledged and who is not – rather, it is defined by the collaborative process and centrality of human interaction. Furthermore, Weiwei is cultivating economic need for artistic labor that would likely not exist without his presence, as the workshops for *Sunflower Seeds* demonstrate. Yet this draws us back to Sholette’s concept of dark matter and raises similar ethical issues as some of Francis Alÿs and Santiago Sierra’s works, which also create market need for artistic labor. Should the social practice artist have an obligation to bring the dark matter upholding their own work into the light in order to acknowledge the extent of collaboration within their practice?

**Socially Engaged Art + Museums**

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The market demonstrates the power of institutions to greatly influence the position of socially practice within the art world and its corresponding economy. These institutions constitute vital mechanisms of support, and can reform both the dark and light matter of creative labor, and the economies through which the public can engage with art. While each of these roles is clearly beneficial for social practice, the value is not always clear from an institutional perspective. If museums look at social practice purely in terms of its market worth, it is difficult to argue its value. The relationship between institutions and socially engaged art must therefore be expressed as social capital over market capital. Social practice can help museums to establish and maintain local art networks, and guide museums towards the more interdisciplinary and inclusive approach that the future necessitates. Much of this work is essentially anti-market, thus some artists in the field reject even the notion of social capital, questioning the need for capital in the context of art engagement. Bishop thus speaks of capital in a symbolic sense: she acknowledges that capital is inherently attached to our concept of art, but recognizes that social practice aims not to supply commodities for the market, but to use “art’s symbolic capital towards constructive social change.”

Institutions and their art possess vast amounts of symbolic capital. Therefore, socially engaged artists and producers must create relationships with museums in which each can support, teach and benefit the other. Social capital may then be a byproduct in the eyes of some, created in the pursuit of constructive social change.

While there are many clear benefits to partnerships between museums and social practice, it is essential to acknowledge that some artists have little desire to pursue institutional relationships. When independence is maintained, there is no need to uphold an institutional identity, report to a board, or operate in a specific space. Without a partnership, artists and producers are less likely to encounter intervention in the artistic process, or face issues of accountability and censorship. Instead, they are free to foster relationships with many different communities, including those historically under-served by institutions. However, unless the artist is fortunate to be the rare exception with ready access to vast funding and publicity of their own, they must face the dependence of their work upon external supports. Kester argues that real change requires artists to engage with existing institutions and not cling to an ideal of total artistic power. Such a statement is hardly sacrificial in the context of

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socially engaged art, where the very premise of collaborative practice rejects the idea of singular artistic autonomy. The central role of dialogue in the process of socially engaged art favors feedback and discussion over single-axis decision making. The relationship between the social practice artist and the museum is therefore another example of the ways in which socially engaged art exposes the falsehood of the individual genius to create a new vision of artistic labor and autonomy.

To understand the relationship between museums and socially engaged art, I will begin by discussing what museums offer. Whether small or large, museums provide support in the form of funding for existing projects, security in the form of guaranteed space and audience, and validation in the form of a recognized name - something that socially engaged works often lack but crave. Firstly, almost all museums have funding set aside for visitor programming, which can fall under education, membership, and/or public engagement. Department staff are typically responsible for the planning, facilitation, and execution of these initiatives, which not only places an unrealistic workload on the staff, but also frequently results in the repetition of work already done by another entity. When museums focus on building their own initiatives from the ground up, they can forget to find out what is already strongly established by active groups in their community. However, time and money may be used more effectively by approaching programming through outsourcing and collaboration. Filling this role by providing pedagogy and established networks is one way in which socially engaged art can support cultural institutions. There are many examples of existing projects that develop skills desired by museum programming, such as storytelling, performance, and art literacy. Thomas Hirschhorn’s Musée Précaire Albinet, The Cause Collective’s Truth Booth, Paul Ramirez Jonas’ Dictar y Recordar, and Paul Chan’s Waiting for Godot in New Orleans are all examples of works that foster the types of learning and engagement museums seek. By choosing to establish partnerships or collaborations with similar works – in which a component of the process acts as museum programming - museums can invest in existing initiatives already active in their community that do not require a complete ground-up build, and socially engaged artists and producers have access to both a means of income and another platform to share their work.

While programming is a short-term benefit, socially engaged art can also contribute to the advancement and future preparedness of cultural institutions over an extended period. The capacity to shape what constitutes public narrative and history is an immense privilege and responsibility attached to the authority of museums. An

189 Bongani Mgijima & Vusi Buthelezi, “Mapping Museum: Community Relations in Lwandle,” *Journal*
inherent role of the museums is deciding which stories are told, and who tells them. Fred Wilson’s *Guarded View* aims to expose the problems surrounding this privilege, while Portland’s *Object Stories* begins to address the issues associated with a sing-axis approach by actively seeking the narratives and histories previously ignored by museums. By choosing to work with socially engaged artists who are experienced with thinking critically about engaging a diverse public, museums are acknowledging their responsibility to practice inclusivity in defining public history.

Although each takes a different approach, museums and social practice both have a vested interest in engaging the public. As collections digitize, it has become increasingly important for museums to become spaces that are experiential rather than collection-based. The collection has always been the museum’s greatest asset, but a social practice approach interpret the content as “relational objects” for the public to engage with, rather than hoarded treasures. Socially engaged art can thus support museums in a pedagogical role that teaches how to enrich the process of visiting and engaging with art works. More specifically, social practice can demonstrate how to help visitors become active engagers rather than passive viewers. In contemporary museums, the public is rarely encouraged to take on an active and critical position of their own. Again, this is a specific skill in which socially engaged artists and producers are highly experienced. By fostering more active engagement from both staff and visitors, socially practice can strengthen the relationship between museums and the surrounding public. Each work offers the museum a different relationship with a community. While some may increase the visibility of the museum to encompass new publics, others may focus on creating depth within a select few areas. Amy Franceschini, the founder of the Futurefarmers collective, says of her work “the people being most affected are a very small group, but I think that the intense contact has a very large ripple effect. The main question we are asking is whether it is more effective to spend a month with 10 to 20 people or an evening with 300?” Defining scale is therefore a key part of establishing a partnership between a socially engaged art work and a museum.

One particularly successful integration of socially engaged art and museum practice comes from the Queens Museum. Collaboration lies at the core of the institution’s
operation, from exhibitions to programming, on-site and off-site. There are clear pathways for artists and community members to engage in these projects, and prior partnerships have included education institutions, government and city offices, foundations, and NGOs. Two of the largest public projects spearheaded by the museum in recent years are *The World’s Park* and *Corona Plaza*. The works aim to bring together individuals and organizations to revitalize the Flushing Meadows Corona Park and the Corona Plaza through improved accessibility and design programming. Both are multiyear initiatives with boards to structure and organize fieldwork, community meetings, and implementation. To sustain this work, Queens Museum hired a community organizer to lead *The World’s Park* project and work with a team of 22 community advisors and fellows appointed by both the Queens Museum and the Design Trust for Public Space. Together the team ran a ‘Community Design School’ to allow residents to participate in the process of rethinking the use of the public space in their community. The recommendations gathered from the first phase of the process were presented in an exhibition at the Queens Museum titled “You are Here: Creating a New Approach to Civic Participation in the World’s Park.”

In addition to long-term community initiatives, the museum also integrates social practice into its staffing, exhibitions and regular public programming. Queens is one of the few museums in the United States to house a working studio program, with eight artists in residence. The Museum also operates a Community Partnership

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Gallery to which community groups can submit exhibition proposals. Regular programming includes drop-in family art-making workshops, open studios for adults, performances in partnership with groups such as Theatre of the Oppressed, and a parent support group for families in the autism community. Many of these initiatives are designed to respond to specific identities present in the borough of Queens. The New New Yorkers program, for example, presents programming for recent arrivals in the city. Queens consistently arises as one of the most diverse counties in the United States, with a population that includes individuals from over 100 countries. Through a partnership with the Queens Library New New Yorkers workshops have been offered in more than eight languages. Subjects include photography, graphic design, computer literacy and English for speakers of other languages. Queens Museum is a thriving example of the ways in which museums can integrate socially engaged art into their practice in order to create stronger relationships with their surrounding community. The museum takes an active role in the issues facing the Queens community, and initiates partnerships to provide programming and resources for specific and intentionally chosen initiatives.

Another major asset museums possess that is of great value to social practice is ownership of space. For non-site specific projects, gaining access to space can be difficult and costly – particularly for long-term works. Thanks to the monumental scale of the ‘starchitecture’ favored by many institutions built over the past two decades, museums occupy vast amount of space. Today, the museum’s architecture has become equally – if not more, in some cases – important as its contents. While starchitecture museums are designed with the intent to create a sense of awe in the viewer, this frequently morphs into intimidation that can dissuade anyone unfamiliar with such spaces from entering. Sharp lines, pristine glass and large, empty galleries can be both magnificent and threatening. When socially engaged art occupies this space, it therefore risks losing some of the desired public to intimidation – an issue that is typically of far less consequence in a community center, school, or studio environment. However, environment is only half of the equation. If artists and producers have already built strong relationships and established inclusive practices,

working in the museum environment can allow them to bridge the space between the public and the institution. Socially engaged art can thus ensure those from the outer circles of art engagement establish a sense of belonging in the museum. After all, “institutional art spaces have become some of the most visible, even spectacular, theatres of informal education and educational expectation in public view.”200 By taking ownership of such spaces, social practice can reshape stereotypes of elitism and reframe the museum as a space for the education and engagement of a broader public.

The Tate Modern’s Hyundai Series (formerly the Unilever Series) is a partnership between socially engaged artists, a private corporation, and a cultural institution that aims to draw a broader public to a starchitect-scale space. The series began with Unilever’s commitment to sponsor the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall Commission, which selected one artist to occupy the 35,000-square foot space every year from 2000-2012. Recently taken over by Hyundai, the series has been guaranteed until 2025.201 While not all the Turbine commissions are classified as social practice, Tino Seghal’s These Associations, Ai Weiwei’s Sunflower Seeds, and Olafur Eliasson’s The Weather Project, are all strong examples of the medium.

The Weather Project was chosen as the 2003 commission, and consisted of sun and sky representations suspended above light mist that accumulated into clouds throughout the day. Beneath the yellow glow of the ‘sun’ formed by mono-frequency lamps, visitors walked, sat, and lay on the floor of the hall, engaging with an ephemeral environment a far cry from London’s typical weather. By using the weather as a medium, Eliasson chose a subject that is particularly topical in English culture through which he could examine several relationships: that of the weather and society, and that of

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society and the institution. The artist writes, “the weather has been so fundamental in shaping our society that one can argue that every aspect of life – economic, political, technical, cultural, emotional – is linked to or derived from it... If you cannot withstand the weather, you cannot survive.”

To Eliasson, the inseparability of weather and society is a model for the relationship between society and cultural institutions. He is critical of the modernist argument that museums should be independent from society in order to act as mirrors for analysis, stating “this standpoint is like assuming that the weather can be separated from the city, experience from interpretation, form from content, or time from space. It means that the institution is not acknowledging its responsibility with regards to society in general and the value of a singular experience in particular.”

Eliasson calls for institutions to be engrained in rather than separate from the public. He recognizes the museum as an institution made up of individual members of the public, and encouraged staff participation from the beginning of his commission. Working closely with Tate curator Teresa May, the artist sent surveys to various departments of the museum to understand their definition of the weather’s role in their own lives and society more broadly. At its presentation, The Weather Project demonstrated the capacity of starchitect museum spaces to act “as places of encounter and aggregation.”

The accounts of visitors who came to sprawl themselves on the floor to watch and feel the changes in the ‘weather’ are evidence of socially engaged art’s ability to draw new audiences to cultural institutions. Since opening, the Tate Modern Turbine Hall has welcomed over 60 million visitors.

In addition to the conversion of dark matter to light matter and the provision of space, museums can also provide social practice projects with the authority and validation that grass-roots and independent projects often lack and crave. Like many other disciplines, independent social practice works are vulnerable to struggle in gaining public and private trust due to a lack of accountability or representation. The interdisciplinary nature of socially engaged art heightens both the need and opportunity for partnership between the institutional and grass roots levels. All museums are positioned within webbed networks both within and outside of the art

205 Marcella Beccaria, “Remember the Weather Project?”
world that can connect socially engaged artists and producers with board members, donors, and visitors whom their work may not have reached had they chosen to work independently. As a part of these networks, institutions have the power to offer vital support due to the accountability and representation they are afforded and held to. Therefore, the relationship between museums and socially engaged art can work together to extend the sphere of potential impact to reach new audiences with a greater audacity.

**Socially Engaged Art + Academic Institutions**

Thus far, we have examined the relationship between socially engaged art and art fairs, biennials, non-profit organizations, and museums. However, one of the most crucial relationships for the sustenance and growth of socially engaged art is with the university. This should come as no surprise when we consider the pedagogical dimension of many works - Michael Rakowitz’s *Enemy Kitchen*, Lenka Clayton’s *Residency in Motherhood*, Tania Bruguera’s *Catedra Arte de Conducta*, and Portland Art Museum’s *Object Stories* all include a teaching and learning component in their process. Universities, like museums, are institutions that bridge both the public and private sphere. Universities are both generators of knowledge for the public, and economic engines in and of themselves. Therefore, the space between the two spheres can be characterized by debate and experimentation, rather than competition.209 Furthermore, many producers, artists and theorists at the forefront of social practice have found more of a home in universities and academia than in art markets and galleries.210 Their faculty positions oftentimes render their pedagogy and practice indistinguishable from one another.

The importance and strength of the relationship between universities and social practice is quickly demonstrated by the many key figures who currently hold university faculty positions. Suzanne Lacy studied in Judy Chicago’s Feminist Art Program and later at Cal Arts, before taking on the position of Dean of Fine Art and Director of the Center for Fine Art and Public Life at the California College of the Arts. She went on to create the MFA program in public practice at Otis College of Art and Design.211 Harrold Fletcher is the founder and a current professor in the Art + Social Practice concentration within the MFA at Portland State University, where Jen Delos

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211 “Suzanne Lacy,” *University of Southern California Roski School of Art and Design*, accessed March 1, 2017, [https://roski.usc.edu/community/faculty/suzanne-lacy](https://roski.usc.edu/community/faculty/suzanne-lacy)
Reyes, the founder of Open Engagement also taught. Shannon Jackson, Pablo Helguera, Paul Ramirez Jonas and Tania Bruguera have also featured as faculty in the PSU program. Delos Reyes is now the Associate Director of the School of Art & Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Theaster Gates is also working in Chicago as the Director of the Art + Public Life program at the University of Chicago. Pedro Lasch is the Director of the Social Practice Lab at Duke University, Claire Bishop is a professor at the City University of New York, Shannon Jackson is the Associate Vice Chancellor for the Arts and Design at UC Berkeley, and Grant Kester is a professor at UC San Diego. There are also some practitioners who intentionally choose educator roles in museums, rather than universities. One example is Pablo Helguera, a social practice artist and theorist who has held director roles in the education departments of the Guggenheim and the MoMA. Tom Finkelpearl, who has contributed significant literature and support to social practice, is the former director of the Queens Museum and current Cultural Affairs Commissioner of New York City. His trajectory demonstrates that government is yet another sphere in which artists and producers can occupy pedagogical roles. Again, there is significant crossover between each of these spheres (particularly faculty members and museum staff), but it is important to acknowledge that artists can occupy educator roles both within and beyond the university.

These relationships offer mutual benefits for both institutions and artists. Universities offer artists employment security, the support and validation often required for establishing grant-based and corporate partnerships, and access to a high interdisciplinary environment that not only accepts, but encourages, experimentation. Artists in turn provide knowledge, skills and research to support individuals and broader programs within the university. As producers and scholars, they generate both new theory and new practice for the field of socially engaged art.

The importance of an interdisciplinary environment cannot be downplayed. There are few settings in our society that continue to encompass the diversity of fields and work that the university offers. While diversity in higher education remains problematic in relation to many of the identity groups previously discussed, there is little doubt that the environment encompasses a diverse range of skill sets, interests, and experiences. It is here that artists and producers have the capacity to forge collaborations that would be far less organic without university support. Working across disciplines requires both parties to build a foundation of common knowledge. Since social practice is typically housed within the art department, assumptions are often made.

regarding the nature of collaboration. One of the first graduates of the Portland State MFA program recounted, “when I first tried to collaborate with other departments in the university many people from the other fields though I was there to contribute something visually. So little by little, I tried to convey to them that I can contribute other things as well, and together we can change the way we do research.” Prior partnerships have intersected with science, technology, urban planning, and design, to name but a few. The same breadth of subject matter typically does not exist in other partnerships: foundations and organizations focus their resources on specific disciplines and issues, while museums are still divided by genres such as art, science or natural history. As a result, social practice artists and producers can forge new ground not only in theory, but also in their practice across new disciplines.

One program that makes use of the interdisciplinary nature of the university is the Arts and Public Life initiative in the University of Chicago School of Arts, directed by Theaster Gates. The program has partnered with the UChicago Harris School of Public Policy to create Place Lab, a team that researches and initiates creative urban redevelopment projects. Gates is well known for his work at the crossroads of art and urban planning in Chicago, as the praise for Dorchester Projects has demonstrated. The projects consist of a group of properties located on Chicago’s Southside, purchased and restored by the artist. The houses include a bookstore, the Black Cinema House, the Listening House, and the Archive House. The Stony Island Arts Bank was Gates’ first property purchase of the group, which he bought from the city for a price of $1 on the condition that he would find the $3.7 million needed for its renovation. Through support from the NEA, the Knight and Kresge Foundations, and the Art + Public Life Program at the University of Chicago, Rebuild Foundation was formed to oversee the development of the Dorchester Projects and their corresponding public programming. The bank and houses hold a number of archival collections available to the public, including Frankie Knuckles’ vinyl collection, books and archives donated by the Johnson Publishing Company, and a collection of more than 60,000 slides of art history from the University of Chicago. In the early stages of the project, the Rebuild Foundation, Gates’s studio, and the U Chicago incubator had a combined full-time staff of 20. However, both the Place Lab

and *Dorchester Projects* put a strong emphasis on ensuring those in the Southside community are directly involved in the work themselves. Consequently, the day to day operation is dependent on many others beyond the small project teams. As *NY Times* journalist Ben Austen wrote, “there are the teenagers on the block paid to clean up, the ex-con who began as a denailer of salvaged wood, Gates’s nephew apprenticing at the workshop.”

The Place Lab is also highly interdisciplinary in its work, and intersects with law, urban planning, architecture, design, social work, gender studies, arts administration, and cultural studies. This breadth of knowledge and skills combined with the support of the university has allowed Gates to scale his work far beyond a single neighborhood. His largest project yet was announced in mid 2016: the Chicago Arts + Industry Commons, a multi-million dollar project to create and grow a network of art institutions across the South Side. The plan intends to repurpose a former power plant into a network of galleries and industrial arts center, while a former Catholic school will become arts and design studios, and 13 vacant lots will host an arts and

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220 “Place Lab,” *University of Chicago*.

sculpture garden.\textsuperscript{222} At the center of the development is the existing Stony Island Arts Bank, and the heart of the original Dorchester Projects. While such a project could certainly be taken on by solely private developers, the central role of the Place Lab ensures the work will carried out with a social practice influence. Human interaction and dialogue are core components, which rely upon the web of skills, people, and facilities that Gates has accumulated during his past decade of work in the city.\textsuperscript{223} “The artist’s relationship with the university ensures the amplified impact of his work, and the inclusion of a greater diversity of thought and skills.

In addition to their interdisciplinary nature and large-scale potential, educational institutions also remain one of the few spaces in which experimentation is both accepted and encouraged. Schools and universities are places where “the emphasis is supposedly on process and learning rather than product. Schools are also multidisciplinary institutions by nature, where discourse, practice and presentation can co-exist without privileging one over the other.”\textsuperscript{224} If the art market is at one end of the socially engaged art partnership spectrum, universities are at the opposite. They allow exploration in places that the market would become skeptical or cautionary. As a result, universities are arguably in the best position to pioneer further development of new social practices.

A discussion of the relationship between socially engaged art and the university would not be complete without mentioning Portland State University (PSU), who offered the first MFA in Art & Social Practice in the country. The program was first proposed to PSU by Harrell Fletcher in 2007, who founded the flexible three year residency program.\textsuperscript{225} The course strongly emphasizes the combination of individual research, group work, and community collaborations.\textsuperscript{226} In addition to personal projects, students produce a journal and a series of books titled \textit{Reference Points}, which focus on key figures and issues in the field of social practice.\textsuperscript{227} From 2010-2013, students also worked closely with the program’s co-director Jen Delos Reyes to

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\item[223] Theaster Gates, quoted in “Reimagining the Civic Commons,” \textit{Civic Commons}, accessed April 8, 2017, \url{http://civiccommons.us/chicago/}
\item[224] Anton Vidokle, quoted in \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship}, by Claire Bishop, (New York: Verso Books), c. 9.
\item[226] “Program,” \textit{PSU Social Practice}, accessed April 8, 2017 \url{http://psusocialpractice.org/program/}
\item[227] “Program,” \textit{PSU Social Practice}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
produce Open Engagement conference before it launched as an independent project. The PSU program addresses a consistent critique of many art schools: the disconnect between the program and practice that is caused by the school itself being the primary environment in which the work is produced and examined.228 The PSU MFA requires students to create projects that integrate the Portland community, and has developed partnerships with other educational institutions, museums and organizations that provide students with entry points to develop their own relationships.

Courses such as PSU’s MFA also teach alternative methods of creating and sharing work outside those endorsed by the gallery and museum world. For artists to be represented by a commercial gallery (and then collected by a museum), they must create commodifiable objects, since representation is the primary marker of success.229 Social practice programs emphasize both finding and creating personalized and independent means of representation that do not rely upon market systems for their validation. This approach extends beyond students to faculty. Fletcher points out that the greatest achievement for faculty applying for tenure is often a solo show at a gallery or museum. The establishment of a social practice concentration therefore required him to call for revisions to the policies surrounding hiring and tenure, since traditional means of representation are not necessarily the best platforms for sharing work as a social practice artist.230 In many ways, the entire MFA is a socially engaged work of Fletcher’s own. He describes the program as an

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228 Pablo Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2012), 84.
229 Judith Rodenbeck, “‘It can be change as we go along’: Social Practice in the Academy and the Community,” Art Journal, 67:4 (2008), 99.
230 Judith Rodenbeck, “‘It can be change as we go along’: Social Practice in the Academy and the Community,” 98.
experiment that is public practice in itself: a project in which human interaction and dialogue are central, in which the emphasis is on the process rather than the end product.231

The need for MFA programs is evidence that the relationship between socially engaged art and the university will continue to grow stronger in the future. The market sector of the art world – dealers, galleries and some museums – puts greater emphasis on the reputation and value of an individual’s work than their academic history. However, any artist or producer who intends to continue their relationship with the university as a faculty member has a growing need to possess a graduate degree.232 The emergence of the Creative Time Summit and Open Engagement conferences, as well as many graduate programs and online courses are further evidence of public demand for more formalized learning environments teaching social practice. The relationship between universities and socially engaged art is therefore only set to grow stronger.

Conclusion

The diversity and rapidity with which socially engaged art has developed signals a future characterized by a continual broadening of publics and disciplines. Looking forward, Harrell Fletcher states, “One of the key reasons why we engage in participation is that the future is fundamentally unknown. So the question that arises is, what can we do to be as smart as possible about the future? It turns out that the only way you can be smart about the future is to get as many people involved as possible.”233 Socially engaged art creates works that are not separate from common experience, but integrated in the social; works that are not “art as experience”, but socially cooperative experience as art.”234

True social cooperation calls us to seek to understand one another – in the case of social practice, for artists and producers to understand the communities and environments in which they work. An exploration of identity, inclusivity, and diversity is essential for creating successful social practice works.

231 Judith Rodenbeck, ““It can be change as we go along”: Social Practice in the Academy and the Community,” 101.
232 Judith Rodenbeck, ““It can be change as we go along”: Social Practice in the Academy and the Community,” 104.
234 Tom Finkelpearl, What we Made: conversations on art and social cooperation, 361.
An intersectional approach is crucial for understanding the complexity and multiplicity of identity. Every individual has multiple identities, and social practice must consider not only those defined by existing social, political, and economic systems, but also those specific to socially engaged art, as illustrated by my included diagrams.

While I acknowledge the power of antagonistic works such as Santiago Sierra’s Wall Enclosing a Space or Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, I have primarily chosen to argue for inclusivity as a means of creating social and political change. Works such as Paul Ramirez Jonas’ Dictar Y Recordar, the Cause Collective’s Truth Booth, and Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed show that inclusivity can create alternative economies of engagement, empower individuals, and produce works that overcome the exclusivity characteristic of the art world.

Inclusivity does not require artists and producers to consider all identities and engage everyone in their work: my argument is rather that artists and producers must be intentional in defining their audience, and adopt methods, aesthetics, and timelines that will engage with the group they wish to reach. From a diversity standpoint, inclusive practice also seeks out specific audiences that have been absent from other art practices, and produces work that calls attention to these issues, as Fred Wilson’s Guarded View demonstrates.

Despite the uniqueness of each project in relation to its specific community and environment, certain elements remain foundational for all social practice works. The timeline must align with a work’s purpose and intended impact. Some may create a short, powerful impact, such as Kara Walker’s A Subtlety, while others aim to establish interaction and knowledge over an extended period, such as Tania Bruguera’s Catedra Arte de Conducta. The balance of aesthetic and methodology presents its own set of complexities within social practice, particularly in relation to documentation. It is essential that artists and producers work with collaborators to document their work: not only for their own benefit, but also to ensure the inclusion of social practice in the canon of art history, and to generate evidence required by external supports. Documentation is also defined by aesthetic, as Santiago Sierra’s black and white photographs demonstrate, and by method, such as the autoethnography adopted by Portland Art Museum’s Object Stories, and The Truth Booth.

In preparing for the future, partnerships remain a major development area for socially engaged art. Relationships with universities, museums, governments, nonprofit organizations, private foundations, biennials, and art fairs can strengthen the impact and reach of social practice, while pioneering new ideas, collaborations
and areas of research that are characterized by their interpublic and interdisciplinary nature. Each relationship can create a different set of benefits: whether it be recognition and profit through private foundations, galleries or exhibitions, access to monumental space such as the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, or a pedagogical role within museum programming or as university faculty. The desire for more interdisciplinary partnerships with socially engaged art is clear, from existing projects like the University of Chicago’s Place Lab run by Theaster Gates, or the Queens Museum World Park project partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space.

Each of these partnerships and the collaborations that form socially engaged art contribute to a compository language that weaves throughout every project. Each of the works included in this paper demonstrate a small part of what creates the “new social compositions, [and] new notions of what a people is or could be,” that are undeniably characteristic of socially engaged art.235

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**Images Included**

Figure 1: hand drawn; modified in Adobe Illustrator.

Figure 2: hand drawn; modified in Adobe Illustrator.

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